

Making Engagement Meaningful



Consumer engagement in policy development, as in other areas of health, such as medical research and service delivery, has evolved considerably over recent decades.

Consumers are just as important as any other stakeholder involved in policy development and best practice engagement is neither tokenistic nor optional.

The National Consumer Engagement Strategy for Health and Wellbeing lists five fundamentals or principles of consumer engagement.

Five fundamentals

To ensure engagement is meaningful, and impactful, it is essential that it is:

- Purposeful
- Inclusive
- Respectful
- Transparent
- Collaborative

Rather than view consumer engagement as a 'one-off' interaction, it is essential to build and sustain a relationship with consumers before, during and after your project and to approach interactions with respect and openness. This may require you to be willing to modify the direction or scope of your policy and to share power with the consumers you engage.

This means being ready to actively listen and understand the needs of consumers and communities, recognising their contributions as equal collaborators, and valuing their time by



ensuring their participation is appropriately resourced and remunerated.

Diversity of voices and perspectives

As most policy changes impact a large cross section of the community, it is essential that the consumers you engage should also reflect a diverse range of demographics including age, gender and location (i.e., regional, rural and remote), as well as people from priority populations including people with disability, people who are LGBTIQ+, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and those from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds.

While any individual's experience or story is valuable, it is essential not just to engage one or two consumers but to broaden your engagement to all community groups and networks that may be affected by the policy initiative.

Connect with peak groups, especially for priority populations, if you do not have established connections and work collaboratively and proactively to engage with people that have been traditionally hard-to-reach. Respect and open, two-way communication is the foundation of good engagement.

“By combining multiple, diverse perspectives, and engaging across all stages of a disability training project, the consumers involved provided key input into, and collectively made, decisions about the training content, methodology, facilitator recruitment and promotion. Consequently, the training was successfully launched and continues to be well-received.”

Ally, CHF Consumer Assembly member

Implementation Checklist

- Commit to meaningful and early consumer engagement, not consultation after policy decisions have been made
- Manage expectations as to the purpose, level of participation and key areas of focus for discussion
- Consider different types of engagement methods to reach a diverse range of consumers
- Adapt your approach to meet people's needs, capacity and expectations
- Attend to all the logistics to make consumers feel valued:
 - detail the engagement objectives
 - allow adequate time for invitations and responses
- Engage with sensitivity: the cultural, emotional and psychological safety of all participants is paramount
- Ensure a diversity of voices and experiences are welcomed and heard
- Where possible, facilitate community-led engagement
- Build feedback loops into the engagement plan