



Health Care Consumers' Association Inc  
100 Maitland Street  
HACKETT ACT 2602  
Phone: 02 6230 7800  
Fax: 02 6230 7833  
Email: [adminofficer@hcca.org.au](mailto:adminofficer@hcca.org.au)  
ABN: 59 698 548 902

**HCCA Response to the 'Building a  
National Clinicians Network'  
Discussion Paper  
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Contact:  
Darlene Cox  
Executive Director  
Health Care Consumers' Association  
[darlenecox@hcca.org.au](mailto:darlenecox@hcca.org.au)  
02 6230 7800



## **Background**

The Health Care Consumers' Association (HCCA) of the ACT was formed over 30 years ago to provide a voice for consumers on local health issues and now provides opportunities for health care consumers in the ACT to participate in all levels of health service planning, policy development and decision making.

HCCA involves consumers through:

- consumer representation
- consultations
- training in health rights and navigating the health system
- community forums
- information sessions about health services
- advocating for issues of concern to consumers

The HCCA is dedicated to the promotion of consumer-centred health care, which we believe can be successfully achieved through the application of these five key principles:

1. Respect
2. Choice and empowerment
3. Consumer involvement in health policy
4. Access and support
5. Information

Our submission is based on these principles and was developed in consultation with our members.

## **HCCA Response to the 'Building a National Clinicians Network' Discussion Paper**

HCCA welcomes the opportunity to provide feedback on the Establishment of a National Clinicians Network (NCN). We agree that a series of state and national forums designed to enhance clinical leadership and influence health reform could be greatly beneficial to the Australian health care system. Moreover, we strongly support the stated aim of the NCN to 'improve patient outcomes and pathways through the health system'. Better integration of health care is a critical issue for consumers and one that we are keen to work with the National Lead Clinicians Group in addressing.

While we agree that the role of health research should be to drive health policy and reform, rather than the other way around, we think it is also important that consumers are given the opportunity to engage meaningfully with this process. As such, we would like to see the NCN designed in a way that involves both consumers and clinicians working together to identify significant issues and developing effective strategies to implement their solutions.

### **Scope and Function**

We found the discussion paper to be quite brief and sometimes vague. The information provided about the NCN does not fully explain the scope that this project will have in practice. It is important to be clear on what the objectives and expected outcomes are in order to be able to evaluate the success of the NCN. In addition, the term 'clinical leadership' needs to be defined in detail, including some information about the implications that this approach will have to health care reform and services. For instance, is clinical leadership limited to medical practitioners, or can it also apply to allied and junior health professionals?

We would also like to find out exactly how the NCN is intended to 'build on' existing structures. While we would support an initiative of this nature, the wording used in the discussion paper makes it appear as though the NCN will ultimately *replace* existing clinical structures.

### **Selecting Relevant issues**

The discussion paper makes reference to the need to focus on issues of state and national significance and to set key questions for discussion. We would be interested to know how these will be identified and by whom. It is true that clinicians have significant firsthand experience of how the health system is operating, and so are well placed to identify these issues. However, consumers can also provide valuable insight into problems with the health system as they are the people receiving the care and suffering the consequences when that care is ineffective. Health care consumers are also the people who will be most affected by the outcomes of the actions implemented by the NCN, making it important that they are able to play a

role in determining the focus of NCN forums. In addition, it would be worth considering a potential role for Medicare Locals in identifying areas of importance to consumers.

### **Consumer involvement**

It would also be good to see consumers being given to opportunity to provide input and feedback to the forums themselves. We note that consumer representatives have been listed as part of the target audience of the NCN forums, but would like to know more about what their role will be. In order to truly promote better patient-centred care and achieve better health outcomes, consumers need to be involved in key discussions and setting priorities. HCCA would also be happy to assist the National Lead Clinicians Group in building relationships with other consumer organisations in the ACT and engaging effectively with consumers.

### **Acting on Forum Outcomes and Evaluation**

The guiding principle 'focus on solutions and outcomes' is very important and will be fundamental to ensuring that the NCN has a positive influence on Australian health care. However, it is equally important that mechanisms are put in place to ensure that these solutions are put into practice. Consumers want to be reassured that the money invested in the NCN will produce tangible health benefits. Under 'Accountability', the discussion paper states that actions arising from forums will be provided in a report. There also needs to be a process for evaluating their implementation as well as the impact that they have on health systems.

We would also like to see NCN outcomes being distributed to the broader Australian public so that they can have access to important information about how their health care might be likely to change in the future. This will also give consumers the opportunity to provide feedback on the solutions identified by clinicians.

### **Encouraging attendance**

As we support the aims and goals of the LCG in establishing the NCN, we are also keen to see that it is successful and able to operate to its full potential. As such, we agree that it will be necessary to attract a broad range of clinicians from different locations and specialties to participate in the NCN. Without succeeding in this area, the NCN cannot be effective. Due to its importance, we would like to see comprehensive strategies developed for engaging clinicians as well as to identify groups or areas that have not been successfully engaged and determine why this is the case.

We are happy to discuss our submission further.