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# **THE QUEST FOR CONSUMER VOICE:**

## **An Evaluation of the Implementation and Outcomes of the Health and Disability Commissioner Act (1994)**

A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for  
the degree of Master of Social Work, Massey University,  
Palmerston North, New Zealand.

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## Abstract

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This research evaluated the implementation and outcomes of the Health and Disability Commissioner Act (1994) from the perspectives of a regionally based group of consumers and advocates that operate under its provisions. The legislation provides for the Health and Disability Commissioner, the Code of Health and Disability Services Consumers' Rights and advocacy services. The foundations of the Act are based on empowerment and it provides the only collective legislated rights for consumers of health and disability services, of this particular kind, in the world. The research identifies the implementation and outcomes of the Act, based on formative policy evaluation. It employed a triangulation of data utilising the methodological tools of document research and focus group meetings. Two focus group meetings were conducted, one for advocates and another for consumers. The data was analysed in six themes, allowing for the elucidation of the key findings. These themes were: the health and disability reforms; consumerism; the office of the Health and Disability Commissioner; the Code of Health and Disability Services Consumers' Rights; advocacy services and; empowerment advocacy. The key findings that resulted from investigation into these themes were utilised to conclude the research with the prescription of alternative recommendations for policy development and/or organisational structural change. The key recommendations are made in relation to: consumer participation in the health and disability sector; funding levels and organisational structural development from the office of the Health and Disability Commissioner through to advocacy services; an emphasis on the importance of, and need for, promotional activities at all levels of the organisation's service provision and; the need to investigate developing parallel systems of service delivery for Māori. Furthermore, the research noted the need for continued empirical investigation into the provision and functioning of this legislation as it continues to attract international attention and solidify its place within the New Zealand health and disability arena.

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