



Health and Disability Services Complaints Office

Public consultation on the application for recognition of a new field of specialty practice: Genetic Pathology

April 2023



Health and Disability Services Complaints Office

About Us

The Health and Disability Services Complaints Office (HaDSCO) is an independent Statutory Authority providing an impartial resolution service for complaints relating to health, disability and mental health services in Western Australia and the Indian Ocean Territories, covering the public, private, not-for-profit sectors and prison health services.

Our vision is to support improvements to health, disability and mental health services through complaint resolution. This is achieved through two key service areas:

Service One: Assessment, negotiated settlement, conciliation and investigation of complaints.

Service Two: Education and training in the prevention and resolution of complaints.

HaDSCO is established by the *Health and Disability Services (Complaints) Act 1995* (the HaDSC Act) and also has responsibilities under Part 6 of the *Disability Services Act 1993* and Part 19 of the *Mental Health Act 2014*. The main functions under these Acts are to:

- Deal with complaints by negotiated settlement, conciliation or investigation.
- Review and identify the causes of complaints.
- Provide advice and make recommendations for service improvement.
- Educate the community and service providers about complaint handling.
- Inquire into broader issues of health, disability and mental health care arising from complaints received.
- Work in collaboration with the community and service providers to improve health, disability and mental health services.
- Publish the work of the Office.
- Perform any other function conferred on the Director by the HaDSC Act or another written law.

In the 2021-22 financial year, HaDSCO received 2,299 complaints about health services. The most common issues identified by these complaints concerned the quality of clinical care, access to services, and/or communication between the service provider and the consumer.

Feedback for the public consultation

The consultation paper “Public consultation on the application for recognition of a new field of specialty practice: Genetic Pathology” is inviting feedback from stakeholders concerning the recognition of a new field of speciality under the Health Practitioner Regulation National Law. HaDSCO is supportive of the adoption of option 1, recognising Genetic Pathology as a distinct field of specialty practice. There are clear benefits to the adoption of option 1, including the strengthening of the health workforce and improving the provision of pathology services for patients.

A clear benefit to the adoption of option 1 is the creation of a pathway for advancement and recognition for medical practitioners working in the pathology field. Designating Genetic Pathology as a field of specialty practice should attract medical practitioners to



the field and allow for the recognition of overseas specialists with comparable qualifications to meet workforce demands in Australia.

There is also value in the assurance provided to both referring practitioners and the public from the recognition of Genetic Pathology as an area of specialty. As evidenced through the ambiguity seen in the use of titles such as 'cosmetic surgeon', having a protected title for 'Specialist Genetic Pathologist' provides certainty around the training, qualifications and competency of the medical practitioners working in the pathology field.

Of particular relevance for Western Australia is the benefit to rural and remote communities in terms of the enhanced access to Genetic Pathologists to support the diagnosis of patients. Access to services continues to be an issue that is raised in the complaints received by HaDSCO regarding health services; in 2021-22, 402 of the health complaints managed by HaDSCO identified a service access issue. Ensuring that consumers can receive a timely and accurate diagnosis will ultimately improve access to treatment and care.

Given the minimal costs associated with establishing 'Specialist Genetic Pathologist' as a protected title, HaDSCO affirms its support for adoption of option 1, which should provide clear benefits in terms of the availability and quality of Genetic Pathology expertise across Australia.

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