

Advocacy tips for Health Advisory Councils

If a community member approaches you with issues relating to health services, here are a few points for consideration:

- This person is your constituent and they think there is something you need to know
- How you respond will affect the way they see the independence and integrity of District Health Advisory Councils
- You do not have to make a judgement on what they say, just listen and direct them to the right place to have their issue addressed.

Active listening

- Try to let the person talk it out without interruption. A healthy approach is to assume - competence, intelligence and honesty on the part of the consumer so that you stay impartial and open to what they have to say.
- You don't have to make any judgement on the content of the information. You don't have to ask questions about facts unless it is critical to help follow what is being said. Not interrupting shows that you are listening and saves you from deciding what questions to ask until the person has finished what they feel they need to say.
- It is OK to say sympathetic comments like "Wow that must have been awful" without this being a judgement or siding with or against the consumer or the health service.
- Ask an open question such as 'What would you like to do about this?' (rather than what would you like me to do about it?), Why did you want to tell me about this?, 'What do you think could be done about this?'

Providing a helpful response

You could say:

- There is a complaints process for the local hospital/health service that you could use.
- There is a consumer advocacy service that could help you write up your complaint or decide what action to take - Health Consumers' Council 1800 620 780.
- There is a complaints agency set up by government that handles complaints – Health & Disability Services Complaints Office (HADSCO) 1800 813 583.
- Thanks for telling me this. I will keep this confidential and not take any action, but it is really helpful for me to hear about people's experiences and health services for when I am in meetings and dealing with the health service.

You may decide there's good reason to:

- Offer to pass their details on to the health service complaints person - but just the contact details, not the content details of the complaint.
- Agree to attend a meeting with them at the health service as an independent third party, if this would make it easier for them to make the complaint.
- You do not have to be judge of the complaint or comments, simply respond authentically as a fellow human being. Your job is to listen and direct them to the right complaint process. It is his or her complaint and their responsibility to pursue it or not. Your role is to learn from the information and make sure the health service responds appropriately.