

Informed consent

What is informed consent in health care?

Health services will help you when you have an illness or health problem. Sometimes you need health tests or treatment. A health worker must ask if you consent to have tests or treatment. Informed consent is when you clearly understand your illness or health problem and agree to what your health worker is going to do.

You should know about all your health care choices before you agree. You can choose to have treatment or not.

What information do I need?

Your health worker will give you information to help you make a decision about your test or treatment.

You can also ask your health worker questions such as:

- What is my illness or health problem?
- What is the test or treatment?
- How will the test or treatment help me?
- Can the test or treatment cause any problems?
- How serious can the problems be?
- Are there different tests or treatments?
- What happens after the tests or treatment?
- Will I get better?
- How long will it take to get better?
- What may happen if I do not get treatment?

Tell your health worker if you do not understand something.

Why do I have to give consent?

In Australia, it is the law that your health worker has your consent before giving you tests or treatment.

Why do I need to sign a consent form?

You will be asked to sign a written consent form for high-risk treatments like surgery. Other times you only need to tell your health worker that you agree. Only health workers involved in your tests and treatments will read your consent form.

Your consent form will not be shared with anyone not involved in your healthcare.

Who can give consent?

If you can understand your treatment options and can tell your health worker what you want, then you must be the one to decide. You can bring friends, family or community members to your appointments and ask them for advice. Sometimes your health worker, a family member or friend can make decisions for you in an emergency.

Who gives consent for a child?

Usually, a parent, guardian or carer gives consent for a child under 18 years of age. If a child can fully understand their treatment and the effect it can have on their health, they can give consent. A health worker will check if a child is able to give their own consent.

How much do I need to know?

A health worker will give you as much information as you want. They will try to answer all of your questions. Tell your health worker if there is anything you do not want to know about your tests or treatment.

How much time do I have to decide?

Decisions have to be made quickly in emergencies. If it is not an emergency, you can take more time to decide. If you are still not sure about your tests or treatment, you can talk to a different health worker to help you make your decision.

Do I need an interpreter?

It can be hard to understand health tests or treatments. To make the best decisions, it is important you and your health worker understand each other. If English is not your first language, a professional interpreter can attend your appointment. Face-to-face interpreters or telephone interpreters are free. You or your health worker can ask for an interpreter to be with you when you talk about your health care. Information you tell your interpreter will be kept private.

What if I gave consent and then I change my mind?

You can always change your mind, even if you have signed a consent form or told your health worker you agree to tests or treatment.

Remember

Ask questions

It is important you understand everything your health worker has told you. You can ask as many questions as you want. You can bring someone with you for support.

Ask for an interpreter

Professional interpreters are free. They make it easier for you and your health worker to understand each other.

It is your choice

Even if you gave consent, you can change your mind at any time.

Partnering with Consumers - This patient information brochure supports National Safety and Quality Health Service Standard 2 (2.4.1) Consumers and/or carers provided feedback on this patient information.

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English informed consent