



Customer Feedback and Complaints policy

Department of Human Services (DHS)

Summary

Providing guidance and best practice management in the effective and timely response to customer feedback and complaints.

Table 1: Document Details

Policy Number	
Applies to	All DHS staff
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Delegated Authority	Chief Executive Officer
Policy Custodian	Director, Office of the Chief Executive
Content author	Principal Advisor, Office of the Chief Executive
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Table 2: Revision Record

Date	Version	Revision description
02/08/2012	1	Implementation
12/05/2016	2	General update
07/08/2018	3	Update to current branding and correct template only
01/05/2019	4	Significant update to context, policy detail and roles and responsibilities to ensure compliance with PC039

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1. Title

Customer Feedback and Complaints Policy

2. Purpose

This Policy supports DHS to manage customer feedback and complaints in a fair, effective, consistent and accountable manner, in line with State Government policy and national standards and responsive to the needs of our customers.

3. Context

Effective complaints management in government is an integral part of performance management and customer satisfaction. A well-managed and transparent complaints handling model can build trust between the public sector and the community, improve services and help identify and mitigate poor processes, practices and risks.

DHS introduced an integrated Complaints Management System (CMS) in 2007, including corporate policy and procedures.

In 2014 the South Australian Ombudsman conducted an audit of complaint-handling practices across the South Australian government. This led to the development of Premier and Cabinet Circular *Complaint Management in the South Australian Public Sector* (PC039), issued in July 2015 and updated in November 2018, which requires agencies to establish and maintain an effective complaint management system that conforms to principles in the Australian/New Zealand Standard: AS/NZ 10002:2014 *Guidelines for Complaint Management in Organisations*.

In October 2018 the South Australian Ombudsman released an *Audit Survey Report* assessing the complaints management systems of state agencies and making recommendations for improvement.

In February 2018 the Independent Commissioner Against Corruption released his report *Oakden: A Shameful Chapter in South Australia's History*. The Commissioner's investigation gives extensive consideration to agency systems and processes, and the individual responsibilities of staff, in relation to complaints.

4. Scope

The Customer Feedback and Complaints Policy applies to all DHS staff.

Included:

- All customer feedback, including comments, suggestions, compliments and complaints.

Excluded:

- Complaints that are the subject of an administrative appeal or other form of legal redress.
- Complaints concerned with workforce conduct.

5. Definitions

Client/Customer: Someone who has received one or more of DHS's services or programs.

Complaint: An expression of dissatisfaction made to or about an agency related to its products, services, employees or the handling of a complaint, where a response or resolution is explicitly or implicitly expected or legally required.

Complaint Management System: Includes policies, procedures, practices, employees, hardware and software used by an agency for the management of complaints and feedback.

Feedback: An opinion, comment or expression of interest or concern, made directly or indirectly, explicitly or implicitly to or about the agency, about its products, services, employees or the handling of a complaint. A response is not explicitly or implicitly expected or legally required. Feedback can be either positive or negative.

6. Policy Detail

DHS will maintain an effective, responsive, fit-for-purpose and respectful customer feedback and complaint management system (CMS) to support consistent and high quality management of feedback and complaints.

Our department values feedback and complaints and is open and responsive. We use feedback to support continuous improvement.

We will handle complaints professionally, efficiently, respectfully and fairly.

We will make it easy for our customers to complain and provide feedback. We will provide support to those who need it. People will not be adversely affected because they have made a complaint.

All complaints will be taken seriously. When complaints are received, they will be assessed and prioritised. Resolution will occur at a local level wherever possible and as quickly as possible.

We will be particularly alert to complaints that indicate potential risk to customers, poor quality service or misconduct and take appropriate action.

We will ensure there are avenues for review and escalation of complaints internally and that the staff member who responded to the complaint will not be assigned to any further review.

If we are unable to resolve matters internally, complainants will be provided with information about avenues for seeking resolution and/or external appeal.

We will ensure complaints are reported to external authorities as required. Any complaints or feedback that potentially relate to issues of corruption, misconduct and maladministration will be immediately reported to the Office for Public Integrity (as required under the *Independent Commissioner Against Corruption Act 2012*).

We will maintain good communication with complainants all the way through the process, including prompt acknowledgement, information about expected timeframes, outcomes and avenues of review and appeal.

We will explain to people the basis on which a decision is made.

We will maintain, and all Divisions will use, an integrated system to record, document and manage complaints and feedback (currently Riskman).

We will ensure that complaints are acknowledged within five business days and will aim to finalised complaints within 30 business days.

We will collect, monitor and evaluate our performance, and look for opportunities to improve.

All business units with direct customer service responsibilities must have in place a complaint handling procedures and processes that conform to this policy and DPC Circular 039 and responds to the specific needs of their customers.

6.1 Roles and Responsibilities

The following governance arrangements support this policy.

The **Chief Executive** is responsible for:

- ensuring DHS maintains an effective CMS; and
- establishing a culture that welcomes complaints, takes them seriously and responds appropriately.

The Executive Leadership Team is responsible for:

- providing leadership and oversight to the CMS within their Division; ensuring procedures and processes are in place and that all customer feedback and complaints are recorded, responded to and managed appropriately, consistent with this Policy;
- ensuring escalation and internal review processes are in place within their Division, and information on how customers can make an external appeal;
- ensuring urgent and serious matters are identified and actioned promptly and appropriately, including reporting or referral as required (to the Chief Executive, the Incident Management Unit, or to external authorities); and
- identifying opportunities and systemic issues and implementing remedial actions and improvements.

The Director Office of the Chief Executive is responsible for:

- providing central support and coordination for the department's CMS, including corporate policy, training and guidelines and performance monitoring, review and reporting; and
- ensuring this policy is accessible to the public on the DHS website.

Directors, managers, supervisors and senior staff are responsible for:

- clearly communicating to their staff responsibilities and requirements, including policy and procedures, related to complaints and feedback;

- supporting staff to respond to complaints and feedback;
- providing oversight to the operations of the CMS in their business unit; and
- ensuring information about how to complain or provide feedback is clearly communicated to customers, and support is provided to those who need it.

All staff are responsible for:

- ensuring they are familiar with this Policy, the mandated incident reporting and feedback system (RiskMan) and any procedures, guidelines and processes, and act accordingly.

7. Risk

Risks of non-compliance include customer and community dissatisfaction and harm, poor quality services, litigation, loss of reputation and staff confidence and/or financial loss.

8. Reference Documents

8.1 Directive documents

Australian/New Zealand Standard: Guidelines for complaint management in organisations (AS/NZ Standard 10002:2014)

Health and Community Services Complaints Act 2004

Independent Commissioner Against Corruption Act 2012

Ombudsman Act 1972

Premier and Cabinet Circular Complaint Management in the South Australian Public Sector (PC039)

8.2 Supporting documents

DHS Client feedback form

8.3 Related documents and resources

An audit of state government agencies' complaint handling – SA Ombudsman (November 2014)

Audit Survey Report: Assessment of state agencies' complaints managements systems – SA Ombudsman (June 2018)

Code of Ethics for the South Australian Public Sector, Office for the Public Sector

Complaint Management Framework – SA Ombudsman (March 2016)

Managing unreasonable complainant conduct practice manual 2nd edition – NSW Ombudsman (2012)

9. Aboriginal Impact Statement Declaration

The needs and interests of Aboriginal people have been carefully considered in the development of this policy and have been appropriately addressed. It is noted that additional considerations may be required to support, assist and respond to feedback and complaints from Aboriginal clients. These specific factors may include, for example, the provision of information to family, next-of-kin and community, seeking specific cultural advice, and developing specific resources.

10. Policy Approval

Approved by Principal Advisor, Office of the Chief Executive on 17 June 2019

Approved by Director, Office of the Chief Executive on 17 June 2019

Approved by Chief Executive on 20 June 2019.