

Partnering with consumers framework

2026 - 2030



Table of Contents

Definitions.....	2
Who we are	3
Why partnering with consumers is important.....	3
Benefits to consumers	4
General principles.....	5
Elements of engagement	6
Examples of ways the framework can be implemented	7
Resources.....	8
Related policies.....	8
References.....	9

Definitions

Board directors: Members of the Continence Health Australia Board.

Carers: Individuals providing unpaid support to someone with bladder and/or bowel health needs.

Co-design: Developing or reviewing services and/or activities in partnership with consumers.

Consumers: People who use, or may use, Continence Health Australia's services.

Consumer Advisory Committee: A subcommittee of the Continence Health Australia Board with lived experience of continence health.

Continence Consumer Network: A group of people across Australia with lived experience of continence health.

Contractors: a self-employed person or business who provides services to Continence Health Australia under a contract.

Engagement: The ways consumers and carers interact with Continence Health Australia.

Lived experience: The knowledge and understanding gained through personal experience of health, illness or caring.

Partnering with consumers: Working with consumers to ensure Continence Health Australia's activities reflect their needs.

Participation: Involving consumers in planning, development, implementation and review of policies, services and practices.

Staff: Paid employees of Continence Health Australia.

Trauma informed approach: Ensuring engagements are safe, accessible, and not triggering.

Introduction

This Partnering with Consumer Framework 2026 to 2030, 'the framework', provides guidance for consumers and staff on working together to make sure our services, programs and resources are accessible and appropriate for the community.

The purpose of the framework is to provide a clear and consistent approach to partnering with consumers and carers across all areas of Continence Health Australia's work. It sets out the values, principles and expectations that guide how we engage with people with lived experience, ensuring their insights shape Continence Health Australia's programs, policies, resources, services and advocacy.

The framework is designed for use by all staff, contractors, Board directors and consumer partners, and supports our commitment to person-centred, equitable and transparent practice.

The framework aligns with Continence Health Australia's Strategic plan 2026 to 2030 and relevant Australian Government standards. The Consumer Advisory Committee (CAC) supported a review of the framework and worked with Continence Health Australia to develop a range of recommendations to support consumer engagement and participation.

Who we are

Continence Health Australia (CHA) is the peak body promoting bladder and bowel control health in Australia with a purpose to improve continence health for people of all ages in Australia. We value the important contribution and lived experience of consumers and carers in shaping effective, equitable continence health support. Consumer experience, evidence-based practice and equity underpin our Strategic Plan 2025–2030.

Why partnering with consumers is important

Partnering with consumers is essential to Continence Health Australia's purpose and a key driver of our 2025–2030 Strategic Plan. Involving people with lived experience ensures our work is relevant, practical and aligned with real community needs. Meaningful consumer involvement strengthens all four strategic pillars—Engagement, Education, Policy and Advocacy, and Organisational Vitality—by improving the quality of our programs, enhancing trust and reputation and demonstrating the value of our work to funders and stakeholders. Importantly, working alongside consumers helps us achieve our core outcomes: greater awareness, more open conversations and better continence health for all.

The following Australian Government standards apply to consumer and community partnerships.

- [National Consumer Engagement Strategy for Health and Wellbeing](#) requires consumer and community participation in all aspects of health policymaking and decision-making.

- [Australian Charter of HealthCare Rights](#)
- [National Safety and Quality Primary and Community Healthcare Standards](#) including the [Partnering with Consumers Standard](#)
- Commonwealth Home Support Programme (CHSP) and National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) standards.
- [Draft Statement on Consumer and Community Involvement in Health and Medical Research](#). National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC) and Consumers Health Forum of Australia.
- [Principles for consumer involvement in research funded by the Medical Research Future Fund \(MRFF\)](#).

Benefits to consumers

Partnering with Continence Health Australia strengthens a culture of dignity, connection and shared humanity. It offers consumers a sense of being seen and valued, providing reassurance that their experiences are being heard and that they are not alone. Through shared stories, compassionate engagement and meaningful involvement, people gain confidence, feel empowered to navigate their continence journey, and contribute their lived wisdom to drive positive, lasting change for others.

Being a part of the Consumer Network has enabled me to contribute to improved outcomes for people with continence health issues using my lived experience and professional skills.

CCN member

I am able to share insights into continence challenges, particularly those connected to neurodiversity, and highlight gaps that may not always be considered in mainstream discussions.

CCN member and mother of two autistic children

Joining Continence Health Australia's (CHA's) Consumer Advisory Committee provides a great opportunity for those who have a lived experience of bladder or bowel control issues to have a voice and contribute to what actions and directions CHA might take.

CAC member

General principles

We partner with consumers in ways that are:

- **Transparent** – clear information about purpose, scope and decision-making
- **Inclusive** – accessible processes that enable diverse participation
- **Respectful** – recognising lived experience as expertise
- **Collaborative** – consumers work as partners
- **Accountable** – Continence Health Australia reports on how consumer input informs outcomes

Framework

The International Association of Public Participation (IAP2) Spectrum of Public Participation is an internationally recognised best practice model that clearly defines different levels of public and consumer participation (inform, consult, involve, collaborate, empower). We are committed to partnering with consumers through decision-making processes and collaborative engagements informed by the IAP2 model.

	Inform	Consult	Involve	Collaborate	Empower
Goal	To provide consumers and carers with evidence based, best practice information to assist them in understanding the support, opportunities and solutions available	To obtain consumer and carer feedback and evaluation of services provided	To work directly with consumers and carers throughout the process to ensure that their concerns and aspirations are consistently understood and considered	To partner with consumers and carers in each aspect of the decision-making process including the development of alternatives and the identification of the preferred solution	To place final decision-making in the hands of consumers and carers
Outcome	We will keep you informed	We will keep you informed, listen to and acknowledge concerns and provide feedback on how consumers and carers influenced the decision	We will work with you to ensure that your concerns and aspirations are directly reflected in the alternatives developed and provide feedback on how consumer and carer input influenced the decision	We will look to you for direct advice and innovation in formulating solutions and incorporate your advice and recommendations into the decisions to the maximum extent possible	We will implement your decision

Figure 1: This framework is based on the IAP2 Spectrum of Public Participation.

The level of consumer participation varies depending on the activity, project or body of work. The levels of engagement range from informing activities to more actively engaged co-designed work as part of an empowerment-focused approach.

Elements of engagement

Governance and leadership

- Maintain a Consumer Advisory Committee reporting to the Board
- Ensure that the Continence Health Australia Board and every subcommittee has at least one consumer as a member
- Support the growth of the Continence Consumer Network
- Include consumer representatives in governance for guideline development, service design, research and policy activities
- Seek consumer involvement in CHA research activities
- Incorporate a trauma informed approach.

Culturally responsive and First Nations-led engagement

- Partner with First Nations and multicultural stakeholders.

Integration into program and service delivery

- Co-design new services and significant program changes
- Embed participation in evaluation, ensuring consumers can meaningfully influence outcomes.

Compliance with Federal Government requirements for health funding

- Demonstrate alignment with the relevant Australian government standards for all government-funded work.

Resourcing engagement

- Allocate funding for recognition, accessibility supports and trauma informed culturally responsive engagement practices
- Provide staff training in engagement methods including trauma informed approaches and culturally responsive practices.

Evaluation and reporting

- Key metrics:
 - number and diversity of consumers engaged
 - participation at each level (inform → empower)
 - evidence of changes made based on consumer input
 - inclusion of consumer perspectives in research funding submissions and policy documents
 - engagement outcomes for diverse communities

- Report to Consumer Advisory Committee meetings
- Present consumer engagement findings to the Board via the Consumer Advisory Committee reports and annually
- Include engagement outcomes in program evaluations and grant acquittals.

Board responsibilities

- Approve and champion organisation-wide Partnering with Consumers Framework
- Ensure alignment with Australian Government standards
- Oversee risk, compliance and accountability related to engagement processes
- Ensure adequate resourcing and training for staff and consumer partners.

Examples of ways the framework can be implemented

Engagement

Involve consumers as co-creators and reviewers of digital and printed health information.

Outcome: Health information that is clearer, more relevant and easier for consumers to understand and use.

Partner with consumers to develop and deliver a new national media campaign.

Outcome: A national media campaign with messaging from lived experience and community priorities to strengthen public understanding.

National Continence Health Conference

Co-design the conference program with at least one representative from the Consumer Advisory Committee to help shape themes, priorities and session topics. Ensure consumer relevance is a criterion for selecting abstracts.

Outcome: A program aligned with real-world needs, increasing relevance and translational impact.

Involve consumers as speakers, panellists and co-chairs in the main conference program.

Outcome: Balanced perspectives, richer discussion and greater human context for scientific findings.

Workforce learning and development

Integrate lived experience into online learning courses through case studies or short video stories co-created with consumers.

Outcome: A workforce that delivers more person-centred care, readily identifies and addresses barriers and improves overall consumer experiences and outcomes.

Policy and advocacy

Strengthen policy and advocacy submissions with the inclusion of lived experience examples and case studies to highlight the impact of incontinence.

Outcome: holistic policy and advocacy that is evidence-based and includes the voices of consumers with lived experience.

Organisational vitality

Involve consumers in the evaluation of research grant applications.

Outcome: A research grant scheme shaped by a range of perspectives that delivers relevant and impactful research findings.

Resources

The Partnering with Consumers SharePoint folder has a range of practical resources for Continence Health Australia staff who are working with consumers.

Related policies

GP07 Recognising Consumer Participation policy to be replaced mid May with the Recognising Consumer and Subject Matter Expert Participation policy.

HRP04 Safeguarding children and vulnerable people

CGP09 Privacy Policy

GP019 Consumer engagement policy and procedure

GFR002 **Authorised by: Jim Cooper Position: CEO Date: April 2026 Date of next review: April 2028**

References

Australian Commission on Safety and Quality in Health Care.

Australian Charter of Healthcare Rights. 2nd edition. 2020.

Available at: <https://www.safetyandquality.gov.au/publications-and-resources/resource-library/australian-charter-healthcare-rights-second-edition-a4-accessible>

Australian Commission on Safety and Quality in Health Care.

National Safety and Quality Primary and Community Healthcare Standards. 2021.

Available at: <https://www.safetyandquality.gov.au/standards/primary-and-community-healthcare>

Australian Commission on Safety and Quality in Health Care.

Partnering with Consumers Standard. 2021.

Available at: <https://www.safetyandquality.gov.au/standards/primary-and-community-healthcare/partnering-consumers-standard>

Australian Government Department of Health and Aged Care.

National Consumer Engagement Strategy for Health and Wellbeing 2025.

Available at:

<https://www.health.gov.au/resources/publications/national-consumer-engagement-strategy-for-health-and-wellbeing?language=en>

Australian Government Department of Health and Aged Care.

Principles for Consumer Involvement in Research Funded by the Medical Research Future Fund. 2023.

Available at:

<https://www.health.gov.au/resources/publications/principles-for-consumer-involvement-in-research-funded-by-the-medical-research-future-fund?language=en>

Continence Health Australia.

Strategic Plan 2025–2030.

Available at:

<https://www.continence.org.au/about-us/who-we-are/strategic-plans-2025-to-2030>

National Health and Medical Research Council & Consumers Health Forum of Australia.

Draft Statement on Consumer and Community Involvement in Health and Medical Research. 2025.

Available at:

<https://www.nhmrc.gov.au/about-us/publications/draft-statement-consumer-and-community-involvement-health-and-medical-research>

Continence Health Australia

ABN 84 007 325 313

Suite 1, 407 Canterbury Road, Surrey Hills VIC 3127

P: 03 8692 8400

E: info@continence.org.au

continence.org.au