



What Can You Do if You Experience Discrimination in Health Care?

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What can you do if you believe you've been discriminated against? We'll talk about some possible steps in this Help Sheet, but it's important to know that few offer the quick solution you may need around immediate diagnosis or treatment.

Talk to Your Practitioner

The first option is to raise your concerns with the practitioner (e.g. your doctor or anyone else who provides healthcare). This option is a difficult one, but it may be the best way to find a solution.

Sometimes discrimination arises because the practitioner has made up their mind about your situation, even though they may have very little experience with your condition.

Our current shortage of family doctors and other practitioners may be another reason you are understandably reluctant to “rock the boat.” It can be a daunting prospect to find a new doctor and start all over to educate them about your disability.

However, even though speaking up may not resolve the issue, it is less difficult and, in some cases, less costly, than other options. Unless you feel the practitioner's conduct creates a serious and imminent threat, this option should be tried before others.

Complain to the Health Authority

If you experience discrimination by staff of a facility managed by a health authority (e.g. provincial government agencies that manage healthcare services, including Vancouver Coastal Health, Fraser Health, Vancouver Island Health, Northern Health, and Interior Health), you can make a complaint to the patient care quality office (PCQO) of that authority.

The PCQO may do an investigation and make recommendations for how you and the health care provider can resolve the dispute. Some clients have reported they waited a long time without updates only to have the matter remain unresolved.



Disability Alliance BC

Information in this Help Sheet is based on the legislation that was current at the time of writing.

The legislation and policy may be subject to change. Please check the date on this Help Sheet.



File a Complaint with a Regulatory Body

You can report your concerns to the college that regulates the practitioner. This may result in an investigation, but it is also a long process that may end or harm your relationship with the practitioner.

File a Human Rights Complaint

You have the choice to file a human rights complaint, but this is the most lengthy process of all. DABC's Disability Law Clinic (DLC) clients have reported long wait times just to learn if their complaint has been accepted by the BC Human Rights Tribunal. It is common for resolution to take more than two years.

Like the other options we have mentioned, a human rights complaint is likely to sour or end your relationship with your practitioner. The amount of time it takes to resolve a complaint is such that, in practical terms, it does not result in improvements in your care. It is also a formal, adversarial process that can be extremely stressful.

A human rights complaint may be a more viable option if you no longer need care from the practitioner or service. Speaking to others who have accessed health care from the same office or practitioner may support a group complaint. This can have a greater impact, as well as reducing the stigma attached to a single complainant.

Be a Self-advocate

In the current environment, patients, and those they trust, need to be proactive and strategic in their advocacy for the care and services they need—to prevent discrimination, rather than being in a position of reacting after it has happened.

This means being selective about when and how you challenge the perspective of your practitioner. It can also mean always having medical records on hand to give to a new practitioner or one who is being asked to complete a form for a benefit.

Since it can be difficult to remain calm or remember what you want to say when speaking to a doctor who has little time or who may be biased, it can be helpful to bring a trusted person with you to appointments.

Sometimes, effective self-advocacy can resolve a particular concern, as well as educating the practitioner—a win-win situation. In other cases, self-advocacy may mean reaching out to people you trust to find a new practitioner before things become unmanageable or unsafe.

There are several organizations that support self-advocates and may be able to help you navigate a difficult situation with your health care provider. Family Support Institute, BC Aboriginal Network on Disability Society and condition-specific organizations, like Autism BC, are some examples of organizations that may be of assistance.



Write to Your MLA

For more systemic concerns, consider writing to your MLA's office to bring the issue to their attention. This can relate to a particular practice in a government-managed medical facility or to the need for funding for specific services.

Please Note: Nothing stated or implied in this document should be taken as legal advice. Anyone considering taking legal action should get legal advice about their specific situation.

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