

As part of the HealthPathways Melbourne Community Resource Project conducted between February and June 2015, thirty-seven consumers with chronic conditions were consulted by survey, focus group and phone interview.

The purpose of the consultation was to obtain feedback from consumers regarding which community based services are appropriate for General Practitioners (GPs) to refer their patients to.

The information collected during the consumer consultation process informed a review of the existing localised cardiac, diabetes and respiratory pathways on the HealthPathways Melbourne website in order to identify gaps in community resources. This project also increased understanding of the issues faced by consumers, the services they find most helpful and what they want from their GPs to help them manage their condition.

The most challenging aspects of managing a chronic condition included:

- maintaining physical health
- breathlessness and fatigue
- managing pain
- managing life with a chronic condition
- getting information about the condition
- feelings of isolation
- mobility and transport issues
- the unpredictability of the condition
- difficulty accessing services.

The most common services consumers have used that have made the biggest difference to their health and independence are:

- exercise programs
- Community Health Services
- psychologist/mental health services
- GP
- aids and equipment
- pain management course/clinic
- hospital
- other community and support services.

Consumers were asked to recommend resources for other consumers. The most popular were:

- condition-specific/peak body/support organisations
- GP
- Community Health Services
- pain management services
- information and check-ups provided by a specialist or hospital.

The ways GPs have (or could) support consumers to manage their condition include:

- referrals to specialists, surgeons, pain management, allied and mental health providers
- provision of medication
- listening, advice and support
- regular check-ups
- collaborating with other professionals involved in consumer's care
- weight loss and diet information appropriate for the condition
- information on support groups and community organisations to support the consumer.

The results show that there are numerous and varied challenges faced by consumers with chronic and often multiple conditions. These can affect both physical and emotional functioning and quality of life, therefore, good support by GPs and local health and community services is invaluable.

Consumers indicated that referrals to other health providers were important and that the GP has a key role in liaising and collaborating with other health professionals, operating as a central 'hub' between services. Referral to community support services by the GP is important, therefore it is of great value if GPs are aware of these types of services in their region.