



## Complaint Management - Tips for Service Providers

### Before making a complaint to the Health and Community Services Complaints Commissioner, complainants are required to complain directly to the provider.

This is often the quickest and easiest way to resolve complaints.

Service providers should discuss complaints openly with consumers. This gives providers and consumers an opportunity to resolve the complaint at an early stage.

### Preparing the organisation

An effective system to resolve and manage complaints should involve:

- procedures to enable consumers and their families, carers or nominees to make complaints
- an organised way to respond to complaints
- recording and reporting
- using complaints to improve the safety and quality of services
- guidance for staff about how to resolve complaints.

As a service provider, consider the following:

- Implement a complaints management policy and procedure.
- Ensure that staff and volunteers are trained to handle complaints.
- Include reminders about policy and procedures in communications.
- Consider developing a complaints resolution team.
- Utilise support networks in professional associations, networks or peer groups.
- Identify insurance requirements. Many practitioners are required to consult with their insurer when they receive a complaint.
- Contact your insurer, they may be able to help.
- Familiarise the organisation with relevant legislation and accreditation requirements.
- Consider ways to make it easier for consumers to make a complaint.
- Develop a complaint database to capture complaint information, identify trends, and monitor service improvements
- Contact external agencies that may be able to help, such as the HCSCC.
- Maintain contact with consumers and be available to discuss any concerns.



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### Your response to direct complaints

- Respond promptly. Delays in dealing with complaints can exacerbate the situation.
- If you can't respond quickly, let the consumer know as soon as possible.
- Give a factual, clear, succinct and complete picture of the essential details, answering all questions fully.
- Provide all relevant documents when requested.
- Be willing to apologise.
- Aim to make progress towards resolving the complaint within 30 days.

### Ask questions

- The reason for the complaint may not be clear at first.
- Clearly identify the consumer's concerns and objectives.
- Determine if there is a need for interpreter services.
- Enquire if the consumer would like a friend or relative to support them.
- Give due consideration to the complainant's point of view.

### Gather all the relevant information

Make sure you have all necessary records, reports and other relevant information.

### Keep clear and accurate records

Separate the consumer's complaint records from their service records. This ensures that the matter is properly documented, protects privacy, and minimises difficulties where other practitioners provide services to the consumer.



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### Emphasise confidentiality and privacy

- Complaints must be treated confidentially.
- Minimise the number of staff who handle the complaint, to protect your privacy and that of the consumer.

### Plan meetings and stay calm

- It is preferable to meet on neutral territory where everyone feels comfortable.
- Minimise interruptions.

### Keep your promises

- Set realistic time frames about promises, offers or agreed actions.
- If unexpected events make previous arrangements difficult, notify the consumer as soon as possible.

### Seek advice and assistance if you are unsure about how to proceed

- There may be times when it is unrealistic or not appropriate for you to deal with complaints personally.
- For example, if complaints involve distressed or aggressive people, multiple providers, or allegations of assault or sexual misconduct, we recommend you seek advice.
- Advice can be obtained from a respected colleague, your employer, a professional association, an indemnity / insurance body, or from the HCSCC.



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### Other points to remember

- Consider if complaints expose flaws in policy or procedure.
- Complaints can provide insights that lead to service improvements.
- A well-managed complaint could avoid further escalation and provide valuable feedback.
- It is common to be initially defensive when a complaint is received, but it is never helpful.
- Take the time to consider the complaint and compose yourself before dealing with the consumer.
- Remain open-minded, and listen.
- After you communicate openly with complainants, they may still choose to speak with the HCSCC.