

Consumer Affairs Victoria

Stakeholder Engagement Framework

2024

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Overview

The purpose of the document is to outline Consumer Affairs Victoria's (CAV) commitment and approach to stakeholder and community engagement. CAV is Victoria's consumer affairs regulator, operating within the national consumer protection framework. Further information about us and what we do can be found on our website consumer.vic.gov.au.

CAV recognises that good stakeholder engagement is vital to achieving our goals and the effective delivery of services to the Victorian community. We understand the decisions we make and the actions we take in performing our role affect a wide range of individuals, businesses, communities, and organisations and that because of that, our stakeholders have a genuine interest in what we do. Engaging with those impacted by our work helps us make better decisions and builds trust and confidence with our stakeholders. We also recognise the insights and experience (including lived experience) that stakeholders can share to support our work in serving the Victorian public.

Our Stakeholder Engagement Framework (framework) is designed to support the delivery of best practice stakeholder engagement within CAV and is modelled on the [Victorian Government Public Engagement Framework 2021-25](#) and the [International Association for Public Participation Australasia, Quality Assurance Standard for Community and Stakeholder Engagement](#).

The framework guides us with a range of principles we adhere to in our engagement activities, the approach we take, as well as the commitments we make to our stakeholders.

By working within our framework, we aim to engage with our stakeholders and achieve:

- improved communication, relationships and trust
- improved collaboration and knowledge sharing
- improved identification of emerging issues and strategies to address them
- better insights to help us to understand stakeholder interests and issues and to consider those in our work
- improved operations and service provision
- an improved focus on those who need us the most
- increased transparency and accountability in how we operate.

Our approach to stakeholder engagement

Our stakeholder landscape

As CAV is a state-wide regulator covering many sectors and undertaking a range of functions, from service delivery to regulation and enforcement, our stakeholder landscape is quite broad.

This includes sectors relating to consumer products and services, buying and selling motor vehicles, housing (such as renting, buying and selling property), building and renovating, owners corporations and retirement villages. We also manage the licencing and registration of operators in a range of sectors in Victoria.

Given our broad remit, and the fact that our work touches on the lives of many Victorians every day, we routinely engage with many stakeholders in various ways across the following categories:

- **Consumers:** the end users of goods or services that the laws we administer are aimed to protect. A particular focus is on consumers experiencing vulnerability.
- **Businesses and traders:** those who provide the goods or services. We educate them about the laws we administer, respond to breaches of those laws, and in some cases, we regulate them through specific licensing or registration regimes.
- **Registered entities:** Other organisations, groups and bodies we also register and administer laws for, including incorporated associations, co-operatives and fundraisers.
- **Advocates, experts and service partners:** individuals and groups who represent consumers and business, as well as individuals or groups who have specific expertise, partner with us to provide services or have other interests in the work that we undertake.
- **Governments, judicial and other regulatory bodies:** include governments at all levels, relevant judicial bodies, and regulatory agencies, such as fellow consumer regulators or specific regulators that play a similar role or complementary role to CAV in relation to particular sectors.
- **Media:** includes any type of media organisation. Informing the public about our activities is an important part of our role as a regulator as it deters businesses and individuals from engaging in conduct that breaks the law, promotes individual rights and compliance with the law, builds confidence in CAV as a regulator and helps keep us accountable and transparent. CAV engages with media and the public in line with our [Policy on publicising of our activities](#).

While we are a Victorian state regulator, as part of our work to protect Victorians, we regularly engage with interstate stakeholders (such as other Australian Consumer Law regulators) and from time to time will also engage with international stakeholders.

Principles that guide our approach

CAV commits to a range of principles that guide our approach to stakeholder engagement. This includes ensuring that our engagement meets the principles below.

- **Meaningful and valuable:** our engagement is genuine, and we listen and value what you tell us and consider it in our decision-making processes. We proactively engage where we can and have built strong relationships to collaborate with stakeholders where quick action is needed. Our engagement always aims to create value for the community and the government. Within our organisation, our workforce values engagement and we ensure they have the skills and systems to engage effectively.
- **Inclusive and informed:** our engagement seeks to involve all interested parties and focuses on those who may be impacted the most. We provide clarity about the purpose of our engagement and do our best to ensure we have the right people from CAV engaging with you and that they are prepared. We are respectful in our engagement and ensure that the way we engage is accessible, enables full participation and focuses on the needs of those who we are engaging with. We seek to ensure there are a variety of voices and diversity in views and representation.
- **Transparent and accountable:** we are clear about why we are engaging and what we are seeking. We tell you how we have incorporated or considered stakeholders' contributions (or in a regulatory setting, why we may not be in a position to). We review how we do things so we can keep improving, and we report on our engagement activities regularly.

How we engage with our stakeholders

We recognise that engagement is a two-way process. To support our partners to engage with us, we will provide a range of channels for stakeholders to initiate engagement. We will also play our part and acknowledge how vital it is that CAV actively engages with its stakeholders.









Different approaches to engagement will be required depending on the specific circumstances. Relevant factors might include the level of stakeholder interest, the nature of the issue, how beneficial additional information or varied perspectives might be, what time constraints exist, and/or the resources available.

Decisions we make about the approach we will take to a particular engagement will be guided by the engagement spectrum in Table 1.

At the most basic level, we may determine that the most appropriate engagement with a particular stakeholder or stakeholder group about a particular issue is to ensure that they are well informed. At the other end of the spectrum, we may consider that a more comprehensive engagement, such as a consultation, collaboration exercise or co-creation may be appropriate.

CAV will employ a range of options across this spectrum to engage with our stakeholders tailored to the needs of the functions or issues at hand and to best work with stakeholders to achieve good outcomes.

Table 1: CAV Engagement Spectrum

	 Inform	 Consult	 Involve	 Collaborate	 Empower
Purpose 	To provide information to stakeholders to assist them to understand our work, our organisation, our position, the law	To gain information and feedback from stakeholders to inform our work.	To work with stakeholders to ensure that issues and concerns are understood and considered.	To partner with stakeholders to develop a mutual understanding of issues and to develop solutions and joint plan of action.	To support stakeholders to make decisions on a particular issue. Stakeholders are enabled/ equipped to actively contribute to the achievement of outcomes.
What we will do 	We will inform you	We will keep you informed, listen and acknowledge your feedback. We will provide feedback on how public input was considered in our work.	We will work with you to ensure that stakeholder concerns and feedback are reflected in our work. We will provide feedback on how public input was considered in our work.	We will create opportunities to partner with you to formulate a mutual understanding of the issues and to formulate solutions. We will provide feedback on how public input was considered in our work.	We will support stakeholders with information that we possess to support effective decision making.
What this looks like 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Website & social media • Electronic distribution groups • Letters • Media releases • Contact Centre – information provision • Publications/ ads • Annual Reports • Public presentations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Surveys • Calls for comment/ submissions • Focus groups • Individual or group meetings • Webinars/ education sessions • Contact Centre – conciliation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Forums • Workshops • Advisory panels/ committees • Individual or group meetings • Working with research entities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Partnership agreements • MoUs • Reference groups or expert panels • Joint projects • Co-design processes • Co-production 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Best practice resources and templates • Contact Centre direct support • Website support tools • Referrals to support services

Our focus on inclusivity and accessibility

As a regulator and provider of services to Victorian communities, we recognise the importance of providing inclusive and accessible services for all Victorians. This is particularly important for people experiencing vulnerability in the marketplace and other people who may have a critical need for our services such as First Nations consumers.

Under CAV's [Strategic Plan 2023– 2026](#), one of CAV's three strategic directions is 'Supporting Victorians, especially those experiencing vulnerability, through inclusive and accessible services', and another is 'Better engagement to understand and serve our communities'. Both of these are supported by this framework.

Consumers who need us the most

A particular focus of our engagement with our stakeholders will be to address any barriers that may inhibit good engagement with those who may be experiencing vulnerability or that prevent us from carrying out our duties to protect people who may need us the most.

We understand vulnerability might present in a variety of forms and some life events or challenges or personal, cultural or social characteristics may increase the likelihood of vulnerability to challenges in the marketplace.

Vulnerability is dynamic and can be part of someone's life in different ways. It can be temporary, sporadic or permanent. Someone may not experience vulnerability to marketplace challenges all the time and anyone can be vulnerable at any point in time. It does not define a person. Some examples of vulnerability in the marketplace are outlined in Table 2.

Table 2: Examples of vulnerability

Life events or challenges	Family or domestic violence Financial stress or low income Experiencing a natural disaster or crisis event Job loss, homelessness, insecure housing or housing stress
Personal, cultural, or social characteristics	Diverse background Having a first language other than English Physical, mental or other disabilities Age (very young or older) Living in a remote area Poor reading, writing or numerical skills

*Note: This list aims to provide examples only and is not exhaustive.

CAV considers it vital to support Victorians experiencing vulnerability because they are likely to be disproportionately affected by unfair practices and may have a reduced capacity to make informed decisions or to exercise their rights. To this end, CAV is committed to addressing any barriers and providing the best possible access to its services to support people experiencing vulnerability.

We will do this by targeting strategies to better understand and support individual Victorians and diverse communities, working with regulated business to ensure they are doing what they are required and should do to support all Victorians, and working on ourselves to ensure that we improve our capability, understanding, awareness and operations to better support Victorians who may find it hard to engage with us or have a greater need for our services at any point in time.

Further details about some of our work to support Victorians experiencing vulnerability can be found on our website: [funded services and grants](#).

First Nations consumers

We recognise communities have differing needs and we want to provide genuinely helpful and responsive services. A key priority will be our commitment to improve our reach and better engage with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people across Victoria, and to ensure our services are culturally safe.

How we will make sure we are doing it right

Affirming the value we place on hearing from and working with our stakeholders, we have put governance and other mechanisms in place to ensure that our culture supports effective stakeholder engagement and that we monitor, review and improve our stakeholder management approach regularly.

Supporting the framework at multiple levels

All of our staff across the organisation take responsibility for good stakeholder engagement practices.

- **Executive and Senior Management:** support the implementation of the framework and the application of best practice to CAV's stakeholder engagement. The Executive oversee our stakeholder engagement activities and ensure that the culture of CAV supports and values effective stakeholder management practices.
- **Staff:** commit to applying the framework to stakeholder engagement they participate in and use every engagement as an opportunity to build stronger relationships with our stakeholders and the community. They commit to ensuring they take opportunities to learn and develop skills around engagement, cultural safety and working with specific communities and be a part of a culture that values effective stakeholder engagement practices.
- **Community and Consumer Engagement Branch:** the custodian of the framework and responsible for supporting the Executive to ensure it is being utilised to embed best practice stakeholder engagement within CAV. They provide staff with advice, support, and tools to carry out their responsibilities in relation to stakeholder management. They collect data and feedback and monitor CAV's stakeholder engagement framework and approach and provide recommendations on improvement opportunities. They are also responsible for ensuring that CAV has a sound approach to engagement with vulnerable community members and groups.

Building staff capability

We will invest in our people and systems to support effective engagement. This will include building the capability of our people through training and other activities in areas such as general stakeholder engagement and customer service skills development, cultural safety, accessibility and inclusion, engaging with priority communities and conflict and relationship management skills development.

CAV will also build capability and consistency in its approach to stakeholder management by implementing internal processes where required and support its people with tools such as guides.

Monitoring our progress and improving our approach

As good stakeholder engagement is fundamental to CAV's success, we commit to reviewing and reporting on our approach and efforts to remain accountable and improve our approach.

A key element of this will be ongoing monitoring. For example, regular evaluation exercises at the end of larger stakeholder engagement processes will provide opportunities for us to evaluate how the framework is operating in practice. Additionally, feedback from our key stakeholders (both formal and informal) will be regularly sought and considered.

Information collected to support monitoring may include: verbal or written feedback, formal surveys, process reviews and other data collection (such as via our website or other engagement platforms that we may use from time to time).

Under CAV's [Strategic Plan 2023– 2026](#), we have adopted four outcome indicators. These outcome indicators are:

- increased confidence of consumers and renters in exercising their rights
- decreased response time to address serious non-compliance
- increased stakeholder confidence in CAV as a regulator
- increased staff satisfaction and engagement.

As we anticipate improved engagement will lead to improved outcomes, data collected under these indicators may provide indirect evidence regarding the effectiveness of the framework.

Over the longer term, it will be important to determine whether this framework remains fit for purpose and meets our (and stakeholders') expectations. Therefore, we intend to review the framework every three years of operation. Reviews will be informed by the feedback we have received about the framework and our engagement.

We will listen to the feedback we receive and always look to actively implement improvements in our approach and engagement practices wherever possible.



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