

HICRG Advice Paper: Consumer Journey Mapping

1. Introduction

During the Health Infrastructure Consumer Reference Group meeting on 3 April 2025, Laura Cornhill from Studio Binocular presented on a wayfinding improvement project at the North Canberra Hospital (NCH). Canberra Health Services (CHS) has undertaken a rebranding process and the new signage throughout the NCH will reflect this. Laura shared the new proposed designs for the wayfinding signage and provided background information on how designs were developed. The new changes focus on the consumers' journey through the hospital. The signage was created around common issues and themes received from consumer feedback, staff feedback and accessibility standards.

This presentation led into a discussion of wayfinding and signage at other Canberra Health Services facilities. Tania Howarth, Senior Director – Program Management Office, kicked off the conversation by asking the group to discuss the wayfinding and signage at Community Health Centres compared to the Hospitals. The group discussed elements that are missing or could be improved in consumer journey mapping. Suggestions were made for improvement.

This paper includes the input, suggestions and needs raised by the group at this meeting. HCCA has expanded on that input with relevant additional information sourced from consumer input received in other infrastructure projects.

2. What is a Consumer's Wayfinding Journey?

A consumer's wayfinding journey refers to the process a consumer goes through to navigate a healthcare facility. This journey starts from their home and includes (ahead of an appointment or unplanned visit) planning their pre-arrival needs, through to the time they leave the facility.

When planning their visit, consumers need clear and accessible information about directions, area names, transport options and what to expect upon arrival. They need to know what facilities are available nearby - for example, where they can get food/drink, parenting rooms, children's play areas, accessible and all-gender amenities, sensory rooms, private spaces to attend to health needs, charging points for devices, medical and mobility equipment.

Upon arrival at a healthcare facility, consumers need clearly marked entrances, visible signage and approachable staff and/or volunteers to help guide them to the right place. Consumers feel more confident when they can easily find their way using signs, maps or navigation tools to access waiting areas, bathrooms and other key facilities. Printed maps remain appreciated and useful for many people.

It is also essential to provide support for consumer's language and sensory needs to ensure effective communication, comfort and inclusion. While waiting, consumers benefit from transparent wait time updates and clear directions to nearby spaces such as play areas or cafes.

Good wayfinding enhances comfort, confidence and accessibility. It is essential for consumers who may be nervous about their appointment, feeling unwell, unfamiliar with the facility, a non-English speaker or have physical or sensory impairments. Poor wayfinding can lead to anxiety and distress and contribute to poorer outcomes and experience for consumers.

3. Recommendations

Pre-arrival information

- Information sent to consumers pre-arrival, and online, should be consistent with information at the facility. For example, if someone receives a text or appointment letter asking them to go to a specific place, or views a map online, this location should be labelled with the exact same name onsite.
- Pre-arrival information on accessibility, waiting room facilities, and public transport helps consumers make decisions on what community health facilities would be suitable for their needs.
 - a. Consumers with children or sensory needs may be more likely to access a facility if they know ahead of time there are dedicated quiet zones or children's areas available.
 - b. Consumers need to have information about accessible parking and distance/time/terrain from car parks and bus stops to facilities
 - c. In last year's all gender amenities meeting, we heard that consumers may not access services if they do not know if there is an all-gender toilet available. We have also had this advice previously from people with disabilities who cannot attend a facility if there is not an accessible bathroom that meets their needs. While most facilities have accessible bathrooms, the standard inclusions provided do not meet everyone's needs.

Support for sensory needs

- Facilities usually lack dedicated sensory spaces to support individuals with sensory needs. This can affect whether a person will be able to wait at that facility.

Real-time information

- Providing accurate wait time information (such as a visible number or getting texts when you are next in line) would allow consumers to leave (for necessary needs like food, water and using the toilet) and return to the waiting area in time, like the systems used at Access CBR.
- Having a visual marker for your place in the queue would also be helpful for Deaf community as it would avoid having to go up to the counter and keep asking to make sure they haven't missed their place.
- Having staff available onsite in a central location to ask for directions

Multilingual and inclusive signage

- Signage in the most commonly spoken languages within the community would better include multicultural communities
- Greater use of icons and symbols would help people with low English literacy levels, and impaired vision. For example, not just the standard toilet symbol but also a coffee cup icon for a cafe or person walking for pedestrian pathway. Use of internationally recognised symbols is best.
- Signage to bathrooms should include information about what type of bathroom (accessible, female/male/unisex or all-gender). A picture of what facilities are inside is helpful.
- Simple, non-clinical language is easier for people to be able to sign in Auslan. There are often not signs for clinical terms meaning that people need to finger-spell very long words. For example, there is a sign for 'eye' but not for 'ophthalmology'
- The words 'welcome' or 'hello' visible in other languages would be welcoming.

Digital navigation tools

- Greater use of interactive digital maps as a wayfinding tool (like information screens in shopping centres). These could include translated pages.

Reception area clarity

- In some facilities, reception counters are separated, without clear signage about what service they provide. This makes it difficult for consumers to distinguish between main reception and service-specific desks. Clearly marking where consumers need to wait for different services is important.
- Consumers appreciate a central point where people can go to talk to a staff member for help/ information.

Nearby facility awareness

- Include clear signage and maps indicating nearby facilities to access while waiting—such as sensory rooms, play areas, or cafes