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**Consumer perspectives on evidence: A tool for shaping human services?**

Processes such as evidence-based practice may have significant implications for the decision-making practices of human service consumers and for the types of choices made available to them. Evidence can be seen as empowering for consumers, arming them with information and understanding to take greater control over treatment decisions and requiring greater accountability from policymakers and practitioners. Conversely, evidence-based processes that do not engage effectively with consumers could reinforce authoritarian decision making and overlook the complex and unique circumstances of individual service users.

This paper reports on the beginning stages of a study of service user perspectives on evidence-based practices in the human services in Australia. It considers ways in which effective collaboration, partnership and consultation with services users might support strategies for the improved utilisation of research evidence. Rather than treating research as the sole domain of academics and experts, it asks whether there is a demand for improved use of evidence being generated from consumers, and if so, how service users might be engaged to support a 'bottom-up' approach to evidence-based practice.

Though consumer participation has long been a part of Australian policy, little is known about its impact. The diversity of consumer groups means that a 'one-size-fits-all' approach to participation is unlikely to work. Mindful of this diversity, this exploratory qualitative research study aims to:

1. Determine consumer or service-user expectations and needs regarding the use of evidence in social service provision;
2. Identify the roles that service user groups play in the Australian human services sector and whether they might play a part in improving the use of evidence in social services in Australia.