

HICRG Advice Paper: Consumer Needs for Northside Hospital

1. Introduction

The Health Infrastructure Consumer Reference Group (HICRG) met on 4 September 2025. A key feature of the meeting was a presentation from Steve Hall, *Site Masterplan Overview*, on the Northside Hospital masterplan. This presentation was followed by a discussion which sought members' priorities for the new hospital's design.

This paper themes and summarises the needs raised by members of the group at this meeting. Many of the points raised are worthy of deeper investigation. We note that the discussion in this meeting was constrained by time and recommend allocating additional space for a similar discussion and information gathering session early in the design phase. Design advice on some topics will require input from people with specific health conditions, demographics and cultural backgrounds.

2. Consumer priorities for Northside Hospital Design

Patient, Family and Carer Support

- Design for [family and carer](#) support, including rest areas, carer zones in patient rooms, and spaces to enable working remotely.
- Larger rooms which have space to accommodate carers both as visitors and overnight.
- Dedicated dementia unit for patients regardless of their initial admission reason.
- Quiet spaces for reflection, rest or working while receiving treatment or supporting loved ones.
- A dedicated, accessible playground for all children visiting or admitted to the hospital.
- Improving design and connectivity across hospital spaces to ensure medical specialists can travel to where they are needed quickly, making it easier for staff to coordinate care and enhance patient experience.

Comfort and Environment

- Comfortable, supportive furniture in ED, wards, waiting areas and family spaces.
- Maximum possible use of natural light, green courtyards, rooftop gardens and outdoor "rooms" for healing.
- Design that features the surrounding bush and reflects the local Aboriginal community.
- Birds or natural features to enhance the therapeutic environment.
- Trauma-informed design across furniture, spaces and care models.

Health Care Consumers' Association

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- Noise reduction through ceiling, flooring and soft-close doors.

Accessibility and Inclusion

- Design that meets wider accessibility needs beyond DDA compliance.
- [Gender-inclusive bathrooms](#) with sanitary bins in all facilities.
- Inclusive infrastructure for cultural, religious, gender identity, disability and carer needs.
- Prayer room with ablution facilities.
- Accessible parking and building entryways.
- More parking for patients, families and carers, and utilising underground parking.
- Avoid large forecourts. Instead include smaller, easy to navigate areas.

Staff Spaces

- Value staff by creating safe, private, spacious, and welcoming staff spaces (e.g. lunchrooms and breakout rooms) where staff can meet their need for rest and timeout and enjoy spending time.

Sustainability

- Energy efficient lighting and use of natural light.
- Solar panels and battery storage for power generation.
- Best practices for recycling rubble and construction waste.
- Embedding sustainability measures at the heart of the project.

Digital Systems

- Greater use of interactive digital maps as a wayfinding tool (like information screens in shopping centres).
- Real-time patient and visitor information screens to show consumers their place in the queue for using the bathroom, getting food or taking a break. This should be done in a way that doesn't reveal consumers' personal information. This will also reduce anxiety and staff pressure by minimising consumers repeatedly asking reception staff or nurses for updates.

3. Recommendations for Canberra Health Services

Staff Wellbeing

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- Create a safe environment where staff are free from bullying or intimidation.

Care Models




- High single-bed ratio in inpatient units to support infection control, privacy, healing and carer involvement.
- Better integration of models of care planning with infrastructure design.
- Avoiding medical knowledge silos to improve patient experience and outcomes.
- Support for paediatric services to be provided at the Northside hospital - especially mental health services for young people.

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