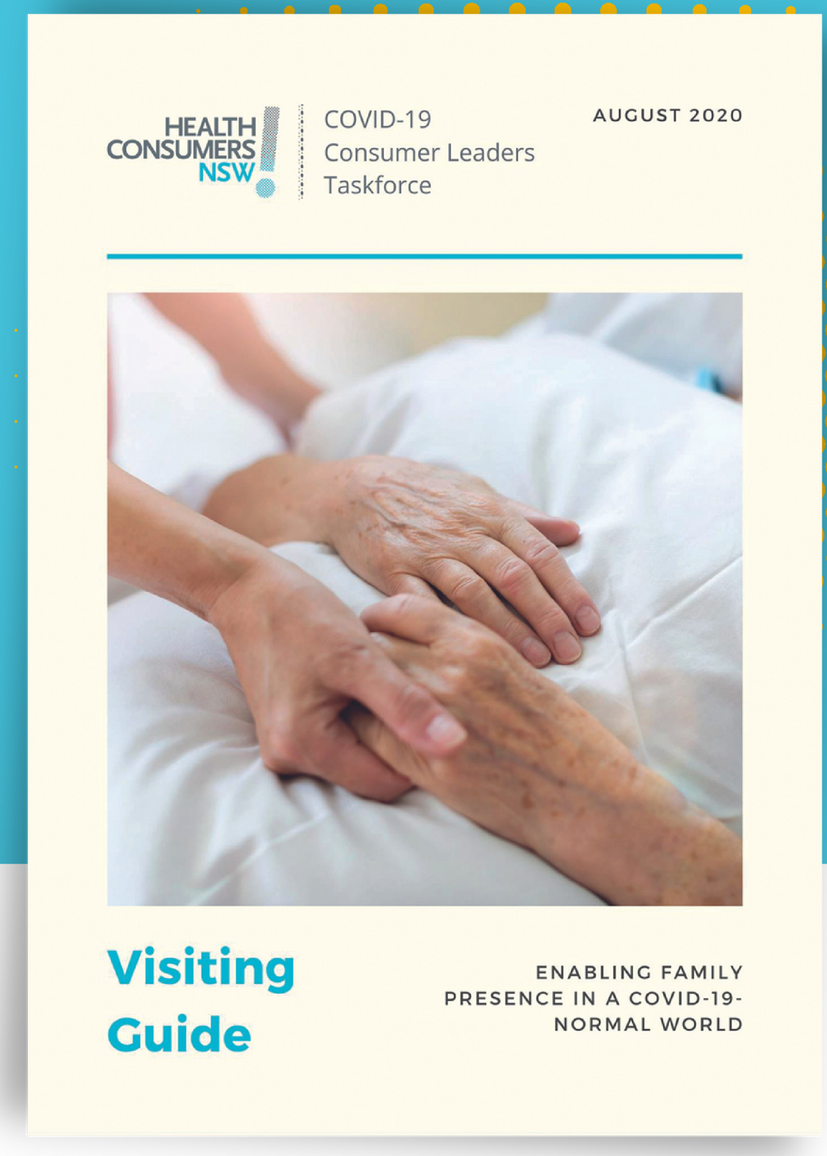
project

HEALTHCARE VISITING GUIDE

ENABLING FAMILY PRESENCE IN A COVID-19 NORMAL WORLD



PROJECT OVERVIEW

As soon as COVID-19 hit Australia, HCNSW established the Consumer Representative Hub (an online engagement space) and formed the *Consumer Leaders Taskforce*.

The Taskforce consists of consumer representative leaders in NSW. Information from the consumer representative hub (our consumer 'rep' base) kept the *Consumers Leaders Taskforce* informed about the important issues and concerns consumers had about health services' response to COVID-19.

The two groups pinpointed visiting policies and family presence in healthcare settings as a priority during the early pandemic days. The group set out to research and publish healthcare visiting guidelines from a consumer point of view.

KEY PROJECT MESSAGES

- The guide outlines a set of principles, developed by health consumers, that balance protecting staff, patients, and families while also acknowledging the importance of the presence of family and friends to health outcomes.
- It informs and emphasises patient and family perspectives around the issues faced by restricting patients' visitors to health facilities.
- Each of the stakeholder groups are essential and significant players in keeping each other safe. The guide acknowledges that no one stakeholder group can succeed alone. We are all dependent on each other.
- The guide is a pragmatic document that can be used to review and reframe family presence responses.

PROJECT OUTCOMES

- Some of the consumer leader authors and HCNSW staff met with the NSW Minister of Health to discuss the guide and its principles in 2020.
- As a result, the guide's recommendations were included in the official NSW Health guidelines and were incorporated into NSW Health policy.
- The principles were used in many NSW Local Health Districts during the pandemic.
- The publication was the first NSW pandemic response document that was organised by consumers, the topic was identified by consumers, and the guide was published by consumers with the support of HCNSW.
- It set the bar and experience for working together remotely and being able to provide a credible, important and recognised consumer voice to emergencies.

The guide recognises COVID-19 as the common threat. All stakeholders (health staff, health administration and consumers) share the same common ground – to be safe and be confident that they can provide or receive uncompromised health services without unduly risking themselves and each other. But our guide brought the stakeholder voice that was missing - and got lost in the emergency response - to the table: The consumer voice.

WHAT NEXT?

Almost three years into the pandemic, the structures and processes we set up together with consumers and their leaders to quickly and nimbly work together hold strong and are one of the main ways we work together. While the guide's principles still set out important points about how to arrange healthcare visiting practices in times of crisis.

We are seeing COVID-centred care, not patient-centred care.

With the coronavirus prompting hospitals to enforce strict visitor policies, many women are leaving the hospital system and looking to birth at home with or without a private midwife.

Some people don't have close family, friends or carers, and well-wishers are very important to them.

Download the report by scanning the QR code.

HEALTH CONSUMERS NSW