



CONSUMER PARTICIPATION

The ADOHTA supports and promotes consumer participation in all aspects of oral health care delivery. This includes direct service delivery, policy development, service planning and evaluation, advocacy and regulation. The Association believes that involving and engaging consumers in the provision of their health care has significant overall benefits for improving the quality and appropriateness of health services as a whole.

ADOHTA encourages its members to promote and embrace consumer participation and assist and support individuals and communities to advocate for improved oral health services.

Health consumers have a unique and important perspective on health. They provide a user perspective on health issues and balance the views of health care professionals, service providers and industry¹. Health consumers are individuals, groups, communities and consumer organisations. Participation may be defined as “the right to be involved in decision making processes”. As consumers are the end-users of health services, they play a critical role in determining the success of health systems and are in a position to comment on the gaps and shortfalls. Experts claim that consumer participation is crucial to an organisation’s accountability. It provides transparency in organisational policies and decisions. It also improves an organisation’s capacity to learn from experiences and ensures deliberation that properly recognises the needs of both the individual and the community it serves².

It is imperative that consumer participation is promoted in the private and public sectors and at all tiers of government. Opportunities for consumer participation include but should not be limited to customer surveys and consumer representative on boards and committees. On an individual level, consumer participation is essential in areas of assessment, treatment planning and intervention. Consumers expect their voice heard and their views respected³.

Health inequality is of real concern to consumers, including oral health consumers. They understand the links between inequality in society and inequality in health. Community development practitioners assert that consumer participation increases social justice, improves individual wellbeing and reduces negative impacts of otherwise disconnected persons⁴. Therefore, it is essential that oral health providers engage with people from disadvantaged groups.

Health Mouths Healthy Lives: Australia’s National Oral Health Plan provides a strategic framework and plan for action to enhance the general health and wellbeing of the Australian population through improved oral health. One of its guiding principles is consumer involvement. It advocates for consumer participation in policy development, service planning and evaluation. It also calls for consumer involvement in decision making at the individual level and recognises the role of the consumer for continuous quality improvement⁴.

Many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities have also recognised the importance of working together in partnerships with health care providers to improve the delivery of health services and health outcomes. In these communities, most of the decision-making is localised and are culturally sensitive. This has allowed for the building of community and health service capacity and increased accountability for health outcomes.

REFERENCES

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