



Australian Government
Department of Health and Aged Care

National Consumer Engagement Strategy for Health and Wellbeing

An implementation initiative for:



Draft for consultation

Acknowledgements

Many individuals and organisations have given their time and expertise to the development of this draft National Consumer Engagement Strategy for Preventive Health. A wide program of consultations with key stakeholder groups informed the development of this draft Strategy. Consumers with lived experience contributed their knowledge and expertise of mental health, ageing, youth, cultural and linguistic diversity, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander, rural and low socioeconomic communities. Policy-makers and professionals from different levels of government, consumers and community organisations, digital health and technology organisations and various other non-government organisations contributed their knowledge and expertise. All gave generously of their time and commitment to the purpose of this Strategy. This work has been undertaken by the Mitchell Institute at Victoria University with the Consumers Health Forum of Australia and the consultancy 89 Degrees East. Content-specific expert advisors were involved in the project throughout and informed and critiqued this draft Strategy.

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Title: Draft National Consumer Engagement Strategy for Health and Wellbeing

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Glossary

Consumer	In the context of health policy, services and care, a consumer is a person who uses, has used or is a potential user of health services and information. Consumers can participate as individuals, community groups, consumer organisations or consumer representatives [1]. Consumers can play various roles when participating in consumer engagement activities: patient, person with lived experience, carer, co-designer, co-producer, active citizen and representative [2].
Consumer engagement	Consumer engagement involves consumers, carers and community members being meaningfully involved in decision-making about health policy and planning, care and treatment, and the wellbeing of themselves and the community.
Consumer representative	A consumer who represents other consumers to provide advice to improve healthcare policy and services. They can be a consumer member of a project, event, or committee who represents the consumer perspectives and participates in decision-making on behalf of consumers [3].
Co-design	Co-design is defined as a way of improving health care services and policy-making by bringing together relevant stakeholders and consumers in partnership to design and develop preventive health policy programs and services that best satisfy the needs and preferences of consumers [4]. The new services or policies are shaped in partnership with consumers “who use them and may be affected by them” [5].
Communities	A community can be defined as a group of people sharing something in common such as interests, location, culture, language, beliefs, values, traditions, shared experiences or even some issues which may intensify the differences or similarities between members of the community [6].
Design thinking	Design thinking is the cooperative approach to problem-solving that puts the user first to make user-centred products and services [7, 8].
Hard-to-engage	‘Hard-to-engage’ describes those population groups or individuals who have been shown in evidence and in recent experience, to be the least responsive to policy actions focused on engagement of the population in public health and preventive health measures. Whilst the term ‘hard-to-reach’ is in common use, it is not necessarily inclusive of those who prove to be hard to engage.



Health policy	<p>"Decisions, plans, and actions that are undertaken to achieve specific health care goals within a society. An explicit health policy can achieve several things: it defines a vision for the future which in turn helps to establish targets and points of reference for the short and medium-term. It outlines priorities and the expected roles of different groups, and it builds consensus and informs people" [3]. Outputs of health policy can vary from standards, practice guidelines or position statements [9].</p>
Policy-makers	<p>In the context of this Strategy, policy-makers are recognised as those involved in informing, designing and developing policy – both individuals and organisations across government and non-government settings.</p>
Preventive health	<p>Preventive health is any action taken to keep people healthy and well, and prevent or avoid risk of poor health, illness, injury and early death. This includes both population-based and individual-based interventions which aim to minimise the burden of diseases and associated risk factors.</p>
Priority populations	<p>There are a range of groups within the population that have specific characteristics, circumstances and/or needs. For this Strategy, the key priority population groups have been identified as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people; • culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) communities and individuals; • lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex, queer, asexual and/or other sexuality and gender diverse people (LGBTQIA+); • people living with mental illness; • people of low socioeconomic status; • people with disability and carers; • rural, regional and remote populations; • children and young people; and • older people. <p>In this Strategy, these groups are referred to collectively as 'priority population groups'.</p>



Executive summary

Strengthening preventive health to improve health and wellbeing throughout the Australian population is a national health priority. The National Preventive Health Strategy 2021-2030 (NPHS) established policy outcomes to be achieved by 2030 to build better capacity and practice in preventive health in Australia. One of the immediate priorities for policy action is the strengthening of partnerships in prevention with the community.

This National Consumer Engagement Strategy for Health and Wellbeing (this Strategy) is an implementation resource for that priority. It aims to support and strengthen partnerships that are equitable and effective and to build trust between consumers and policy-makers in all policy areas relevant to preventive health.

In the context of health policy, services and care, a consumer is a person who uses, has used or is a potential user of health services and information. Consumers can participate as individuals, community groups, consumer organisations or consumer representatives [1]. Consumers can play various roles when participating in consumer engagement activities: patient, person with lived experience, carer, co-designer, co-producer, active citizen and representative [2].


Policy-makers are recognised as those involved in informing, designing and developing policy – both individuals and organisations across government and non-government settings. Policies relevant to preventive health are developed at all levels of government and within health service providers, non-government organisations (NGOs), community organisations, business and industry. Throughout this Strategy, policy-makers is used in its broad sense to include all these stakeholders.

The purpose of this Strategy is to mobilise a person-centred systematic approach to preventive health. This will be achieved by addressing three objectives:

- building trust and strengthening partnerships between consumers and policy-makers;
- enhancing capability and capacity for policy-makers to undertake effective, fit-for-purpose engagement with consumers and community organisations; and
- empowering and facilitating consumers and community organisations to engage in and co-design preventive health policies and programs.

Comprehensive implementation of this Strategy will lead to a more engaged population and contribute to improved health and wellbeing outcomes for all Australians.

Five Fundamentals set out the requirements for good practice consumer engagement to ensure development of trust and equitable and effective partnerships between consumers and policy-makers in the policy development process. Ten Good Practice Guidelines are provided to support engagement activities that are consistent with these fundamental requirements. While this Strategy was developed with a focus on preventive health, the Fundamentals and Good Practice Guidelines would support effective consumer engagement in all areas of policy-making.



A consumer engagement toolkit – the *Health Engagement Learning Platform* (HELP) Toolkit – provides policy-makers and consumers with a guide to planning, initiating, undertaking, supporting and evaluating consumer engagement throughout the policy and program development process. The Toolkit provides a high-level overview of common consumer engagement approaches and their features, and describes specific approaches for policy-making relevant to health and wellbeing. The major consumer engagement touchpoints across policy-making cycles are illustrated in the Toolkit.

The HELP Toolkit outlines what is required of policy-makers and the engagement process to deliver on the Fundamentals for building partnerships and trust. The Good Practice Guidelines are supported with factsheets incorporating checklists of activities that are consistent with the fundamental requirements for consumer engagement.

The content of this Strategy has been informed by a robust evidence base of effective consumer engagement approaches and best practice co-design principles and methods. Development of this Strategy was further informed and guided by expert advisers, including consumers with lived experience and experts in relevant disciplines such as social marketing, preventive health and community engagement. A national program of consultations included consumer-led community conversations; community-specific face-to-face consultations with priority population groups; and multiple online workshops with policy-makers, consumers and community groups, digital health and technology organisations and various other non-government organisations.

Strategy overview

Purpose

Mobilising consumer and community participation in preventive health policy and program design, evaluation and implementation, leading to a more engaged population and improved health and wellbeing outcomes for all Australians.

Objectives

Strengthen partnerships and build trust between consumers, communities and policy-makers to facilitate consumer participation and engagement in preventive health at all levels of policy-making.	Build capability and capacity for policy-makers to achieve trusted engagement with consumers and community organisations to better inform policy-making and service design.	Empower and facilitate consumers and community organisations to engage in and co-design preventive health policies and programs.
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Consumer Engagement Fundamentals

Purposeful	Inclusive	Respectful	Transparent	Collaborative
Shared understanding of purpose and outcomes. Objectives agreed and clearly communicated. Consumers engaged from the start and throughout.	Easy and accessible for all consumers to engage. Diversity of voices, perspectives and modes of engagement. Provide cultural, physical, ethical, psychological and emotional safety for all consumers involved.	Valuing lived experience, recognising consumers as equals and experts. Consumers and organisations resourced appropriately. Engagement occurs in a way and at a pace that suits the consumers.	Early framing and communication of expectations and limitations. Two-way feedback loops are available and actively used. Consumers have access to appropriate training and supports.	Commitment to ongoing relationships with consumers and their organisations. Genuine partnerships with trust, collaboration and participatory engagement. Engagement embedded in all policy-making.

Good Practice Guidelines

Build & sustain relational, not transactional, partnerships	Treat people and communities with respect and value their contributions and development. Work with communities even when this does not immediately translate into policy outcomes – actively listen and seek to understand the needs of consumers and communities.
Develop a detailed understanding of the context	Consider the social, demographic, cultural, political, technical, psychological and physical environments influencing the policy context and possible consumer engagement approaches, including any limitations or constraints.
Identify who to engage	Consider who the community and stakeholders are and your purpose for engaging. Identify engagement intermediaries, community leaders and engagement champions.
Seek & support diverse engagement participation	Employ inclusive processes that invite diverse participation and engage differences productively. Aim to include voices normally excluded from decision making due to a lack of engagement, active disengagement or existing barriers that prevent participation.
Meet people where they are	Explore where, when and how consumers will be most receptive to engagement approaches; adapt your approach to meet the needs of consumers.
Understand people require different approaches	Utilise multi-modal engagement approaches that are fit for purpose including a range of engagement mechanisms to reach all consumers.
Engage with humility & empathy	Recognise lived experience as valuable subject matter expertise and be open to learning from consumers. Be a facilitator, not a driver of the engagement. Remain responsive to potential power imbalances that may exist between lived experience expertise and other forms of expertise
Don't let 'perfect' be the enemy of good	Understand the iterative and adaptive nature of successful consumer engagement, recognising that there is not a 'one size fits all' approach to consumer engagement. If an approach isn't working, seek feedback on how to better facilitate engagement and whether to try a different approach.
Seek & act on feedback	Provide and sustain two-way feedback loops to provide participants with timely and iterative information and opportunities to inform the process and outcomes and to ensure a transparent and accountable process.
Monitor engagement & evaluate impact	Consumers should be actively engaged in policy monitoring and evaluation to assess the implementation outcomes of the policy approach. Indicators of effective engagement and evaluation/monitoring processes should be included and co-designed for engagement approaches.

HELP Toolkit	Engagement approaches	Engagement touchpoints	'How to' factsheets	Other resources
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About this Strategy

Improving the health and wellbeing of all Australians at all stages of life through prevention is the focus of the National Preventive Health Strategy 2021-2030 (NPHS) [10]. This National Consumer Engagement Strategy for Health and Wellbeing (this Strategy) is a central implementation initiative of the NPHS.

Despite having one of the best health care systems in the world [11], more Australians are now living with and suffering from chronic illnesses than ever before [12]. People in Australia, on average, live almost eleven years in poor health [13]. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people experience significantly worse health and life expectancy outcomes than others in the population due to the colonial legacy, intergenerational trauma and complex social determinants of health [14]. At least one third of chronic disease could be prevented by reducing risk factors such as physical inactivity, overweight and obesity, smoking and alcohol use [15].

Improving the health and wellbeing of all Australians at all stages of life through prevention requires attention to:

- the wider determinants of health (such as education level, housing, income) which contributes to greater risk of preventable health problems;
- reducing health inequity for priority populations (e.g. access to healthcare, racial and language barriers); and
- addressing the increasing burden of disease [10].

Policy approaches focusing on prevention and early intervention are critical to improved health outcomes for everyone living in Australia [16]. However, both evidence and experience demonstrate that direct involvement of consumers and communities in policy-making for preventive health is essential in order to achieve improvement in the prevalence of disease risk factors, chronic health conditions and premature mortality and morbidity [17].

Preventive health requires active participation from consumers and communities to affect behaviour change and create healthy environments. Active participation for improved health outcomes include increased participation in screening that would prevent thousands of deaths from cancer [10], to community-based and community driven efforts that are needed to alter environmental, socioeconomic and cultural conditions in ways that promote health equity and generate healthier environments [18].

Partnerships and community are at the core of a strong and resilient preventive health system that can build and sustain capacity to promote health and prevent illness [19]. This requires systematic recognition of – and commitment to – the critical role of consumers and communities as equal participants in health partnerships, to ensure that preventive health systems are person-centred and able to maximise health and wellbeing outcomes [19].



We heard from consumers that:

“Power and empowerment of consumers is important. Power needs to sit with the community, then you can build collaborative, respectful, transparent and trusting relationships. Consumers need to feel empowered by the engagement process that they can influence change.”

This Strategy is designed to establish and strengthen preventive health partnerships with communities and organisations, including with priority population communities and organisations that are robust, effective and developed through co-design approaches to inform and influence policy and practice that will improve health and wellbeing in the Australian population.

Supporting partnerships and consumer engagement

Partnerships in policy-making between consumers and policy-makers are central to the design and implementation of this Strategy. Partnerships between policy-makers and consumers are essential for good practice policy development both in the health sector and other public policy sectors relevant to health equity and healthier environments. The Toolkit provides information, advice and resources to build and sustain ongoing partnerships in all aspects of policy-making for preventive health.

This Strategy recognises policy-makers as those involved in informing, influencing, designing and developing policy – both individuals and organisations. This Strategy acknowledges that policies relevant to preventive health are developed at all levels of government and within health service providers, NGOs, community organisations, business and industry. Throughout this Strategy, policy-makers is used in its broad sense to include all of these stakeholders.

Effective consumer engagement requires the empowerment of consumers as equal stakeholders and collaborating partners in the policy development process. This will foster both program and service design and provision that is relevant to diverse consumers and communities and to health and related information and resources that are tailored to the needs, circumstances and preferences of priority and hard-to-engage population groups.



Strategy components

This Strategy provides both government and non-government policy-makers with an evidence-based, fit-for-purpose, future-focused guide for good practice consumer engagement that will facilitate authentic and sustainable connections with consumers, communities and their representative organisations.

It will equip consumers, their organisations and policy-makers with knowledge, frameworks and skills to engage effectively and purposefully with each other in equal partnerships in the design and development of preventive health policies, programs and services.

Three objectives frame this Strategy. They are to:

- strengthen partnerships and build trust between consumers and policy-makers to facilitate consumer participation and engagement in preventive health at all levels of policy-making;
- build capability and capacity for policy-makers to achieve trusted engagement with consumers and community organisations to better inform policy-making and service design; and
- empower and facilitate consumers and community organisations to engage in and co-design preventive health policies and programs.

Five fundamental requirements for building partnerships and trust for consumer engagement in policy activities are central to the Strategy. They are fundamental because all five must be recognised as essential in all consumer engagement activities if these activities are to be trusted, respected and embraced by consumers. The Fundamentals for good practice consumer engagement are to be purposeful, inclusive, respectful, transparent and collaborative. These Fundamentals underpin Ten Good Practice Guidelines that will inform and support planning and implementation of consumer engagement activities.

A Toolkit of information and resources – the *Health Engagement Learning Platform* (HELP) – provides policy-makers with a resource to guide initiation and implementation of consumer engagement at all stages of preventive health policy-making. It sets out what is required of policy-makers and engagement processes to implement the Fundamentals and build trusted partnerships with consumers for effective consumer engagement. The Toolkit also provides instructive factsheets, which include 'how-to' checklists, associated with each of the ten Good Practice Guidelines.

The Toolkit describes the diversity of engagement approaches that can be considered and employed in preventive health policy-making. The stages of the policy-making cycle are outlined with information to guide consumer engagement at each stage – whether in response to an emerging policy issue; across the later stages of policy development and testing; or during policy implementation and impact evaluation. The Toolkit also includes Good Practice Guideline factsheets, to provide checklists of relevant activities within the broader engagement process.




Building this Strategy

This Strategy is informed by a rapid review of contemporary relevant evidence, on consultations that identified what effective consumer engagement and partnerships require and how they are best undertaken and supported. This Strategy is developed from the perspectives of policy-makers, consumers and community organisations, and communications and engagement experts. These perspectives were gathered through multiple engagement methods including focus groups, expert interviews and 'produce and test' co-design workshops.

The design and content of the Strategy takes into account, and will complement, well recognised public participation frameworks, particularly those of the International Association for Public Participation (IAP2) [20], and resources produced to guide the Australian Public Service (APS) in engagement and place-based approaches [21, 22]. Most importantly, it draws from existing well regarded, co-designed frameworks generated by the health consumer sector including priority population groups. All these frameworks identify the benefits of public participation and consumer engagement in policy-making [4, 20, 21, 23-25].

This Strategy was built using a range of engagement practices and processes that are included in the implementation toolkit, the HELP Toolkit. These are:

- Consumers with a broad range of lived experience and engagement expertise provided expert guidance to the project. A diverse mix of consumer participants were reached by working with community organisations and trusted intermediaries:
 - The Consumers Health Forum of Australia – the national peak body representing the interests of Australian healthcare consumers – facilitated the contributions of consumers with lived experience and consumer advisors through the course of the Strategy's development and brought together consumers from their networks in a diverse range of community consultations that informed and critiqued the development of the Strategy. This included mental health and youth health groups, disability and older age groups.
 - Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander, CALD, low socioeconomic and rural communities were engaged through a range of approaches that were tailored to and with representative groups and organisations. Approaches were co-designed in discussions with trusted intermediaries for priority population groups.
- Policy-makers working in government and non-government organisations in preventive health were specifically and purposely consulted as implementers of consumer engagement initiatives and a critical audience for the Strategy.
- Consultation workshops were arranged to 'meet people where they were' through a range of engagement approaches including:
 - kitchen table conversations with consumers led by a trusted local leader; and
 - conversations with community members through established, place-based community forums convened by local government alliances and Primary Health Networks.

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- A variety of engagement approaches, ranging from formal and structured consultations to semi-informal community conversations, were used in response to participant circumstances and preferences.
 - Consultation participants were presented with a clear explanation of the scope and context of the project both prior to any engagement and during the consultation activities themselves.

We heard from consumers that:

"It is important not to reinvent the wheel and tap into the high quality existing consumer engagement tools and resources already available."

We heard from policy-makers that:

"Listening and unlearning is as important as the learning. As bureaucrats we often go in with preconceived ideas. We need to go in open to raw, authentic conversations, unlearning our beliefs and being open to just listening to the community."



Good practice consumer engagement

The strong, consistent advice of all stakeholders who participated in the design of this Strategy is that there must be trust in the connection and relationships between consumers and policy-makers. Trust is established through ongoing connections and relationships, it is not an 'instantly attainable' goal and is built by working in collaboration with trusted, acceptable and accessible formal and informal intermediaries for consumer and population groups and communities.

Partnerships that place consumers and communities at the heart of policy design and implementation are built on equal relationships established over time. Establishing and building trust and partnerships requires engagement approaches that are purposeful, inclusive, respectful, transparent and collaborative.

Trusted consumer engagement does not summon consumers and their representatives. Trusted consumer engagement is built up over time; it engages with consumers where they are and in their communities: geographical, cultural, social or economic. Outcomes of trusted consumer engagement include mutual agreement and understanding of the engagement purpose and potential; it empowers people on the ground and it delivers accepted and sustained changes [22].

We heard from consumers:

"We have to move at the speed of trust – can't work within the same time pressures as policy-makers. Co-design doesn't happen neatly within a financial year – it doesn't fit into traditional decision-making structures."

Good practice also requires that those initiating consumer engagement in health policy issues relevant to preventive health are informed, trained and resourced to:

- understand the characteristics of trusted engagement and how to contribute to the development of trust in engagement approaches;
- develop a detailed understanding of the context of the policy issue and particularly the context and perspective of consumers and relevant consumer and community organisations with shared interest in the policy issue;
- work with humility and empathy throughout the engagement process and activities, recognising lived experience as expertise and acknowledging the policy-maker's role as facilitator, not driver, of the engagement;
- establish, sustain and act on iterative feedback throughout the process and with the outcomes of the engagement; and
- collaboratively monitor engagement activities and evaluate the impact of engagement and implementation outcomes from all participant perspectives.

We heard from consumers:

"I might not have a PhD, but I have a PhD in lived experience"

"You have to truly value people with lived experience or they won't engage."

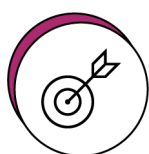
Consumer Engagement Fundamentals

To support effective consumer and community participation at all levels of co-planning, co-designing, co-delivery and co-reviewing of health and wellbeing policies and programs, a range of elements have been identified as fundamental.

The term 'fundamental' has been deliberately chosen as it describes something that affects "the basic nature of other things or are the most important element upon which other things depend" and that are "a principle, law (or other) that serves as the basis of an idea or system" [26].

The Consumer Engagement Fundamentals outlined in this Strategy identify the foundational building blocks for effective and authentic consumer engagement throughout the policy-making process. Applying these Fundamentals in all areas of policy-making relevant to health and wellbeing will facilitate effective engagement, through building trust and supporting and strengthening equitable partnerships between consumers and policy-makers.

The five Fundamentals require consumer engagement for policy-making to be:



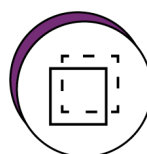
Purposeful



Inclusive



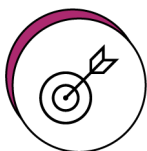
Respectful



Transparent

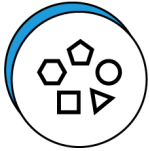


Collaborative



Purposeful

Ensure there is a clear and shared understanding of the purpose and outcomes of the engagement at the outset	Be responsible and accountable for securing an agreed, unambiguous, shared understanding of both the objectives and means of engagement with consumers at the beginning.
Involve consumers from the start and across the life course of the policy	Consumers and community organisations can help refine and evolve the policy or program as it develops, as well as shape a fit-for-purpose engagement strategy that works for all.
Negotiate the process and timelines for the engagement	<p>Talk with consumers and community organisations to jointly determine the engagement process, best modes of engagement, schedules and timelines to manage expectations and optimise involvement.</p> <p>Sometimes shorter more focused engagement can be more appropriate, particularly where there is a risk of over-engagement, often experienced by identified priority population groups.</p>
Take an authentic, holistic, iterative co-design approach	Carefully consider where and how consumers can be engaged across the policy development cycle to ensure their engagement has impact. Different methods may be appropriate as the policy is in development compared to those of most benefit to implementation evaluation.

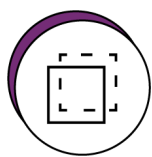


Inclusive

Ensure the engagement process is easy and accessible for all consumers, especially those harder to engage or reach	Create environments and platforms where a diverse range of consumers can equally participate in safe and appropriate ways especially for those harder to engage or reach. Be empathetic, kind and gracious in your interactions.
Recognise the intersectionality and heterogeneity of consumer groups	Consumers are not one homogenous community – many may be disadvantaged due to the wider determinants of health, intergenerational trauma, racism, poverty, marginalisation, language barriers, age or mobility.
Embed, plan and cater for diversity and inclusion	Provide cultural, physical, ethical, psychological and emotional safety for all consumers involved. Research and ensure diversity and inclusion are catered for in accord with relevant industry and expert guidance. Avoid the convenience of approaching the same individuals or group of individuals who always participate. Ensure the health workforce is sufficiently trained in understanding cultural safety and inclusion.
Use the right range of engagement channels to reach all targeted consumers	Remember that different people engage at different levels and in different ways. Use multi-modal engagement approaches and multiple engagement platforms to reach the audience/s. Maintain ongoing monitoring and sense-checking during the process to evaluate whether there is engagement with consumers who represent the full spectrum of people and communities with a shared interest in the policy issue.



Respectful	
Value lived experience, recognising consumers as equals and experts	A breadth and depth of lived experience and insights is a strength. Capturing and interpreting this will assure the policy or program is robust, relevant, well-tested and targeted and that it is focused on the problem it is seeking to solve.
Acknowledge and appreciate consumers' expertise, knowledge, perspective and needs	'Hardwire' and ensure systemic respect for consumer participation through formal means such as remuneration, terms of reference, familiarisation and induction, and attribution in documentation.
Appropriately resource engagement approaches	Provide consumers and consumer organisations with access to the resources they require to participate meaningfully. These resources should include access to appropriate training and skills development including in policy-making and health and wellbeing.
Implement engagement activities using methods and pace that suits consumers	Before commencing an engagement approach, design the approach with the group you wish to work with, not for that group, to build connection and trust.
Connection and trust must be prioritised	Review, evolve and continuously improve engagement strategies to ensure they are meeting the expectations of consumers and community organisations and that consumer insights are reflected in the developing policy or program.



Transparent	
Be open, transparent and accountable	<p>Information should be provided to consumers to empower them to participate in a meaningful and equitable way.</p> <p>Ensure any perceived or actual conflicts of interest are declared and identified throughout the engagement process.</p>
Explain the intent, expectations and limitations of engagement	<p>Clearly communicate and ensure understanding of the level of influence and ownership consumers will have, including what is out of their hands, so consumers can understand how their input is informing the policy-making process.</p>
Facilitate dynamic and comprehensive feedback loops	<p>Facilitate confidence in the transparency and accountability of the engagement relationship by providing and enabling timely and iterative information to and from participants about the process and outcomes.</p>
Build relationships with trusted intermediaries	<p>Work through trusted intermediaries and/or community leaders to establish open communication and engagement with consumer and community groups.</p>
Support confidence in engagement	<p>Facilitate continued engagement by ensuring consumers can see the purpose of or tangible outcomes from an engagement process. Participants need to see 'their voice' in the end-product.</p>
Support engagement capability	<p>Equip consumers, communities and trusted intermediaries with access to appropriate resources and training to participate and contribute with confidence and understanding.</p>



Collaborative

Facilitate genuine participatory engagement where power and knowledge is shared	Establish long-term trust and collaborative practice between policy-makers, consumers and community organisations. Factor in the time it takes to develop this trust to enable collaboration, consumer ownership and empowerment, particularly for hard-to-reach and hard-to engage population groups.
Make local community-controlled organisations and trusted intermediaries central	Work in partnership with organisations, such as representative peak bodies and community leaders, that spend time building up trust and community relationships, to link lived experience and expertise with government.
Build organisational culture that supports and values consumer engagement and collaborative practice	Communication and leadership of a strategic vision of partnership with consumers throughout the health policy-making environment is fundamental to building organisational capability and capacity for sustainable effective consumer engagement in health policy-making relevant to health and wellbeing.
Ensure consumer engagement is a core component of all policy-making processes and actions	Hardwire into culture, policies, procedures, systems and education and training that a planned, purposeful and systematic approach to consumer engagement is always taken. Embed consumers in planning, design, delivery, monitoring and evaluation of policies regarding the health, wellbeing and welfare of consumers and in the governance and provision of health services.



Good Practice Guidelines

Good Practice Guidelines are to support the planning, design and implementation of consumer engagement activities that are based on the Fundamentals for good practice in consumer engagement in policy-making.

These Guidelines have been developed through analysis of how consumer engagement for policy-making has been undertaken in practice, using a range of approaches and across a range of settings, to identify what has worked well and what hasn't. They were shaped through an iterative process of broad consultation from a range of consumer and policy-makers perspectives and developed further through design workshops with consumers and policy-makers.

The Guidelines detail *how* policy-makers can plan, design and engage in effective consumer engagement initiatives. They are purposefully presented as Good Practice Guidelines because there is no one best or set way to engage with consumers. There is a wide range of engagement methods and modalities from which to draw to shape an engagement initiative that is relevant to the consumers and communities for which it is intended.


The Guidelines provide policy-makers with descriptors and strategies to *help* with the selection and design of engagement approaches likely to be most appropriate and effective for the policy issue and the consumers and communities that have a shared interest in the issue.

Development of the Guidelines was informed by a review of evidence of good practice in consumer engagement. The Guidelines have been developed through consultations and workshops with consumers, consumer and community organisations and policy-makers in government, health and other non-government organisations and services.


We heard from policy-makers that:


"If you're thinking about perfect, you can't even think about engagement. Best advice is to embrace the chaos, because they throw things at you and you have to take the time to listen – that's where you get the real value from community engagement."



Guidelines overview


	Build and sustain relational, not transactional, partnerships
	Develop a detailed understanding of the context
	Identify who to engage
	Seek and support diverse engagement participation
	Meet people where they are
	Understand people require different approaches
	Engage with humility and empathy
	Don't let 'perfect' be the enemy of good
	Seek and act on feedback
	Monitor engagement and evaluate impact

Understanding the Guidelines



Guideline	Description	Strategies
 <p>Build and sustain relational, not transactional, partnerships</p>	<p>Treat people and communities with respect and value the contributions of community voices, cultural advisors and consumers with lived experience.</p> <p>Work with communities even when this does not immediately translate into policy outcomes – actively listen and seek to understand the needs of consumers and communities.</p> <p>Make time to build rapport and relationships – learn about the community group or individuals that you are trying to engage with.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Meet with consumers/communities to hear their concerns and needs outside of specific policy development – provide opportunities to engage more broadly on the issues that are important to them. • Value the time of consumers and ensure their participation is appropriately resourced and remunerated. • Empower consumers by developing their engagement, advocacy, and leadership skills. Provide information, training and mentoring as appropriate in policy-making and health and wellbeing. • Build two-way communication and open engagement pathways. • Don't 'tokenise' engagement. Consumer partnerships need to be mutually beneficial and reciprocal, with give and take. • Explore ways to maintain continuity of relationships between consumers, consumer and community organisations and government officials.



Guideline	Description	Strategies
 <p>Develop a detailed understanding of the context</p>	<p>Consider the social, demographic, economic, cultural, political, technical and physical environments influencing the policy context and the consumers' environment.</p> <p>Consider possible consumer engagement approaches, including any limitations or constraints.</p> <p>Beware siloed consumer engagement and over-engagement, where the same consumers or community groups are approached on multiple fronts, and sometimes on the same or similar issues.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify resource and time constraints – consider these from both the policy-making perspective and from the perspective of the consumers and communities you are wanting to engage with. • Design engagement approaches that take account of the broader context to better identify and understand the barriers consumers may face, to help create a safe and inclusive environment for engagement. • Prior to consultation and engagement, take time to understand the politics and unique structure of a community and ensure each member who wishes to be included can participate. • It matters what questions are being asked in an engagement process. A fundamental question needs to be 'What matters to the consumer?'

Guideline	Description	Strategies
 <p>Identify who to engage</p>	<p>Consider who the community and stakeholders are and your purpose for engaging.</p> <p>Identify trusted intermediaries, community leaders and engagement champions.</p> <p>Local community-controlled organisations that spend time to build up trust and relationships should be part of consumer engagement processes, connecting consumers with lived experience with government and policy-makers.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identify where people in hard-to-reach communities place their trust and connect through these networks – whether it is social media influencers that have built trust with their followers, existing and active online or in-person support groups (e.g. carer support groups) or peak multicultural organisations that have great community communication channels and use social media platforms that are not mainstream in Australia. Establish formal networks, such as population-based or community-led advisory boards, to support engagement processes. Identify 'engagement allies' or 'critical friends' from consumer peak bodies and other policy partners who can be directly involved in informing and guiding policy development.
 <p>Seek and support diverse engagement participation</p>	<p>Employ inclusive and culturally appropriate processes that invite diverse participation and engage differences productively.</p> <p>Aim to include voices normally excluded from decision making either because they are actively disengaged, or because existing barriers prevent participation.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Consider using cultural advisers to facilitate engagement participation Build relationships with multiple voices within a community, don't assume that one person can speak for everyone in a cultural group or community. Offer flexibility in methods of engagement to enhance accessibility for a diverse range of consumers. Invest in consumer representatives – with inductions, training and support. Develop capacity building opportunities within engagement activities to incentivise and enhance participation – for example a digital literacy introductory course could be offered to consumers prior to seeking engagement through digital platforms.

Guideline	Description	Strategies
 <p>Meet people where they are</p>	<p>Adapt your engagement approach to meet the needs of consumers rather than bringing consumers into a policy-making process that is familiar to policy-makers and government, but not to consumers.</p> <p>Be aware that some engagement approaches may not fit the needs of consumers and may reduce, ability, capacity – or willingness – to engage effectively or safely.</p> <p>Explore where, when and how consumers will be most receptive to engagement approaches.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wherever possible, facilitate community-led engagement and adapt your approach to meet people's needs, capacity and expectations. • Work at the pace of consumers and provide skill development and capacity building where needed. • Lower the health literacy barrier for consumers rather than trying to raise the health literacy of consumers • Go to where people are – utilise existing settings (social media, community networks, community events), where people feel more comfortable and are more likely to engage. • Design engagement approaches where consumers can offer their feedback at a time and place that is convenient and relevant for them (i.e., at home or on mobile device) rather than having to attend a certain venue at a certain time. • Ensure that consumers are able to contribute through multiple formats and media - e.g. Easy Read or simple English or non-written communication.

Guideline	Description	Strategies
 <p>Understand people require different approaches</p>	<p>How you engage with consumers depends on the scale and complexity of the issue, the possible policy approaches, the particular cohort and the options available.</p> <p>It is useful to use a mixed-methods approach and adapt engagement methods as needed.</p> <p>The types of engagement methods to use can be informed by local intelligence and exploring what has worked for a particular community or population group previously.</p> <p>Rigid approaches to engagement and policy and program development more broadly can result in the exclusion of certain consumers and population groups.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A good way to start an engagement process is to ask people in the community “what are some of the ways we can talk with you?” • No single platform or approach has all the answers – utilise multi-modal engagement approaches that are fit-for-purpose including a range of engagement mechanisms to reach all consumers. • Be mindful of the ‘digital divide’. Online platforms have their place but there are many in the community for whom this is not an optimal or natural way for them to engage with policy-making. Provide additional familiarisation and training for those less confident with digital platforms. • If an approach isn’t working, try a different approach – allow for adaptation in policy development and project planning, ensuring that processes are responsive to feedback and flexible throughout the development cycle. • Engagement processes must be ‘tailored’ to the end user (e.g. older people, CALD communities, people with disabilities) – need to be speaking to the actual end audience, not treat them as generic or homogeneous groups.

Guideline	Description	Strategies
 <p>Engage with humility and empathy</p>	<p>Humility leads to better listening, increased collaboration, and a more compassionate engagement approach. It creates more authenticity and leads to better engagement outcomes.</p> <p>Recognise that the lived experiences of all participants are just as important as each other and that all should be respected, valued and treated with understanding from policy-makers.</p> <p>Be open to learning from consumers.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Acknowledge the power dynamics between government, policy-makers and consumers and redistribute ownership of the process through a commitment to co-design. • Take time to actively listen and hold space for conversations to find the real value from consumer and community engagement. • Be a facilitator, not a driver of the engagement. • Suspend judgement – be open to the ‘unlearning’ of any pre-conceived notions. • Exercise mindfulness and be respectful. • Be open to raw, authentic conversations and just listening to consumers and communities – don’t feel compelled to respond or provide answers when you are in discovery mode.
 <p>Don't let 'perfect' be the enemy of good</p>	<p>The aim is trusted and welcomed consumer engagement. The perfect process is not the aim.</p> <p>Embrace the chaos and be agile and innovative in your approach to consumer engagement.</p> <p>Agility in consumer engagement for policy-making can lead to the development of highly practical and responsive policy outcomes, either to meet immediate needs or as part of a longer-term planning process.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Understand the iterative and adaptive nature of successful consumer engagement and be flexible with your approach. • Be open to changing engagement approaches or policy design based on unanticipated engagement outcomes. • Be open to innovative ideas and new ways of engaging. • Recognise that it is okay to ‘take a risk’ when engaging with consumers and communities.

Guideline	Description	Strategies
 <p>Seek and act on feedback</p>	<p>Ensure open and accessible communication channels between the people being engaged and those undertaking the engagement. Consumers are more likely to continue to engage if they feel they have been listened to and you have acted on what you heard.</p> <p>Actively seek and facilitate feedback opportunities throughout the engagement process. Two-way feedback loops enable engagement to be more responsive to consumer and policy-maker needs and issues and to be transparent to all.</p> <p>Complete the feedback loop – if community expectations cannot be fully met, be transparent and accountable. Demonstrate to participants that their concerns and aspirations have been heard. Ensure participants are fully informed about the outcome/s of the process.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When you collect information from community consultation, ensure that it's reported back to participants and clearly communicate what any data collected is being used for. • Be flexible with your approach – embed capacity to modify engagement processes in line with consumer feedback. • Transparency is key to engagement; people need to see that consumer perspectives are being heard and acted upon or they don't believe it happens. • Train teams on how to engage in feedback from and to and with consumers – feedback in real time is critical for effectiveness.
 <p>Monitor engagement and evaluate impact</p>	<p>Indicators of effective engagement and evaluation/monitoring processes should be developed in all engagement approaches.</p> <p>Consumers should be actively engaged in policy monitoring and evaluation to assess the implementation outcomes of the policy approach.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Agree shared expectations early on in engagement process, including 'what does success look like for the engagement activity?' • Embed multiple feedback opportunities across various feedback mediums throughout the engagement process. • Employ relevant indicators and evaluation measures to assess the engagement processes. • Ensure engagement objectives are aligned with any evaluation measures.



This Strategy in action

Long-term, systematic commitment to improved consumer engagement in preventive health policy and practice will directly contribute support for the sustainability of Australia's health system and health budget through reductions in the incidence and impact of preventable diseases in Australia.


The value and benefits of sustained engagement with consumers is recognised in other aspects of health policy-making, including in the design and delivery of treatment and support for mental illness, in other chronic illness treatment and management, and in broader areas of policy-making and program delivery such as the National Disability Insurance Scheme.

Preventive health policy-making will also reflect the practices set out in wider engagement guidelines and advice such as the International Association of Public Participation 3 Pillars of Public Participation [20]; the Australian Public Service (APS) Framework for Engagement and Participation [21]; the better practice guide to place-based initiatives of the Australian Government Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet [22]; and established co-designed consumer engagement frameworks in the health sector, such as those developed by the health consumer sector such as Health Consumers Queensland and Cancer Australia [27, 28].

This National Consumer Engagement Strategy for Health and Wellbeing will inform, facilitate and support consumer engagement in preventive health policy-making through the next decade that:

- establishes and sustains connections and an iterative interchange of information and communication between both government and non-government policy-makers and consumers and communities;
- is robust and evidence-based, providing evidence and consumer informed strategies, tools and resources for health providers and policy-makers;
- provides consumer-focussed information and resources that better facilitate engagement with health providers and policy-makers;
- facilitates and supports co-design in engagement approaches and implementation;
- provides methods, tools and resources that are demonstrably effective in reaching and engaging priority and hard-to-engage population groups in preventive health information, awareness and action;
- provides methods, tools and resources that take into account varying levels of health literacy and activation across consumer and population segments; and
- promotes the use of contemporary information, digital technologies, and innovative engagement approaches that are relevant to current and emerging health issues.

The Strategy recognises and provides for the demanding operating environment affecting health policy-makers as well as addressing the contextual and practical barriers to participation and responsiveness that inhibit the engagement of consumers in health policy-making and implementation. Embedding effective co-design practices into the policy development process is essential to addressing these barriers.



This Strategy places co-design principles at the centre of good practice consumer engagement. Key principles of co-design are that:

- people are creative;
- people are experts in their own lives;
- policy should be designed by people with relevant lived experience [29].

These principles are embedded in the Strategy as is the co-design method or process of iterative design thinking oriented towards innovation and practical tools that support creative and tangible methods for 'telling, enacting and making' [29].

The Guidelines, tools and resources for this Strategy will resource and empower both government and non-government policy-makers to work in effective partnerships, focused on co-design approaches, with consumers and community organisations. This will support and facilitate development and testing of innovative, relevant and implementable solutions to preventive health challenges by:

- building trusted and sustained relationships with consumer organisations across the health policy spectrum relevant to preventive health;
- building trusted and sustained relationships with trusted intermediaries for priority populations and hard-to-engage consumers and population groups;
- recognising the point of the policy-making cycle at which consumer engagement is sought to establish agreed and transparent understanding of the preventive health challenge, problem or policy opportunity to be addressed; and
- using the Good Practice Guidelines to engage, plan and co-design with consumers and community organisations to address specific preventive health policy opportunities or challenges.

Implementation of this Strategy by policy-makers at all levels of government and throughout the health sector and by consumers and community organisations, will enable and support equal and sustainable partnerships in policymaking.

To aid implementation of this Strategy, the Health Engagement Learning Platform (HELP Toolkit) has been produced as a lift-out resource that accompanies the Strategy. It is a brief, stand-alone representation of the Strategy. The Toolkit will provide policy-makers, consumers and community organisations with a quick reference and easily navigated means of applying the Fundamentals and Guidelines of the Strategy. The Toolkit could be further implemented through translation into a web based resource in which the Toolkit icons and brief descriptions would link to resources providing more detail.



Health Engagement Learning Platform: The HELPE Toolkit

A practical toolkit for the
National Consumer Engagement
Strategy for Health and Wellbeing



HELP: a practical toolkit

The HELP Toolkit is a resource for policy-makers at all levels of government and within health and other non-government organisations and for consumers and their organisation to support implementation of the National Consumer Engagement Strategy for Health and Wellbeing. The Toolkit will guide policy-making for Health and Wellbeing that is based on the Fundamentals for consumer engagement underpinning this Strategy. The five Fundamentals are that consumer engagement is purposeful, inclusive, respectful, transparent and collaborative. Ten Good Practice Guidelines are outlined and supported with factsheets incorporating checklists of activities that will be relevant to implementing consumer engagement based on the Good Practice Guidelines.

The design and content of the HELP Toolkit takes into account and is consistent with well recognised public participation frameworks, particularly those of the International Association for Public Participation (IAP2) and resources produced to guide the Australian Public Service in engagement and place-based approaches. Most importantly, it draws from existing well regarded, co-designed frameworks generated by the health consumer sector.

Strategy overview

Purpose

Mobilising consumer and community participation in preventive health policy and program design, evaluation and implementation, leading to a more engaged population and improved health and wellbeing outcomes for all Australians.

Objectives

Strengthen partnerships and build trust between consumers, communities and policy-makers to facilitate consumer participation and engagement in preventive health at all levels of policy-making.	Build capability and capacity for policy-makers to achieve trusted engagement with consumers and community organisations to better inform policy-making and service design.	Empower and facilitate consumers and community organisations to engage in and co-design preventive health policies and programs.
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Consumer Engagement Fundamentals

Purposeful	Inclusive	Respectful	Transparent	Collaborative
Shared understanding of purpose and outcomes. Objectives agreed and clearly communicated. Consumers engaged from the start and throughout.	Easy and accessible for all consumers to engage. Diversity of voices, perspectives and modes of engagement. Provide cultural, physical, ethical, psychological and emotional safety for all consumers involved.	Valuing lived experience, recognising consumers as equals and experts. Consumers and organisations resourced appropriately. Engagement occurs in a way and at a pace that suits the consumers.	Early framing and communication of expectations and limitations. Two-way feedback loops are available and actively used. Consumers have access to appropriate training and supports.	Commitment to ongoing relationships with consumers and their organisations. Genuine partnerships with trust, collaboration and participatory engagement. Engagement embedded in all policy-making.

Good Practice Guidelines

Build & sustain relational, not transactional, partnerships	Treat people and communities with respect and value their contributions and development. Work with communities even when this does not immediately translate into policy outcomes – actively listen and seek to understand the needs of consumers and communities.
Develop a detailed understanding of the context	Consider the social, demographic, cultural, political, technical, psychological and physical environments influencing the policy context and possible consumer engagement approaches, including any limitations or constraints.
Identify who to engage	Consider who the community and stakeholders are and your purpose for engaging. Identify engagement intermediaries, community leaders and engagement champions.
Seek & support diverse engagement participation	Employ inclusive processes that invite diverse participation and engage differences productively. Aim to include voices normally excluded from decision making either because they are actively disengaged, or because existing barriers prevent participation.
Meet people where they are	Explore where, when and how consumers will be most receptive to engagement approaches; adapt your approach to meet the needs of consumers.
Understand people require different approaches	Utilise multi-modal engagement approaches that are fit for purpose including a range of engagement mechanisms to reach all consumers.
Engage with humility & empathy	Recognise lived experience as valuable subject matter expertise and be open to learning from consumers. Be a facilitator, not a driver of the engagement.
Don't let 'perfect' be the enemy of good	Understand the iterative and adaptive nature of successful consumer engagement, recognising that there is not a 'one size fits all' approach to consumer engagement. If an approach isn't working, try a different approach.
Seek & act on feedback	Provide and sustain two-way feedback loops to provide participants with timely and iterative information and opportunities to inform the process and outcomes and to ensure a transparent and accountable process.
Monitor engagement & evaluate impact	Indicators of effective engagement and evaluation/monitoring processes should be included in all engagement approaches. Consumers should be actively engaged in policy monitoring and evaluation to assess the implementation outcomes of the policy approach.

HELP Toolkit	Engagement approaches	Engagement touchpoints	'How to' factsheets	Other resources
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Consumer engagement approaches

Consumer engagement takes many forms and are all capable of facilitating successful and authentic consumer engagement if undertaken in line with the Consumer Engagement Fundamentals and Good Practice Guidelines. The approaches identified in this Toolkit are designed to provide government and non-government policy-makers with a wider range of effective and innovative engagement options to explore beyond the standard consultation approaches often used in public policy-making.

When developing an engagement process, policy-makers should consider the use of both direct and indirect engagement approaches.

Features of **direct engagement** include:

- Structured and purposeful engagement processes
- Directly seeking input from specific consumers or consumer representatives
- Input required from consumers at specific times
- Often a combination of in-person and digital engagement
- Consumer input is captured directly by policy-makers

Features of **indirect engagement** include:

- Pursuing and facilitating instances of opportunistic engagement
- Widely seeking input from consumers via opportunistic engagement
- More fluid and flexible engagement processes
- Consumers are able to provide input at any time
- Predominantly using online platforms and digital engagement
- Consumer input is often captured through digital analytics

Engagement approaches for health and wellbeing policy-making





Digital engagement

Digital engagement platforms provide a far greater reach than other engagement approaches, enabling participation by a greater number and a more diverse range of consumers.

It can be a means by which those who are not normally heard can find a voice.

Digital engagement can create time and cost efficiencies for both policy-makers and participants.

Social media is any online platform that allows users and audiences – not just site owners or managers – to create content and interact with each other.

Social media can be a good tool to engage consumers who otherwise don't engage by using the power of social media to create communication channels that enable people to communicate directly rather than through someone else or through someone who already has a voice.

Digital engagement hubs are designed to expand consumer participation, and capture local intelligence and insight.

Digital engagement hubs such as **Peoplebank**, **EngagementHQ** and **collective intelligence networks** serve as a central platform for both internal and external stakeholders, producing and supporting a mutual space for exchanging and capturing information, and a unifying communications hub.

Crowdsourcing is a participative online activity performed by a group of individuals in response to an online call by an organisation. It is increasingly common for governments and the public sector to adopt crowdsourcing to perform various activities, including deliberation, regulation, policy-making, public services, and open innovation.



Deliberative engagement

Deliberative engagement brings people together to talk about a problem that is important across a community or population group, exploring options together and weighing the costs and consequences of decisions in the context of the views of others.

It involves everyday people listening to each other, refining options, seeking common ground, making careful considerations to reach consensus or judgment.

A **Citizens' Jury** is an innovative means of involving everyday people in the process of government decision-making. They are an in-person, deliberative process, where everyday people are chosen randomly or by democratic lottery convened to consider a given topic and provide a response or recommendation to the governing body.

Community deliberative forums include and prioritise community voice in policy development, meaning the policy is more likely to reflect community values and priorities.



Experience-based engagement

Every person has a story to tell about their health, and their experience of the healthcare system.

These first-hand experiences can help policy-makers at all levels of government and within consumer, health and other non-government organisations and services to understand what's working and what's not working and to partner with consumers to identify and make the changes that are needed.

Consumer journey mapping and story-telling can create a strong evidence base to shape better decision-making about policies, services and spending - gathering, analysing and using consumer experience to drive better health outcomes.

Story cards and supporting instructive materials are an engaging visual prompt that can be used by policy-makers and consumers, to promote positive conversations about specific health-related topics.

Kitchen table discussions are small, informal meetings that take place in someone's home or a local café and use trusted intermediaries to hear community views on varied subjects. Kitchen table discussions can be used to hear the voice of consumers who do not normally participate in consultation processes, or feel they can't have a say in policy decision-making and design. They have also been enablers to reach diverse groups of people, including hard-to-reach and those who are sometimes disadvantaged.

Community conversations are a reframed kitchen table discussion engagement approach developed by the Consumers Health Forum, in recognition that the language of 'kitchen table discussions' may be limiting consumer participation, particularly given the impact of Covid-19 and social distancing measures; and is not truly reflective of the process, as kitchen table discussions can be held anywhere within a community, including online.



Place-based engagement

Place-based approaches target the specific circumstances of a place and engage local people as active participants in policy development and implementation, requiring government to share decision-making.

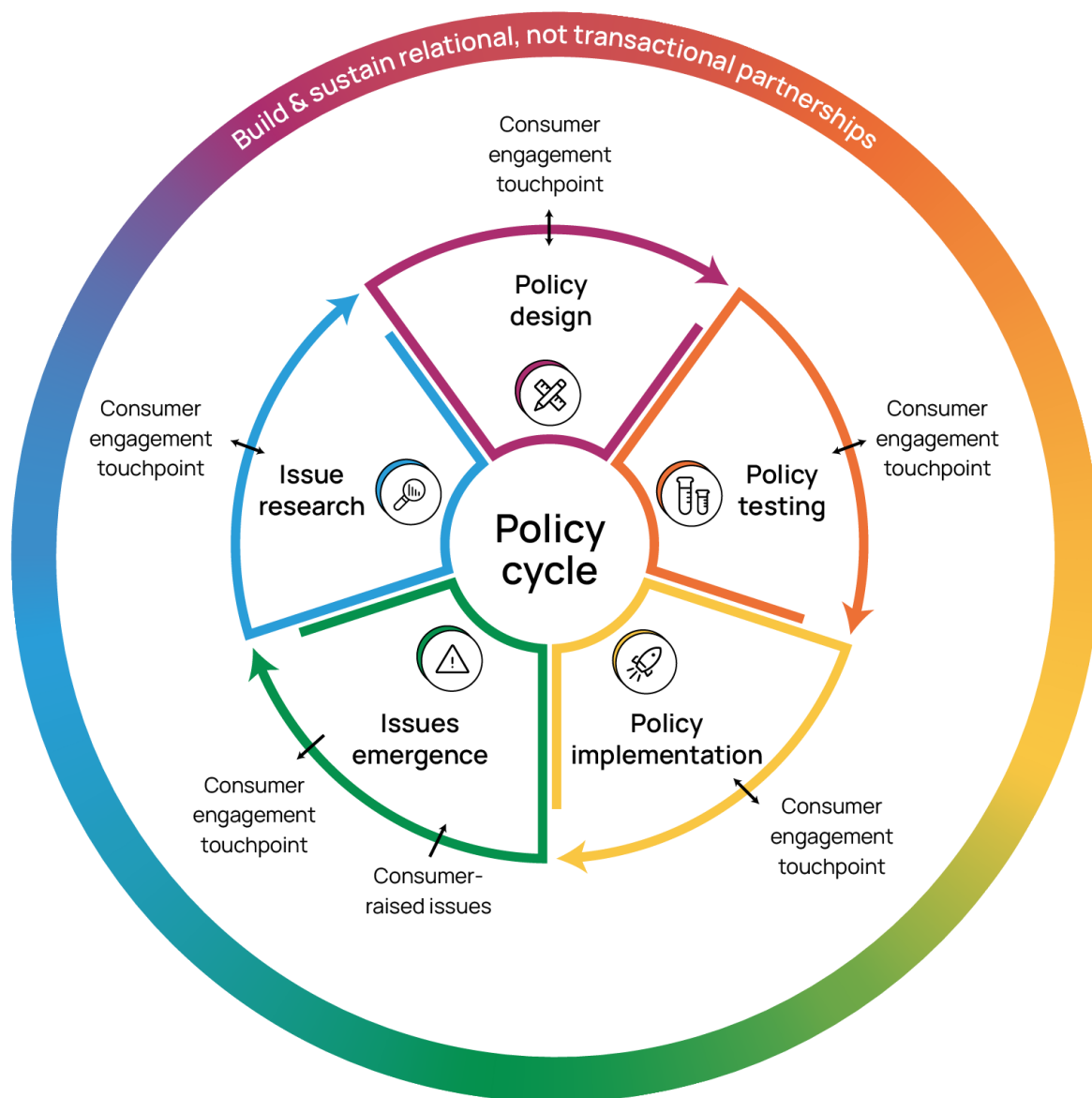
These approaches consider the unique built environments, social networks, economic conditions and people in a community, recognising that the place where someone grows up and lives influences their health and wellbeing, as well as their access to opportunities.

Place-based **collective impact initiatives** are one kind of place-based approaches at the more intensive end of a continuum involving multiple levels of government, business and community sectors.

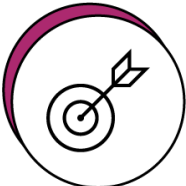


Community circle storyboards can be used to centre community knowledge and values to encourage the group to engage with broader perspectives and evidence. The storyboard provides a mechanism to allow shared stories and identification of community issues they believe governments should prioritise in their community.

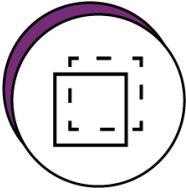

Community touchpoints could be people or places within a community that connect with a range of people from across the community. These could be people such as community leaders, influencers, or unofficial mentors, or places such as health or community hubs, places of worship, or gathering places such as local markets, schools, and parks.

The policy cycle: consumer engagement touchpoints








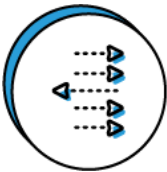




Consumer Engagement Fundamentals

 <p>Purposeful</p>	<p>Ensure there is a clear and shared understanding of the purpose and outcomes of the engagement.</p> <p>Objectives and expectations of the engagement need to be agreed and communicated clearly at the beginning.</p> <p>Consider where and how consumers can be engaged across the whole policy development process to ensure engagement is impactful.</p> <p>Consumers need to be informed about the process and timelines and given the chance to negotiate the process and meeting schedules.</p>
 <p>Inclusive</p>	<p>Ensure the engagement process is easy and accessible for all consumers, especially those harder to engage or reach.</p> <p>Provide cultural, physical, ethical, psychological and emotional safety for all consumers, providing structured platforms for people with varied lived experiences to engage.</p> <p>Recognise the intersectionality and heterogeneity of priority population groups and how this influences consumer engagement processes.</p> <p>Embed processes in policy-making and consumer engagement to ensure a diversity of voices and perspectives are included in all consumer engagement approaches, not just the same individuals or group of individuals who always participate.</p>
 <p>Respectful</p>	<p>Value lived experience, recognising consumers as equals and experts.</p> <p>Appropriately resource engagement approaches, and participation of organisations and consumers in these engagement processes.</p> <p>Authentic engagement needs to occur in a way and at a pace that suits the consumers. Engagement design should be designed <i>with</i> that group not <i>for</i> that group.</p> <p>Connection and trust with communities must be prioritised – prior to engagement activities being designed and implemented.</p>

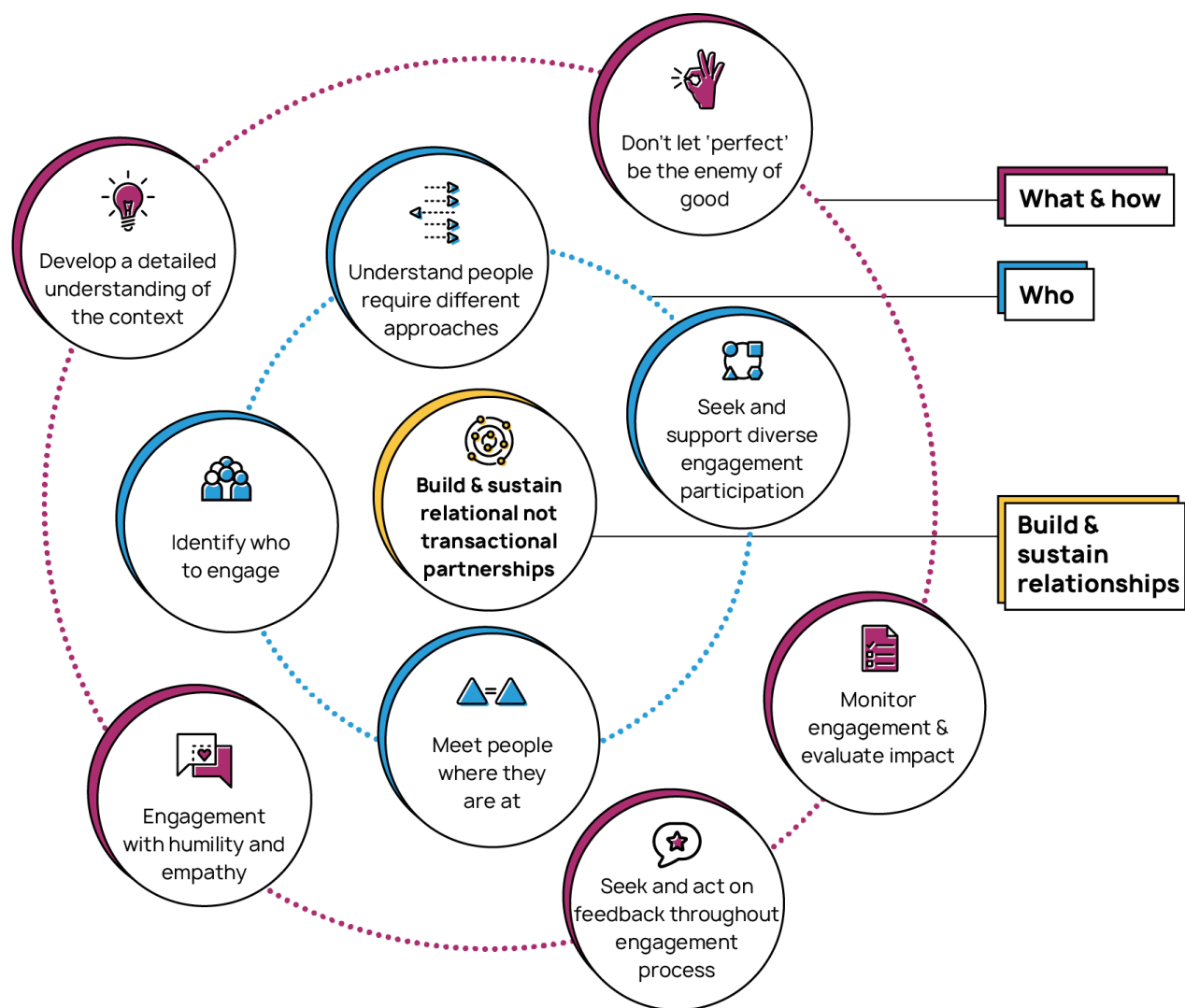
 <p>Transparent</p>	<p>Engagement processes need to be open, transparent and accountable, with early communication of intent, expectations and limitations clearly outlined.</p> <p>Expectations should be communicated clearly regarding the level of influence and ownership consumers will have.</p> <p>Two-way feedback loops provide and enable timely and iterative information to and from participants about the process and outcomes and facilitate confidence in the transparency and accountability of the engagement relationship.</p> <p>Consumers need to have access to appropriate training and supports to develop their skills and resources to engage and participate effectively.</p>
 <p>Collaborative</p>	<p>Establish long-term trust between policy-makers, consumers and communities to facilitate genuine participatory engagement.</p> <p>Local community-controlled organisations and trusted intermediaries, should be part of consumer engagement processes – working in partnership to link lived experience and expertise with government.</p> <p>Organisational culture must support and value consumer engagement through committed leaders who are able to build organisational capacity for sustainable consumer engagement.</p> <p>Consumers and communities should be involved in planning, design, delivery, monitoring and evaluation of policies regarding the health, wellbeing and welfare of consumers and in the governance and provision of health services.</p>

Good Practice Guidelines

	Build & sustain relational, not transactional, partnerships	Build rapport and relationships. Treat people and communities with respect and value their contributions and development. Work with communities even when this does not immediately translate into policy outcomes – actively listen and seek to understand the needs of consumers and communities.
	Develop a detailed understanding of the context	Consider the social, demographic, cultural, political, technical and physical environments influencing the policy context and possible consumer engagement approaches, including any limitations or constraints.
	Identify who to engage	Consider who the community and stakeholders are and your purpose for engaging. Partner with engagement intermediaries, community leaders and engagement champions.
	Seek & support diverse engagement participation	Employ inclusive processes that invite diverse participation and engage differences productively. Aim to include voices normally excluded from decision-making either because they are actively disengaged, or because existing barriers prevent participation.
	Meet people where they are	Explore where, when and how consumers will be most receptive to engagement approaches; adapt your approach to meet the needs of consumers.

	Understand people require different approaches	Utilise multi-modal engagement approaches that are fit for purpose including a range of engagement mechanisms to reach all consumers.
	Engage with humility & empathy	Recognise lived experience as valuable subject matter expertise and be open to learning from consumers. Be a facilitator, not a driver, of the engagement.
	Don't let 'perfect' be the enemy of good	Understand the iterative and adaptive nature of successful consumer engagement, recognising that there is not a 'one size fits all' approach to consumer engagement. If an approach isn't working (e.g. interest and participation is low), try a different approach.
	Seek & act on feedback	<p>Provide and sustain two-way feedback loops to provide participants with timely and iterative information and opportunities to inform the process and outcomes.</p> <p>Dynamic two-way feedback loops contribute to a transparent and accountable engagement process and relationships.</p>
	Monitor engagement & evaluate impact	<p>Indicators of effective engagement and evaluation/monitoring processes should be included in all engagement approaches.</p> <p>Consumers should be actively engaged in policy monitoring and evaluation to assess the implementation outcomes of the policy approach.</p>

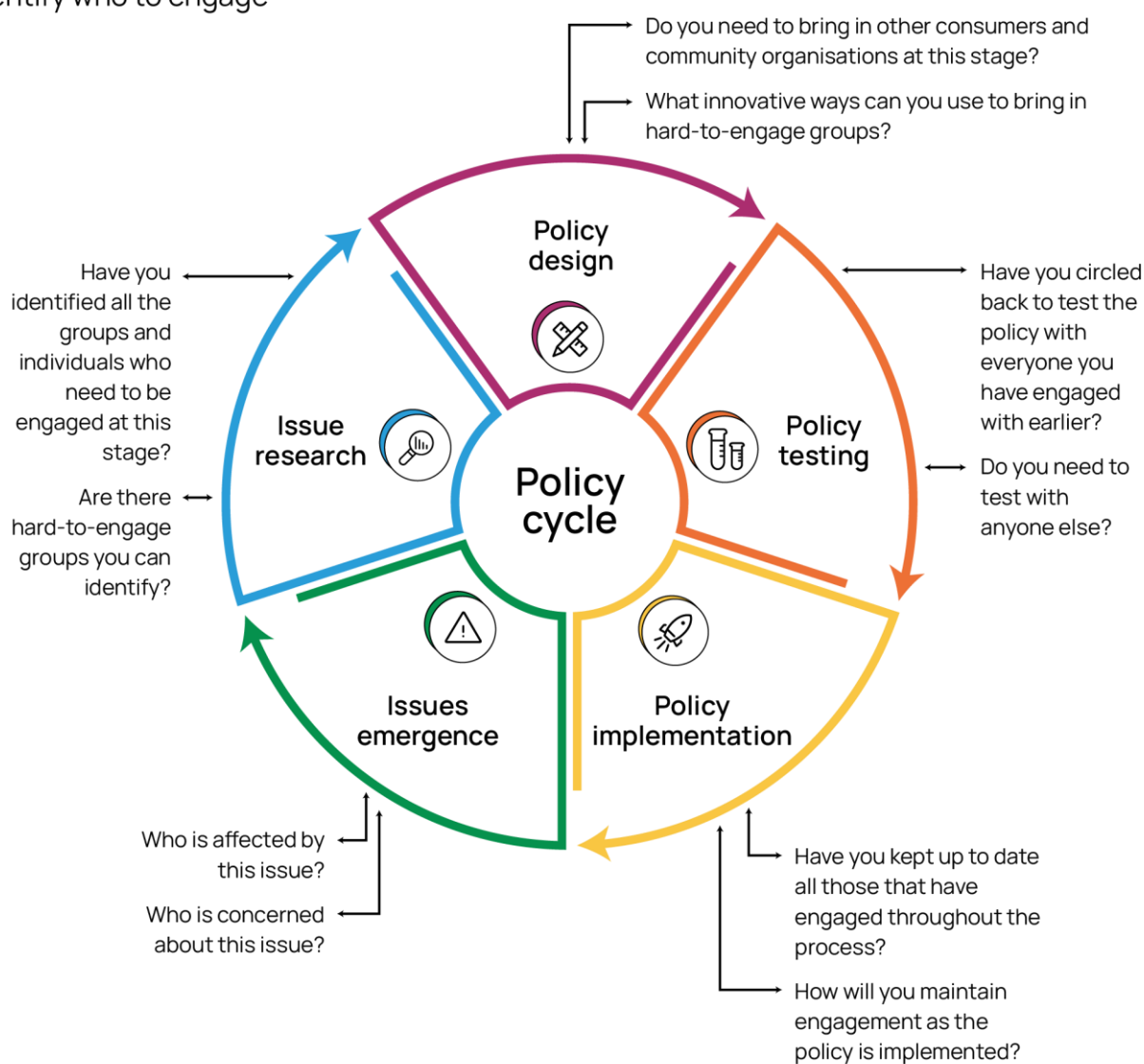
Good Practice Guidelines: who, what and how



Using a Guideline throughout the policy cycle: an illustration

Guideline:

Identify who to engage





Guideline Factsheets





Build & sustain relational, not transactional, partnerships

Your relationship with the community starts well before and outside of any specific policy engagement needs. This is at the core of consumer engagement.



Listen to and learn about the community with respect and openness



Value the contributions of community voices, cultural advisors & consumers with lived experience



Actively listen & seek to understand the needs of consumers and communities



Empower consumers by developing their engagement, advocacy, and leadership skills



Build two-way communication and open engagement pathways



Value the time of consumers and ensure their participation is appropriately resourced and remunerated



Don't 'tokenise' engagement



Consumer partnerships need to be mutually beneficial and reciprocal, with give and take

Tips for success

Build foundations	Genuinely listen	Listen for potential	Valuing participation	Nurture relationships
Build equal and respectful relationships with the community before the need to engage about policy.	Active listening techniques can show that you're listening. Acknowledge and seek to understand the broad range of topics that are important to the community. Ask questions.	Initial engagement might not immediately or obviously link into policy, but listen for emerging ideas and needs, keeping topics and themes on file for future reference and potential policy development.	Allocate budget to an engagement fund so you can offer remuneration when needed and appropriate.	Explore ways to keep continuity of relationships between consumers, organisations and government officials, such as quarterly gatherings and attending community events.



Develop a detailed understanding of the context

Understanding the many aspects of the policy context will help you better establish with whom to engage and how to approach your engagement.

- ① Consider the social, demographic, cultural, political, technical and physical environments influencing the policy context
- ② Think ahead to possible consumer engagement and consultation approaches
- ③ Assess what resources are needed and available
- ④ Consider any limitations or constraints, such as time and resources – from the perspective of the policy-makers, consumers and communities involved
- ⑤ Create a safe and inclusive environment for engagement
- ⑥ Design approaches that take account of the broader context to better identify and understand the barriers consumers may face
- ⑦ Take time to understand the politics and unique structure of a community
- ⑧ A fundamental question needs to be 'What matters to the consumer?'

Tips for success

Be prepared	Avoid cookie cutters	Beware of silos	Be accessible	Plan
Exploring and understanding the context of a policy is the first step in your preparation for consumer engagement.	Every policy issue has unique aspects so ensure you give time to gain understanding a policy's context.	Avoid siloed consumer engagement and over-engagement, where the same consumers or community groups are approached on multiple fronts and sometimes on the same or similar issues.	Ensure each consumer who wishes to be included can participate. Consider having a budget for inclusive requirements, e.g. if a person needs a support worker to participate, or for translation of materials if required.	Use this context understanding stage to consider what matters and prepare appropriate questions community events.



Identify who to engage

Identifying who the consumers and community groups impacted within the policy context is a crucial stage and is time well spent.

- ① Consider who the community and stakeholders are
- ② Be clear on your purpose for engaging – avoid 'tokenistic' engagement
- ③ Identify trusted intermediaries, community leaders and engagement champions that can represent or help you connect with consumers
- ④ Identify where people in hard-to-reach communities place their trust and connect through these networks
- ⑤ Establish formal networks, such as population-based or community-led advisory boards, to support engagement processes
- ⑥ Identify 'engagement allies' or 'critical friends' from consumer peak bodies and other policy partners
- ⑦ Nurture relationships with 'engagement allies' or 'critical friends' who can be directly involved in informing and guiding policy development
- ⑧ Seek advice from community groups, networks, partners and consumers you already have a relationship with on who else should be engaged
- ⑨ Go to peak multicultural organisations that usually have great community communication channels and use non-mainstream social media platforms
- ⑩ Explore existing and active online or in-person support groups (e.g. carer support groups)







Tips for success

Utilise existing networks	Value lived experience	Think outside the box	Be social
Include local community-controlled organisations that have already spent time building trust and relationships.	People are the experts of their own experience and needs so their input is immensely valuable.	Look for who the trusted intermediaries are as they may not be the obvious point of engagement.	Consider that social media influencers who have built trust with their followers might be a trusted intermediary.



Seek & support diverse engagement participation

Consumer engagement needs to reflect the diversity of the community in the resulting policy if it is to be representative and effective.

-  Employ inclusive and culturally appropriate processes that invite diverse participation and engage differences productively
-  Aim to include voices normally excluded from decision-making either because they are actively disengaged or because existing barriers prevent participation
-  Consider using cultural advisers to facilitate engagement participation
-  Build relationships with multiple voices within a community, don't assume that one person can speak for everyone in a cultural group or community
-  Offer flexibility in methods of engagement to enhance accessibility for a diverse range of consumers
-  Invest in your engagement channels and people with relevant training, support, inductions and helpful introductions

Tips for success

Break barriers	Sweat the small stuff	Support participation
Seize opportunities when they arise to ask someone, or a representative, why they don't engage. This can help you find ways to remove barriers to participation.	When engaging with specific groups, the small details can make a big impact, for example type of refreshments, time of day, cultural practices.	Find out what is needed to support people to take part. Work out what you can do to accommodate their needs and, if necessary, secure a budget to do so.



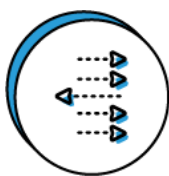
Meet people where they are

Engagement will be most effective if it is pitched at the right level for the people you are engaging with.

-  Adapt your engagement approach to meet the needs of consumers
-  Be aware that some engagement approaches may not fit the needs of consumers and may reduce capacity or willingness to engage effectively or safely
-  Explore where, when and how consumers will be most receptive to engagement approaches
-  Wherever possible, facilitate community-led engagement and adapt your approach to meet people's needs, capacity and expectations
-  Work at the pace of consumers and provide skill development and capacity building where needed
-  Practice good health literacy: lower the health literacy barrier for consumers rather than trying to raise the health literacy of participants
-  Go to where people are: utilise existing settings (social media, community networks, community events), where people feel more comfortable and are more likely to engage
-  Design engagement approaches where consumers can offer their feedback at a time and place that is convenient and relevant for them (e.g. at home or on a mobile device) rather than having to attend a certain venue at a certain time

Tips for success

Manage expectations	Be adaptable	Know your place	Foster a safe environment	Be approachable
Be clear in invitations and session introductions about what will happen and what is being asked.	The policy-making approach is likely to be unfamiliar to consumers, so consider what you need to adapt, such as your language, presumptions of prior understanding, and timing.	Don't expect people to come to you. Whether it's physical or virtual, think about how you can meet people where they are.	Ensure your check-ins are sensitive to avoid feelings of embarrassment or inadequacy. For example, asking an individual privately rather than a question to a group may encourage more input and honesty.	Encourage people to approach you during breaks or after a session to seek clarity or give further input and provide opportunities for people to engage outside of the designated times via phone, email or by other means.



Understand people require different approaches

People have varying capacity, understanding, availability, desire, ability, and access, so each unique combination will connect with varying approaches.

- Consider different engagement approaches with thought to the scale and complexity of the issue, the policy context, the particular cohort and the options available
- Adopt a mixed-methods approach and adapt engagement methods as needed
- Inform your engagement methods by local intelligence and exploring what has worked for the particular cohort previously
- Avoid rigid approaches to engagement and policy and program development more broadly as they can result in the exclusion of certain consumers and population groups
- A good way to start an engagement process is to ask people in the community "what are some of the ways we can talk to you?"
- Be aware that no single platform or approach has all the answers
- Utilise multi-modal engagement approaches that are fit-for-purpose and include a range of engagement mechanisms to reach all consumers
- Allow for adaptation in policy development and project planning
- Ensure that processes are responsive to feedback and are flexible throughout the development cycle
- 'Tailor' engagement processes to the end user and avoid treating them as generic or homogeneous groups

Tips for success

Ask	Be flexible	Check in	Digitise (with caution)
Find out what approaches have worked and not worked for a cohort in the past. Ask cohort members or representatives and other policy-makers to get perspectives from both sides.	Arm yourself with various engagement approaches so you can pivot when needed. If an approach isn't working, try a different one. Flexibility minimises the risk of excluding or losing participants.	Regularly ask the people you are engaging with how they feel about the process. Ask for feedback on what can be improved or tips on what has worked based on their previous experience.	Build digital engagement pathways to facilitate broad and varied engagement but watch for the 'digital divide' ensuring that you don't lose those that don't feel comfortable in a digital space. Offer training, help and alternatives.



Engage with humility & empathy

Humility leads to better listening, increased collaboration, and a more compassionate engagement approach. It creates more authenticity and leads to better engagement outcomes.

- ① Recognise that the lived experiences of all participants are just as important as any other
- ② Respect, value and treat all with understanding
- ③ Be open to learning from the 'constituents'
- ④ Acknowledge the power dynamics between policy-makers and consumers
- ⑤ Take time to actively listen and hold space for conversations to find the real value from consumer & community engagement
- ⑥ Suspend judgement - be open to the 'unlearning' of any pre-conceived notions
- ⑦ Exercise mindfulness and be respectful
- ⑧ Be open to raw, authentic conversations
- ⑨ Simply listen to consumers and communities

Tips for success

Truly collaborate	Let it flow	Engage with sensitivity	Let them 'raw'
Redistribute ownership of the process away from just policy-makers through a commitment to co-design.	Be a facilitator, not a driver of the engagement.	Assuring participants of their anonymity and that comments won't be attributed in summaries can help people feel more comfortable and encourage input and honesty.	Listen to the raw, authentic conversations and don't feel compelled to respond or provide answers. Be aware of the importance of emotional and psychological safety for each and all participants.



Don't let 'perfect' be the enemy of good

Striving for the impossible is destined for failure, so set yourself up for success.



If you're thinking about perfect, you can't really think about authentic consumer engagement



Embrace the chaos and be agile and innovative in your approach to consumer engagement



Be agile to enable the possibility to develop highly practical and responsive policy outcomes



Understand the iterative and adaptive nature of successful consumer engagement and be flexible with your approach



Be open to changing engagement approaches or policy design based on unanticipated engagement outcomes



Innovate



'Take a risk' – governments can't be risk adverse when engaging with community

Tips for success

Be open to potential

Consider that agile engagement for policy-making can lead to unexpected long-term innovation as well as meet immediate needs. Keep an open mind and good notes.

Iterate

Explain the iterative process to participants to encourage broad input and engagement across the process, not just at one point.








Connect the dots

Use a whiteboard or craft paper to create 'mind maps' of ideas to connect them back to the issues and goals.



Seek & act on feedback

Everything about consumer engagement needs to be two way and transparent and requires feedback loops that enable timely and iterative information to and from participants about the process and outcomes.

-  Actively seek and facilitate feedback opportunities throughout the engagement process
-  Complete the feedback loop. If community expectations cannot be fully met, be transparent and accountable – demonstrate to participants their concerns and aspirations have been heard. Ensure participants are fully informed about the outcome/s of the process.
-  Consumers are more likely to continue to engage if they feel they have been listened to and you have acted on what you heard
-  Report back to participants the information collected from community consultation
-  Clearly communicate what you're doing with the data collected
-  Train policy-making teams to receive feedback from consumers as feedback in real time is critical for effectiveness
-  Be flexible with your approach – embed capacity to modify engagement processes in line with consumer feedback

Tips for success

Communicate regularly	Check in	Be approachable
Update participants on the progress of the engagement and policy development through methods like a newsletter, regular email or phone update to a community leader that can be communicated to the wider group.	<p>Regularly ask the people you are engaging with how they feel about the process.</p> <p>Ask for feedback on what can be improved or tips on what they have seen work before.</p>	Encourage people to approach you during breaks or after a session to seek clarity or give further input and provide opportunities for people to engage outside of the designated times via phone, email or by other means.



Monitor engagement & evaluate impact

Transparency is key to engagement, people need to see that consumer perspectives are being heard and acted upon or they don't have confidence that it happens.



Develop agreed indicators of effective engagement and evaluation/monitoring processes in all engagement approaches



Actively engage consumers in policy monitoring and evaluation to assess the implementation outcomes of the policy approach



Build consensus with consumers on what success looks like for both the process of engagement (have you engaged well?) and for the impact of the engagement on the resulting policy



Consumers should be actively engaged in policy monitoring and evaluation to assess the implementation outcomes of the policy approach



Embed multiple feedback opportunities across various feedback mediums throughout the engagement process



Employ the relevant indicators and evaluation measures to assess the engagement processes



Ensure engagement objectives are aligned with any evaluation measures

Tips for success

Work it out together	Write it up	Keep it simple	Assess impact
Take time early in your consultations with people to talk about what success would look like and how to monitor it.	Have the agreed measures of success in a shared record so they can be easily seen as a reminder of the goals and help refocus conversation.	Indicators of engagement can be as simple as how many people turn up to a consultation or how many diverse voices you're hearing from.	You could use surveys or further consultations to find out if consumers feel their input and 'measures of success' are reflected in the resulting policy.



Other resources

- **Public Participation Spectrum**
International Association for Public Participation (IAP2)
<https://iap2.org.au/resources/spectrum/>
- **APS framework for engagement and participation**
Australian Public Service (APS)
<https://www.industry.gov.au/publications/aps-framework-engagement-and-participation>
- **Health Stakeholder Engagement Framework**
Australian Government Department of Health
<https://www.health.gov.au/resources/publications/stakeholder-engagement-framework>
- **Consumer and carer engagement: a practical guide**
National Mental Health Commission
[https://www.mentalhealthcommission.gov.au/lived-experience/consumer-and-carers/consumer-and-carer-engagement-\(1\)](https://www.mentalhealthcommission.gov.au/lived-experience/consumer-and-carers/consumer-and-carer-engagement-(1))
- **Consumer engagement action plan and online toolkit**
Victorian Comprehensive Cancer Care Alliance
<https://vcccalliance.org.au/our-work/consumer-engagement/>
- **Youth Engagement Evaluation Framework**
Victorian Health Promotion Foundation
<https://www.vichealth.vic.gov.au/-/media/PDFs/YEEF/youth-engagement-evaluation-framework-full-report.pdf>

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