

29 August 2014

Hon Jack Snelling MP
Minister for Health, Mental Health and Substance Abuse
GPO Box 2555
Adelaide SA 5001
By email: MinisterforHealth@health.sa.gov.au

Dear Minister

Reform of South Australian government boards and committees

I am writing to you in response to a letter I received from the Premier dated 8 July 2014 in my capacity as Presiding Member, Health and Community Services Advisory Council.

Following discussion with Council members and the Commissioner, I offer the following advice to inform your decision-making process about the future of the Council.

The Council supports the Premier's aim to improve the way Government engages with community, business and citizens in making public policy. We also agree that the past decade has seen significant changes in communications technology. However, while these changes enable new and direct forms of engagement, and most certainly need to be embraced, they cannot substitute for the informed and thoughtful collaboration that is made possible by citizens from diverse backgrounds and interests coming together to deliberate public policy in the public interest.

The Health and Community Services Complaints Act 2004 is important and significant legislation that provides a sound foundation for the resolution of health and community services complaints and the protection of the wellbeing and rights of vulnerable South Australians. The introduction of the Act, and a Commissioner, was an important development in improving access to safe, quality services responsive to the needs and concerns of South Australians. Further, the establishment of the Health and Community Services Advisory Council, as required by the Act, has enhanced the role of the Commissioner's office by providing regular and well informed strategic and systemic advice from a diverse range of stakeholders.

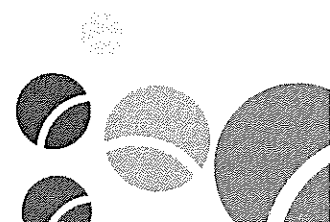
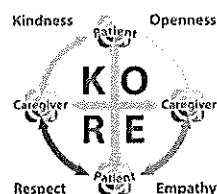
The Advisory Council is unique in that it brings together stakeholders from across health, disability, children's and community services and from diverse professional and community backgrounds. Hence, it provides the Commissioner with a highly experienced and qualified "sounding board" to enhance their independence and capacity for effecting sustainable system change. We are not aware of any other Board or Committee that brings together practitioners, providers and consumers in this way.

If there is an argument for any statutory authority requiring an independent advisory body, the key consumer complaints resolution agency for health and community services, is one that surely has

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a strong case. The individuals who are users of the services covered by the Act are some of the most vulnerable in our community and the Commissioner is very often their only recourse and the only place they feel they are heard and their concerns acted upon.

In light of increasing public concern with respect to education and children's services in South Australia, the Advisory Council believes that the role of the agency is even more vital for the safety and protection of vulnerable South Australians.

The current Council has been meeting on a bi-monthly basis since July 2010 and during that time we have had regular meetings with Ministers to provide advice on a range of issues. We have also invited experts in the fields of disability, safety and quality in health care, consumer experience, health professional registration and notification, mental health, and human rights to provide the Council and Commissioner with advice and guidance to ensure that we are up to date and effective as a Council.

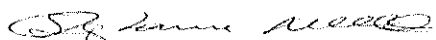
Given the broad remit and considerable expertise of Council our advice to the Commissioner and relevant Ministers has covered a wide range of issues of importance to the community. These have included community and provider education and engagement, development of the SA Charter of Health and Community Services Rights, the impact of reform and budget review processes in health and community services, community and practitioner views of registration and accreditation, the National Disability Insurance Scheme, Advance Care Directives, Patient Assistance Transport Scheme, eHealth, open disclosure and consumer experience of complaints management.

In our view the Council is a very efficient way of undertaking the functions set out in Section 69 of the Act. In addition, as argued above, the functions absolutely require a level of independence from government to ensure objectivity.

Finally, we accept that there may be some synergies between the Council and other advisory bodies such as the Health Performance Council (HPC) and the SA Council for Safety and Quality in Health Care. However, these two bodies have a much narrower remit and do not provide direct advice to a statutory officer with significant responsibility for vulnerable South Australians.

I look forward to hearing from you. Please let me know if you require any further information.

Yours sincerely



Stephanie Miller
Executive Director

Copied to:

Hon Jennifer Rankine MP, Minister for Education and Child Development;
Hon Tony Piccolo MP, Minister for Disabilities;
Hon Ian Hunter MLC, Minister for Aboriginal Affairs and Reconciliation;
Hon Zoe Bettison MP, Minister for Communities and Social Inclusion.

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