

14 MARCH 2016

CALL TO OVERHAUL UNFAIR COMPLAINTS PROCESS

AMA Queensland has called on the Health Minister to overhaul the state's inefficient and unfair medical complaints system.

Reforms made in 2013 to set up the Health Ombudsman, replacing the Health Quality and Complaints Commission (HQCC), have failed to fix the flawed system of dealing with complaints against medical practitioners.

"The new Health Ombudsman has been just as problematic as the previous Commission," Dr Zappala said.

In 2014-15, the Ombudsman's Office commenced 2446 assessments. 39 per cent of them took longer than the time allowed for completion (which varies according to the case's complexity).

"On numerous occasions, the medical practitioners and complainants had to wait more than a year for a resolution," Dr Zappala said.

"Long drawn out assessments are simply unacceptable and put an enormous strain on doctors, causing depression, insomnia and loss of appetite."

In a submission to the Health Minister, AMA Queensland has recommended steps to set up an effective medical regulator.

"Firstly, for complaints to be resolved fairly, it is essential that clinical advice is sought and received at every stage of the complaint, from initial contact through to investigation," Dr Zappala said.

"Our members have also raised concerns about the Ombudsman's Office being unnecessarily aggressive during its investigations, and the standards being applied need to be transparent and reproducible.

"As well, the way the Ombudsman operates undermines the national complaints system because the Queensland's standards and reporting don't match those of the Medical Board of Australia – a nationally agreed standard."

AMA Queensland's recommendations include:

- Amending legislation to ensure the Health Ombudsman is independent and impartial.
- Establishing a health professional council to advise the Ombudsman's Office.
- Appropriately resourcing the Ombudsman's Office to ensure complaints are handled within the allocated timeframes.

"Making these changes would help to ensure that the public and the profession have faith in the operation of the Health Ombudsman," Dr Zappala said.

The full submission is available at www.amaq.com.au.

MEDIA CONTACT: Anita Jaensch, Sequel PR – 0403 090 911 or 07 3251 8111.