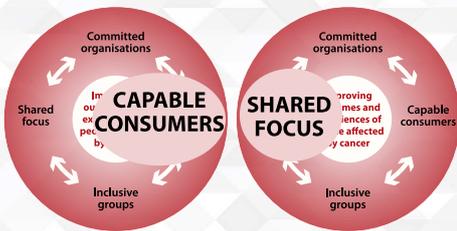


# Involving consumers in policy



'The Government, in our portfolio, has a policy of involving consumers in all the work that we do. And that's something that takes place in a formal as well as an informal sense. I can't recall having been in any policy forum, consultative group or advisory group that didn't have consumer representation. So we have this codified and formalised process in our system whereby consumers are expected to be represented on all of the key consultative groups that we have....

From the policy perspective, the challenge is how do you sift through consumer views and determine which ones are the most critical. If you can only take account of two or three features or elements, how do you actually sift through those views and perspectives and come up with an understanding of which are the 'must haves' in policy and programs?

There are two or three ways of getting around that. One is by posing a problem to the person or posing an issue to the representative or voice and saying: "Can you please go back and talk with your constituency"—that's when it's useful for them to be part of a group, and say—"and come back to us with an informed position as to whether this is vitally important or not so important." The trouble is often the timeframes are too compressed for government to be able to do that. But that's one way.

Another way is by seeking guidance on specific issues which you know to be important. So, you know what the problem is, but you're not sure what the answer is. Or at least you might be pretty confident what you think government will do and you might be testing it out... Sometimes it's very handy because somebody will say: "Well that might sound great, but that just won't work because of X." So, it's very useful to get a reality check, that community or consumer perspective. And that's probably how government uses consumers most frequently.'

—Rosemary Knight, Principal Advisor, Department of Health and Ageing