



Involving Consumers in COVID-19 Response and Recovery

Consumer engagement and participation in strategic and operational healthcare planning and decision-making has never been more important than in the current COVID-19 environment. Consumers are a key stakeholder and an essential source of advice and guidance in your work. Consumer engagement is particularly relevant during the COVID-19 pandemic that necessitates rapid and changing policy and clinical decisions, and protocols at systemic levels.

It is important for health services to have access to consumer input and advice quickly and easily. This Tip Sheet is designed to support health staff to involve consumers in the codesign of COVID-19 Response and Recovery strategies and operational planning and decision-making.

Your engagement doesn't have to be perfect, but its important you try

- Consumers want to be involved and are standing by waiting to support you
- HCASA exists to assist health services and consumers to improve health care. We are there to help you to connect with consumers

Consumers can provide feedback on the effectiveness of the health system response

- Consumers can consolidate multiple lived experiences of health care consumers into system issues that health services can then respond to, in a timely and effective manner
- Contact HCASA to request rapid response input and feedback from the COVID-19 Consumer Reference Group

Use established networks to find consumers quickly and easily

- Work with your Consumer Engagement staff to help you connect with consumers
- Involve the consumer advocates you have already recruited (eg to your Consumer Advisory Committees, clinical Governance, Safety and Quality and other committees)
- Contact HCASA to request rapid response input and feedback from the COVID-19 Consumer Reference Group
- Contact established community organisations and groups who can connect you with their communities
- HCASA recommends consumers be paid for their contribution. It is likely you may involve for a series of short communications or meetings so consider
 - Estimating time at the end of each month and make one payment
 - Asking consumers to keep a tally of their hours and send in at the end of each month
 - Talking to consumers about these options and what you will cover

Consumers will help ensure you are making the right decisions

- Consumers will understand and can advise you on the potential community impacts
- Consumers will be able to inform you of vulnerable groups who may fall through the gaps
- Consumers can help you get the messaging right
- Consumers can act as a check and sounding board for your decisions

Facilitate consumer to link online and remotely

- Use simple options for consumers to link in, such as video and audio calls, teleconferencing
- Keep consumers updated on key issues. This can be as simple as short, regular email updates with three dot points. These could outline 1) what has happened since you last met, 2) what the next steps are and 3) what input you want from consumers
- Work with your Consumer Engagement staff to help you
 - Set up remote/online connections and facilitate consumers access to them
 - Connect with consumers through phone calls and emails and keep them updated

Involve diverse consumers particularly those who are most impacted

- We know health services are considering the needs of all South Australians in COVID-19 planning and response. Particular focus is important on those individuals and groups most impacted; through increased vulnerability, due to high-risk groups, or reduced access to health services.
- Involving consumers from vulnerable communities will assist health services to identify strategies to reduce gaps and address risk.
- Health services should consider involving;
 - People and groups who are at higher risk of poor outcomes
 - Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities
 - People living in rural and remote communities
 - Survivors with direct experience of COVID-19 health services

You do not need to protect consumers from difficult discussions and decisions

- Consumer groups are having the same discussions as health services and clinicians
- They are monitoring national and international information sources and understand the reality
- They are not clinical experts but they do understand the impact to consumers and the communities of COVID-19 response and recovery decisions
- Consumers have a right to access clear, reliable and emerging data about COVID-19
- When you involve clinicians you should involve consumers who experience the outcomes of these decisions

Consumers know best, about their individual experience of the COVID-19 pandemic. Involving consumers in COVID-19 Response and Recovery will ensure decision-making will be the best it can be.

HEALTH PROVIDERS & CONSUMERS, WE'RE ALL IN THIS TOGETHER, OUR SHARED EXPERIENCE

For further assistance contact HCASA on 08 8231 4167 or email info@hcasa.asn.au

This resource has been adapted from Health Consumers Queensland (HCQ) with their generous permission