

DISCUSSION PAPER ON THE AUSTRALIAN AA STRUCTURE – AN INVENTORY

Introduction:

The 2017 General Service Conference recommended that AA Australia should take structural inventory.

Conference 2017 recommended the following advisory action:

Advisory Action #001B/2017:

- 2018: The findings so far, and tell us what you want.
- Discussion paper and on-line survey.
- Circulate a Discussion paper informing the fellowship on the general service conference workshop (2/11/17), adding that an on-line members survey will follow for the fellowship to participate.
- The on-line survey to be activated around the time of the discussion paper.
- The survey will seek the following information:
 - Are we fulfilling our primary purpose?
 - What, if any, are the issues at local, area, regional, national levels of structure?
 - What would you change?
- Findings submitted to conference 2018.
- The conference submission would be an inventory document to inform the desire for structural change if any, or to address *smaller matters via topics of conference*.

This paper is the first stage of a process intended to inform Conference, Central Service Offices and other Service Entities what the Australian Fellowship may want, if anything, regarding structural change.

No inventory of the Australian structure has been taken in nearly half a century. Therefore, the paper aims to provide sufficient information for members and Groups to be able to further help Conference by completing an online survey about fulfilling our Primary Purpose; Structural Issues (Local, Area, Regional and National); and any Desire for Structural Change.

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What you told the 2017 Conference Workshop

The following summaries are notated by region, and although some issues were echoed across regions, we have not repeated them to alleviate the need for extra written material.

Eastern region:

- Unity needs to be restored, splintered service entities double up. The invitation needs to be extended to all entities. People have rotated. New people are open to inventory. There has been positive feedback from the NSW CSO service entities about a structural inventory.
- Members want to heal and move on as one.
- There are too many structural service positions vacant. Some areas cannot fully function in structural service and financially struggle.
- One national service forum for all facets of sub-committee service: Corrections/treatment/PI/CPC/Special needs. Could this happen in unison or coordinated with conventions or instead of regional forums?
- There have been positive examples of Areas and CSO's (Intergroups) combining to eliminate primary purpose cross-over and unnecessary bureaucracy.
- Financial situation and reporting from GSO and the board needs to be improved.
- Topics of conference could go on-line for voting.
- CSO's could come to conference with voting rights.
- The process of topic 001/2017 has been positive. Workshops, information and group discussion has seen more awareness about the service structure. Don't stop now!

Southern Region:

- There is an opportunity to heal with Richmond CSO. Extend the invitation for inventory.
- There are 3 non-functioning areas in Southern. The current make-up of the structure could change to facilitate these areas to rejuvenate.
- The forums held around topic 001/2017 were well-attended and informative for members.
- If combining Areas and CSO's increases participation then that would be a good thing
- Less national service events could save money and increase participation
- Some AA literature is sourced direct from overseas reducing the profits available to General Service
- Conference and the GSB have been distracted by disunity for too long. Some members say the situation discourages them from service.

North Eastern Region:

- a brilliant opportunity to examine what we have.
- A single website and single helpline is a very good idea.
- Confusion between CSO and District duties; where the money goes and what it does.
- Incoming treasurers unaware or unable to do it so money stopped at CSO.
- Groups confused and mis-informed.
- We have overly fragmented our structure.
- Too costly to get to forums and events from a remote region.
- There is merit in all Structural Review Committee options: already led to improvement in 12-Step work.

North and South-Central Regions:

- A change could be good to stimulate interest. It's healthy to take inventory and newer members aren't doing service. The issue with the structure was shown by the Richmond experience and could happen again
- There is some disunity between districts and areas.
- Issue of designating by State boundaries
- Whilst in the process of the re-structure it could bring Steps 4-12 into the Structure
- Some areas are vast with limited groups/meetings. Australia has severe population clusters which informs possible area/region revision?
- Areas could align with the region according to health/medical entities.
- An opportunity to improve communication on-line: meetings lists, on-line literature.

Western Region:

- Members need to own the structure
- It is not clear that a change to structure would make a difference to the core problem which is a lack of participation
- It would be useful to address the geographic challenges
- Not enough members informed about the service structure
- There are gaps in carrying the message.

General Service Office:

- Delegates when at conference aren't representing Area, they are representing nationally. CSO's are local. They shouldn't have representation at national level. Can see issues with incorporating CSO's.
- North America make money from online donations/literature.
- Delegates aren't as proactive as days gone by. All the work involved in preparation of such workshops, yet poor participation for numerous areas at conventions, forums may be from a lack of promotion or sponsorship.
- There has never been litigation regards Vic or Croydon CSO entities. It's an outside issue but it would be great to get resolved. However, GSO remit is to preserve and protect AA copyright.
- groups should maintain responsibility for their own donations and manage the split themselves, rather than to one entity to allocate on their behalf.
- Some CSO's aren't always doing their 12-step work and basic AA duties.

General Service Board:

- Amount of money that goes to the GSB compared to the money going to the fellowship is very minimal.
- Members struggle to understand the difference between CSO vs GSO.
- Groups report and fund CSO, but don't understand CSO / GSO structure.
- Unification may help people to understand the structure.

Tell Us More!

This Survey takes the 3 legacies as its guide: Recovery, Unity and Service.

In the language of personal *recovery*, if we are to conduct a thorough inventory of our structure then we need to understand its current flaws, the causes; and the measures we must take to change.

The *traditions* warn that ‘...nothing can surely destroy our spiritual heritage as futile disputes over money, property and authority.’ Similarly, ‘problems of money, property or prestige may divert us from our primary purpose’.

In the *concepts*, the ‘ultimate authority for world services should reside in the collective conscience of the whole fellowship.’ and that ‘all important decisions be reached by discussion, vote and wherever possible substantial unanimity.’ The concepts make conference ‘the final decision respecting large matters of general policy and finance.’

We ask that you spend time to tell us about what you and your groups conscience might show to be the best way forward for the service structure of Alcoholics Anonymous in Australia.

The Inventory Committee will report the results of the survey to Conference under the following headings:

1. Fulfilling our Primary Purpose
2. Structural Issues (Local; Area; Regional; National)
3. Desire for Structural Change

Your insight and responses to the on-line survey are truly appreciated. Groups may take the survey multiple times. But we ask members to take it only once.

Link to survey:

<https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/T82PLPN>

Yours in service,
2018 Conference Inventory Committee
For further information, contact your local Area or CSO representatives.

Background Information to Help Complete the Survey

To further inform inventory, the paper includes information about history of the Australian structure; the current structure and its service arms, reference to Structure Review Committee material and sources; ways other countries have altered the service structure to meet their needs; and possible scenarios for Australia to pursue.

Functions Any Structure Must Perform

Inventory may inform a simple national structure to carry out the following 5 functions with neither gap nor overlap:

Public Information: our front door, where public and media can access our public relations and non-alcoholic spokespersons, and to facilitate the message to our delegated regions of Asia and Oceania.

AA literature: hold the copyright, protect trademarks as we approve, publish and supply literature to members and the public, including professionals and the community. Carrying the message is substantially funded from sales of literature.

Legal entity: the formal guardian of AA 'world services' for Australia; the custodian of the 12 steps and 12 traditions. Empowered to act on its own responsibility within its charters and by-laws, requiring administrative support.

Australian Group Conscience: AA founders arraigned for a single entity to have authority for the active maintenance of our world services, requiring administrative support to facilitate gatherings, independently of the legal entity.

Public Liability Insurance: Groups need the protection of public liability insurance. Hopefully, the contents of this paper have informed you, and your group.

A brief history of the Australian Service Structure.

Australia has two service structures: Central Service and General Service.

Central Service arose on the first few decades of the fellowship when state councils organically grew in different states to coordinate groups.

1952: NSW service council established.

1954: Victorian service council established. NSW propose the states get together for a National forum.

1959: first National forum. Australian Conference established subject to confirmation from state service bodies.

1961: First Conference declaring that: Conference exists to further our collective Twelfth step work at the nation-wide level.

1968: Tasmanian state council established. Conference amended its constitution to admit 'state' Central Service offices to conference with full voting rights.

The 10th anniversary Convention resolved that Australia had come of age and would assume responsibility of the 3 legacies of AA. Thus, Australia formally adopted the North American General Service Structure in March 1970.

Through the 70's, Conference sought greater unity with the NSW service council. In 1982, discussions cease with the NSW service council as all attempts to cooperate were unsuccessful.

1986: Conference adopts 'as nearly as possible' the Nth American structure, considering extending full membership to all CSO's but sticking with representation by State Central Service Offices for 'the foreseeable future'.

1988: Conference forms a Structure Committee to consider greater interaction between Conference, the Board, General and Central Service systems, with the committee to consider participation at conference by increasing number of Central Service Offices being set up in Australia.

1991: The structure committee recommend that existing service bodies (CSO's) merge into Australian General Service Conference as regional committees with voting rights.

1992: Conference invites one CSO rep from each region to represent that region at conference with full voting rights.

1993: Conference refers a topic to structure committee recommending one stream of service.

1995: Conference rejects the call for a single service structure, encouraging Area's and CSO's to liaise over service matters.

1997: In view of the growth of the General Service Structure since the days when Central Service Offices were the major provider of AA services, Conference removes the vote from Central Service Offices attending conference. CSOs could attend as observers.

2009: Conference reject a topic calling for a meeting of conference and all central service offices to restore unity.

The Current Structure

Central Service

There are 25 Central Service Offices listed as such in Australia:

QLD: Cairns, Townsville, Mackay, Sunshine Coast, Brisbane, Toowoomba, Gold Coast/Southport.

NSW: Ballina, Newcastle, Central Coast, Northern Sydney, Blue Mountains and Western Sydney, Sydney City, Southern Highlands, Wollongong and South Coast.

Victoria: Richmond, Prahran.

Tasmania: Launceston, Hobart.

SA: Adelaide

WA: Perth

NT: Darwin, Katherine, Alice Springs

ACT: Canberra

Guideline GL-12 defines a CSO as:

A central service office is an AA service office that involves partnership among groups in a community, just as groups are a partnership of individuals. It is established to carry out certain functions common to all groups, best handled by a centralised office, and is usually maintained, supervised and supported by the groups in their own general interest. It exists to aid groups in their common primary purpose of carrying the message to the alcoholic who still suffers.

General service literature suggests 9 functional areas of a CSO:

1. Receiving, distributing and following up on 12th step calls, answering enquiries about AA.
2. Maintain conveniently located office and PO box.
3. Ordering, selling AA conference approved literature.
4. Accepting and re-directing donations to GSO and Areas.
5. Local information hub – newsletters, events, meetings lists, contacts.
6. Manage details of local events.
7. Maintain information about local hospitals, treatment centres.
8. Cooperate with other community agencies, assist press or PI matters.
9. Maintain contact with groups, particularly in Correctional or Treatment Facilities.

Some of these functions are duplicated in Area (General Service). This has resulted in examples of two arms of service working well together, but more importantly, other examples where the service arms compete, duplicate or miss opportunities in other aspects of twelfth step work.

NOTE: referenced to Australian General Service Manual, Inc. GL-12 and the AA group handbook, both produced by General Service – some CSOs may differ in their view of functions.

The Current Structure (cont'd)

General Service

Bill Wilson observed that General Service was necessary because central service offices, mostly concerned with 12th step work, were unable to provide those services which affected AA as a whole. For example, the fundamental functions that the general service structure in Australia was introduced to provide are:

- A group conscience for all of Australia (conference)
- A legal entity to represent AA in Australia (General Service Board)

It also publishes AA literature.

To achieve this, 2,000 AA meetings across Australia are divided into 21 geographical areas. These are re-grouped into regions:

Region	Meetings	Active Areas	Groups Active in Area
Northern	23	1 of 1	50%
North-Eastern	427	3 of 3	20%
Eastern	863	7 of 8	<36%
Southern	457	3 of 5	<25%
Central	102	2 of 2	<20%
Western	190	2 of 2	<21%
Total	2062	18 of 21	AV = 15%

Source: Structure Review Committee; AA.org.au; 2015 Conference attendance.

As of 2017, 18 areas are financial enough to end a delegate to Conference, where up to 14 members of the General Service Board also have voting rights.

	Votes at Conference
Area Delegates	21
Non-Alcoholic Trustees	4
Regional Trustees	6
General Service Trustees	2
World service delegates	2
General Service Office	1
Maximum	36

NOTE: World Service Delegates are non-voting members on board committees, they have a right to attend board meetings in an advisory capacity only: they do have a vote at conference as does the Manager of the General Service Office. This employs 3 full-time staff who serve both the Conference and the General Service Board.

According to the service manual, 'area delegates should ideally constitute more than 2/3 of the voting members'.

At last year's conference, only 16 delegates were in attendance.

Some service structures: the differences.

Australia, North America and other Countries Structures

The Australian General Service Structure is based on the North American model but functions somewhat differently because:

- A Central Service structure had evolved organically decades before the General Service structure was introduced in 1970.
- There are far fewer groups in Australia (2,063 vs 65,741).

The North American service manual maintains an area as 'part of a state or province, or all of it, or may include parts of more than one state or province, depending on the size and needs of the AA population'.

North American areas are based on population/language clusters. Several areas can exist within state boundaries, whereas Australian areas are divided up by borders, resulting in groups separated by long distances; or vast areas that struggle to support the service structure; or align services to either central or general service.

In North America, Area positions rotate simultaneously to retain service knowledge; World service delegates are chosen from serving trustees; Australia chooses them outside the trustees, adding 2 positions to the board and conference. In America, there are no regional or national coordinators.

Among the ways other countries have changed their service structure from the North American model include:

- Belgium has a board of 4 while GSO provides services to 'groups' and coordinates CSOs. A single distribution centre provides AA literature.
- In Denmark, the number of groups in a region determines how many delegates it sends to conference.
- In Germany guests are invited to conference.
- in Finland, the publishing entity acts as the board and the groups hold an annual 'great meeting' separate from conference.
- Changed laws in Great Britain required AA to change away from the North American Model. It published a structure manual, separate from the service manual and got approval from New York GSO to alter the concepts. The board holds an annual workshop to reflect on personal and collective effectiveness.
- In the Netherlands, there are no CSO's. GSO is staffed by volunteers, sells all literature and regions respond to enquiries and communicate amongst groups.
- In NZ, the board and finance documents are published on a website for any members. The board resigns each year but can stand for re-election.
- In Sweden, 75% of all literature sales are from an on-line shop, with the publishing entity responsible for the GSO. In 2012, Sweden reviewed its structure.

Some Structural Options

The Structural Review Committee presented a document to the Australian fellowship called *Structural Review Plan* in 2016. The plan presented different ways Australia could alter its structure to suit its unique set of issues, such as:

Scenario 1: Fine tune the existing model.

Groups could adopt some ideas from other countries, for example:

- Improve on-line communications, including selling literature.
- Groups vote on topics on-line.
- Conference could re-confirm the board annually.
- Empower more service volunteering at Office and Board level.
- A separate manual on the service structure to inform:
 - How structure works.
 - Which entity does what.
 - How money is managed.
- Finance reporting confirmed prior to conference to enable considered discussion and possibly topics.
- Create more areas so wealthier cities/areas could support those that struggle for representation at Conference; creating more delegates.
- Areas and groups could annually endorse or have a say on conference agenda as with topics.

Scenario 2: Add CSO's to conference.

Reconsider the 1991 recommendation of the then 3rd legacy structure committee that all CSO's could have a voting voice at conference, further facilitating the way for a national on-line shop.

Scenario 3: A 'European' or hybrid model.

A scenario based on groups working through a single channel of service. CSO's and Area's could join as 'Intergroup' steering committees. Where there is no CSO, the Area assumes the role.

- Intergroups become the primary providers of 12th step services, aligning with Government health or social services in the area.
- Group Service Reps are pivotal to this form of structure.
- Intergroups send delegates to conference, some combining to present CSO and Area reps to conference, regaining a non-delegate 2/3 majority.
- Trustees become responsible for national PI, treatment, correctional and other sub-committee requirements.
- The general/national service office could report to the Board and administer independently of the Board and Conference. There may be strategic branches of the GSO in required locations.

Scenario 4: All or some of the above.

Scenario 5: Stay the same.

As the concepts remind us, AA always needs to consider the 'do nothing' option.

NOTES: