

## Context

The Independent Advice and Support Service (IASS) was established in response to the restructuring of Local Health Councils. In 2005 it was decided that there should be an independent source of information and assistance to help people access and navigate the NHS complaints procedure. This led to the creation of the Independent Advice and Support Service (IASS) which is provided by all citizens advice bureaux in Scotland and funded by the NHS.

There are IASS caseworkers based in bureau across the country in all of Scotland's health board areas.

## Policy Background

### Better Health, Better Care

The Scottish Government has committed to delivering “high quality, patient focused healthcare”, as set out in the *Better Health, Better Care* report (2008). It has promised that the views and experiences of the people who use services are part of the process of continuous quality improvement. The Government also wants to ensure that the comments and concerns of patients and their families are dealt with as they arise.

### Ensuring patients' voices are heard

The IASS service has worked with individuals across Scotland to ensure that their voices can be heard in relation to their health care and health services. Getting information and advice about how to access services that help to improve health and well being, getting the right advice or raising concerns with the NHS can be complex and daunting. The support and advice offered by IASS focuses on all aspects of individual's circumstances.

It recognises the wide range of influences that can contribute to ill health. These can include money worries, or issues with employment, benefits or housing. This holistic approach contributes to improving health.

### Consultation on Patients' Rights

In 2008 the Scottish Government carried out a consultation on a Patients' Rights Bill. Citizens Advice Scotland responded in full on behalf of the Scottish CAB Service to the proposals, which include rights in relation to access, respect, safety, communication, information, participation and privacy. The proposals also include rights for patients in relation to Independent Support and Redress. The CAS response, informed by experiences from the IASS, makes clear that:

- The NHS and bureaux working together can help to resolve issues for health service users before they become formal complaints
- After consulting their GP or looking on the internet people would next consult their local CAB for information about patients' rights
- If, as the consultation proposes, Patients' Right Officers are introduced as part of any legislation, IASS is well placed to employ these staff.
- These staff would be independent, impartial and able to take a holistic view of an individual's needs.

Following the public consultation launched in September 2008, the [Consultation Analysis Report](#), [Research Findings](#) and the [Scottish Government response](#) to the report on a Public Consultation on a Patients' Rights Bill for users of the NHS in Scotland have been added to the Scottish Government's website.

The Patients' Rights Bill is due to go through the Scottish Parliament in early 2010.

### **The Craigforth Report**

The Craigforth Report "Making It Better: Complaints and Feedback from Patients and Carers about NHS services in Scotland" was published on the Scottish Health Council's website (<http://www.scottishhealthcouncil.org/shcp/924.html>) in July 2009. It states that:

- There should be greater use of IASS
- Patients "were unaware of ...resources such as the Independent Advice and Support Service for support to progress their complaint".

IASS is mentioned in 2 of the 15 Recommendations:

- Recommendation 2: "All publicity about complaining and raising problems should include reference to the support available through agencies such as the **Independent Advice and Support Service**.....The opportunities of mediation and conciliation should also be explained"
- Recommendation 3: "All those who have lodged a formal complaint should be automatically advised about the services available from the **Independent Advice and Support Service** and asked if they would like their assistance"

The Executive Summary says that

- "Assistance is available to patients in making, pursuing or resolving a complaint, In particular through the **Independent Advice and Support Service** (IASS), but awareness and use of these services has been, to date, limited."