



Consumers Health  
Forum OF Australia

REVIEW OF THE CONSUMER  
REPRESENTATIVE PROGRAM,  
CONSUMERS HEALTH FORUM OF  
AUSTRALIA

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY AND  
RECOMMENDATIONS

MAY 2017

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

---

The Consumer Representative Program of the Consumers Health Forum of Australia (CHF) has been in place for many years. It has been the subject of several internal and external reviews and more recently, the Program has been reoriented to be more strategic and focused. At the same time, there has been significant reform in the health system which has implications for the role and voice of consumers. The emergence of consumer-centred care, place-based health and improved technology or ehealth services creates a new role for consumers as partners in health care planning, delivery and evaluation. Therefore, it is timely for CHF, the peak health consumer body in Australia, to review its Consumer Representative Program in the light of this emerging and changing health system and role of consumers and make decisions about the role and function of this Program going forward.

There have been several reviews since 2010 that have focused on the Consumer Representative Program and consumer participation, more broadly. However, due to changes in personnel and resource allocation, the main recommendation adopted from these reviews has been to reorient the Program to be more strategic and focused on nominating consumers to committees aligned with the core business of CHF. Therefore, the aims of this Review are threefold:

- To review the Consumer Representative Program in terms of its strengths, weaknesses and areas for improvement from a representation perspective
- To review consumer representation in the context of a broader, contemporary approach to consumer engagement reflective of changes in the health system
- To determine the responsibility of CHF as the peak health consumer body to develop and maintain a Consumer Representative Program as aligned to the CHF Strategic Plan, and its funding arrangements with the Australian Government – Department of Health.

The methodology designed for this Review was a combination of desktop analysis, quantitative and qualitative methods. It included an audit of the current Program, four high level key informant interviews, five consumer representative interviews, six stakeholder interviews and a survey to all the current consumer representatives of CHF. Three other models were identified and explored that administer a program similar to CHF's for comparison. CHF currently services over 100 committees and has 67 consumer representatives currently on the register. High users of the Program include the Australian Government - Department of Health, industry, professional, research and accreditation organisations.

The results of the survey and key informant interviews indicated that both consumers and stakeholders are unanimous in their support for the Program and would like to see it continue. However, they would also like to see some significant improvements which would enhance the Program and make it more effective.

The most valuable component of the Program for consumers is the opportunity it provides them at the national level to influence the way health services are developed and delivered. For stakeholders, the most valuable component of the Program is the impact that an effective consumer perspective has on the decisions a committee makes. The Program doesn't need a major overhaul but It does need refreshing and integrating into a broader consumer engagement strategy within CHF.

Eight recommendations have been made regarding the outcomes of this Review and future directions. The first five recommendations take into consideration emerging good practice principles in relation to administering an effective consumer representative program. These include:

- Appropriate resourcing
- Well documented policy and procedures
- Up to date databases
- Fair and democratic selection processes
- Clear and transparent decision-making
- Reporting and accountability
- Networking and support
- Learning and development

Recommendations 6, 7 and 8 are aspirational with the intent of providing future directions for CHF in transforming the Program into a multidimensional platform for promoting the consumer voice. There is universal support for maintaining the Program. However, relying on consumer representation on committees as the main method for consumer participation not only has limited effectiveness, it does not fully utilise the available talent for a range of other ways of promoting the consumer voice. The final recommendation provides a transparent mechanism for guiding priority setting and co-designing an action plan for implementing the recommendations of this Review.

# RECOMMENDATIONS

---

RECOMMENDATION 1: Further develop and document a policy and procedures manual for the Consumer Representative Program and keep the databases up to date

RECOMMENDATION 2: More systematic approach to the administration of the Program

RECOMMENDATION 3: Developing and implementing a range of strategies to build the capacity of consumer representatives to be effective in their role

RECOMMENDATION 4: Development of some mechanisms for review and monitoring

RECOMMENDATION 5: Increased funding from the Department of Health to ensure adequate resources to administer the Program

RECOMMENDATION 6: Reconceptualising the Value Proposition

RECOMMENDATION 7: Expanding and diversifying the pool of consumer representatives

RECOMMENDATION 8: Partnering with stakeholders to facilitate networking, policy and leadership development

RECOMMENDATION 9: Establishing a Consumer Advisory Group to advise on priorities for implementation