FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Standard 2: Partnering with Consumers

1. **What is a consumer?**

Consumers are members of the public who use, or are potential users of healthcare services. When referring to consumers the Commission is referring to patients, consumers, families, carers and other support people.

Consumers can be people who currently use your health service or people who have used your service in the past. 

Consumers involved in the governance of your organisation can be individuals representing themselves or their family, consumer representatives, members of community groups or representatives of disease-based advocacy groups.

It is important that you match the skills, experience and preferences of the consumer to the role within your organisation as different roles may require different types of consumers.

2. **What is a consumer representative?**

According to the Consumers’ Health Forum of Australia a “consumer representative is someone who is a member of a government, professional body, industry or non-governmental organisation committee who voices consumer perspectives and takes part in the decision-making process on behalf of consumers. This person is nominated by, and is accountable to, an organisation of consumers.”

Consumer representatives are generally trained and supported by the consumer organisation of which they are a member. Contact the Consumers’ Health Forum of Australia or your state based consumer health organisation for information on consumer representative programs.

3. **Who is not a consumer?**

Any consumer who works in partnership with your organisation needs to participate in that role principally as a consumer. The consumer should not be conflicted by other roles. For example, one of your clinicians (such as a GP or a visiting medical officer) may also be a consumer of your organisations services however; if they are involved in a committee principally as a clinician they cannot also be considered a consumer representative for that committee.

4. **What is a patient information publication?**

A patient information publication is information that has been (or will be) specifically provided to a patient which is directly relevant to their health care. This may include information sheets on a condition or medication, forms provided to patients, information on services and health care options.
This generally does not include population level health information provided to consumers such as through posters, advertising, general web page information or in-house videos.

5. **What kind of orientation and training do I need to provide to consumers involved in governance?**

It is important that you provide information to consumers who engage with your organisation that ‘orients’ them to your organisation and the event they are participating in.

This orientation information is needed for consumers who may be involved in one-off events (such as a focus group, a waiting room discussion or workshop) through to those involved in more structured arrangements (such as committees). The orientation would include, at a minimum, information about your organisation, the purpose of the event, what will occur at the event, how the consumer can contribute and what will be done with the feedback and comments they provide.

In addition, those consumers who have regular involvement in the governance of your organisation (such as a member of your board or a committee) should be provided with ongoing training and support.

This could be undertaken in a number of ways including through regular formal training sessions (such as training provided by consumer organisations), informal information sessions with consumers, support meetings with a liaison from your organisation or provision of information preceding meetings with an opportunity for discussion.

Any education and training for consumers should consider their pre-existing skills and experience, and focus on information and skills development that would enable them to actively engage within their governance role.

6. **Where can I find information on training and supporting consumers?**

The Consumers’ Health Forum of Australia and state based consumer organisations provide training, information and support for consumers who are involved in the governance of healthcare organisations. Information on this training can be found at the [Our Health, Our Community](#) web site.

In addition, the Health Issues Centre offers [VET accredited training](#) on consumer leadership and participation for consumers.

7. **Where can I find information on training staff in patient centred care and partnerships?**

You can either develop your own training curricula or adapt from an existing model or resources.

If you have particular needs within your community it may be worth working with community groups and consumer healthcare organisations in order to develop a simple training program which is tailored to your environment. For example, if your organisation operated within a small Aboriginal community you may consider working with community members to design a workshop or education session on what patient centred care and partnerships means within your community. This could include interactive discussion, consumer stories and case studies to practically demonstrate how staff can make sure the consumers are treated as partners, both in their own care and in the governance of the organisation.
Alternatively, a number of organisations have developed more structured training for staff in patient centred care and partnerships. Examples include:

- Banyule Nillumbik Primary Care Alliance: Consumer Participation Resource and Training Kit for Service Providers
- Health Issues Centre: Consumer Leadership and Consumer Engagement training
- Education and Training for Consumer Participation in Health Care: Resource Guide
- Consumer Participation in Primary Care Training modules A-D

If you opt to use training which has been developed by another organisation, you will need to review the training and adapt it to your organisational context.

You may also consider contacting your state based consumer health organisation regarding options for training staff in patient centred care and partnerships.
