



TO IMPROVE HEALTH SERVICES FOR ALL

INFORMATION LEAFLET



OMBUDSMAN

COMMISSIONER FOR HEALTH

COMMISSIONERS FOR ADMINISTRATIVE INVESTIGATIONS

In 2010, the amendments to the Ombudsman Act provided for the appointment of Commissioners for Administrative Investigations in specialised areas of public administration, specifically in Health, Environment and Planning and Education.

The Commissioners became integrated within the current structure of the Office of the Parliamentary Ombudsman. Like the Ombudsman, they are Officers of Parliament and enjoy the same independence and security of tenure. Their powers are set out in law, and their services are free of charge.

The three Commissioners and the Ombudsman regularly consult each other on the methods of investigation, the conduct of procedures, the interpretation of legal provisions, as well as the rules of due process.

THE ROLE

Investigations are fair and impartial.

The Commissioner for Health is responsible for the investigation of complaints about any decision, action or lack of action, or any other form of maladministration on the part of the public health authorities or entities. Complaints can be submitted by the general public including those working with the health service provided for or on behalf of government. The Commissioner for Health can also, with the approval of the Parliamentary Ombudsman, conduct investigation on his own initiative.

The powers of the Commissioner for Health are set out in law and the service is free for everyone. The Commissioner is autonomous and independent of government.

AUTONOMY

The Commissioner for Health is autonomous and does not form part of the government.

The Commissioner for Health is an Officer of Parliament and carries out his duties in full independence. He operates within the legal framework of the Office of the Ombudsman thus benefitting from its administrative and research resources. He works in close collaboration with the Ombudsman and the other Commissioners to provide an integrated and comprehensive system that scrutinises all the types of Health services provided by the State.

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OUR VISION

Complaints will help to improve health services for everyone

We believe that legitimate complaints and their investigation serve to improve the quality of service offered to all members of the community. Consequently, we strive to ensure that people who wish to submit complaints can do so in an easy and straightforward manner. We also treat all legitimate complaints with all due diligence and fairness.

SUBMITTING A COMPLAINT

The Office of the Ombudsman is one of last resort.

The Ombudsman Act requires that as a first step, one should present the complaint to the institution concerned. Give the officials of the institution the opportunity and the time to solve your problem. Keep copies of all correspondence (letters and emails) related to your complaint in case you need to refer to them later.

Submitting a complaint in writing

If the authorities concerned do not answer your complaint within a reasonable time, or if you consider their reply unsatisfactory, you can submit your complaint by means of a letter or an email, or by completing the online complaint form available on www.obudsman.org.mt. Complaints submitted either by email or online have to be followed by a signed copy of the complaint.

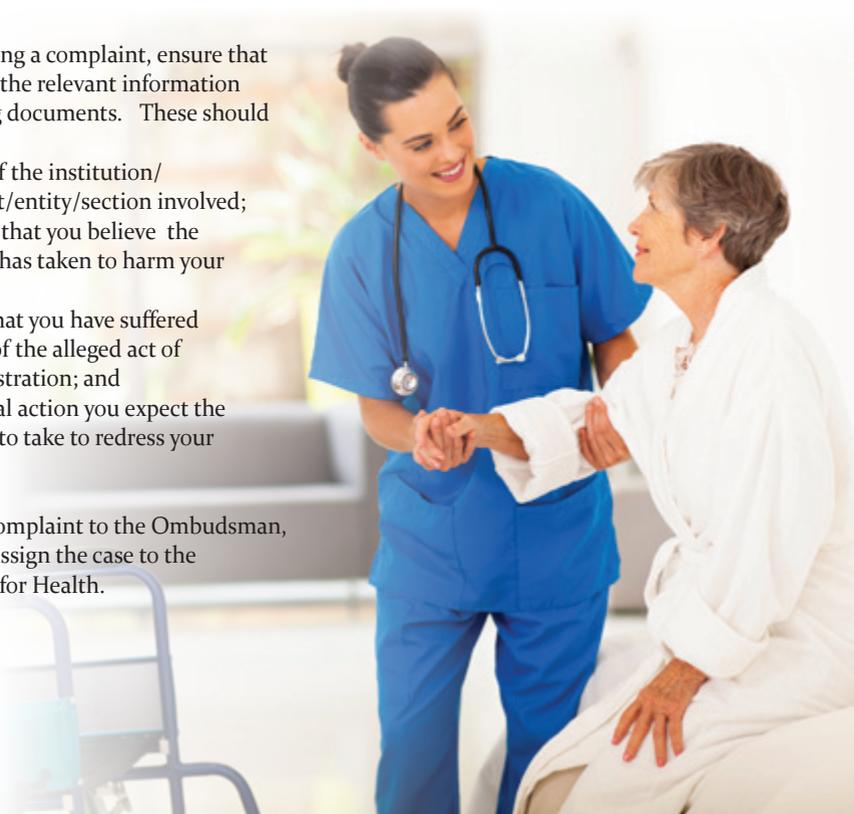
Submitting a complaint in person

You may visit our Office if you prefer to discuss your grievance personally with one of our officials before putting it down in writing, or if you wish to ascertain whether your complaint is eligible for consideration. Alternatively you can phone our Public Relations Officer on **2248 3210** and request an appointment.

When submitting a complaint, ensure that you include all the relevant information and supporting documents. These should include:

- a. the name of the institution/ department/entity/section involved;
- b. the actions that you believe the institution has taken to harm your interests;
- c. the harm that you have suffered as a result of the alleged act of maladministration; and
- d. the remedial action you expect the institution to take to redress your complaint.

Address your complaint to the Ombudsman, who will then assign the case to the Commissioner for Health.



THE INVESTIGATIVE PROCESS

Every complaint is unique and therefore the methods used in our enquiries vary.

STEP 1

If the complaint is not eligible for investigation:

Upon completion of the preliminary investigation, the Commissioner for Health will decide whether the complaint falls within his remit and is eligible for enquiry. If it does not, he will advise you as soon as possible giving you reasons for his decision.

If the complaint is eligible for investigation:

The Commissioner will initiate a formal enquiry and look into the case in detail if he considers the complaint admissible for investigation.

In this process, the Commissioner:

- will look at all the facts that are available;
- can gather additional evidence and information by speaking to you and officials of the institution concerned; and
- can seek expert advice on specific aspects of the case.

Our experience shows that through dialogue with the organisations concerned, a complaint can be addressed without the need to initiate a formal investigation.

STEP 2

The investigation process

The Commissioner for Health will ask the institution involved to submit, by a stipulated date, its comments and reactions related to the submitted complaint. The Ombudsman Act obliges the institution or the authorities concerned to provide this Office with all the necessary details, including files and other documents, which the Commissioner may require in order to carry out his investigation. Failure to provide the requested information or documentation renders the officials concerned liable to the penalties laid down in the Ombudsman Act.

When the Commissioner gathers the necessary information, if he deems necessary, he can formulate the information into an **initial report** which he may submit to the parties concerned for their reactions. This initial or draft report will only contain the facts and findings and not observations or opinions.

STEP 3

The Final Opinion

When the Commissioner for Health has evaluated the comments and reactions to his initial report (where applicable) from the parties concerned, he will proceed to formulate his **Final Opinion** on the complaint. This will contain a full description of the complaint, the facts and findings emerging from the investigation, the Commissioner's observations and comments, and his conclusions with the reasons leading to his decisions.

The Final Opinion can take several forms. The Commissioner may conclude that the complaint is fully or partially justified in which case he offers remedies towards an equitable solution. Alternatively, he may find that the institution or authorities concerned had acted correctly and therefore the complaint is not justified. He can also note that the institution had already taken the appropriate steps to remedy its shortcomings.

Where appropriate, the Final Opinion will include recommendations for a reasonable conclusion to the case. The Commissioner will forward a copy of his Final Opinion to all the parties involved.

Review of the Final Opinion

The 2010 amendments to the Ombudsman Act, allow the Ombudsman to review the Commissioner's Final Opinion especially where it contains points of law or principles of equity or natural justice. The Ombudsman can endorse the Commissioner's conclusions and recommendations or may offer alternative and/or additional solutions.

STEP 4

Helping in redressing the situation

When the Commissioner's Final Opinion includes recommendations, he will work with the institution concerned to implement them. He will ask the institution to indicate, within a reasonable time, how it intends to put them into effect.

What happens if the institution takes no action?

The Ombudsman and the Commissioners, do not have the executive power or the authority to impose their views, or to enforce changes, or to take binding decisions. However, it is a fact that in the majority of cases, the institutions and authorities concerned accept and implement the recommendations contained in the Final Opinion.

However, if an institution fails to comply fully with the Commissioner's suggested remedy, he could notify the Ombudsman, the Minister responsible for the entity concerned, as well as the complainant for them to take any further action they deem fit.

Furthermore, if the Ombudsman also fails to secure the implementation of the Commissioner's recommendations, he can bring the matter to the attention of the Prime Minister and Parliament for their appropriate action.



Mr Charles Messina
**COMMISSIONER
FOR HEALTH**

Charles Messina was appointed Commissioner for Health at the Office of the Ombudsman in August 2012 by unanimous resolution. He joined the Civil Service in 1957, serving in various posts at the Department of Health and St Luke's Hospital. Mr Messina followed a Council of Europe Fellowship at the University of Leeds, on Health Services in UK. Later, he followed a Senior Management Development Programme comprising Postgraduate Training in Hospital Management (International) from the University of Birmingham.



WE ARE HERE TO HELP

To find out more about how we can be of help, please get in touch.

The Office of the Ombudsman is open:

October to May
Monday to Friday
8:30 – 12:00 hrs
13:30 – 15:00 hrs

June to September
Monday to Friday
08:30 – 12:30 hrs

Office of the Ombudsman
11, St Paul Street, Valletta VLT 1210
Tel: 2248 3210
Email: pro@ombudsman.org.mt

Commissioner for Health Email:
ch@ombudsman.org.mt

www.ombudsman.org.mt