

Health Consumers Queensland.... your voice in health

Guide towards developing a consumer and community engagement strategy

Background

Consumer and community engagement is integral to delivering an integrated health system that enhances navigation and transition across the system for consumers and improves health outcomes.

This guide has been developed by Health Consumers Queensland (HCQ) following discussions with Health Service Districts and other key consumer and community stakeholders in relation to the Districts' development of consumer and community engagement strategies as part of their transition into Local Health and Hospital Networks (LHHNs). It is designed to provide prompts, assist thinking and support the work being undertaken by Districts as they progress their development of consumer and community engagement strategies.

Developing a strategy

Introduction

HCQ believes that developing an initial understanding of the 'lay of the land' helps inform the development of an integrated consumer and community engagement strategy and build targeted engagement mechanisms which are reflective of the consumer and community population within the District/LHHN.

Each District/LHHN has a unique population within its geographical area, with diverse groups of health consumers and communities, wide-ranging public and private health services and programs, community health services, other government agencies and non-government organisations.

Consumer and community engagement occurs through different **elements** of engagement - Inform, consult, involve, collaborate and empower (**Elements** based upon the International Association of Public Participation (IAP2) Spectrum of Engagement <http://www.iap2.org.au/>). These **elements** range from one-way information sharing, to consultation, to active participation in decision making with stakeholders.

Consumer and community engagement also occurs at different **levels** of interaction across the elements detailed above, within the health system including at an:

- individual level,
- program/service level,
- regional or district level and
- state and national level.

Districts have varying engagement at different elements and points of interaction depending on what you are engaging on.

Defining consumer and community engagement

The following terms and definitions support this work.

Consumers:

HCQ identifies consumers as people who use, or are potential users, of health services including their family and carers. Consumers may participate as individuals, groups, organisations of consumers, consumer representatives or communities. (HCQ Consumer Representatives Handbook 2009)

Community:

Community refers to groups of people or organisations with a common interest. Some communities may connect through a community of place, such as a neighbourhood, region, suburb; a community of interest such as patients, industry sector, profession, environment group; or a community that forms around a specific issue such as improvements to public health care, etc. (*Based upon Queensland Government Department of Communities: Engaging Queenslanders*)

Community can refer to a group of people or organisation that has a local or regional interest in health; others may share a cultural background, religion or language. Some communities may be geographically dispersed but linked through an interest in a specific health issue by the internet or some other means. (HCQ Consumer Representatives Handbook 2009)

Consumer engagement

Consumer engagement informs broader community engagement. Health consumers actively participate in their own healthcare and in health policy, planning, service delivery and evaluation at service and agency levels. (HCQ Consumer Representatives Handbook 2009)

Community engagement

Community engagement refers to the connections between government, communities and citizens in the development and implementation of policies, programs, services and projects. It encompasses a wide variety of government-community interactions ranging from information sharing to community consultation and in some instances, active participation in government decision making. It incorporates public participation, with people being empowered to contribute to decisions affecting their lives, through the acquisition of skills, knowledge and experience. (Community Engagement Manual: Queensland Health 2010)

First steps in developing a strategy

The steps outlined below support the initial phase in the development of a consumer and community engagement strategy.

1. **Develop a detailed understanding** of the population within your District including:
 - Demographics
 - Social indicators
 - Health status
 - Local factors and issues
 - Diverse populations
 - Transient and mobile populations eg. seasonal workers, tourists, etc.

Tip: Consider linking with Medicare Locals/Divisions of General Practice, Local Government Authority or other Community Organisations who have undertaken population mapping for their own engagement strategies and have collected and mapped a range of data within their own geographical and/or demographic area.

Potential Resources: To assist understanding your population in particular difficult to identify population groups.

- The Queensland Health, Health Services Planning Supplement lists a wide range of resources both internal to Queensland Health and external data sources available at http://www.health.qld.gov.au/hsppanel/docs/health_info.pdf
 - Epidemiology resources and links available at <http://www.health.qld.gov.au/epidemiology/default.asp>
 - Department of Communities Community Door <http://www.communitydoor.org.au/>
2. **Identify the services/programs** delivered by your District/LHHN within the hospital and community health areas.

Tip: Consider Health Service District, Service Planning as a resource for services/programs delivered by your District.

Consider bringing together staff currently undertaking consumer and community engagement planning initiatives to assist you in mapping services, programs and engagement work occurring across the District.

3. **Undertake a stakeholder analysis** for your District/LHHN including:
- a. Consumer groups and organisations
 - b. Government and Non-Government organisations and agencies
 - c. Current networks or inter-agency forums that operate across government and non-government agencies and the relationships that already exist
 - d. Level of interest that each of the key stakeholders have in relation to LHHN services and programs.
 - e. Existing relationships that these organisations and agencies have with the District/LHHN.

Potential Resources: To assist with stakeholder analysis

- Health Service Districts may obtain information from previous Australian Council and Healthcare Standards (ACHS) surveys to support this work.
 - Queensland Health Qfinder directory of health and community services : <https://access.health.qld.gov.au/QFinder/Views/DirectorySearch/DirectorySearch.aspx>
 - Lifeline's Service Finder, directory of free or low cost health and community services : <http://www.lifeline.org.au/Find-Help/Lifeline-s-Service-Finder/Lifeline-Service-Finder>
 - Community service delivery information <http://www.mycommunitydirectory.com.au/>
 - Medicare Local profiles including partnership and consultation details where applicable <http://www.yourhealth.gov.au/internet/yourhealth/publishing.nsf/Content/medilocprofiles>
 - Queensland Health Multicultural Health website has a range of resources and links specifically targeted at multicultural health <http://www.health.qld.gov.au/multicultural/default.asp>
 - Peak non-Government bodies.
4. **Identify consumer and community engagement** currently in place within the District/LHHN, and where applicable across districts or state-wide engagements:
- a. As driven by public health services
 - b. As driven by consumers and the community which have included public health services as stakeholder
5. **Identify what has been working well** and the current gaps in consumer and community engagement, and identify opportunities to build and link with what is already happening within the District/LHHN.

Questions to inform this initial stage of the development:

- In progressing the strategy, how will you work with consumers and community towards broad public endorsement of your Consumer and Community Engagement Strategy? *Good practice indicates that strategies that engage consumers and community from the beginning of the work, including the development stage, achieve better outcomes.*
- How can you engage in the initial stages with key stakeholders around the strategy with a view to creating opportunities for joint engagement approaches and mechanisms where appropriate?
- What is the nature and complexities of relationships that exist amongst stakeholders (consumers, community and community services) within your District? What is the interest/stake that each stakeholder has in the outcomes of the engagement?
- What are the specific needs of diverse consumer and community (as individuals or groups) within your District?
- How does your planning include specific strategies for ensuring the engagement is accessible, responsive and inclusive of the needs of diverse groups? Eg, Homeless, Disability, Culturally and Linguistically Diverse, Indigenous, Older people, etc. How does this build upon what has been effective previously?

Where to from here?

HCQ is planning to develop other documents and resources to support the work of Districts in their development of consumer and community engagement strategies which will be informed by ongoing discussions with the Districts. These materials will also be informed by a forum HCQ is holding with key government, consumer and community stakeholders in relation to what constitutes best practice consumer and community engagement. The forum will also provide an opportunity for key stakeholders to hold conversations about the opportunities and ways of working together.

HCQ has developed a **Resource Directory** that may be of assistance in the progression of your consumer and community engagement strategy and includes: principles and methods, approaches, engagement in practice, Queensland Health Policy Documents and other resources are available at:

<http://www.health.qld.gov.au/hcq/publications/cceresdirect.pdf> .

QCOSS have developed a **guide for health and community services** which reflects this guide and the opportunities for further collaboration and partnerships where possible available at:

<http://www.qcoss.org.au/national-health-reform> .

Health Consumers Queensland can offer information and support via telephone, email or in person.

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