

## Consumer Involvement in Australian Medical Research is Growing



A national workshop to discuss consumer and community involvement (CCI) in health and medical research has heard there is a surprising level of activity in Australia including some pockets of world-class excellence.

The workshop conducted by the Australia Health Research Alliance agreed that while the principles of CCI are increasingly accepted in the research community, much more work needs to be done to support wider adoption, demonstrate its value and measure its impact.

Co-chair of AHRA's national CCI initiative, Professor Gary Geelhoed, said there was evidently enormous passion amongst many researchers and health administrators for CCI.

"The workshop reiterated that in order to achieve faster translation of research into clinical practice you have to have consumers involved in every stage – from determining the best question for the research through to implementation of the answers in primary and hospital care."

Professor Geelhoed, who is also the Executive Director of the Western Australian Health Translation Network (WAHTN), said there was a wide variation between the states in both the level of CCI activity and the methods used to achieve it.

"While it's really taken hold in some jurisdictions and they have a more evolved system, in other places there's quite a long way to go with CCI.

"It's one of these ideas that slowly grows over many years and we need to take all the good things we are doing with CCI across Australia and share them. I'm sure that out of this meeting there will be much more collaboration realised."

AHRA is conducting a review of CCI activity in Australia and recently completed a survey of almost a thousand people in the sector.

Sydney Health Partners is co-leading the AHRA CCI initiative and its Chief Operating Officer, Aisling Forrest, described the findings of the survey as a great encouragement to all those committed to promoting CCI in Australia.

“The survey tells us very clearly that consumer and community involvement in health and medical research *is* valued by researchers, health professionals and – importantly – by consumer and community members,” said Ms Forrest.

She said the survey also indicates that while there are a wide range of tools and resources available to support CCI, “there are opportunities to increase awareness and provide simpler pathways for consumers and the community to become involved.”

SHP consumer representative, Mohit Kumar, said it was obvious from the workshop that there is now general acceptance of the value consumers can bring to research.

“This way we are not just delivering better health outcomes, we are also being smarter about the way we spend public funds.”

The Australian Health Research Alliance is the peak national body representing Australia’s network of Advanced Health Research and Translation Centres, including WAHTN and SHP, and Centres for Innovation in Regional Health. The centres are accredited by the National Health and Medical Research Council and together aim to accelerate the translation of research innovations into health care improvements.

*Photo caption: (L-R) Professor Gary Geelhoed, Mohit Kumar and Aisling Forrest at the Australian Health Research Alliance consumer and community involvement workshop.*