

Partnering with Consumers Case Study:

Alpine Health

Person-centred approaches and consumer partnerships

Person-centred approaches and strong consumer partnerships are critical for delivering care that meets people’s needs, achieving better health outcomes for communities and ensuring better value for health services. They also underpin the Partnering with Consumers Standard of the National Safety and Quality Health Service Standards. However, each health service organisation is on its own journey and must determine what strategies work best for their local communities and service delivery contexts.

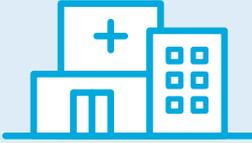
This case study is one of eight, designed to assist other organisations working to embed person-centred care. It highlights the person-centred approaches and strategies that Alpine Health uses to partner with consumers, including:

- A. Providing formal structures to support engagement with diverse and distinct local communities**
- B. Gathering consumer feedback through multiple channels and responding in a timely manner**
- C. Maintaining a culture and communication style that values, invites and responds to consumer input**
- D. Developing approaches to effectively engage with older people, and their families and carers**
- E. Supporting health literacy, local engagement and workforce planning through the Alpine Institute.**

These themes and good practice examples have been aligned with the four criteria of the Partnering with Consumers Standard, and the seven attributes of high-performing person-centred healthcare organisations (the attributes), which are detailed below.



Snapshot of Alpine Health

Where	What	Whom
 <p>Public provider of multi-purpose services in the Alpine Shire, Victoria 3 sites in Bright, Mount Beauty and Myrtleford Alpine Shire covers close to 4,800 square kilometres</p>	 <p>3 hospitals and 3 aged care homes Services include integrated acute health, community health and aged care</p>	 <p>Community of more 12,000 people Generally older than the rest of Victoria Communities in the 3 main towns have unique characteristics</p>

Overview

Alpine Health is a small, rural, multi-purpose service that aims to meet the needs of several diverse communities. It has created formal structures, including consumer advisory groups, to gather input from many geographically dispersed services. Its focus is on understanding the needs of older people. Consumer engagement is supported by dedicated resources, and a strong culture that values and invites feedback.

A. Providing formal structures to support engagement with diverse and distinct local communities

<p>Criterion</p>  <p>Clinical governance and quality improvement systems to support partnering with consumers</p>	<p>Attribute</p>  <p>Governance</p>
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Alpine Health’s governance structures are organised to facilitate and support consumer engagement. The board of directors mainly comprises people from the local communities, although there is not a specific consumer representative on the board.

Alpine Health has three Community and Health Advisory Groups (CHAGs) – one each in the towns of Bright, Mount Beauty and Myrtleford. This was done to meet the unique needs and challenges of each community. The CHAGs are part of the overall governance structures and report directly to the board.

The purpose of the CHAGs is to:

- Share relevant information from Alpine Health with the community
- Gather feedback from consumers on the health needs of the community
- Advise Alpine Health on health matters and community issues.

The CHAGs comprise members who represent their local community, including current and former patients and community members with an interest in Alpine Health. Any person living in the Alpine Shire or using Alpine Health services can express interest in joining a CHAG. The CHAG assesses the suitability of the interested person and provides their recommendation to the board of directors, which approves all CHAG appointments.

“
 We have three major towns, and each has different needs and different preferences – we can’t treat them as a homogenous whole.
 – Executive team member

Along with the board of directors and the CHAGs, local community members are engaged through a formal volunteer program.



You have to put in the dollars and the staff and the time to make this work. Someone has to manage and support the Community and Health Advisory Groups, otherwise they'll just sit on the sidelines as a token group.

– Executive team member

Consumer engagement is backed by a Partnering with Consumers Officer. The officer supports the CHAGs with administration, promotion, communication and capacity development, such as helping CHAG members attend national conferences. Executives and senior managers have said that this dedicated resource is vital for Alpine Health to effectively engage with consumers.

Alpine Health has identified some ongoing challenges with consumer engagement, including ensuring that consumer engagement reflects community diversity. This has led Alpine Health to focus on better engagement with young people, disadvantaged groups and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

B. Gathering consumer feedback through multiple channels and responding in a timely manner

Criterion



Clinical governance and quality improvement systems to support partnering with consumers

Attribute



Measurement

Acknowledging and responding to feedback from consumers is a critical part of Alpine Health’s work. The organisation uses multiple channels to collect feedback from its various services (Table 1).

Table 1: Sources of consumer feedback at Alpine Health

Location	Feedback
Hospital	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Consumer feedback form ■ Victorian Healthcare Experience Survey ■ Meals survey
Aged care homes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Consumer feedback form ■ Meals survey ■ Resident review
Home support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Consumer feedback form ■ Client experience survey ■ Meals survey ■ Client review
Health promotion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Consumer feedback form ■ Primary Health Network survey
Workforce	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Consumer feedback form ■ People Matter survey

These channels provide Alpine Health with feedback at different intervals – some such as the online Consumer Feedback Form are available all the time with feedback reviewed and acted upon as it comes in, whereas others, like the People Matter Survey are conducted annually. Some staff members spoke about the benefits of using shorter surveys to gather consumer feedback as they are easier for consumers to complete and results can be analysed quickly. This helps the organisation to respond in a timely manner. For example, Alpine Health recently conducted a short, five-question survey of consumers about food options available. The results were quickly analysed, discussed at a team meeting, and service improvements planned. As a result, consumers can now speak to staff members about their meal and menu preferences.

The Alpine Health team has trained several CHAG quality representatives on how to review and respond to consumer feedback. Alpine Health also offers ongoing support and guidance to these representatives.

C. Maintaining a culture and communication style that values, invites and responds to consumer input

Criterion

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Partnering with consumers in organisational design and governance

Attribute



People, capability and culture

Consumer representatives regularly visit Alpine Health hospitals and speak to members of the workforce.

The representatives believe that patient input into safety and quality is taken very seriously at Alpine Health. They also feel that Alpine Health genuinely values having a consumer voice in strategic planning and service design. This is reflected in recruitment practices, as Alpine Health aims to include a consumer representative when recruiting for community-based positions.



We have really open lines of communication. I can call up the chief executive offer if I need to, or walk directly into his office and say: 'I've been hearing this is an issue, how can we solve it?'

– Consumer representative



A core part of our culture is to be truly client-centred.

– Clinical staff representative

Importantly, the consumer representatives appreciate the open, honest and transparent communication style that exists at all levels of Alpine Health. They feel empowered to raise issues and concerns with all levels of leadership, including the chief executive offer, and clinical leaders and teams.

Box 1 describes how Alpine Health is using a food services review to improve patient meals.

Box 1: Responding to consumer feedback through the food services review

Alpine Health has a standing Food Services Committee. Each month, it discusses all feedback related to food. Feedback is collected continuously, through direct recommendations to the workforce, the consumer feedback form and the annual meals survey. The data collected influence menu changes.

Alpine Health recently assessed its food services. It wanted to explore new ways of providing nutritious, high-quality food to consumers. Members of the workforce participated in workshops on the quality standards for production and service of food, as well as their own conduct.

The review found that Alpine Health was committed to providing tasty meals to consumers. However, their food services would benefit from stronger site-based leadership and a redesign of kitchen workflows.

As a result of the review, Alpine Health has:

- Appointed a leadership team to work in each kitchen
- Developed clear processes and roles
- Established an aged care working party.

These actions ensure that consumer feedback is incorporated and quality standards are met.

D. Developing approaches to effectively engage with older people, and their families and carers



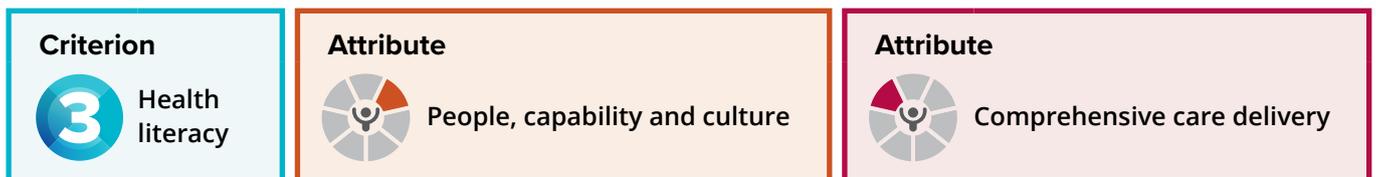
Alpine Health’s community are generally older than the rest of Victoria. As a multi-purpose service, it operates three aged care homes. Alpine Health has developed formal structures, in addition to the CHAGs, to effectively engage with older people, and their families and carers.

The Alpine Independent Aged Care Advocacy Service provides free independent help and advice to older members of the Alpine Shire community. This includes those living in the community and in aged care homes.

The Advocacy Service supports engagement with older people in a number of ways, including:

- Conducting an annual survey of 10–15% of the people living in Alpine Health’s aged care services, which provides feedback that differs from what is received through other channels
- Operating the Alpine Telechat Service in collaboration with the Australian Red Cross, where volunteers make a weekly phone call to socially isolated and vulnerable community members who elect to be part of the service
- Supporting service redesign – for example, the alpine@home Home Support Program worked closely with the CHAGs and Alpine Independent Aged Care Advocacy Service to understand how changes to their aged care community service model might affect the community.

E. Supporting health literacy, local engagement and workforce planning through the Alpine Institute



The Alpine Institute was formed in 2012 to meet Alpine Health’s commitment to ongoing education and training. Initially, it was established as a training facility for members of the Alpine Health workforce. It has since expanded to provide training, development and work opportunities to the workforce, international students and community members.

The Alpine Institute offers training in home and personal care, hospital and aged care, kitchen duties, cleaning, and health administration. It contributes to community engagement and helps the public better understand health information by:

- Developing local knowledge and skills
- Increasing local capacity to deliver health services
- Providing employment opportunities and supporting workforce sustainability
- Increasing social connectedness.

CHAG members are becoming more and more involved with the Alpine Institute. They – along with other community representatives – share their experience as consumers of Alpine Health services, emphasising the importance of effective, clear and compassionate communication.

Find out more

Further information and resources on the attributes of high-performing person-centred healthcare organisations, the Partnering with Consumers Standard and the development of the case studies include:

- [Person-centred healthcare organisations](#)
- [National Safety and Quality Health Service Standards](#)
- [Alpine Health.](#)

Acknowledgements

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Level 5, 255 Elizabeth Street, Sydney NSW 2000
GPO Box 5480, Sydney NSW 2001



@ACSQHC

www.safetyandquality.gov.au