

Community Advisory Council communiqué

May 2025

The Community Advisory Council (CAC) met face to face and virtually on **Wednesday, 28 May 2025** at the Melbourne Convention and Exhibition Centre. This communiqué highlights key discussions and considerations from the meeting.

The Chair welcomed members to the meeting and acknowledged the Traditional Owners of the lands on which the meeting was being held and paid respect to their Elders, past and present.

Navigator Service - our measures of success (overview)

Members noted an update highlighting that Ahpra have moved quickly on the Dawson Review's recommendations, particularly around the concept of a navigation service. The plan is to launch the service by July 2025 and recruitment for managers and navigators is underway and envision the service as a key support mechanism for consumers, helping them identify the right stakeholders within and outside the Scheme. While it is expected there will be challenges during implementation, it was advised that the team are confident that the service will lead to faster, more personal and effective complaint resolutions than previously.

It was proposed to hold a workshop with the CAC to help define success for the navigation service, especially from the consumer perspective, with input from health consumer peaks and other consumer bodies being vital for the service. The goal is to ensure that the first step in resolving concerns is effective and empathetic, with it ideally at the local level before escalating to external bodies.

Members advised that they strongly support the navigation service that empowers consumers and ensures clarity around escalation pathways, especially in complex areas like mental health where systems and legislation vary across jurisdictions.

Dawson second report

Members held an in-camera session to discuss the second report from Sue Dawson.

Chair's report

The Chair provided an update advising that there is a strong consensus across the Forum of NRAS Chairs and the Ahpra Board to formally connect community members on National Boards with the Community Advisory Council, recognising their shared role as representatives of the public within the regulatory system. While this may not evolve into a full Community of Practice as originally envisioned, proposals such as biannual forums to discuss public expectations and systemic issues have gained traction. The current lack of formal linkage and structured communication between these groups is a missed opportunity for strengthening the community's voice. Dawson's recommendations overlook the limited capacity of health consumer bodies to engage in collaborative work without dedicated funding or infrastructure, and fail to address the need for culturally safe, locally tailored engagement particularly for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. In establishing a formal connection between CAC and community Board members it will support transparent data, shared protocols, and inclusive consultation processes which would significantly enhance trust, accountability, and effectiveness within the scheme.

CEO update

CEO, Justin Untersteiner, shared his early reflections after stepping into the new role, expressing gratitude for the warm welcome and the strong sense of purpose he has observed across the organisation. Justin expressed that there is a lot to learn and many people to connect with, he has been actively listening, engaging with staff, practitioners, community members, government departments, and those directly impacted by the system. The conversations have already revealed consistent themes and challenges, including deeply moving stories that highlight the serious consequences when the system doesn't work as intended. Justin emphasised the weight of responsibility he feels and his commitment to understanding and improving the system through transparency and shared insights.

Justin acknowledged the recent release of the second Dawson consultation report, which he found invaluable in understanding the diverse perspectives across the sector. Justin advised that he hopes to reduce the need for future reviews by fostering more proactive and responsive systems. Justin highlighted the importance of recognising differing views on reform and the consistency of issues raised, which suggests the consultation process has accurately captured key challenges.

Justin advised that he would be giving a speech at the conference dinner highlighting the four focus areas that have been identified.

CAC guide to consultations for National Board/Ahpra

Members discussed the idea of developing a document that outlines how consultations and reviews are managed by the CAC, noting it could be valuable for new members and external stakeholders. Given the volume and complexity of consultations, this resource could clarify the CAC's expertise, expectations, and processes, especially for those outside the Council who may seek input in future reference groups or projects. Members further discussed the importance of understanding the nature of each request whether and ensuring there's a clear process for how these are brought to the CAC, including whether they require agenda time, presentations, or follow-up engagement.

Members noted the upcoming Consultation and Engagement Hub is expected to play a key role in transforming how consultations are conducted, moving away from PDF-based processes toward more dynamic, flexible engagement. This platform is to allow for broader participation, enabling community members to contribute at different stages of policy development, not just react to final drafts. While technical and regulatory requirements still apply, the Hub offers potential to rethink how and when community voices are invited into the conversation.

Videos for notifiers on the website

Members noted the presented draft scripts for a series of videos aimed at supporting potential notifiers and members of the public who may be considering making a notification. Members appreciated the responsiveness to previous recommendations and noted the importance of emotional authenticity, clarity, and reassurance in the messaging. Members advised there was strong support for a navigator-style approach that not only informs but actively guides people through the process, helping them feel supported and confident.

Members further discussed the importance of accessibility, especially for people with low literacy or limited English proficiency. Members suggested using visual formats, real people or actors to convey emotional nuance, and exploring technologies like AI-driven translation tools. Members emphasised the need to normalise feelings of anxiety or uncertainty around making a notification and suggested including statistics to help contextualise outcomes. Overall, there was enthusiasm for a more adventurous and inclusive approach to video design, with a focus on empathy, clarity, and practical support.

Update on the RRRU

Members noted an overview of the current priority issues including compassionate release of superannuation, telehealth prescribing, and AI in healthcare. A steering committee comprising National Board members—guides the work, while an oversight group, who includes a community representative (from the Consumer Health Forum), provides advice and feedback. The team is exploring flexible engagement models, such as tapping into existing consumer groups for issue-specific input rather than creating new reference groups for each topic.

Members raised important questions about how community voices are included in decision-making and how the CAC can proactively engage with emerging issues. Ahpra staff acknowledged the need for clearer visibility of current workstreams and that the CAC can identify areas of interest and influence. Members noted that Ahpra would share a summary of current focus areas and welcomed feedback on which topics the CAC would like to engage with further. There was also recognition that while some issues may be better addressed by other groups, Ahpra is keen to contribute meaningfully to consumer guidance and ensure community perspectives are considered in shaping regulatory responses.

Consultation and Engagement Hub

Members noted an update on the development of a new Consultation and Engagement hub, designed to improve how Ahpra gathers and responds to community input. The project is currently in the planning phase, with a goal to finalise requirements and go to market for a platform by the end of the year, aiming for rollout in early 2026. Subject matter expert working groups will be formed to shape key aspects of the Hub, including consultation design, data management, and communications. Ahpra are seeking input from groups like the CAC to ensure the hub supports more inclusive, flexible, and meaningful engagement, particularly in reaching beyond current boundaries and capturing lived experience.

Members discussed the importance of designing the new Consultation and Engagement Hub not just as a technical solution, but as part of a broader strategy to improve trust, accessibility, and genuine community involvement. While the hub will help scale engagement and streamline processes, it was acknowledged that relationships, lived experience, and culturally responsive outreach remain critical. Key features identified included the need for clear, ongoing consent mechanisms, topic-specific preferences, and safeguards against biased or mass-generated feedback. Members emphasised that the system must be flexible, inclusive, and capable of supporting deeper engagement beyond traditional consultation formats, especially for underrepresented communities.

Please advise the Community Advisory Council if you have any emerging topics for discussion for their upcoming meetings.

The next meeting of the Community Advisory Council is face to face on Tuesday, 17 June 2025.

Pat Hall

Chair