



Involving consumers from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities



The following key issues are particularly important to have in mind when involving consumers from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

- Your first step should be to try to grasp what cultural considerations may exist within the particular community group you are hoping to engage. Remember that in some Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, particularly those in rural and remote areas, the cultural understanding of wellbeing and health may be quite different from the bio-medical model adopted by health services. This is especially important in understanding an individual's perspective on cancer and the treatment process, and the community's acceptance of a particular medical approach. It is important not to go into a community with a preconceived view of what is required.
- Speak to elders and other community leaders to understand any particular cultural considerations that will need to be acknowledged. For example, in some communities it is not appropriate to speak the name of someone who has died. You need to be especially aware of the cultural sensitivities and traditions associated with death and dying.
- If you are conducting consultations with individuals from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, these need to be done sensitively and in a way that is mindful of the culture, values and historical perspective of the specific community. It is important not to assume that all of these communities are the same or that all individuals within that community share the same values or cultural sensitivities.

- When presenting information about cancer, you will need to look carefully at your material, recognising that some generic documents produced for 'consumers' may not be appropriate for an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander person affected by cancer. An individual's traditions or cultural views may impact on their understanding and acceptance of cancer. Also, remember that English may not be the first language of many people from these communities. If you are able to think of innovative ways of presenting health information about cancer treatment and support—ways that do not rely solely on the written language—you may have greater success with some consumers.

Who should facilitate Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander consumer involvement in the organisation?

Hopefully your organisation will have some Aboriginal staff employed as Aboriginal Liaison Officers, Aboriginal Family Support Workers or Aboriginal, Education and Training Officers. If so, they are the ideal people to facilitate the involvement of their community. Keep in mind that staff in these positions may be isolated at times from the rest of the organisation and expected to take responsibility for all things 'Aboriginal'. These positions should be supported through mentoring, training and effective networking with other Aboriginal positions in similar organisations.

If your organisation doesn't have any Aboriginal staff employed in these positions, approach the person who is responsible for involving consumers more broadly across the organisation. Together you may need to make contact with members of the local Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander communities for support and guidance in reaching these groups.



What support is needed to effectively involve Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander consumers in the organisation?

Senior management support is essential to involving Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander consumers. To ensure that consumer involvement is successfully undertaken, management needs to be engaged at the early stages. One way to do this is to invite a senior staff member to lead any partnership or project meetings with the Aboriginal community. Ideally, the organisation will have or will develop policies regarding working with and involving these consumers. It will also be important to establish a team of staff or a dedicated position to work on specifically with them.

Implementing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander consumer involvement will take time.

Your organisation may be large and complex with its own unique culture. Involving consumers from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities may challenge this culture. It is necessary for your organisation to start with small and clearly defined consumer involvement initiatives, relatively short in timeframe and manageable by current staff. Avoid large, complex projects initially to allow the relationship between the organisation and the community to develop.

Elements for successful involvement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander consumers

- strong partnerships with Aboriginal communities
- leadership by hospital boards, CEOs and clinical staff
- strategic policies within the organisation
- structural and resource supports
- a well-supported Aboriginal workforce.

How do we improve communication with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander consumers?

- Increase participation of consumers in service planning and management.
- Facilitate involvement of staff from relevant cultural and language groups.
- Increase opportunities for consumers to initiate and structure interactions.
- Create conditions for consumers to make genuinely informed decisions, through increasing shared understanding and improving communication practices.
- Staff, consumers and interpreters work together to construct a shared understanding of key processes and concepts.
- Improve consumer and staff collaboration in case management, including better consumer access to their medical records.
- Offer training on intercultural communication for staff.
- Offering training for interpreters.

Develop, implement and evaluate specific communication strategies to increase the capacity of staff to prevent, monitor and repair communication difficulties in interactions with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander consumers

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