

Health Consumers Queensland's COVID-19 response: A snapshot

BACKGROUND

About Health Consumers Queensland:

- Peak organisation representing the interests of health consumers and carers in the state.
- A small (7.2 FTE), not-for-profit organisation and a registered health promotion charity.
- We work with health consumers and health staff to improve health outcomes for people in Queensland.
- Funded by Queensland Health to ensure the Department of Health and the Hospital and Health Services (HHS) involve consumers in planning and policy decisions that are going to impact them.
- We achieve this through our Queensland-wide health consumer network, tailored training and skills development programs, and maximising opportunities for consumer representation at all levels of the health system.

OUR COVID-19 RESPONSE

Health Consumers Queensland responded early to the onset of COVID-19. In early March we pivoted our work to support consumers and the health system to collaborate on solutions to challenges not seen before.

Our early action has played a key role in ensuring a consumer-centred public health system response to COVID-19. Through our work, Queensland Health has been able to hear from hundreds of Queenslanders with significant health needs and use that intelligence to form a more wide-reaching response than otherwise possible.

1. COVID-19 Consumer Community of Interest Group

Creation of a new Community of Interest Group for consumers interested in COVID-19 (132 members, as of 21 June). These consumers are invited to our weekly Community of Interest Consumer Conversations to discuss consumer related issues and concerns about health care and messaging during the pandemic. We have been able to track and instigate change on issues the group has raised. We turn to the Community of Interest Group when we are asked for rapid consumer consultation on behalf of Queensland Health.

2. Consumer Conversations

Health Consumers Queensland has been hosting regular consumer conversations by videoconference several times per week since 25 March. We have held 26 Consumer Conversations with more than 500 consumers.

This provides regular opportunities for consumers to raise concerns, identify gaps they see and work with the health system to strengthen the COVID-19 response. The conversations are held with different cohorts of consumers including:

- COVID-19 Consumer Community of Interest members

- Experienced consumers – including Statewide HHS Consumer Advisory Group leaders, consumer members of the Health Consumers Collaborative of Queensland and HCQ’s own consumer advisory group
- Statewide Clinical Networks consumer representatives
- Queensland’s Primary Health Networks consumer representatives

We have also held a one-off on-line forum for First Nations peoples and those who live in rural and remote communities. We are hopeful we can continue to collaborate with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Division in the Department of Health to continue these conversations regularly.

3. Bespoke consumer consultations

To facilitate consumer involvement in key decision making, Health Consumers Queensland has supported consumers being involved in 20 rapid consultations (involving more than 100 consumers) for Queensland Health projects and initiatives including:

- Funding priorities and models
- Community media/communications campaigns including for culturally and linguistically diverse consumers, Queenslanders generally and around a mental health and wellbeing campaign.
- Reviewing form letters and SMS messages to patients when elective surgery delayed, and then again, when reinstated
- Health and Wellbeing Queensland’s website.

We have also successfully converted the Kitchen Table Discussion methodology to work on-line (rather than face-to-face). Eleven (11) community hosts conducted kitchen table discussions with 69 participants during COVID-19 to hear the voice of the wider community in relation to learning what level of communication they would expect from Queensland Health during the pandemic and what they would expect as patient centred care.

4. COVID-19 Resource Development

- Development of [factsheet for Queensland Health staff](#) on involving consumers in decision-making during a pandemic. This has been adapted by state/territory consumer peaks across the country. Safer Care Victoria have requested to adapt this resource.
- Health Consumers Queensland’s pilot of Project ECHO training was adjusted to be COVID-19 responsive – we were the first in the Asia-Pacific region to deliver this training from homes and the first in the world to use Project ECHO to build skills in consumer engagement.
- Development of a [COVIDSafe tracing app decision guide and FAQs](#). Health Consumers Queensland understands we are the only state/territory consumer peak organisation in Australia to have developed a decision-making guide for consumers.
- Write and distributed [issues papers that summarise key consumer issues](#). These are distributed to the Public Health Response Implementation Advisory Group, to QH leaders and on our website for consumers and staff. Topics have included:
 - QH funding priorities including consumer insights about telehealth and virtual care
 - Rebalancing the health system (in light of some surgeries recommencing)
 - Consumers delaying healthcare (early in the pandemic)
 - Positives and innovations consumers want to keep beyond COVID-19

For a full list of issues and summary of key themes look at our [Issues Papers](#) on our website.

MILESTONES/ACHEIVEMENTS

Health Consumers Queensland has a seat on key QH committees, so are able to speak up on behalf of consumers across Queensland.

HCQ has facilitated and advocated for Queensland Health to involve consumers in their COVID-19 responses. Queensland has done this better than any other jurisdiction in Australia according to an opinion piece in Croakey: <https://croakey.org/governments-urged-to-engage-in-community-consultation-as-part-of-pandemic-response/>

Strategic Communications Branch include consumer insights from health consumers into their work and influencing key messages – including the move away from “social distancing” to “physical distancing”. A small but important change that consumers championed understanding the benefits of social connection more than ever before.

Consumers have valued having their voice heard and see how that shapes the system’s response to COVID19. “Being heard and having our input providing value during CVOID19 has helped the hospitals and health systems understand what the community needed from them.” Another consumer recommended people join the HCQ networks “So we can all be a part of change and make our health system great.”

LOOKING FORWARD

- CEO of health Consumers Queensland is an expert member on the [Reform Planning Group](#)
- Training for health staff and consumers: Health Consumers Queensland has plans to provide training for staff and consumers over the next 12 months that will further embed strong consumer partnerships and system-wide engagement. Lunchtime sessions will be held with QH staff in the Department of Health and across HHSs. Experienced consumers will get the opportunity to take part in our successful Project Echo training sessions that build peer support and mentoring and training all into one.
- Health Consumers Queensland will continue to listen to and amplify the consumer voice and will be looking at ways to better partner with young people.