

Submission

No 6

**INQUIRY INTO HEALTH CARE COMPLAINTS AND COMPLAINTS
HANDLING IN NSW**

Organisation: Health Care Complaints Commission

Name: Mr Kieran Pehm

Date Received: 2/02/2012

Our ref: AF1231
Your ref:

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Mrs Leslie Williams MP
Chair
Committee on the Health Care Complaints Commission
Parliament House
Macquarie Street
Sydney NSW 2000

Dear Mrs Williams

Inquiry into health care complaints and complaints handling in NSW

Thank you for your letter of 1 December 2011 inviting the Commission's submission to this inquiry.

The Commission notes the terms of reference of the inquiry include that the Committee examine the operation of the *Health Care Complaints Act 1993*, with particular reference to:

- a) A comparative analysis of complaints lodged with the Health Care Complaints Commission by regional and metropolitan consumers including the quantity and nature of complaints and consumer satisfaction; and
- b) Consumer awareness and understanding of the complaint handling systems and processes available to them both within the hospital system and in relation to external systems.

The Commission's submission is attached. I trust that this information is of assistance to the Committee's inquiry and I would be pleased to elaborate on it at the Committee's convenience.

Yours sincerely

(signed 2 February 2012)

Kieran Pehm
Commissioner

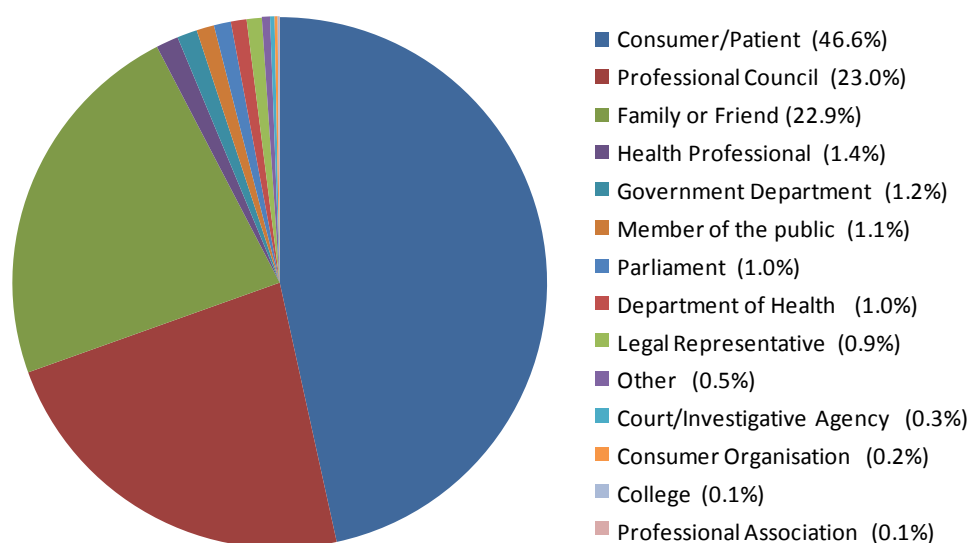
Health Care Complaints Commission submission to the Committee on the Health Care Complaints Commission inquiry into health care complaints and complaints handling in NSW

A comparative analysis of complaints lodged with the Health Care Complaints Commission by regional and metropolitan consumers.

Source of complaints

As shown in Chart 1 not all complaints received by the Commission are from consumers.

Chart 1 - Complaints received by source of complaint (2008-09 to 2010-11)



Counted by complainant

Over the three years 2008-09 to 2010-11, the Commission received 46.6% complaints received a consumer or patient, 22.9% from a family member of friend of the patient, 1.1% from a member of the public and 0.2% from consumer organisation.

In addition, 1.0% of the Commission complaints are received from 2008-09 to 2010-11 were from a Member of Parliament. As these are generally a referral of a consumer complaint the commission has classified these as a consumer complaint.

Overall in the three years 2008-09 to 2010-11, 70.4% of complaints received by the Commission were in one of these consumer categories.

For the purposes of analysing its complaint data for this inquiry the Commission has determined that consumer complaints are those received from:

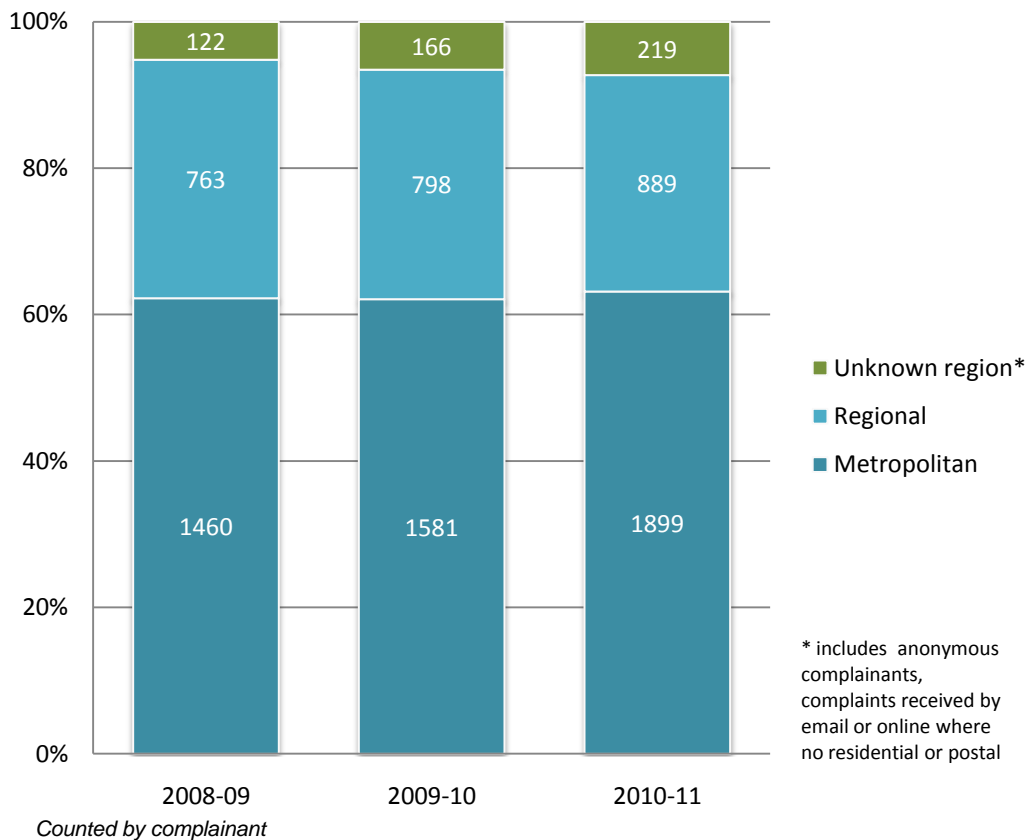
- Consumer or patient
- Family or friend
- Member of the public
- Consumer organisation
- Members of Parliament.

Quantity of complaints received by regional and metropolitan consumers

Chart 2 shows the proportion of complaints received from regional and metropolitan consumers in the years 2008-09 to 2010-11.

Over the three years, 62.6% of complaints were received from metropolitan consumers, and 31.0% from regional consumers. In an average of 6.4% of complaints over the three years the regional area of the complainant was unknown. This is mainly due to complaints being received online or via email with no postal address provided by the complainant. It also includes anonymous complaints. These complainants have been excluded from the remaining analysis into the nature of complaints.

Chart 2 - Consumer complaints received by region

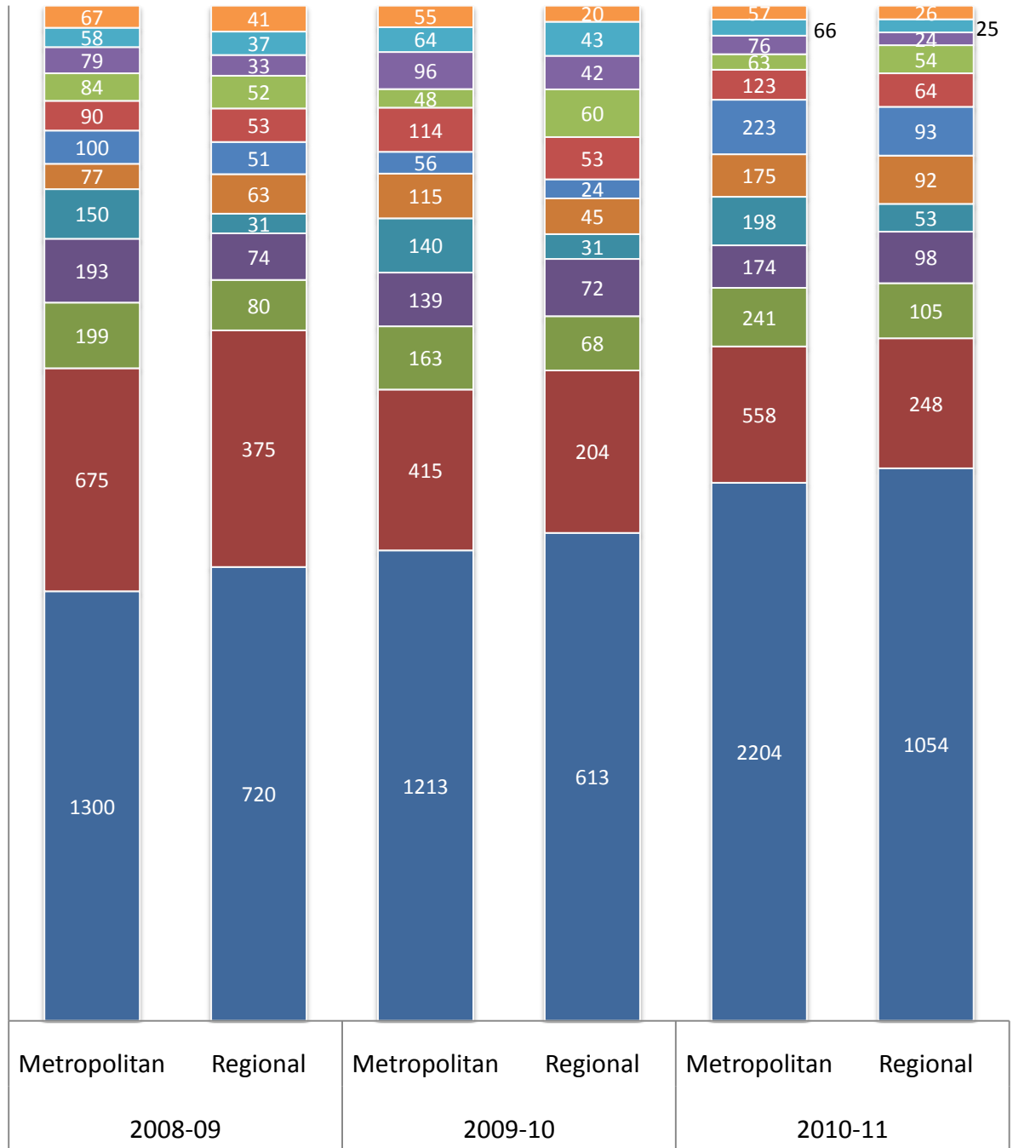


Note: Appendix A provides a description and listing of the locations including the the regional and metropolitan area groupings.

Nature of complaints received by regional and metropolitan consumers - Issues

The Commission records the issues raised in complaints received. Chart 3 shows the issues raised in complaints received from regional and metropolitan consumers over the years 2008-09 to 2010-11. Table 1 also shows the same data by proportion.

Chart 3 - Issues raised in complaints received from regional and metropolitan consumers (2008-09 to 2010-11)



- Treatment
- Medication
- Grievance Processes
- Consent
- Communication & Information
- Fees & Costs
- Environment/Management of Facilities
- Medical Records
- Professional Conduct
- Access
- Discharge & Transfer Arrangements
- Reports/Certificates

Counted by complainant

Table 1 - Issues raised in complaints received from regional and metropolitan consumers (2008-09 to 2010-11)

| Issue category | 2008-09 | | | 2009-10 | | | 2010-11 | | | Grand Total |
|---------------------------------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|
| | Metropolitan | Regional | TOTAL | Metropolitan | Regional | TOTAL | Metropolitan | Regional | TOTAL | |
| Treatment | 42.3% | 44.7% | 43.1% | 46.3% | 48.1% | 46.9% | 53.0% | 54.4% | 53.5% | 48.4% |
| Communication & Information | 22.0% | 23.3% | 22.4% | 15.9% | 16.0% | 15.9% | 13.4% | 12.8% | 13.2% | 16.9% |
| Professional Conduct | 6.5% | 5.0% | 6.0% | 6.2% | 5.3% | 5.9% | 5.8% | 5.4% | 5.7% | 5.8% |
| Medication | 6.3% | 4.6% | 5.7% | 5.3% | 5.6% | 5.4% | 4.2% | 5.1% | 4.5% | 5.1% |
| Fees & Costs | 4.9% | 1.9% | 3.9% | 5.3% | 2.4% | 4.4% | 4.8% | 2.7% | 4.1% | 4.1% |
| Access | 2.5% | 3.9% | 3.0% | 4.4% | 3.5% | 4.1% | 4.2% | 4.8% | 4.4% | 3.9% |
| Grievance Processes | 3.3% | 3.2% | 3.2% | 2.1% | 1.9% | 2.1% | 5.4% | 4.8% | 5.2% | 3.7% |
| Environment/ Management of Facilities | 2.9% | 3.3% | 3.1% | 4.4% | 4.2% | 4.3% | 3.0% | 3.3% | 3.1% | 3.4% |
| Discharge & Transfer Arrangements | 2.7% | 3.2% | 2.9% | 1.8% | 4.7% | 2.8% | 1.5% | 2.8% | 1.9% | 2.5% |
| Consent | 2.6% | 2.0% | 2.4% | 3.7% | 3.3% | 3.5% | 1.8% | 1.2% | 1.6% | 2.4% |
| Medical Records | 1.9% | 2.3% | 2.0% | 2.4% | 3.4% | 2.7% | 1.6% | 1.3% | 1.5% | 2.0% |
| Reports/ Certificates | 2.2% | 2.5% | 2.3% | 2.1% | 1.6% | 1.9% | 1.4% | 1.3% | 1.4% | 1.8% |
| Grand Total | 100.0% | 100.0% | 100.0% | 100.0% | 100.0% | 100.0% | 100.0% | 100.0% | 100.0% | 100.0% |

Counted by complainant

While Chart 3 and Table 1 show a difference in the issues raised by consumers year to year, overall in any given year the proportion of complaints from regional and metropolitan consumers raising the same issues appears largely similar.

The data indicates a number of trends in the types of complaints received from regional consumers compared to metropolitan consumers.

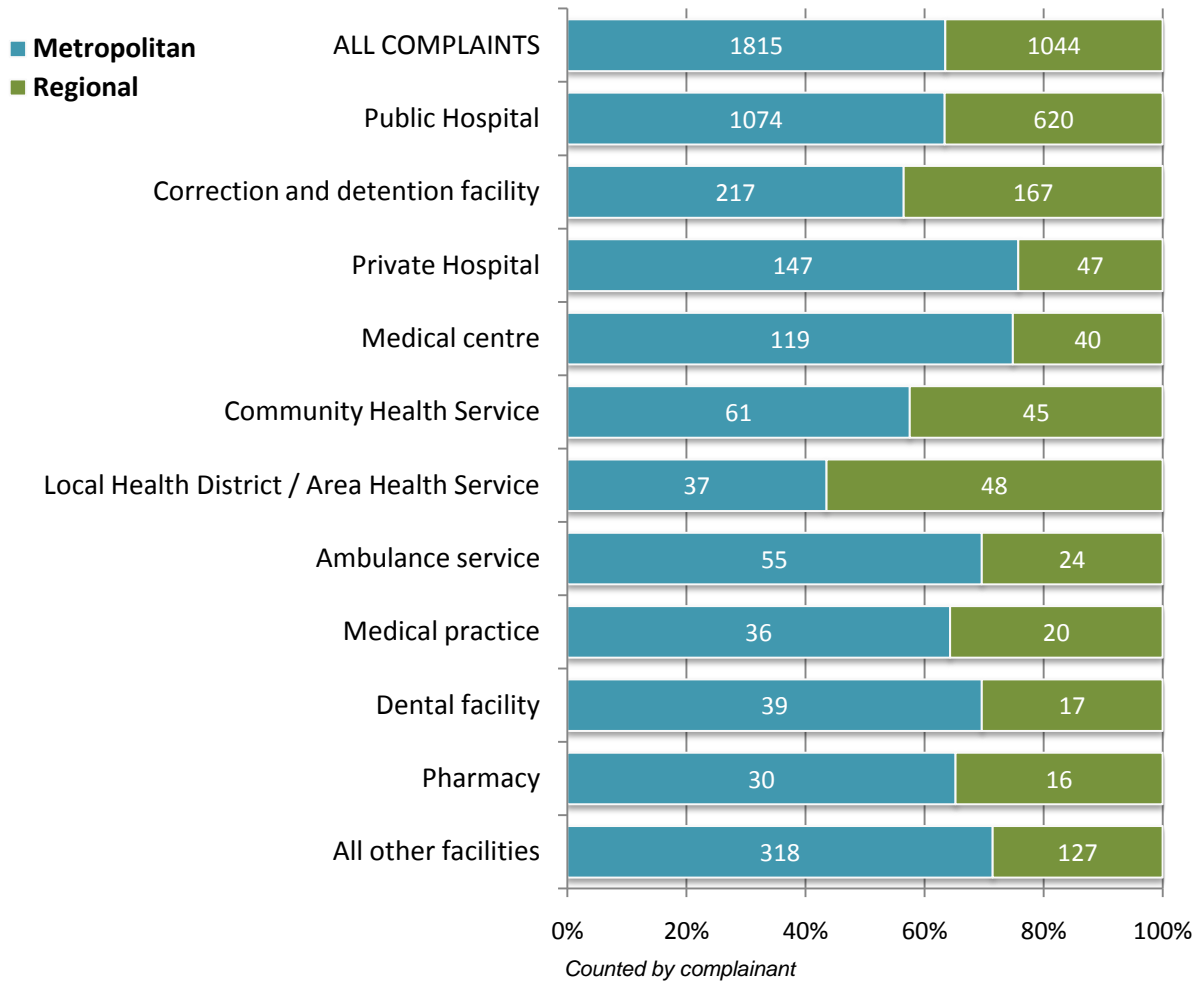
- Discharge and transfer arrangement issues are consistently raised in more complaints received from regional consumers compared to metropolitan consumers.
- Issues regarding fees and costs have been raised in a higher proportion of complaints received from metropolitan consumers compared to regional consumers.
- A slightly higher proportion of access issues were raised in complaints for regional consumers in the years 2008-09 and 2010-11, however in 2009-10 access issues were raised a higher proportion of complaints from metropolitan consumers.

Nature of complaints received by regional and metropolitan consumers – Facility types

The Commission receives complaints about health organisations (facilities), such as public or private hospitals, clinics and medical centres, as well as complaints about individual health practitioners, such as doctors, nurses, dentists, acupuncturists, naturopaths and other health practitioners.

Chart 4 shows the types of facilities which were the subject of complaints received from regional and metropolitan consumers over the period 2008-09 to 2010-11.

Chart 4 - Complaints received about health organisations from regional and metropolitan consumers



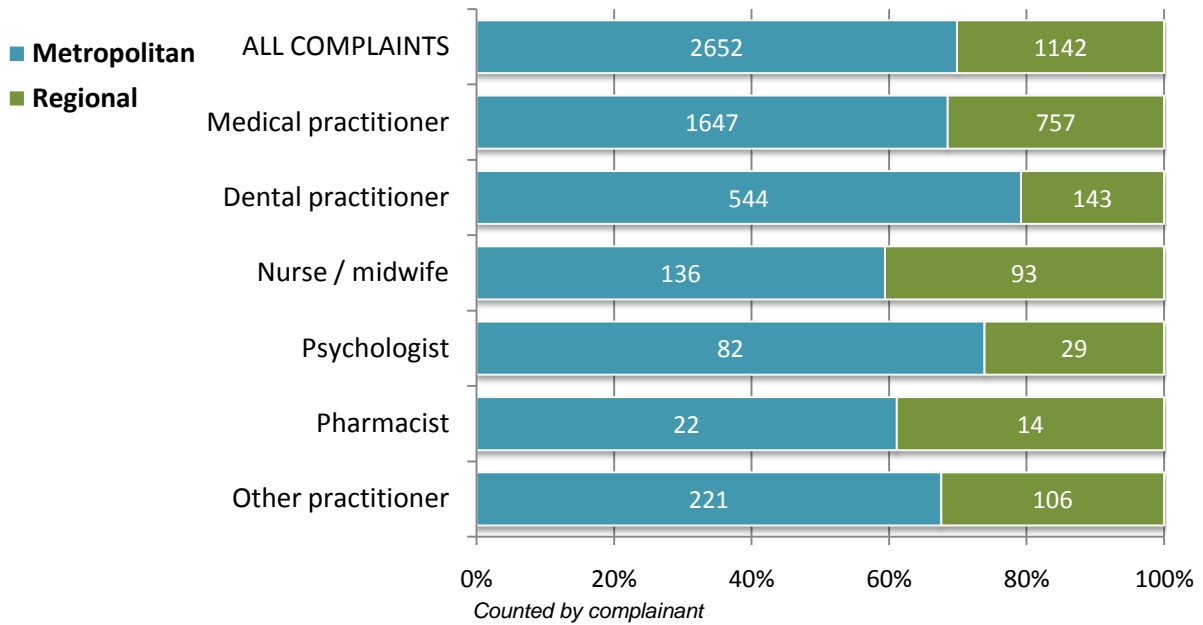
Over the period 2008-09 to 2010-11, an average of 64.6% of complaints about facilities were received from metropolitan consumers and 35.4% from regional consumers.

Complaints about public hospitals showed no greater proportion that the average from regional consumers. Metropolitan consumers, however, account for a higher than average proportion of complaint against private hospitals (75.77%) and medical centres (74.84%). Regional complainants appear to complain more about Local Health District / Area Health Services (56.47%) which may reflect failures by local administrators to deal with complaints to the satisfaction of complainants.

Nature of complaints received by regional and metropolitan consumers – Health professionals

Chart 5 shows the types of practitioners complained about in complaints received from regional and metropolitan consumers over the years 2008-09 to 2010-11.

Chart 5 - Complaints received about health professionals from regional and metropolitan consumers



Over the years 2008-09 to 2010-11, an average of 69.9% of complaints about health practitioners were received from metropolitan consumers and 30.1% from regional consumers.

As shown in Chart 5, the proportion of complaints received from regional compared to metropolitan consumers is similar to the average in most instances.

Consumer satisfaction

The Commission maintains a separate database that records responses to its consumer satisfaction surveys. This database is not linked to the Commission's complaint database to ensure that any responses are anonymous.

The Commission is therefore unable to provide an analysis of the consumer satisfaction of regional consumer compared to metropolitan consumers.

Consumer awareness and understanding of the complaint handling systems and processes available to them both within the hospital system and in relation to external systems.

Over the past five years the Commission has expanded its outreach activities in an attempt to increase consumer awareness of the Commission its role in handling complaints about health service providers.

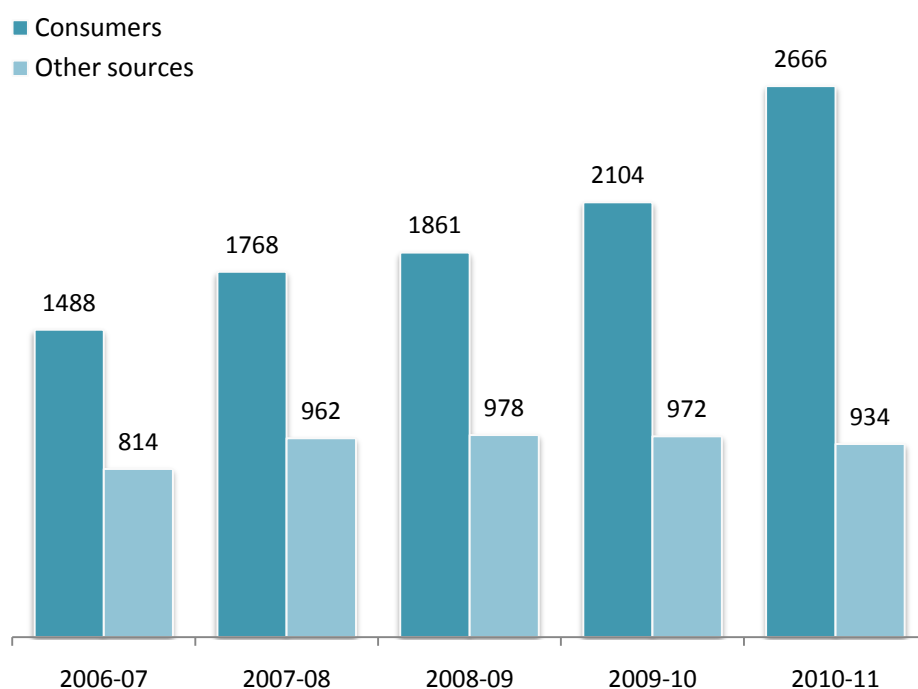
While it is difficult to estimate whether these activities have been successful, there are a number of indicators that show that consumer awareness of the Commission has increased.

Increase in the proportion of complaints received by consumers

Complaints to the Commission have increased significantly over the past five years. One measure of whether consumer awareness of the Commission has improved is shown by the increasing number and proportion of complaints received by consumers compared to other sources, such as professional councils, other health professionals and government departments.

Chart 6 shows the increase in the number of complaints received by consumers from 2006-07 to 2010-11. The proportion of complaints received by consumers increased from 64.6 % of all complaint in 2006-07 to 74.1% in 2010-11.

Chart 6 - Complaints received by consumers (2006-07 to 2010-11)



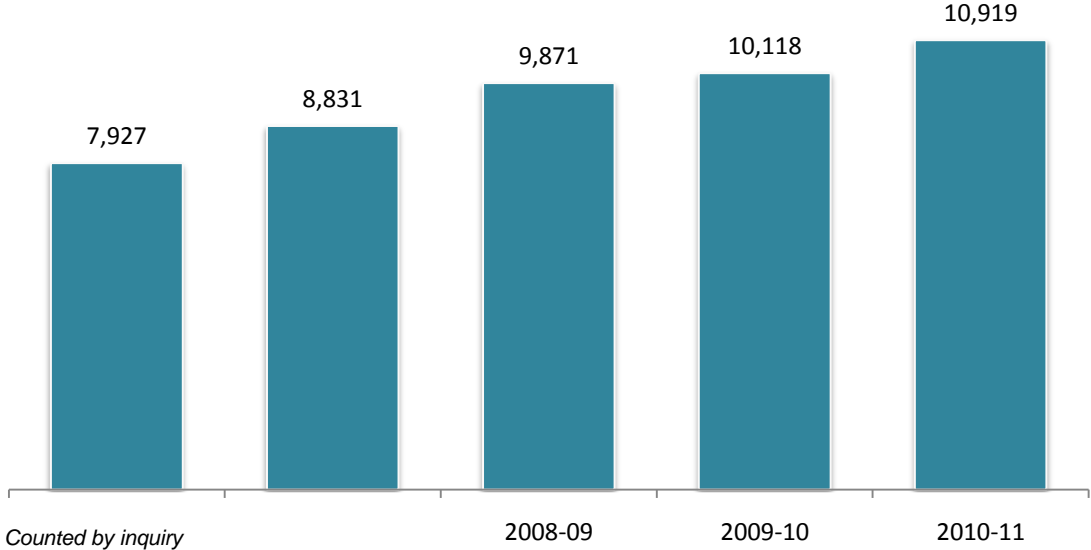
Counted by complainant

Increase in the number of inquiries to the Commission

The Commission has an inquiry line, which is usually the first point of contact for people who are concerned about the health care provided to them or a family member. Overwhelmingly inquiries to the Commission are made by consumers, rather than other health professionals.

The significant increase in inquiries to the Commission is another measure of whether consumer awareness of the Commission has increased. Since 2006-07 inquiries to the commission have increased 37.7%, as shown in Chart 7.

Chart 7 – Inquiries received (2006-07 to 2010-11)

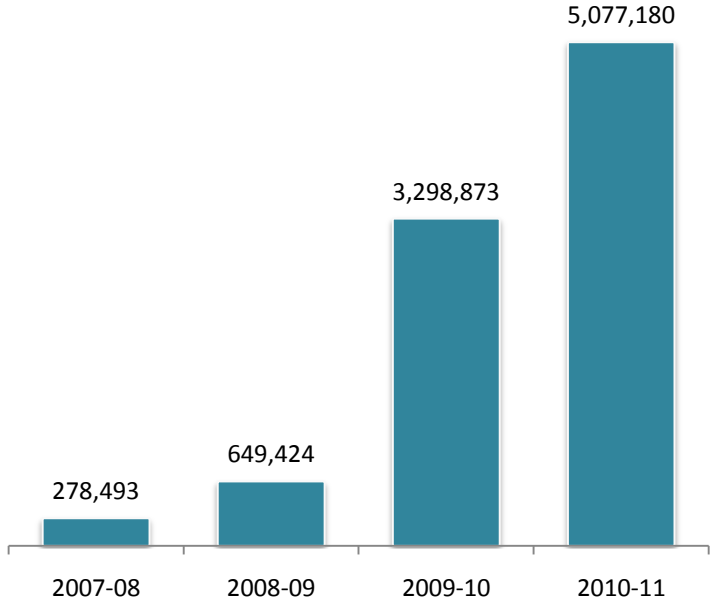


Increased traffic on the Commission's website

A major outreach activity for the Commission in 2009-10 was the launching of a new website with the ability to lodge complaints online. Inquiries to the Commission can also be made via the website.

Chart 8 shows the significant increase in hits to the the Commission's website from 2007-08 to 2010-11.

Chart 8 – Hits on the Commission's website (2007-08 to 2010-11)



In addition the number of unique visitors to the Commission's website increased from 40,440 in 2009-10 to 186,796 in 2010-11.

Counted by website hit

Appendix A – Regional and Metropolitan Area Groupings

The Commission faced some difficulties in accessing current information sources that would allow it to map postcode data to a Local Government Area (LGA) and then to a regional/metropolitan area grouping.

To code its complaint data the Commission used ABS's Australian Statistical Geography Standard (ASGS), which was released in 2011. While this allowed us to map our postcodes we were not able to map LGAs as this would require GIS Mapping Software. The specific Geographic Classification used was the '1270.0.55.001 - Australian Statistical Geography Standard (ASGS) Volume 1 - Main Structure and Greater Capital City Statistical Areas, July 2011'.

The Commission then created a Metropolitan area grouping which included Greater Sydney, Newcastle (city) and Wollongong.

Regional

Albury
Armidale
Bathurst
Bourke - Cobar - Coonamble
Broken Hill and Far West
Clarence Valley
Coffs Harbour
Dapto - Port Kembla
Dubbo
Goulburn - Yass
Great Lakes
Griffith - Murrumbidgee (West)
Inverell - Tenterfield
Kempsey - Nambucca
Kiama - Shellharbour
Lachlan Valley
Lake Macquarie - East
Lake Macquarie - West
Lithgow - Mudgee
Lower Hunter
Lower Murray
Maitland
Moree - Narrabri
Orange
Port Macquarie
Port Stephens
Queanbeyan
Richmond Valley - Coastal
Richmond Valley - Hinterland
Shoalhaven
Snowy Mountains
South Coast
Southern Highlands
Tamworth - Gunnedah
Taree - Gloucester
Tumut - Tumbarumba
Tweed Valley
Upper Hunter
Upper Murray exc. Albury
Wagga Wagga

Metropolitan

Auburn
Bankstown

Baulkham Hills
Blacktown
Blacktown - North
Blue Mountains
Botany
Bringelly - Green Valley
Camden
Campbelltown (NSW)
Canada Bay
Canterbury
Carlingford
Chatswood - Lane Cove
Cronulla - Miranda - Caringbah
Dural - Wisemans Ferry
Eastern Suburbs - North
Eastern Suburbs - South
Fairfield
Gosford
Hawkesbury
Hornsby
Hurstville
Kogarah - Rockdale
Ku-ring-gai
Leichhardt
Liverpool
Manly
Marrickville - Sydenham - Petersham
Merrylands - Guildford
Mount Druitt
Newcastle
North Sydney - Mosman
Parramatta
Pennant Hills - Epping
Penrith
Pittwater
Richmond - Windsor
Rouse Hill - McGraths Hill
Ryde - Hunters Hill
St Marys
Strathfield - Burwood - Ashfield
Sutherland - Menai - Heathcote
Sydney Inner City
Warringah
Wollondilly
Wollongong
Wyong