

SA is the only jurisdiction in Australia without government support for statewide independent health consumer advocacy

The Health Consumer Advocacy Network of South Australia (Health CAN SA) is calling on all political parties, and all candidates for the next South Australian state election, to commit to:

Provide core, ongoing state government funding for an independent health consumer organisation in South Australia so all South Australians can be informed about and influence statewide health policy, and work in partnership for safety and quality improvement in health care and services

Key Actions:

1. Ensuring Partnership at Every Level

- a. State government recognition for health consumer advocacy and policy that includes restored funding to reinstate a state health consumer peak body.
- b. Initial 5 year funding contract with indexation to ensure fiscal certainty for systemic health advocacy and policy in South Australia.
- c. A commitment to continuation of recurrent funding of state health consumer peak body.

2. Making it Happen in SA Health

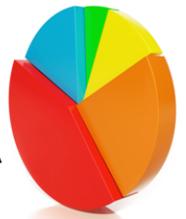
- a. Ensure systemic health advocacy and policy is recognised and resourced in core services.
- b. Appointment of a Senior Health Consumer Engagement Advisor in SA Health reporting to the Chief Executive Officer.
- c. Establishment of a SA Health, Consumer Advisory Committee/Community of Practice with consumer representatives from all Local Health Networks, Health CAN SA, key community groups in particular communities of identified lived experience of health disadvantage.

3. Promoting Health Consumer Rights

- a. State government recognition and alignment of the role of an independent state health consumer peak body as part of ensuring health consumer rights under the Charter of Health and Community Services Rights in South Australia.

4. Making it Happen in the Community

- a. Establishment of a model for individual consumer advocacy under the newly formed independent health consumer advocacy peak body.
- b. Additional funding for statewide training in partnering with consumers in consumer centred care and in governance for clinicians, policy makers, educators, safety and quality managers, leaders and for consumers, carers and community members.
- c. A statewide campaign to support and boost the numbers, training and membership of health consumer advocates and representatives facilitated by the health consumer peak body.



About the Health Consumer Advocacy Network of South Australia

The **Health Consumer Advocacy Network of South Australia** (Health CAN SA - the Network) is a group of health consumers who believe the people, who pay for, fund and use health services in South Australia should be able to inform and influence how those services are designed and delivered.

The Network recognises and promotes the growing body of evidence that partnering with health consumers ensures greater access and equity, and safety and quality health care, and improves health outcomes.

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In 2019 the South Australian government made a decision to cease funding health consumer partnerships at a statewide level. As a result, the Health Consumers Alliance of South Australia (HCASA) ended in September 2020. After nearly 20 years there is no longer independent, systemic health consumer advocacy in South Australia to inform health policy. This leaves South Australia out of step with all other states with government funded, independent and systemic peak health consumer organisations.

HCASA was informed that with the devolution of governance to the Local Health Network Governing Boards, the Local Health Networks would be responsible for consulting with consumers and the community. In practice this decision has however:

- Failed to ensure independent health consumer advocacy
- Failed to ensure statewide consumer and community input into informing statewide health policy
- Failed to ensure broad consumer and community consultation and engagement
- Failed to ensure minimum training to underpin and prepare health consumers to work effectively with health services
- Failed to provide health consumers with an independent voice in SA

Health Consumers in South Australia have established Health CAN SA as direct response to the closure of Health Consumers Alliance of South Australia as a commitment to ensuring independent health consumer advocacy continues in South Australia. This group has no funds and relies on the voluntary support of its members.

What's happening now?

Whilst most LHNs have or are in the process of developing such a strategy, there are growing concerns raised by health consumers to Health CAN SA of:

In Local Health Networks

- Establishment of siloed consumer registers by LHNs
- Isolated rather than embedded consumer engagement
- Resignation of senior consumer engagement managers in key LHNs resulting in a lack of health consumer advocacy expertise in senior leadership positions



- Lack of training of health consumer advocates specific to preparing them for their role (other than induction and orientation) ie no training in governance, advocacy, health system and policy, principles of consumer engagement and participation, working on committees etc

In SA Health

- Reduced consumer representation on statewide decision-making committees
- Ad hoc, limited or no health consumer and community input into statewide health policy
- The lack of any direct health consumer advice to the Minister for Health and Wellbeing or the Chief Executive Officer SA Health on emerging health issues, risks or concerns to ensure early and informed action.
- Health consumers have no mechanism to raise concerns about health care and service delivery in South Australia other than through complaints processes.

What needs to happen?

Bureaucrats and politicians must acknowledge and action their accountability for ensuing health consumer advocacy in South Australia to ensure;

- SA health services comply with national standards and health service planning, delivery, monitoring and evaluation is informed by consumers through their lived experience and
- the SA health system meets the individual needs of consumers and improves health outcomes for individuals and communities.

Consumers and communities must have meaningful input into the development of a new advocacy model, in its codesign and in it's ongoing role and function. Government funding is essential to ensure a health consumer advocacy model that is able to achieve its core mission with legitimacy, core.

Immediate priorities outline the need for:

(1) A central health consumer peak body

- To provide support, advice and mentoring for consumer advocates independent of the LHNs and other organisations with which they are involved/aligned
- To build the capacity of health consumers through information, training, networking, projects and forums.
- To represent consumers, independent of specific organisations/networks (ie LHNs, SA Health, SAHMRI).
- To establish health consumer advocacy and engagement policy, guidelines, resources independent of the health service providers.
- To maintain and expand relationships with communities and community organisations to ensure broader understanding and representation of diverse needs
- To promote and support consumers as partners in health and medical research, health education and curriculum and other relevant stakeholders in the health sector.



(2) Centralised consumer advocate recruitment, training and mentoring

- To ensure appropriate recruitment of consumer advocates who are 'role ready' (ie appropriate recruitment and screening, orientation, lived experience, skills and ability based).
- To ensure consumer advocates are recruited from diverse backgrounds, lived experience, knowledge and skills and who have other opportunities to develop these skills through a range of recruitment opportunities.
- To ensure access to trained, experienced consumer advocates who have broad opportunities to develop advocacy skills.
- To ensure access to information about consumer vacancies including LHNs, SA Health, other sectors, state and national bodies.
- To ensure appropriate, transparent recruitment processes free from tokenism and "cherry picking" (ie appropriate expression of interest recruitment and screening, orientation, lived experience, skills and ability based, sitting fees etc).

(3) Ongoing training for both consumers and workforce

- To ensure new consumer advocates receive appropriate levels of training from an independent provider, that is evidence and skills-based, consistent with standards and from entry to leadership programs.
- To ensure the training reflects current best practice and is provided by experts in consumer engagement and advocacy.
- To help build the capacity and capability of the health workforce to understand the benefits and implement consumer engagement at all levels of the health service.

Our members would be pleased to speak with all political parties and candidates to speak further about our election policy and the priorities and needs of South Australian health consumers

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