



Australian Government

Department of Health, Disability and Ageing



Health Engagement Learning Platform: The HELP Toolkit

**A practical resource supporting consumer
engagement in health policy-making**

An implementation resource for the:

**National Consumer Engagement
Strategy for Health and Wellbeing**

Acknowledgements

Many individuals and organisations have given their time and expertise to the development of this National Consumer Engagement Strategy for Health and Wellbeing and HELP Toolkit. This included an extensive program of consultations with key stakeholders and working closely with a broad range of consumers, many representing priority population groups, who provided lived experience expertise and insights that were integral to the development process. It also included numerous consultations with policy-makers from different levels of government, consumer and community organisations, digital health and technology organisations and various other non-government organisations. All contributed their time and expertise generously.

Development of this Toolkit was undertaken by the Mitchell Institute at Victoria University, with support from the Consumers Health Forum of Australia and the consultancy 89 Degrees East. The project team included Professor Rosemary Calder, Mitchell Institute and Ms. Leanne Wells, Consumers Health Forum of Australia, as Project Co-directors; Ms. Erin Bowen, Mitchell Institute, Project Lead; and Professor Mark Morgan, Expert advisor and Professor of General Practice, Bond University. Additional content-specific expert advisors also contributed to and informed the development of this Strategy.

Design work on the Strategy and Toolkit documents was undertaken by 89 Degrees East.

© Commonwealth of Australia as represented by the Department of Health, Disability and Ageing 2025

Title: Health Engagement Learning Platform: The HELP Toolkit

Creative Commons Licence



This publication is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International Public License available from <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/legalcode> ("Licence"). You must read and understand the Licence before using any material from this publication.

Restrictions

The Licence may not give you all the permissions necessary for your intended use. For example, other rights (such as publicity, privacy and moral rights) may limit how you use the material found in this publication.

The Licence does not cover, and there is no permission given for, use of any of the following material found in this publication:

- the Commonwealth Coat of Arms (by way of information, the terms under which the Coat of Arms may be used can be found on the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet website <https://www.pmc.gov.au/government/commonwealth-coat-arms>);
- any logos and trademarks;
- any photographs and images;
- any signatures; and
- any material belonging to third parties.

Attribution

Without limiting your obligations under the Licence, the Department of Health, Disability and Ageing requests that you attribute this publication in your work. Any reasonable form of words may be used provided that you:

- include a reference to this publication and where, practicable, the relevant page numbers;
- make it clear that you have permission to use the material under the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International Public License;
- make it clear whether or not you have changed the material used from this publication;
- include a copyright notice in relation to the material used. In the case of no change to the material, the words "© Commonwealth of Australia (Department of Health, Disability and Ageing) 2025" may be used. In the case where the material has been changed or adapted, the words: "Based on Commonwealth of Australia (Department of Health, Disability and Ageing) material" may be used; and
- do not suggest that the Department of Health, Disability and Ageing endorses you or your use of the material.

Enquiries

Enquiries regarding any other use of this publication should be addressed to the Branch Manager, Communication Branch, Department of Health, Disability and Ageing, GPO Box 9848, Canberra ACT 2601, or via e-mail to copyright@health.gov.au



Table of contents

Glossary	3
HELP: a practical toolkit for consumer engagement	5
The National Consumer Engagement Strategy for Health and Wellbeing.....	6
Strategy overview	7
Developing the HELP Toolkit.....	8
Good practice consumer engagement	9
Building partnerships and policy co-design.....	10
Consumer Engagement Fundamentals.....	11
Good Practice Guidelines	17
Understanding and applying the Guidelines.....	18
Good Practice Guidelines: what, who and how	28
Consumer engagement approaches.....	29
Engagement methods.....	30
The policy cycle: consumer engagement touchpoints	34
Using a Good Practice Guideline throughout the policy cycle.....	35
Guideline implementation checklists	36
Other resources	47
References	51

Table of figures

Figure 1: Good Practice Guidelines – what, who and how.....	28
Figure 2: Engagement touchpoints across the policy cycle	34
Figure 3: Applying a Good Practice Guideline to the policy cycle	35



Glossary

Carer	Carers are people, often family members, who provide informal care, assistance and support with daily living activities to a person living with a disability, chronic health condition, terminal illness or frailty [1].
Co-design	In the context of this Toolkit, co-design refers to an iterative and participatory engagement process in which policy-makers, consumers and other relevant stakeholders work collaboratively to develop and implement health policy solutions. Existing definitions of co-design can vary slightly, however they consistently emphasise a process of active (rather than passive) consumer participation in creating mutually acceptable outcomes [2-4]. Co-design processes aim to build equal and reciprocal relationships between consumers and policy-makers and assist in aligning policy design with community needs [5].
Community	A community can be defined as a group of people sharing something in common. This could include interests, location, culture, language, beliefs, values, traditions, and/or shared experiences, which contribute to an individual's sense of identity and the connections between members of the community [6].
Consumer	Within the health sector, 'consumer' is used to refer to anybody who has lived experience of a health issue [7]. This includes all people who are affected by health policy, use health services or have a health condition, and extends to their families, carers and friends [7, 8]. Consumers can play various roles when participating in engagement activities, including person with lived experience, expert advisor or consumer representative, right through to policy, program or service co-designer [7, 9, 10].
Consumer engagement	Consumer engagement refers to the practice of involving members of the public in developing and implementing the policies that will affect them as health consumers [11]. This includes agenda setting, decision making and other policy development activities undertaken by governments, government agencies and other policy-making organisations [12]. In the context of this Strategy, consumer engagement is used broadly to include various related terms and concepts such as community consultation, public participation and citizen involvement.
Consumer representative	Consumers can participate in engagement activities as individuals, or as consumer representatives who are nominated by, and accountable to, a consumer group or organisation [13]. Consumer representatives often feature in government and non-government led committees, advisory groups and other engagement activities to represent consumer perspectives and ensure they are considered in policy development and decision-making processes [13, 14].



Engagement process	In the context of this Toolkit, 'engagement process' is used to describe the overarching engagement initiative, which can include multiple different engagement approaches and a variety of engagement methods.
Hard-to-engage	In the context of this Toolkit, 'hard-to-engage' describes the population groups or individuals who have been shown in evidence and recent experience to be those that policy-makers are least likely to successfully engage. The responsibility for diverse and representative engagement lies with policy-makers, not communities and individuals. The barriers to engagement exist between policy-makers and those who are hard-to-engage, not within the individuals and communities themselves [15].
Health policy	Health policy refers to the decisions, plans, and actions that are undertaken by governments and other organisations to promote health [16]. Health policy processes involve setting health-related goals, designing systems and programs to meet those goals, implementing these systems and programs, and monitoring their outcomes [14, 16]. Outputs of health policy can include legislation, regulation, standards, practice guidelines or position statements [17].
Policy-makers	In the context of this Toolkit, policy-makers are recognised as those involved in developing and/or influencing policy, in both government and non-government organisations and settings.
Preventive health	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-level policy interventions and individual-based actions which aim to minimise disease burden and associated risk factors. Preventive health is of fundamental importance to overall population health and wellbeing [18].
Priority population groups	<p>There are a range of different population groups within society who experience a disproportionate burden of disease and disparities in health. The National Preventive Health Strategy 2021-2030 identifies these 'priority populations' as including, but not limited to [18]:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people; • culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) populations; • lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex, queer, asexual and/or other sexuality and gender diverse people (LGBTIQ+); • people with mental illness; • people of low socioeconomic status; • people with disability; and • rural, regional and remote populations. <p>In this Toolkit, these groups, and others who may experience health disparities, are referred to collectively as 'priority population groups'.</p>



HELP: a practical toolkit for consumer engagement



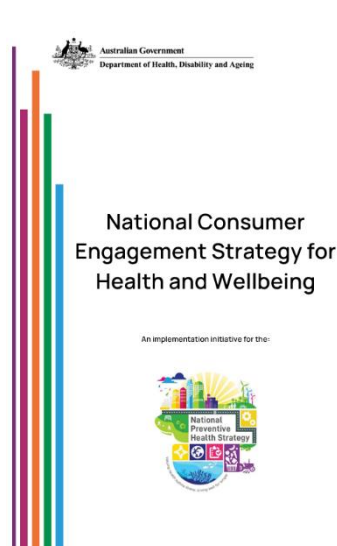
The Health Engagement Learning Platform (HELP) Toolkit is a supplementary resource developed to support the implementation of the National Consumer Engagement Strategy for Health and Wellbeing (the Strategy) and inform consumer engagement activities undertaken by policy-makers across a variety of settings. The primary target audience of this Toolkit is policy-makers, however, it can also be used as a resource by consumers and consumer organisations to help inform their expectations of what good practice engagement should look like.

This Toolkit provides evidence and experience-based, practical guidance to assist with designing, implementing and evaluating consumer engagement activities in health policy development. This includes an overview of common engagement methods relevant to health policy-making, the essential characteristics of effective engagement and detailed checklists to support implementation of the Good Practice Guidelines and engagement Fundamentals identified in this Toolkit and associated Strategy. A range of engagement methods and approaches are described, to allow for consumer engagement processes that can be tailored to the specific circumstances, needs and preferences of different communities and population groups.

The design and content of this Toolkit takes into account, and complements, well recognised public participation frameworks, particularly those of the International Association for Public Participation (IAP2) [19], and resources produced to guide the Australian Public Service (APS) in engagement and place-based approaches [20, 21]. Most importantly, it was informed by 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 [2, 19, 20, 22-24].

The stages of the policy-making cycle are outlined to illustrate the potential consumer engagement touchpoints across the cycle, and to guide engagement activities at each stage – whether in response to an emerging policy issue; in the later stages of policy development and testing; or during policy implementation, monitoring and evaluation.

The National Consumer Engagement Strategy for Health and Wellbeing



Improving population health and wellbeing in Australia is a national policy priority, highlighted in the Australian Government national wellbeing framework – Measuring What Matters, the National Preventive Health Strategy 2021-2030 (NPHS), and further emphasised by the recent Strengthening Medicare reforms [18, 25, 26]. Good health and wellbeing enables Australians to lead fulfilling and productive lives, participate in education and/or employment and contribute positively to their community. The NPHS emphasises that preventive health action, informed and co-designed by consumers, is central to achieving a healthier Australia [18].

The National Consumer Engagement Strategy for Health and Wellbeing (the Strategy) is a priority of the NPHS and has been developed to support and inform consumer engagement in health policy-making and to strengthen partnerships between policy-makers and consumers.

3 primary objectives, 5 Consumer Engagement Fundamentals and 10 Good Practice Guidelines make up the core elements of the Strategy (see Strategy overview on next page for further detail) and form the basis for this Toolkit.

Effective implementation of the Strategy will establish strong consumer engagement in health policy-making that:

- is purposeful, inclusive, respectful, transparent and collaborative;
- facilitates and supports co-design in all engagement initiatives;
- supports ongoing partnerships between policy-makers, consumers and trusted intermediaries;
- enables the participation of priority and hard-to-engage population groups using engagement approaches and methods appropriate to their particular social, economic, and cultural circumstances and needs;
- empowers consumers with varying health literacy levels to participate in engagement activities by providing the necessary resources and health literacy supports; and
- promotes the use of contemporary information, digital technologies, and innovative engagement approaches that are relevant to current and emerging health issues.

Strategy overview

Purpose

To enable and support consumer and community participation in all aspects of health policy-making and decision making, for improved policy and health and wellbeing outcomes.

Objectives

Strengthen partnerships and build trust between consumers and policy-makers to facilitate consumer participation and engagement at all levels of health policy-making.	Build capability of policy-makers to achieve trusted engagement with consumers and communities for better informed health policy-making.	Empower and support consumers and community organisations to engage in and co-design health (including preventive health) policies and programs.
--	--	--

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. Providing 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 and sustain relational 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, 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 trusted intermediaries and other stakeholders with existing community networks and local expertise.
Seek and 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 different 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 and 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 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 and 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 and evaluate engagement and 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 co-designed with consumers and included in all engagement approaches and processes.

HELP Toolkit	Engagement approaches	Engagement touchpoints	'How to' checklists	Other resources
--------------	-----------------------	------------------------	---------------------	-----------------

Developing the HELP Toolkit

Development of this Toolkit involved canvassing and collating the perspectives and engagement experiences of a diverse range of stakeholders, including:

- Policy-makers across all levels of government;
- consumers and consumer representatives, including many from priority population groups;
- health peak bodies;
- communications and engagement experts; and
- community and other non-government organisations.


These were gathered through consultations which aimed to identify what good practice consumer engagement looks like and how best to support it in practice.

Priority population groups were engaged through a range of tailored approaches that were co-designed in collaboration with trusted intermediaries. This included:

- community discussion consultation with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and organisations in far north Queensland, undertaken by a trusted intermediary;
- a large in-person workshop in Western Sydney, facilitated by the local Primary Health Network, which brought together various consumers and organisations from priority population groups within the community; and
- a series of small online workshops facilitated by the Consumers Health Forum of Australia (CHF) with specific priority population groups.

The content of this Toolkit and associated Strategy were further informed by a rapid evidence review on consumer engagement in policy-making. The rapid review examined relevant literature and existing engagement frameworks to establish what effective consumer engagement looks like according to the evidence and underpinned the development of this Toolkit.





Good practice consumer engagement

The strong, consistent advice of all stakeholders who contributed to the development of this Strategy is that trust in the connection and relationships between consumers and policy-makers is essential for effective engagement. This requires sustained effort over and investment in consumer relationships, as trust is not an instantly attainable goal – it is established through ongoing interactions and connection. Sustained and reciprocal partnerships are built over time and are predicated on placing consumers and communities at the heart of policy development and decision making. Strengthening partnerships and building trust requires engagement approaches that are purposeful, inclusive, respectful, transparent and collaborative [11].

For some engagement processes, especially those targeting priority population groups, establishing collaborative partnerships with appropriate intermediaries is essential to achieve trusted engagement and long-term consumer relationships [27].

Good practice consumer engagement does not summon consumers and their representatives, it meets them where they are, geographically, culturally, socially and economically. Outcomes of effective consumer engagement include mutual agreement about and understanding of the engagement purpose and potential; empowerment of consumers to participate in policy co-design activities ; and confidence in the results of the engagement process [28].

Good practice engagement also requires that policy-makers are informed, trained and resourced to:

- understand the characteristics of effective engagement and how to contribute to the development of trust with consumers and communities;
- develop a detailed understanding of the context and consumer and community perspectives related to the policy issue;
- demonstrate humility and empathy throughout the engagement process, recognising lived experience as expertise and acknowledging the policy-maker's role as facilitator, not driver, of the engagement;
- embed opportunities for iterative consumer feedback throughout the engagement process and adapt approaches accordingly; and
- collaboratively evaluate engagement activities and their subsequent impact on policy design and outcomes.



Building partnerships and policy co-design

This Toolkit recognises the demanding operating environment affecting policy-makers and acknowledges the contextual and practical barriers to participation that inhibit the engagement of consumers in health policy-making. Embedding effective co-design practices into policy development processes and building long-term relationships with consumers and communities are essential to addressing these barriers. Trusted partnerships between policy-makers and consumers (and communities more broadly), are also integral to ensure that policy is responsive to the diverse social, economic and cultural needs and circumstances that influence the health and wellbeing across the population.

In the context of this Toolkit, co-design refers to an iterative and participatory engagement process in which policy-makers, consumers and other relevant stakeholders work collaboratively to develop, design or improve policies, programs and services [2-4]. Co-design processes should emphasise active (rather than passive) consumer participation, include opportunities for shared decision-making and aim to build equal and reciprocal relationships between consumers and policy-makers, to achieve mutually acceptable outcomes [2-5]. Best practice co-design represents a shift from engaging consumers after an agenda has already been set, to seeking consumer knowledge and leadership from the outset so that consumers are involved in both describing the problem and designing the solution [2-4].

The active participation of consumers in co-design policy-making processes is associated with increased consumer satisfaction and approval of these processes [29]. While the evidence base for co-designed policies and programs being more effective in achieving positive policy outcomes is limited, evidence and experience demonstrate that the direct involvement of consumers and communities is associated with a range of benefits in policy-making processes [3, 29]. Co-design processes are recognised as a way to generate more innovative ideas, foster cooperation and trust between different stakeholders, meaningfully engage priority population groups and achieve community support for change [3]. Ensuring the active participation of consumers with relevant lived experience in policy-making processes, also makes it more likely that the policy solution will meet their needs [30].

This Toolkit emphasises the importance of strengthening partnerships and building trust between consumers and policymakers to facilitate effective consumer participation approaches in health policy. It is important to consider priority populations and their specific requirements when it comes to consumer engagement.

This Toolkit works in parallel with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Partnership and Engagement Framework (the framework), which focuses on fostering meaningful partnerships and engagement with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities to improve health outcomes.

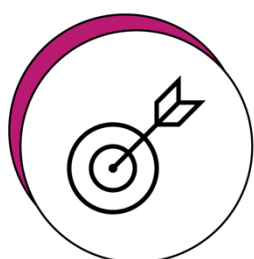
The framework outlines actionable steps that staff can take to effectively plan, engage and partner with stakeholders to achieve genuine partnership, and ensure that programs, policies and services best suit the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

Consumer Engagement Fundamentals

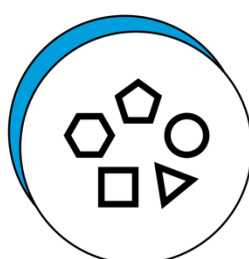
To support effective consumer and community participation in all engagement activities related to health policy-making, 5 elements have been identified as fundamental. The term 'fundamental' has been deliberately chosen as it describes something that affects "the basic nature of other things or are the most important element[s] upon which other things depend" and serve "as the basis of an idea or system" [31].

The Fundamentals are the foundational building blocks for effective consumer engagement approaches. They are essential for engagement activities at any point of the policy-making process and are applicable to engagement with all consumer and population groups. Applying these Fundamentals in all engagement activities relevant to health policy development is essential for building trust and supporting and strengthening equitable partnerships between consumers and policy-makers.

The 5 Fundamentals require consumer engagement in health policy-making to be:



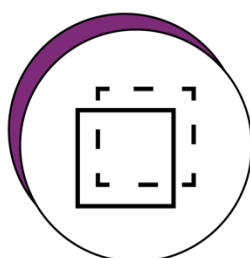
Purposeful



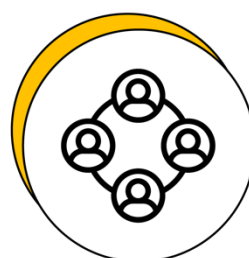
Inclusive



Respectful



Transparent



Collaborative

Purposeful



Ensure there is a clear and shared understanding of the purpose and expectations of the engagement	Be responsible and accountable for securing an unambiguous, shared understanding of the objectives, method/s and level of engagement with participants at the outset of the engagement process.
Engage with consumers and incorporate lived experience from the outset	Consumers should be involved across all stages of the policy-making process. They can help to refine and evolve the policy or program as it develops, as well as shape a fit-for-purpose engagement process 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 methods of engagement and project timelines to manage expectations and optimise participation.</p> <p>Sometimes a more focused period of engagement over a shorter timeframe can be more appropriate, particularly where there is a risk of over-engagement which is often experienced by various priority population groups.</p>
Identify different engagement touchpoints across the policy-making cycle	Carefully consider when and how consumers can be engaged throughout the policy-making process to maximise the value of their contributions. The engagement approaches best suited to the policy design phase may be different to those of most benefit to policy implementation and/or evaluation.

Inclusive



Ensure the engagement process is accessible for all consumers	Create environments and platforms where a diverse range of consumers can equitably participate in safe and appropriate ways. Be empathetic, kind and gracious in your interactions.
Recognise the diverse and varied circumstances and needs of different consumers and priority population groups	The circumstances and experiences of individuals varies greatly, both across and within communities. It is important to recognise this diversity when engaging, and to be mindful of how different consumers and population groups may be affected by the wider determinants of health, including intergenerational trauma, racism, poverty, marginalisation, language barriers, or reduced mobility. All of these factors can influence individual consumer needs and must be considered when planning an engagement process. Consumers may also identify with more than one priority population group and this intersectionality can further amplify health disparities.
Embed, plan and cater for diversity and inclusion	Undertake research to ensure diversity and inclusion are catered for in accordance with established best practice and expert guidance. Prioritise safety, including cultural, physical, psychological and emotional safety for all consumers in any engagement activity. Ensure policy-makers are sufficiently trained in cultural safety, inclusivity and trauma-informed best practice. Avoid the convenience of approaching the same individuals or groups who are always willing to participate.
Use a range of engagement approaches and methods to reach all targeted consumers	Remember that different people engage at different levels and in different ways. Include a variety of engagement approaches and methods in the overarching engagement process to encourage broad and diverse participation. Maintain ongoing monitoring and evaluation throughout the engagement process to assess whether participants are reflective of the full spectrum of consumers being targeted.

Respectful



Value lived experience, recognising consumers as equals and experts	Consumer perspectives can be enormously valuable to ensure the policy or program being developed is robust, appropriately targeted, fit-for-purpose and implemented effectively. Consumers should be recognised as equals, with complementary expertise to policy-makers and other stakeholder groups.
Acknowledge and formally recognise the contributions of consumers	Build into all engagement processes systematic respect for consumer participation through formal means such as remuneration, terms of reference, regular correspondence (including acknowledgements of contributions) and appropriate attribution in publications and other documentation.
Appropriately resource engagement approaches	Provide consumers and communities with access to the resources and engagement supports to participate meaningfully. This could include remuneration, travel reimbursements, access to interpreters, training or inductions and various other supports specific to the group being engaged.
Undertake engagement activities in a way and at a pace that suits consumers	When planning an engagement process, seek input from consumers regarding their needs and preferences, to ensure it is designed with, not for, the group you wish to work with.
Adhere to relevant organisational policies and professional standards	Ensure that engagement processes are undertaken with a high-level of professionalism and diligence. Consider how existing organisational policies and procedures need to be integrated into engagement activities.
Ensure policy outputs are reflective of consumer insights and contributions	Regularly review policy-making and engagement outputs to ensure consumer insights and perspectives are reflected in the policy or program being developed or implemented.

Transparent



Be open, transparent and accountable	<p>Empower consumers to participate in a meaningful and equitable way by ensuring they have all necessary information.</p> <p>Ensure any perceived or actual conflicts of interest are identified, declared and managed throughout the engagement process.</p> <p>Describe what, if any, personal information and/or data will be collected throughout the engagement process and how it will be used. Ensure any personal data is stored and managed appropriately to maintain consumer confidentiality.</p>
Explain the intent, expectations and limitations of engagement	<p>Clearly communicate and ensure that consumers understand the level of participation being proposed in any engagement initiative, how their input will be used and the level of influence they will have in the policy development process.</p>
Facilitate dynamic and comprehensive feedback loops	<p>Prioritise transparency and accountability to build trust in the engagement relationship by providing timely and iterative information to participants and embedding regular opportunities for participant feedback on the engagement process.</p>
Establish relationships with trusted intermediaries	<p>Where appropriate, work through trusted intermediaries, including community leaders, cultural organisations and other NGOs, to establish open communication and engagement with consumers and community groups.</p>
Build consumer confidence in engagement processes	<p>Facilitate continued engagement and ensure consumers can see the purpose and outcomes of an engagement process.</p> <p>Participants need to see their voice in the end-product.</p>

Collaborative



Facilitate genuine participatory engagement where power and knowledge are shared	<p>Establish long-term trust and collaborative practice between policy-makers, consumers and community organisations.</p> <p>Factor into engagement planning and processes the time that it takes to develop trust to foster equal collaboration, consumer empowerment and effective co-design, particularly for hard-to-reach and hard-to engage population groups.</p>
Put local community-controlled organisations and trusted intermediaries at the centre of engagement	<p>Work in partnership with trusted intermediaries, individuals and organisations that have established relationships with specific groups of consumers and communities.</p> <p>Identify trusted intermediaries through community leaders, local service providers, representative peak bodies and local/regional government agencies. Trusted intermediaries spend time building long-term community relationships and can facilitate connections between health consumers and policy-makers undertaking engagement activities.</p>
Build an organisational culture that supports and values consumer engagement and collaborative practice	<p>Establish leadership responsibility for good practice consumer engagement at the most senior level of an organisation.</p> <p>Systematically embed information and guidance on good practice consumer engagement into organisational culture, policies, procedures, systems and training.</p>
Ensure consumer engagement is a core component of all policy-making processes	<p>Embed consumer engagement activities into all stages of the policy-making cycle, including the design, implementation and evaluation of health policies and programs.</p>

Good Practice Guidelines

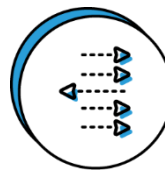
The Good Practice Guidelines (the Guidelines) set out the most important features of effective consumer engagement approaches in health policy development. The Guidelines are underpinned by the 5 Fundamentals and will support policy-makers in achieving meaningful consumer engagement throughout the policy-making process.

The Guidelines were developed through analysis of how consumer engagement for policy-making has been undertaken in practice, across a diverse range of settings, to identify the key characteristics of successful engagement approaches. This was underpinned by the rapid evidence review and consultations, which included targeted workshops with priority population groups to specifically develop and refine the Guidelines.

They are purposefully presented as 'Good Practice Guidelines' because there is no one 'best' way to engage with consumers. The Guidelines provide policy-makers with descriptors and strategies to assist with the development and implementation of engagement approaches likely to be most appropriate for the policy issue and the consumer cohort being engaged.



Build and sustain relational partnerships



Understand different people require different approaches



Develop a detailed understanding of the context



Engage with humility and empathy



Identify who to engage



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



Seek and support diverse engagement participation



Seek and act on feedback




Meet people where they are





Monitor and evaluate engagement and impact

Understanding and applying the Guidelines


Guideline	Description	Strategies
 <p>Build and sustain relational partnerships</p>	<p>Recognise consumers as experts in lived experience and value their contributions as equal collaborators in an engagement process.</p> <p>Establish and nurture ongoing relationships with trusted intermediaries and respect their advice regarding consumer and community engagement activities.</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>Prioritise building rapport in early interactions and show a willingness to 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. • Establish two-way communication channels between policy-makers and consumers. • Do not '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 policy-makers.

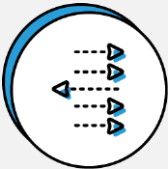
Guideline	Description	Strategies
 <p>Develop a detailed understanding of the context</p>	<p>Consider the social, demographic, economic, cultural, political and physical factors influencing the engagement context and policy environment of the consumer cohort or community being engaged.</p> <p>Develop an understanding of the major contextual issues and barriers to engagement within a specific community.</p> <p>Be aware of siloed consumer engagement and over-engagement (i.e. where the same consumers or community groups are approached to participate in multiple engagement activities on the same or similar issues), as this can result in engagement fatigue and be a barrier to establishing sustained, trusted relationships with consumers and communities.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prior to engagement, take time to understand the politics and unique structure and characteristics of the community being engaged. • 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. • Consider the diverse needs and circumstances specific to the target population group/s and identify any potential limitations or constraints to engagement. Mitigate these by fostering a safe and inclusive environment for all consumers. • Investigate any other engagement activities that are under way or have been undertaken in the community previously to inform engagement planning and avoid over-engagement with certain communities and population groups. • Talk to community leaders, local stakeholders and consumers directly (where appropriate), to canvass their views on the policy issue/s being considered.


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 and utilise trusted intermediaries to assist with connecting to consumers who have lived experience that is most relevant to the engagement topic. Trusted intermediaries can include community and cultural leaders, local community organisations, consumer organisations and other relevant NGOs.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identify where potential engagement participants place their trust and connect through these networks. This could include social media influencers that have built trust with their followers, active online or in-person support groups or multicultural and other community organisations that have their own consumer communication channels or that use locally trusted social media networks to connect with people. Identify 'engagement allies' or 'critical friends' from consumer peak bodies and other community organisations who can be directly involved in informing and guiding engagement approaches. Seek advice from relevant collaborators, organisations and consumers within your existing networks, on which communities or population groups are most affected by the policy issue/s in question.


Guideline	Description	Strategies
 <p>Seek and support diverse engagement participation</p>	<p>Employ inclusive and culturally appropriate processes and language that enable diverse participation and productive engagement with various individuals and population groups.</p> <p>Aim to include voices commonly excluded from decision making either because they are actively disengaged, or because existing barriers prevent participation.</p> <p>Offer flexibility in methods of engagement to enhance accessibility for a diverse range of consumers.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Consider using cultural advisers to facilitate engagement participation. Engage with multiple 'voices', don't assume that one person can speak for a whole community or cultural group. Ensure in-person engagement activities are physically accessible for all and employ the use of accessibility aids where appropriate (e.g. interpreters, assistive technologies). Provide capacity building opportunities within engagement activities, including consumer training, inductions and other support, to encourage and enhance participation – e.g. digital literacy training could be offered to consumers prior to participating in a digital engagement activity.




Guideline	Description	Strategies
 <p>Meet people where they are</p>	<p>Explore where, when and how consumers will be most receptive to engagement approaches.</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 organisations, but not to them.</p> <p>Be aware that some engagement approaches may be less accessible for consumers than others and can reduce the capacity and/or willingness, for consumers to participate effectively or safely.</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. • Identify with consumers how to support their health literacy needs. • Utilise existing settings (social media, community networks, community events), where people feel more comfortable, safe and empowered and are more likely to engage. • Provide flexible participation options so that consumers can contribute at a time and place that is convenient for them (i.e. at their home or on a 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, simple English or non-written communication.

Guideline	Description	Strategies
 <p>Understand different people require different approaches</p>	<p>How you engage with consumers depends on the scale and complexity of the issue, the scope of policy solutions being considered, the group/s of consumers affected by the policy issue and the options available.</p> <p>The design of engagement approaches can be informed by local intelligence and exploring what has worked for a particular community or population group previously.</p> <p>Inflexible approaches to engagement, and policy development more broadly, can result in the exclusion of some 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 method or approach has all the answers – utilise multi-modal engagement approaches that are fit-for-purpose and include a range of engagement methods to maximise participation within the target population group. • 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, natural or accessible way to engage with policy-making. Provide additional familiarisation and training for those less confident with digital engagement methods and platforms. • If an approach is not working, try a different approach – allow for adaptation in engagement processes to ensure they are flexible and responsive to participant feedback. • Avoid generic or one size-fits-all engagement approaches and processes. Approaches should be tailored to the community or priority population group being engaged and be appropriate for all participants in the target group.


Guideline	Description	Strategies
 <p>Engage with humility and empathy</p>	<p>Humility enables better listening, increased collaboration, and a more compassionate engagement process.</p> <p>Trying to properly understand and relate to the circumstances and perspectives of participants is likely to correlate to more authentic engagement and better consumer input.</p> <p>Recognise that the lived experiences and contributions of all participants are valuable and should be respected equally. Be open to learning from consumers.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Acknowledge the power imbalances between consumers and policy-makers, particularly those in government. Redistribute power and foster shared ownership of the process through a commitment to co-design. • Take time to actively listen without feeling compelled to provide answers and enable authentic conversations that allow consumers and communities to be open and frank. • Recognise the inherent imbalances of information and understanding of government priorities between policy-makers and consumers. Work to address these through transparent and open communication regarding the context and purpose of the engagement. • Be a facilitator, not a driver of the engagement. • Suspend judgement and be open to the unlearning of any pre-conceived notions. • Be mindful and respectful of the diverse needs and sensitivities of the group being engaged.

Guideline	Description	Strategies
 <p>Don't let 'perfect' be the enemy of good</p>	<p>Embrace the unpredictable 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 adaptable and willing to change engagement approaches or policy design based on unanticipated engagement outcomes. • Be open to innovative ideas and new ways of engaging. • Avoid being overly risk averse when planning engagement activities and don't be afraid to share significant decision-making responsibilities with consumers.



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.</p> <p>Actively seek and facilitate feedback opportunities throughout the engagement process. Two-way feedback loops enable engagement to be transparent and responsive to consumer and policy-maker needs and issues.</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 and ensure they are fully informed of the engagement outcome/s.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When you collect information or data from community consultation, ensure that it is reported back to participants and clearly communicate what it is being used for. • Be flexible with your approach – embed capacity to modify engagement processes in line with consumer feedback. • Ensure that engagement participants can see that consumer perspectives are being heard and acted on to build trust in the process. • Provide education and training to policy-makers on how to engage in feedback from, to, and with consumers – feedback in real time is critical for transparency and effectiveness.



Guideline	Description	Strategies
 <p>Monitor and evaluate engagement and impact</p>	<p>Indicators of effective engagement and monitoring/evaluation processes should be developed for individual engagement approaches and for the engagement process more broadly.</p> <p>Consumers should be included in evaluation of engagement activities to assess engagement outcomes and the impact on final policy design.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Agree on shared expectations and measures (indicators) early in engagement process, including consumer perspectives on what success would look like. • 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.



Good Practice Guidelines: what, who and how

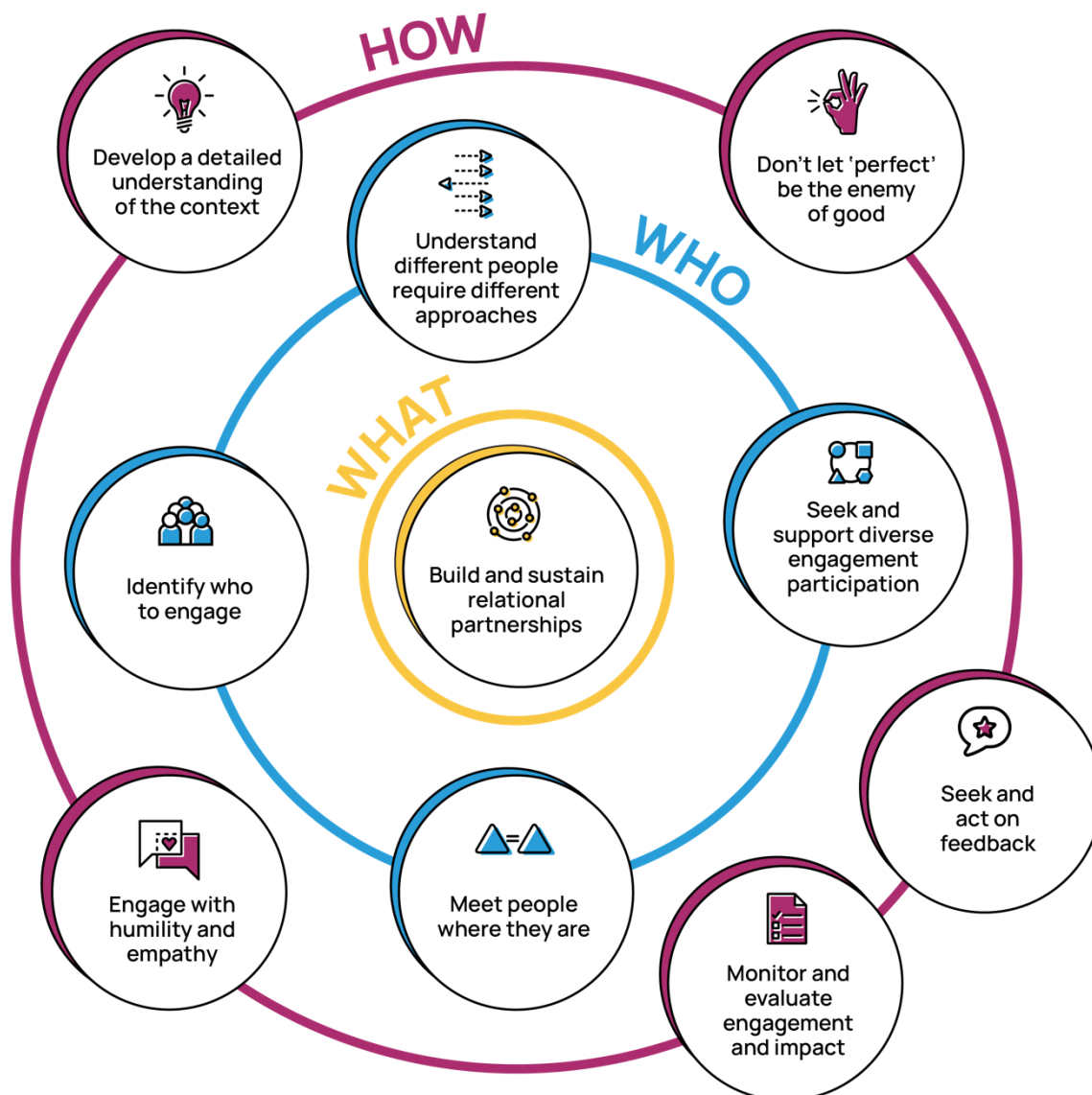


Figure 1: Good Practice Guidelines – what, who and how



Consumer engagement approaches

Consumer engagement approaches can involve varying levels of participation, and it's important to be clear on what level of participation any approach or process is planning to entail. Commonly understood levels of participation are based on the IAP2 Spectrum of Public Participation which identifies the levels as: inform, consult, involve, collaborate and empower [19]. These have been adapted in numerous consumer engagement frameworks in Australia and elsewhere [8, 30, 32].

The effectiveness of any engagement approach is contingent on implementing the Fundamentals and Good Practice Guidelines identified in this Toolkit. The approaches identified in this Toolkit are designed to provide policy-makers with a wider range of effective options beyond the standard consultation approaches that are often used in public policy-making.

Engagement approaches can be direct or indirect.

Features of **direct engagement** include:

- Structured and purposeful activities
- Seeking input from specific consumers or consumer representatives
- Seeking input from consumers at specific times
- Often through a combination of in-person and digital means
- Consumer input captured directly by policy-makers

Features of **indirect engagement** include:

- Widely seeking input from consumers via opportunistic engagement
- Fluid and flexible activities
- Consumers can provide input at any time
- Predominantly through online platforms and digital engagement methods

When developing an engagement process, policy-makers should consider the use of both direct and indirect approaches, to cater for the diverse needs and circumstances of different consumers and provide optimal flexibility for participants. An engagement process can feature multiple direct and indirect approaches, underpinned by variety of engagement methods. This can include digital, place-based, experience-based and deliberative engagement methods. In 2019, the Australian Government Department of Industry, Science and Resources developed the [APS Guide to the right engagement](#) for use by policy-makers in the Australian Public Service (APS), which provides detailed advice to assist with selecting the most appropriate engagement methods and approaches to use in a variety of different circumstances.

Engagement methods

Digital engagement



Description	Examples
<p>Digital engagement methods can provide far greater reach than other types of engagement, enabling participation by a greater number and a more diverse range of consumers [33]. This includes by providing a platform to consumers who may otherwise be hard-to-reach or engage [34].</p> <p>Digital engagement methods are also often associated with improved time and cost efficiencies, for both policy-makers and participants [33].</p> <p>Despite these positive features, it is important to remain mindful of the 'digital divide' and to mitigate engagement barriers related to digital literacy or digital access.</p>	<p>Social media is any online platform that allows users (not just site owners or managers) to create content and interact with each other. Social media can be useful to engage consumers that are unlikely to engage otherwise. Social media platforms and their communication channels allow consumers to engage directly without an intermediary [35].</p> <p>Crowdsourcing is a participative online activity by individuals who respond to an online call by another individual, group, or organisation. It is increasingly common for government organisations to adopt crowdsourcing for activities such as deliberation, policy-making and open innovation [36].</p> <p>Digital engagement hubs are designed to expand consumer participation and capture local intelligence and insight. Digital engagement hubs serve as a central platform for various stakeholder groups on any given issue, providing a mutual space to share ideas and communicate with each other [37].</p> <p>Digital story-telling brings together the use of storytelling as a means to learn about and understand real-life, subjective experiences relevant to policy-making, with multi-media such as videos, graphics, audio and animation to amplify the voices of people who experience marginalisation [38].</p>



Place-based engagement

Description	Examples
<p>Similar to place-based health interventions, place-based engagement activities recognise that the place where someone grows up and/or lives influences their health and wellbeing, as well as their access to opportunities [39]. Place-based engagement can range from small, locally resourced engagement activities, to wide-ranging government-led initiatives that aim to engage with large numbers of consumers and communities on various issues [40].</p> <p>Place-based methods aim to engage local consumers as active participants in policy development and implementation [40] and give particular consideration to the unique built environments, social networks, economic conditions and demographics in a community [41].</p>	<p>Place-based collective impact initiatives are an intensive example of place-based engagement that involves organising a broad system of stakeholders, which can include local community organisations, consumers, governments and industry representatives, to collaborate across sectors to address complex social issues in local communities [42]. Collective impact initiatives establish a common agenda, shared progress and outcome measures, foster mutually reinforcing activities to maximise impact, build trust and strengthen relationships [42].</p> <p>Community touchpoints are points of contact or interaction, with a range of people from across that community. Community touchpoints can be people or places within the community, such as community leaders, influencers and mentors. Places might include health or community hubs, places of worship, or gathering places such as local markets, schools, sporting clubs and parks [43].</p> <p>Social innovation labs for policy design are used to support co-design with specific communities, by catering for diverse cultural sensitivities and local social dynamics and emphasising the role of local communities in the innovation process. They aim to rebalance power between policy-makers and consumers and generally promote community-centred engagement with flexible timelines and approaches that cater to consumer needs and preferences [44, 45].</p>

Experience-based engagement



Description	Examples
<p>Every person has a story to tell about their health and their experiences of health policy and the health system.</p> <p>Lived experience is a principle of co-design. It enables policy-makers to understand what is working for people and what is not. Sharing and listening to these stories provides potential launch pads for policy-makers to partner with consumers to identify and make changes that are sought and accepted [3, 24].</p>	<p>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.</p> <p>Story cards and storyboards are a written or audio-visual summary of relevant experience of a person or group and are used as tools by policy-makers and consumers to promote positive conversations about specific health-related topics [38, 41, 46].</p> <p>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 [47]. They are effective in reaching and engaging diverse groups of people, including consumers from priority population groups and those less likely to participate in more structured, traditional engagement approaches [47].</p>





Deliberative engagement

Description	Examples
<p>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 [48-50].</p> <p>It involves people with an interest or who are affected by a particular issue listening to each other, refining options, seeking common ground, and making careful considerations to reach consensus or judgment [50].</p>	<p>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 community members (citizens) are chosen randomly or by democratic lottery to jointly consider a given topic and provide a collective decision or recommendation on a policy issue [51, 52].</p> <p>Community deliberative forums include and prioritise community voice in policy development, leading to policy that is more likely to reflect community values and priorities [37].</p>



The policy cycle: consumer engagement touchpoints

The policy cycle is a framework developed to articulate and organise the process of public policy-making. While there are multiple iterations of the policy cycle framework that differ slightly, they all share the same primary purpose of illustrating the various stages of the policy-making process. For this Toolkit, we have adapted the policy cycle framework to also include the array of possible engagement touchpoints throughout the cycle (see Figure 2). It is important to note that the stages of the cycle are not necessarily followed sequentially and some may even be skipped or repeated. Identifying emerging issues can include issues raised by participants in formal consumer engagement activities or arise outside of an engagement process through consumer-initiated advocacy.

The policy cycle diagram is a useful tool for planning and structuring policy projects, communicating processes and supporting better understanding of policy-making in the broader population. It also provides a ready aid for embedding consumer engagement activities as part of business-as-usual in health policy-making.

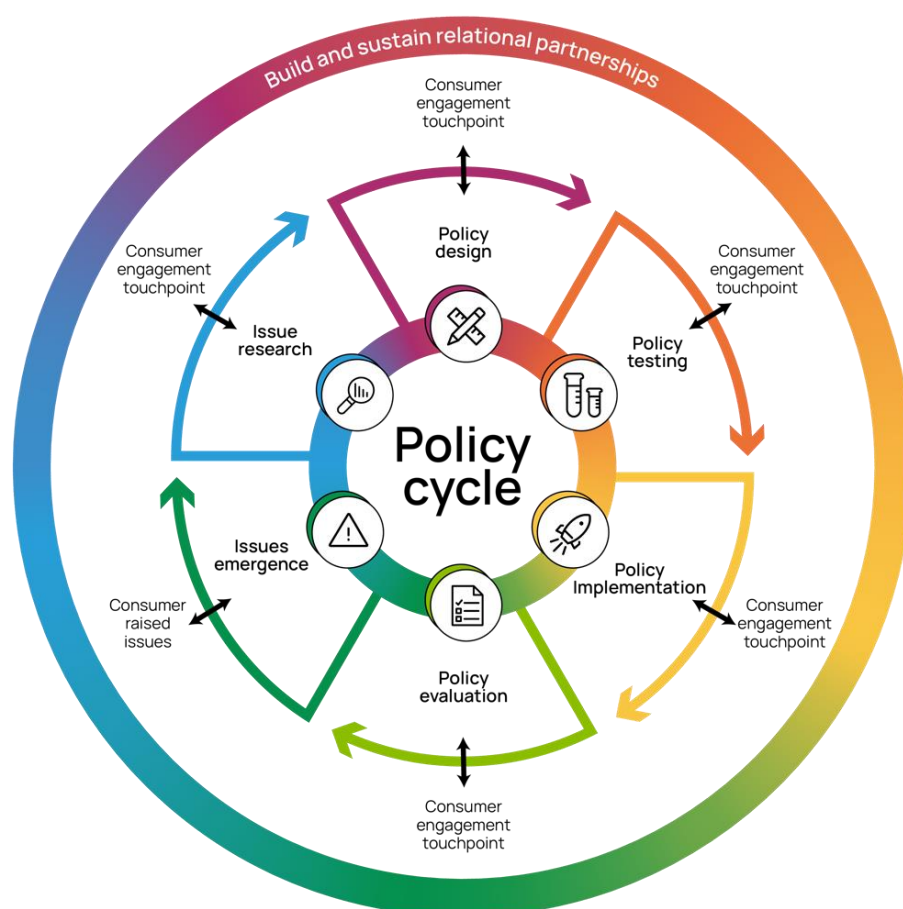


Figure 2: Engagement touchpoints across the policy cycle

Using a Good Practice Guideline throughout the policy cycle: an illustration

Guideline:

Identify who to engage

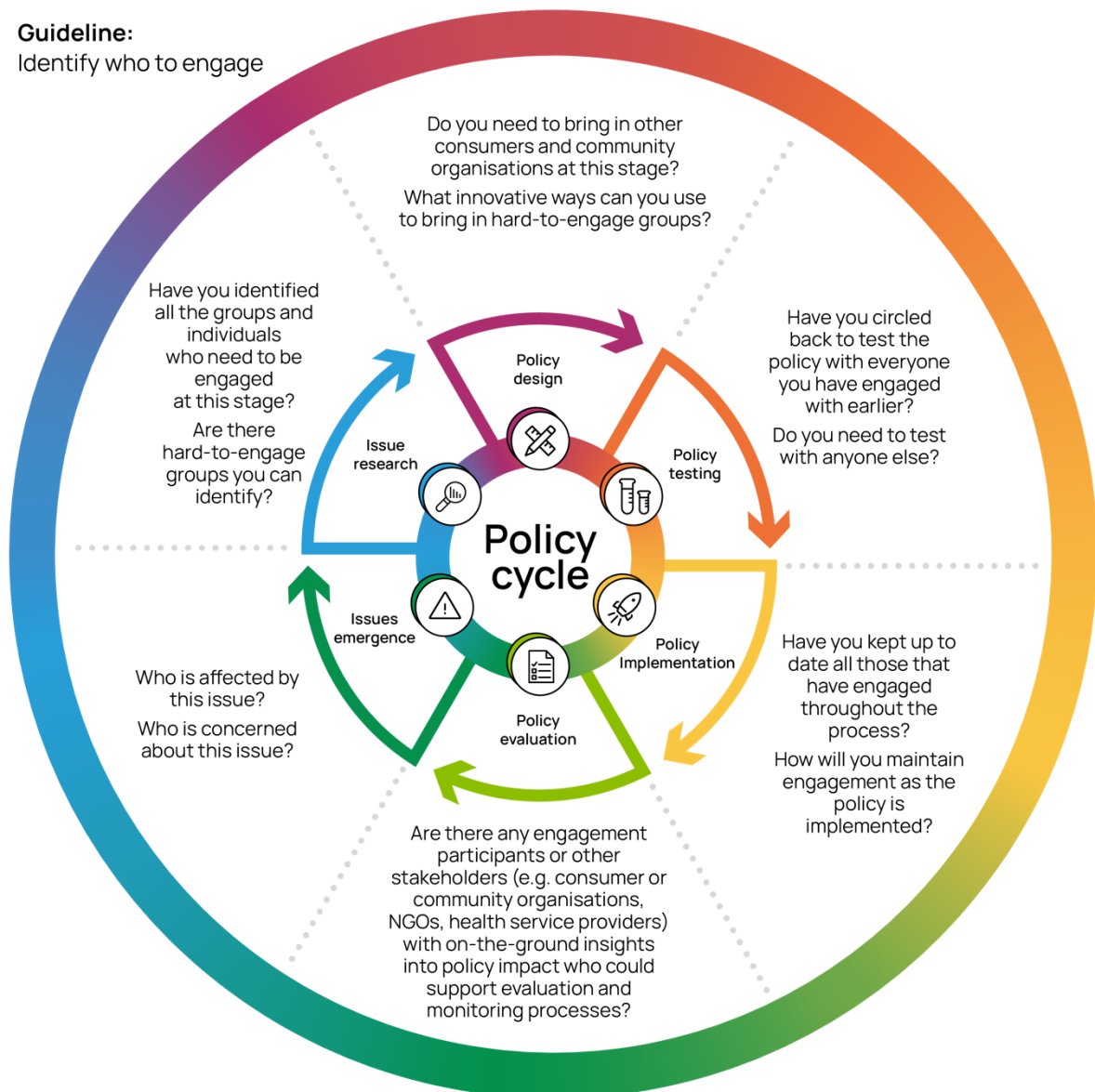



Figure 3: Applying a Good Practice Guideline to the policy cycle



Guideline implementation checklists



Build and sustain relational 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.



Build rapport with consumers and communities and approach interactions with respect and openness.



Recognise consumers as experts in lived experience and value their contributions as equal collaborators in an engagement process.



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



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



Establish two-way communication channels and open feedback loops.



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



Don't 'tokenise' engagement.

Tips for success

Build foundations	Genuinely listen	Look out for potential	Give and take	Nurture relationships
Pre-existing relationships with communities and consumers, which are underpinned by equality and respect, will help facilitate effective engagement when policy-makers do undertake an engagement process.	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.	Partnerships between policy-makers and consumers need to be mutually beneficial and reciprocal.	Continuity of relationships between policy-makers, consumers, and trusted intermediaries should be supported by establishing regular catch ups and/or attending community events.



Develop a detailed understanding of the context

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



Consider the social, demographic, cultural, political and physical environments influencing the engagement context.



Include consumer engagement activities in your planning at the outset of a policy development process.



Assess what resources are needed and available.



Consider any limitations or constraints, such as time and resources – from the perspective of the policy-makers, consumers and communities involved.



Identify issues that are important to creating a safe and inclusive environment for engagement.



Take time to understand the politics and unique structure of a community.



A fundamental question needs to be 'what matters to the consumer?'

Tips for success

Be prepared	Avoid cookie cutters	Beware of silos	Be accessible	Start planning
Exploring and understanding the context of the engagement activity and policy issue more broadly is the first step to prepare for and support good practice consumer engagement.	There are unique aspects of every community and population group, so ensure there is adequate time built into engagement processes to properly understand the community context regarding the policy issue.	Siloed consumer engagement and over-engagement, where the same consumers or community groups are approached to participate in multiple activities on the same or similar issues can cause engagement fatigue and restrict future engagement opportunities.	Including accessibility and inclusivity requirements in the broader project budget is important to make engagement as accessible as possible e.g. to fund support workers or for translation of materials if required.	As you better understand the context, start preparing appropriate engagement questions and prompts that will elicit consumer knowledge and expertise to best inform the engagement objectives.



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.

- Consider who are the consumers and communities that the policy initiative affects.
- Seek advice from community groups, networks, partners and consumers you already have a relationship with on who else should be engaged.
- Identify trusted intermediaries, community leaders and engagement champions that can represent or help you connect with consumers, and particularly for people in hard-to-engage communities.
- Establish and sustain relationships with 'engagement allies' or 'critical friends' who can be directly involved in supporting consumer engagement.
- Connect with peak groups for priority populations and work collaboratively to reach consumers through established community communication channels and non-mainstream social media platforms.
- Explore existing and active online or in-person support groups.

Tips for success

Utilise existing networks	Value lived experience	Think outside the box	Be social
Local community-controlled organisations have already spent time building trust and relationships.	People are the experts of their own experience and needs so their input is immensely valuable.	Trusted intermediaries from various parts of the community, including those with no direct links to the policy issue being engaged on.	Social media influencers who have built trust with consumers and community groups affected by the policy initiative might be an effective trusted intermediary.



Seek and 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.
- Identify and understand the barriers to engagement that consumers may face and work to mitigate these where possible.
- 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
Collecting information from consumers or community groups on why they aren't able to or choose not to participate in engagement activities can assist in removing or mitigating these barriers to participation in the future.	When engaging with specific groups, the small details can make a big impact. For example, the type of refreshments offered, the time and location of the engagement activity and appropriately observing cultural sensitivities can all contribute to participant experience.	Engagement activities should be appropriately resourced to investigate what is needed to support diverse consumer participation and accommodate the varied needs of participants.



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.



Simplify language and avoid unnecessarily technical concepts to reduce health literacy barriers for consumers, rather than trying to raise the health literacy of participants.



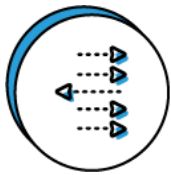
Go to where people are: utilise existing settings (social media, community networks, community events), where people feel more comfortable and are more likely to engage.



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	Don't rush
The purpose, level of participation and focus issues of the engagement, as well as what the engagement can realistically achieve regarding final policy outputs, should be clearly communicated in invitations and during engagement activities.	The policy-making process is likely to be unfamiliar to consumers, so consider what you need to adapt, such as your language, presumptions of prior understanding and time allowed for inductions and introductions.	Don't expect people to come to you. Whether it's physical or virtual, think about how you can meet people where they are.	Work at the pace of consumers and provide skill development and capacity building where needed.



Understand different 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.



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 methods to reach all consumers.



Ensure that engagement activities are adaptable and responsive to feedback throughout the policy development process.



Tailor engagement processes to the end user and avoid treating them as generic or homogeneous groups.

Tips for success

Learn from history	Be flexible	Check in	Digitise (with caution)
Talking to consumers and policy-makers involved in previous engagement activities can assist with understanding what approaches have worked for engaging specific consumer cohorts in the past.	The inclusion of various engagement approaches and methods supports a flexible engagement process that can pivot when needed. Flexibility minimises the risk of excluding or losing participants.	Assessing the suitability of the approaches being used is often best achieved by asking participants how they feel about the process. Feedback on what is working and what can be improved will help inform future engagement initiatives.	Digital engagement methods can facilitate broad and diverse participation. But be aware of the 'digital divide', ensuring that you don't lose those that don't feel comfortable in a digital space.



Engage with humility and empathy

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



Recognise that the lived experiences of all participants are just as important as any other.



Value the contributions and treat all consumers and other stakeholders with respect and understanding.



Be open to learning from the lived experiences of consumers.



Acknowledge the power dynamics between policy-makers and consumers.



Take time to actively listen and hold space for conversations to find the real value from consumer and community engagement.



Suspend judgement – be open to the 'unlearning' of any pre-conceived notions.

Tips for success

Truly collaborate	Let it flow	Engage with sensitivity	Let them 'raw'
Genuine co-design redistributes ownership of the process away from just policy-makers to empower consumers as equal collaborators.	Be a facilitator, not a driver of the engagement.	The cultural, emotional and psychological safety of all participants is of paramount importance, both to avoid any unintended harms and to encourage broad and insightful consumer input.	Listen to the raw, authentic conversations and don't feel compelled to respond or provide answers.



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

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



Set realistic engagement objectives, with input from the consumers and/or communities being engaged.



Embrace the chaos and be agile and innovative when undertaking consumer engagement activities.



Allow for potentially unorthodox or non-traditional policy solutions and ideas – don't go into the engagement process with preconceived expectations regarding the outcomes and outputs.



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



Be open to changing engagement approaches based on unanticipated engagement outcomes.



Don't be afraid to develop and/or implement innovative engagement approaches.



'Take a risk' – policy-makers can't be risk adverse when engaging with community.

Tips for success

Be open to potential

Agile engagement for policy-making can lead to unexpected long-term innovation as well as meet immediate needs. Keep an open mind and document engagement outputs comprehensively.

Authenticity over perfection

Authentic consumer engagement involves realistic goals and prioritising flexible approaches, rather than striving for the perfect engagement process.

Connect the dots

The use of 'mind maps' to brainstorm, present and record ideas can be useful to connect consumers back to the issues under consideration and engagement objectives.



Seek and act on feedback

Good practice consumer engagement requires transparent communication and 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.



If community expectations cannot be fully met, be transparent and accountable – demonstrate to participants their concerns and aspirations have been heard and 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 in the engagement process.



Clearly communicate what you're doing with the data and consumer input that is being collected.



Establish real-time feedback loops for consumers to communicate with policy-makers, to facilitate responsive and continuous improvements throughout the engagement process.



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 regular correspondence via preferred communication methods e.g. email, written letters, phone updates or via trusted intermediaries.	Regularly ask participants how they feel about the engagement process and use this feedback to adapt the approaches being employed and to inform future engagement approaches.	Fostering an approachable environment where participants feel comfortable to seek clarity or provide further input outside of the designated engagement time will enhance the breadth and quantity of consumer contributions.



Monitor and evaluate engagement and impact

Monitoring and evaluation are critical to engagement, providing transparency and understanding of effectiveness and outcomes for all stakeholders.



Develop, with trusted intermediaries and/or consumers, agreed indicators of success in all engagement initiatives.



Actively engage consumers in the implementation and evaluation phases of the policy cycle, to ensure valuable consumer perspectives are incorporated beyond just policy design.



Build consensus with consumers on what success looks like for both the process of engagement and for the impact of the engagement on the resulting policy.



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



Employ the use of relevant indicators and evaluation measures to assess the engagement process.



Ensure engagement objectives are aligned with any evaluation measures.

Tips for success

Work it out together	Write it up	Keep it simple	Assess impact
The perspectives of engagement participants and other stakeholders can assist in shaping what success in the engagement initiative would look like and what indicators would be best to measure it.	Documenting the agreed measures of success in a shared record to refer back throughout the engagement process can be a helpful reminder of what is trying to be achieved 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.	Follow up evaluation activities (e.g. surveys, interviews) with participants can be an effective tool to assess whether they feel their contributions to the engagement process are reflected in the subsequent policy design and implementation.



Other resources¹

- [Partnering with Consumers: A guide for consumers](#). Australian Commission on Safety and Quality in Health Care (ACSQHC). 2023.
- [Public Participation Spectrum](#). International Association for Public Participation (IAP2). 2018.
- [The Australian Public Service Framework for Engagement and Participation](#). Australian Public Service (APS), Australian Government. 2019.
- [A Guide To The Right Engagement](#) (APS). Australian Government, Department of Industry, Science and Resources. 2019.
- [Health Stakeholder Engagement Framework](#). Australian Government, Department of Health. 2017.
- [National Framework for Consumer Involvement in Cancer Control](#). Cancer Australia; Australian Government. 2011.
- [Engaging Canberrans: A guide to community engagement](#). ACT Government. 2011.
- [Community engagement techniques](#). Queensland Government, Department of Health. n.d.
- [Community engagement toolkit for planning](#). Queensland Government, Department of Infrastructure, Local Government and Planning. 2017.
- [Consumer, Carer and Community Engagement Strategic Framework 2021-2025](#). SA Health, South Australian Government. 2020.
- [Consumer engagement action plan and online toolkit](#), Victorian Comprehensive Cancer Care Alliance. n.d.
- [Experience-based co-design: A toolkit for Australia](#). Consumers Health Forum of Australia (CHF); Australian Healthcare and Hospitals Association (AHHA); Dawda P; Knight A. 2017.
- [Consumer engagement resources](#). Health Issues Centre. 2021.
- [Online community engagement guideline](#). Queensland Government, Department of Public Works. 2010.
- [Working with consumers and carers](#). Victorian Government, Department of Health. n.d.



Engaging with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities

- [Aboriginal Cultural Inclusion Framework 2015–2018](#). NSW Family and Community Services. 2014.
- [Aboriginal Health Impact Statement and Declaration for WA Health](#). WA Health. 2014.
- [Aboriginal Services and Practice Framework 2016–2018](#). WA Government, Department of Child Protection and Family Support. 2016.
- [Engaging Queenslanders: Introduction to working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities](#). Queensland Government. 2005.
- [National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Plan 2013–2023](#). Australian Government. 2013.
- [Engaging Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in guideline development](#). National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC). n.d.
- [Working with Aboriginal Peoples and Communities: a practice resource](#). NSW Government, Department of Community Services. 2009.
- [SA Health Guide for Engaging with Aboriginal People](#). SA Health. 2013.
- [Consumer, Carer and Community Engagement Strategic Framework 2021–2025](#). SA Health. 2021.
- [WA Aboriginal Health and Wellbeing Framework 2015–2030](#). WA Health. 2015.

Engaging with CALD communities

- [Involving consumers from culturally and linguistically diverse background](#). Australian Government; Cancer Australia. n.d.
- Chauhan A, Walpole RL, Manias E, et al. [How do health services engage culturally and linguistically diverse consumers? An analysis of consumer engagement frameworks in Australia](#). Health Expect. 2021;24:1747–1762.
- [Consumer participation strategies](#). Centre for Culture, Ethnicity & Health. n.d.
- [Delivering for diversity: Cultural diversity plan 2016–2019](#). Victorian Government. 2016.
- [Engaging Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Communities: A guide for the Western Australian Public Sector](#). WA Government, Department of Local Government and Communities, Office of Multicultural Interests. 2020.
- [Health care providers' guide to engaging multicultural communities and consumers](#). Queensland Government. 2012.
- [Framework for Mental Health in Multicultural Australia: Towards culturally inclusive service delivery](#). Mental Health in Multicultural Australia (MHiMA). 2014.
- [Implementing the Principles of Multiculturalism Locally: A planning guide for Western Australian local governments](#). WA Government, Department of Local Government, Office of Multicultural Interests. 2010.



Engaging with rural, regional and remote communities

- [National Strategic Framework for Rural and Remote Health](#). Australian Health Ministers Advisory Council (AHMAC). 2012.
- [Queensland Health Rural and Remote Health and Wellbeing Strategy 2022 – 2027. Handbook](#). Queensland Government. 2021.
- [WA Country Health Service Consumer and Community Engagement Strategy 2021-26](#). WA Government, WA Country Health Service. 2020.

Engaging with people with disability

- [Disability Gateway. Follow good practice engagement principles](#). Australian Government. n.d
- [Count Me In: A better future for everyone](#). WA Disability Services Commission, 2013.
- [Towards a 10-year ACT Disability Strategy. Listening Report 2022](#). ACT Government. 2022.
- [National Disability Strategy 2010–2020](#). Australian Government. 2011.
- [WA Disability Health Framework 2015-2025: Improving the health care of people with disability](#). 2nd edition Department of Health State of Western Australia 2021.
- [Disability Health Network Commitment to Inclusive Engagement](#). WA Government, Department of Health. 2014

Engaging with people with mental illness

- [Consumer and carer engagement: a practical guide](#). National Mental Health Commission. 2019.
- [Consumer and Carer Engagement and Participation](#). PHN Primary Mental Health Care Flexible Funding Pool Implementation Guidance. Australian Government, Department of Health. n.d.
- [Consumer Participation Framework](#). Neami National. 2014
- Daya, I., Hamilton, B. and Roper, C. (2020), [Authentic engagement: A conceptual model for welcoming diverse and challenging consumer and survivor views in mental health research, policy, and practice](#). Int J Mental Health Nursing, 29: 299-311.
- [Mental health lived experience engagement framework](#). Victorian Government, Department of Health and Human Services. 2019.
- [My Mental Health. The consumer and carer movement](#). Brisbane North PHN. n.d.



Engaging with older people

- [Better Together. A Practical Guide to Effective Engagement with Older People.](#) South Australian Government. 2017.
- [Community of Practice – Engagement with Older Australians.](#) The Energy Charter. 2023
- [Consumer engagement in aged care. Literature review.](#) Aged Care Quality and Safety Commission. 2020.
- [Queensland Stay on Your Feet® Toolkit Phase 2 – Community Engagement](#)

Engaging with children and young people

- [Youth Engagement Evaluation Framework](#), Victorian Health Promotion Foundation. 2022.
- [Citizen Me! Engaging children and young people in your organisation.](#) NSW Commission for Children and Young People. 2012.
- [Involving Children and Young People. Participation Policy.](#) Commissioner for Children and Young People WA. 2020.
- [Understanding and supporting children and young people's participation.](#) NSW Advocate for Children and Young People. 2015.
- [Yerp. Young people making change. A toolkit to support one big idea – that young people have an important role in shaping the present and future of Victoria.](#) Youth Affairs Council Victoria. 2013.


Engaging with LGBTQIA+ people

- [Inclusive communication with LGBTQIA+ clients.](#) Australian Institute of Family Studies. 2022
- [Beyond a rainbow sticker: A report on How² create a gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender and intersex inclusive service, 2012-2013.](#) Gay and Lesbian Health Victoria. 2013.
- [LGBTI Inclusive Practice.](#) Rainbow Tick. n.d.
- [Queensland public sector LGBTQIA+ inclusion strategy 2017-2022.](#) Queensland Government. 2017.
- [Pride in inclusion programs.](#) ACON. n.d.

References

1. Carers Australia, *The economic value of informal care in Australia in 2015*. 2015, Deloitte Access Economics: Canberra, Australia.
2. Agency for Clinical Innovation, *Patient Experience and Consumer Engagement: A Framework for Action - Understand, Act, Empower*. 2015, NSW Government Department of Health,.
3. Blomkamp, E., *The Promise of Co-Design for Public Policy*. Australian Journal of Public Administration, 2018. **77**(4): p. 729-743.
4. SA Health, *SA Health Consumer, Carer and Community Engagement Strategic Framework 2021-2025*. 2021, Government of South Australia,.
5. Agency for Clinical Innovation, *A Guide to Build Co-design Capability: Consumers and staff coming together to improve healthcare*. 2019, NSW Government, : Sydney.
6. Tasmanian Government, *Tasmanian Government Framework for Community Engagement*. 2013.
7. National Health and Medical Research Council, *NHMRC Guidelines for Guidelines Handbook: Consumer involvement*. 2018, NHMRC.
8. Health Consumers Queensland, *Consumer and Community Engagement Framework*. 2017, Health Consumers Queensland: Brisbane, Queensland,.
9. David, O. and R. Adela, *Tasmanian alcohol, tobacco and other drug treatment services: A Guide to Consumer Engagement*. 2011.
10. Health Issues Centre, *Consumer Model – Partnering with healthcare organisations*. 2023.
11. Gregory, J., *Conceptualising consumer engagement: A review of the literature*, in *Melbourne, Australia: Australian Institute of Health Policy Studies*. 2007.
12. Rowe, G. and L.J. Frewer, *Evaluating Public-Participation Exercises: A Research Agenda*. Science, Technology, & Human Values, 2004. **29**(4): p. 512-556.
13. Consumers Health Forum of Australia. *Consumer Representation*. Available from: <https://chf.org.au/representation>.
14. World Health Organization, *WHO Health Systems Strengthening Glossary*. 2011: Geneva.
15. Davies, R.L., et al., *Effective support for those who are "hard to engage": a qualitative user-led study*. Journal of Mental Health, 2014. **23**(2): p. 62-66.
16. Danis, M. and R. Nayak, *Health Policy*, in *Encyclopedia of Global Bioethics*, H. ten Have, Editor. 2016, Springer International Publishing: Cham. p. 1458-1468.
17. Wiles, L.K., et al., *Consumer engagement in health care policy, research and services: A systematic review and meta-analysis of methods and effects*. PLoS ONE, 2022. **17**(1): p. e0261808.
18. Australian Government Department of Health, *National Preventive Health Strategy 2021-2030*. 2021.
19. International Association for Public Participation (IAP2), *IAP2 Public Participation Spectrum*. 2014.
20. Australian Government, *Australian Public Service Engagement Framework for Engagement and Participation*. 2019: Canberra, Australia.
21. Australian Government Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet, *Practice place-based initiatives: a better practice guide*. . 2012: Canberra, Australia,.
22. Aston, R. and J. Tse, *Youth Engagement Evaluation Framework*. 2022, VicHealth.
23. Australian Government Department of Health, *Stakeholder engagement framework*. 2017: Canberra, Australia,.
24. National Mental Health Commission, *Consumer and carer engagement: A practical guide*. 2019, NMHC: Canberra, Australia.

25. Australian Government Department of Treasury, *Measuring What Matters: Australia's First Wellbeing Framework*. 2023, Commonwealth of Australia: Canberra, Australia.
26. Australian Government Department of Health and Aged Care, *National Cabinet Statement on a better future for the federation*. 2023, Commonwealth of Australia, : Canberra, Australia.
27. Maker, Y., N. Hudson, and B. McSherry, *Sensitive and appropriate engagement with consumers experiencing vulnerability: guidance and principles for action*. 2021.
28. DeBortoli, E., et al., *Measurable outcomes of consumer engagement in health research: A scoping review*. *Frontiers in Public Health*, 2022. **10**: p. 994547.
29. Ball, S. and R. Rejón, *Unlocking policy success: is codesign the key to achieving effective policy outcomes?* *Policy Design and Practice*, 2024. **7**(3): p. 251-264.
30. Dawda, P. and A. Knight. *Experience Based Co-design: a toolkit for Australia*. 2017.
31. Collins English Dictionary. 'Fundamental' definition. Available from: [collinsdictionary.com/dictionary/english/fundamental](https://www.collinsdictionary.com/dictionary/english/fundamental)
32. the Co-design Initiative, *Co-design: Shared perspectives on authentic co-design: Putting consumers and carers at the centre of mental health reform*. 2016: Melbourne, Australia.
33. Tacchi, J., *Digital engagement: Voice and participation in development*, in *Digital anthropology*. 2020, Routledge. p. 225-241.
34. Sarrami-Foroushani, P., et al., *Implementing strategies in consumer and community engagement in health care: results of a large-scale, scoping meta-review*. *BMC Health Services Research*, 2014. **14**: p. 402.
35. Rathore, A.K., D. Maurya, and A.K. Srivastava, *Do policymakers use social media for policy design? A Twitter analytics approach*. *Australasian Journal of Information Systems*, 2021. **25**.
36. Liu, H.K., *Crowdsourcing: Citizens as coproducers of public services*. *Policy & Internet*, 2021. **13**(2): p. 315-331.
37. Street, J., et al., *Supporting youth wellbeing with a focus on eating well and being active: views from an Aboriginal community deliberative forum*. *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Public Health*, 2018. **42**(2): p. 127-132.
38. Mourik, R., G. Sonetti, and R. Robison, *The same old story-or not? How storytelling can support inclusive local energy policy*. *Energy Research & Social Science*, 2021. **73**: p. 101940.
39. Murphy, K., *Understanding place-based approaches*, in *QCOSS*.
40. Victorian Government, *A framework for place-based approaches*, Department of Premier and Cabinet, Editor. 2020: Melbourne, Australia.
41. McGowan, V., et al., *Examining the effectiveness of place-based interventions to improve public health and reduce health inequalities: an umbrella review*. *BMC Public Health*, 2021. **21**: p. 1-17.
42. Smart, J., *Collective impact: evidence and implications for practice - Child Family Community Australia Project*. 2017, Australian Institute of Family Studies: Melbourne, Australia.
43. Cavaye, J., *Community capacity building toolkit for rural and regional communities*. 2005.
44. Whicher, A., *Evolution of policy labs and use of design for policy in UK government*. *Policy Design and Practice*, 2021. **4**(2): p. 252-270.
45. Lewis, J.M., *Policy design labs and innovation*, in *Research Handbook of Policy Design*. 2022, Edward Elgar Publishing. p. 372-387.
46. Fadlallah, R., et al., *Using narratives to impact health policy-making: a systematic review*. *Health research policy and systems*, 2019. **17**: p. 1-22.
47. Health Consumers Queensland. *Kitchen Table Discussions* Available from: <https://www.hcq.org.au/kitchentablediscussions/>.
48. Holmes, B., *Citizens' engagement in policymaking and the design of public services*. 2011: Parliamentary Library Canberra.

- 
49. Gregory, J., R. Watson, and J. Hartz-Karp, *Using deliberative techniques to engage the community in policy development*. Australia and New Zealand Health Policy, 2008. **5**(1).
 50. Bone, Z., J. Crockett, and S. Hodge. *Deliberation forums: a pathway for public participation*. in *Australasia Pacific Extension Network (APEN) International Conference*. 2006. The Regional Institute Ltd.
 51. *What is a Citizens' Jury?*, in *newDemocracy Foundation*.
 52. *Citizens' Jury – Participedia*.



Australian Government

Department of Health, Disability and Ageing