



**Holstep
Health**

Community care.
For life.

Your voices shaping our care

Consumer and Community Engagement Framework



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Holstep Health acknowledges Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as the Traditional Owners and Custodians of the unceded lands and waterways where we work. We acknowledge the enduring impacts of colonisation and the sorrow of the Stolen Generations. We pay our deepest respect to Elders past and present and honour their enduring connection to Country. We recognise their ongoing care for these lands over countless generations and commit to listening, learning, and walking together toward a future grounded in truth, respect, and justice.

At Holstep Health, we welcome people at all ages and stages of life. We work with diverse communities shaped by culture, faith, ability, sexuality, gender, age, lived experience and migration status. Enriched by this diversity, we are committed to upholding human rights, promoting equity, and providing culturally safe, respectful, and inclusive services and spaces where everyone feels valued, supported and able to thrive.



A message from our Chair and CEO

We are delighted to share Holstep Health's Consumer and Community Engagement Framework with our consumers, carers, families, communities, partners, and workforce.

At Holstep Health, community is at the heart of everything we do. This framework reflects our commitment to listening to, learning from, and working alongside the people and communities we serve. It guides how we partner with consumers and community to shape and improve our services, programs, processes and spaces.

Our purpose is to provide lifelong community-based care that empowers individuals, addresses inequities, and supports every person to thrive.

To do this well, we know it is essential that the voices, experiences, ideas, and feedback of our consumers and communities help inform the decisions we make.

Importantly, this framework is not only about listening, but also about taking meaningful action based on what we hear.

This document outlines how Holstep Health continues to build strong, inclusive, and respectful relationships with community. It supports consistent and accountable engagement across the organisation and strengthens the trust and partnerships that are essential to delivering safe, high-quality, person-centred care.

Consumer and community insights help us better understand what matters most to people. They guide how we plan and deliver services, identify opportunities for improvement, enhance experiences of care, and help ensure our services remain responsive to the diverse and changing needs of our communities.

Building on more than 50 years of community wisdom and collective action, the framework ensures engagement remains central to who we are - a community health organisation created *by* community, working *with* community, *for* community.

This framework is an important step in working together into the future. We look forward to engaging widely to build healthier and more connected individuals and communities.



From left: Tass Mousaferiadis, Board Chair and Tassia Michaleas, Chief Executive Officer

“

We know it is essential that the voices, experiences, ideas, and feedback of our communities help inform the decisions we make.”

Our commitment to engagement

Thriving communities are built through strong partnerships and collaboration. Holstep Health recognises the best outcomes can only be achieved when people are involved in decisions that affect them.

Our Consumer and Community Engagement Framework outlines how we work alongside individuals, families and communities to shape services, policies and decisions, creating better experiences for consumers – from the care they receive to the places where services are delivered.

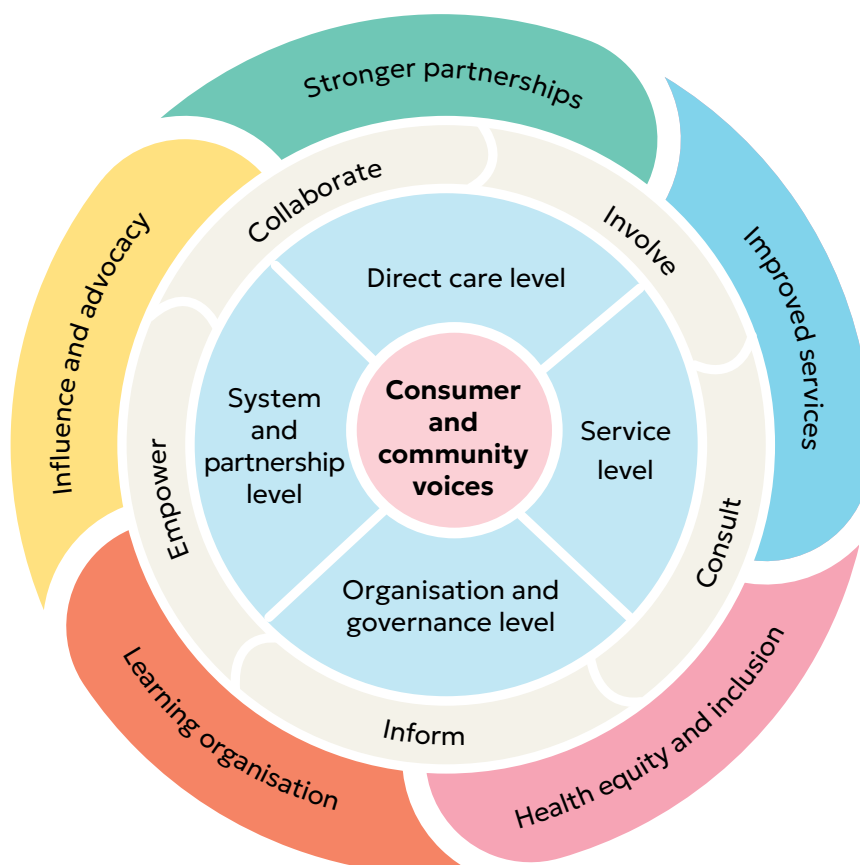
We improve our services by listening to community feedback and lived experience, and using organisational data ethically and transparently to guide positive change, ensuring everyone has a voice and fair access to care. Engagement is reciprocal, a process of mutual learning, shared understanding and shared benefit

We are committed to culturally safe and inclusive engagement, ongoing learning, and feedback opportunities that lead to meaningful and lasting change.

Our engagement framework model

The model reflects our commitment to meaningful, respectful and inclusive engagement. We recognise that engagement is not a single activity, but an ongoing approach that shapes better outcomes together.

- **Consumer and community voices** - listening to perspectives to inform decisions is at the heart of everything we do.
- **Every level of our organisation** - engagement is embedded across the direct care, service, organisation and governance, and system and partnership levels, ensuring consumer and community voices help shape planning, delivery, and continuous improvement.
- **How we engage** - our approach is flexible and responsive. Using a variety of proven methods, we inform, consult, involve, collaborate with and empower consumers and communities, creating genuine opportunities for participation and contribution.
- **Successful outcomes for all** - achieved by working together to support healthier and more connected communities.



Who we engage

Holstep Health engages with a broad range of consumers, carers, communities, members, partners, stakeholders, and our workforce to ensure our services, programs, systems, and organisational decisions are informed by lived experience, community priorities, and local knowledge.

Our priority groups include:

- Consumers, carers and families
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples
- LGBTIQA+ communities
- People from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds
- Refugees and people seeking asylum
- People with disability
- People with lived experience
- People experiencing homelessness or social disadvantage

Supporting diverse, inclusive participation

At Holstep Health, everyone is welcome. Our communities are diverse, and so are we. We value the traditions, cultures, and lived experiences of the people we serve, and work with us.

We are committed to building healthy, inclusive, and equitable communities. We believe health equity means everyone, regardless of culture, faith, ability, sexuality, gender, lived experience, or migration background, can access safe, respectful, and person-centred care.

We know inclusion must be intentional. That is why we embed diversity and inclusion across everything we do, ensuring people feel safe, supported, and able to bring their whole selves to our services and workplaces.

We work respectfully with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, LGBTIQA+ communities, people with disabilities and people from all cultural backgrounds, making sure their voices help shape the decisions that affect them. We design our engagement processes to recognise intersectionality, where people's experiences of culture, faith, gender, sexuality, and ability overlap and shape participation. Through this work, we aim to build strong relationships based on trust, respect, and equity, recognising that cultural safety is essential to better health and wellbeing.



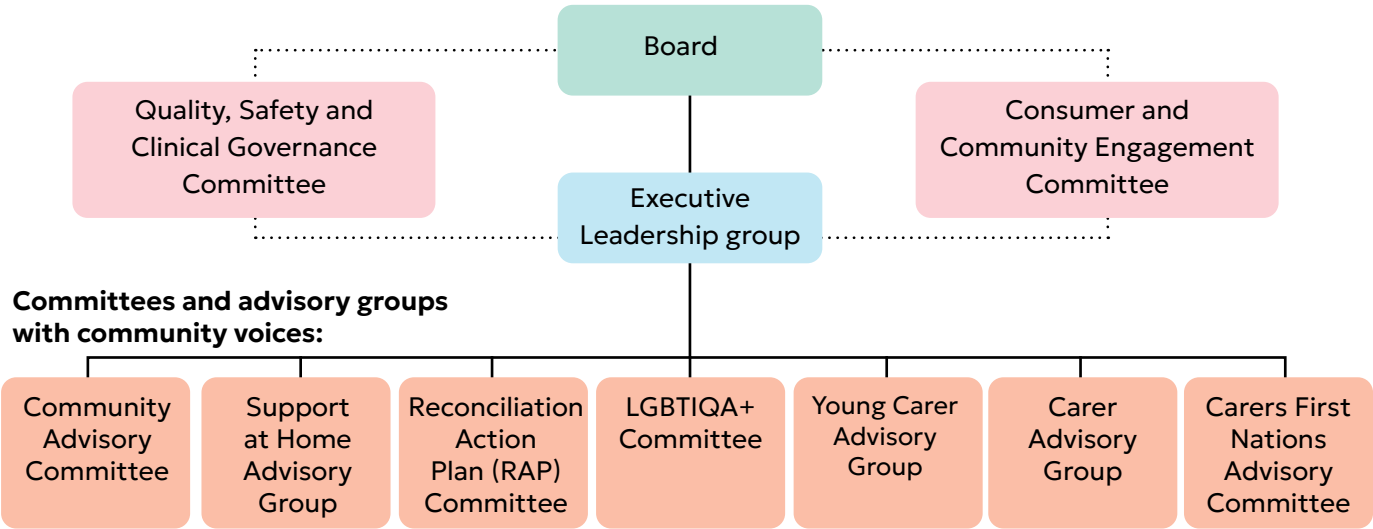
Engagement embedded at every level

Community participation and engagement is embedded across all levels of our organisation and practice. There are many opportunities for consumer and community to be meaningfully involved within all levels of health care. Participation may occur through formal engagement activities as well as through community programs, group activities and other shared experiences that provide opportunities for learning, connection and feedback.

Level	Explanation
Direct care level	We partner with individuals and families in their own care, treatment, and recovery planning to ensure care is person-led and culturally safe, and to get feedback on ways to improve.
Service level	We involve consumers and communities in designing, reviewing, and improving services, programs, systems, and policies for better impact.
Organisation and governance level (see below)	We focus on consumer and community voice in leadership, strategy, and accountability processes with dedicated consumer and community engagement staff, committees, advisory groups and Board reporting to understand needs and impact.
System and partnership level	We collaborate with external partners, community organisations, and government to co-design initiatives that address broader health and social needs. We use the insights from our other levels of engagement to guide advocacy, sector submissions, reform discussions, and collective action that address barriers to health equity.

How we listen

Our engagement is supported through governance oversight from the Board, Executive and Board Committees, ensuring engagement is meaningful, consistent, and accountable. Governance oversight includes regular monitoring of the delivery of this framework, with progress reported regularly to the Consumer and Community Engagement Committee and at least annually to the Board.



Other opportunities for engagement:

Focus groups | Workshops | Surveys | Feedback | Interviews | Social media | Co-design sessions

Community participation in practice

We recognise community engagement is not “one-size-fits-all”. The level and method of engagement is guided by the purpose of the activity, the impact of the decision, and the appropriate level of participation, ensuring flexibility in how consumers and communities are involved in decision-making. Holstep Health uses the International Association for Public Participation (IAP2) Spectrum, which outlines five levels of engagement.

	Inform	Consult	Involve	Collaborate	Empower
Purpose	To provide clear, accessible and timely information to support understanding	To listen to community views and gather feedback to inform decisions or planning	To work directly with consumers and communities to ensure their concerns and ideas are understood and considered	To partner with communities in each aspect of the process, including developing alternatives and identifying preferred solutions	To place final decision-making in the hands of consumers or communities
Our promise to you	We keep you informed	We listen and acknowledge your feedback and tell you how it has influenced our decisions	We work with you throughout the process and ensure your views shape the outcomes	We seek your advice and innovation, and work together on decisions where possible	We support your leadership, and the decision will be community-led
Engagement tools	• Brochures • Fact sheets • Newsletters • Emails • Calls and texts • Noticeboards • Social media • Website • Community information sessions	• Surveys • Polls • Interviews • Feedback kiosks and forms • Forums • Social media • People with lived experience	• Workshops • Focus groups • Journey-mapping • Conversations • Forums • People with lived-experience	• Board advisory committee • Community advisory groups • Planning sessions • Co-design sessions • People with lived-experience	• Community initiatives • Delegated decision-making committees • Community governance models
Project examples	Sharing of services and consumer stories across our social media platforms	Community advisory groups gave us valuable feedback on the Holstep Health branding while in design phases	Community members shaped our website terminology, navigation and user experience across multiple consultations	RAP committee members provided valuable understanding and insight in developing our Reconciliation Action Plan	The Great Idea Program provided grants, guidance and mentorship to support community-led projects

Our principles of engagement

Our principles of working are the foundation of how we make decisions, guiding every aspect of how we work together. The same principles are applied in how we engage with everyone.

Community centred

Our origins stem from a movement of community action and leadership. We connect through engagement to empower individuals and address inequity. We advocate and work in partnership with communities to design programs to make an impact and meet need.

Person led

We recognise each person is unique and requires responses that respond and reflect their needs. We deliver a person centred approach through compassionate care and accessible services.

Culturally safe

We are enriched by the diverse communities we serve and are committed to providing culturally safe and respectful services. We listen to the voices of our communities and ensure our people are trained to be responsive to needs.

Quality focused

We are led by the best available evidence and research, clinical expertise, and the guidance of consumers and those with lived experience. We are driven by processes of feedback, review and continuous improvement to achieve excellence in what we do.

Health equity focused

We are committed to ensuring a social justice approach to our work, acknowledging the importance of community participation, intersectionality, and the social determinants of health.

Environmentally focused

We are committed to leading environmental sustainability within the sector. We are focused on reducing our carbon footprint through building organisational resilience to climate-related risks and continually improving our environmental sustainability practices.



Building stronger participation

Through consistent, transparent and respectful engagement, we ensure consumer and community voices influence decisions and improvements, building trust, strengthening accountability, and encouraging continued participation in shaping our services and organisation.

- **Consistent engagement** – we build trust, confidence and strong relationships with consumers and communities through predictable, transparent and respectful engagement. We use strengths-based language that recognises people’s capabilities, strengths and potential, creating opportunities for honest participation and meaningful contributions that are valued and considered.
- **Tailored approach** - we ensure engagement is culturally safe, suitable for different literacy levels and languages, age-appropriate, accessible for people with disability, respectful of community preferences and appropriate for the purpose and need of the engagement.
- **Fair and inclusive** - we ensure our engagement practices are fair, inclusive and meaningful across the organisation, so every person, no matter where they connect with Holstep Health, encounters the same level of respect and responsiveness, and has an opportunity to be heard.
- **Feedback loop** - we regularly review engagement activities, feedback and outcomes to help improve our services, strengthen accountability, and ensure community voices shape planning, decision-making and service development. Wherever possible, we will let consumers and community members know how their feedback has influenced changes and improvements.
- **Measured improvement** - by applying shared methods, tools, and principles, and adapting them thoughtfully to reflect the strengths, needs, and perspectives of different communities, we measure progress, close the feedback loop, and continuously improve how we listen, learn, and act.

Successful outcomes for all

Engagement is most effective when it creates meaningful and lasting change. While some outcomes can be measured, others are reflected in stronger relationships, increased trust, improved cultural safety and greater confidence to participate. Together, these outcomes help us understand our impact and ensure community voices continue to influence the way we plan, deliver and improve our services, programs, processes and spaces.

Improved services

Success means our services improve by listening and responding to lived experience and feedback, resulting in positive feedback following change.

Health equity and inclusion

Success means diverse and under-represented voices are included, barriers are removed, and engagement is adapted to meet different needs. We know we are succeeding when services are fair, accessible, culturally safe, and shaped by the people who use them.

Stronger partnerships

Success is evident when consumers, carers, and communities are actively involved in shaping priorities, decisions, and solutions. Strong partnerships are built over time when community input influences outcomes and people can see the impact of their contribution.

Influence and advocacy

Success is evident when consumer and community insights help shape policy, funding decisions, and wider sector change. Holstep Health uses lived experience to guide advocacy and works with partners to address the causes of inequity. Communities can see their voices influencing the broader system.

A learning organisation

Success is achieved when learning and feedback are shared across teams and used to improve everyday practice and decision-making. Changes are guided by data, evidence, and lived experience, helping Holstep Health continuously strengthen outcomes for individuals, families, and communities.

Everyone has a role to play

Everyone has a role in implementing this Framework and supporting the work of Holstep Health. Here are the ways everyone can do their part.

Leadership

- Champion consumer and community engagement at all levels and across all activities of the organisation.
- Monitor the delivery of this framework, with progress reported regularly to the Consumer and Community Engagement Committee and at least annually to the Board.
- Include consumer and community feedback and ideas when shaping organisational strategies, programs, services, and governance decisions.
- Actively promote a workplace culture that supports learning, values consumer and community voices, and creates safe and inclusive spaces.
- Ensure engagement aligns with Holstep Health's values and framework principles.
- Build staff capability in communication, relationship building and co-design.
- Monitor engagement outcomes and embed them into planning, reporting, and quality improvement systems.
- Embed engagement approaches across the full consumer experience, from service delivery and program design to service improvement, systems, and procedures that support safe, accessible, and culturally responsive care.

All staff

- Embed engagement across work in line with procedures and this framework.
- Listen with empathy and respond to feedback respectfully.

- Apply culturally safe, person-led, and community-centred practices in everyday work.
- Ensure privacy, consent, and the ethical use of information, including stories and lived-experience insights.
- Close the loop by communicating how feedback and input have influenced decisions and outcomes.
- Demonstrate accountability through regular reporting on engagement outcomes.
- Consult with our community through Holstep Health's committees and advisory groups.

Committees and advisory groups

- Make sure consumer and community voices are meaningfully included in planning and decision-making within their areas of responsibility.
- Provide structured opportunities for meaningful consumer and community input.
- Report outcomes, insights, and recommendations to senior leadership and/or the Board in line with agreed terms of reference.
- Ensure spaces are culturally safe, accountable, and transparent in decision-making and engagement practices.

Consumers and community

- Share perspectives, stories, and feedback to help inform their experience of services.
- Participate actively and respectfully in engagement opportunities.
- Maintain confidentiality when contributing to committees, co-design processes, or governance activities.

To find out more, visit our website under [Get Involved](#) or email engage@holstephealth.org.au.



Definitions

Term	Description
Advocacy	Advocacy is the intentional act of using evidence, lived experience, and community insight to influence decisions, policies, funding, systems, and public discourse in ways that advance health equity and social justice.
Co-design	Co-design is a collaborative approach where consumers, communities and staff work together to design, improve or evaluate services, programs and systems. It values lived experience and professional expertise equally, and is guided by active listening, shared decision-making, responsiveness and a genuine willingness to incorporating consumer and community perspectives.
Community	Community includes residents, service users, community organisations, and cultural or faith-based groups who contribute to, or are affected by, Holstep Health's work.
Consumer	Patients or clients of Holstep Health, their families or support people, those with lived and living experience, carers, advocates, representatives, and community members who may be past, current, or potential users of Holstep Health.
Consumer experience	Consumer experience refers to the interactions, impressions, and outcomes individuals have across every touchpoint with Holstep Health - including physical spaces, communication, access systems, cultural safety, and staff behaviour - before, during, and after receiving care or participating in services.
Cultural safety	Cultural safety refers to an environment where people feel respected, free from discrimination, and safe to express their cultural identity. It is achieved when consumers and communities determine that their care experiences are culturally appropriate and inclusive.
Engagement	Engagement is the active process of working with others to shape better health, wellbeing, and service experiences. Reciprocal engagement recognises that consumers and communities contribute valuable expertise towards mutual learning, shared understanding and collective benefit.
Feedback loop / closing the loop	Closing the loop means communicating back about how input has been considered, what decisions were made, and why.
Health equity/ equity	Health equity means making sure everyone has a fair and equal chance to be as healthy as possible. It recognises that some people need extra support to achieve good health because of things like income, where they live, language, culture, disability, or life experiences.
International Association for Public Participation (IAP2)	The IAP2 Spectrum of Public Participation provides a practical model for planning engagement.
Learning organisation	An organisation that continuously improves by listening, reflecting, sharing knowledge and adapting its practices based on evidence, lived experience and community insight. It recognises consumers, carers and communities as active partners in generating knowledge and shaping improvements, supporting a culture of curiosity, learning and innovation.
Lived experience	Refers to the knowledge, insights and perspectives gained through direct personal experience of a health condition, social issue or service system. This expertise complements professional knowledge and is valued equally in shaping services, programs, policies and systems.

Your voices shaping our care

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Let's connect:



www.holstephealth.org.au



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