



# Consumer feedback toolkit: Introduction and background



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Supporting Proactive and Informed Change  
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This resource was developed on behalf of the Eastern Sector Development Team (ESDT), as part of the ESDT Consumer Feedback Project. The revised edition was supported by the Australian Government Department of Health and Aged Care <https://www.health.gov.au/>



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If you wish to cite this document, please use the following notation:

ESDT (2024) *Consumer feedback toolkit: Introduction and background. Version 2*. Developed by Kate Pascale and Associates Pty. Ltd. on behalf of the Eastern Sector Development Team (ESDT), EACH, Melbourne, Vic.

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The *ESDT Consumer Feedback Toolkit* is also available electronically. Microsoft word versions of some tools have also been created so they can be used electronically.

<https://www.esdt.com.au/>

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## The value of consumer feedback

**Understanding the way that consumers experience healthcare is vital to our ability to deliver quality services that are appropriate, effective and tailored to the needs of the local community.**

People's experience of seeking, accessing and using health services has a significant impact on the outcomes they achieve. There is a strong body of evidence that links consumer experience of healthcare to the physical, mental and emotional health outcomes, satisfaction, service engagement, quality of life and wellbeing outcomes for clients and carers.

Consumers have a unique perspective and provide valuable insights into the strengths and weaknesses of the programs and services we deliver and the broader healthcare system. At an individual level, listening to consumers allows us to understand what is most important, what they want to achieve and how we can work together to support them achieve their goals. Engaging clients and carers in making decisions about their healthcare is therefore an essential part of a person centred approach to service delivery.

**Providing feedback is only one of many ways that consumers can participate in the ongoing improvement of health and community services.**

While collecting and using consumer feedback is important, it is only one element of consumer engagement. Organisations need to think more broadly, and consider a range of ways to engage consumers and develop effective consumer engagement strategies.

Please refer to *An introduction to Consumer engagement strategies* for further information about how to embed effective consumer engagement strategies.





## Our responsibility to collect and use consumer feedback

In recent years, there has been growing impetus for consumers, staff, service providers, funding bodies and Governments to work together to develop the systems, culture and processes that can empower consumers to:

- Understand their health and the options available to manage their health.
- Make informed choices and decisions about their health and their healthcare.
- Be actively involved in the design, evaluation and planning of health and community services and the systems in place to support quality service delivery.

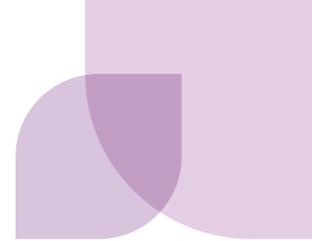
**Consumer feedback can be used to inform the way we work with individuals and the way we design, deliver and evaluate our services more broadly.**

These expectations are embedded in the legislation, charters, policy and quality standards that guide health, aged care, disability and community services<sup>1-9</sup>. The Royal Commission into Aged Care Quality and Safety further highlighted the need for service providers to focus on working collaboratively with consumers to transform the way care is delivered<sup>10</sup>. Ensuring that consumers have a voice has also been a key focus of sector reforms across the industry. The message is clear that consumer's must be empowered to provide feedback in meaningful ways and services must be set up to listen and act.

Agencies are required to maintain systems and processes that enable consumers to provide feedback about their experience of services and opportunities for improvement. This can be achieved in a range of ways, including:

- Surveys and interviews.
- Focus groups and discussion groups.
- Program and project evaluations.
- Informal / incidental client and carer feedback.
- Compliment and complaint systems.
- Individual care plan reviews.
- Patient or client advocates.
- Online forums and discussion boards.
- Community forums and workshops.
- Community polls.

**Consumer feedback is only valuable, when it is used to inform ongoing planning and quality improvement activities.** This may include revising the way an individual's care is delivered, tailoring the way a program is promoted, delivered and evaluated or creating new services that respond to consumers' needs.



## What's happening now?

While the benefits of consumer feedback are well known, designing and implementing effective consumer feedback systems can be challenging.

Common challenges for staff include:

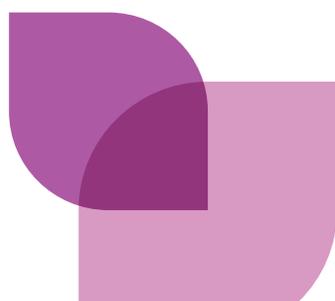
- Many agencies relying heavily on written surveys which often garner poor response rates and exclude a number of consumers (e.g. people with limited English literacy).
- Existing systems not providing the feedback required to drive service improvements (e.g. many consumers only provide positive feedback, vague responses, or feedback about issues that are beyond the staff member's control).
- A lack of confidence about how to collect feedback in ways other than surveys (e.g. their ability to facilitate focus groups or conduct interviews).
- Concern about the amount of time required to collect and collate consumer feedback (and the subsequent impact on client care).

Many consumers also experience barriers that make it difficult for them to provide feedback. Some people are reluctant to provide feedback, others are fatigued by the number of requests to provide feedback or disillusioned when previous feedback hasn't been acted upon.

Consumers, staff and service providers have a number of things in common:

- **They're all busy.** Time is precious and they need to be sure that the time and effort that is spent providing or collecting consumer feedback is valued and makes a difference. Systems need to be streamlined, efficient and integrated.
- **They're all different.** There is no one size fits all approach that will work for consumers or staff.
- **They're all committed to getting the best possible outcomes.**

This *Consumer feedback toolkit* has been designed to address these challenges. It focusses on practical, achievable ways that service providers can integrate meaningful consumer feedback systems into their work. We hope it will be a valuable tool to build staff skill and confidence about how to collect the feedback they need to continue to improve services.



# The ESDT Consumer feedback toolkit

This *Consumer feedback toolkit* has been designed to help service providers develop and implement effective and efficient consumer feedback systems. It contains practical advice, tools and strategies to assist staff to design, plan and deliver consumer feedback strategies that are:

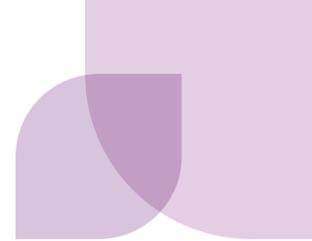
- 'Fit for purpose'
- Appropriate and meaningful for consumers (acknowledging the diversity of consumers).
- Efficient and appropriate for staff to apply without advanced evaluation skills or experience.

It has been developed by Kate Pascale and Associates Pty. Ltd. in partnership with the Eastern Sector Development Team (ESDT).<sup>11</sup> The first iteration of the toolkit was developed in 2015. Many staff generously shared their experience and ideas to help shape the toolkit. Since then, we've received lots of great feedback about how staff have used the toolkit to re-think their consumer feedback strategies. Staff have shared a range of ways they've have used the toolkit to review and update their existing tools. Others have used the toolkit to create new opportunities to learn from their consumers. We've used that feedback to review the toolkit and update it to ensure its currency and relevance to the changing sector.

We hope the tools and strategies in this toolkit will assist you to generate meaningful evidence about the value of your work and provide you with new ideas about how to continue learning from, and with your consumers.



<sup>11</sup> The Eastern Sector Development Team (ESDT) is funded to support Commonwealth Home Support Programme (CHSP) services in the eastern metropolitan region of Melbourne. The ESDT support the implementation of inclusive aged care services, built on the principles of equity and person centred care. For further information, please refer to <https://www.esdt.com.au/>



## How to use the toolkit

The toolkit is set up to guide you through each step of the process. It has been designed as a set of discrete resources so you can ‘dip in’ and use different sections that are relevant to you. It is not designed to be read cover to cover.

While the information is tried, tested and supported by evidence, the toolkit focuses on practical aspects of collecting and using consumer feedback. Links to relevant resources are included within each section though, so you can access more comprehensive information as you need to.

### Consumer feedback toolkit: Introduction and background

Sets the scene, providing an overview of the toolkit and how to use it.

#### Step 1

Identify the best way to collect feedback from your consumers and plan your approach.

#### Step 2

Set yourself up to collect the feedback you need in a way that is meaningful and appropriate for your consumers.

#### Step 3

Access practical tools and templates to plan, implement and evaluate your consumer feedback strategy.

#### Collecting and using consumer feedback effectively: Designing your approach

Planning is the key to success!

Outlines the key steps to designing a consumer feedback strategy that is tailored to your needs, appropriate for your consumers and feasible within the time and resources available.

#### Developing consumer surveys

Provides guidelines about how to plan and develop effective consumer surveys using a range of approaches.

#### Consumer survey tools and templates

Includes the *Survey design guide* and a *Survey checklist* to design and evaluate consumer surveys.

#### Conducting in-depth interviews with consumers

Outlines strategies to set up and deliver successful face to face or phone based interviews.

#### Consumer focus group tools and templates

Includes a set of templates that can be used to create a *Facilitator's guide* to plan and deliver focus groups effectively.

#### Conducting focus groups with consumers

Contains practical advice about when focus groups are most effective and strategies to plan, set up and conduct focus groups with consumers.

#### Consumer interview tools and templates

Includes a set of *Interview protocol templates* that can be used to plan and deliver in-depth interviews with consumers.



Health and Community service staff are already experts at engaging with consumers. They observe, listen and learn from clients and carers constantly and adapt their practice to meet each person's needs. These skills are the foundation of effective consumer feedback systems. We hope that this toolkit will provide staff with new ideas about how to apply those skills to collecting and using feedback from consumers.

**We encourage you to think about ways to capture feedback opportunistically and where relevant, integrate feedback mechanisms into other activities to save time and reduce the burden on consumers and staff.**

## Limitations of the toolkit

There is no 'one size fits all' approach when it comes to collecting consumer feedback. Consumer feedback systems are most effective when a range of strategies are in place and consumers have the opportunity to provide feedback in a way that's appropriate for them.

Not every tool or approach included in this toolkit will be relevant for every consumer. You need to use your professional judgement to determine what is appropriate for your consumers.

This toolkit focuses exclusively on collecting and using feedback from consumers to improve the quality of service delivered. Broader program evaluation and consumer engagement models are therefore not included in this toolkit.

Please refer to *An introduction to Consumer engagement strategies* for further information about how to embed effective consumer engagement strategies

These resources do not negate the need for training. To support good practice, we recommend that the tools included in this toolkit are used in conjunction with practical, skills based training. Organisations should also consider reviewing relevant policies, procedures and systems to ensure that strategies are in place to maximise the value, efficiency and effectiveness of their consumer feedback systems.

**The ESDT Consumer Feedback Toolkit is also available electronically. Microsoft word versions of some tools have also been created so they can be used electronically.**

*<https://www.esdt.com.au/> or <http://kpassoc.com.au/>*

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