

Cancer Support Group program

Across the state, Cancer Council Victoria

recognises over 120 community-led groups for people affected by cancer. We're here to support existing groups and to help people looking to establish new ones.



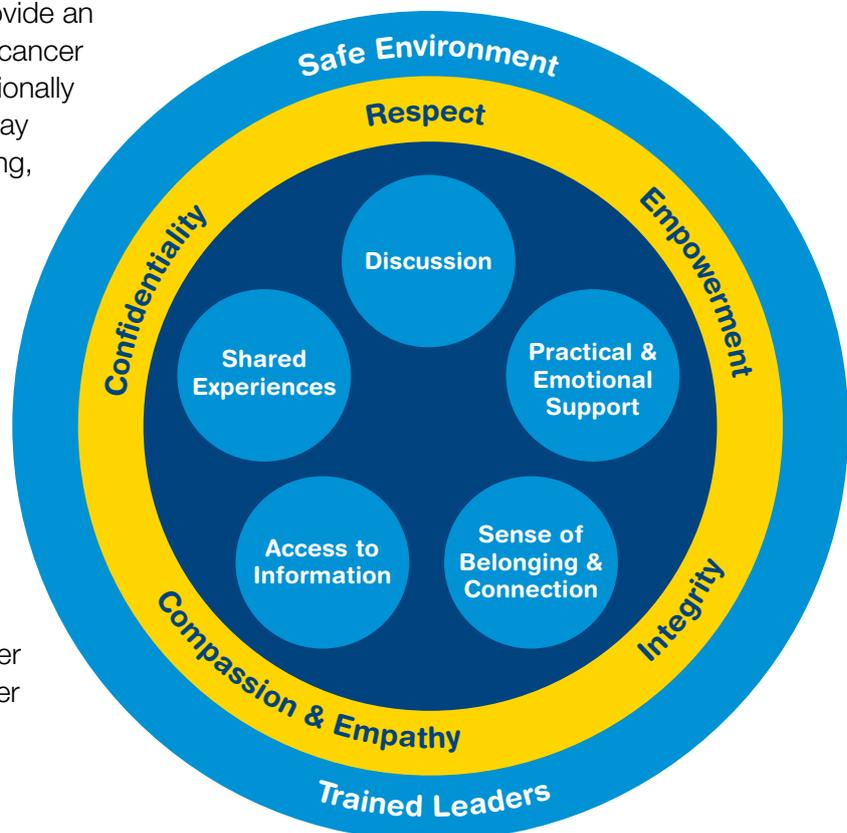
What is a CSG?

Cancer support groups (CSGs) provide an opportunity for people affected by cancer to meet for discussions in an emotionally supportive environment. Groups may also choose to engage in fundraising, advocacy, practical support, or social and educational activities, according to the wants and needs of members.

Group members can discuss the impacts of diagnosis and treatment, and access evidence-based information for themselves and for families and carers.

CSGs are also often a place of social connections, where people can learn not only to live with cancer but also to enjoy life during and after their treatment.

Cancer Support Groups



Aims of a CSG

- That a group member can access emotional and practical support from others with a similar lived experience of cancer.
- That through the experience of speaking with peers, they will be empowered to seek the information and support they need, and will feel less alone and isolated.

Core values of an effective CSG

- Respect
- Empowerment
- Compassion/empathy
- Integrity
- Confidentiality

Evidence of the impact of peer support

Research has shown that peer support can improve quality of life by reducing feelings of isolation, stress and anxiety in people affected by cancer.^{1,2} It can help to normalise feelings and can provide emotional, practical and informational support.³ It can also foster better two-way communication between patients and their health care teams.⁴

What makes a good CSG leader?

It's important that CSG leaders are stable in their own health and emotionally ready to take on the challenges and responsibilities of leading a group. Cancer Council Victoria recommends that leaders are at least 18 months to 2 years post-diagnosis.

Training is an important part of developing a leader's communication skills and empathic understanding. It's also critical in strengthening a leader's ability to deal with confronting situations such as grief, loss, anger and dominating group members. Research shows that trained leaders are better equipped to provide a safe and nurturing environment and experience less difficulty than leaders without training.⁵

A good CSG leader is:⁶

- **Aware** – balances own needs and health with that of the group, is aware of group dynamics and interactions
- **Willing** – committed to the group, is available, has time
- **Agreeable** – supportive, warm, empathic, honest, has a sense of humour
- **Open** – flexible, enthusiastic, shows initiative

References

- 1: Chronic Illness Alliance, 2011, Peer support for chronic and complex conditions: a literature review, Melbourne.
- 2: Gottlieb B & Wachala E, 2007, 'Cancer Support groups: a critical review of empirical studies', *Psycho-oncology*, 16: 379-400
- 3: Hoey L, Ieropoli S, White V, Jefford M, 2008, 'Systematic review of peer-support programs for people with cancer,' *Patient education and counselling*, 70: 315-337
- 4: Peers for Progress, 2014, Global evidence for peer support: humanising health care, Report from an International conference hosted by Peers for Progress and the National Council of La Raza.
- 5: Zordan RD, Juraskova I, Butow PN, et al, 2010, 'Exploring the impact of training on the experience of Australian support group leaders: current practices and implications for research,' *Health Expectations*, 13: 427-440
- 6: Pomery A, 2014, Psychologist, PhD candidate of The University of Melbourne, work in progress

How does Cancer Council Victoria support CSG leaders?

- **Training** in practical aspects of running a group and communication skills
- **Guidelines** for running effective groups
- **Regular communication** through newsletters, emails, phone calls and visits where possible
- **Education updates** on a variety of topics are offered throughout the year, to keep leaders up to date with skills and evidence-based information
- Access to **public liability insurance** for group activities
- **Referral of potential new group members** through Cancer Council Victoria support services
- **Help** with letters of introduction to health professionals and letters of support for grant applications
- **Provision of logo** to help promote group as officially recognised by Cancer Council Victoria

Want to find out more?

Whether you'd like to establish a new group or are involved in an existing CSG, we can assist with queries about training, support, group leadership and obtaining recognition by Cancer Council Victoria. Call us on **13 11 20** or email csg@cancervic.org.au



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