

5 August 2016

Health, Communities, Disability Services and
Domestic and Family Violence Prevention Committee
Parliament House
George Street
Brisbane Qld 4000

Via email to: hcdsdfvpc@parliament.qld.gov.au

To whom it may concern,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide a submission on the Inquiry into the performance of the Health Ombudsman's functions.

The role of the Public Advocate was established by the *Guardianship and Administration Act 2000* to undertake systems advocacy on behalf of adults with impaired decision-making capacity in Queensland.¹ The primary role of the Public Advocate is to promote and protect the rights, autonomy and participation of Queensland adults with impaired decision-making capacity in all aspects of community life.

The Health Ombudsman's functions under the *Health Ombudsman Act 2013* include the identification and handling of health service issues by undertaking investigations, inquiries and other relevant action,² as well as identifying and reporting on systemic issues in the provision of health services.³ Therefore, when systemic issues in the health system affect Queensland adults with impaired decision-making capacity, the Health Ombudsman and the Public Advocate's functions find common ground.

In such circumstances, the Office of the Public Advocate has sought to work with the Health Ombudsman. The office has welcomed the Health Ombudsman's assistance and has found the Health Ombudsman both willing and helpful to contribute to areas of mutual interest.

For example, the Health Ombudsman was part of an expert Advisory Panel for the Public Advocate's systemic advocacy report, *Upholding the right to life and health: A review of the deaths in care of people with disability in Queensland*.⁴ The Panel was formed to assist the Public Advocate in the systemic analysis of information about the deaths of people with disability in care. The Panel also assisted in the analysis of current policies, procedures or guidelines relating to the reporting and analysis of such deaths.⁵

The Office of the Public Advocate has also been exploring effective complaints management systems for people with impaired decision-making capacity. During this work, the Health Ombudsman has

¹ *Guardianship and Administration Act 2000* (Qld) ch 9.

² *Health Ombudsman Act 2013* (Qld) 25(b).

³ *Ibid* 25(c).

⁴ Office of the Public Advocate (Qld), *Upholding the right to life and health: A review of the deaths in care of people with disability in Queensland* (February 2016).

⁵ *Ibid* 11.

provided insights and constructive feedback regarding how various complaints systems function in Queensland particularly, the complaints system for health service consumers.

An effective and accessible complaints system is critical in the proper functioning of health services. It not only provides a safeguard for potentially vulnerable people, but can act as a feedback mechanism for the improvement in quality and effectiveness of such services. Therefore, the Health Ombudsman's functions to monitor and deal with health services complaints are an important and necessary part of a quality health system. This is especially so when increasing pressures on the system will create further challenges to a complaints handling mechanism.

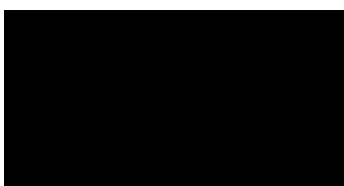
For instance, one of the most significant social and demographic trends is Australia's ageing population. The National President of Alzheimer's Australia commented that "dementia is without question the single biggest health issue facing Australia in the 21st century".⁶ Forecasts by Deloitte Access Economics estimate that, in the absence of new medications to treat dementia, the prevalence of dementia in Queensland will be 73,470 people in 2020 and will reach 215,272 by 2050.⁷

People suffering from such conditions will impact the health system through an increased demand for allied health services, and in turn will require suitable complaints systems that can accommodate issues that arise from the treatment of people with dementia. Complaints systems will need to be easy to navigate, as well as have accessible supports in place to assist people with impaired decision-making capacity to make complaints when required.

I am pleased to support the functions of the Health Ombudsman and the importance of such a role in relation to not only people with impaired decision-making capacity, but the population in general.

I look forward to working with the Health Ombudsman in the future to undertake systems advocacy to improve the opportunities for people with impaired decision-making capacity to access high quality health services in Queensland's health system.

Yours sincerely



Mary Burgess
Acting Public Advocate

⁶ Ita Buttrose, National President, Alzheimer's Australia as cited in Deloitte Access Economics, Dementia Across Australia: 2011-2050 (9 September 2011) Alzheimer's Australia 17 <<https://fightdementia.org.au/research-and-publications/reports-and-publications/access-economics-reports>>, 7.

⁷ Deloitte Access Economics, Dementia Across Australia: 2011-2050 (9 September 2011) Alzheimer's Australia 17 <<https://fightdementia.org.au/research-and-publications/reports-and-publications/access-economics-reports>>, 17.