

4. Accessing health services

This fact sheet is about the rights family and friend carers have when they are accessing health services with or for the person they care for. Health services include doctors, specialists, nurses and allied health workers like physiotherapists and speech pathologists and can generally be found in hospitals or local clinics or surgeries.

Knowing your rights is important, because it helps you understand what you can and can't expect when you access services with or on behalf of the person you care for. When you know your rights, you are in a better position to stand up for yourself or the person you care for when a problem arises. This fact sheet focuses on rights that can be upheld through formal complaints processes.

When someone that you care for is accessing health services, you have the right to be engaged with and valued as a 'partner in care.' The Australian Charter of Healthcare Rights requires healthcare providers to include people identified by consumers – often carers – in planning and decision making.



Accessing patient information

Sometimes carers are unable to access important health management information about the person they care for, even when they require it to continue supporting the person safely and effectively after discharge.

[The NSW Health Recognition and Support for Carers: Key Directions 2018-2020](#) guides NSW Health employees working in hospitals and community health services to value carers and engage with them as 'partners in care'. This includes sharing information that protects the patient and carer and supports carer wellbeing.

Health staff can give information to carers about the patient if the patient has given their permission.

Carers of adults with limited decision making ability who are also their legally appointed substitute decision maker – such as guardians, financial managers and 'persons responsible' for providing consent to medical or dental treatment – are also entitled to receive the information they need to fulfil these roles.

Difficulty accessing information

Carers who have difficulty getting important information about the person they care can ask to speak to the **Nursing Unit Manager (NUM), service manager, social worker or Privacy Contact Officer**. Read NSW Health's [Patient Information and Privacy](#) brochure for more information.

Concerns about health services

If you are concerned about the quality, behaviour or actions of a health employee or health service, you should start by **raising your concerns with the person or service directly**, if appropriate. If you are not happy with their response, there are other steps you can take.

Hospital services

In a hospital setting, you can **contact the patient representative or hospital complaints officer**. Their contact information can be found by phoning the hospital or visiting the hospital website. You can search for these details by **hospital name or location online** [here](#).

KNOW YOUR RIGHTS

Information for family and friend carers



Community based services

To complain about a community or non hospital-based service, you can write to the Director of Clinical Governance of your local health district. A list of local health districts and the areas they cover is available [here](#). Follow the links to find that local health district's postal address.

Private health care services

If you have a concern about the practice, behaviour or treatment of a GP in private practice, or other private health practitioners - for example, a chiropractor, dentist, nurse, midwife, optometrist, osteopath, pharmacist, physiotherapist, podiatrist or psychologist - you can contact the [NSW Health Care Complaints Commission](#) on 1800 043 159. They will also handle complaints about unregistered health practitioners like counsellors, speech therapists, massage therapists and alternative health care providers.



Paul's daughter Lisa, who lives with physical disability and a range of complex health conditions, was admitted to hospital due to a chronic health condition. Paul was not happy with the level of care Lisa received while in hospital and felt that her safety was at risk. Paul spoke to the Nursing Unit Manager about his concerns, but was not satisfied with his response. Paul then phoned the hospital and asked to speak with the Hospital Complaints Officer, and it was determined that Lisa should be moved to a High Dependency Unit to meet her additional care needs.

Concerns about purchased items

If you have concerns about goods (for example dentures, glasses, orthotics) which are faulty and have not been able to resolve this with the provider contact the [NSW Office of Fair Trading](#) on 13 32 20.

Concerns about private health insurance

If you have a complaint about your health insurer, raise it with them directly. If they cannot resolve the issue, contact the [Commonwealth Ombudsman](#) on 1300 362 072.

External complaints bodies

If you have a concern about the quality of care and treatment provided to a patient or the professional conduct of a health practitioner that cannot be resolved using the other information in this fact sheet, you can contact the [NSW Health Care Complaints Commission](#) on 1800 043 159 for more information.

All of the agencies listed on this fact sheet also provide support through the Translation and Interpreting Service and National Relay Service.



This fact sheet was developed by the Carer Rights & Complaints Network (CRCN), a joint initiative of Carers NSW and the NSW Government. For more information, please contact the Carers NSW Policy Team on 02 9280 4744 or policy@carersnsw.org.au.