BRITISH COLUMBIA SCHIZOPHRENIA SOCIETY

Providing families with a reason to hope and the means to cope.

Raising a Concern About Health Care for a Loved One with a Severe and Persistent Mental Illness

A FAMILY GUIDE TO THE HEALTH CARE COMPLAINT AND REVIEW PROCESS IN BRITISH COLUMBIA

IN THIS GUIDE

Before you begin 2

The complaint and review process at a glance 3

Part A: Steps you take 3

- Step 1: Raise your concerns with the care team 3
- Step 2: Contact the Patient Care Quality Office 4
- Step 3: Request a review by the Patient Care Quality Review Board 5
- Optional step: Speak up for change beyond your own case 5

Part B: What happens next (no action needed from you) 6

- How the review works 6
- Results and follow-up 6

Part C: Support for First Nations and Indigenous families 7

- FNHA Quality Care and Safety Office 7

How BCSS can help 7

INTRODUCTION

Families are often the main caregivers for people living with severe and persistent mental illnesses but are not always included in their loved one's care.

If you or your loved one has concerns about the health care they are receiving or have received, this guide explains how to raise those concerns with a health authority in British Columbia, and how to request an independent review if they are not resolved.

We encourage family members to support their loved one in raising their concerns whenever possible. If your loved one is unable or unwilling to do so, you can proceed with this process as a family member. You can use this process for any health authority care, not just mental health care.

BEFORE YOU BEGIN

Keep a written record

Start a written record as early as you can and keep adding to it. Good notes are often the most important thing you can bring to the complaint process. Use the Five Ws:

- **WHO**: Your loved one, and the staff involved (names and roles, if you know them).
- **WHAT**: What happened, what you or your loved one did, whether it was reported, and what happened next.
- **WHERE**: The hospital or facility, and the unit or program (for example, General Hospital, Emergency Department).
- **WHEN**: The date, the approximate time if you know it, and how long it went on.
- **WHY**: What you think led to it, why you are concerned, what risks you see, and what outcome you want.

Also keep copies of all written communication, such as emails and letters, as well as admission and discharge dates.

Check whether you need your loved one's consent

If you are raising a concern about an adult family member's care, the Patient Care Quality Office may need your loved one's consent, or proof that you are allowed to act for them, before it can share information with you.

Please contact the Patient Care Quality Office to confirm what is required and what information can be shared with you. The Patient Care Quality Review Board has its own consent form (see Step 3).

BRITISH COLUMBIA SCHIZOPHRENIA SOCIETY

Providing families with a reason to hope and the means to cope.

THE COMPLAINT AND REVIEW PROCESS AT A GLANCE

WHAT YOU DO / WHAT HAPPENS AFTER YOU REQUEST A REVIEW

STEPS YOU TAKE



1. Raise your concerns with the care team

Start with the people involved in your loved one's care. If needed, ask for the nurse in charge or program manager.



2. Contact the Patient Care Quality Office

Send your concern to your Health Authority's Patient Care Quality Office, ideally using its online form.



3. Request a review by the Patient Care Quality Review Board

Not satisfied with the Patient Care Quality Office's response? Ask the Patient Care Quality Review Board for an independent review.



OPTIONAL STEP

Speak up for change beyond your own case

At any point, if your concerns point to a wider problem in mental health care, you can write to the Minister of Health (HLTH.Minister@gov.bc.ca), your MLA, or your Health Authority's Board of Directors.

WHAT HAPPENS NEXT

No action needed from you



How the review works

The Patient Care Quality Review Board conducts an independent review of your file, mainly in writing. It can take up to about six months.



Results and follow-up

You and the Health Authority receive a final review letter. Any recommendations also go to the Minister of Health, and the Health Authority must contact you to discuss them.

You are not alone. BCSS can offer guidance at any point in the process.

PART A: STEPS YOU TAKE

STEP 1: RAISE YOUR CONCERNS WITH THE CARE TEAM

When it feels safe to do so, start by speaking with the people involved in your loved one's care. If that does not resolve your concern, ask to speak with the nurse in charge, the physician or psychiatrist, or the program manager, ideally in a private space.

Explain what happened, why you are concerned, and what you would like to happen. You do not need to wait for a crisis to raise a concern.

Concerns may relate to your loved one's mental or physical health, safety, medication, discharge and follow-up care, or communication with the care team.

STEP 2: CONTACT THE PATIENT CARE QUALITY OFFICE

If your concern is not resolved with the care team, contact the Patient Care Quality Office for the Health Authority that provided the care.

Use the Health Authority's online form if you can. It asks for the information the Patient Care Quality Office needs. You can also phone, email, send a letter, or ask about meeting in person. You can find each office's contact details below or at patientcarequalityreviewboard.ca/makecomplaint.html.

HAVE THIS INFORMATION READY	QUESTIONS TO ASK
• Your loved one's name and date of birth • Your written record of events • Names of the people you spoke with • Copies of letters or emails • Why your concern was not resolved with the care team • The outcome you are hoping for	• How will my concern be reviewed? • When will I hear back? Will I get a written response? • Do you need anything else from me? • What can I do if I disagree with the response? • Could this concern affect other patients and families too?

HEALTH AUTHORITY	TELEPHONE	EMAIL
Fraser Health	1-877-880-8823	pcqoffice@fraserhealth.ca
Interior Health	1-877-442-2001	pcqo@interiorhealth.ca
Island Health	1-877-977-5797	patientcarequalityoffice@islandhealth.ca
Northern Health	1-877-677-7715	patientcarequalityoffice@northernhealth.ca
Vancouver Coastal Health	1-877-993-9199	pcqo@vch.ca
Provincial Health Services Authority	1-888-875-3256	pcqo@phsa.ca

First Nations and Indigenous families can also get support from the FNHA Quality Care and Safety Office. See Part C: Support for First Nations and Indigenous Families.

The Patient Care Quality Office has 40 business days to respond, unless it requests your permission to extend this timeline.

When you get the response, ask yourself: Were your concerns described accurately? Were gaps in care or communication addressed? Were the risks you raised taken seriously? If not, go to Step 3.

STEP 3: REQUEST A REVIEW BY THE PATIENT CARE QUALITY REVIEW BOARD

If you are not satisfied with the Patient Care Quality Office's response, or you have not heard back within 40 business days, you can ask the Patient Care Quality Review Board for an independent review. The Patient Care Quality Review Board is independent of the Health Authorities.

HOW TO REQUEST A REVIEW	INCLUDE IN YOUR REQUEST
• **Online:** complete the Review Request form at patientcarequalityreviewboard.ca • **Phone:** 1-866-952-2448 (staff can fill in the form with you, and translation help is available) • **Email:** contact@patientcarequalityreviewboard.ca • **Mail:** PO Box 9643, Victoria, BC V8W 9P1	• A copy of the Patient Care Quality Office's response • Why you are not satisfied with the response • The outcome you are hoping for • If requesting a review for someone else: the Third-Party Consent form (required by law)

Other places to raise a concern: Some concerns are handled outside this process. You can contact:

- Concerns about a doctor: College of Physicians and Surgeons of BC, complaints@cpsbc.ca or 1-800-461-3008
- Concerns about a nurse: BC College of Nurses and Midwives, complaints@bccnm.ca or 1-866-880-7101

OPTIONAL STEP: SPEAK UP FOR CHANGE BEYOND YOUR OWN CASE

At any point, if your concerns point to a wider problem in mental health care, you can also write to the Minister of Health (HLTH.Minister@gov.bc.ca), your MLA, or your Health Authority's Board of Directors. This step is optional. Your complaint will be reviewed whether or not you take it.

PART B: WHAT HAPPENS NEXT

This part is handled by the Patient Care Quality Review Board and the Health Authority. You do not need to do anything unless they contact you.

HOW THE REVIEW WORKS

The Patient Care Quality Review Board reviews your file, including your complaint, the Health Authority's response and related records. It looks at whether your concern was handled properly and what could be improved. Its focus is on improving care, not assigning blame.

Reviews are conducted mainly in writing, so please include everything you would like considered in your request.

Reviews may take up to 130 business days (about six months). You will be notified should more time be needed.

RESULTS AND FOLLOW-UP

You and the Health Authority will receive a final review letter with the findings and any recommendations. Recommendations are not binding, however:

- A copy is sent to the Minister of Health.
- The Health Authority must respond to the recommendations in writing.
- The Health Authority must contact you to discuss the outcome. You may ask what will change as a result.

The Patient Care Quality Review Board also reports recurring issues across Health Authorities to the Minister of Health to help inform provincial policy.

PART C: SUPPORT FOR FIRST NATIONS AND INDIGENOUS FAMILIES

FNHA QUALITY CARE AND SAFETY OFFICE

The First Nations Health Authority (FNHA) is the province-wide health authority serving First Nations in British Columbia. If you or your loved one is First Nations or Indigenous, the FNHA Quality Care and Safety Office can support you with a concern about any BC public health care service. The FNHA Quality Care and Safety Office can:

- Explain your options and help you put your concern in writing
- With your permission, send your concern to the right place
- Support you through the review process, including a First Nations-led resolution process

Your information is shared with a Health Authority only with your consent. The FNHA Quality Care and Safety Office aims to respond within two business days. Learn more at fnha.ca/compliments-and-complaints.

Contact: quality@fnha.ca or 1-844-935-1044 (toll-free).

FNHA REGION	EMAIL	FNHA REGION	EMAIL
Province-wide	quality@fnha.ca	Fraser Salish	QualityFS@fnha.ca
Interior	QualityInterior@fnha.ca	Northern	QualityNorth@fnha.ca
Vancouver Coastal	QualityVC@fnha.ca	Vancouver Island	QualityVI@fnha.ca

HOW BCSS CAN HELP

BCSS Regional Managers and Educators can offer guidance at any point, including before you file a complaint. Visit bcss.org to find support in your community. We can help you:

- Understand the complaint and review process
- Organize your notes and records
- Prepare questions to ask along the way

BCSS is not part of the complaint process and cannot file, investigate or resolve a concern on your behalf. Concerns are resolved through the process outlined in this guide.