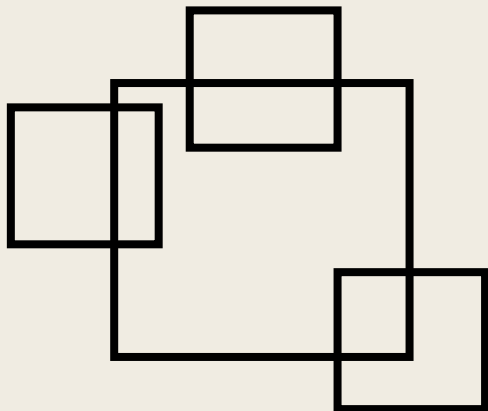


---

# Participating on a Committee:

A Resource for Patient & Family Advisors



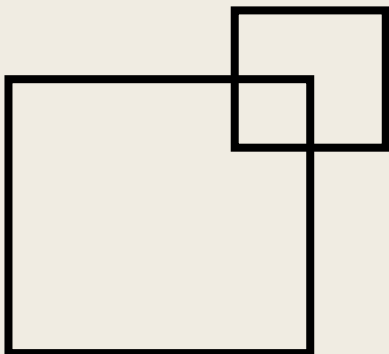
**Ontario  
Health**

# Participating on a **COMMITTEE**

## **What this guide is for:**

This guide is meant to support you in your role as a patient or family advisor on a committee. Much of the tips in this resource come from a presentation co-designed with patient advisors.

**The insights here are what experienced patient advisors felt were important to share with their peers.**



This resource was created at Ontario Health—for patient and family advisors working with us. We have broadened the language in this version so that it can be used by other organizations. We recognize that there is always more to learn and share about patient and family engagement and see this as a living document. We are always open to edits and additions to improve our resources. If you have questions or suggestions, please reach out to us at: [patientengagement@ontariohealth.ca](mailto:patientengagement@ontariohealth.ca)

# UNDERSTAND

## Your role

As a patient or family advisor, you bring a unique and valuable perspective.

As a committee member, you will help put a face to the numbers and share experiences that the data can't tell us.

You will advise the committee on how to improve and plan services through the lens of a patient or caregiver.

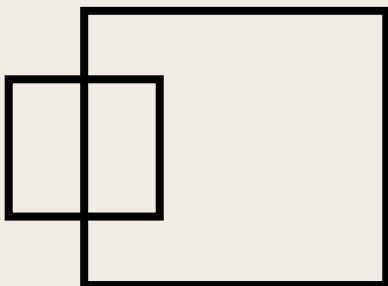
You will share your own or your community's experience related to the topic can guide the discussion and decision-making for policies and programs that can help improve the health of your community.

You will guide the committee to consider what the other steps in a patient's journey might be and understand the complex choices that patients and their families must make.

As you go into your first meetings, consider the following:

- Do you have enough information to participate?
- Do you have information about who you'll be working with? Google them or ask the chair to give you information.
- Do you understand what is up for discussion and what is not? Ask the chair to explain more about the project or committee's work if you need it.

*Understand the goals of the committee so you can position your ideas and thoughts so they resonate.*



# UNDERSTAND

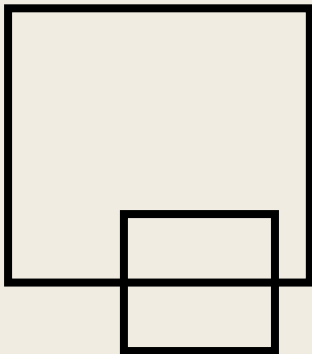
## Our role

*The success of your participation is not all on you. The staff supporting the committee are here to ensure you feel heard and have all the information you need to participate.*

You can expect that the staff supporting the committee will:

- Share meeting materials with you in advance
- Help you understand what is up for discussion and what is not.
- Build in opportunities for feedback in meetings and afterwards.
- Balance participation and keep discussions on track.
- Help you and committee members connect and get to know each other.
- Support you to meaningfully contribute to key decisions .

You can also ask the Chair or staff lead for feedback on your participation and on the work you contribute to the committee. You can also ask the chair or staff lead to facilitate connecting with the other patient and family advisors on the committee for conversation and support.



For some health care professionals working on the committee, it will be new for them to collaborate alongside patient advisors. If you have concerns about how you are being treated on the committee, how you are listened to or how your input is received please give feedback to the staff member you feel comfortable with. It's important that the committee be a respectful and productive space for everyone participating.

# COMMUNICATE

## Strategically & Effectively

*We know that sometimes it can feel overwhelming to know how you can participate on a committee, especially if you've never had this role before. Sometimes it can be hard to speak up and share, but it's important for us to have your input—after all, that's what you're here for!*

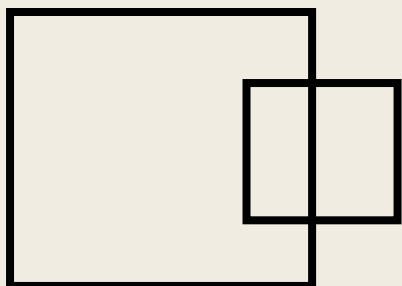
Check the agenda ahead of time and focus on one or two points to respond to that are important to you.

Choose your words carefully. Stay aware of how much time there is for discussion and ensure you leave time for others to share their thoughts

Listen well and deeply and keep an open mind! See past your own experiences.

If you feel like something is missing from the conversation, bring it forward!

Focus on problem solving. Whether you are identifying needs in your community, telling your own story, or that of a family member's, we are looking for your clear and constructive feedback to help us improve healthcare for everyone in Ontario. Try to connect your personal experiences to action.



# Ask QUESTIONS

that help move the conversation forward

*Asking questions is one of the most effective things you can do as a patient or family advisor.*

Ask the chair, what kind of feedback are you looking for from us?

Ask question to help clarify your understanding:

"Let me make sure I understand this correctly, I heard you say..."

"Can you walk me through this so I can picture it?"

There can be many acronyms thrown around, and details about programs or policies you might not know about, feel free to ask for definitions of medical terms and acronyms.

Ask: How is this decision going to affect patients and caregivers?

Ask: Have you spoken to other patients directly influenced by this?

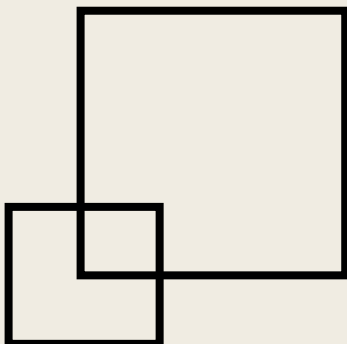
Ask: How can I learn more about this topic?

Ask: What are other ways you consult with patients and families beyond this committee?

Ask if you can bring the topic back to your community or other patient and family advisor groups you might work with.

Ask: Have we thought of everything?

Ask: When can we expect to see the results of our input?



# MOVE

---

## beyond your own story

We've heard from patient advisors as well as health care professionals the importance of moving beyond your own story and connecting your experience to the larger goals of the project you are working on.

Experiences, when shared as stories, can help promote thinking from other perspectives – we tend to tell emotional or personal experiences in story-form! After a patient has a bad experience, they often develop an understanding of what they needed to make the situation better.

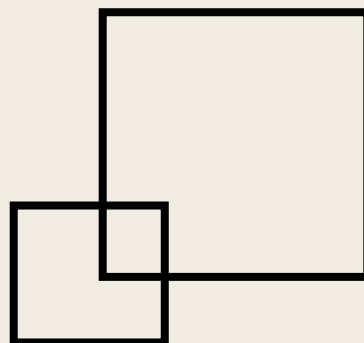
The only problem with telling stories on committees is sometimes the message or key point gets lost – it's hard for people in the room to relate the story you've just told, to the topic at hand.

Good stories that lead to action tend to be short, sharp, and inspirational, with a very clearly articulated central message. When advisors give concrete ideas for healthcare to work on, it makes it easier to develop quick solutions.

Tie your personal experience to the larger issues in the project or committee. Ask yourself, "how much detail do I need to share with the group to answer this question?"

It's more difficult in a virtual meeting environment but try to be aware of body language cues when you are telling your story. Fidgeting, yawning, looking around—if the group seems disengaged, it could be because you have been giving too many details or not gotten to your point fast enough.

You will have a clearer time seeing how your input has influenced a decision when you are direct and succinct in sharing how your personal experience relates to the topic.



# Equity in Engagement

*An important way we can address health equity is to approach our work knowing that we don't have all the answers—that we all come to the table with different worldviews, experiences, and cultural teachings.*

Be aware of and take responsibility for your own worldview, cultural teachings, and the things you take for granted (privileges).

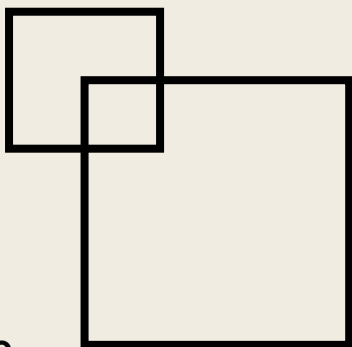
Challenge others on the committee, to understand the barriers you or your community continue to face. Refer to your life and learning experiences when it might help others to understand your point of view.

Be aware of the policies, historical and current events, and social context of patients and families in Ontario that access healthcare. For example—the Black Lives Matter movement, the discovery of unmarked graves at Residential Schools, etc.

Keep working to understand and use what you know and have experienced to shape your contributions and participation in committee discussions.

Work towards trusting and respectful relationships, and reciprocal collaboration with other committee members.

With thanks to the Toronto Birth Centre for permission to share these ideas.





# Anatomy of a Meeting

*Some terms often used on committees*

## Chair/Co-Chairs

The Chair facilitates the work of the meeting by moving the discussion from topic to topic. They will try to ensure all perspectives around the table are heard. The chair is responsible for sharing recommendations and information back to the Ontario Health team members working on the project.

## Terms of Reference

The terms of reference is a document that outlines the purpose and scope of a committee's work, as well as the roles and expectations of committee members.

## Action Items

Action items are tasks that may be delegated for committee members or Ontario Health staff to complete between meetings. The Chair will report back at each meeting on the outcome or status of any action items or decisions that were made at previous meetings and try to provide answers to questions that are brought up.

## Parking Lot

Parking lot is another term that is sometimes used to create space for comments or questions that are maybe out of scope for that meeting, but still relevant to discuss at a later time.

## Agenda

All committee members share in the decision to approve the agenda. The Chair uses this list of items for discussion to keep track of the goals for each meeting and to track the time spent on each.

## Review & Approval of Minutes

Every meeting is documented by Ontario Health staff in notes called "minutes" about what happened during the meeting, especially any recommendations or decisions the committee makes and the reasons for them. The minutes are a record that help carry the work forward from meeting to meeting. Any committee members who were present at the previous meeting can participate in approving the minutes from that meeting. Without people who were present at the meeting, the minutes cannot be approved.

## Decisions

Varying perspectives are important and reaching a decision that everyone agrees on isn't always possible, but the Chair will encourage discussion and decision-making that draws out and reflects all members viewpoints.

