

## Partnering with Consumers Case Study:

# Riverland General Hospital and Riverland Mallee Coorong Local Health Network

### 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 Riverland General Hospital and Riverland Mallee Coorong Local Health Network (LHN) uses to partner with consumers, including:

- A. Developing governance mechanisms that support closer engagement with the local community**
- B. Redesigning workforce models to support partnering with consumers and continuity of care**
- C. Engaging with local Aboriginal communities to deliver culturally safe and appropriate care**
- D. Promoting a culture of open feedback by gathering information about patient experience using multiple methods**
- E. Enhancing telehealth to support multidisciplinary teams and person-centred service delivery in rural areas.**

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 Riverland General Hospital and Riverland Mallee Coorong Local Health Network

Where	What	Whom
 <p>Regional public hospital network Serves the Riverland Mallee Coorong region, east of Adelaide</p>	 <p>27 facilities, comprising: 6 acute hospitals 4 community health sites 6 multi-purpose services 10 aged care homes 1 general practice owned by the Local Health Network</p>	 <p>Supports approximately 68,000 people (14% of the regional South Australian population) spread across a large geographic area Most people are aged over 65 years A substantial Aboriginal population</p>

**Overview**

The Riverland Mallee Coorong LHN serves a large rural and regional area of South Australia. Since the original case study in 2018, Riverland General Hospital has had a significant shift in governance structures. It moved from being part of the Country Health SA LHN to becoming the Riverland Mallee Coorong LHN. The governing board and key committees now comprise local community members, which has led to better engagement with consumers and local communities. As a rural and regional health service, the LHN has also focused on supporting continuity of care for patients and enhancing recruitment and retention of its workforce.

## A. Developing governance mechanisms that support closer engagement with the local community

<p><b>Criterion</b></p>  <p>Clinical governance and quality improvement systems to support partnering with consumers</p>	<p><b>Attribute</b></p>  <p>Governance</p>
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Riverland General Hospital executives and senior managers said the shift to becoming its own LHN had supported greater accountability and connection with the local community. The previous LHN was responsible for managing services across all of regional and rural South Australia, making it difficult to connect with individual local communities. The new Riverland Mallee Coorong LHN has a governing board that comprises local community members, including consumer representatives.

Executives and senior managers also said that the shift to the new LHN structure included a review of ways to engage with consumers. Under the new structure, consumers have more involvement in strategic planning processes. The most recent LHN Strategic Plan was developed in partnership with consumers.

The relationship with health advisory councils (HACs) – which comprise community representatives – has also improved. They inform the LHN and South Australia’s Minister for Health and Wellbeing about health issues for specific groups or regions across the state. HACs work to influence health priorities and planning on behalf of their community.



**We’re one region with three distinct and diverse communities. The health advisory councils make sure the network is listening to each community’s individual needs.**

– Consumer representative



**The shift to being our own Local Health Network has given us greater accountability and meant that decisions are made closer to the community.**

– Executive team member

There are eight HACs across the LHN that ensure a strong link between the health service and the community. Members of the workforce say the HACs are effective, although some feel there could be better connection between them.

Box 1 describes how the LHN is engaging with consumers through its Consumer and Community Engagement Strategy.

**Box 1: New consumer engagement strategy drives partnering with consumers and person-centred care**

The Riverland Mallee Coorong Local Health Network (LHN) recently created a new Consumer and Community Engagement Strategy, which was developed through extensive consultations with local communities. Executives and senior management said the process of developing the strategy prompted the LHN to reset their work on partnering with consumers.

Key features of the strategy include:

- Aligning with other LHN strategies and frameworks, including the core values of RMC CARES (respectful, motivated, compassionate, consumer-focused, accountable, resourceful, excellence and service)
- Promoting an existing Partnering with Consumers Working Group to a governance committee that will provide leadership across the LHN
- Committing to include consumer representatives on all major governance committees.

**B. Redesigning workforce models to support partnering with consumers and continuity of care**

**Criterion**



**Clinical governance and quality improvement systems to support partnering with consumers**

**Attribute**



**People, capability and culture**

Riverland General Hospital has redesigned its workforce model, offering salaried inpatient unit positions. The hospital has also taken responsibility for recruiting staff for the emergency department, which was previously done through a private provider.

The hospital has found that, by reducing workforce turnover, they can deliver better continuity of care and person-centred care. It has also encouraged its workforce to move to the region and become part of the local community.

The hospital is also focusing on recruiting clinicians who can work in general practice. This builds a relationship between clinicians and the community, and further supports continuity of care.



**Our patients don't see a difference between the hospital, aged care and the general practitioner. To them, it's all one system. We encourage our doctors to also work in the community and support general practice.**

- Executive team member

The hospital and the LHN have ongoing challenges with recruiting and retaining their workforce. One option is for the LHN to provide its own training programs as part of broader, long-term workforce planning. For example, the LHN provided training to nurses interested in specialised mental health care for older adults. The LHN is exploring opportunities to build this training up to a diploma level.

### C. Engaging with local Aboriginal communities to deliver culturally safe and appropriate care

#### Criterion



Partnering with patients in their own care

#### Attribute



Partnerships

The Riverland Mallee Coorong LHN has developed approaches to partnering and engaging with local Aboriginal communities, to ensure the delivery of culturally safe and appropriate care. These approaches include:

- Engaging with representatives from Aboriginal communities to gather feedback
- Employing Aboriginal liaison officers who support inpatient care, work with patients to avoid early self-discharge, and coordinate with community services when a patient is discharged (an evaluation into how this has affected patient experience and outcomes is underway)
- Asking representatives from local Aboriginal communities to conduct cultural audits of facilities alongside the directors of nursing
- Building Aboriginal advisory groups and employing an Aboriginal Partnerships and Project Officer to support Aboriginal community input into governance.

The LHN celebrates and formally recognises those who deliver exceptional person-centred and culturally safe care for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. This includes an award for Exceptional Service by an Aboriginal Clinician in the LHN's annual awards.



**We've got a strong history of engagement across the board. But I think, in particular, the network does a great job with building links with local Aboriginal communities.**


- Consumer representative



**We found that many of our Aboriginal patients wanted to leave hospital early. The Aboriginal liaison officers are really focused on trying to understand why this is, and what we can do to better support these patients.**

- Executive team member

## D. Promoting a culture of open feedback by gathering information about patient experience using multiple methods

<p><b>Criterion</b></p> <p><b>4</b> Partnering with consumers in organisational design and governance</p>	<p><b>Attribute</b></p> <p> People, capability and culture</p>	<p><b>Attribute</b></p> <p> Measurement</p>
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Executives and senior managers believe that Riverland General Hospital and the Riverland Mallee Coorong LHN have a culture that supports and encourages open feedback. The culture encourages the workforce to ask patients for feedback, and gives patients many opportunities to provide it.


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 We often go and speak with the patients. We find that people speak differently to us and tell us different things than they do to staff.  
 – Consumer representative

“  
 You’re not going to get all your feedback through one avenue; you have to find different ways to connect with different people.  
 – Executive team member

Patient experience data and feedback is collected through formal and informal channels. Innovative ways of gathering feedback include:

- Asking consumer representatives to interview patients about their experience, as consumer representatives are able to build rapport, create a more informal environment and gather information that would otherwise be left out of formal surveys
- Using the ‘What Matters to You’ concept, adapted from the NSW Clinical Excellence Commission, rather than a formal survey. Here, a member of the patient’s care team sits with the patient, their family and carer and asks ‘What’s important to you today? What matters today?’
- Using consumer stories to highlight patient experience, rather than just presenting figures and numbers to the board.

## E. Enhancing telehealth to support multidisciplinary teams and person-centred service delivery in rural areas

<p><b>Criterion</b></p> <p><b>4</b> Partnering with consumers in organisational design and governance</p>	<p><b>Attribute</b></p> <p> Technology and the built environment</p>
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Opinions on telehealth have shifted in recent years. Instead of being a ‘temporary and second choice’, it is now a more integrated and integral part of delivery of care.

In 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic meant there was more investment in, and support and use of, telehealth. This further advanced work underway since 2018 at Riverland General Hospital and the Riverland Mallee Coorong LHN, to promote and support telehealth and telemedicine.

The executive team explained that, for many people in rural and regional areas, telehealth may be the only way to access allied health and community services. Because of this, the LHN is exploring ways to fully embed telehealth across services and facilities. This includes working with disciplines to identify where telehealth should be the first choice.

Current telehealth initiatives include:

- Supporting patients post-discharge through check-up phone calls; the workforce found that patients appreciate knowing there is someone they can call if they have troubles or questions
- Shifting specialist care to telehealth models of care, so patients do not have to travel to metropolitan centres for short specialist appointments
- Adding inpatient rehabilitation, led virtually by a specialist based in Adelaide who travels to the LHN once per fortnight to see patients face-to-face; this model has been very well received by patients
- Establishing a virtual community-based diabetes clinic where specialists offer guidance and advice through virtual methods (for example, telephone or video consultations); this has reduced appointment times and patient travel requirements
- Providing virtual emergency department care in smaller towns using emergency doctors based in one of the LHN's larger hospitals; this is especially useful after hours and when the rostered doctor is not available to provide care.

Executives, senior managers and the health service workforce all support the telehealth initiatives. They believe that the initiatives have contributed to the development of person-centred models of care. However, not all patients will be comfortable with, or prefer, virtual care or telehealth. The LHN is committed to working closely with patients to provide them with care that meets their needs and preferences.

**I've seen telehealth work really well here and it's definitely expanded in recent years. Now I don't have to drive all the way to Adelaide if I need to see my specialist.**

– Consumer representative

**Some people prefer a face-to-face consult. We have to meet the needs of our patients; we can't force telehealth on them.**

– Clinician

## 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](#)
- [2018 case study: Riverland General Hospital and Country Health SA](#)
- [Riverland Mallee Coorong Hospitals and Health Services.](#)

## Acknowledgements

Many individuals have freely given their time and expertise in the development of this case study. In particular, the Australian Commission on Safety and Quality in Health Care wishes to thank the consumer representatives, clinical and corporate workforce, and the executive teams and senior managers at Riverland General Hospital and Riverland Mallee Coorong Local Health Network. The involvement and willingness of all concerned to share their experiences and expertise is greatly appreciated.

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