

# FORUM DIALOGUES

**BehaviourWorks**  
AUSTRALIA

## COLLECTIVE PROBLEM-SOLVING THROUGH FACILITATED FORUM DIALOGUES

When it comes to solving difficult or complex health, social, environmental and organisational challenges, it's important to know what the problem actually is. This may sound obvious or counter-intuitive, but the truth is that many organisations rush to solutions without first conducting a detailed examination of the problem, which can lead to poor program outcomes.

To help organisations avoid making costly assumptions, BehaviourWorks Australia (BWA) offers facilitated Forum Dialogues. These creative exploration exercises give stakeholders the opportunity to consider the latest research on the problem and identify evidence-informed opportunities for action.

By inviting and encouraging stakeholders to lend their perspective and experience to the problem, Forums create space for those 'aha' moments to occur and ultimately yield a shared understanding of exactly 'who needs to do what differently'.

## THE FORUM APPROACH

Developed by Professor John Lavis (right) from McMaster University in Canada, Forums have been used in the health sector for over a decade to accelerate a shared understanding of healthcare challenges.

One of the main benefits of Forums is that they support and promote the use of research evidence in policy and practice - something that researchers and practitioners have long called for.

Forums have since brought hundreds of CEOs, department heads, researchers, clinicians and consumer representatives together and resulted in



dozens of peer-reviewed publications, conference presentations and reports.

Introduced to Australia in 2012 by Associate Professor Peter Bragge, Forums are proving to be equally effective in Australian contexts, bringing diverse groups of stakeholders

together to discover how others view and address complex problems, understand key contextual factors, target behaviours and the person/group responsible for performing the behaviour.

# FORUMS DIALOGUES



## REACHING CONSENSUS

Forum participants bring their own tacit knowledge and views of the problem or challenge to each dialogue. The aim is not necessarily to find consensus among participants, who may include researchers, policymakers and practitioners, but for them to deliberate upon the findings of a rapid literature and practice review and consider how their particular challenge can be addressed using this shared knowledge.

It's not about finding the 'right' option, but about reaching agreement on which of the many options is 'right enough'.

“ The Forum process ended up being the thing that gave us a breakthrough in the Save 000 for Emergencies project because it helped us identify how people really felt about Ambulance Victoria. ”

## HOW FORUMS WORK

Following briefings by the commissioning agency on the problem and stakeholders who should be invited/involved, BWA runs Forums in four main steps:

### Step 1 - Define the challenge

The specific focus of the Forum is determined – what's in and what's out of scope. This results in collaboratively-developed aims (the problem we are trying to solve), terms of reference (the specific questions that need to be answered to address the problem) and the identification of relevant stakeholder groups.

### Step 2 - Consider findings of the rapid evidence and practice review

Relevant evidence sources, including government and other reports ('grey' literature), peer-reviewed academic papers and other data resources are identified, reviewed and synthesised into a briefing document. Practice reviews, involving interviews with topic experts and practitioners, may also be undertaken to extend our understanding of how the problem is experienced in the real world.

### Step 3 - Structured stakeholder dialogue

The briefing document is sent to 18-22 key stakeholders (identified in step 1) prior to the day-long, structured stakeholder dialogue where participants deliberate upon evidence-informed opportunities for action and develop concise statements of what needs to happen next.

### Step 4 - Supported action

Outcomes of the dialogue are recorded and post Forum briefings are held with the commissioning agency and others with carriage of the challenge.

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## INSPIRING CHANGE

Forums are evaluated using questionnaires developed by Professor John Lavis (page 1).

The results of these evaluations, from both Australian and international Forums, reveal very high satisfaction rates among participants who consistently report that the experience is both professionally and personally satisfying/rewarding.

Participants report that they enjoy canvassing ideas in an open and creative environment and building relationships with other key stakeholders.

Perhaps more importantly, they report that the exercise has given them the confidence they need to make evidence-based decisions and take action.

“ I appreciated being presented with carefully-evaluated evidence in the field, which is broader than I have time to consider in my day-to-day clinical duties.

Participation has given me renewed optimism to explore our practices and make changes/improvements. It has also shown me that it is a national issue and not just state. The whole process is great and well organised.

I found the Forum to be extremely informative and ultimately helpful for me personally and for the organisation from a systems perspective. ”



BWA has recently conducted several successful Forums for various government and non-government agencies. For example:

In seeking to find a way forward in reducing the high number of non-emergency 000 calls to Ambulance Victoria, a Forum was convened with representatives from Ambulance Victoria, The Victorian Department of Health, the Emergency Services Telecommunications Authority, marketing firms and behavioural experts.

The insights gained from this Forum were used to underpin a major advertising campaign by the specialist behaviour change communications consultancy, The Shannon Company. The campaign highlighted the important role that Ambulance Victoria plays in keeping Victorians safe and included messages about alternative services.

Forums also played a central role in a \$1.5M Victorian Managed Insurance Authority (VMIA) Research and Innovation Program being developed to improve patient safety in Victorian public healthcare. The Forums helped to bring priority problems to the surface, with six trial interventions currently underway.

Forums also helped WorkSafe Victoria identify strategies for improving workers' compensation claim management processes.

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## THE BWA METHOD

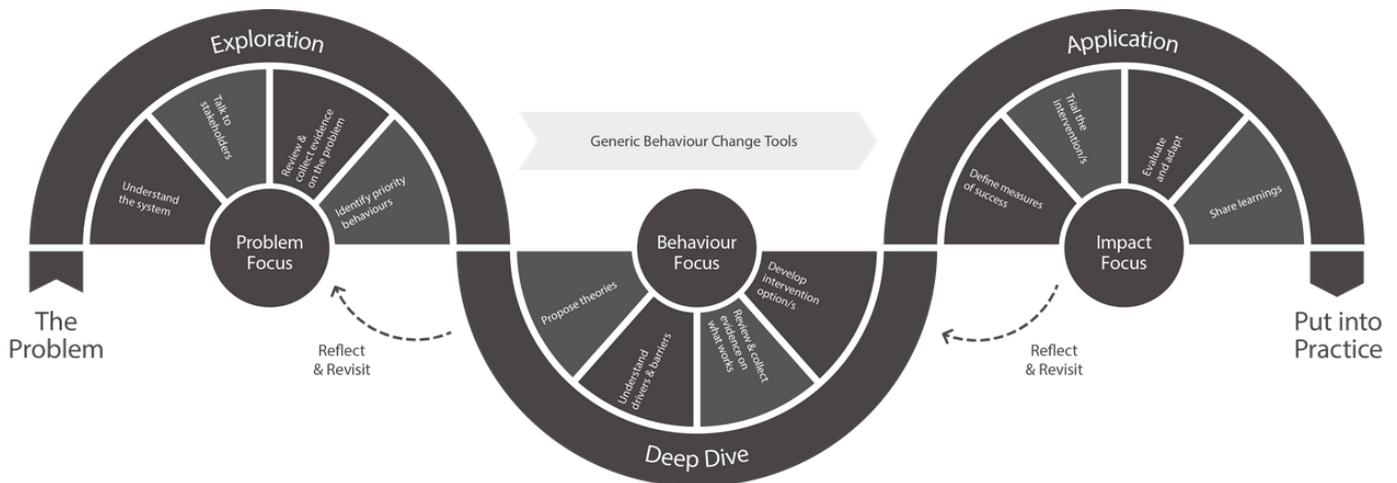
While Forums Dialogues are a stand-alone product, they also form a key part of the BehaviourWorks Method (see below), a three-phase change kit used to explore and unpack problems, identify behaviours and trial/evaluate interventions.

## FURTHER INFORMATION

To learn more about the BWA Method, or our stakeholder Forums, contact us on:

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BehaviourWorks Australia is a behaviour change research enterprise within the Monash Sustainable Development Institute.

Consortium partners include: TheEnvironment Protection Authority Victoria, The Shannon Company, Sustainability Victoria, The Office of Environment and Heritage New South Wales, WorkSafe Victoria, VicRoads, Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning, Australia Post and NSW Environment Protection Authority.

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