



Setting up a community health forum for community engagement

Case study: Carterton Medical Centre

The Carterton Medical Centre community health forum demonstrates the value and impact of consumer, whānau and community engagement in primary care.

The Carterton Medical Centre team is committed to providing the highest standards of care in the community. To do this, the medical centre maintains its core values - Whānau, Integrity, Self-respect and Hauora – WISH, follows the principles of te Tiriti o Waitangi and demonstrates innovative leadership.

In May 2024 Carterton Medical Centre held a public meeting to share some of the challenges the health sector faces. It invited community members to form a community health forum designed to help the Carterton Medical Centre support their community through sharing ideas and feedback.

Nine people from the community volunteered to join the forum and they have been meeting monthly since June 2024.

The establishment phase

Early on, the forum chair asked us for our support and advice on establishing the community forum. We shared resources that included consumer advisory group terms of reference¹ and consumer engagement policy², together with introducing them to people experienced in consumer engagement.

Forum members wanted clarity around what their role is and the forum's operations. They developed terms of reference based heavily on what the former Wairarapa District Health Board used.

How terms of reference provide focus

The terms of reference help the forum support the Carterton Medical Centre to:

- communicate to the community what services it offers and how best to access them
- support new members of the practice
- monitor trends from satisfaction surveys and service metrics that track effectiveness and efficiency.

¹ <https://www.hqsc.govt.nz/assets/Consumer-hub/Partners-in-Care/Publications-resources/Terms-of-Reference-Consumer-Advisory-Group-2023-PDF.pdf>

² <https://www.hqsc.govt.nz/resources/resource-library/policy-for-paying-consumers-who-are-involved-health-quality-and-safety-commission-work/>

The terms of reference also clearly sets out expected behaviour (such as privacy) and prevents discussion about private or clinical matters and individual complaints.

Regular meetings

The chair is responsible for the meeting agenda and taking minutes, while the centre hosts the meetings, answers questions and responds to suggestions.

The practice manager attends the meetings and presents an update and any appropriate items.

Code of expectations

We met with the medical centre chair and practice manager to introduce the code of expectations and gave a presentation at the December 2024 meeting. Support to implement the code and use the SURE (Supporting, Understanding, Responding, Evaluation) framework to measure progress and improvement over time is ongoing.

[Read the Code of expectations for health entities' engagement with consumers and whānau – hqsc.govt.nz](https://www.hqsc.govt.nz/engagements/health-entities/)

How the forum contributes to community engagement

Some examples of how the community forum supports the Carterton Medical Centre include:

- information and education – understanding what is needed and is helpful for consumers and staff
- improving health literacy
- patient information sessions, including for the Manage My Health Patient Portal, discussion on diabetes prevention and management, and learning with the Cancer Society and Hato Hone St John
- reviewing and re-recording answer phone messages
- regular contributions to the community paper.