

Complaints and Compliments

Northern Support Services (NSS) aspires to be an organisation that is physically, culturally and emotionally safe; where there is no assault on, challenge to or denial of people's identity, understandings, needs or person. Everyone involved in NSS has a responsibility to understand the important and specific role he/she plays individually and collectively to ensure the wellbeing and safety of our clients, our employees, and other key stakeholders. This is particularly so for the most vulnerable persons including Aboriginal children, children from culturally and/or linguistically diverse backgrounds, and children with a disability. NSS is resolutely committed to ensuring that all those engaged in providing services through NSS promote the inherent dignity and fundamental right of all our clients to be respected and nurtured in a safe environment. This commitment is reflected in our mission and vision and put into practice through our policies and procedures.

Policy

Northern Support Services (NSS) is committed to providing consistently high quality person-centred services and recognises that feedback, both positive and negative, is an opportunity to measure and evaluate the quality of services delivered.

NSS is committed to listening to and responding to complaints and compliments and recognises that effective recording and management of feedback:

- Ensures that clients and stakeholders understand their rights and responsibilities and can easily access information about feedback processes
- Informs continuous improvement by providing valuable information on emerging and existing trends, systemic issues, and risks as well as information about what we do well as an organisation
- Allows for a consistent and coordinated approach for the resolution and acknowledgement of issues
- Reduces the potential for future complaints and the escalation of existing issues
- Ensures that staff skills and capabilities required to manage compliments, complaints and feedback are supported and developed and that all staff recognise the value of feedback as a mechanism for continuous improvement
- Monitors and measures client and stakeholder satisfaction
- Allows for meaningful and timely reporting and efficient allocation of resources

When addressing a complaint, NSS will ensure that:

- Receipt of the complaint is acknowledged within 3 working days and resolved within 21 working days of receipt
- Processes are in place to escalate issues if a resolution cannot be achieved within 21 working days
- The points of view of all involved in a complaint will be heard and respected
- Reasonable steps are taken to ensure that no-one is disadvantaged or subjected to discrimination as a result of giving feedback or raising a complaint or because feedback has been given on their behalf
- The complaints process will not be facilitated by anyone involved in the complaint in anyway
- People's right to complain and provide other feedback is upheld and supported
- People's right to access advocacy or other independent supports to assist them with making a complaint is upheld and supported
- People's rights in respect to privacy and confidentiality is upheld and supported

- Access to information held about individual complaints is restricted to relevant senior staff

Purpose

The purpose of this policy and procedure is to outline how clients and external stakeholders can make a complaint or compliment about services and the action that will be taken to help resolve it. The purpose is also to ensure that NSS learns from complaints and compliments to form part of its continuous improvement.

Scope

This policy and procedure applies to all employees, clients, students and volunteers. It also applies to anyone who provides compliments and/or complaints regarding NSS. This may be carers, families, or members of the public.

References/Legislation

- Disability Services Act (2006)
- Department of Human Service Standards
- Disability Services Commissioners Annual Complaints Reporting Tool (ACR)
- Disability Services Commissioner Good Practice Guide and Self Audit Tool (2013)

Procedures

NSS welcomes feedback about any aspect of its service and is committed to encouraging clients, their families and carers, and other stakeholders to give NSS feedback by providing:

- Clear and accessible information about feedback processes
- A variety of options to give NSS feedback

Accessibility and Visibility

Clients are given information about giving feedback to NSS as part of information provided about their rights and responsibilities at NSS. The Complaints and Compliments policy and procedure is also readily available upon request in an Easy Read format.

Information about giving feedback to NSS is also displayed at NSS sites and available on the NSS Website.

Compliments and complaints can be given to NSS in several different ways and NSS encourages people to provide feedback in a way that is comfortable to them. At NSS feedback can be given in writing (by mail or email), via a phone call, in person at one of our locations, or through the NSS website.

Receipt and Acknowledgement

Most complaints and compliments are addressed by the Manager responsible for the area in the first instance. Where the feedback relates to a manager, relate to the organisation as a whole or are of a sensitive nature, the feedback will be addressed by a member of the Executive Management team or the Quality and Risk Manager.

Where a complaint or compliment is given in person or by telephone, the employee receiving feedback will record the conversation on a Complaints and Compliments File Note and forward this to the relevant Manager. In all instances of receiving a complaint or compliment in person or over the telephone the staff member who receives the feedback will acknowledge the complaint or compliment and inform the person giving the feedback who will address the matter and explain that they will receive a formal acknowledgement by mail/email (as preferred).

The Manager responsible for addressing the feedback will acknowledge receipt of the complaint or compliment in writing within 3 working days of receipt.

For complaints, the acknowledgement letter:

- provides contact details for the person who will investigate and respond to the complaint
- commits to a 5 working day timeframe for initial investigation and response with a maximum 21 days resolution period
- informs the complainant that they can at any time request or nominate and advocate or other independent support (e.g. language, cultural support, etc.)
- provides information about the Disability Services Commissioner

Annual Complaints Reporting Tool

NSS is required to report complaints and compliments to the Office of the Disability Services Commissioner (ODSC) so that they can track trends in the sector including what complaints have been made and how they were resolved. The ODSC is an organisation that is independent of both NSS and the Department of Human Services.

Information entered into the Office of the Disability Services Commissioners Annual Complaints Reporting (ACR) is confidential. No personal identifying information about clients or complainants will be provided to the Office of the Disability Services Commissioner as part of this reporting process.

Management, Resolution and Escalation

Compliments

Compliments should be from external sources and be verified or passed on to a person other than the one being complimented.

It is the responsible Manager's responsibility to inform individual staff and/or their team about the compliment and to inform the Management team.

Where appropriate, compliments should be referred to the office of the CEO for inclusion in staff communications.

Complaints

Complaints should be resolved within 21 working days of receipt of the complaint. Resolving complaints quickly and in a way that respects and values the person's feedback can help recover the person's confidence in NSS.

Investigation and resolution will usually be the responsibility of the Manager responsible for the area. This may include discussion with staff and relevant parties, a review of policies and procedures and risk assessments in consultation with Quality and Risk and Executive Management as required.

Investigation includes discussing the issue with the person who made the complaint so that a mutually satisfactory resolution can be determined.

Details of the investigation, conversations and proposed resolution will be documented on the Complaints and Compliments File Note created for the complaint.

A Complaint Resolution Letter detailing the investigation and proposed resolution of the issue will be sent within 5 working days of having received the complaint. If the complaint cannot be resolved within 5 working days, a Complaint Progress letter will be sent within 5 working days of having received the complaint with details of the investigation and timeframe for resolution (no more than 21 days from date the complaint was received).

Where the Manager is unable to resolve the issue within 21 days or the person making the complaint is unhappy with the resolution or progress of the investigation, the complaint can be escalated to the Executive Manager responsible for the area or to the CEO. The person making the complaint should be notified in writing that the complaint has been referred to a member of the Executive and the expected timeframe for response using Complaint Escalation Letter. A response should be sent within 14 working days of the escalation.

The use of standard letters ensures that throughout the complaint process ensures that NSS informs the person making the complaint is of his/her right to:

- access the assistance of the Disabilities Services Commissioner to resolve the issue
- request an advocate or other independent supports

When the complaint has been resolved, the Manager should update the ACR Tool with details of the resolution.

Quality Review and Reporting

The Quality and Risk Manager will be sent an email when a new complaint or compliment is recorded on the ACR Tool and will review all complaints and compliments lodged to ensure that they are addressed appropriately and in a timely manner.

The Quality and Risk Manager is also responsible for reporting on complaints and compliments (including trends and learnings) to the CEO and Board through the Audit and Risk Committee and for lodging the Annual Compliant Report to the Office of the Disabilities Services Commissioner. The Quality and Risk Manager also reports on trends and learnings to the Management team through Quality and Risk meetings and Leadership Meetings.

The Quality and Risk Manager is responsible for recording and monitoring any corrective, preventative or improvement (CPI) actions that are identified as part of the complaint and compliment process and for ensuring necessary changes to policy and procedures are enacted.

Record Keeping

Complaints must be stored for a minimum of five years at NSS as per NDIS guidelines. These are to be managed by the Quality and Risk Department.

Responsibilities

Title	Responsibility
Manager	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Works with the person who made the complaint to fully establish what the complaint is about, what outcome the complainant is seeking, how a resolution can be sought and what the organisation can learn from it. Logs compliments and complaints in the Office of the Disability Services Commissioners online Annual Complaints Reporting Tool.
CEO/Executive Managers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Investigate unresolved complaints.
Quality and Risk Manager	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ensures the Complaints and Compliments process is understood and followed. Monitors complaints and compliments logged on the Annual Complaints Reporting Tool for completion and to determine trends. Analyses complaint and compliment trends, outcomes, issues and identifies any corrective, preventative and improvement actions that may be required with the Management team at Leadership and at Quality and Risk Meetings. Report on complaints and compliments, including trends, issues and learnings, to the Audit and Risk Committee and Executive Team.
All staff	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Accept complaints and compliments and pass them onto their line manager immediately and provide the complainant with a copy of this policy and procedure. Acknowledge compliments and complaints received verbally.

Definitions

Word	Definition
Adversely affected	To be affected in a way that is not in the interests of a person's welfare, could cause them harm or be seen as unfavourable.
Aspect of service	Anything to do with the services that NSS provides including the quality of service and the way services are managed.
Complaint	An expression of dissatisfaction made to or about an organisation that is 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.
Compliment	An expression of praise, encouragement or gratitude about a service that is funded, regulated or provided. It may be about an individual staff member, a team, a service or the organisation as a whole.
Culture	Forms and goals of interactions among members of a group, and how they understand and communicate with one another.
Cultural sensitivity	Appreciating that there are differences among cultures.
Cultural competence	Being skilled in understanding interactions among members of a culture on their own terms.
Cultural safety	The outcome of interactions where individuals experience their cultural identity and way of being as having been respected or, at least, not challenged or harmed.
External stakeholders	A client, their family members or carers and members of the local community who share influence over the organisation but are not members of it.
Acknowledgement	A notification to a person giving feedback that their compliment or complaint has been received and informs them of the process and anticipated time of resolution