



Hon Lawrence Springborg MP
Minister for Health

05 SEP 2013

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Mr Neil Laurie
Clerk of the Parliament
Queensland Parliamentary Service
George Street
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Dear Mr Laurie

I write in response to your letter regarding petition number 2095-13, tabled in Parliament on 15 August 2013, in relation to the establishment of a Health Royal Commission into health complaints handling in Queensland.

I acknowledge the petitioners' concerns about the management of complaints against health practitioners in Queensland in recent years and I note the suggestion to establish a Royal Commission. I am also deeply concerned about the fundamental deficiencies in the way in which the public is protected by the existing health complaints management system in Queensland. These deficiencies were highlighted in the three recent reports resulting from inquiries conducted by Mr Richard Chesterman AO RFD QC, Dr Kim Forrester and Mr Jeffrey Hunter SC.

I have already taken action in response to the issues raised. As you are aware, on 4 June 2013, I introduced the Health Ombudsman Bill 2013 (the Bill) into the Queensland Parliament and represents a key step towards fulfilling the Queensland Government's commitment to strengthening health complaints management in this State. Subsequently, the Bill was passed by Parliament on the 20 August 2013.

The Bill establishes the statutory position of Health Ombudsman, to be supported by the Office of the Health Ombudsman. This office will provide a future single point of contact for all complaints in relation to individual registered and unregistered health practitioners, as well as health service provider organisations across public, private and not-for-profit health sectors.

The main objects of the Bill are to protect the health and safety of the public; to promote professional, safe and competent practice by health practitioners; and to promote high standards of service delivery by health service organisations. The Health Ombudsman will offer new standards of transparency and accountability to health complaints management in Queensland.

A key change introduced in the Bill is that all complaints and notifications (voluntary and mandatory) relating to a registered health practitioner under the *Health Practitioner Regulation National Law 2009* (the National Law) will be made to the Health Ombudsman. Currently, these are made through the Health Quality and Complaints Commission (HQCC) and the Australian Health Practitioner Regulation Agency (AHPRA).

The Health Ombudsman will be responsible for dealing with serious matters in relation to registered health practitioners currently dealt with by the National Boards. This includes matters involving professional misconduct or where there are grounds for the suspension or de-registration of a registered health practitioner. The National Boards will continue to deal with other health, performance and conduct matters under the National Law.

The Bill also introduces new and tighter time frames for complaints handling, and provides for immediate action to be taken to suspend the registration or place conditions upon the practice of a registered health practitioner or to issue an interim prohibition order in relation to the practice of an unregistered health practitioner.


Under the proposed legislation, the HQCC will cease to operate, and its assessment, resolution and conciliation functions will continue under the Health Ombudsman.

With the passage of the Bill, transitional arrangements to establish the Health Ombudsman will commence immediately and, as a careful and robust process is required, I expect this will take several months. However, I expect that the full functions of the Health Ombudsman will commence by July 2014.

Should you require any further information in relation to this matter, I have arranged for Ms Amanda Hammer, Acting Director Clinician Workforce Futures, Clinician Planning and Leadership, Department of Health, on telephone 3646 9766 to be available to assist you.

I trust this information is of assistance to the petitioners.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'L. Springborg', written in a cursive style.

LAWRENCE SPRINGBORG MP
Minister for Health