



Health and Disability Commissioner

Te Toihau Hauora, Hauātanga

STRATEGIC PLAN 2006–2010



Introduction

This is the second Strategic Plan I have prepared as Health and Disability Commissioner. The plan reflects the changes to the Health and Disability Commissioner Act that came into effect in 2004, and the implementation of the Act and Code over the past decade.

Our vision is “Champions of consumers’ rights”. It reflects the purpose of the Health and Disability Commissioner legislation — “to promote and protect the rights of consumers”.

HDC champions consumer-centered health and disability services for all New Zealand — services delivered with care, competence and compassion. We believe that New Zealand should lead the world in its promotion and protection of the rights of health and disability services consumers.

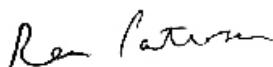
Our mission reflects our purpose as an organisation — *resolution* of complaints, *protection* of individuals and the public, and *learning* from complaints to improve all health and disability services.

It is our responsibility to “speak up” in three key areas: *partnership* (making consumers true partners in their own care), *participation* (ensuring consumers are heard at every level of the health and disability systems) and *protection* (ensuring the safety and quality of all health and disability services).

Key priorities in the 2002–06 Plan included high quality complaints resolution processes, strengthened Advocacy and Proceedings services, and more targeted education. Significant progress has been made in all these areas. Our vision of complaints resolution through fair processes, credible decisions and just outcomes has largely been achieved.

This Strategic Plan identifies the results we plan to achieve and our strategic priorities for the next five years. It also identifies the internal capability and infrastructure we will need to reach our goals.

I look forward to working with staff, advocates, consumers, providers, key agencies and the wider community to make this plan a reality.



Ron Paterson
Commissioner

STRATEGIC DIRECTION



What does this mean in practice?

Champions HDC champions consumer-centred health and disability services for all New Zealand — services delivered with care, competence and compassion.

New Zealand leads the world in its promotion and protection of the rights of health and disability services consumers.

Consumers' rights Consumers' rights are:

- recognised (people know what their rights are),
- respected (people are able to exercise their rights), and
- protected (people are protected when their rights are not respected).

STRATEGIC DIRECTION



What does this mean in practice?

Resolution

We resolve complaints by fair, timely processes and credible decisions to achieve just outcomes.

Protection

We have a watchdog role — to protect individuals and the public by being alert to concerns that may indicate a risk of harm to others.

Learning

We see complaints as an opportunity to improve the quality of health care and disability services. We share the learning from our work throughout the sectors and the community.

External Drivers — What's happening around us?

Economic: As part of the increasing pressure in New Zealand and globally, there will be continued pressure on health budgets, and increasing emphasis on evidence-based decision-making in funding health and disability services. This may impact on levels of service and lead to more complaints from consumers. Health workforce shortages, and the need for improved training and funding of caregivers for disabled and elderly consumers, are likely to be cost drivers.

Social Changes: Consumers are increasingly aware of their rights, including the right to make a complaint, but there are varying levels of confidence, knowledge and expectations amongst different ethnic groups. The attitude of providers to the complaints process is shifting, with many seeing it as a more positive process than they expected. Workforce changes are occurring in some parts of the health sector, for instance in rural areas where it is difficult to recruit medical staff. There are also greater numbers of overseas-trained practitioners, who are unfamiliar with New Zealand's health system and approach to consumer rights. Varying backgrounds in the provider workforce mean there is an ongoing need for targeted education about consumer rights and provider responsibilities.

Cultural: There has been a move towards greater inclusiveness of diverse groups and their "cultures" within New Zealand society — for instance youth culture, gay culture, deaf culture, migrants and older persons' culture. There has been a significant increase in the number of Māori providers and in the visibility of disabled people, older people and those with mental illness.

Technological: Electronic processes and records are being used to a greater extent by the health sector. Technological change also means consumers expect a more immediate response from providers. This raises potential safety issues, for example with the use of on-line prescribing, clinical videoconferencing and the long-distance provision of services in areas such as radiology.

Legal: Changes to the HDC legislation have given HDC a number of new options. Following a thorough assessment of a complaint, options now include referring the matter to an advocate, or the provider, for resolution; calling a mediation conference; finding a practical solution; investigation; or taking no further action. The new legislation strikes a sensible balance between achieving early resolution for individuals and protection of the public. The Health Practitioners Competence Assurance Act 2003 has introduced competence requirements for all registered health practitioners, and ACC has moved to a genuine "no fault" system, replacing "medical misadventure" with "treatment injury".

Government policy: Key policy documents including a range of national strategies as well as the Health and Disability Sector Standards are increasingly becoming incorporated into the provision of services. This is helping to increase the focus on quality, inclusiveness and the need to engage with consumers and their communities.

Other: There is an increasing maturity in the health sector in the handling of complaints, with a greater focus on achieving resolution and more acceptance of a systems approach. However, from time to time it can be expected that some individual cases will receive a high profile. Despite this, there are some providers who are reluctant to offer a straightforward apology when things haven't gone well, or who withdraw their services as a punitive response to a consumer making a complaint.

Internal Drivers — what's happening internally?

Staffing: We need to ensure that HDC (including the Nationwide Advocacy Service) is a workplace of choice and that we recruit and retain high-performing staff. Selecting and training for the range of competencies our staff need is a priority as we seek to lift our performance as an organisation.

Systems: Key information systems and processes have been reviewed. There is now a more strategic focus. Our information systems, (eg, information technology, document management and website) need to be well connected to all our functions, so there is greater continuity and ability to share information readily. We need to ensure that our systems are more effective in supporting staff to carry out their roles across our education, complaints resolution, financial and human resource management functions.

Structure: We have made changes to our organisation's structure to reflect changes to the Health and Disability Commissioner Act 1994. There is now a second Deputy Commissioner, and we have centralised our complaints resolution team in the Auckland office.

Organisational Culture: Our culture is highly professional and staff are committed to the work of the HDC. One challenge is our tendency to work in silos. We need to make it easier for staff to work across divisional boundaries.

Strategic Direction: The greater range of options available for dealing with complaints has enabled us to shift resources to areas where we can have the most impact. Our emphasis on fair processes, credible decisions and just outcomes remains relevant and important.

Processes: Significant progress has been made in achieving a quicker turnaround for dealing with the majority of complaints, but reducing the timeframe for investigations remains a challenge. We have good processes in place to support the interface between advocates and the Commissioner's staff, and the work of the Director of Advocacy and the Director of Proceedings, while ensuring their statutory independence.

Resources: Our resources are limited so we need to be a smart organisation and use them effectively. There is still scope to increase our productivity with better systems and processes.

Our Vision for HDC:

What will our organisation be like in 2010?

HDC will be an organisation that:

- Speaks up for the rights of health and disability services consumers throughout New Zealand
- Champions safety and quality in all health and disability services
- Is seen as a highly credible organisation by consumers, providers and key agencies
- Attracts and retains the best people and provides them with the best possible work environment
- Has strong and independent Advocacy and Proceedings functions
- Is respected internationally for its expertise and knowledge.

Key Strategic Directions

Based on the analysis of our internal and external drivers, we have identified the following key strategic issues that we need to address in our strategic plan.

Improving safety and quality — becoming a champion for safety and quality improvement. Working with other relevant agencies to lead change and improve the safety and quality of health care and disability services. Making sure that consumers are able to exercise their right to complain without fear or retribution.

Using learning to achieve change — continuing to focus on finding the most appropriate way to resolve complaints, identifying systemic issues, and ensuring that the lessons from complaints are shared throughout the sectors.

Greater engagement with consumers — ensuring that consumers experience the benefits from our focus on early resolution. Providing opportunities for consumers to have more say about what is important to them and ensuring consumer perspectives are well understood by HDC.

Building strong Advocacy services — actively supporting the development of enhanced Advocacy services that support and encourage changes throughout the sectors. Improving the level of funding for the Nationwide Advocacy Service, including specialist advocacy, so it can be more proactive and responsive to the full range of consumers' needs.

Refocusing educational activities — being more customised and strategic in our educational activities. Raising the profile of HDC and developing educational services aligned to HDC's leadership role in safety and quality improvement.

Developing and maintaining relationships with key provider agencies and consumer groups — developing relationships with new players in the sectors. Making links and working collaboratively with agencies that have a shared interest in our work.

Maintaining an independent Proceedings function — ensuring that the Director of Proceedings is well supported and funded to undertake high-quality proceedings.

Providing an excellent working environment for staff — being an organisation that has a clear sense of purpose and shared values, that recognises and rewards professionalism and encourages staff to develop and contribute their expertise at all levels. Exemplifying a culture of continuous improvement.

Building an effective national capability within HDC — maintaining a strong Wellington office, while streamlining the complaints assessment and investigation processes to ensure efficient and effective use of resources across the organisation.

Continuing to strengthen systems and processes — Regularly reviewing key systems and processes to ensure that they continue to meet our changing needs. Improving our information technology and knowledge management systems to enhance the work of all divisions.

Improving file management — managing files more strategically so that we can make better use of resources and reduce the time taken to resolve complaints.

Our Values

What are the fundamental principles and beliefs that guide us in our behaviour and our work?

Fairness

- being fair and independent
- hearing both sides
- considering all information carefully
- being consistent in our processes

Care and Compassion

- caring about our work and each other
- providing a high level of service to the public
- being committed to the Code of Rights
- demonstrating compassion in our work

Responsiveness

- recognising that people are waiting on our actions and decisions
- understanding the Treaty and its significance for our work
- being open to different perspectives
- being innovative and creative

Quality

- operating to high standards of quality at all times
- learning from our successes and mistakes
- continually striving to improve all aspects of our work
- keeping up to date with the latest developments in our field

Our Strategic Goals

Three strategic goals must be achieved if we are to implement our strategic direction successfully and live up to our values.

Goal One: To achieve sustainable improvements in safety and quality in the health and disability sectors

What do we intend to achieve over the next five years?

HDC has an important leadership role in ensuring that there are ongoing systemic improvements in safety and quality in the health and disability sectors.

Information obtained from the complaints process provides a valuable source of learning for both providers and consumers. We want to ensure that information is shared effectively across the sectors and results in positive change. We will facilitate the sharing of information about best practice and effective ways to improve poor practice.

We will be alert to patterns of poor practice and intervene at an early stage.

We will showcase good decisions and processes to demonstrate positive outcomes that have been achieved. We will follow up our decisions to ensure that sustainable change has occurred and report back to consumers.

We will work with both consumers and providers to make a real difference to the safety and quality of health care and disability services in New Zealand.

How will we know what impact we have made? What measures can we use to monitor those impacts?

- Regular surveys and consultation will show that consumers will feel more confident to make complaints directly to providers.
- Providers will use complaints as an opportunity to improve services and make them more consumer-centred.
- Increasing numbers of providers will openly and promptly disclose adverse events, apologise and demonstrate how they will prevent similar events from happening again.
- All District Health Boards will have open disclosure policies in place by 2010.
- Health and Disability Sector Standards will require open disclosure policies by 2010.
- A systemic approach to monitoring and following up on HDC recommendations and provider undertakings will confirm compliance.
- We will have evidence that the recommendations from at least three major investigations have been implemented nationally each year.

- We will present trend information to District Health Boards and the Ministry of Health annually.
- Our expertise in safety and quality improvement will be well recognised and regularly sought by other agencies.
- Providers will increasingly see HDC as a body that actively encourages them to make significant systemic changes to improve the safety and quality of health and disability services.

Goal Two: To ensure that consumers are protected and are able to exercise their right to complain without fear or retribution

What do we intend to achieve over the next five years?

We will increase awareness among health and disability services consumers about their rights under the Code, and ensure that they are able to exercise their rights. We will provide a strong Advocacy service to assist consumers to understand their rights and the responsibilities of providers, and to assist consumers to resolve their complaints, recognising that knowledge and the ability to speak up is variable.

We will promote the involvement of consumers as partners in every stage of their care. We will encourage and support more active consumer participation in the design and delivery of health and disability services.

We will provide greater opportunities for consumers to participate in our decision-making process. We will involve consumers in our educational activities and in Advocacy to promote and protect consumer rights.

We will be an effective watchdog for consumers, by alerting relevant agencies to problems, reporting publicly on breaches of the Code, and “speaking up” for the rights of consumers.

We recognise that there is an important place for accountability through disciplinary and Human Rights Review Tribunal proceedings. We will ensure that appropriate cases are referred to the independent Director of Proceedings, and that the Director is well supported and funded to bring proceedings.

How will we know what impact we have made? What measures can we use to monitor those impacts?

- We will use a range of mainstream media to inform consumers about the Code and how to get the best from health and disability services.
- Regular external surveys will confirm an increase in public awareness that health and disability services consumers have rights under the Code.
- Consumer satisfaction with HDC processes will increase.
- There will be an increase in complaints from people who have in the past found it hard to access HDC and Advocacy services.
- Complaints to HDC will be resolved fairly and promptly via the most appropriate option.

- Use of Advocacy services will grow and more consumers will have access to specialist advocacy.
- Consumers will report high levels of satisfaction with complaints processes and outcomes.
- We will regularly review the effectiveness of the complaints processes used by District Health Boards.

Goal Three: To facilitate the resolution of complaints at every step

What do we intend to achieve over the next five years?

We will develop our skills in complaints resolution. There is now a greater willingness on the part of providers to acknowledge shortcomings, apologise where appropriate, and take steps to remedy the situation. We intend to build on this environment and to work swiftly to resolve the complaints we receive.

Legislative change has given the Commissioner a greater range of options for resolving complaints. We will further develop these options, particularly advocacy and mediation, to ensure that complaints are resolved in appropriate settings, using fair and timely processes. Consumers will have a better understanding of the full range of the Commissioner's options for finding a practical solution.

We will build capacity in the Nationwide Advocacy Service and ensure there are more advocates on the ground, including specialist advocacy.

We will improve the timeliness of our investigations, with 90% completed within a year.

Both consumers and providers will be encouraged to participate in the resolution process, and to achieve an early and acceptable outcome.

How will we know what impact we have made? What measures can we use to monitor those impacts?

- HDC will be seen as an organisation that is respected for resolving complaints in a fair, effective and timely way.
- Fewer complaints will be formally investigated, and increasing numbers of complaints will be successfully resolved using other options.
- There will be greater use of advocacy and mediation to resolve complaints.
- There will be an increase in external understanding of the full range of options used by HDC for complaints resolution.
- Consumer and provider satisfaction with HDC processes will improve.
- Providers will use learning from the complaints processes to achieve systemic improvements in their organisations.
- There will be an increase in consumer confidence and self-advocacy to deal with concerns.

Strategic Priorities

We have four strategic priorities for 2006–2010:

- One:** To raise the profile of HDC and align our educational activities to our leadership role in safety and quality improvement.
- Two:** To ensure we have the internal capability and infrastructure needed to achieve our strategic goals.
- Three:** To build the capacity of the Nationwide Advocacy Service.
- Four:** To improve the timeliness of our formal investigations.

Critical Success Factors

What will be essential to the achievement of our strategic goals and priorities?

Effective leadership and clear strategic direction — we need a clear strategic direction for our organisation that staff share and are committed to. Senior management need to clearly articulate their areas of focus and expectations of staff.

Credibility — we must be seen as credible by consumers, providers and key agencies. Our knowledge and expertise must be recognised both nationally and internationally.

Consumer engagement — we must use our Consumer Advisory Group effectively and engage with consumers to hear their views and increase their involvement in processes and policy development at HDC.

Stakeholders — we must build and maintain relationships with all our key stakeholders and be alert to changes occurring in stakeholder groups.

Responsiveness to Māori — we must have a good understanding of the needs, values and beliefs of Māori. Our complaints resolution processes from advocacy through to investigations and proceedings must work well for Māori.

Responsiveness to diversity — we need to ensure our processes meet the diverse needs of society, including different ethnic groups, disabilities and age groups.

Advocacy — we must support an enhanced Advocacy function and build strong links between Advocacy and HDC. We need to resolve increasing numbers of complaints at this early stage of the process.

Investigations processes — timeliness must continue to be a priority in all our complaints resolution processes, including the time taken to complete formal investigations.

Proceedings — our Proceedings function must be seen as fair, strong and effective.

Organisational culture — we need to be innovative and creative, willing to learn, and responsive to change. We need to operate as a happy, humming organisation, able to work collaboratively across divisional boundaries and making the most efficient use of our resources.

Staff — we must ensure that we attract and retain the best people. We need people who are committed to the values and goals of HDC and to serving the public.

Improved internal systems and infrastructure — we need to continue to invest in developing our internal systems and infrastructure. We must continue to improve our information systems and our ability to utilise the wide range of information we hold to improve the quality of health and disability services.

