



Office of Health Standards Compliance
Ensuring quality and safety in health care



SAFEGUARDING QUALITY HEALTHCARE

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THE OHSC CAUTIONS HEALTH ESTABLISHMENTS ABOUT THIRD-PARTY COMPLIANCE SERVICES

The Office of Health Standards Compliance (OHSC) is raising awareness among General Practitioners (GPs) and health establishments about individuals and companies offering private services to assist health establishments with OHSC compliance, inspection preparation and the process relating to an OHSC Compliance Certificate.

The OHSC has become aware of instances in which third-party service providers approach health establishments and offer services such as preparing establishments for OHSC inspections, interpreting regulatory requirements, completing compliance documentation, conducting private assessments, or providing advice on meeting prescribed norms and standards.

Health establishments may, at their discretion, engage private consultants for professional advice, training, quality improvement or other support. However, it is important to understand that such services constitute a private arrangement between the health establishment and the service provider. Unless expressly communicated through official OHSC channels, such service providers are not endorsed, accredited, authorised or appointed by the OHSC.

Be Cautious of Claims about OHSC

Health establishments and GPs are encouraged to exercise caution when approached by individuals or companies claiming to have a special relationship with the OHSC or claiming to be able to influence the regulatory, inspection or certification process.

Particular caution should be exercised where a person or company claims that they:

- act on behalf of the OHSC;
- are endorsed or accredited by the OHSC;
- are authorised to conduct an OHSC inspection or official compliance assessment;
- can guarantee the issuing of an OHSC Compliance Certificate;
- can influence the outcome of an OHSC inspection; or
- have a formal affiliation with the OHSC for purposes of inspection or certification.

Such claims should be independently verified with the OHSC through its official communication channels before services are procured, information is disclosed, or any payments are made. Health establishments should not rely solely on representations made by a third-party service provider regarding its relationship with, or authority from, the OHSC.

A Private Consultant Cannot Guarantee an OHSC Compliance Outcome.

Engaging a private consultant does not guarantee, secure or influence the outcome of an OHSC inspection or certification process.

A private consultant may provide advice to health establishments on training, documentation, quality improvement, regulatory readiness, or other compliance-related activities. However, advice or assessment provided by such a consultant remains the responsibility of the private service provider. Such advice does not constitute an official interpretation, assessment or finding assurance, unless expressly issued by the OHSC through its authorised processes and official communication channels.

Health establishments should therefore not assume that information and advice provided by a third party represents the OHSC's position or ~~that the~~ following such advice will guarantee compliance or the issuing of a Compliance Certificate.

OHSC Inspections are Conducted Independently

The OHSC is an independent regulatory authority responsible for monitoring and enforcing compliance with prescribed norms and standards in health establishments, in accordance with its legislative mandate.

OHSC inspections are conducted in accordance with the National Health Act and applicable inspection tools aligned to the prescribed norms and standards. The outcome of an inspection is based on an independent assessment of the health establishment against the applicable regulatory requirements by OHSC-certified inspectors.

Know the Process. Verify the Information Before You Engage.

Health establishments are encouraged to obtain information about OHSC inspections, applicable compliance requirements and certification process directly from the OHSC through its official communication channels.

The OHSC urges GPs and health establishments to verify any claims of association with the OHSC before engaging a third-party service provider, particularly where the provider claims to influence the inspection or certification process.

Understanding the regulatory process and using reliable information can help health establishments make informed decisions and avoid unnecessary costs or misleading claims. The OHSC remains committed to conducting its regulatory responsibilities fairly, independently, and transparently in the interests of safe, high-quality healthcare.

OHSC BEGINS STAKEHOLDER CONSULTATIONS ON THE REVISED 2018 NORMS AND STANDARDS REGULATIONS TO SOLICIT INPUTS

The review of the 2018 Norms and Standards Regulations for Health Establishments has reached an important stage, with the OHSC preparing to consult stakeholders on the first draft. The consultations form part of the OHSC's commitment to an open and inclusive review process that supports safer, higher-quality healthcare across South Africa.

In-person consultations will take place across all nine provinces from October 2026, providing healthcare professionals, health establishments, provincial health departments, communities, patient representatives, and other stakeholders with an opportunity to share their views and practical experiences, and to provide input on draft 1.1 of the norms and standards.

The first provincial sessions are scheduled for Mpumalanga on 6 and 8 October 2026, followed by Eastern Cape on 13 and 15 October 2026 and KwaZulu-Natal on 20 and 22 October 2026. A virtual participation option will be made available for the sessions. Further details on the virtual arrangements and consultation sessions for the other provinces will be communicated through our digital platforms.

Stakeholders are encouraged to monitor OHSC's official digital platforms for consultation dates, venues, and participation details, and to take part when consultations are held in their areas. The input received will help ensure that the revised regulations are practical, relevant to different healthcare settings and responsive to the needs of patients and communities.

STRENGTHENING QUALITY IMPROVEMENT THROUGH ELECTRONIC SELF-ASSESSMENT

How well is your health establishment meeting the prescribed norms and standards? Annual Self-Assessment allows health establishments to answer this question for themselves, identify areas that need attention and take action to address gaps before the next formal routine inspection.

The OHSC uses self-assessment as part of its broader approach to monitoring compliance and supporting continuous quality improvement. It also provides valuable information for assessing compliance status and planning OHSC inspection activities.

To streamline this process, the OHSC introduced an electronic Self-Assessment System for private acute hospitals in 2024. The system currently has approximately 4,500 registered users and has received strong participation from the private healthcare sector.

During the 2024/25 financial year, 212 of 227 private acute hospitals completed their self-assessments, representing an 89% completion rate. The system has also been enhanced to generate Quality Improvement Template Plans from the assessment results, helping health establishments turn identified gaps into practical improvement actions.

Self-assessment is more than a compliance exercise; it is an opportunity for health establishments to identify and close gaps, improve services and strengthen the quality and safety of care!

PROGRESS UPDATE ON THE DEVELOPMENT OF INSPECTION TOOLS

The Office of Health Standards Compliance continues to strengthen quality assurance and regulatory oversight across South Africa's health sector by developing and implementing comprehensive inspection tools. The OHSC currently has inspection tools in place for clinics, community health centres (CHCs), district and regional hospitals, tertiary hospitals, private acute hospitals, and general practitioners' practices.

The OHSC continues to make progress in developing and refining inspection tools for different types of health establishments.

Emergency Medical Service (EMS) Inspection Tools

Following the scoping visits conducted in June 2025, the OHSC has progressed in developing the EMS Inspection Tool. Stakeholder engagement workshops were recently held with representatives from both the public and private sectors to obtain input on the draft tool.

The workshops provided an opportunity to engage stakeholders on the practical application of the tool and to gather views based on their experience of EMS service delivery. The input received will inform the further refinement of the tool and ensure that it takes into account the different contexts in which EMS services are provided across the country.

GP Inspection Tool Updated to Strengthen Assessment of General Practices

The OHSC has updated its General Practitioner (GP) Inspection Tool to strengthen the assessment of compliance with prescribed norms and standards at general practices.

Version 1.1 of the GP Inspection Tool has been developed as part of the OHSC's ongoing work to support consistent assessment of healthcare establishments in the primary healthcare sector.

The tool provides a structured approach to assessing general practices against areas important for safe, high-quality healthcare. These include clinical governance, patient rights, infection prevention and control, medication management, health records, emergency preparedness, and the safety and functionality of the practice environment.

A structured approach to assessing compliance

The GP inspection is structured around two main functional areas: Administration/Practice Management and Clinical Care and Support.

The measures within these areas are risk-rated to help identify areas of greater concern and prioritise patient safety. They are categorised as:

- **Non-Negotiable Measures:** Areas where non-compliance may pose an immediate risk to patient safety.
- **Vital Measures:** High-priority requirements that support clinical and operational safety.
- **Essential Measures:** Requirements relating to general regulatory and operational practices.

This risk-based approach allows the OHSC to focus on areas that may directly impact the safety and quality of healthcare provided to patients.

Supporting general practices

The GP Inspection Tool is not only used to assess compliance. It also provides general practices with a clear indication of the requirements against which they will be assessed.

Practices can use the tool to review their own systems and identify areas that may require attention. Regular internal reviews, staff training, incident reporting, and ongoing quality improvement can help practices address gaps and maintain compliance with prescribed norms and standards.

The introduction of Version 1.1 is part of OHSC's ongoing efforts to strengthen the regulation of healthcare establishments and promote a consistent approach to assessing the quality and safety of healthcare services. Through the inspection process, the OHSC identifies areas of compliance and non-compliance and, where necessary, supports the regulatory processes required to address identified gaps and risks.

A Dedicated Inspection Tool for Psychiatric Hospital

The OHSC continues to strengthen its inspection tools to ensure that they reflect the different healthcare settings and the specific needs of the people receiving care.

As part of its ongoing commitment to improving healthcare quality, the OHSC is developing inspection tools for Psychiatric Hospitals to strengthen compliance assessments in these establishments. The dedicated tool will provide a more comprehensive approach to assessing the specific services, processes and environment of psychiatric hospitals.

Significant progress has been made in developing the Psychiatric Hospital Inspection Tool, with scoping visits recently conducted to inform the development of Draft 2. These visits provided valuable insights into the unique operational environments and service delivery requirements of psychiatric healthcare facilities, ensuring that the tool is relevant, practical, and aligned with sector needs.

The Psychiatric Hospital Inspection Tool will cover both the public and private sectors and address the unique environment in which psychiatric care is rendered, with implementation planned for 2027. Together, these developments form part of the OHSC's ongoing work to strengthen its inspection and assessment framework and ensure that regulatory tools remain relevant to the different healthcare settings in which care is provided

TAKING PREVENTION TO THE GROUND: THE HEALTH OMBUD'S CONTRIBUTION TO THE NATIONAL PREVENTIVE MECHANISM

During the second quarter of the 2026/27 financial year, the Office of the Health Ombud strengthened its contribution to South Africa's National Preventive Mechanism (NPM) through unannounced monitoring visits to places where people are deprived of their liberty. This monitoring is undertaken in line with South Africa's obligations under the United Nations' Optional Protocol to the Convention against Torture and other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (OPCAT), to which the country has been a signatory since 2019.

The Health Ombud conducted visits in the Northern Cape (July 2026) and KwaZulu-Natal (August 2026). A total of 11 places of deprivation of liberty were visited across the two provinces. These included six South African Police Service (SAPS) facilities, two female correctional centres, two psychiatric facilities and one place of safety. The visits form part of the Health Ombud's additional function under the NPM and support efforts to prevent torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment.

While the facilities visited differed in purpose and setting, the focus remained on identifying risks, assessing conditions, and considering whether appropriate measures were in place to protect the rights, dignity, health, and well-being of people whose freedom was restricted.

Bringing a Healthcare Perspective to NPM Monitoring

Under the coordination of the South African Human Rights Commission (SAHRC) as the single designated NPM organisation, the Health Ombud brings a specific healthcare perspective to this work. This is particularly important in places where people who are deprived of their liberty also require healthcare or are receiving treatment under conditions that restrict their freedom.

In psychiatric facilities, for example, practices such as involuntary admission, seclusion and restraint can have a significant impact on the rights and dignity of healthcare users. These practices, therefore, require appropriate safeguards, proper oversight and accountability. The Health Ombud's experience in handling healthcare complaints and identifying failures in healthcare delivery also helps identify risks that could affect the safety and well-being of persons deprived of liberty. The monitoring process considers a range of healthcare-related matters, including medication management, patient observation, staffing, clinical governance, infection prevention and control, clinical records, and the reporting and management of incidents.

Attention is also given to concerns relating to possible abuse or neglect, the protection of patients' rights, infrastructure and accountability.

From Monitoring to Action

NPM monitoring is not only about identifying challenges. It also provides an opportunity to bring concerns to the attention of the relevant authorities and to identify matters that may require further attention, referral, investigation or collaboration with other stakeholders.

Through these visits, the Health Ombud contributes to a broader system of prevention and accountability, helping to ensure that the health and dignity of people whose freedom is restricted remain part of the conversation on human rights and safe healthcare. The work forms part of the Health Ombud's broader responsibility to promote accountability in healthcare and contribute to improving the experiences and outcomes of people who use the health system.

STAY ALERT REMINDER: BEWARE OF INDIVIDUALS IMPERSONATING OHSC INSPECTORS

The OHSC reminds health establishments and healthcare practitioners to remain vigilant against individuals who falsely claim to be OHSC inspectors or officials and request payment in exchange for influencing an inspection or securing a favourable outcome. Payment, gifts, favours or any other benefit cannot influence OHSC inspections and regulatory decisions. No OHSC official may solicit or accept any form of inducement in connection with an inspection or regulatory decision.

If someone claims to be acting on behalf of the OHSC, verify their identity before allowing an inspection to proceed. Authorised OHSC inspectors carry a valid OHSC identification card or a form signed by the OHSC Chief Executive Officer. Any suspicious request for payment, personal benefit, or other inducement should be reported immediately to the OHSC Fraud and Ethics Hotline on 0800 003 231, by email at office@thehotline.co.za, or through the OHSC website. Continued vigilance by health establishments and healthcare practitioners helps protect the integrity, independence and credibility of healthcare regulation!

