



Consumer and Community Participation Fact Sheet M07: Research Buddies

What are they?

Research buddies are consumers and community members that provide links between the researcher, consumers and community members, organisations and/or research funder. They may be helpful when the researcher is using linked data or working in a laboratory and does not have any direct contact with consumers or community members.

Having contact with consumers and community members who have an interest in your work, directly or indirectly, can help to gain public support and lobby for current and future research.

How does it work?

- The researcher will either meet or send the research buddy a report once or twice a year on the research progress.
- Research buddies may also provide insight into unexpected or unexplained research findings.
- Research buddies will feedback the report to their consumer and community organisations.
- Research buddies can also help with the dissemination of the research findings.



Practical considerations

- Develop draft Terms of Reference and a plain language summary (see Fact Sheet M11) of the research for the research buddies. Be clear about the role and expectations of the buddies as contact may be limited.
- For help with identifying appropriate consumers and community members see (Fact Sheet P04).
- Consider the ability of the buddies: will the report be technical?
- Write reports in plain language – avoid using jargon and give explanations of any technical terms
- Draft parameters of the report: what will it include and when will be completed?
- It is essential that the buddies understand any issues so they can be accurately reported back to consumers and community members or organisations.
- Consider how the research buddies will be supported to engage with other consumers and community members. Discuss honorarium and payment of expenses.

At The University of Western Australia we successfully used a modified version of the research buddy system in a large project investigating older people with chronic obstructive pulmonary disorder (COPD).

Analysis of the study data found unusual patterns in medication use so researchers met with two health consumers who were of similar age to the study sample and who had COPD.

They provided valuable insight into how medications were used 'on the ground' which was different to what may be expected from the available literature such as national clinical guidelines. It assisted with the interpretation of results that would have been difficult to explain based on previous research findings alone.

In the UK the Multiple Sclerosis Society trained a number of people affected by Multiple Sclerosis (MS) to act as buddies to researchers who received funding from the MS Society.

Benefits of this approach;

- Researchers had meaningful interaction with people living with the condition they were studying.
- The research buddies (consumers) understood the research better.
- The consumers provided feedback to other consumers and the Multiple Sclerosis Society.
- The Multiple Sclerosis Society (the funder) had another way of ensuring the research was on track, on budget and on time.