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New Australian Charter of Healthcare Rights empowers patients as partners

A revised *Australian Charter of Healthcare Rights* to be launched today encourages people receiving health care in Australia to actively engage in decisions about their care with their healthcare provider.

The second edition of the Charter, developed by the Australian Commission on Safety and Quality in Health Care, describes rights that apply to people in all healthcare settings across Australia and reflects an increased focus on person-centred care.

The Charter outlines what every person can expect when receiving care and describes seven fundamental rights including: *access, safety, respect, partnership, information, privacy* and *giving feedback*. Its use is embedded in the National Safety and Quality Health Service (NSQHS) Standards that all hospitals and other acute health services must meet to stay accredited.

“Today’s release marks the first major update to the original Charter, adopted by Australian Health Ministers in 2008. The inaugural Charter was a landmark document and the second edition builds on that strong foundation,” said Commission Chair Professor Villis Marshall AC.

“Community attitudes to health are constantly evolving and we reviewed the Charter through that lens, to ensure it reflected what the wider community believe are their appropriate healthcare rights in today’s landscape, and to clarify areas that required further explanation.

“The new Charter explains a patient’s rights to privacy in practice, it expands on the importance of informed consent and open disclosure, and it reflects the increased focus of the medical profession on partnering with the consumer in the delivery of health care in Australia,” said Professor Marshall.

Consumer groups and advocates have welcomed the renewed focus that a new Charter brings on the rights of patients, their families and carers.

“Australia is among a small number of countries to have a Charter of Healthcare Rights. The Charter helps crystallise what consumers can expect from their health care. These attitudes and expectations will continue to evolve and grow and the Charter will evolve with them, and that is a good thing,” said Melissa Fox, Chief Executive Officer of Health Consumers Queensland.

“We look forward to the Charter coming to life through its promotion and use throughout health services and the community.”

Dr Grant Davies, South Australia’s Health and Community Services Complaints Commissioner, explained: “In practical terms, the Charter provides a set of clear directions to consumers of how they can participate in the health care they receive. It encourages consumers to be equal partners in that healthcare delivery and it also makes health service providers aware of what their obligations are with consumers.”

“We want people to really engage in their health care and have legitimate expectations about what that health care looks like and how they experience it. With many of the complaints we receive, things have gone wrong due to poor communication. A Charter of Healthcare Rights sets an expectation for consumers that they have a right to be informed about their health care, services and treatment in a way that they understand,” said Dr Davies.

The Charter also assists healthcare professionals, who can use it to discuss with patients their rights when using the healthcare system. The Commission has developed resources to support healthcare providers when discussing patient rights.

The second edition Charter will be launched by Professor Marshall today via a live-streamed event in Sydney. This will feature a panel discussion with Commission Clinical Director Associate Professor Amanda Walker, SA Complaints Commissioner Dr Grant Davies, CEO of Health Consumers Queensland Melissa Fox, and Executive Director, Nursing Services at Princess Alexandra Hospital Adjunct Associate Professor Veronica Casey. Health advocate and singer Luke Escombe will host the online event.

About the Commission

The Australian Commission on Safety and Quality in Health Care is an Australian Government agency that leads and coordinates national improvements in the safety and quality of health care based on the best available evidence. By working in partnership with patients, consumers, clinicians, managers, policy makers and healthcare organisations, the Commission aims to ensure that the health system is better informed, supported and organised to deliver safe and high-quality care.