ENABLING CONSUMER INVOLVEMENT IN RESEARCH: A CONSUMER CONSULTANCY SERVICE FOR RESEARCHERS

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INTRODUCTION

The evolving landscape of research increasingly mandates the involvement of consumers beyond their conventional participation roles. This shift is propelled by demands from various stakeholders, including funders, governmental bodies, and consumers, who seek more meaningful engagement within research projects. Such expectations necessitate a departure from traditional methodologies, urging researchers to embrace consumer collaboration. While existing models offer varying degrees of engagement, the unique nature of each research project poses a significant challenge. Researchers are finding that these predefined frameworks may not fully accommodate the complexities of their projects.

METHOD

To help researchers navigate the consumer engagement landscape, which is becoming more necessary, a consultancy service was developed and offered on the Spinal Research Institute's (SRI) Spinal Cord Research Hub (SCoRH) platform. The service aims to allow researchers to discuss consumer engagement opportunities on current or future projects. The service encourages researchers to incorporate consumer engagement across all aspects of the research cycle where possible and reasonable. A user-friendly format for the service was developed, allowing users to meet with a consumer engagement consultant twice and receive written feedback on consumer engagement opportunities for the project. The service does not offer opportunities for participant recruitment or any review of protocols, grant submissions or other activities.

RESULTS

The consultation service was launched on the SCoRH platform in January 2024 and is available for members to engage with. A social media campaign was used to market the service, which will continue to be advertised and available to all members.

CONCLUSION

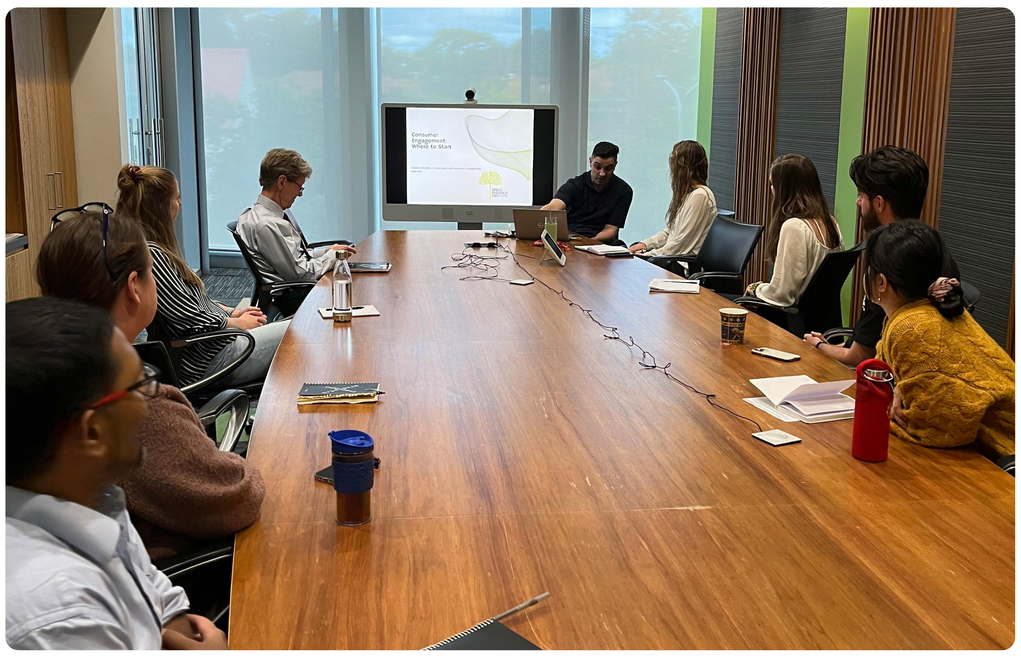
Introducing a consultancy service on the SCoRH platform marks a step towards integrating consumer input into research. By offering tailored advice and feedback, this initiative not only supports researchers to navigate the complexities of consumer engagement but also emphasises the value of such involvement for enriching research outcomes. This movement towards a more inclusive research methodology highlights a significant evolution from traditional practices, fostering an environment where consumer perspectives are not merely included but are integral to the research process. This service's implementation and continued promotion underscores the crucial role of ongoing initiatives in transforming research into a collaborative effort, enhancing its relevance, depth, and societal impact.

196
articles relating to SCI research in Australia were published between 2018 & 2023, however, only

9
included people with lived experience other than as research participants

"Consumer involvement in Medical Research Future Fund research is expected. The Medical Research Future Fund encourages researchers to involve consumers at all stages of their proposed research, including its prioritisation, design, conduct, the dissemination of results (including to the community), and its translation and evaluation."

Consumer Involvement in Research Funded through the Medical Research Future Fund (August 2024)
Medical Research Future Fund is the largest source of medical research funding in Australia.



Looking to involve consumers in your research but not sure how?
Join SCoRH and access the Consumer Engagement Consultation Service.

63RD ISCoS ANNUAL SCIENTIFIC MEETING

The Spinal Research Institute's Consumer Engagement Program puts consumers at the forefront of research by supporting them to co-design and co-deliver research that is relevant to the needs and priorities of the SCI community.

thesri.org/consumer-engagement
thesri.org/spinal-cord-research-hub

The Spinal Research Institute is an Australian registered charity building research collaboration and consumer engagement to improve the lives of people with spinal cord injury.

There is no cost to join the Spinal Cord Research Hub (SCoRH), and all SCoRH services are free for members.

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