

The COVID-19 vaccine roll-out in Queensland: Enabling Queensland Health’s communications and engagement to hit the mark

Health Consumers Queensland: online Consumer Conversation

When: Tuesday, 9 February 2021

Who: 30 health consumers from across the State

What: To understand what consumers are looking for from Queensland Health’s engagement and communications to underpin informed decision-making and instil public confidence in the plans to roll out the COVID-19 vaccination.

The conversation followed weeks of intense media coverage and the release of limited information by the Commonwealth and State Governments.

Prior to the event, Dr John Wakefield, Director General, Queensland Health sent us this message: *"Our big challenge now is to build confidence in the vaccination and ensure that its delivery promotes confidence. Clear communication is critical, and we need strong consumer input and engagement to get this right."*

Consumers agreed. Their questions and comments have enabled us to identify the gaps and considerations for Queensland Health and the broader health sector to address, to ensure their engagement and communications hit the mark for the people of this State.

Interestingly, many of the recommendations being made in February 2021 were previously raised at a Consumer Conversation in August 2020 and shared with Queensland Health in this [issues paper](#).

Health Consumers Queensland thanks David Harmer, Senior Director of the Social Policy and Legislation Branch for presenting on Queensland Health’s draft COVID-19 Vaccination Strategy for Queenslanders which also provided a basis for the conversation. Lisa Nissen, Pharmacy Lead for Queensland Health’s COVID Task Force also joined and was able to answer many of the consumers’ questions.

Consumers’ key concerns and Health Consumers Queensland’s recommendations

The over-arching focus for this group of health consumers and consumer NGOs is to be confident that the vaccine is **safe and effective for them** and **that it is equitably rolled out**.

Consumer concerns	Recommendations from consumers and HCQ to health authorities
Which sources of information about the vaccines can we trust?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Support consumers to develop their health literacy skills by providing information and links to enable them to think critically and assess any information they come across about the vaccination and its roll-out. These links should be broader than QH communication channels. HCQ can play a vital role in directing consumers to these sources.

<p>How do I know the vaccine is right for me and my health needs?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • People have different information needs e.g. people with complex health conditions require more nuanced information. • Offer multi-layered communications in terms of detail, nuance and complexity to meet the needs of all your consumers. • People with complex health conditions are some of QH’s key stakeholders and arguably the people most likely to seek out information via QH’s channels. It is important that they find what they are looking for in terms of information. • It is not enough for people with complex needs to be directed to speak to their GP or specialist if they want more detailed information as many GPs and specialists are no more informed than their patients regarding the vaccine and its considerations for them. This advice also assumes that people have a relationship with a health professional they trust and can have this discussion with. • Patients with more complex conditions or needs require a detailed information pathway from QH to build their confidence in the safety of the vaccine for their own individual circumstances.
<p>What are the differences between the vaccines and are both effective? -It was clear that many consumers felt like the Astra-Zeneca vaccine is “second-rate” and “the communication is really poor” from Queensland Health to engage on this issue.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The issue about differences between COVID vaccines requires urgent open and transparent engagement by trusted public health experts across the country and on a state-by-state basis with bi-partisan support. • Our Conversation indicated that there is greater consumer confidence in the Pfizer vaccine than the Astra-Zeneca vaccine. Consumers asked if they could choose the vaccine or choose to wait longer in order to get the Pfizer vaccine. This needs to be addressed by health authorities. The announcement from 16/2/21 that Astra-Zeneca vaccination has now been approved by the TGA, but on a person-by-person basis for those aged 65 and over could also impact consumer confidence further in the Astra-Zeneca vaccine. • Whereas in other parts of the world where people are facing the daily consequences of COVID-19 in the community, there may not be the same urgency to consider and accept the vaccinations being offered. Considering this context for Queensland, it will be important to get the messages right. • Taking the time now to understand any consumer/community hesitancy will help to ensure that consumers have the information they need to make their decision about vaccination. It is also important in this decision-making process that they remain engaged in the conversation about the roll-out of the vaccine. It could help to avoid situations where consumers opt to delay or not to have the vaccine. Concerns from consumers are about safety and effectiveness including queries about the regulatory approval process and ensuring that this has been fully undertaken.
<p>How can we trust the robustness of the TGA’s</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Offer open and transparent information and updates on the regulatory approval process for the COVID vaccines. Include statements of how the process was accelerated.

<p>rapid approvals process?</p>	<p>We understand that no steps were missed in the usual TGA approval processes but were done in parallel and with a concerted focus by many people to do this in a timely way. Additionally, that some administrative processes were made more efficient and this resulted in the time savings rather than technical or regulatory processes being modified or reduced.</p>
<p>How will you be notified about having a vaccine if you are not 'in' the health system?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Offer open and transparent information and updates on the work being carried out by QH to respect privacy, gather people's contact information, advise when they are eligible and how to access
<p>Who is in the Phase 1 roll-out? How are some of those groups of people being defined e.g. person with a disability?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Address equity of timing and access to the vaccine for priority populations with open and transparent updates. • Ensure there is transparent information about how these groups of people have been defined.
<p>"There are still lots of unknowns" e.g. faith-based considerations, risks for pregnancy, overlap with the flu vaccine</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide "live" updates on the communities' key concerns on the vaccines to support public understanding and address issues local and global as they emerge. • Consumers are accepting of uncertainty when what is known can be honestly and openly communicated – without delay or hesitation. • The number of fundamental questions from consumers indicates that an open communication approach is more effective to ensure that consumers are hearing from QH to help inform their decisions and understanding about the latest information regarding the vaccines, the rollout and their effectiveness. • It is difficult for QH to deliver absolute certainty or have all the answers given the constantly shifting situation. This is understood by consumers given the current situation. • Withholding information until there is complete certainty creates a number of issues of consumers seeking other sources of information, not having information for our local context and reducing their engagement with QH as a timely source of information.

For more information on the questions asked by health consumers during the Conversation and the level of detail they are requiring in the response please click here to download [the de-identified chat](#) from the session.