



Royal College of Nursing, Australia (RCNA)  
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ABN 69 004 271 103

17 March 2008

Dr Nicola Dunbar  
Draft National Patient Charter of Rights  
GPO Box 5480  
SYDNEY NSW 2001

Dear Dr Dunbar *Nicola*

**Comment on draft *National Patient Charter of Rights***

Thank you for providing Royal College of Nursing, Australia (RCNA) with the opportunity to make comment on the Australian Commission on Safety and Quality in Health Care's draft *National Patient Charter of Rights*. RCNA is keen to comment on this important work and our response is attached.

RCNA believes that patient needs must be at the centre of any health care decisions which are made and this Charter will assist in that occurring.

RCNA commends the Commission on this work.

Yours sincerely

*Rosemary Bryant*

Rosemary Bryant FRCNA  
Executive Director

Encl. Submission on draft *National Patient Charter of Rights*



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## **Response to the call for submissions on a draft National Patient Charter of Rights**

### **1. Introduction**

Royal College of Nursing, Australia (RCNA) welcomes the opportunity to provide comment to the Australian Commission on Safety and Quality in Health Care on the draft National Patient Charter of Rights.

RCNA believes that patient needs must be at the centre of any health care decisions which are made and this Charter will assist in that occurring, and so we provide the feedback below.

### **2. RCNA – Background**

RCNA is the peak national professional organisation for Australian nurses. RCNA represents nursing across all areas of practice throughout Australia. RCNA has members in all States and Territories of Australia, and internationally. A not-for-profit organisation, RCNA provides a voice for nursing by speaking out on health issues that affect nurses and the community. With representation on government committees and health advisory bodies, RCNA is recognised as a key centre of influence in the health policy arena in Australia. When health policy decisions are made, RCNA presents a professional nursing perspective, independent of political allegiance.

### **3. Responses to Consultation questions**

#### **Question:**

1. RCNA supports a National Charter.

RCNA believes that it needs to be stated clearly that the Charter will apply to both the private and public healthcare sectors.

RCNA would like to see reference to the use of the term 'client' as an alternative to patient.

It is important that the document is accessible and informative. RCNA would like to see a strategy in place to ensure that this document is available to those patients for whom English is not their first language.

RCNA believes that while the principles need to be understood a shorter document would encourage wider readership. Patients already receive quite a lot of information to read and it is known and has been demonstrated through patient surveys and focus groups that they do not/can not read some of the existing patient information. There may be some middle ground to be achieved in relation to content and length.

2. The eight rights are sufficient but patients' obligations should be included, for example decisions to leave/ discharge themselves from the healthcare setting or withdraw from treatment or research, if enrolled.

In order to maintain consistency, 'Redress' should also include complaints. It may be preferable to reflect that complaints and concerns will be investigated and a prompt response provided. The use of the current word, 'Properly' does not seem explicit enough in this circumstance.

3. In terms of Access (Page 6) the third point notes 'equitable access to public health services regardless of place of residence'. RCNA is very supportive of this point and commends the Commission for raising an issue that, while a basic human right, will be seen by some as very challenging to facilitate.

In terms of Participation (Pages 7 and 8), RCNA views informed consent as an extremely important part of the Charter. Thus it needs to be well defined, and if brevity is required in the document, with a reference to the Commission's detailed background on this matter. Possible risks associated with procedures should also be included in information provided to patients. RCNA would also like to see an explanation of the necessity of recording this consent.

4. Comments about patients' responsibilities are noted above at Question 2. Patients also have a responsibility to be courteous to healthcare providers. Staff safety cannot be compromised at the expense of patient rights.
5. All States and Territories need to be given strong encouragement to adopt the National Charter.

Many private sector organisations will also have their own Charter and they will need to be encouraged to assess their documentation against a National Charter.

6. RCNA would like to see the Charter tested against the requirements in the Mental Health, Oral Health and Community Health environments.
7. The documents will be a valuable reference for Australian Council on Healthcare Standards, as is currently the case for other Commission documents.

## **8. Conclusion**

RCNA acknowledges that this National Patient Charter of Rights is an important document that will continue to assist with ensuring safe, quality healthcare for all Australians. We wish you well in finalising this work.

## **9. Contact Details**

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