



# Strategic priority: Putting consumers front and centre in all that we do

## What do we mean?

This strategic priority defines our commitment to working with consumers: involving consumers in decision-making at both an individual level – around their own health literacy, treatments and illness management; and at an organisational level – around policy development, service design, delivery and evaluation. Our approach aims to ensure that consumers and carers are active participants, not just sources of endorsement or information.

## Why is this a priority?

In 1978, the Declaration of Alma Ata stated that “people have the right and duty to participate individually and collectively in the planning and implementation of their health care.” As the population of south eastern NSW ages and lifestyles change, more people are living with multiple long-term conditions that can affect health, quality of life and ability to function. In particular, vulnerable populations are at greater risk of poor health outcomes, including those with low socio-economic status (unemployed, low income, low education), Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, culturally and linguistically diverse communities, and refugee communities. With the health system facing unsustainable pressure and increasing cost, we need to work with consumers to co-design new, sustainable approaches that better meet their current and future needs.

## What does the evidence say?

Evidence is strong that involving consumers in their own care, and working together with hard to reach communities, has multiple benefits: improved health outcomes for people, increased efficiencies in health services, increased trust in the health care team and reduced health care costs both to the patient and to the health system overall. When providers form partnerships with consumers and carers, not only can a consumer’s experience of care be improved, but the design and planning of organisational processes, safety systems, quality initiatives and training can also be more effective.

## What have our stakeholders told us?

- the health system is described as disconnected and difficult for people to navigate
- the voices of vulnerable people have not been sufficiently heard
- health care providers have expressed concern about low levels of health literacy in the community
- some people are not effectively managing their chronic conditions leading to avoidable poor health outcomes
- shifting to a model of meaningful consumer participation will require a change in attitude and practice, for service providers in particular but also for many consumers themselves
- support will be needed for consumers to develop leadership capacity in order to influence and champion change
- consumers have indicated they are willing to get involved and want information available to make good decisions
- consumers want an accessible health system providing choice in the types of care available, regardless of where they might live within the region

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## What is our approach?

Our aspiration for this strategic priority is to achieve meaningful, systematic and equitable consumer engagement across the whole of health sector, with consumers and providers as equal partners.

We will be guided by the wisdom of our Community Advisory Committee and share our intentions in our Consumer Engagement Implementation Plan.

We recognise:

- people want to know how they've made a difference, we will let people know what we have understood, and what we plan to do
- we can't fix everything, we will be upfront with people about what we can and can't do
- when we work with people we will make sure expectations are realistic and we will be upfront and clear about the level at which decisions will be made
- things will take time to change

We will:

- **improve consumer representation** across all aspects of the organisation's work - creating opportunities for participation both at a system and a service level, for example in:
  - advisory groups
  - online tools to contribute views eg. consumer health panel
  - targeted community planning initiatives
  - commissioning selection panels
- create opportunities for **people to tell their stories and be listened to** and by understanding these experiences- advocate and influence for change
- partner with consumers and providers across the whole health system to **map patient journeys** of care – to understand the strengths, weaknesses and pitfalls
- develop consumer and provider **leadership capacity** in the primary care sector to champion the change required
- create opportunities for consumers and providers to **problem solve together**
- **plan and co-design services with consumer input** to achieve commissioned services that are tailored and responsive to consumer needs, preferences and choices
- support the primary care sector to empower consumers in decisions regarding their own health care through provision of targeted education and resources to develop **consumer health literacy, self-management skills and patient activation strategies**
- work with service providers to include **consumer representation and reporting of consumer experience** across all aspects of commissioned services
- assess and **monitor consumer experience of care** and work together to make improvements across the whole of health system