

AGENCY Procedure: Client / Stakeholder Feedback and Complaints**PURPOSE:**

Centacare NENW is committed to actively seeking input from clients and stakeholders and encourages them to provide feedback, both positive and negative, as a source of ideas for improving services and activities.

This document outlines the principles Centacare NENW will follow when dealing with client and stakeholder feedback and complaints.

SCOPE:

This document applies to all clients, staff members, volunteers and stakeholders of Centacare NENW. The process for dealing with feedback or a particular concern will vary depending on the nature, circumstances and seriousness of the complaint.

OBJECTIVE:

The objective of this document is to promote and maintain positive client relationships and to prevent, where possible, minor complaints escalating to become more serious matters.

To achieve this Centacare NENW will:-

- foster a service culture that encourages open and honest communication;
- inform clients about the standard of service they can expect;
- protect the right of clients and stakeholders to provide feedback and to make complaints about service delivery;
- encourage and make it easy for people to provide feedback;
- provide anonymity to people providing feedback;
- record and analyse information arising from feedback and use it to improve services.

Encouraging client and stakeholder feedback:

Staff and/or volunteers will be responsible for ensuring that clients and stakeholders are informed of what they can expect from the service and how they may provide feedback.

All staff [and volunteers] working with clients and stakeholders are responsible for ensuring they are familiar with the procedures for clients and stakeholders to provide feedback, and for:-

- accepting and reporting informal feedback;
- offering clients an opportunity to provide formal feedback when appropriate.

Initiating and collecting client and stakeholder feedback:

Feedback may be provided by individual clients and stakeholders on their initiative or in response to requests from the organisation.

Individual clients and stakeholders may provide feedback by:-

- Completing a client/stakeholder/Carer survey;
- Completing the complaints section of the Centacare NENW Complaints brochure;
- Sending in a letter or email;
- By making a phone call;
- By talking to a staff member or volunteer of Centacare NENW.

Staff will be responsible for receiving and making a record of feedback by documenting the feedback in the feedback matrix located on the Centacare NENW server. Program Managers will be responsible for reviewing feedback records during program meetings and identifying any action required.

The organisation will seek feedback from clients and stakeholders by completing an annual client/stakeholder/Carer survey. Results of the surveys will be reviewed all staff and management during annual business planning days and used to:-

- Inform service planning, monitoring and evaluation activities;
- Inform decision making as a standard item on staff and management meeting and annual business planning day agenda's.

Client Complaints:

A client complaint, which can also be known as a grievance, is a clear statement, written or oral raised by a client. This can include concerns, issues, worries, or presumed unfairness in relation to staff or of the service provided.

All Clients will be notified of the complaints procedure upon acceptance to Centacare New England North West (NENW) Programs including the processes of lodging a complaint along with how to notify external third parties (NDIS Commissioner or Ombudsman).

Anonymous Complaints:

Some complainants choose to remain anonymous. This may be because of a fear that reprisal action will be taken in response to their complaint. The anonymity of a complaint will not be the basis for deciding that the complaint does not raise a substantive issue.

Centacare NENW will investigate an anonymous complaint should it be assessed as having some substance, are of reasonable seriousness, and there is sufficient information in the complaint to enable the allegations to be investigated.

Principles for Managing a Client Complaints:

Centacare NENW is aware it is difficult for clients and families to express their concerns and as such Management and Staff will make every effort to ensure the Complaints Handling policy is well publicised and appropriate advocacy support to complaints is promoted.

A complaint can sometimes arise because a client has seen or heard something, come to their own conclusion on what they saw or heard and acted as a consequence.

All complaints will be treated seriously, dealt with as soon as practicable and conducted in a fair, impartial and professional manner.

Centacare NENW will document all complaints, whether formal or informal.

No action will be taken without the prior knowledge and consent of the person lodging the complaint, unless disciplinary procedures, criminal action or notification of abuse is involved.

Centacare NENW will endeavor to inform a person making a complaint the progress of the complaint and will provide the reason for a decision within 28 days of the written complaint. Complainants have the right of an internal review of a decision and where relevant a right to appeal certain decisions. Centacare NENW will advise complainant of this right.

If the Complaint is of a criminal nature immediate action must be taken. Refer to the HR Procedure - Mandatory Reporting.

Staff members who have a complaint raised against them should be treated with respect and be provided with sufficient information about the complaint to be able to adequately respond to it. They will be given a reasonable opportunity to respond to the complaint and have the option to have a support person with them in any meetings.

They will also be kept informed of the status of the complaint and any recommendations that may result from it. They must actively participate in the resolution process and not victimise the client who raised the grievance.

All staff members have a responsibility to maintain confidentiality if they are involved in any capacity in a complaint. This includes not discussing the complaint with anyone else, including others who may be involved in the complaint such as witnesses or the person who raised the allegation, unless expressly authorised to do so by Centacare NENW.

If information about a complaint is discussed or released without authorisation, the staff member who released the information could find themselves the subject of disciplinary action for misconduct.

In some circumstances the complaint may not be kept confidential by Centacare NENW as they may be obliged to interview staff regarding the complaint and/or notify external bodies of the complaint, such as the NSW Police, or the NDIS Commissioner if it raises a matter that involves alleged illegal activity.

Victimisation:

At no stage during a complaints process is any person to be adversely affected as a result of making a complaint.

Options for Resolving Clients Complaints:

Given that client complaints can encompass a wide variety of issues; each complaint should be considered on its own merits to determine the most appropriate way to resolve it.

Outlined below are a range of options that may be used to resolve a workplace complaint. Whilst it is recommended that a complaint is sought to be resolved in the order set out below, it is also recognised that in some circumstances this may not be appropriate, and it may be necessary to commence with a later option.

All complaints must be lodge with the Complaints Officer.

1. Category 1

There may be instances where staff members make decisions without realising the impact those decisions have on others around them, or behave in a manner they do not realise may cause offence, disturb or annoy others.

Therefore, in the first instance complaints that fall within this category will be forwarded to the respective Program Executive. The Program Executive may seek to resolve the issue by speaking directly to the complainant in a respectful manner, clearly articulating the behaviour and the effect of that behaviour, the complaint can often be resolved at this point. It also gives the other party an opportunity to respond to the concerns raised without the matter having to be referred to a third party.

2. Category 2

Where resolution has been unsuccessful or is not appropriate in the circumstances of a category 1, Centacare NENW may decide to commence a formal investigation undertaken by an independent person, either internal or external to the organisation.

To ensure natural justice and procedural fairness principles are applied, the investigating officer should interview the client raising the complaint, any respondent/s and any other relevant witnesses. After considering the evidence made available to them, the investigator should provide a report with findings to the CEO.

The CEO will review the report and make the final decision on what actions, if any, will be taken. These may include initiating a new work process, an apology, counselling, training or initiating disciplinary action.

Once the report has been approved, all parties agree with the recommendations and steps have been taken to implement any actions, the Complaints Officer must notify the respective Manager/s that the complaint has been closed. A copy of the recommendation letter is stored in the complaints file.

Review Mechanism:

If a client is not satisfied with the outcome of a complaint, Centacare NENW acknowledges the right of clients to seek external support/intervention in the resolution of complaints at any step in the process.

Information on external complaint bodies associated with a particular program will be given to the clients at the commencement of service with Centacare NENW.

If the complaint cannot be resolved within the organisation, the complaint is referred to an outside agency or to an alternative dispute resolution procedure.

Centacare NENW will ensure appropriate support and assistance will be offered to any person wishing to contact an external body in relation to a complaint.

External Organisation	Contact Details
The Department of Social Services	Phone: 1300 653 227 Email: complaints@dss.gov.au Website: www.dss.gov.au
NSW Ombudsman (Includes handling complaints about Disability services)	Phone: 1800 451 524 Email: nswombo@ombo.nsw.gov.au Website: www.ombo.nsw.gov.au
NSW Civil & Administrative Tribunal (NCAT)	Phone: 1300 006 228 Website: www.ncat.nsw.gov.au
NDIS Commissioner	Phone: 1800 035 544 Website: www.ndiscommission.gov.au

Maintaining Documentation:

All appropriate records of complaints received are to be kept by the Complaints Officer for a period of 7 years. Records should include the following:-

- Information about the complaint;
- Files notes, interview notes or recordings, any evidence obtained;
- Any action taken to resolve the complaint;
- The outcome of any action taken.

Documentation relating to client complaints will be kept confidential and located in a secured file.

This will assist Centacare NENW review the effectiveness of the complaints process and also identify any systemic problems or trends that may warrant further investigation.

Centacare NENW Internal Reference Documents: -**Policies**

HRPOL001 – Client Complaints

GOVPOL001 – Code of Conduct

Procedures

HRPRO039 – Code of Conduct

HRPRO012 – Discrimination, Harassment & Bullying

CBBRO009 – Complaint Brochure

External Reference Documents / Legislations:-

Ombudsman NSW - Effective complaint handling guidelines – 3rd edition February 2017

NDIS Commissioner

HRFORM083 – Legislation Register-HR

DISFORM045 – Legislation Register-Disability