

## 2 How engagement relates to the Aged Care Standards

Each of the Aged Care Quality Standards has a consumer outcome at its centre. Engagement is about how we communicate, involve, and co-create this with people. But what does that mean in practice?

It means, first, that effective, ongoing, responsive engagement strategies are fundamental to every aspect of care services. There is a lot of detail in the Standards, and each point has some implications for how we engage with consumers. However, there are four major themes across all the standards that underpin how engagement should look.

### Video: “Engagement and the new Aged Care Quality Standards”

This video takes a quick look at how consumer engagement relates to the Aged Care Quality Standards. The video was co-produced with three older people who are part of COTA Queensland’s volunteer community team. Watch the video at [www.cotaql.org.au](http://www.cotaql.org.au).

#### PARTNERSHIP

Partnership is about equal involvement in decision making. It means being open to changing how things are done, responding to what you hear and being willing to negotiate, and keeping the dialogue open at all times. It means that everyone has all the information they need, explained to them in a way they can understand, and can make properly informed decisions. This includes any risks they might be taking with the choices they’re making.

It also means that everyone’s needs, both those of the consumer and of the service, are properly considered when an agreement is reached. The consumer might be able to make the final decision about their care, but you need to work together to help them identify their needs and goals, talk through the various options, and find solutions that will work.

Partnership isn’t just individual. Consumers can be involved in most aspects of governance. This could include development of clinical practice, policies and procedures, design of service models or services, design of physical spaces, or development of staff training.

#### RESPONDING TO THE INDIVIDUAL

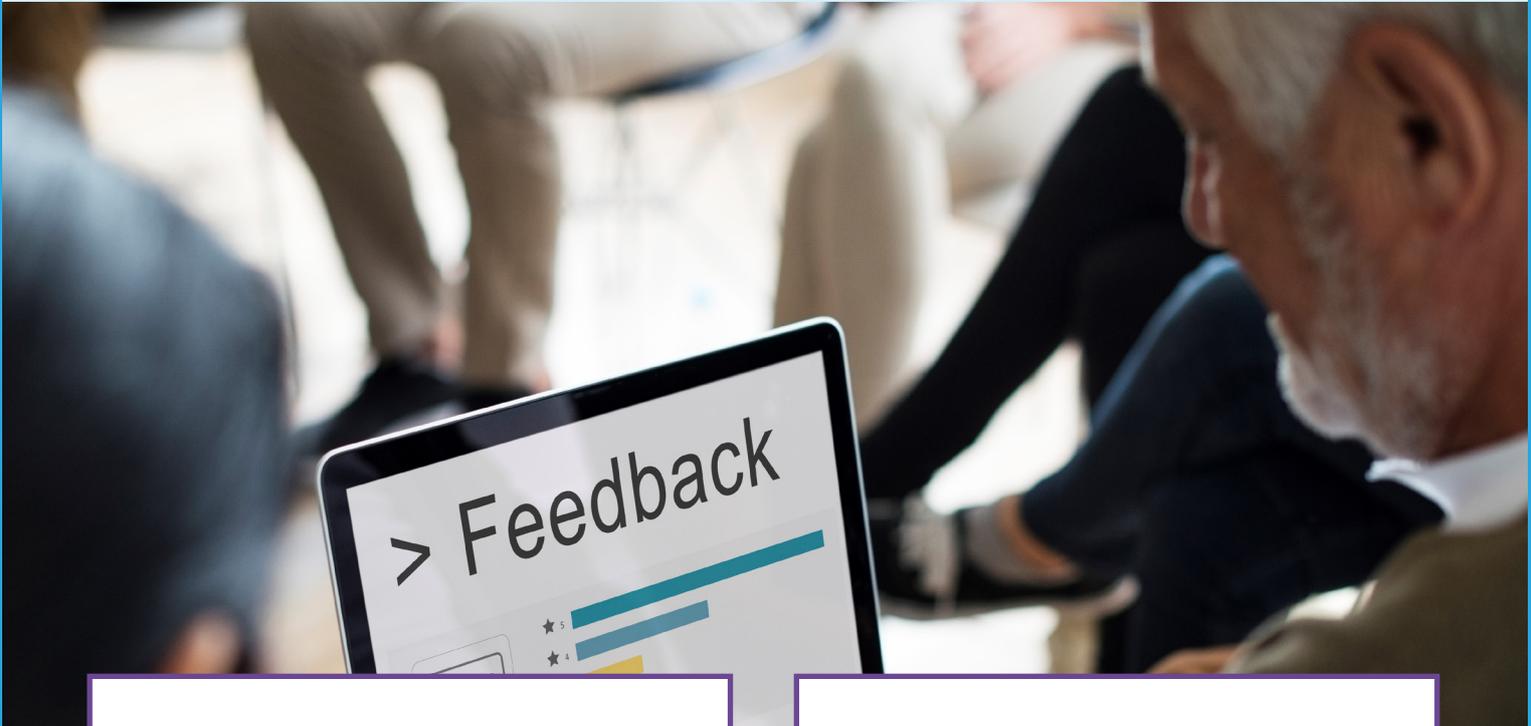
You might have many people using your service, but only one that is quite like the one you’re dealing with at that moment. You have to take time to listen and adapt.

The Aged Care Quality Standards include requirements for clinical care and a range of other things that support people’s health, safety, and wellbeing. However, putting consumers at the centre means that we have a different way of setting and meeting those requirements. You need to take the time to understand each individual’s needs and experience, what they need to feel safe and supported, and what they need to live the life they choose, including the risks they want to take. This is different for every person. You need to understand what is important to each person about who they are.

While it’s important to understand the potential implications of someone’s cultural background, personal background, or sexuality, for example, it is also important not to make assumptions about them based on these characteristics.

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### SUPPORTING PEOPLE TO ENGAGE

People have their own unique needs, preferences, identity, ideas about care, and experiences. These all affect whether they can, or will, engage with your service the way the person next to them might. Just because you think it should be simple for people to understand something doesn't mean it is. There are many people who are vulnerable in this system for a range of reasons, some of which might not be obvious. People's life experiences or challenges can't always be seen from the outside. They may have a very different understanding of things like risk and choice. You need to work with people to understand what help they need to participate.

Communication is an important part of choice. Just because someone is not able to communicate in the ways you expect them to does not mean they can't participate.

### GETTING STAFFING RIGHT

Getting the right staff and giving them the right skills is essential.

Staff performance is not just about clinical skills or efficiency. What drives consumer experience and how good staff are at responding to their needs are the skills of staff in engaging. This means that staff need to have strong skills in communication as well as emotional intelligence - recognising their own emotions and responding to those of others - and being open to working in partnership with consumers.

Not everyone develops these skills naturally. Some need training and support from managers, mentors, and colleagues. They need you to model good practice and a strong positive culture. In good examples of staff recruitment and workforce management, consumers have a role in assisting the service to ensure that staff are the right fit.

