



Steps toward a consumer engagement plan



Step 1: Getting started

Understanding why you want to involve consumers in your organisation is key to developing a consumer participation plan. Try answering the questions below to help you determine where your organisation currently stands with consumers:

- What is the management and staff commitment to consumer participation?
- Do we know who our consumers are?
- Do we know how consumers would like to participate in our organisation?

Remember, consumer participation is only really effective across an organisation if it is supported by management at all levels.

Step 2: Consumer participation audit

The second step is to conduct an audit of current consumer participation activities within your organisation. For this you can ask questions such as:

- Has consumer participation been incorporated into our health service's vision, values and any philosophical statements?
- Does our health service have consumer policies in place?
- What organisational resources have been allocated to support the incorporation of consumer views into strategic planning and review?

Organisational self-assessment survey

Ensure that your organisation has policies in place for groups which may be harder to reach, for example, people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, people with low socioeconomic status and people with disabilities.

Step 3: Where will consumers participate in the organisation?

Consumers are able to participate at various levels within the organisation. They can be involved with their health care team by discussing and planning their own care and treatment, or they may be involved as representatives on committees, reference groups and advisory groups. Consumers can be active in many other ways, such as focus groups, working parties, and through consultations and feedback, etc.

Remember to engage consumers early in the process of developing a consumer engagement plan – even in the process of deciding how you will engage consumers! One of the best ways to determine where consumers should participate in the organisation is to ask them.

Step 4: Writing a consumer engagement plan

Once your organisation has conducted its audit and identified where and how consumers will be involved in the organisation, the next step is to write your consumer engagement plan. The plan does not have to be complex or overly detailed, but rather a simple guide that includes:

- a description of the issue or activity
- the organisation's objectives
- where and how consumers will be involved in the organisation
- the participants your organisation wishes to involve
- strategies and key issues
- timelines
- budget and personnel
- an evaluation plan



Consideration should also be given to ensuring that the plan is sustainable over the long-term. When developing your plan, it is important that policies and procedures are put in place to ensure this sustainability. Policies will need to outline what resources are required, clarify roles and describe how to act on input from consumers. When developed and sustained over the long-term, your consumer engagement plan should enable your organisation and consumers to work together and provide feedback and accountability from consumer participation activities.

Step 5: Communication Strategies

In terms of consumer participation, a communication plan is useful for ensuring that all stakeholders are provided with the most relevant and up-to-date information.

A communication plan needs to:

- identify stakeholders
- define what it is you want to communicate to your consumers
- define how information can be fed back from consumers to your organisation
- determine a range of strategies for effectively communicating with consumers
- encourage engagement of stakeholders and foster commitment
- develop user friendly information-sharing through access to information about the aims and specific projects being undertaken by your organisation. (Adapted from Victorian Integrated Cancer Services (2012), p. 9.)

See an excellent example of a communication plan for consumer participation [here](#) and;

References

The main steps in this document were adapted from National Resource Centre for Consumer Participation in Health. 2004. *Steps to develop a consumer participation strategy*. UNPUBLISHED.