



**SENATE COMMUNITY AFFAIRS COMMITTEE
INQUIRY INTO THE NATIONAL REGISTRATION AND ACCREDITATION
SCHEME FOR DOCTORS AND OTHER HEALTH WORKERS**

Submission by the Health Consumers Alliance Inc of South Australia (HCA)

HCA is a not for profit, independent peak body. We are a membership based organisation with both individual and organisational members who work together to provide a strong, independent and effective health consumer voice in South Australia.

HCA welcomes the opportunity to comment on policies and legislation, position papers and participation frameworks as it considers it is fundamental that consumers be involved throughout all aspects of the health system in Australia.

A. Impact of the scheme on state and territory health services

NRAS should ultimately provide clear guidance to health services as to the processes necessary to ensure appropriate credentials for their health workforce.

B. Impact of the scheme on patient care and safety

Consumers in most states have seen the terrible consequences of poor and inconsistent registration and accreditation of health professionals. Indeed, the pursuit of a national scheme is a consequence of the failure of separate state based systems to consistently ensure the safety of the Australian public from poor quality practice. It is of central concern to consumers that new mechanisms are created which allow for improved access to information about the status of their health professional and that assurance is provided so that regardless of where someone lives, access to quality professionals is guaranteed.

C. The effect of the scheme on standards of training and qualification of relevant health professionals

Uniform national standards and accreditation mechanisms should help facilitate the consistent, high levels of competence required by the whole Australian community. Consumers also need to be able to access information about the qualifications of providers offering specialist health services.

D. How the scheme will affect complaints management and disciplinary processes

NRAS provides a welcome opportunity to improve the operation of complaints management processes from a consumer perspective.

Whilst it is clear that some form of state and territory structure may need to remain in place, it is equally apparent that maintenance of the status quo in regard of state and territory boards and their functions is unacceptable. The rationale for change has been well established in the light of the difficulties experienced by health consumers across Australia. SA consumers have expressed particular concerns regarding the lack of publically available information on the restricted practice conditions of some health professionals. It is vital that consumers are easily able to determine whether a health professional has limitations on their practice.

The inclusion of consumer and community members on National Boards is a further example of the type of public accountability now expected within the community.

SA Health has contributed funds towards this program

E. Alternative models for the implementation of the scheme

Consumers are seeking a scheme that will provide ease of access to information on accreditation, registration and complaints structures and processes. HCA supports the position of the Consumers Health Forum of Australia which has called for the creation of a one-stop national resource for consumers as part of NRAS. Recognition of the new Australian Charter of Healthcare Rights is an important development and should also be reflected in NRAS structures and policies.

Summary

HCA has been involved in contributing to changes to legislation governing health professionals in SA over the last four years and is well aware of the difficulty of improving systems and accountability in this area. This difficulty cannot be avoided if consumers are to be better served by the governance arrangements for health professionals' practice.

HCA is concerned that the National Registration and Accreditation Scheme must continue to be pursued with vigour and resolve. Failure to deliver a national approach to registration and accreditation would be a severely retrograde step and signal a lack of political will to deliver a robust and comprehensive system of protection for Australian consumers.