



SRNA POSITION STATEMENT

CITIZEN ENGAGEMENT—ADVANCING SOCIAL JUSTICE IN POLICY

Competent, caring, knowledge-based nursing for the people of Saskatchewan

SRNA Position

As part of its commitment to quality health care and social justice, the SRNA believes that citizen engagement is vital to ensuring effective, accountable and open health policy. Citizen engagement provides decision-makers with a community perspective on health issues and services. Consistent with primary health care (ICN, 2007), it is a part of a culture that values participation and partnering.

The SRNA endorses a citizen engagement approach which ensures that the public has a venue to speak, gather information, discuss trade offs, partner in problem solving and be active in evaluating outcomes (UBC, 2007). Citizen engagement in healthcare decision making supports responsiveness to community needs, increases the scope of options and facilitates the legitimacy of decisions.

Background

Effective citizen engagement is consistent with SRNA position statements on professional self-regulation (SRNA, 2007) and public representation (SRNA, 2006). It is responsive to needs, purposeful, tailored, democratic, efficient and proportionate (Huxford, 2005). The aims of citizen engagement are to:

- Inform and educate decision-makers and the public
- Improve decisions by exchange of information between citizens and decision-makers
- Create opportunities for citizens to shape and, in some cases determine, policy
- Legitimize decisions by ensuring the voices of those impacted by policy have been heard, considered and addressed
- Involve citizens in monitoring the outcomes of policy for evaluation
- Improve quality of public life by restoring trust and engagement

(Lukensmeyer, & Hasselblad Torres, 2006)

Social justice needs to be considered at all stages of policy development and all levels of work within an organization (CNA, 2006). Citizen engagement supports social justice by encouraging equity in decision-making, distributing power, and acknowledging human/civil rights when recruiting citizens (Lukensmeyer & Hasselblad Torres, 2006). Citizen capacity is built through increased access to information and the creation of supportive policy forums for debate and exchange. Through including the populations affected by policy and recruiting marginalized people to have input, citizen engagement is a tool for social justice.

Citizen engagement protects public interest and decrease biases. "The average citizen[s] are ... the best arbiters of public interest because they experience health care across multiple dimensions: patients, caregivers, taxpayers and voters" (UBC, p. 9). Effective citizen engagement goes beyond individual needs in the interest of the broader societal good for the health and well-being of all citizens.

References

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