Northern Health

Consumer Engagement Plan

2025-29

Partnering for Better Care

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Northern Health acknowledges the rich Aboriginal heritage of this country and acknowledges the Traditional Custodians of the lands on which our health services are built, the Wurundjeri Willum Clan and Taungurung People.

We acknowledge the waterways, the land, the sky and all who inhabit this place we call – Country.

We pay respect and acknowledge their ancestors and Elders, past, present and future, we recognise those who continue to protect and promote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures.

Mandy Nicholson | Traditional Owner of the Wurundjeri, Dja Dja Wurrung and Ngurai Illam Wurrung, performed the smoking ceremony at the opening of the new Inpatient Psychiatric Unit at Northern Hospital.

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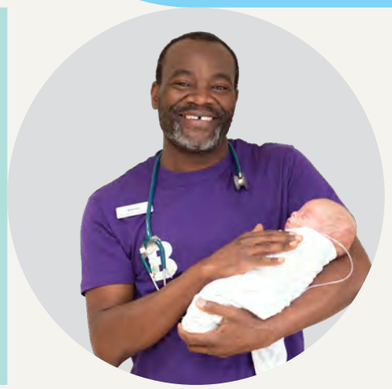

Message from Northern Health Chief Executive

We are proud to introduce the Northern Health Consumer Engagement Plan 2025–29. This plan reflects the progress we have made in strengthening consumer participation across our health service and sets out our vision to embed true partnership in every aspect of care.

Northern Health wants to partner with consumers, not only in decisions about their own health and health care, but also in shaping these services.

When people are empowered with the right tools and opportunities to participate, they make more informed choices and help drive positive change across the health system. In today's connected world, consumer voices are a powerful force for better healthcare.

We continue to build strong collaborations with leading academic and industry partners to explore innovative technologies that improve the patient journey through co-design with consumers.

Looking ahead, and in alignment with our Strategic Plan 2025–29, we are placing even greater focus on partnering to keep people well and deliver the best possible care locally. We will strive to find new and meaningful ways to engage, to listen, and to work together to achieve the best possible health outcomes.

Debra Bourne
Chief Executive,
Northern Health

Introduction

The Consumer Engagement Plan 2025–29 celebrates the progress we have made in partnering with consumers, carers, families, and our community, while setting out our vision for the future. It showcases the achievements we are proud of and provides a clear roadmap for how we will deepen and expand consumer participation across all areas of care.

At its heart, this plan is about working **together**. For consumers, together means being involved, connected, equal, and recognised as true partners - in their own care, in the design of our services, and in the broader journey of shaping health for our community. Their voices and lived experiences are not only valued, but essential to ensuring care that is safe, kind, effective, and person-centred.

This document is intended to be a living plan that will continue to grow and evolve alongside our Strategic Plan 2025–29 and other key commitments, including our Reconciliation Action Plan and Cultural Responsiveness Plan. By embedding consumer partnership at every level, from individual care to service design and system leadership, we will continue to build a health service where progress is celebrated, voices are amplified, and better outcomes are achieved, together.

About Us

Our Vision

Creating a healthier future by working together, innovating and delivering great care.

Our vision conveys our aspiration to lead health care and innovation for our community, drawing on the commitment and contributions of all our staff.

Our Values

Our values are integral to the culture of care, team work and collaboration at Northern Health.

In this Strategic Plan, Northern Health re-commits to the values of **Safe**, **Kind** and **Together** in our approach to patient care, and to each other.

Safe

We provide safe, trusted care for our patients. We are inclusive and culturally safe, celebrating the diversity of our staff and community.

Kind

We treat everyone with kindness, respect and empathy. We provide patient-centred and compassionate care.

Together

We work together with our staff, patients, consumers and health system partners.

Our Strategic Directions

These six directions have been developed in response to strategic issues identified in consultations with key stakeholders.

The directions are focused on addressing priorities for safety, sustainability, growth and innovation. They reflect our best assessment of opportunities and challenges in our current and future environment.

These directions will guide Executive and Board decisions and priorities over coming years, provide clarity of purpose for teams across Northern Health and enable progress to be measured and assessed.

1. **Collaborate to deliver safe, efficient, effective and sustainable care in all our services**
2. **Demonstrate our commitment to the wellbeing of our valued workforce**
3. **Renew and strengthen our infrastructure, systems, tools and processes for financial sustainability and growth**
4. **Innovate to shape the future of health care in Victoria**
5. **Partner to keep people well and deliver the best possible care locally**
6. **Drive research and education to deliver excellent care and develop the next generation of clinicians and health care leaders**

Our Community

Northern Health serves one of the most diverse and rapidly growing populations in Australia. Residents in our catchment come from more than 185 countries, speak over 100 languages, and follow over 90 different faiths and beliefs.

This cultural richness is a defining feature of our community and shapes the way we deliver healthcare.

We recognise the knowledge, strengths and lived experiences that people bring from their diverse backgrounds, and we are committed to creating a safe, inclusive and responsive environment for everyone — patients, carers, staff, volunteers, contractors and visitors alike.

Northern Health is a major employer, many of our staff live in communities we serve.

More than
9,000
staff

Over
170
volunteers

Northern Health strives to provide equity of access and culturally responsive care and has established governance structures and strategies that aim to strengthen our capacity to meet the needs of priority communities.

Northern Health serves one of the most diverse communities in Australia, and we are proud to reflect that diversity in how we plan, deliver and improve care. We work in close partnership with the Aboriginal community through the Northern Health Aboriginal Advisory Committee, and our Reconciliation Action Plan guides our efforts to improve health outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

We are equally committed to supporting culturally and linguistically diverse communities, including refugees and asylum seekers, through dedicated services and tailored supports. Our Cultural Responsiveness Plan 2025–29 sets out a whole-of-organisation approach to cultural diversity, aligning with the National Safety and Quality Health Service (NSQHS) Standards, the Safer Care Victoria Partnering in Healthcare Framework, and our Equity, Diversity & Inclusion Plan.

Our Equity, Diversity & Inclusion Committee brings this work to life through focused subcommittees on Aboriginal health, cultural responsiveness, disability, LGBTIQ+ inclusion, and refugee and asylum seeker health. These groups support Northern Health to better understand community needs and to reflect them in service planning, staff education, and improvement initiatives.

As one of the fastest-growing regions in Australia, the north faces a future of increasing demand for healthcare. This growth presents both challenges and opportunities. It compels us to rethink how services are delivered, and it guides our Consumer Engagement Plan to ensure that the voices of our diverse community are central to shaping safe, kind, effective and future-focused care.

Our Network of Health Services

Northern Health is the major provider of public health care in Melbourne's northern region.

The Northern Health catchment includes three of the state's six growth areas: Hume, Whittlesea and Mitchell. The swift development of new suburbs in the outer north will see our population grow by an Annual Growth Rate (AGR)1 of 3% (more than 282,000 people) between 2021 and 2036.

With revenue of over $1 billion annually, Northern Health provides a comprehensive range of services for our community, spanning emergency and urgent care, intensive care, acute medical, surgical and maternity services, sub-acute, palliative care and aged care, specialist clinics, mental health services and community-based services.

Our campuses include Broadmeadows Hospital, Bundoora Centre, Craigieburn Community Hospital, Northern Hospital Epping, Kilmore District Hospital and 7 mental health services in the community. A new Community Hospital has recently been developed in the City of Whittlesea (Mernda).

LEGEND

- Hospital
- Mental health services (hospital)
- Mental health services (community)

Our National and State Context

The Northern Health Clinical Governance Framework is based on the Victorian Clinical Governance Framework (2024)[i], the Victorian Safety Culture Guide (2025)[ii] , the Australian Commission on Safety and Quality in Health Care (ACSQHC), the Foundations of High-Quality Care (July 2025)[iii] and the New Aged Care Quality Standards[iv].

Together, these provide a common clinical governance language across Victoria and Australia.

The NH Clinical Governance Framework has been developed to accommodate the needs and culture of Northern Health.

Safe and high quality health care for Australia

Australian Safety and Quality Framework for Health Care

Partnering in healthcare

A framework for better care and outcomes

SCV Safer Care Victoria

[i] https://www.safercare.vic.gov.au/best-practice-improvement/clinical-governance/framework
[ii] https://www.safercare.vic.gov.au/publications/victorian-safety-culture-guide
[iii] https://cdn-au.mailsnd.com/29474/C--mqK2zPE_-WKS8rxk0uVvOKmlzaCpohNyrWmeMq0Q/1754958536/4038289.pdf
[iv] https://www.agedcarequality.gov.au/providers/quality-standards

Consumer Engagement at Northern Health

There are many ways that we partner with consumers across all the services and functions of Northern Health. Together, we have made significant inroads into helping improve the experience of our patients when they visit any of our Northern Health services.

The following sections detail Northern Health'sapproach to compliance with the requirements set out in NSQHS Standard 2.

1 Clinical governance and quality improvement systems to support partnering with consumers

Northern Health has consumer and community representation on key strategic, governance and operational committees to advise and provide guidance on proposed activities. This ensures that actions can address the problems and meet the needs of the community. Examples include:

Key committees and advisory functions

- Community Advisory Committee (CAC)
- Northern Health Aboriginal Advisory Committee (NHAAC)
- Consumer Network
- Clinical Improvement Committees
- Consumer Literacy: Establish and Review Group (CLEAR)
- Equity, Diversity & Inclusion Committee
- Open Access Board Meeting
- Resident and Support at home advisory groups

Developing our key overarching plans

Extensive consultation occurred to develop Northern Health's clinical services plans and the Northern Health Strategic Plan 2025-29. Working with consumers is also embedded into our capital planning processes.

Capturing and responding to feedback

Northern Health places value on feedback provided by our community to inform service delivery and design. This includes positive and negative experiences received via the following sources:

- Victorian Healthcare Experience Survey (VHES)
- Direct community engagement and consultation
- Northern Health Patient Experience Survey (available in multiple languages) (NHPES)
- Your Experience of Service (YES) survey
- Carer Experience Survey (CES)
- Feedback shared with Patient Experience

Expanding the role of consumers on interview panels

Consumers have made valuable contributions when joining interview panels for some roles and we continue to develop this resource.

2 Partnering with consumers in organisational design and governance

Designing our facilities together

Consumers, volunteers, patients, carers, and their families are key partners when it comes to planning and co-designing care models that cater to their needs. As part of the Victorian Government's investment to develop building 5 at Northern Hospital Epping, our consumers worked side-by-side with clinicians, engineers, designers, and architects, to co-design and develop our new Intensive Care Unit into a space that offers improved comfort, care and privacy for patients and their families. Other recent examples include the Emergency Department redevelopment project consumer consultations undertaken through 2025.

Adverse Event Reviews

Consumer participation on adverse event reviews provide multiple benefits to the review process, with Northern Health gradually establishing a dedicated 'consumer pool'. The consumer voice remains critical to ensuring reviews are balanced, transparent and informed by lived experience.

Partnering with key groups

We value our partnerships with key groups such as Victorian Aboriginal Health Service (VAHS) and First Peoples' Health and Wellbeing (FPHW), Ethnic Communities Council of Victoria (ECCV), Tandem and Victorian Mental Illness Awareness Council (VMIAC). These and the many existing informal partnerships we have help us tailor culturally appropriate care models and service environments.

These groups help us to tailor care models and service environments that are culturally appropriate.

3 Partnering with patients in their own care

Information Boards for Patients and Consumers

Located in a prominent public area of the ward, these boards provide a great way for staff, patients, families and carers, to gain an understanding of how the ward is performing against objectives of improving patient safety, patient experience, efficiency of care, and staff wellbeing. They also support a culture of continuous improvement by making outcomes visible and fostering shared responsibility for progress.

Patient-Reported Outcome and Experience Measures (PROMs & PREMs)

At Northern Health, we listen to patients so we can improve care and make sure it reflects what matters most to them. We do this by using PROMs (Patient-Reported Outcome Measures) and PREMs (Patient-Reported Experience Measures). Many teams, including mental health, nursing and allied health, have used PROMs for several years.

NH have also invested in the My Health @ Northern app, which allows patients on digital care pathways to share their feedback and health outcomes digitally as part of their care journey. In the Back Pain Digital Care Pathway, patients regularly complete PROMs through the app so that progress can be tracked over time. In Mental Health, consumers use PROMs to inform areas for interventions and groups during recovery. In the Victorian Virtual Emergency Department (VVED), we also collect PREMs through the digital intake system, giving us real-time feedback on patient experience.

By using PROMs and PREMs in this way, Northern Health is making care more responsive, more personalised, and more centred on what matters most to patients. Our challenge is to expand the use of PROM's and PREM's in future service development.

4 Health Literacy and Publications

A dedicated role

Our Health Literacy Coordinator is a key role in our Patient Experience and Consumer Participation team. Our coordinator leads work in connecting with consumers on key activities such as developing information and printed publications.

Enhancing communications and publications

The Consumer Literacy: Establish and Review Group (CLEAR) is our patient information review group consisting of consumers, and staff representatives. The CLEAR Group plays a vital role in developing, and enhancing publications for our consumers patients, families and carers.

Consideration is given to whether publications need to be translated into the top 10 languages of our community as part of the CLEAR review.

Transcultural and Language Services (TALS)

Our Transcultural and Language Services (TALS) Department supports equitable access to care for our diverse communities by providing high-quality interpreting, translation, and AUSLAN services. TALS is committed to strengthening consumer engagement and assists with health literacy initiatives and publications to ensure patients understand and can act on the information provided to them.

Hearing the voice of our community

Views of 90 consumers/community members from the new Strategy Consultations

- Strengths in our committed, caring clinicians
- Opportunity for increased community engagement to ensure shared expectations
- Many people report challenging experiences of the emergency department

How we consulted with the community, who we consulted & what they said

Focus groups — 22 participants	Interviews — 5 people	Surveys— 65 responses
Consumers & Volunteers	Consumers on committees	Refugee week event attendees
Faith Leaders	Community representatives	Consumer network

Strengths

- Comprehensive range of services
- Victorian Virtual Emergency Department
- Staff commitment to patient care

Opportunities

- Access to timely care
- Information about our services
- Access to specialist services

Challenges

- Accessibility of sites
- Expectations regarding emergency care
- Communication with consumers

Consumer Plan for 2025-29

The Consumer Engagement Plan 2025–29 sets out how Northern Health will partner with patients, families, carers and communities to shape safe, kind, effective and person-centred care.

It builds on the progress we have already made, celebrating our achievements and highlighting the voices of our diverse community. Guided by our Strategic Plan and underpinned by the Safer Care Victoria Partnering in Healthcare framework, this plan provides a clear roadmap for deepening consumer participation at every level — from individual care decisions to service design, research and system leadership.

Together, we will create a health service that reflects the needs, aspirations, and lived experiences of the people we serve.

The new 2025–29 Consumer Engagement Plan introduces three key priority areas, listed below. Each priority area is mapped to one or more of our Strategic Directions along with associated goals and objectives.

1 **Partner in safe and effective care**

2 **Improve experiences through better systems and processes**

3 **Drive innovation and research with consumers**

Consumer Engagement Priorities

1 Priority 1: Partner in safe and effective care

Strategic Priority 1:
Collaborate to deliver safe, efficient, effective and sustainable care.

Goal
Consumers are equal partners in ensuring safe, effective, and patient-centred care.

Objectives
- Review clinical governance and structure of consumer engagement / participation to improve our consumer participation at NH.
- Strengthen shared decision-making at the point of care.
- Embed the consumer co-design framework.
- Build staff capability in partnering with consumers.

2 Priority 2: Improve experiences through better systems and processes

Strategic Priority 3:
Renew and strengthen infrastructure, systems tools and processes.

Goal
Consumers insights drive how we design and improve systems, digital tools, and infrastructure.

Objectives
- Embed consumer input into relevant service redesign, digital health and infrastructure projects.
- Enhance feedback mechanisms to demonstrate consumer input informs actions and outcomes
- Strengthen improvements in health literacy to support equitable access and understanding.

3 Priority 3: Drive innovation and research with consumers

Strategic Priority 4 & 6:
Innovate to shape future of health care and education & drive research and education.

Goal
Consumers voices are embedded in research and innovation to shape future models of care.

Objectives
- Position the consumer voice central in research governance, education and innovation.
- Leverage improvement measures and/or patient-reported measures to guide design and implementation of new models of care.

Action Plan

Priority 1 : Partner in safe and effective care

1

Strategic Priority: safe, efficient, effective, sustainable care

SCV domains: Shared decision-making; effective communication; working together

Objectives

1. Review clinical governance and structure of consumer engagement / participation to improve our consumer participation at NH.
2. Strengthen shared decision-making at the point of care
3. Embed the consumer co-design framework
4. Build staff capability in partnering with consumers

Key Actions	Measures/Outcomes
1.1 Conduct a gap analysis of the current consumer engagement /participation model	• Reporting the findings of the gap analysis • Implementation plan on the recommendations
1.2 Revise the governance structure for consumer engagement work across NH	• New structure identified and implemented
2.1 Identify key area to strengthen shared-decision making and carry out audits (e.g. design an audit tool to capture key shared-decisions within the clinical record for defined patient cohorts)	• Develop the shared-decision making tool • Reporting on audits
3.1 Consider and standardise the consumer co-design framework we use at NH and apply consistently as a tool to support service redesign	• Improved knowledge of consumer input impacting decision making at NH. • Implementation of a system to capture the above the information.
4.1 Design and deliver training and resources to support staff in partnering effectively with consumers.	• Reporting on numbers/percentages of staff buddies who participate in training and /or use the provided tools

Priority 2: Improve experiences through better systems and processes

2

Strategic Priority: infrastructure, systems, tools & processes

SCV domains: Effective communication; equity & inclusion

Objectives

1. Embed consumer input into relevant service redesign, digital health and infrastructure projects.
2. Enhance feedback mechanisms to demonstrate consumer input informs actions and outcomes
3. Strengthen improvements in health literacy to support equitable access and understanding.

Key Actions	Measures/Outcomes
1.1 Require consumer input in all new capital works and digital health projects	• Consumer input documented in all relevant papers (e.g. Functional brief or Detailed Design report)
1.2 Include consumers in co-design of service improvements and feedback processes	• No of service improvement projects where consumer input is demonstrated
2.1 Develop and implement a standard process for communicating back to consumers how their input influenced decisions and improvements	• Percentage of projects that used this process
3.1 Continue CLEAR reviews of patient education and information resources	• Reporting of resources reviewed
3.2 Improve staff participation in health literacy training	• Reporting on numbers/ percentages of staff trained
3.3 Review Health Literacy procedure to ensure meeting best practice	• Revised procedure

Action Plan

Priority 3 :
Drive innovation and research with consumers

3

Strategic Priority: innovate for Victoria; research & education

SCV domains: Personalised & holistic care; working together

Objectives

1. Position the consumer voice central in research governance, education and innovation.
2. Leverage improvement measures and/or patient-reported measures to guide design and implementation of new models of care.

Key Actions	Measures/Outcomes
1.1 Expand consumer roles on research and ethics committees	• Number of research/ethics projects with consumer involvement
2.1 Include in all new models of care and model of care reviews, the requirement to identify and collect PROMs/improvement measures	• PROMs collection in targeted services

Monitoring & Reporting

Monitoring of the action and implementation plan will occur regularly through the Northern Health's Consumers Advisory Committee (CAC) and other NH consumer Committees.

Annual progress reports will also be provided to the Executive Committee and Board Committee.

Implementation will also be monitored annually by the Australian Council on HealthCare Standards (ACHS) as part of Northern Health's accreditation processes under the National Safety and Quality in Health Service Standards, along with the Aged Care quality and Safety Commission Accreditation Standards.

Reporting to the Department of Health in line with annual mandatory reporting requirements.

Northern Health

For more information:
Please contact the Consumer Participation team at
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or 03 9495 3313

Interested in becoming a part of our Consumer Network?
Find our more by visiting our website:
nh.org.au/support-us/consumer-community-participation/