



Victoria Community Health Co-operative

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Serving our Member-Owners and Community

The Co-operative Identity

Definition: A co-operative is an autonomous association of persons united voluntarily to meet their common economic, social, and cultural needs and aspirations through a jointly-owned and democratically-controlled enterprise.

Values: Co-operatives are based on the values of self-help, self-responsibility, democracy, equality, equity and solidarity. In the tradition of their founders, co-operative members believe in the ethical values of honesty, openness, social responsibility and caring for others.

Principles: The following co-operative principles are guidelines by which co-ops put their values into practice. *Courtesy of the International Cooperative Alliance (www.ica.coop)*.

1. **Voluntary and Open Membership:** Co-ops are voluntary organisations, open to all persons able to use their services and willing to accept the responsibilities of membership, without gender, social, racial, political or religious discrimination.
2. **Democratic Member Control:** Co-ops are democratic organisations controlled by their members, who actively participate in setting their policies and making decisions. Men and women serving as elected representatives are accountable to the membership. In primary co-ops, members have equal voting rights (one member, one vote) and co-ops at other levels are also organised in a democratic manner.
3. **Member Economic Participation:** Members contribute equitably to, and democratically control, the capital of their co-op. At least part of that capital is usually the common property of the co-op. Members usually receive limited compensation, if any, on capital subscribed as a condition of membership. Members allocate surpluses for any or all of the following purposes: developing their co-op, possibly by setting up reserves, part of which at least would be indivisible; benefiting members in proportion to their transactions with the co-op; and supporting other activities approved by the membership.
4. **Autonomy and Independence:** Co-ops are autonomous, self-help organisations controlled by their members. If they enter into agreements with other organisations, including governments, or raise capital from external sources, they do so on terms that ensure democratic control by their members and maintain their co-op autonomy.
5. **Education, Training and Information:** Co-ops provide education and training for their members, elected representatives, managers, and employees so they can contribute effectively to the development of their co-ops. They inform the general public - particularly young people and opinion leaders - about the nature and benefits of co-operation.
6. **Co-operation among Co-operatives:** Co-ops serve their members most effectively and strengthen the co-op movement by working together through local, national, regional and international structures.
7. **Concern for Community:** Co-ops work for the sustainable development of their communities through policies approved by their members.