

Patient and Public Advisors 101



Community Engagement, Vancouver Coastal Health

What is their role?

1. **To provide patient or public voice** that helps the committee reflect on decisions from a different point of view
2. **To contribute expertise** from their lived and/or professional experiences
3. **To represent their unique perspective**, like everyone else at the table (e.g. they do not represent the entire “public”)

Why are they important?

- We can make better decisions about how to provide care when we work alongside those who have, or will, receive that care.
- Diversity, and the range of perspectives it brings, leads to more sound decision-making.
- Their involvement demonstrates and ensures accountability and transparency.
- Their involvement reflects our commitment to putting People First and providing patient-centred care.

What process have Patient Advisors gone through to get here?

- Joined VCH’s Community Engagement Advisory Network (CEAN), including orientation and signing of confidentiality and respectful workplace policies
- Applied for this particular committee, interviewed, and chosen as the most appropriate candidate
- Participated in project-specific orientation with committee chair and read all shared background documentation. In some cases, it may be appropriate to plan an initial meeting with the advisor and other committee members.

How can I support meaningful participation?

- Introduce yourself, welcome Patient Advisors and thank them for volunteering their time
- Assign a staff liaison for the Patient Advisor to connect with to help answer questions and provide support
- Minimize your use of acronyms and jargon and be prepared to provide context

- Use nametags/tent card at meetings to provide names and titles of participants
- Keep an open mind and commit to understanding that whatever time is taken in orientation and preparation will be balanced by more informed decision-making
- Allow space for hearing about what does, or does not, work from the patient/public perspective
- In terms of reference and evaluation of committee work include a component that addresses the participation of the patient/public member
- If issues arise, deal with them in timely manner directly with the advisor, committee chair and/or the CE team
- Ensure that Patient Advisors are reimbursed for any out of pocket expenses (eg. transportation costs)
- Consider what you can do to reduce barriers to participation i.e. – time and location of meetings, language, transportation, childcare, etc.
- Once the advisor’s term is over, acknowledge them for their volunteer time and service. Be sure to advise all committee members about the transition and conduct an exit interview if appropriate.

What support is available?

VCH’s Community Engagement team:

- Can provide problem solving support to advisors, chairs and/or committee members
- Has more detailed resources (workbooks) available for both public advisors and staff committee members
- Can, if appropriate, lead broader engagement initiatives for your project, to reach more patients and public
- Stays connected to the advisor and will check in with them, and you, on an established schedule

For a more detailed guide to working with Patients and Public Advisors, please visit Community Engagement’s Intranet page and download ***How to Engage Patient and Public Advisors: A guide for staff***