consumer participation strategies

This table lists a range of strategies that enable current or potential consumers to participate in service planning and decision making. When deciding which strategies to use, you need to consider (a) your organisation's capacity and readiness to involve consumers in decision making and (b) the consumer group's capacity to participate at different levels. Additional considerations for CALD communities are included.

The consumer:	Receives information	Is consulted	Advises the organisation	Plans jointly	Has delegated control	Has control
Description	CALD consumers receive one-way information from a service or organisation	CALD consumers are invited to a structured discussion where they share their knowledge and views on a particular topic.	A formal process is established to enable CALD consumers to provide information to the organisation on a regular basis.	CALD consumers are a core part of the organisation's planning processes, as well as implementation and evaluation	CALD consumers are given the responsibility to make decisions about an aspect of an organisation or its services	CALD consumers have representation in governing bodies and actively participate in the organisation's decision-making processes
Example	• Information sessions • Printed material • Media (eg radio or newspapers)	• Focus groups • Forums • Community consultations • Stakeholder interviews • Surveys or feedback forms	• Consumer advisory groups • Project advisory groups	Input from consumer representatives is factored into each stage of planning	• Consumer planning days • Consumer representatives sign off on planning outcomes	CALD consumers on Board
Benefits	• Informs consumers about a specific issue or service • Consumers can make informed decisions • Can reach a large number of people in a small amount of time • Consumers can take information away to review	• Organisation can ask specific questions of interest • Provides opportunities for consumers to express their views • Allows for the consumer's specific cultural and linguistic requirements to be met • Small-group discussion allows topics to be explored in depth	• Consumers are able to initiate discourse and topics for discussion • Organisation can collect diverse perspectives on an issue or topic • Organisation is able to target particular communities and engage with them on a specific issue	• Plans reflect the needs of CALD consumers • Consumers who are involved in planning are more likely to promote the service within their communities • Potential consumer issues can be identified and managed at an early stage.	• Community has greater ownership of the process • Plans and services are more likely to be culturally appropriate • Services are tailored to meet the needs of CALD consumers	• Consumers are represented across the decision-making process • Organisation can build strong links with community leaders • Consumer representatives have opportunities for skill enhancement and social participation • Cultural and linguistic considerations can be addressed at all levels of program and service planning
Actions for success	• Use simple English or relevant languages • Pilot-test resources prior to use, to ensure their effectiveness • Use culturally appropriate venues and disseminate material through community representatives • Provide opportunities for consumers to provide feedback on the information provided	• Provide incentives for participation • Consider more than one form of consultation to cater for age, gender and availability • Ensure that surveys tools are linguistically appropriate • Where possible, provide feedback on findings or actions to the community • Train bilingual facilitators in consultation methodologies	• Select consumer representatives who have knowledge and interest in the issue to be discussed • Field-test questions to ensure that consumers can understand and respond to them	• Use ethno-specific and multicultural organisations as a starting point for identifying and recruiting consumer representatives • Find representatives who have strong links with their communities • Support and mentor consumer representatives	• Ensure that there is sustained consumer involvement throughout the process of planning, implementation and evaluation • Ensure that interpreting and translating services are provided as required • Consult with the consumers to develop procedures for planning days or steering groups	• Consult with CALD communities to identify appropriate representatives • Train, support and mentor the consumer representative • Provide interpreting and translating services as required by the consumer representative
Remember …	• Pitch information at the appropriate comprehension and literacy levels of your audience	• Consumers may not be familiar with consultation techniques • Field-test questions and survey tools • Consider whether written surveys are appropriate for particular groups	• Consumer input must influence decision-making processes; the group's contribution should not be tokenistic. • Ensure that the issue is relevant to consumers before seeking their advice	• Be flexible about meeting times, structures and processes • Be clear about what you expect from consumer representatives • Provide incentives for participation	• Some consumers may not be experienced in attending meetings or collaborative decision-making processes. • Planning days and steering groups can take some time to coordinate • Evaluate the process to identify what worked and what could be improved	• One consumer cannot represent all CALD communities • The consumer representative is not a 'cultural expert' for their entire community • Identified 'leaders' may only represent certain sections of the community. • Culturally, people may not be familiar with providing direct opinions in a public setting.

centre for culture, ethnicity & health