

Accessible & Inclusive Engagement



The starting point for consumer engagement is to consider who will be impacted by a proposed policy change, either directly or indirectly. This will determine how many consumers should be engaged and what are the best methods of engagement.

For example, a change that impacts the general public (for example, a change to bulkbilling or the price of prescription medications) will need broader engagement than a change impacting a more specific community (such as a new

service for First Nations peoples).

Sometimes a consultation process will also identify other segments of the community that need to be engaged, such as carers or advocacy groups.

Understand community context

Prior to engagement, take time to understand the politics and unique structure and characteristics of the communities being engaged. Talk to community leaders, local



stakeholders, representative groups and consumers directly to canvass their views on the policy issues being considered.

Also be conscious of any other engagement activities underway, or that may have been undertaken previously, to avoid over-engagement. This may be particularly relevant in remote and rural communities or with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

Be willing to share power

Whoever you decide to engage with, a foundational key to success is the willingness to share power. In essence, this means only engaging if you are ready and able to hear different perspectives, put aside assumptions and truly empower consumers to give input and shape the policy being discussed.

It is also being open to adapting your engagement approach to meet the needs of consumers, rather than bringing them into a policy-making process that is familiar to policy makers and organisations but not to them.

It is important also to ensure engagement is accessible, be it related to physical location, digital access, communication or literacy. Providing flexible options so that consumers can contribute at a time, pace or method that is convenient to them demonstrates commitment to meaningful involvement.

“I understand staff may have a fear of discussing sensitive topics with consumers. However, consumers do want to share and talk about their experience and make positive change because of their experience. That is why they have put themselves forward to be part of the conversation.”

Ally, CHF Consumer Assembly member

Implementation Checklist

- Once you know which communities you wish to engage, ask them how they would like to engage with you
- Ask consumers:
 - “What matters to you culturally?”
 - “What would respectful care look like for you?”
 - “What are your access needs?”
 - “How can we best support you to participate?”
- Be mindful of the ‘digital divide’ – online platforms have their place, but there are many in the community for whom this is not a natural or accessible way to engage
- Create environments and platforms where a diverse range of consumers, including those who live with disability, can equitably participate in a safe and appropriate way
- Remember that access and inclusion are linked, but not synonymous. Strive for settings that uphold both
- Avoid the convenience of only engaging the same people who are always willing to participate
- Ask, “Whose voices haven’t we heard from?”