

10. You & the health service system

In Australia, health services strive to provide the best possible service to the people who use them. There are different names for the users of services – health consumers, clients or patients. There are policies and practices within public health services that protect the rights and interests of health consumers.

Your rights and responsibilities

- Queensland Health has a Public Patients' Charter that sets out the rights and responsibilities of public patients
- the charter is translated in nine languages and can be downloaded from: www.health.qld.gov.au/qhppc/downloads.asp#multilingual. The Charter is also available from public hospitals where you are welcome to ask for a copy
- the Federal Government has a Private Patients' Hospital Charter. This is a guide to what it means to be a private patient in a public hospital, a private hospital or a day hospital facility
- the charter is translated into many languages and can be downloaded from: www.health.gov.au/internet/wcms/Publishing.nsf/Content/health-privatehealth-consumers-charter-language.htm

Health Quality and Complaints Commission

- deals with complaints about public and private health services that have not been resolved after consumers have gone back to the health service and complained directly
- is independent from Queensland Health
- must receive complaints within one year of the incident that is subject of the complaint, or within one year of the complainant becoming aware of the issue or problem
- ph: (07) 3120 5999 or toll free 1800 077 308 (outside Brisbane). The website address is www.hrc.qld.gov.au

How to make a complaint

- **act quickly** – talk to the health service as quickly as possible. The longer you wait the less clear the facts become and the harder it can be to find a solution
- **first go to the health service about which you are complaining** – complaints do not have to be in writing, you can make a verbal complaint to the health service directly (can be in your own language). Give the service a chance to fix the problem if you think they can
- **make a formal complaint** – if you do not wish to talk about your concerns with staff at the health service or they have not been able to address your concerns, you can make a formal complaint with a Complaints Coordinator at the health service
- **make it clear** – set out the order which things happened, preferably with dates, and descriptions of the incident/s, phone calls, letters or meetings and be clear about the action you want taken
- **if you feel more comfortable**, discuss your concern with a settlement or support worker who may be able to provide advice and assistance for you to make a complaint.

Consent

- prior to receiving treatment you must provide consent – this means that you understand the treatment and give permission for it to proceed. There are translated consent forms available from the website: www.health.qld.gov.au/informedconsent/multi_info.asp. You can ask for one at the hospital
- generally a parent or an adult carer can consent to the treatment of a child. However, in some circumstances a child under the age of 18 can provide their own consent if a health professional reasonably believes the child is of sufficient age and mental and emotional maturity to understand the nature of the consent.



Interpreters

- you have a right to a professional interpreter if you need one, when you use a Queensland Health public service
- interpreters can be provided either in person or by phone at no charge
- it is Queensland Health policy to use friends and relatives only in emergency situations. If the friend or relative is less than 18 years old they should not be used as an interpreter under any circumstance
- please request a professional interpreter in advance so arrangements can be made for your appointment.

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Confidentiality and privacy

- everyone has a right to confidentiality and privacy when using Queensland Health services. Staff must deal with your information in an ethical, confidential and lawful way
- 'confidentiality' means that your information will only be discussed and made available to those health workers involved in your care. This means your information cannot be given even to your relatives unless you give permission
- some laws require Queensland Health to pass on information to other government departments such as information about births, deaths, and notice of diseases that are infectious
- sometimes an insurer may be paying for your hospital services such as for an accident at work. Hospital staff will ask for your consent to release your information so your insurer can pay your hospital bill.

This factsheet is part of a series of 10. The complete set comprises:

1. Health system in Queensland
2. Seeing a doctor
3. Medicines
4. Queensland hospitals
5. Community health centres
6. Dental services
7. Allied health
8. Staying healthy and preventing illness
9. Health and support services for specific groups
10. You and the health service system