



## HEALTH CONSUMERS' COUNCIL WA

### BRIEFING PAPER

## CONSUMER RIGHTS/CONSUMER PROTECTION/CONSUMER RECOGNITION LEGISLATION

### Background

The Health Consumers' Council is an independent community based organisation, representing the consumers' 'voice' in health policy, planning, research and service delivery. The Council advocates on behalf of consumers to government, doctors, other health professionals, hospitals and the wider health system. To find out more you can check our website [www.hcc-wa.global.net.au](http://www.hcc-wa.global.net.au). The Council has contact with and provides direct assistance to many people (over 2,500 a year) who are having difficulties navigating the WA health system. The Council is of the view that consumers in Western Australia require either a set of Consumer Rights or a set of Consumer Protections or a Consumer Recognition Act . We believe that this will assist health consumers as well as the consumers of goods and services in Western Australia.

Early in 2005, the Health Consumers Council Board unanimously supported the framing of a Consumer Recognition Act. We noted that the Carers Recognition Act was established in 2004. This support for Carers was part of ALP policy agenda. In reality, governments in Australia (the ACT being the noble exception) are notoriously reluctant to embrace a human rights/consumer rights agenda.

If we were successful in moving this issue along, we would be among the first states in Australia to embrace the concept of consumer rights/consumer recognition, and it would be a historic initiative on the part of the WA government. If we fail to get this enterprise on the agenda of the state government, we will watch as the neo-liberal marketplace gathers speed and traction with little recognition of the rights of consumers.

As John Lloyd wrote in the New Statesman some years ago:

*“Mass transport, global capital, the internet and supermarkets have steadily taken citizens and turned them into consumers, in whom citizenship is to a growing degree expressed in consumption patterns.”*

The Health Consumers Council is of the view that the role of the DOCEP CAC is to auspice a discussion paper canvassing the options for Consumer Rights legislation which should include a strong component of community consultation, about the proposed legislative options.

We believe that a six month Consultation/Discussion on the paper would be optimal garnering political support at the same time. We would see 2006 as consultation phase and 2007 as phase of drafting legislation. It would then be placed on the Parliamentary Agenda.

Michele Kosky  
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR