

TIP SHEET



Standard 2: Partnering with Consumers

Tip Sheet 1: Helpful things to know when partnering with consumers

Starting with a shared understanding

When starting partnerships with consumers, it is important that everyone has a common understanding of some core concepts.

There are a lot of different words and phrases used when talking about partnering with consumers, and different ideas about what those terms mean — which can be quite confusing.

Following are descriptions of some concepts to help you understand what the Commission means when it talks about partnering with consumers.



What is a consumer?

Consumers are people who use, or are potential users of healthcare services. When referring to consumers the Commission means patients, families, carers, friends and other support people.

Consumers involved in the governance of your organisation can be individuals representing themselves or their family, consumer representatives, members of community groups or representatives of advocacy groups.

Not all consumers are the same, so it is important that you have a clear understanding of the type of consumer that you need. You should ensure that you match the skills, experience and preferences of the consumer to the role within your organisation. It is also important to seek consumers with different opinions, experiences and expertise to ensure that different voices and views can be heard.

What is partnering with consumers?

Partnering with consumers is a broad concept that covers a wide range of strategies, approaches and terms. There are many terms that have been used to describe these concepts, including:

- patient-centred care / consumer-centred care / patient- and family-centred care
- consumer / patient / community / citizen engagement
- consumer participation / consumer partnerships.

Despite these different terms, and the different emphases within them, the ideas that underpin them are all similar. Partnerships exist when consumers are treated with dignity and respect, when information is shared with them, and when participation and collaboration in healthcare processes are encouraged and supported to the extent that consumers choose.

The purpose of these partnerships is to improve the outcomes, experiences and the delivery of care by drawing on the knowledge, skills and experiences of people who are using, have used or may use the health service.

Different types of partnerships

Partnering with consumers is relevant in many different ways across the health system. Different types of partnerships are not mutually exclusive – partnering with consumers at all levels of the health service organisation is necessary to ensure that the service is responsive to consumer input and needs.

At the level of the individual, partnerships relate to the interaction between the healthcare provider(s) and the consumer when care is provided. At this level a partnership would involve the provision of care that is respectful, sharing of useful information in an ongoing manner and the support and encouragement of patients and families. Actions in National Safety and Quality Health Service (NSQHS) Standards 1, 3-4 and 6-10 relate to this type of partnership.

At the level of service, department or program of care, partnerships relate to the organisation and delivery of care within specific areas. At this level a partnership would involve the participation of consumers in the overall design of the service, department or program. This could be as full members of quality improvement and redesign teams, and participating in planning, implementing and evaluating change. Actions in NSQHS Standard 2 relate to this type of partnership.

At the level of the health service

organisation, partnerships relate to the involvement of consumers, patients and carers in the organisations overall governance, policy and planning. This level overlaps with the previous level in that a health service organisation is made up of various services, departments and programs.

At this level, partnerships relate to the involvement of consumers as full members of key organisational governance committees for subjects such as patient safety, facility design, quality improvement, patient or family education, ethics and research. Actions in NSQHS Standard 2 relate to this type of partnership.

What is a consumer representative?

According to the Consumers' Health Forum of Australia a "consumer representative is someone who is a member of a government, professional body, industry or non-governmental organisation committee who voices consumer perspectives and takes part in the decision-making process on behalf of consumers. This person is nominated by, and is accountable to, an organisation of consumers."

Consumer representatives generally have experience as consumers of the healthcare system. They are also generally trained and supported by the consumer organisation to which they belong.



What is the role of the consumer or consumer representative?

The role of a consumer is to provide an individual perspective primarily based on their own knowledge, experience and skills as an individual consumer of health services; or as someone supporting a consumer of health services. Individual consumers are motivated to become involved in partnerships for a variety of reasons, including positive and negative experiences within the system.

A consumer representative also provides a consumer perspective, but their input is often informed by feedback and the views of other consumers as well as their own experience and opinions. The role of the consumer representative involves liaison between the committee or other governance mechanism that they are involved in and interested consumers, associations or consumer organisations that are outside your health service.

Limits to the role of a consumer

One of the most important things to consider when engaging consumers in partnership with your organisation is to ensure that each consumer is matched with a role that suits their skills, experience and interests.

You should establish a good understanding of the skills and experience of any consumer you engage in a partnership with your organisation. Do not expect a consumer or consumer representative to have a technical background in the subjects you may discuss.

You should support your consumers and consumer representatives by providing information on subjects for discussion, timely agenda papers and opportunity for questioning throughout the partnership.

By doing this you can help your consumers to feel better supported and prepared to meaningfully contribute to your organisations and you will also be contributing towards addressing NSQHS Standard 2 Action 2.3.1.

You should not use your consumer as a proxy for broad consumer consultation which may be required on larger issues. For example, if you propose to redesign a part of your service you will need to consult with more than one consumer in order to gain the appropriate breadth of consumer perspectives and input on the project (regardless of whether they are a consumer representative). In this situation engaging with one consumer provides only a single perspective on design priorities and as a result you may miss key issues for people who have different experiences and needs such as people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, people with disabilities including physical and psychosocial conditions, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and people with low levels of individual health literacy.

Seeking views and engaging with multiple consumers provides the opportunity to identify potential future problems for consumers and pre-emptively address those problems. It is important to seek out consumers with different experiences and expertise to ensure that you understand the breadth and depth of any issues facing your consumers.

Who is not a consumer?

Any consumer who works in partnership with your organisation needs to participate in that role principally as a consumer. The consumer should not be conflicted by other roles. For example, one of your clinicians (such as a GP or a visiting medical officer) may also be a consumer of your organisations' services. However; if they are involved in a committee principally as a clinician they cannot also be considered a consumer for that committee.

What is a consumer health organisation?

A consumer health organisation is an organisation which represents the views and interests of healthcare consumers and supports consumers to be active participants within the healthcare system. These organisations include advocacy groups, interest groups and patient support groups.

Consumer health organisations generally provide structured support, systems and advice for consumers interested in working with the healthcare system to improve care. Some organisations provide information, liaison services and training to consumers, healthcare organisations and government organisations. The organisations are mainly non-government, not-for-profit organisations.

The national peak consumer body is Consumer Health Forum of Australia. There are also a range of national condition-based consumer health

organisations, as well as state-based consumer health organisations and local consumer health organisations. The [Our Health, Our Community](#) web site includes a directory of many consumer health organisations.



Further Information

Where to find more information on partnering with consumers

Safety and Quality Improvement Guide
Standard 2: Partnering with Consumers: http://www.safetyandquality.gov.au/wp-content/uploads/2012/10/Standard2_Oct_2012_WEB.pdf

Our Health web site (Consumer Health Forum of Australia): www.ourhealth.org.au

Health Issues Centre web site (Health Issues Centre): www.healthissuescentre.org.au

Institute for Patient- and Family-Centered Care web site (Institute for Patient- and Family-Centered Care): www.ipfcc.org/

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