

**Minutes of the
Consumer and Patient Working Group Meeting
Thursday 9 October 2025**

The meeting was held online from 2pm to 4pm.

Present:

Malcolm Mulholland (Chair)
Rachel Smalley (Deputy Chair)
Chris Higgins
Francesca Holloway
Trent Lash
Gerard Rushton
Deon York

Pharmac staff in attendance:

Jannel Fisher (Reset Programme Manager)
Sarona Iosefa (Reset Programme Engagement Lead)
Sam McCarthy (Reset Programme Project Manager)
Becky Littlewood (Reset Programme Coordinator)
Cushla Managh (Acting Manager, Public Affairs and Government Services)
Michael Johnson (Director of Strategy, Policy and Performance)

Apologies:

Libby Burgess
Tim Edmonds
Tracy Tierney

1. Karakia and welcome

Opening by the Chair

2. Member only time

3. Minutes of previous meeting

Minutes of the previous meeting minutes were approved.

- Moved by: Trent
- Seconded by: Francesca

4. Action items

Action register reviewed, completed actions were noted and updates given on in-progress actions.

5. Interest register

Rachel updated her declarations.

6. Pharmac communications approach

Members engaged in a constructive discussion on Pharmac's communications approach, guided by pre-meeting questions. Pharmac confirmed another opportunity to review the document before finalisation.

Strategy Title:

Members considered the title Pharmac Public Affairs Strategy. Preferred alternative was Pharmac Communications Strategy.

- Moved by: Malcolm
- Seconded by: Rachel

Audience Analysis:

Members refined the description of consumer and patient group needs to: Information that is detailed, timely, accurate, transparent, respectful, and conveyed in accessible language with genuine understanding of their experiences and needs.

- Moved by: Rachel
- Seconded by: Deon

Strategy Objectives:

Members would like to see empathy used more explicitly. Objective 3 amended to: We communicate with empathy, respect and understanding.

Members felt partnerships is an overused term and should be replaced with relationships. Objective 4 amended to: We build genuine relationships. We collaborate and consult with consumer and patient groups, the health sector, and other agencies to improve understanding and foster trust in Pharmac's work.

- Moved by: Malcolm
- Seconded by: Trent

Transparency and Integrity:

Members want Pharmac to show willingness to discuss with the public decisions that are difficult and unpopular with compassion. Action 2 amended to: Communicate difficult or challenging decisions clearly, with context and rationale.

Members suggest that 'outcomes' need to be notified as well. Action 5 amended to: Regularly update the public on the status of applications, investment options, and outcomes.

- Moved: Rachel
- Seconded: Gerard

Audience Needs:

Proposed actions accepted.

- Moved by: Malcolm
- Seconded by: Francesca

Inclusive and Acting with Respect:

Action 1 amended to: Build and develop ongoing relationships with patient groups across different conditions.

Action 3 amended to: Provide internal training and tools to support compassionate, respectful and inclusive communications.

- Moved by: Chris
- Seconded by: Francesca

Collaboration and Sector Engagement:

Members discussed the need for clearer definitions of the term health sector. Further work required on the proposed actions to enable collaboration with the health sector and beyond. Pharmac noted existing regular meetings with Health NZ and the Ministry of Health in the communications space.

Genuine Collaboration:

Action 1 amended to: Engage with advocacy groups on mutual communications and announcements.

Action 3 to be expanded to consider the timing of sensitive releases.

- Moved: Francesca
- Seconded: Chris

Use of Advocacy Channels:

Members supported advocacy groups sharing Pharmac updates. There is preference that Pharmac is the original owner of the messages (website) and the perspective of advocacy groups can be added.

Emphasis on early collaboration when news may be challenging. Amend action 1 to: Provide early, clear, and timely information that groups can adapt for their audiences.

- Moved: Malcolm
- Seconded: Deon

Patient Storytelling and Patient Voices:

Deferred to subgroup (Deon, Francesca, Tracy, and Rachel) for advice.

Agreed Actions:

- Reset Programme Team to revise collaboration and sector engagement actions for member feedback.
- Subgroup to provide advice on patient storytelling.
- Amended draft communications strategy to be presented for endorsement by the Working Group before the end of the year.

7. General Business

Written questions from a member were acknowledged.

The Director of Strategy, Policy and Performance provided an update on data enhancements to support future Budget bids. Feedback from the Working Group was acknowledged as valuable, particularly in highlighting patient impact. There are limitations on what can be shared at various stages of the Budget bid process. However, members will be updated as appropriate.

The Director of Strategy, Policy and Performance provided an update on progress with Pae Ora Act amendments. Changes to the Act are being considered by Ministers and an update will be provided to the group when available.

Feedback was sought on the pre-meeting question approach which members agreed was helpful and useful to stimulate the thought process.

Agreed actions:

- Inform the Working Group when a more substantive update on the budget bid is available.
- Inform the Working Group as soon as an outcome on the Statutory Objective paper is reached.

Close of meeting at 4.00pm.

Next meeting is 2.00pm – 4.00pm on Thursday 21 October to discuss the medicine funding application process.