

## Care Opinion and Alpine Health Case Study

Seeing the Person Behind the Data



### Introduction

Alpine Health recognised that traditional feedback methods were failing to reflect what really mattered to consumers — particularly in small rural communities where trust and confidentiality are key. Traditional systems were not capturing the emotional, relational or detailed insights needed to support service learning. Feedback mechanisms such as paper forms and generic surveys offered limited visibility, failed to build trust, and under-represented positive experiences. This prompted the adoption of Care Opinion in late 2021, aligning with Alpine Health’s broader shift toward person-centred care.

#### SNAPSHOT

**The challenge:** Traditional feedback systems were fragmented and limited in visibility. Opportunities to learn from consumers were often lost in administrative processes.

**The response:** Alpine Health adopted Care Opinion to strengthen transparency, capture relational insights, and support continuous service learning.

**The impact:** In the first year, 110 stories were shared via Care Opinion — over six times more than VHIMS. Staff could see, hear and act on what mattered to consumers, strengthening trust and accountability.

### Background

Alpine Health introduced Care Opinion across its three rural sites in Bright, Myrtleford and Mount Beauty. These are close-knit communities where consumers are often hesitant to speak up, not only for fear of being identified or labelled as complainers, but also because they do not want to offend staff with whom they may have ongoing relationships.

Existing feedback systems relied on manual and fragmented reporting, with minimal capacity to track trends or demonstrate how feedback informed improvement. Response tracking was inconsistent, making it difficult to build trust or close the loop with consumers.

Care Opinion’s moderated, anonymous format offered a way forward. It enabled consumers to share their experiences online in their own words, safely and without fear of reprisal, and provided staff with a consistent, independent channel for listening and responding.

## Embedding feedback into everyday practice

Rather than positioning Care Opinion as a standalone initiative, Alpine Health integrated it into everyday communications. Feedback invitations were included in discharge letters, and community and aged care clients received annual mail-outs with reply-paid leaflets and flyers featuring real stories and service improvements.

The rollout of the platform was not instant. Staff at Alpine Health's Bright campus were the first to champion the approach, stepping into the space with curiosity and leadership. Their early engagement created the foundation for success, and once the value of the platform was visible, other sites followed with growing confidence. This phased uptake reflects the importance of peer modelling and visible outcomes in embedding new practices.

Across all sites, the Partnering with Consumers Officer played a critical role in supporting implementation and sustaining momentum. They led education sessions, coordinated promotional and engagement materials, and ensured that feedback continued to be shared, responded to and reflected in reporting. This facilitation role helped embed Care Opinion into daily routines and governance processes, ensuring it remained active and meaningful over time.

At Alpine Health, narrative feedback is actively capturing the emotional and relational elements often lost in survey data, transforming feedback from a compliance task into human conversations.

Feedback boards were installed in public areas, and stories were regularly discussed at governance and operational meetings. This made consumer stories not only visible but central to service learning.

## Building community trust

To support uptake, Alpine Health co-branded all Care Opinion materials, reinforcing the relationship between the two organisations. The Community and Health Advisory Group (CHAG), made up of local consumers, played a vital role in promoting the platform. They shared information with their communities and participated in orientation sessions to help others understand the value and independence of the platform.

Trust in the platform grew over time. One initial sceptic on the CHAG became a vocal advocate after seeing how respectfully staff handled stories and how stories led to improvement.

### Story spotlight: Inclusion, autonomy and identity in care

A consumer undergoing a day procedure shared challenges around gender identity, disability, and limited social support. They highlighted gaps in admission paperwork, misgendering, and the emotional toll of self-advocacy — while also recognising moments of respectful care.

Their suggestions led Alpine Health to:

- Review consumer-facing forms
- Commit to inclusive communication training
- Clarify support options for isolated consumers

Read the full story: [careopinion.org.au/91034](https://careopinion.org.au/91034)

## From feedback to improvement

Narrative feedback is embedded in Alpine Health’s continuous improvement processes. Stories are mapped against national standards and used to identify gaps not always visible in audit data. They surface both systemic and relational issues, prompting real-time learning.

One way Alpine Health demonstrates accountability is through its annual Your Feedback Matters flyer, which publicly shares actions taken in response to stories. These have included improvements in communication, discharge, access and inclusivity — often sparked by a single, powerful account.

In one such story, a consumer shared their experience navigating a day procedure while managing disability, social isolation and gender diversity. They offered clear, constructive suggestions for improvement, which Alpine Health committed to taking forward.



## Outcomes

The integration of Care Opinion has delivered significant cultural and operational benefits:

### Consumer voice and agency:

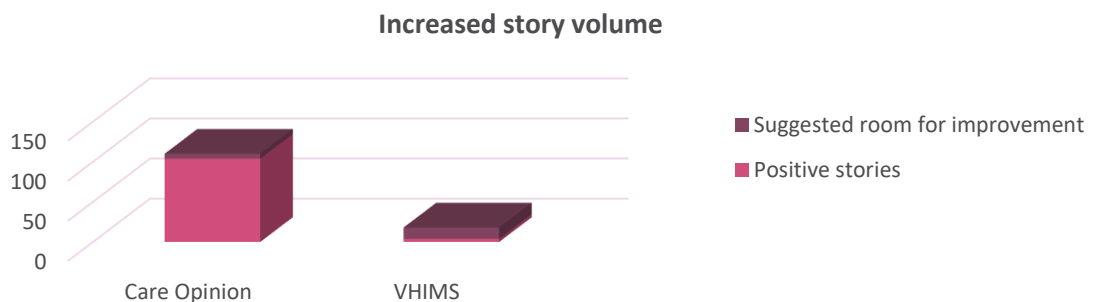
Narrative feedback provides consumers with the space to tell their full story in their own words, increasing the perceived value of their experience, and reinforcing their agency in shaping care. The ability to be heard on their own terms, publicly, anonymously, and without retaliation, has helped people feel safer, more respected, and more involved in decision-making about the services they use.

*“In a small rural health service like ours, it’s the personal stories and feedback that really resonate with staff. Qualitative feedback helps us connect more meaningfully with our community, respond to what matters most, and keep improving the care we provide.”*

*Fiona MacPhee, Director Safety & Quality*

### Increased volume and reach:

In 2023–24, Alpine Health received 110 Care Opinion stories compared with 18 logged through the formal VHIMS system. Of these, only six were negative, while 14 of the VHIMS entries were critical.



### Strategic value:

Stories are now routinely mapped to quality standards and used in accreditation evidence.

### Enhanced staff engagement:

Staff who were initially hesitant now see Care Opinion as a reliable tool for quality improvement. Middle managers and directors regularly use it in meetings and reporting, and it is embedded into Alpine Health's governance structures. This has helped validate staff contributions during a challenging period and strengthened trust in the platform as a quality improvement tool.

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*“Care Opinion provides consumers with an independent platform to provide feedback on their experience with Alpine Health. From the perspective of CHAG, we can see that consumers take the time to provide thoughtful and honest descriptions of the care they received, their interactions with staff and the impact their journey through Alpine Health has had on them.*

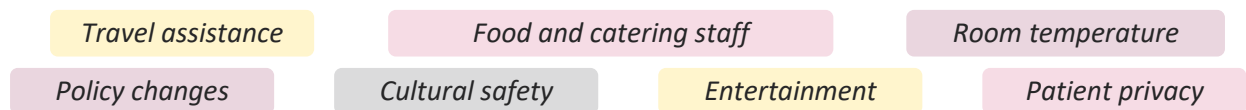
*Alpine Health has also embraced Care Opinion. It is great to see the boards in wards showing the Care Opinion feedback. It boosts staff morale but also highlights where improvements can be made to make the consumer experience even better.”*

*Libby Owen-Jones, Consumer Health Advisory Group Chair*

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### More meaningful themes:

Historical complaints often focused on food, whereas Care Opinion stories now include a wider range of topics such as discharge processes, staff conduct, and cultural safety.



### Looking ahead

Alpine Health's experience with Care Opinion has demonstrated that narrative feedback can do more than supplement existing systems—it can transform them. By shifting away from static forms and generic surveys toward real human stories, Alpine Health has created a feedback culture that values voice, emotion and experience. Staff now use the platform not only for accreditation and quality improvement but as a way to meaningfully connect with the people behind the care.

As the service looks to increase engagement from younger people and families in aged care, Care Opinion continues to evolve from a feedback tool into a trusted channel for dialogue. Alpine Health's story shows that when feedback is relational and visible, culture shifts, and people feel seen.