



CLIENT & COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT FRAMEWORK: THE BHN WAY

BHN'S SECOND EDITION OF THE PARTICIPATION & ENGAGEMENT MODEL

July 2025

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT & INTRODUCTION	3
Introduction	3
Practicing our value of courage	3
PURPOSE, VALUES, PRINCIPLES & SCOPE	4
Purpose	4
Why is this needed?	4
Our Engagement Values	4
our Engagement Principles	4
What's in scope	4
What's the change process?	5
ENGAGEMENT MODELS	5
Embedding Participation Models	5
ENGAGEMENT CHECKLIST	6
10 steps to plan effective and inclusive community engagement for new initiatives	6
GOVERNANCE & STRUCTURE	7
How we work	7
How and when will we do this?	7
WHAT'S NEXT & HOW DO WE KNOW IT'S WORKING?	8
In 2025, we aim to:	8
Implementation Phases	8
Indicators of progress:	8
Our evaluation approach:	8
REFERENCES	9

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT & INTRODUCTION

INTRODUCTION

BHN Better Health Network acknowledges Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as the First Peoples and Traditional Owners and custodians of the lands and waterways on which we live and work. We acknowledge that sovereignty was never ceded. We honour and pay our respects to Elders past and present and extend that respect to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

We also acknowledge the many contributions from community members, carers, clients, staff and partners who have shaped this Framework. Your insights, honesty and lived wisdom are deeply valued.

This document is not just a framework—it is a statement of intent.

We commit to ensuring that those most affected by health inequities are not only heard but are leading the way in shaping the services they use.

This is about becoming a service provider that is shaped by our communities, for our communities.

PRACTICING OUR VALUE OF COURAGE

At BHN, courage is more than a value—it's a practice. It invites us to reflect, to adapt, and to move forward with clarity and purpose when the moment calls for it. This revised Client & Community Engagement Framework reflects such a moment.

Originally launched as the Participation & Engagement (P&E) Model, this work was developed with care, ambition, and the input of many across our organisation and community. It laid a strong foundation and signalled BHN's intention to centre lived experience and community voice in how we design and deliver services.

Since that time, and as we progressed beyond the initial discovery and implementation phases (Dec 2023 – May 2025), the opportunity emerged to pause and take stock. Through feedback and reflection, it became clear that the original model—while well-intentioned—had become too complex in scope and difficult to apply in practice.

This transition point has provided the space to return to the heart of the work: ensuring our engagement approach is clear, focused, and useful across the organisation. The revised Framework maintains the spirit of the original model, but with a refined structure and sharper intent. It is aligned with the work unfolding across BHN and is designed to support real, meaningful participation.

PURPOSE, VALUES, PRINCIPLES & SCOPE

PURPOSE

This Framework guides how BHN partners with clients, carers and communities to shape more inclusive, responsive services. It embeds lived and living experience into the heart of our planning, delivery and evaluation, with a clear aim: better health outcomes through shared power, trust and care.

WHY IS THIS NEEDED?

Too many people in BHN's communities are missing out on the care they need due to systemic barriers. This model addresses that by:

- Listening to community voices, especially those facing disadvantage
- Embedding inclusive practices across all of BHN
- Delivering services that are safe, accessible, and culturally responsive

OUR ENGAGEMENT VALUES

We are committed to engagement that is:

- **Relational** – built on trust, connection and continuity
- **Inclusive** – honouring all forms of identity, voice and lived experience
- **Transparent** – clear about purpose, process and limitations
- **Purposeful** – grounded in accountability and impact
- **Evolving** – responsive to learning, feedback and change

OUR ENGAGEMENT PRINCIPLES

- Power is present – use it accountably and in partnership
- Start and finish with purpose
- Show up with care, curiosity and respect
- Make participation accessible and visible
- Use plain, dignifying language
- Honour the diversity within and between communities

WHAT'S IN SCOPE

This revised Framework sets out BHN's streamlined approach to client and community engagement, with a sharpened focus on how lived, living, and local experience shapes the design, delivery and governance of our services. It no longer encompasses internal workforce capability (now led separately by P&C), and instead concentrates on strengthening structures for meaningful participation. The Framework outlines how we recruit, support and sustain community involvement—starting with a diverse Working Group, transitioning into an ongoing Committee, and connecting through to the Board Community Advisory Group. It provides a practical roadmap for embedding co-design, equity and accountability at all levels of BHN's operations.

WHAT'S THE CHANGE PROCESS?

BHN starts by listening and engaging → builds trust and capacity → supports communities to co-design services → delivers better health outcomes → contributes to a fairer, healthier society.

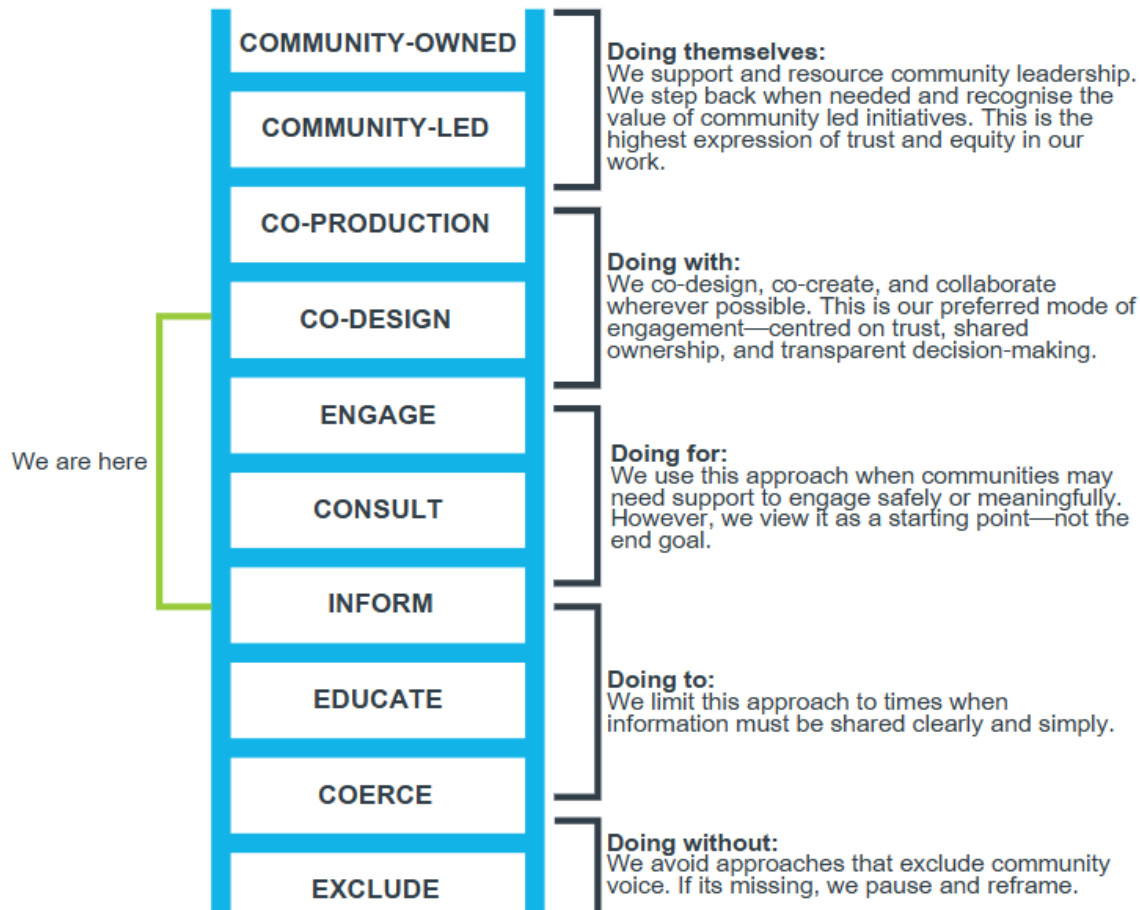
ENGAGEMENT MODELS

EMBEDDING PARTICIPATION MODELS

This framework is informed by two complementary models that underpin best practice in public and community engagement:

- The IAP2 Spectrum of Public Participation – used globally to help organisations match the level of participation to the desired promise to community. It ensures transparency in intent and supports appropriate engagement planning.
- The Ladder of Participation – adapted by Indigo Daya, Sherry Arnstein and Think Local Act Personal, this model draws from the lived experience and community development sectors. It emphasises power dynamics and reminds us that engagement should never be performative or tokenistic. Real influence must be shared.

By integrating both models, BHN acknowledges that different approaches may be appropriate in different contexts, but **our default position is to aim higher on the ladder** — toward co-design, shared leadership, and community support. We commit to being transparent about the level of participation we can offer, while continuously striving for better outcomes.



ENGAGEMENT CHECKLIST

10 STEPS TO PLAN EFFECTIVE AND INCLUSIVE COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT FOR NEW INITIATIVES

1.	Clarify the Purpose <ul style="list-style-type: none"> What is the reason for engaging? What decisions or actions will this influence? Are you consulting, co-designing, or enabling community-led leadership?
2.	Define Boundaries & Scope <ul style="list-style-type: none"> What aspects are open to community influence? What is fixed (e.g., due to funding, regulation, or core mandate)? Who needs to be involved in setting the parameters?
3.	Align with BHN's governance Structure <ul style="list-style-type: none"> At what level are you engaging? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Operational service delivery, program or team planning Strategic or governance input Does the engagement align with the Committee, or Board Community Advisory Group (CAG) pathways?
4.	Position on the Participation Spectrum <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Where does this sit on BHN's "ways of working" spectrum? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Doing without → Doing to → Doing for → Doing with → Doing themselves
5.	Design the Engagement Approach <ul style="list-style-type: none"> What engagement methods are best suited (e.g., workshops, storytelling, interviews)? What supports are needed to ensure meaningful and safe participation?
6.	Plan Timeframes & Resourcing <ul style="list-style-type: none"> How long will the engagement run? Are resources (staff, facilitation, reimbursement, accessibility) secured? Have community members been involved in setting timelines?
7.	Communication & Relationship Building <ul style="list-style-type: none"> How will you keep people informed before, during, and after the process? Have you communicated how feedback will be used—and what won't be possible?
8.	Inclusivity <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Who is missing from the table? Have you considered intersectionality, cultural safety, and accessibility? How will you create safe spaces for underrepresented voices?
9.	Plan for Closure & Feedback <ul style="list-style-type: none"> What does a respectful conclusion look like for participants? How will you close the loop and demonstrate impact?
10.	Evaluate & Reflect <ul style="list-style-type: none"> How will you assess the process and its outcomes?

- What feedback will you gather from participants?
- How will learnings be shared across BHN?

GOVERNANCE & STRUCTURE

HOW WE WORK

To streamline participation and strengthen community voice across BHN, this framework will guide our transition to a new engagement structure—overseen by two key bodies: the Client & Community Engagement Committee and the Board Community Advisory Group (CAG).

BOARD COMMUNITY ADVISORY GROUP	CLIENT & COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT COMMITTEE
Focus: Strategy and governance Reporting: Reports to the BHN Board Key functions: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Advise the BHN Board on issues impacting local communities. • Provide community perspectives on BHN's strategy, planning and policy. • Oversee performance of the Client & Community Engagement Committee. • Support partnerships and strengthen community relationships. • Reflect lived, local, and cohort-specific experiences to help the Board make informed decisions. 	Focus: Operational Reporting: Reports to the CAG Key functions: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Advises on service design, policies, and programs • Ensures lived experience and community voices shape day-to-day practice • Monitors how well we're engaging clients and communities • Reflects diversity across BHN priority groups

HOW AND WHEN WILL WE DO THIS?

By September 2025, the CAG will be stood up. This will be supported by the foundational work of the Participation & Engagement Working Group, as it prepares to transition into the Client & Community Engagement Committee.

JULY 2025	By the end of July 2025, the Participation & Engagement Working Group will have recruited community members to help shape how BHN involves clients—co-designing tools, advising on inclusion, defining success, and preparing for the transition to a permanent Committee.
SEPTEMBER 2025	By the end of September 2025, the foundational work of the Participation & Engagement Working Group will have positioned us to formally establish the CAG. Expressions of interest will open to all BHN community members in mid-August 2025.
MARCH 2026	By the end of March 2026, the Participation & Engagement Working Group will be ready to transition into the ongoing Client & Community Engagement Committee. Expressions of interest will open to all BHN community members in early February 2026.
JUNE 2026	By the end of June 2026, the Committee and CAG will have worked together for a full three months—aligning with a quarterly review cycle to reflect on progress, share learnings, and report back to the BHN community, establishing a formal feedback loop.

WHAT'S NEXT & HOW DO WE KNOW IT'S WORKING?

IN 2025, WE AIM TO:

- Establish the Board Consumer Advisory Group
- See increasing representation of priority groups in planning and decision-making

IMPLEMENTATION PHASES



PHASE 1: JULY 2025 TO SEPTEMBER 2025

Discovery – Map existing engagement practices, recruit to the Working Group, identify early wins, develop procedures and clear methods that define the way we work



PHASE 2: SEPTEMBER 2025 TO MARCH 2026

Implementation – Co-design the operational Committee structure, embed engagement in organisational governance, test procedures and new methods of engagement



PHASE 3: APRIL 2026 TO JUNE 2026

Consolidation – Review and refine engagement pathways, evaluate outcomes, share back with community

INDICATORS OF PROGRESS:

- More people feel safe, respected, and seen in BHN services
- Communities recognise their ideas reflected in our work
- Staff feel equipped and supported to co-design
- Committee members report feeling heard and valued
- Real service and policy changes are co-created

OUR EVALUATION APPROACH:

We will evaluate with community, not on community. This includes:

- Storytelling and lived experience feedback
- Quantitative service data
- Open dialogue and shared reflection

Our goal is to create a feedback loop that builds trust, demonstrates transparency, and drives continuous improvement toward a more inclusive BHN.

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