

Wish You Could Write a Prescription for Fairness? Consider the Ombudsman.

Do you have a patient who is having difficulty getting his health coverage? Or a patient who has had endless rounds of appeals through the Workers Compensation Board and continues to ask you for more letters about his or her condition? Or how about that patient who needs a form of treatment that is only available in another province yet the Ministry of Health won't provide complete coverage? Consider a referral to the Ombudsman.

Ombudsman Saskatchewan reviews administrative decisions and policies of provincial government agencies, including health regions, the Ministry of Health and the Saskatchewan Cancer Agency to determine whether they are fair to citizens. We do this in a number of ways that include taking complaints about unfairness, investigating individual complaints, conducting systemic reviews that identify and address broader policy or program issues, educating the public and government about fairness and the role of our office, and offering our fairness lens advice to agencies to assist them to incorporate fair processes in the delivery of their programs and in the design of their policies.

When we receive a complaint about the fairness of a government program, we review the matter to ensure that we are the appropriate body to manage the complaint. If we are not, we refer to the appropriate agency. If we are, then we have a range of services that include investigation, mediation, or early resolution. If we find that a policy or an administrative decision of government is unfair, we can recommend changes. We can also recommend changes if we determine that the ministry or agency acted fairly but there is room for improvement.

We make the distinction that our reviews consider 'matters of administration' and we do not consider or investigate complaints about clinical practice or decision making. Complaints of this nature will be referred to the appropriate body. We also refer complainants who require assistance in navigating the health care system to the Quality of Care Co-ordinators in each health region as they can ensure the system has the first opportunity to address an issue at the place where the concern first arose.

Our broad mandate allows our office to examine issues that may involve more than one provincial government agency. Resolving a health related concern often requires that government agencies work in collaboration with each other. For example, travel to access health care services might mean the involvement of the Social Assistance Program or a subsidized bus pass available from the Saskatchewan Transportation Company. Being eligible for family health benefits might require an application to the Ministry of Social Services. Services to a victim of sexual assault might also include Victims Services. In any of these situations, we have the jurisdiction to examine how these systems work in tandem with each other.

So what can you do? Think about us when faced with one of those troubling cases where your patient may not be getting a 'fair shake' from the health system or any other provincial government system. Let your patient know that we might be an option for them. And call or check out our website if you want to know more about our services.

Ombudsman Saskatchewan

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