



Policies and Procedures

Complaints





Policy

Client Complaints



Introduction

AHEAD views feedback and complaints as a way to help us improve our services and create greater client satisfaction and outcomes. Our Complaints and Feedback management process ensures that any problem you have with AHEAD's supports, practices, decisions and policies are valued and listened to respectfully, taken seriously and dealt with promptly and in ways that are culturally appropriate. Your concerns will be treated confidentially, as a priority, keeping you fully informed and are committed to working with you towards a satisfactory resolution.

Purpose and Scope

The purpose of this policy is to outline how people are able to provide feedback and make complaints about any aspect of AHEAD and the process that we will take to address and/or respond to the complaint without prejudice.

This policy all applies to stakeholders of the organisation including: clients, families and carers, contractors, other service providers and members of the community.

Issues raised by staff would generally be dealt with under our Staff Grievance and Dispute Resolution policy, however from time-to-time staff may raise issues or provide feedback that is best dealt with under this policy.

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AHEAD is committed to managing complaints in an accountable, transparent, timely and meaningful way and in the most direct way possible.

AHEAD supports and encourages the rights of our participants, their families/carers and stakeholders to lodge and pursue any complaint in relation to any aspect of AHEAD or its operations.

The organisation is committed to the following complaints management principles:

- assisting people to make a complaint in whatever way is meaningful for them and in a language or communication method that is appropriate to the client;
- anyone can make a complaint
- complaints can be lodged without fear of retribution;
- full protection of confidentiality and privacy of complainants;
- complaints are assessed fairly, objectively and professionally;
- we are committed to openness and accountability;
- complaints are resolved in a timely manner;
- we ensure the application of procedural fairness and natural justice for all involved;
- we encourage the development of harmonious partnerships;
- integrate complaints information into the organisation's quality improvement process
- staff are informed and training on complaints procedures and the rights of clients



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Outcome

Each client has knowledge of and access to the provider's complaints management and resolution system. Complaints and other feedback made by all parties are welcomed, acknowledged, respected and well-managed.

Quality Indicators

We demonstrate this by:

- A complaints management and resolution system is maintained that is relevant and proportionate to the scope and complexity of supports delivered and the size and scale of the organisation. The system follows principles of procedural fairness and natural justice and complies with the requirements under the National Disability Insurance Scheme (Complaints Management and Resolution) Rules 2018.
- Each participant is provided with information on how to give feedback or make a complaint, including avenues external to the provider, and their right to access advocates. There is a supportive environment for any person who provides feedback and/or makes complaints.
- Demonstrated continuous improvement in complaints and feedback management by regular review of complaint and feedback policies and procedures, seeking of participant views on the accessibility of the complaints management and resolution system, and incorporation of feedback throughout the provider's organisation.
- All workers are aware of, trained in, and comply with the required procedures in relation to complaints handling.



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AHEAD expects that most complaints/feedback will be able to be addressed and responded to by the people directly involved or at a support worker/middle management level, with only the most serious or unresolved complaints being dealt with by the CEO and/or the CEO. However, where complaints require investigation or a more formal review, we will ensure that sufficient resources are allocated as a means to ensure that complaints are proficiently managed and investigated and will only allocate suitably skilled and qualified employees to investigate and manage complaints of that nature.

Quick Guide

- Provide a simple complaint process that is easily accessible to all stakeholders
- Take immediate action for any matters of safety
- Provide the complainant with an acknowledgement of receipt within 1 business day
- Inform complainant of process and gather more information
- work collaboratively to resolve the issue, if easy to resolve within 1-2 business days and for more complex matters within 10 business days
- Escalate or refer the complaint to a qualified mediator if the complainant is unhappy with the proposed resolution or if it would be unfair if the matter was determined in-house
- Use complaints as an opportunity for improvement

Handling a Complaint

If required, AHEAD will refer to, or seek guidance from external agencies, such as the NDIS Commission or beyond that the relevant State or Commonwealth Ombudsman. Complaint Management Stages include:

- acknowledgment of receipt of complaint
- complaint assessment;
- investigation of complaint;
- complaint response;
- communicating the decision; and
- complaint closed.



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Complaints = Opportunities

Staff are to take a broad view of what constitutes a 'complaint', any indication that our services are not meeting the needs and expectations of our clients no matter who or how it is communicated this is to be treated as a complaint. Assistance is to be provided in making a complaint in any method of communication meaningful to the person voicing an issue. All 'complaints' are to be dealt with through to resolution, which is to be understood as the client and anyone else involved feeling respected and heard, that action, adjustments and anything else required to comprehensively resolve the issue is completed. That all relevant stakeholders have had communication about resolution. At no time should any client or stakeholder feel rejected or treated any differently for making a complaint. Services should not cease unless there is a safety concern, and this must be authorised by a director of the organisation. Other arrangements and / or a transition plan will be made. Complaints should be viewed as opportunities for our organisation to improve.



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A person does not necessarily have to expressly state that they wish to make a complaint to have an issue or concern dealt with as a complaint. Regardless of whether it is a big or small issue, if it is treated seriously, it demonstrates to the person that their input is valued to improve the services bring delivered.



Each element of a complaint should be addressed through to resolution. This means listening carefully, confirming understanding of everything that is trying to be communicated, along with specifically asking if there is more.

We are nothing without our clients and our clients are consumers who have a choice about who supports them. It is an honour to serve them, and we have an obligation to serve them well but more than that we want them to feel good about our organisation being a provider of services that make their lives better.

When handling complaints trauma informed care with respect and dignity should always be at the forefront. It would not be uncommon for our clients to have had negative experiences with services and supports and they may not have felt safe in voicing their fundamental right to speak up and say when something is the way they like it, when there is an issue that is affecting their lives. We must not be another experience of this nature. We need to be part of the solution.

The vast majority of complaints should result in relationships with our client improving.

This is more than possible if they feel heard, respected, understood, safe, in the knowledge we will work with them and any others important to the client to resolve any issues and improve out service and support of them.



The little things really do count. No feedback or issue is too small and in fact how important it is, is not for us to judge. If it is important enough to be brought up it is important enough for us to give it our attention.

Everyone has experienced a situation in a relationship where things have been left, when one or both haven't spoken up when they are annoyed, angry or disappointed (you get the idea), only to find thing 'blow-up' due to a seemingly small issue. This is never about the issue that was the final straw but is the result of the relationship not being nurtured and not feeling it is safe to bring things up. When relationships are fractured by this cycle it can be destructive and take far more work in the long right to get things resolved and back on track. By checking in regularly, treating feedback and complaints seriously, reflecting with our clients and about our own practices this cycle can be stopped.

So take action on the little things.



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Reasons For Complaints

Complaints can arise due to a number of reasons, here are a few of those:

- The person feels unheard
- Something that was agreed hasn't eventuated or been to their satisfaction (implied or specified)
- They feel hurt
- They have been hurt, any allegations of abuse, neglect, exploitation must be reported to authorities, if the situation is an reportable incident such as sexual misconduct then the policies and procedures for incident management must be followed
- There is another issue or a number of issues they have been unhappy about but haven't said anything and something happens to trigger a complaint
- There are other issues at play and the person lashes out (kick the cat concept)
- Trauma has been triggered due to past experiences

Regardless of way the complaint has occurred it is important to listens and learn about the client and the situation to get to the heart of the matter so a true resolution can be found. It should also be remember that the first thing mentioned may not be the entire story.

Resolving Complaints

Never underestimate the power of simply listening and an apology.

- Acknowledge the complaint
- Ensure everyone's safety
- If a criminal offense is indicated the matter should be referred to the police
- If about a staff member
 - They should not have any contact with clients until the matter is reviewed and resolved
 - Your immediate supervisor and a director must be notified as soon as possible
- Create a safe space for the person to talk about the complaint, this may be the person they made it to or is may be better for someone neutral to do this
- The place can be important, keep it as casual as possible, the client should never feel intimidated or 'ganged up' on, a formal office environment may not be suitable. Make sure the place and time suits the client, is comfortable and accessible
- The client should not be bothered with paperwork, staff should complete this where ever possible
- The process should be fair to the client and there is NDIS legislative guidelines that must be adhered to [NDIS Procedural Fairness Guidelines 2018](#)



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Resolving Complaints

- Always look for ways to deescalate the situation, this starts with your feelings and reactions, if necessary take the time to regroup so you are able to calmly respond. Always make the client feel comfortable and that it is okay to complain. Keeping the client informed, providing support, options and time frames are all ways to deescalate the situation
- Only try to resolve issues within the scope of your role, refer to a supervisor and / or director as necessary
- Provide any needed assistance to lodge a complaint either internally or externally
- If appropriate remind the client of their rights and options
- Should they wish to have a support person or representative then involvement as per the client's wishes
- Find out what outcome the client wants, if it is possible make it happen as quickly as possible, if not explain why and / or refer to a supervisor or director
- If something has happened then explain why, without giving excuses, if we need to change something, we will. There may be legitimate reasons why such as legislation, regulations or our policies, these things should be explained, in a way that is meaningful to the client, any options should be provided
- Apologise. An apology may be all someone is looking for and either way it doesn't harm anyone. An apology does not mean you are agreeing, you can apologise for any misunderstanding, apologise that they are feeling angry, disappointed etc
- Resolve the complaint as quickly as possible, dragging it out helps no-one
- If there are any improvements we can make to policy and procedures this should be noted in the complaint form



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Fundamental

If you see something say something. It doesn't matter if it's about our organisation, the way our supports and services are being implemented, another provider or how others in the lives of our clients are treating them.



You have a legal and ethical responsibility to speak up and put the needs and well-being of our clients first.

Every **assistance** should be given to our clients in making a complaint, this may include but is certainly not limited to:

- Providing transparent information and communicating with them in a way that is meaningful to them
- Making calls, filling in forms
- Providing referrals
- Facilitating conversations
- Following up
- Ensuring their safety



Our clients should be included in any decision-making processes. Even with children and those under guardianship orders should be included as much as possible. Capacity is always assumed, it is not something someone has to earn. Our client not only have a seat at the table, they are at the head of the table and are the expert in their lives.



The rights of people with disability are to be respected and all assistance provided to:

- Realise their potential for physical, social, emotional and intellectual development.
- Be supported to participate in and contribute to social and economic life to the extent of their ability.
- Be supported to exercise choice including in relation to taking reasonable risks in pursuit of their goals and the planning and delivery of their supports.
- Be respected for their worth and dignity and to live free from abuse, neglect and exploitation.
- Be able to determine their own best interests including the right to exercise choice and control and to engage as equal partners in decisions that will affect their lives to the full extent of their capacity.





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- Have their privacy and dignity respected.
- Have the role of families, carers and other significant persons in their lives acknowledged and
- respected.
- Have access to advocates and supports which promote innovation, quality, continuous
- improvement, contemporary best practice and effectiveness

Complaints Do Not Affect Services & Supports

Making a complaint is in no way cause to disrupt or change services and supports provided and all clients and their representatives must be treated in the same way “as if” they had not made a complaint. Staff are to use respectful language at all times and assist wherever possible to make and document a complaint. Should clients request to cease services this is to be respected without penalty and should be provided with any referrals where possible to providers who may be able to assist.

Complaints Do Not Affect Services & Supports

Complaints must be handled through to resolution. There must be a decision or action which completed the matter. Dee McCulloch is a registered mediator who will conduct mediation should a resolution be challenging to find. Should it be required an external mediator will be engaged at the organisations expense.

Complaints Can Be Made Anonymously

Complaints may be made anonymously. Staff can still assist but all measures should be taken to protect the identity of the client, this may mean another staff member takes the complaint to a supervisor / director, the website complaints form does not require a name or email. Where possible clients should be informed that they will not be able to obtain details of any changes or resolution to the matter but not pressured into providing their details.

Record keeping, is important to ensure the necessary people are able to access the information they need in order to assist and resolve the situation. A complaint form with final report to the directors must be used and complaints put on the register. All feedback and complaints are used as part of our continuous improvement processes.

Through to Resolution

Complaints must be handled through to resolution.



There must be a decision or action which completed the matter. Dee McCulloch is a registered mediator who will conduct mediation should a resolution be challenging to find. Should it be required an external mediator will be engaged at the organisations expense. A resolution is trying to find a win/win by both sides listening to each other, discussing the options and finding a resolution both can live with. By listening, being flexible and putting all the pieces together in most cases a natural solution will emerge.



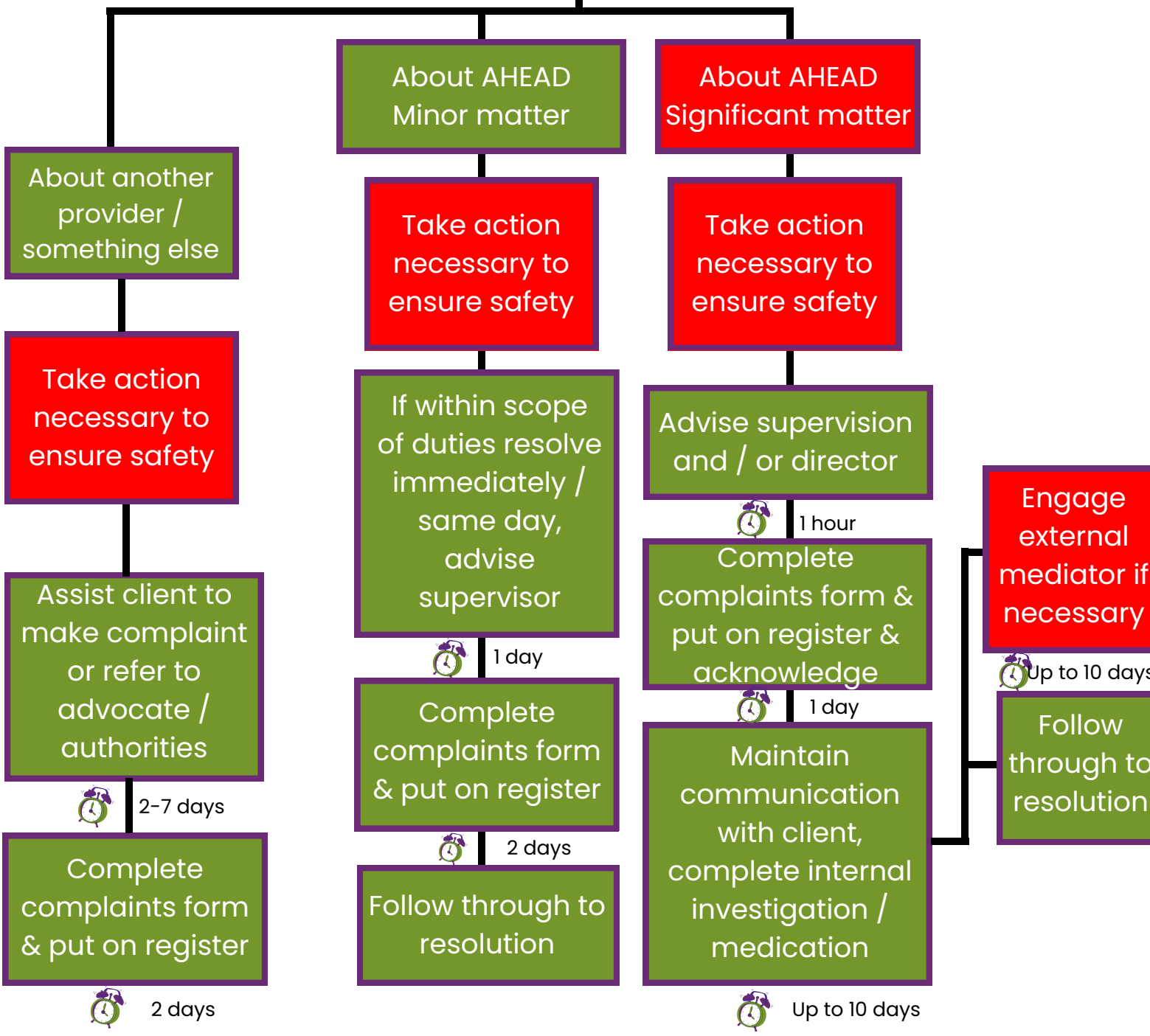
Flowchart

Client Complaints

Staff member receives complaint



Expected time-frame
business days



Used for continuous improvement activities, policy & procedure reviews