

Complaints Management Guiding Principles

SA INNOVATION HUB COMPLAINTS
MANAGEMENT WORKING GROUP



Background

The SA Innovation Hub Complaints Management Working Group collaborated to develop the Complaints Management Guiding Principles (Guiding Principles). Members reviewed national and international best-practice complaints handling and management guidelines to identify and agree on the critical elements to be included in the Guiding Principles. These principles were those most conducive to supporting the customer in a complaint process. The Guiding Principles were developed in reference to the Commonwealth Ombudsman's Better Practice Guide to Complaint Handling (2009) and the Department of Social Services Better Practice Guide to Complaint Handling in Aged Care Services (2014).

Purpose

The Guiding Principles have been developed to assist organisations in their application of a customer-focused complaints management process, emphasising the importance of valuing the customer experience to exceed customer expectations and avoid unnecessary escalation of the complaint. The Guiding Principles provide aged care organisations with the opportunity to review their current complaints management practices and to appreciate complaints as valuable information and a learning experience from within a customer-focused and continuous quality framework.

As most aged care organisations will be operating from well-established and mature systems, these Guiding Principles are intended to support continuous improvement and the incorporation of best-practice models, particularly in relation to customer engagement. For those organisations requiring support in the development or improvement of a complaints management process, the resources included at the end of this document provide an in-depth and practical guide. The Guiding Principles can be used as a check-point to guarantee a comprehensive approach in relation to establishing a customer-focused process.

Developing the Guiding Principles

Five key elements described in the Better Practice Guide to Complaint Handling were used as a springboard to discuss the essential criteria for inclusion in the Guiding Principles.

These elements describe five essential touch points to support an effective complaint management process:

CULTURE

Agencies must value complaints as a means of strengthening their administration and improving their relation with the public.

PRINCIPLES

An effective complaint handling system must be modelled on the principles of fairness, accessibility, responsiveness, efficiency and integration.

PEOPLE

Complaint handling staff must be skilled and professional.

PROCESS

The seven stages of complaint handling — acknowledgment, assessment, planning, investigation, response, review, and the consideration of systemic issues — should be clearly outlined.

ANALYSIS

Information about complaints should be examined as part of a continuous process of organisational review and improvement.

The language in the reviewed best-practice guidelines tended to favour a hierarchical and organisational-focused approach, with a strong emphasis on recording, analysing and reporting.

While the elements were clearly relevant, when developing the Guiding Principles the group adopted language applicable to the aged care industry and placed the customer at the centre of the process.

The Four Guiding Principles

Each of the four guiding principles is accompanied by a clarifying 'plain English' statement that reflects how organisations will endeavour to respond to complaints in a way that conveys a sense of value to the customer and places them at the centre of the complaints management process.

CULTURE >

We acknowledge that we are not perfect and sometimes we will make mistakes. We wish to learn from our mistakes and value the customer's contribution in helping us do this.

An open and learning organisational culture is fundamental to a positive customer experience. This includes openness, honesty and acknowledgment with the whole process commencing and centred on the customer's point of view.

Components

- Organisational complaints process is visible and easily accessible to the customer
- Balance of power between customer and organisation is equitable
- Customer feels safe and empowered (no retribution)
- Process commences with and is centred on, the customer's point of view
- Seeking to understand the customer
- Validation of customer's complaint
- Process is conducted in a fair and impartial manner, optimising the experience for all parties
- Recipient of complaint maintains ownership until closure
- Complaints are owned by the frontline through to the Executive team, Senior Management and Management
- Resolution given high priority
- Complaints viewed as a learning experience

PEOPLE >

We want our customers to enjoy their experience with us at all times. In that spirit, we will ensure our people are educated and experienced to be responsive and inclusive so that you feel heard and understood as we work through and resolve your concerns.

Components

- Staff recruited with appropriate attitude and experience to handle complaints
- Staff educated to be able to appropriately handle complaints when they arise (listen, acknowledge and respond)
- Staff actively engage with customers in the complaints process
- Staff communicate in an honest, open and transparent manner
- Staff need to ensure they follow up with the customer until resolution
- Staff empowered by organisation to resolve complaints effectively

PROCESS >

We have an open and transparent process for handling complaints that supports us in being responsive and flexible in working with you to fix the problem.

Components

- Acknowledgement of complaint and the customer's point of view
- Engagement with customer
- Assessment of the problem
- Exploring the problem and planning together for resolution (agreed outcomes)
- Confidentiality throughout the process
- Responsiveness to needs
- Follow-up and review outcomes with customer
- Aim to resolve the complaint to the best of our ability
- Robust quality improvement system

ANALYSIS >

We will learn and grow from your feedback, applying what we have learnt to improve our services for the benefit of others.

Components

- Investigate underlying causes and identify trends
- Design and develop improved systems and services
- Implement changes and improvements
- Monitor ongoing activities
- Evaluate changes and improvement activities

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Resources

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