

CANBERRA HOSPITAL EXPANSION PROJECT REQUIREMENTS FOR FAMILY AND CARER SPACES

Introduction

There is increasing evidence that family members and carers play an important role in the care and recovery of patients in hospital. Programs such as the award-winning Carer Zones Project¹ at the Blacktown and Mt Druitt Hospital (BMDH), demonstrate the value of investing in strategies that support family members and carers to be involved in patient care. At BMDH this was done by providing a carer zone in 40 single rooms. This included a lounge that could convert to a bed. They also changed procedures regarding visitors and developed information and resources for carers.

This project found that supporting carers to stay overnight in hospital with the patient led to:

- improved patient and carer experience. Patients with carers staying overnight reported reduced anxiety and improved satisfaction while carers also reported very favourably on their experience
- improved opportunity for staff-carer communication
- a positive impact on nurse workload with a reduced frequency of nurse calls being reported
- a reduction in the number of patient falls within the Stroke and Rehabilitation wards
- increased opportunity for clinicians to communicate with carers leading to better discharge planning, education opportunities and the exchange of relevant information.

The new emergency, surgical and critical care building at the Canberra Hospital provides a unique opportunity to design and construct a facility that is family centered, addressing the specific needs of family members and carers as well as the consumer. This document outlines the types of spaces and features that family members and carers will require in the new facility to enable them to better support consumers during an admission to hospital.

This paper was informed by the views and experiences of healthcare consumers, including family members and carers, and members of the SPIRE Consumer Reference Group.

What do family members and carers need?

Supporting a loved one admitted to hospital is usually a stressful time for family members and carers. They are often experiencing heightened levels of anxiety, fear, emotion and sometimes grief. During this time, family members and carers may need to access a range of different spaces within the hospital to meet their physical, psychological and social needs. These spaces will vary in size, location, level of privacy and amenities offered and are detailed below.

While the types of family and carer spaces will need to vary across the hospital, all these spaces need to be:

- a healing environment based on evidence-based design principles
- designed in consultation with consumers, family members and carers

¹ Refer <http://www.bmdhproject.health.nsw.gov.au/projects/carers-zones>

- pleasant, comfortable, relaxing and quiet non-clinical spaces with access to plenty of natural light and views to the outdoors, where possible
- accessible for people with disabilities, mobility issues or prams
- culturally appropriate, safe and welcoming to all people, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders and people from culturally and linguistically diverse communities.
- a Dementia Enabling Environment² to maximise enablement and wellbeing for people living with dementia. By implementing the principles of a Dementia enabling environment, it is possible to create a calm, inclusive and functional area for all people.

Waiting areas

General waiting areas need to accommodate family members and carers, including children, who are accompanying consumers. The requirements will differ depending on the area of the hospital and the length of time spent waiting in that space. For example, the waiting rooms of the Emergency Department and Day Surgery Unit will have different requirements to the waiting room in Medical Imaging.

Waiting rooms need to include:

- Access to natural lighting and outdoor views
- a mix of ergonomic chairs with and without arms to accommodate people with different needs, including chairs to accommodate bariatric consumers
- The layout of chairs should be oriented to have direct sight lines to information sources, i.e. where people will be called by clinicians or monitors displaying status or wait times. The layout should allow for auditory and visual privacy, i.e. avoid unbroken rows of chairs all facing the same way.
- Small group seating should be provided to allow people to be separated from strangers yet close with family members.
- Access to WIFI and recharging points
- Display of up-to-date information and resources
- Children's play area and quiet entertainment options e.g. iPad with headphones
- Enough space for people with wheelchairs, strollers and other mobility aids to move around.
- Access to healthy and allergy-friendly food (not just snacks in a vending machine), water and beverage options, particularly where consumers may have waiting times e.g. in Emergency Department. Consumers should be able to access food and drinks outside of standard café hours.

In the Emergency Department waiting room, consumers are very supportive of the inclusion of a paid concierge (staff member) who can provide information, directions and assistance to consumers.

² Refer to [Dementia Enabling Environment Design Principles](https://www.enablingenvironments.com.au/hospitals.html) developed by Professor Richard Fleming, Wollongong University. See also <https://www.enablingenvironments.com.au/hospitals.html>

Inpatient room/bedside

Where a consumer is an inpatient of the hospital, it is expected that family members and carers will spend most of their time in the patient's room or by their bedside. Where possible, inpatient rooms should be designed to include separate zones for the patient, clinicians and carers (i.e. trizone)

The carer zone should include a lounge that can be converted to a bed for overnight stays. The lounge could include storage underneath for linen, pillows and belongings. There should be sufficient space in the room to allow for clinicians to provide care unimpeded by the carer zone. A curtain that can be drawn around the lounge would provide privacy for both the patient and the carer. In rooms where a lounge cannot be accommodated, comfortable recliner chairs should be provided.

Other features that are required in an inpatient room includes:

- Storage for belongings of family member and carers to avoid tripping hazards from items placed on the floor
- Easy access to a toilet and bathroom facilities
- Charging station for mobile devices and access to wifi
- Access to linen, pillows and blankets.

Small private/semi private spaces

Family members and carers have expressed the need for smaller private/semi private areas in close proximity to the patient where they can retreat for privacy to make phone calls, take a quick break or hold private conversations. Consumers have found that a designated room or space at the end of each floor of the hospital with views to the outdoors and seating was suitable this purpose.

Beverage Bars

Having easy access to a beverage bar for tea, coffee and water was important to family members and carers. Having access to biscuits or other snacks in these areas was also appreciated. Ideally, these areas are located close to inpatient rooms and waiting rooms.

Family Lounge/respice area

In some cases, family members and carers will need to spend extended periods of time in hospital with a patient. It is not always possible for carers to leave the hospital for any length of time, e.g. where a patient is critically ill or where they have travelled to hospital from interstate. It is important that these family members and carers can access larger non-clinical spaces, or lounge areas for respite from their caring role, have a meal or use as a comfortable waiting area. Ideally, these family lounges are near patient areas, such as the Intensive Care Unit, inpatient units, the Perioperative Suite and Cardiac Care Unit.

The amenity of these areas is critical. They should be calm, relaxed, comfortable and home-like non clinical spaces with plenty of natural light, views of the outdoors and, if possible, access to the outdoors, e.g. a terrace. They need to be fully accessible to accommodate wheelchairs, other mobility aids and prams. They should be culturally appropriate, welcoming spaces.

A lounge area should include:

- Groupings of comfortable chairs and lounges to accommodate people who want some privacy as well as family groups who wish to sit together
- Sleep pods or areas where a carer can rest
- Fully accessible toilet and bathroom facilities, including showers, and a fully accessible adult changing facility³
- Kitchen facilities, including a fridge and a microwave oven, tea and coffee facilities, cutlery and crockery. The kitchen and its finishes should be domestically styled to create a home-like environment. It is noted that the inclusion of fridges and microwave ovens is against current hospital policy. Alternate solutions to accessing healthy, allergy-friendly meals need to be identified if family members are unable to access a fridge and microwave oven. Purchasing food from a café, especially over several days, is expensive. A carer may also find it difficult to leave the patient to eat at regular mealtimes and may require after-hours access to food.
- Dining table and chairs so people can sit down and eat comfortably
- Access to some form of entertainment
- Charging station for mobile devices and Wi-Fi access
- Baby feeding and changing facilities
- A separate children's play area which offers play options that are not too disruptive and allows parents to observe their children
- Information and resources may be made available in this area. However, there must be a process in place to ensure this information is current and restocked as required. It may be also useful to have a volunteer or concierge located in the lounge if it also functions as an information resource centre for carers.
- The inclusion of alternative lighting options, such as warm lighting and lamps, and artwork can contribute to a welcoming, home-like environment.

Smaller private rooms for family meetings and gatherings

There are occasions when family members and carers need to access a private room for meetings with clinicians or discussions with other family members. As family meetings are often focused on making very difficult, emotional decisions or families may be grieving, it is preferable that the room is a calm, comfortable and private space rather than a standard office meeting room i.e. furnished with lounges or comfortable chairs, art work, plenty of natural light etc. The inclusion of video-conferencing facilities would also be useful for family members who are unable to participate in person.

Spaces for cultural/spiritual/religious spaces

Separate spaces need to be provided within the hospital for cultural, spiritual or religious purposes, for example a chapel, cultural grieving rites etc.

³ Refer <https://changingplaces.org.au/>

Access to Outdoors

Many consumers highlighted the importance of being able to access outdoor green spaces, such as gardens and outdoor terraces, and connect with nature. These spaces provide important respite from the clinical environment; a place to sit quietly and reflect or grieve, or to go for a walk.

The outdoor areas should include plenty of seating and some protection from the elements such as adequate shade in the hot summers. There should be a variety of areas within these outdoor spaces where people can either retreat for privacy or sit in small groups. The areas need to be accessible for people with disabilities, mobility issues and with prams. They also need to be safe, especially at night, so good lighting is also important.

Other issues raised

Consumers also raised the following issues regarding family and carer spaces:

- The importance of clear signage directing people to the room, lounges, and other facilities. It is useful if signage includes walking distances/times (eg if pushing a wheelchair for a long distance)
- Family members and carers should be provided information on the spaces and facilities available to them and how they can access them. This information should be provided on admission.
- In light of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic and likelihood of future pandemics, consumers flagged the importance of ensuring all family and carer spaces are designed with sufficient space to allow people to maintain the appropriate physical distancing measures to reduce the risk of contagion.