

Initiation



Consumers

The best innovation and healthcare improvements can only come from listening to and understanding what matters to people who use the services, sometimes known as consumers.

Initiation

The purpose of this phase is to develop a clear understanding of what your project is, what you want to achieve and how you plan to get there.

Key points

1. Partner with consumers

Our vision is for consumers and families to be equal partners in healthcare improvement in NSW. The evidence shows that consumer participation leads to better quality of care, improved health outcomes and more accessible and effective health services. Consumer engagement is the process of incorporating consumer aspirations and needs into decision making, service planning and evaluation. Consumers and community members should be partners in improvement projects.

2. Involve consumers

Sometimes clinicians and managers are reluctant to involve patients and carers, because they think they won't be able to meet consumers' expectations. In reality, consumer input is enlightening and can help staff to think differently. Consumers experience care across the continuum of services, so they can often identify opportunities for improvements in service delivery. Consumers generally understand that healthcare funds need to be spent prudently.

3. Consider potential contributions

The levels of consumer engagement are expressed as a continuum of participation (see diagram). Some ways to involve consumers along the continuum are:

- Inform – pamphlets, newsletters
- Consult – interviews, surveys
- Collaborate – part of project team
- Co-design – develop and test solutions
- Empower – project lead, decision making authority.

4. Determine the level of engagement

The level of patient engagement will depend on a number of factors, such as the focus of your project, the time and resources available to undertake the project, and the availability of consumers to dedicate time to the work. Higher levels of engagement require more time and skills from staff and consumers, and can be very rewarding. Infrastructure and clinical service redesign have demonstrated strong benefits from co-design approaches.

Considerations and tips

Getting consumers 'around the table' and embedding their involvement in your project is essential in designing services for those at the centre of our care.

How to get started

Local health district (LHD) community and consumer participation, carer support, and multicultural health units provide direct linkages to consumers and community members who want to be involved in healthcare decision making. Staff in these units can help to involve consumers.

The patient survey

The Bureau of Health Information's NSW Patient Survey Program houses a wealth of validated and detailed patient survey data. It displays information from patients across NSW about their experiences with services in hospitals and other healthcare facilities in an easy to access and read format.

Tools for success

Many LHDs provide staff with tools to gather real-time patient feedback on specific topics. These tools can collate results and provide reports to track issues and results. Guides on how to conduct patient interviews are available here Patient Experience Resources <https://www.aci.health.nsw.gov.au/resources/patient-experience>

Represent NSW diversity

It is important to consider the true representation of your community when engaging consumers. Develop an inclusive strategy to engage consumers who are culturally and linguistically diverse, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders or LGBTQI.

Further information

Increasing level of engagement and influence



International Association for Public Participation

Further information

[My Health Learning Log in Form](#) – Redesign Initiation (202464923): Introduction to Project Initiation

Patient Experience Resources – www.aci.health.nsw.gov.au/resources/patient-experience

Contact the ACI Patient Experience and Consumer Engagement (PEACE) team on aci-peace@health.nsw.gov.au

Next Steps

The Agency for Clinical Innovation, Clinical Excellence Commission and local consumer and community participation managers have a range of resources to assist staff to build skills in working with consumers to achieve rewarding results.