

The why of Consumer Engagement



Why engage with consumers?

Engaging with consumers at all stages of policy development and decision-making not only improves the quality of the policy but ultimately improves the community's health and wellbeing outcomes. This, in turn, helps everyone lead fulfilling lives, participate in education and employment, and contribute to their community.

Engaging consumers is one of the eight priority actions included in the National Preventative Health Strategy 2021-2030. It is also a global imperative, with 76 world leaders unanimously committing in 2024 to strengthen, systematise, and sustain social participation in health and wellbeing.

Consumer engagement in Australian health policy is, therefore, a 'must-have', not a 'nice-to-have'.

Who is a consumer?

Within the health sector, a 'consumer' is anyone who has lived experience of a health issue. This includes all people who are affected by health policy, use health services or have a health condition, and this extends to their families, carers and friends.

The value of lived experience

Incorporating lived experience and expertise into policy development helps improve



implementation by providing 'real world' input and know-how that may be otherwise missed or minimised. Consumers can also identify challenges and barriers before policy implementation which reduces risk and the cost to rectify any poorly-planned policy.

How is lived expertise different to professional expertise?

People with lived expertise bring different perspectives to health policy and may have different priorities compared to health professionals or policymakers. Consumers also usually see the impact of a decision from end-to-end, not just the part each individual professional or service delivers. All perspectives are valid, but consumer experiences and insights help shape policies and solutions that best meet the community's needs.

Is there evidence to prove the value of consumer engagement?

Numerous studies have shown how public participation and consumer engagement deliver benefits to policymakers, health services and researchers. Benefits include building trust and accountability in the community, improving efficiency, promoting health equity and increasing safety and quality.



“In a policy context, engagement is a process and a partnership between health consumers and policymakers that aims to achieve the best outcomes for the community.”

Ally, CHF Consumer Assembly member

Implementation Checklist

- Understand the consumer engagement strategy
- Before undertaking any engagement, develop a detailed understanding of the context that may influence your policy development
- Consider the social, demographic, cultural, political and physical environments
- Include consumer engagement activities at the outset of the policy development process
- Assess what resources are needed and available (including any constraints)
- Think how you will create a safe and inclusive environment for engagement
- Think about how you will record and measure the impact of your consumer engagement
- Talk to other stakeholders who have successfully engaged consumers
- Check out the other fact sheets in this series on consumer engagement