



Australian Government

Private Health Insurance Ombudsman

MEDIA RELEASE

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PRIVATE HEALTH INSURANCE OMBUDSMAN RELEASES 2009/10 ANNUAL REPORT

The Private Health Insurance Ombudsman, Samantha Gavel, today released her office's Annual Report, which provides information on the activities undertaken by the office in the 12-month period between 1 July 2009 and 30 June 2010.

"What my office consistently finds is that private health insurance is all too often out of sight out of mind for consumers until they get sick. To this extent, the key to better outcomes in private health insurance for consumers and insurers is greater awareness and better access to information.

"It is for this reason that for the past twelve months, my office has focussed on improving information and advice for consumers about private health insurance," Ms Gavel said.

"This work has included major updates to the consumer website www.privatehealth.gov.au and the office's own website www.privatehealth.gov.au, as well as consumer Fact Sheets on issues that cause complaints to the office."

Ms Gavel said her office had received 2,618 complaints during the year, which was an increase on the 2,502 complaints received during the previous year.

"The level of complaints received was in line with expectations, given an increase in the number of people taking out private health insurance during the year. The issues consumers complained about most during the year included: general services issues; waiting periods; fund rule changes; and complaints relating to the level of cover held by members. Complaints about premium increases actually decreased during the year."

Ms Gavel noted that the number of higher level complaints requiring more detailed investigation by her office had continued to decline during the year.

"A number of factors have contributed to this continuing decline, including: the very detailed work undertaken by my office in assisting insurers improve their internal complaint handling practices; improved availability of information and advice for consumers via the www.privatehealth.gov.au website; and the introduction of an industry Code of Conduct in 2006," she said.

1/2

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Ms Gavel said priorities for the coming year included the launch of a campaign to raise awareness of the consumer website www.privatehealth.gov.au, working with insurers to address the underlying causes of complaints to the office, as well as improving the format of the State of the Health Funds Report to make information more accessible and useful to consumers.

The Private Health Insurance Ombudsman 2009/2010 Annual Report can be viewed on the Ombudsman's website at www.phio.org.au and copies of the Report can be requested by contacting the Ombudsman's office on (02) 8235 8777.

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