



Consumers taking control

Finding your way through the healthcare maze

There are lots of services and resources out there to help you navigate the health system. Searching online will provide you with up to date information and links. Here are just a few:

- [Find Help Tas](#) provides a publicly accessible, independently managed database of Tasmania's social services
- Consumers Health Forum of Australia: [Find your way. Guide to our Health System](#)
- Primary Health Tasmania: [My Passport to Better Health. Connecting Care](#)
- Beyond Blue: [The Beyond Blue Support Service](#)
- Association for Children with Disability (Tas.) Inc [Finding your way](#)

Before an appointment

Get clear in your mind about what you want to get from the appointment.

- Write a list of any questions you want to ask and anything you want to tell the service provider before you go.

- Gather together information to take with you on current conditions, past surgeries or illnesses, and any medications you are taking.
- Decide whether you want to take anyone else along for support and an extra pair of ears.
- Work out where you need to go and how long it will take to get there.

Asking questions

You have a right to ask questions of service providers and to get clear answers. Some people find it overwhelming to receive lots of information, while others want as much information as they can get.

- Let the service provider know how much information you want and how much you want to be involved with decisions about your care.
- If you don't understand what they are saying, tell them. This does not mean you are stupid – just that they are not good at communicating.
- Make sure they listen to what you say and what you want.
- Don't be afraid to ask 'silly' questions – these are often important.

- Take notes of what they say.
- Ask for an explanation of anything that you don't understand.
- Ask if there are any handouts, websites or other places you can get more information.
- If they can't help with any specific issues, ask who you should contact for more help.
- If any drugs are prescribed, ask:
 - Why should I take this?
 - Are there any side effects?
 - What does it cost?
 - Is there a generic (cheaper) form of the drug?
- If you are sent for tests ask:
 - What is the test for?
 - How much does it cost?
 - When will I get results?
- If a procedure is recommended, ask:
 - Why do I need this procedure?
 - How many times have you done this procedure?
 - Are there any alternatives?
 - What happens if I don't do anything?
 - What are the possible complications?
 - What are the costs?

Resources:

<http://www.consumerreports.org/cro/news/2015/02/3-questions-to-ask-a-doctor/index.htm>

<http://www.ahrq.gov/patients-consumers/patient-involvement/ask-your-doctor/10questions.html>

Know your providers

- Find out who's who in the world of health practitioners – check out [Clinicians' Guides - a Consumer Perspective](#); and [The Company We Keep: A user's guide to mental health clinicians](#).
- Ask other consumers for advice on who to see (noting that most service providers are not able to make specific recommendations).
- Find specific service providers. Some provide a list of the services they offer and details such the availability of bulk-billing, cost, accessibility. Check out:
 - Primary Health Tasmania: [Tasmanian Health Directory](#)
 - DHHS Service Finder – [South](#) | [North](#) | [North West](#)
 - [Find Help Tas](#)

Get involved

There are lots of ways for consumers to get involved in changing health and community services' systems so that they are more 'user-friendly and empowering. [Find Help Tas](#) lists lots of advocacy groups that you may like to join. Search for 'consumer advocacy' or for a specific group or condition.

Being on committees

Decision-making and advisory bodies need to 'abandon the idea that a consumer can possibly be "representative" on a committee' but acknowledge that every consumer is an expert in their own right and has their own lived experience.

- Before agreeing to go on a committee, find out some background information – eg. why they want a consumer representative, whether any other consumers are involved, and what expertise is needed.
- Ask about entitlements – are there any sitting fees, reimbursement of expenses, resources to consult with other consumers, support

from the organisation?

- Has the committee undertaken any training in recognising and working with consumers, or are they willing to do this?
- Is there recognition within the committee of [entrenched power imbalances](#) and the tyranny of status?
- Is the committee aware of the need for health literacy and have they undergone any training?
- Are committee members willing to sign up to a '[committee agreement](#)' on how to work collaboratively with consumers?

Resources:

[Our Consumer Place](#): Resource Centre for Mental Health Consumers

[Positive thinking about consumers](#)