

1.0 Policy

Uniting (Victoria and Tasmania) Limited (Uniting) is committed to ensuring that each client has the right and access to raise any complaints he or she may have regarding Uniting or one of its services.

Complaints provide valuable information on levels of client satisfaction and provide Uniting with an opportunity to improve upon all aspects of service. Complaints are taken seriously and are seen as an opportunity for improvement.

Resolving complaints at the earliest opportunity in a way that respects and values the client, can be one of the most important factors in recovering the client's confidence about our service. It can also help prevent further escalation of the complaint. Uniting is committed to providing a responsive, efficient, effective and fair complaint management system that assists the organisation to achieve this.

2.0 Overview

This procedure has been developed to define the action required when a client has a complaint.

3.0 Scope

This procedure applies to all workers (employees, volunteers and contractors) of Uniting.

4.0 Definitions

Complaint – *Australian Standard AS/NZS ISO 10002:2014 Guidelines for Complaints Management in Organisations* defines a complaint as an 'expression of dissatisfaction made to or about an organisation, related to its products, services, staff or the handling of a complaint, where a response or resolution is explicitly or implicitly expected or legally required'.

5.0 Procedure

5.1 General Principles

- a) The primary aim of the complaint procedure is resolution of any problems or concerns.
- b) Any client has the right to make a complaint or raise an issue or legitimate concern.
- c) Clients shall be able to express complaints without fear of retribution and have these matters addressed in a non-threatening, fair and proper manner.
- d) Where possible complaints shall be addressed and resolved at the point of conflict or as close as possible to the level within the organisation where the conflict has occurred.
- e) Clients shall have readily available access to the procedures for raising complaints.
- f) Complaints shall be dealt with in a confidential manner.
- g) Clients will be listened to, empathised with and asked questions about what outcomes they are seeking.
- h) Complaints and outcomes shall be recorded. Where appropriate, copies of written outcomes may be forwarded to relevant individuals.
- i) Clients shall have the right to have their chosen representative present at any time.

5.1 Responsibilities of Clients

- a) Ensure that the complaint has legitimacy.
- b) Raise the complaint as promptly as possible – as close to the time it happened as possible.
- c) Be prepared to raise issues of concern or complain formally in writing.
- d) Be prepared to engage in open discussion/mediation/negotiations to ensure a mutually satisfactory outcome of the complaint.

5.2 Responsibility of the Agency

- a) Treat each complaint seriously and thoroughly investigate complaints which have been raised.
- b) Ensure that no one who raises a complaint is subsequently discriminated against.
- c) Ensure that complaints are addressed within the time frames given.
- d) Workers shall inform the appropriate Manager of any such issues and complaints.
- e) Communicate with complainants/worker/advocates etc. in an open, honest manner and be prepared to engage in open discussion, mediation or negotiation to ensure a mutually satisfactory outcome.
- f) Acknowledge the need for both those making a complaint and those about whom a complaint may be made to have the assistance of an advocate.
- g) Document the complaint issues and outcomes using Client Complaint Form.

5.3 Client Complaint Steps

- a) Clients may make a complaint formally or informally through their closest contact person, or a Manager via the website, phone, email or in person.
- b) Every effort shall be made to resolve a complaint informally by all affected parties in an open, frank manner with due consideration to each other.
- c) If it cannot be resolved informally, or the issue is such that it cannot or should not be dealt with in this way, then a third person at the next organisational level should become involved to assist in the process.
- d) Any person making a complaint shall be given a copy of this complaint procedure.
- e) The process by which the complaint is resolved, along with outcomes shall be recorded in the Client Complaint Register. These records will be retained by the Manager or Chief Executive Officer in a confidential file. Where appropriate, copies of any such records shall be made available to any of the parties involved.
- f) At any stage of this process, a person has the right to elicit the support and assistance of an advocate (formal or informal) of his/her choice.
- g) Should a person want an advocate, but is unable to gain one through his/her own networks, then the Manager or Chief Executive Officer may refer the person to a formally established advocacy service.
- h) It should be noted that legal representation is not applicable within this framework of complaints procedure.
- i) This complaints procedure in no way denies a person's right or responsibility to seek police involvement where complaints fall within this jurisdiction.

5.5 Formal Complaints

- a) A Client Complaint Form shall be given to clients to complete if required.

- b) The complaint shall be recorded on a Client Complaint Form. If not written by the complainant concerned, anything written shall be verified (by a third party acceptable to the complainant) to ensure accuracy.
- c) The worker receiving the complaint form shall forward it to the most appropriate area as follows:
 - If it is about a worker, it is to go to the relevant Manager
 - If about a Manager, to the Chief Executive Officer
 - If about the Chief Executive Officer, to the Board Chair.
 - General complaints shall be forwarded to the Manager of the area involved.
- d) The worker must advise the Chief Executive Officer if the complaint involves an alleged criminal action or could result in adverse public relations.
- e) The Manager receiving the formal complaint shall:
 - Ensure the complaint is recorded on a Client Complaint Form
 - Ensure the complaint is registered in the Client Complaint Register and that a unique number is allocated to the complaint
 - Endorse the complaint form with the unique number
 - Forward the form to the relevant person as described in 5.5.2 to initiate an investigation
- f) The relevant person must attempt to resolve the complaint within 14 days.
- g) The relevant person will maintain communication with the complainant to report on progress and expected timeframes

5.5 Assessment and Investigation

- a) The relevant person will conduct an investigation that includes:
 - Acknowledging receipt of the complaint within 2 working days.
 - Assessing the nature, severity, complexity, impact and any need for immediate action.
 - Information collected that is adequate and appropriate and protects the privacy and confidentiality of the complainant.
 - If the complaint is about a worker, then that person must be told about the nature of the complaint and the name of the complainant unless it is an anonymous complaint.
 - This worker then has the right to respond and to have support from a representative of their choice.
- b) The person conducting the investigation shall record the results and final outcome on the Client Complaint Form and the Client Complaint Register. and inform all parties as appropriate.

5.6 Feedback

- a) The relevant person will provide the complainant with details of how the investigation was conducted, what has been done to fix the issue, further actions to complete and how they will be communicated to check things are resolved.
- b) If Uniting failed to meet its service obligations, an apology will be provided which is sincere and accepts responsibility
- c) The relevant person will follow up with the Complainant to determine the effectiveness of any outcomes within an appropriate time.

5.7 Access and Copies

- a) The Client Complaints Register and Complaint Files are confidential and access is only available at the discretion of the Chief Executive Officer or designate.
- b) The Compliance Officer shall place the completed original Client Complaint Form in the Complaint File.

5.8 Review of Complaints

- a) The Chief Executive Officer or Manager responsible for the person conducting the investigation, shall review complaints and ensure that appropriate corrective and/or remedial action was considered, agreed and implemented. If the issue is still not dealt with to the satisfaction of the complainant after following this procedure, further steps may be taken.
- b) The Client Complaints Register will be reviewed quarterly by the CEO and Compliance Officer to identify any emerging trends or systemic issues.
- c) Complaints and complaint review outcomes will be used as an opportunity for improvement to Uniting. De-identified information will be relayed to appropriate areas of the organisation for action to improve service delivery and worker performance.

5.9 Further steps

Government Departments may be able to provide some assistance to you in resolving a complaint that has not resolved to the complainant's satisfaction.

Further assistance can be sought in resolving a complaint by contacting the following:
In Tasmania

The Department of Communities
1300 135 513 www.communities.tas.gov.au

Office of the Public Guardian
1800 955 772 <https://www.publicguardian.tas.gov.au/>

Tasmanian Ombudsman
1800 001 170 <https://www.ombudsman.tas.gov.au/>

In Victoria

The Department of Health and Human Resources
1300 650 172 www.dhhs.vic.gov.au

Office of the Commissioner for Privacy and Data Protection
1300 666 444 <https://www.cpdp.vic.gov.au>

Office of the Public Advocate
1300 309 337 www.publicadvocate.vic.gov.au/

Victorian Ombudsman
1800 806 314 www.ombudsman.vic.gov.au

6.0 References/ Related Documents

Health Records Act
Privacy Act 1988
Housing Registrar's Performance Outcomes
DHHS Quality & Safety Standards