

# Get to know a consumer representative

At Metro North Hospital and Health Service, we are listening to our consumers. Diverse community engagement helps make a positive impact on the delivery of patient-centred care across our services. Fiona Comber answers some questions about her role as a Consumer Representative.

## Q: How did you come to be a consumer representative?

When my daughter was born in 2008, it became clear that I was not going to be able to return to work as soon as I had hoped due to her health needs. At the same time my eldest daughter was also receiving treatment at Children's Oral Health Service. We were at the hospital and visiting a number of health services regularly for appointments for both girls. I wanted to do something to keep my mind active and develop some new skills that I could add to my resume while I was away from the workforce.

During one visit I saw a poster about becoming involved in the Family Advisory Council at Children's Health Queensland. I got involved and my interest in the voice of the consumer in health care has grown.

Fast forward another five years and my involvement with the patient community has grown to include establishing a charity with other parents and carers of children born with cleft lip and palate called Cleft Connect Australia. We represent the needs of people with this condition throughout the lifespan. This includes advocating and representing these patients in the services they use, many of which are located within Metro North.

My role also includes representing the experience of other families who might not have the time and energy to attend meetings and give feedback in that way. This is certainly true if they are caring for elders or people with a disability, or have a disability themselves.

## Q: What is involved in your role as consumer representative?

I attend a meeting once a month and do some reading in between meetings. I might review a presentation or read a report and send in some feedback over email.



In some cases I will meet with a staff member over the phone or in person if I have something specific I want to raise. I also take time to listen to the experiences of other people who use the service so I can be informed not just about my own journey, but other perspectives too.

**Q: What do you find most positive about this role?**

The way staff are receptive to the feedback I give, and seeing how dedicated and informed staff are behind the scenes. For example, our experience in an appointment is really only the tip of the iceberg for what goes into running a high quality health service.

In the same way it is very rewarding to be able to point out that what a clinician sees in a patient during an appointment or hospital stay is not the whole story about that person and their life. Patients have full lives and are connected to their family and their community. This is very important to their wellbeing both in that clinical setting and beyond.

**Q: What advice do you have for anyone considering becoming a consumer representative?**

It's very worthwhile. Even if you don't see results straight away because the wheels tend to move slowly in a big organisation, be patient and hang in there. Build relationships with other consumers and with the people within the organisation that are seeking a consumer perspective. The patient experience is an essential part of making healthcare better for everyone. Telling your own story can be very empowering especially in an environment that is supportive and where your audience wants to learn from your perspective.



## Listening to our community...

Metro North Hospital and Health Service (MNHHS) is committed to meaningful and diverse consumer and community engagement and is focussed on making a positive difference to the delivery of patient-centred care. We partner with consumer advocacy and community organisations and Brisbane North PHN.

The Community Board Advisory Group (CBAG), which was established in October 2013, provides strategic advice and voices of the communities we service to MNHHS planning, service delivery and evaluation. Membership of the group is made up of organisations and consumers who represent the diverse communities based on burden of disease, high current MNHHS system users and hard to reach populations, those with special health needs, MNHHS and Brisbane North PHN.

MNHHS and Brisbane North PHN recognise that collaboration is crucial to improving the health and wellbeing of Metro North Brisbane communities. Current priorities for collaboration include chronic disease prevention and management, providing care in the most appropriate setting and avoiding unnecessary hospital admissions, end of life care, mental health and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health.