

Eight user/consumer rights

Around the world, consumer organisations have discussed, agreed and written a list of user or consumer rights.^{1,2} Most of these documents link themselves to a major commitment by the World Health Organization in 1978 called the 'Declaration Alma-Ata.'³ It described the basic requirements to support good health. This included people's right and duty to participate in planning and implementing health and social care.

There are eight areas that consistently appear in these documents. They are the common ground for user or consumer advocacy in health and social services. As you read the eight user rights you will notice that they also apply to issues such as the environment, buying things or local government.

User rights are starting to be more clearly named and supported in health and social service documents. For example, the report on children's heart surgery at the Bristol Royal Infirmary - known as the Kennedy Report - has a list of principles for involving patients and the public in the NHS (see page 19).² The principles match up with these eight common rights:

1. **The right to satisfaction of basic needs** - food, clothing, shelter, health care and education
2. **The right to safety** - protection against products, production processes and services that are harmful to health or life
3. **The right to be informed** - given the facts needed to make an informed choice, and protected against dishonest or misleading advertising and labelling
4. **The right to choose** - to select from a range of products and services offered at competitive prices with a guarantee of satisfactory quality
5. **The right to be heard** - to have user/consumer interests represented in the making and implementation of government policy, and in the development of products and services
6. **The right to redress** - to receive a fair settlement of just claims, including compensation for misrepresentation, shoddy goods or unsatisfactory services

7. **The right to consumer education** - to acquire knowledge and skills needed to make informed confident choices about goods and services, while having an awareness of basic user/consumer rights and responsibilities

8. **The right to a healthy environment** - to live and work in an environment that is non-threatening to the wellbeing of present and future generations

As a user consultant, you can use these eight rights in different ways. For example they are useful:

- To remind you about your commitment to user involvement and user and carer rights
- To remind you that rights are not special entitlements of a few people - they are basic expectations that should be met for everyone
- To support your advocacy arguments
- To promote user perspective when the situation may be more difficult: for example, when there are no clear views from users, carers and the public, or there are differing views these rights can offer a guide

- To keep health and social service staff focused on the issues by bringing them back to these basic eight rights

References

1. Consumers' Health Forum of Australia (2001). *Guidelines for consumer representatives: Suggestions for consumer or community representatives working on committees*. Curtin, Australian Capital Territory: Consumers' Health Forum of Australia.
2. Kennedy, I. (2001). *Learning from Bristol: the report of the public inquiry into children's heart surgery at the Bristol Royal Infirmary 1984 -1995*. Bristol: Bristol Royal Infirmary Inquiry. Available online at:
<http://www.bristol-inquiry.org.uk/>
3. World Health Organization (1978). The Declaration Alma-Ata. *World Health*, August/September, 16-17.