

FEEDBACK AND COMPLAINTS

POLICY

SydWest Multicultural Services is committed to ensuring that any person or organisation using any SydWest Multicultural Services services or affected by its operations has the right to lodge a complaint or to appeal a decision of the organisation and to have their concerns addressed in ways that ensure access and equity, fairness, accountability and transparency.

It is within this context, continuous improvement of service delivery is stimulated through the availability of a client complaints procedure. Feedback obtained through this procedure provides SydWest Multicultural Services with valuable information about how the service is perceived and how the client experiences services, along with the opportunity for clients to raise and resolve issues or grievances.

SydWest Multicultural Services further recognises that clients may be able to resolve minor issues with a staff member without invoking a formal grievance procedure. Where clients are able to speak directly to the relevant staff member and feel satisfied with the resolution, there should be no need to instigate a formal grievance procedure.

SydWest Multicultural Services will support clients in the process of making a complaint, including the right of the client to have an advocate involved in the process. Therefore, staff will actively promote the availability of a complaints and grievance procedure by providing all clients with written information on service standards and client grievance procedures during client intake/reviews.

SydWest Multicultural Services supports the right of clients to make their complaint to an external agency, such as the NDIS Commissioner (as per the National Disability Insurance Scheme (Complaints Management and Resolution) Rules 2018) or the Aged Care Quality and Safety Commission (as per the Aged Care Quality and Safety Commission Act 2018 and Rules). We will make information relating to both entities available to relevant clients and will provide direction to how clients can make a complaint to these entities if needed.

All information supplied by the client is deemed to be confidential and will only be discussed within the framework of the grievance procedure process. SydWest Multicultural Services recognises that clients have the right to have grievances heard in a timely manner.

SydWest Multicultural Services has developed a complaints and appeals management procedure that:

- is simple and easy to use;
- is effectively communicated and promoted to all clients and stakeholders;
- ensures complaints or appeals are fairly assessed and responded to promptly;
- is procedurally fair and follows principles of natural justice;
- complies with legislative requirements.

PRINCIPLES

SydWest Multicultural Services will:

- consider all complaints it receives;
- treat all complainants with respect, recognising that the issue of complaint is important to the complainant;
- maintain confidentiality of parties involved, keeping any information private to those directly involved in the complaint and its resolution;
- ensure advocacy is available to clients who make a complaint and require support;
- resolve complaints, where possible, to the satisfaction of the complainant
- deal with all complaints in a timely manner;
- keep parties to the complaint informed of progress of the complaint;
- ensure that BOD members, staff and volunteers are given information about the complaints procedure as part of their induction and are aware of procedures for managing client feedback and complaints;
- ensure all service users, stakeholders and members are aware of the complaints policy and procedures;
- ensure that a complainant is not penalised in any way or prevented from use of services;
- ensure that feedback data (both positive and negative) is considered in organisational reviews and in planning service improvements.

PROCEDURES

a. Information for clients and stakeholders

All clients will be informed of their rights and responsibilities with regards to complaints and appeals at the earliest possible stage of their involvement with SydWest Multicultural Services.

All clients will be given a copy of the 'Client Rights and Responsibilities' document at their initial visit.

b. Making a complaint

A person wishing to make a complaint may do so in writing or verbally to:

- the staff member they were dealing with at the time;
- the supervisor of that staff member;
- the CEO;
- the BOD;
- an advocate of their choice;
- the relevant external complaints agency.

If the complaint is about:

- a staff member: the complaint will normally be dealt with by their supervisor/section manager;

- a senior staff position: the complaint will normally be dealt with by the CEO
- the most senior staff position: the complaint will normally be dealt with by the Chairperson;

Written complaints must be sent to the CEO and marked confidential. The CEO will be responsible for receiving this correspondence and directing it to the appropriate person.

c. Lodging an appeal

Clients or their advocates may lodge an appeal if they disagree with a decision made by the organisation, or by a staff member, related to service delivery or lack of access to services. An appeal should be made in writing and submitted to the CEO.

d. Procedure for complaints and appeals management

The person managing the complaint will be responsible for:

Step 1: Processing the complaint or appeal:

- registering the complaint or appeal in the 'Complaints Register';
- informing the complainant that their complaint has been received and providing them with information about the process and time frame;

Step 2: Investigating the complaint or appeal:

- examining the complaint within 10 days of the complaint being received;
- investigating the complaint and deciding how to respond;
- informing the complainant by letter within 14 business days of the complaint being received of what is being done to investigate and resolve it, and the expected time frame for resolution.

As far as possible, complaints or appeals will be investigated and resolved within 3 weeks of being received. If this time frame cannot be met, the complainant will be informed of the reasons why and of the alternative time frame for resolution.

Step 3: Resolving the complaint:

- making a decision or referring to the appropriate people for a decision within 3 weeks of the complaint being received;
- informing the complainant of the outcome:
 - upheld (and if so what will be done to resolve it)
 - resolved (and how this has been achieved); or
 - if no further action can be taken, the reasons for this.
- Informing the complainant of any options for further action if required.

Step 4: Reviewing the complaint:

If the complainant is not satisfied with the investigation and proposed resolution of their complaint or appeal they can seek a further review of the matter by the CEO within 2 weeks.

Step 5: Referral to external service:

A formal external complaints procedure may follow Step 4 if the complainant is still not satisfied with the outcome.

The complainant will be referred to OTHER SERVICES, please see below (end of document).

RECORD KEEPING

Copies of all complaints from clients and external agencies must be given to the Corporate Services Manager.

The register will be maintained by the Corporate Services Manager who will record the following for each complaint or appeal:

- Details of the complainant and the nature of the complaint;
- Date lodged;
- Action taken;
- Date of resolution and reason for decision;
- Indication of complainant being notified of outcome;
- Complainant response and any further action;

Copies of all correspondence will be kept on the client file and cross referenced to the register.

The complaints register and files will be confidential and access is permitted to the staff member directly involved when accompanied by their section manager, the CEO and the Corporate Services Manager.

A statistical summary of complaints and appeals will also be kept in a Complaints Spreadsheet and maintained by the Corporate Services Manager who will be responsible for preparing a report on nature of complaints, process and outcomes each 6 months to the CEO.

Results from this report will be reviewed by CEO and used to:

- inform service planning by including a review of complaints and appeals in all service planning, monitoring and evaluation activities;
- inform decision making by including a report on complaints and appeals as a standard item on staff and management meeting agendas;

COMPLAINTS INVOLVING SPECIFIC STAFF MEMBERS, STUDENTS OR VOLUNTEERS

- a. The CEO has delegated responsibility for resolving complaints or disputes involving staff members or volunteers;
- b. Internal complaints, where a staff member or volunteer makes a complaint concerning another staff member or volunteer, will be dealt with in accordance with the Human Resources Policies and Procedures.

External complaints by clients or stakeholders made against a staff member or volunteer will be managed by the CEO who will:

- notify the staff member or volunteer of the complaint and its nature;
 - investigate the complaint and provide the staff member or volunteer with an opportunity to respond to any issues raised;
 - attempt to mediate the dispute (if appropriate) and/or attempt to resolve the matter to the satisfaction of the outside party;
 - take any other action necessary to resolve the issue;
 - Formally inform staff member or volunteer about the complaint's outcome.
- c. Complaints involving the CEO will be managed by the Chairperson.

COMPLAINTS INVOLVING SYDWEST'S MEMBERS OR THE BOD

Complaints made against a member or BOD will be referred to the Chairperson and, they, or their delegate, will:

- notify the person about whom a complaint is being made of the complaint, and its nature;
- investigate the complaint and provide the member with an opportunity to respond to any issues raised;
- attempt to mediate the dispute (if appropriate) and/or attempt to resolve the matter to the satisfaction of the outside party.

Where the Chairperson is the subject of a complaint, the complaint should be referred to The Secretary.

If the matter remains unresolved, the Chairperson or notified office bearer will raise the matter at the next BOD meeting. Depending on the seriousness of the complaint, the BOD may:

- deal with the matter at its meeting; or
- manage this in line with SydWest Multicultural Services' Constitution.

CONFIDENTIALITY OF COMPLAINTS

As far as possible, the fact that a client has lodged a complaint, the details of that complaint should be kept confidential amongst workers directly concerned with its resolution. The client's permission should be obtained prior to any information being given to other parties in order to satisfactorily resolve the complaint.

OTHER SERVICES

Community Services Commission

Phone: 9384 4999 Toll Free: 1800 060 409 Fax: 9384 4948

Address: Level 3, 128 Chalmers Street, Surry Hills, NSW, 2010

Postal Address: Locked Bag 16, Strawberry Hills NSW 2012

Anti-Discrimination Board (NSW)

Level 4, 175 Castlereagh Street, Sydney 2000

Telephone: 9268 5555

Fax: 9268 5500

TTY: 9268 5522

NSW Ombudsman

Level 24, 580 George Street

Sydney NSW 2000

Telephone: 9286 1000

Fax: 92832911

TTY: 9264 8050

Aged Care Quality and Safety Commission

GPO Box 9819, Sydney, NSW

Telephone: 1800 951 822

Online: <https://www.agedcarequality.gov.au/making-complaintlodge-complaint/online-complaints-form>

NDIS Quality and Safeguards Commission

Telephone: 1800 035 544

Online: <https://www.ndiscommission.gov.au/participants/complaints>