



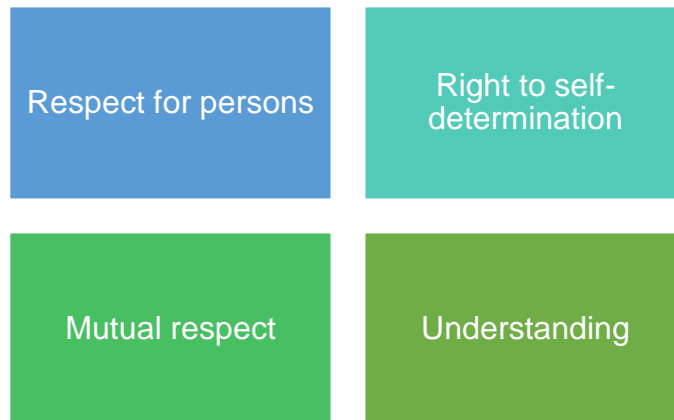
Person-centred approach: background information

Considerations for health professionals when communicating with people with disabilities

What is a person-centred approach?

An approach where people using health services are “recognised as **individuals**, encouraged to play an **active role** in their care, where their needs and preferences are **understood and respected**”.¹

The underlying philosophy is about doing things **‘with’** people, rather than **‘to’** them.²
A person-centred approach is underpinned by the following values:³



Until recently, people with disabilities have been expected to fit in with routines and practices that health and social services felt were most appropriate.^{2,4-5}

Applying a person-centred approach is about putting people with disabilities and their families at the **centre of decisions**, seeing them as **experts** of their own lives, who **work alongside** health professionals to get the best outcome.²

Why shift to a person-centred approach?

Person-centred care is now recognised as a key component of safe and quality health care.^{2,6}

Benefits for patients^{4,6-7}	Benefits for health professionals^{2,6}	Benefits for the health system⁴
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Improved patient & family satisfaction with care• Empowered to make lifestyle modifications• Improved health outcomes	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Improved adherence to treatment plans• Improved job satisfaction• Reduced emotional exhaustion• Increased sense of accomplishment	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Decreased readmission rates• Decreased average length of stay• Decreased mortality• Improved staff retention• Decreased costs

Why is it so important to apply a person-centred approach to people with disabilities?

People with disabilities are more likely to experience multiple **health disadvantages** including:

- **Diagnostic overshadowing**
 - Symptoms or behaviour are attributed to the person's disability, rather than to an unrelated health condition.⁹
 - Results in delay or misdiagnosis of treatable medical issues.⁹
- **Increased risk of premature death** and reduced life expectancy.^{8,9}
- Increased risk of dying from preventable causes.^{8,9}

People with disabilities need to be able to communicate their health concerns with others.⁸ A person-centred approach **acknowledges the basic human right to communicate** and supports individual communication adjustments.⁸

Facilitators and challenges

Practising in a person-centred manner involves¹¹

- being open to giving and receiving feedback,
- critical self-reflection,
- lifelong learning,
- personal growth.

Challenges include⁴

- workload and workforce constraints that reduce continuity of care
 - i.e. the quality of care over time,
- fragmentation of care
 - i.e., limited integration or coordination of care between providers,
- the power differential in the relationship between healthcare professionals and the person with disability.

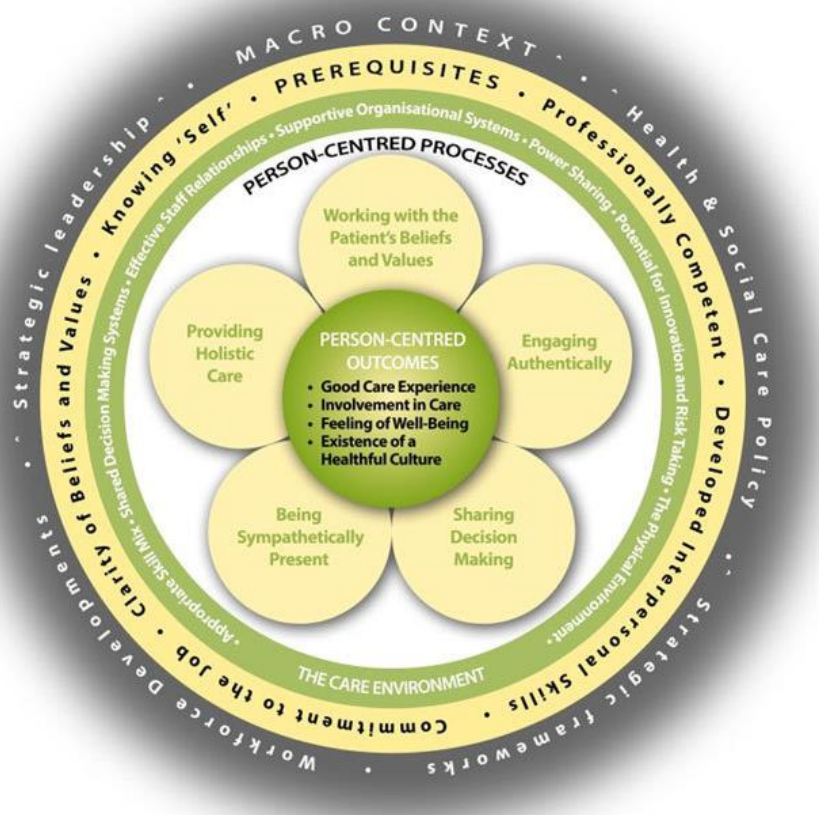


Figure 1: The Person-centred Practice Framework^{10(p5)}

Health care staff are often concerned person-centred communication strategies will be time consuming.¹² However, research indicates the provision of person-centred care **does not require longer consultation times**, but it does require a **qualitatively different** interaction.⁷ It relies on the health care professional “using their skills and knowledge to acknowledge and interact with patients as **active**, rather than passive, recipients of care”.^{4(p56)}

Fact sheet 1 of 3: This is part of a series of fact sheets on person centred communication for hospital staff. Full reference list is available.

The Ready to Go Home project is funded by the Australian Government Department of Social Services. Go to dss.gov.au for more information.