



SUBMISSION

Coombs Health Centre Paediatric Expansion

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Health Care Consumers' Association

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About HCCA

The **Health Care Consumers' Association (HCCA)** is a health promotion agency and the peak consumer advocacy organisation in the Canberra region. HCCA provides a voice for consumers on local health issues and provides opportunities for health care consumers to participate in all levels of health service planning, policy development and decision making.

HCCA involves consumers through:

- consumer representation and consumer and community consultations;
- training in health rights and navigating the health system;
- community forums and information sessions about health services; and
- research into consumer experience of human services.

HCCA is a Health Promotion Charity registered with the Australian Charities and Not-for-profits Commission.

Considerations for consultation rooms

1. Furniture

Consider furniture selection with parents and children in mind. Acknowledging the impact of space constraints, choices could include:

- lower chairs for children
- larger, comfortable chairs with arms to accommodate children on parents lap and/or breastfeeding
- small couches that parent/child can sit together on

Acknowledging that the waiting room for the centre is out of scope for this project, these suggestions also apply to furniture within it. Should there be a time/ opportunity to consider an upgrade furniture in that room, please consider these needs.

2. Health literacy and inclusion measures

Again, acknowledging that the reception area and toilet/amenities areas are not in scope for this project, however some signage may be. We include this advice for the in-scope area, in hope that it may also be able to be applied throughout the centre.

- Greater recognition of multicultural community needs:
 - placing a welcome sign with words like “welcome” or “hello” in other languages near the entrance/volunteer desk.
 - A designated, visible area for handouts in languages.
 - Signage or QR codes to explain TIS availability.
 - Visual signs of inclusion like art or flags.
 - Icons (standard international) should be used as much as possible on signage, as well as words.
- Deliberate choice of plain/ simple English words on signage and information, to ensure maximum understanding for everyone. An example: In Building 5 at TCH, part of the new ED is just called ‘**Children’s**’ not ‘Paediatric’. This terminology change was advocated by HCCA and consumers, as part of a broader philosophy to put everyday language on consumer-facing signage, to improve accessibility. HCCA staff have health literacy expertise/ training and can advise on wording choices.
- We support the relabelling of toilet/amenities cubicles as ‘all gender’ and would like to see any new cubicles continue to be labelled as all gender. Many different parts of the community benefit from all gender amenities. We have a separate (currently being drafted) advice paper on this subject which is attached for your interest.

3. Consultation space/s adapted for sensory considerations

Consider having all or several of the consultation spaces adapted to provide a sensory friendly environment. The use of sensory spaces as a therapeutic and de-escalation tool in health care is well known. A sensory room has been integrated into the Children's area of Building 5 ED at The Canberra Hospital.

Who benefits from sensory friendly spaces?

- Neurodivergent children and people of all ages
- People with epilepsy, asthma, Multiple Chemical Sensitivities (MCS), sensory processing disorders, migraine headaches, cognitive impairments.

Lighting and visual

- Ideally lighting is dimmable
- Lighting suitable for clinical observations may need be provided but this does not need to be the main lighting- it can be turned on when needed for observations. Or used generally, but able to be replaced by dimmable/low lighting when needed.
- Additional lighting could also be used for visual stimming (e.g. lamps, coloured lights) to create a quiet/calming space
- Maintaining natural light into consultation spaces where possible.
- Remove visual clutter- calm effect

Sound

Sound-reduced or soundproofed spaces. Baffling materials can be integrated into seats, flooring, walls and ceilings.

Fragrance and scent

Consumers may be badly affected by strong smells and for some this can be dangerous or worsen their condition (consumers with asthma, Multiple Chemical Sensitivities and allergies). Air purifiers can be used in smaller spaces to remove overstimulating or harmful smells.

Materials and colours

Consider paint, fabric, and surface colour choices and finishes for calming effect. HCCA recommends expert advice is sought on this.

Sensory toy box

Make available a box of materials and objects that support stimming (e.g. fidget toys, lava lamp, light projections), and provide distraction/ calming/ engagement for children. A weighted blanket or toy could be included. Further advice should be sought on inclusions.

4. Virtual health care capability

Consumers need health care that is well integrated across different locations and providers. This is a challenge for some people, including children, in the ACT who have complex health needs and have part of their care team located interstate (e.g. at Westmead Children's Hospital). It can also apply to a mix of private and public care providers. Whole families are impacted across health, wellbeing, social, and financial fronts when care is poorly integrated. Virtual care can provide some important solutions for better, safer care in these circumstances.

Virtual health care is not just telehealth but also includes video conferencing facilities, remote monitoring of patient health, and safe and efficient ways of recording, storing, and sharing health information with patients who access and see multiple clinical specialties.

We advocate for technology capabilities which support the diagnostic, monitoring and health management needs of children with complex health conditions, and their families. We expect and advise that clinicians who care for these children are involved in the selection of technology for the new consultation spaces, which provides this capability.