



## **Complaint Management Policy – Complaints from an external source against an individual staff member or volunteer (including CoM) OR against an operational aspect of the WNC**

*Wonthaggi Neighbourhood Centre at Mitchell House Inc. (WNC) is a non-profit, charitable organisation, based on community development principles, whose purpose it is to:*

- *Provide a safe, welcoming and inclusive environment where people can meet to learn and share ideas, friendship, skills and information and improve social health and well-being.*

*This central and fundamental purpose informs policy development and is reflected in all WNC policy documentation.*

### **Policy statement**

Complaints and other forms of feedback provide valuable information on levels of client satisfaction and provide an organisation with an opportunity to improve upon all aspects of service. Feedback is to be taken seriously and to be seen as an opportunity for improvement. Feedback that is recorded and handled effectively will provide valuable information in identifying areas for improvement, coordinating a consistent approach for resolution, reducing the potential for future complaints and allow for reporting and efficient allocation of resources.

Resolving complaints at the earliest opportunity in a way that respects and values the person's feedback, can be one of the most important factors in recovering the person's confidence about a service. It can also help prevent further escalation of the complaint. A responsive, efficient, effective and fair complaint management process can assist an organisation to achieve this.

### **Definition**

*Complaint – Australian Standard AS/NZS ISO 10002:2014 Guidelines for Complaints Management in Organisations defines a complaint as an 'expression of dissatisfaction made to or about an organisation, related to its products, services, staff or the handling of complaint, where a response or resolution is explicitly or implicitly expected or legally required'.*

## Guiding principles

An effective complaint handling process addresses the principles of visibility and accessibility, responsiveness, assessment and investigation, feedback, improvement focus and service excellence.

An approach to complaints management supports:

- People understanding their rights and responsibilities
- information on the complaint being easily accessible
- satisfaction of clients in the management of their complaints
- the recording of data to identify emerging and existing trends or systemic issues
- staff to demonstrate an awareness of feedback and complaint management processes
- staff to develop the range of skills and capabilities required to manage complaints and feedback
- an organisational culture that is focused on effective, person-centred complaints resolution and utilising feedback for continuous improvement.

## Visibility and accessibility

The complaints management process will be visible and accessible to individuals and:

- explain how and where to make a complaint, including an anonymous complaint
- ensure the website and service sites have information on how to lodge a complaint
- consider specific needs of the individual or barriers they may experience
- explain how the organisation will manage a complaint and the expected timeframe for resolution
- support individuals to identify and seek their preferred outcome.

## Responsiveness

The complaints management process will be responsive and provide mechanisms and strategies to:

- promote service user rights, particularly those with special support needs, so they can actively participate in the complaints process
- inform and train staff to use the complaint management process
- support the individual to seek the most appropriate resolution
- ensure there is clarity about the requested outcome
- monitor timeframes for resolution
- communicate with all relevant parties about the progress of the resolution of the complaint.

## Assessment and investigation

The complaints management process will have mechanisms to:

- assess complaints for severity, safety, complexity, impact and the need for immediate action
- collect adequate and appropriate information
- protect the privacy and confidentiality of the information
- determine who and at what level the complaint should be dealt with
- enable complaints to be considered independently, fairly and objectively.

## Feedback

The complaints management process will provide mechanisms and strategies to:

- explain what happened and why, what will be done to fix the issue, and who will do it, how we will communicate our progress and how we will check things are on track
- explain the reasons for the decision
- provide an apology where the organisation has failed to meet its service obligations
- where an apology is provided, ensure it is sincere, and accepts responsibility for what occurred and the impact
- explain the circumstances without making excuses, and summarise the key actions that will be taken
- provide regular updates to the complainant if the resolution is delayed
- notify the complainant of alternative complaint resolution pathways and review mechanisms
- follow up with complainants to determine the effectiveness of the outcome, where appropriate.

## Improvement focussed

The complaint management process will provide mechanisms and strategies to gather and record feedback and other information to:

- meet any statutory, policy or procedural reporting requirements
- improve the training and capabilities of complaint management staff
- analyse the complaint data and identify complaint trends for performance improvement
- monitor the time taken to resolve complaints
- notify service providers as part of a continuous quality improvement approach.

## Service excellence

The complaint management and resolution process is a part of a quality culture where complaints are an opportunity for improvement through:

- positive attitudes towards dealing with feedback, and complaints and respect for the person who has raised the matters
- values that reinforce the commitment of the organisation to quality service delivery and encouragement for provision of feedback on what is and what isn't working
- a clear commitment that no one will be adversely affected as a result of making a complaint or a complaint being made on their behalf
- a policy that enables the complaint management process to address and investigate issues relating to all employees, including senior management.
- data analysis to identify and explore trends that highlight opportunities to improve service delivery and complaint handling
- a commitment to continued training and development of effective complaint management staff
- a commitment by the organisation's leadership to an effective complaints management process as part of a robust quality improvement framework.

## Complaint management process

The complaint management process can be simplified into five steps:

1. Receive
2. Record
3. Acknowledge
4. Resolve
5. Communicate resolution.

## **1. Receive**

- Listen – openly to the concerns being raised by the complainant.
- Ask – the complainant what outcome they are seeking.
- Inform – the complainant clearly of the complaint process, and set realistic expectations.
- Accountable – be empathic towards the affected person and action all commitments made.
- Assess – create a prioritisation framework to identify situations that pose an immediate threat or danger, or require a specialised response.

## **2. Record**

- Record – all information that is relevant to the complaint, in its original and simplest form.
- Stored – in a also in such a way that allows for data analysis.
- Protect – ensure access is restricted to clients who are involved in managing the complaint and all information remains confidential.
- Refer to the Complaint template reporting form that can be used for reporting purposes.

## **3. Acknowledge**

- Acknowledge – receipt of the complaint early to build a relationship of trust and confidence with the person who raised the complaint.
- Anonymity – a person may request to remain anonymous in their lodgement and therefore contact may not be possible or expected.
- Desired outcomes – provide realistic expectations and refer the matter to other organisations where identified as being more suitable to handle.
- Conflict of interest – avoid this by appointing a person unrelated to the matter as an investigator if deemed necessary and appropriate.
- Timeframes and expectations – provide these to the complainant where possible.

## **4. Resolve**

- Involve the complainant – keep them informed of the progress of the complaint and discuss any disparities identified in the information held.
- Additional information – request when required but apply a timeframe that limits when it is to be provided.
- Extensions in time – consider only where necessary and always communicate any additional time requirements to the complainant with an explanation of the need.
- Record – continue to record all decisions or actions of the complaint investigation on the complaint template recording form and save as specified in the complaints management process.
- Focus – when investigating, focus on the identified complaint matters only.

## **5. Communicate resolution**

- Outcome – Where possible, discuss the outcome verbally with the complainant before providing written advice and allow them the opportunity to make further contact following receipt of the written advice.
- Recourse – include what further action may be available to the complainant at the conclusion of the complaint investigation. An action of recourse may be to escalate the matter further with an external agency or for a further review within the organisation.
- Further reviews – providing a minimum of one further review will enable the first investigation to be reviewed for soundness and allow additional information not available in the first complaint to be included.
- Opportunities – develop a mechanism or process by which complaint outcomes can be relayed to the appropriate area within the organisation for action to improve service delivery.
- Feedback – develop a process that allows for a review of the complainant’s experience of the complaints process by encouraging and enabling feedback on how the process by which their complaint was dealt with.
- Support – is available from the Department of Health and Human Services or other organisations in the form of training, advice and resources to support receiving and managing compliments and complaints. Refer to the Listing of organisations for additional support.