

CENTRE FOR HEALTH COMMUNICATION AND PARTICIPATION



The Centre for Health Communication and Participation is located at La Trobe University, Melbourne, Australia. The Centre investigates the best ways to increase the participation of consumers in health care through effective communication.

WELCOME TO THE CENTRE

The Centre is headed by Dr Sophie Hill, Senior Research Fellow at La Trobe University and Cochrane Consumers and Communication Coordinating Editor. Sophie established the Centre from the foundation of Cochrane Consumers and Communication, which has been located at La Trobe University since 2000. She leads a range of national and international research collaborations that engage policy makers in the evidence base for consumer participation. She is also committed to educating the next generation of researchers responsible for improving communication and participation in health.



Dr Sophie Hill

Our mission

Our mission is to improve the health of consumers by supporting their participation in health care through effective communication with health care providers. We partner with consumers, health professionals and policy makers to promote health care decision-making that is informed by high-quality research as well as consumers' views and experiences.

Who is a consumer of health care?

Consumers include patients and potential patients, their family members and carers, organisations representing consumers' views and the public.

What is health communication and participation?

The term 'health communication and participation' refers to approaches used to promote informed, active consumers in health care. Approaches include those that help consumers to be knowledgeable about their health and to participate in their health in different ways. This involves being able to express their views and beliefs, make informed choices, and access high-quality health information and health services.

Why is health communication and participation important?

Health communication and participation are at the heart of good health care. Good communication among health professionals and consumers leads to:

- improved health outcomes;
- decreased adverse events;
- reduced complaints; and
- increased consumer satisfaction.

Consumer participation in health care also results in health services that are more oriented to consumers' needs.

How do we contribute to improving health communication and participation?

Our work aims to improve health communication and participation by promoting policy and decision-making that is informed by evidence as well as consumers' views and experiences. We investigate different approaches that seek to foster informed and active health care consumers. Examples of these approaches include cultural competence education for health professionals, peer support for carers, using decision aids to help consumers weigh the benefits and harms of different medical treatments and finding out the best ways to assist consumers to take their medications as prescribed. Our work shows many of these strategies do improve consumers' health and experiences.

How do we partner with consumers in our work?

We use a range of innovative methods to partner with consumers and other groups (such as health professionals, health service managers and policy makers) in our research programs. We work with consumers in the following ways:

- Involving consumer representatives from across the health care sector in identifying priority research topics (see Box 1);
- Partnering with consumers as co-researchers or steering committee members on research projects;
- Hosting public events and brainstorming sessions with consumers to generate ideas for improved engagement with the health sector;
- Running workshops to develop the skills and knowledge of consumers in interpreting health research; and
- Seeking feedback from consumers about our resources.

We are currently exploring ways to involve consumers as co-authors in our Cochrane reviews (see Box 1).

OUR RESEARCH PROGRAMS

Our work involves two major research programs:

1. Cochrane Consumers and Communication

Cochrane Consumers and Communication is part of the international organisation, Cochrane. Cochrane is an independent, not-for-profit organisation dedicated to producing up to date, accurate information about the effects of health care for everyone to access. These assessments of the evidence are known as Cochrane reviews, and they are published on the Cochrane Library (cochranelibrary.com).

We provide the editorial base for Cochrane Consumers and Communication. This means we publish high-quality reviews of the evidence about interventions, or approaches, which affect the way consumers interact with each other, or with health care professionals, health services and health researchers.

Examples of leading reviews are:

- Interventions for enhancing medication adherence
- Decision aids for people facing health treatment or screening decisions
- Interventions for providers to promote a patient-centred approach in clinical consultations.

We engage in widespread consultation to ensure our review topics are relevant for consumers, health professionals and policy makers (see Box 1).

2. Innovative research projects focusing on health communication and participation

We collaborate with consumer organisations, health professionals, health care services, governments and universities in Australia and internationally to conduct leading research into priority health communication and participation topics.

Our researchers bring a strong and diverse track record to the field of health communication and participation. We also run a substantial program for higher degree students in the emerging public health field of consumer participation.

High profile health care issues we investigate include:

- Improving communication about vaccination (see Box 2);
- Improving communication about use of medicines;
- Understanding the specific communication and participation needs of people with multiple health problems;
- Understanding how carers participate to prevent medical mistakes; and
- Implementing the best ways to share evidence with or transfer knowledge to policy makers, health professionals and consumers.

1. COCHRANE CONSUMERS AND COMMUNICATION REVIEW PRIORITY-SETTING

Increasingly, Cochrane partners with consumers, health professionals and policy makers to ensure our research has real world relevance. Cochrane Consumers and Communication has conducted an extensive, multi-stage international consultation exercise to identify the top five priorities for new Cochrane reviews in health communication and participation.

When the topics are finalised, we will invite teams to undertake these high-priority reviews. We are currently exploring funding and partnership avenues that will enable us to trial novel review production and participation approaches as part of the development of these reviews.

2. COMMUNICATE TO VACCINATE (COMMVAC)

We are part of an international research project that aims to develop evidence-based recommendations to improve communication about childhood vaccinations, particularly in low-income countries. Our role in this project focuses on improving the way communication for vaccination is evaluated, by establishing which outcomes are important to measure.

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