

Access to  
information

# Community involvement and the right to health

Access to  
health care  
services

Lawful, fair  
administrative  
actions

Access to  
adequate  
housing

Dignity,  
equality and  
life

A healthy  
environment

Basic  
education

Access to  
social security

Personal  
freedom and  
security

Stand Up! · Speak Out! · Do Something!  
Good Health  
is your right

Freedom  
of religion,  
belief and  
opinion

# What is the right to health?

The right to health means that the state must take steps to ensure that all citizens have an equal chance to live a long and healthy life.

This includes:

- the right to a safe, clean living environment
- the right to expect and demand adequate health care
- The right to health is for everyone, rich and poor, without discrimination.

## **You have a right to health!**

The government must help you to live in a safe, clean living environment and ensure that you have access to adequate health care. It is not enough for the government to say it will try or it is doing its best, it must comply with its obligations. (See Pamphlet 1). You must hold government answerable if it does not meet this obligation.

**This is what makes a  
human right different  
from other demands  
for service!**

# Community involvement



Emma has a cold. She takes the day off work and she goes to the Community Health Centre (CHC) for treatment. There are long queues at the CHC. After waiting for hours the nurse says that they will not be helping anyone else for the day. Emma has to leave, even though access to health care is a right provided for in the Bill of Rights and the CHC has an obligation to meet this right. She complains to the staff at the Community Health Centre, but no one will listen.

## How can we help to realise the right to health?

Emma tells her friends, and they mobilise other members of their community to support and demand that the State meets its obligations to protect, respect and fulfil Emma's and other people's right to health. As a group they go back to the Community Health Centre and demand to meet the Community Health Forum. The Forum accepts that Emma has a right to get treatment and intervenes to ensure that Emma's rights are not violated and that she gets treatment for her symptoms.

The Patients' Rights Charter informs us of our rights and responsibilities and teaches us that we need strong, active and mobilised communities to ensure that our rights are met. The charter should be displayed in all hospitals and clinics.

## Why should we mobilise and stand together?

When Emma was alone, no one would listen, even though she knew she had a right to health. Like oxen ploughing a field, or people building a house, it is more effective to stand together when we fight for our rights. Knowing and understanding human rights can empower people and communities to change the conditions that cause their ill-health. That means that people must actively participate in bringing about change in their communities and that government must make it possible for people to participate. This is part of our democracy.



## How can health professionals help us access our right to health?

Health professionals can help us to raise awareness about human rights. Standing together with patients, they can:

- demand sufficient resources from the State
- work together in an environment of mutual respect and communication between providers and patients
- help patients to access necessary information
- minimise mistakes and misunderstandings
- make health care more efficient and effective.

To participate in change, we need to have the rights to freedom of association and assembly, freedom of speech, access to information and the opportunity to tell decision makers what we think.

Do you know your community health forum representatives? Contact them! Talk to them! Get to know them.



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1. The right to health
- 2. Community involvement and the right to health**
3. The patients' rights charter
4. Individual and collective rights in public health
5. Access to information
6. Rights and resource allocation



People's Health Movement



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