Feedback & Complaint Handling Policy

Version: 1.3

January 2025

Document history

Version	Document Owner	Approved by	Approved on	Scheduled review date	Comments
1.0	Renee Green Governance & Finance Manager	Board	25/03/2019	31/03/2021	Document creation
1.1	Denae Holland Finance & Governance Mgr	Board	21/03/2022	31/03/2023	Review only
1.2	Denae Holland Finance & Governance Mgr	Board	17/05/2023	31/03/2025	Minor updates
1.3	Denae Holland Finance & Governance Mgr	Board	03/02/2025	31/03/2027	Review only

© The copyright in this document is the property of Lifeline South Coast. Lifeline South Coast supplies this document on the express terms that it shall be treated as confidential and that it may not be copied, used or disclosed to others for any purpose except as authorised in writing by this organisation.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction 3
Purpose 3
Scope 3
Organisational Commitment 4
Terms and Definitions 5
Policy 6
Facilitate feedback and complaints 6
Respond to complaints 7
Manage the parties to a complaint 8
Accountability and learning 10

INTRODUCTION

An effective complaint handling system must be modelled on the principles of fairness, accessibility, responsiveness. It needs to be, efficient and be integrated into organisation culture.



PURPOSE

This policy is intended to ensure that Lifeline South Coast handles feedback and complaints fairly, efficiently and effectively.

This policy provides guidance to workers (paid and volunteer) and people who wish to provide feedback or make a complaint. It describes the key principles and concepts of our feedback and complaint management system.

SCOPE

This policy applies to all workers (paid and volunteer), contractors and our Board, receiving or managing complaints from the public and clients made to or about us, regarding our products, services, staff, or on the complaint handling process itself.

This Policy applies in conjunction with Lifeline Australia Policy. If the Lifeline South Coast and Lifeline Australia Policy is in conflict, the Lifeline Australia Policy will apply.

This policy does not apply to “whistleblowers”. A separate policy, Whistleblower Policy, applies where there is a known or suspected incidence of a serious breach.

ORGANISATIONAL COMMITMENT

Lifeline South Coast expects workers at all levels to be committed to fair, effective and efficient complaint handling. The following table outlines the nature of the commitment expected from workers and the way that commitment should be implemented.

Who	Commitment	How
Board	Promote a culture that values feedback and complaints, and their effective resolution	• Regularly review reports about feedback and complaint trends and issues arising. • Support recommendations for service, staff and complaint handling improvements arising from the analysis of complaint data, where these are considered appropriate and feasible
CEO	Promote a culture that values feedback and complaints, and their effective resolution	• Advises Board when complaints received, their status and resolution and provides trend data on frequency and themes. • Provide adequate support and direction to key staff responsible for handling feedback and complaints. • Encourage all workers to be alert to feedback and complaints and assist those responsible for handling complaints to resolve them promptly. • Encourage workers to make recommendations for system improvements. • Ensure appropriate staff are trained to carry out their roles within the complaint procedure.

Management Team	Demonstrate exemplary complaint handling practices	• Treat all people with respect, including people who provide feedback or make complaints. • Assist people to provide feedback or make a complaint, if needed. • Comply with our policy and associated procedures. • Provide regular feedback to the Management Team on issues arising from feedback or complaints. • Provide suggestions on ways to improve our feedback and complaints management system. • Implement changes arising from individual feedback and complaints and from the analysis of data.
All workers	Understand and comply with our feedback and complaint handling practices.	• Treat all people with respect, including people who provide feedback or make complaints. • Be aware of our feedback and complaint handling policies and procedures. • Assist people who wish to provide feedback or make complaints access our process. • Be alert to feedback and complaints and assist other workers handling complaints resolve matters promptly.

TERMS AND DEFINITIONS

Complaint	An expression of dissatisfaction made to or about us, our services, staff, workers or the handling of a complaint where a response or resolution is explicitly or implicitly expected or legally required. (AS/NZ 10002:2014)
Feedback and Complaint handling/management system	All policies, procedures, practices, staff, hardware and software used by us in the management of feedback and complaints.
Dispute	An unresolved complaint escalated either within or outside of our organisation.
Feedback	Opinions, comments and expressions of interest or concern, made directly or indirectly, explicitly or implicitly, to or about us, about our services or complaint handling system where a response is not explicitly or implicitly expected or legally required.

Grievance	A clear, formal written statement by an individual staff member about another staff member or a work-related problem.
Worker	An employee or volunteer

POLICY

Facilitate feedback and complaints

People focus

We are committed to seeking and receiving feedback and complaints about our services, systems, practices, procedures, products and complaint handling.

Any concerns raised will be dealt with within a reasonable time frame (as in AS/NZ 10002).

People providing feedback or making complaints will be:

- provided with information about our process and how to access it
- listened to, treated with respect by workers and actively involved in the process where possible and appropriate, and
- provided with reasons for our decision/s and any options for redress or review.

No detriment to people providing feedback or making complaints

We will take all reasonable steps to ensure that people providing feedback or making complaints in good faith are not adversely affected as a result of that feedback or complaint.

Anonymous complaints

We accept anonymous complaints if there is a compelling reason to do so and will carry out a confidential investigation of the issues raised where there is enough information provided.

Accessibility

We will ensure that information about how and where feedback and complaints may be made to or about us is well publicised on our website. We will ensure that our systems to manage feedback and complaints are easily understood and accessible to everyone, particularly people who may require assistance.

If a person prefers or needs another person or organisation to assist or represent them in the making and/or resolution of their complaint, we will communicate with them through their representative if this is their wish. Anyone may represent a person wishing to make a complaint with their consent (e.g. advocate, family member, legal or community representative, member of Parliament, another organisation).

Respond to complaints

Early resolution

Where possible, complaints will be resolved at first contact with us.

When appropriate we may offer an explanation or apology to the person making the complaint.

Responsiveness

We will promptly acknowledge receipt of complaints.

We will assess and prioritise complaints in accordance with the urgency and/or seriousness of the issues raised. If a matter concerns an immediate risk to safety or security the response will be immediate and will be escalated appropriately.

We are committed to managing people's expectations, and will inform them as soon as possible, of the following:

- the complaints process
- the expected time frames for our actions
- the progress of the complaint and reasons for any delay
- their likely involvement in the process, and
- the possible or likely outcome of their complaint.

We will advise people as soon as possible when we are unable to deal with any part of their complaint and provide advice about where such issues and/or complaints may be directed (if known and appropriate).

We will also advise people as soon as possible when we are unable to meet our time frames for responding to their feedback or complaint and the reason for our delay.

Objectivity and fairness

We will address complaints with integrity and in an equitable, objective, and unbiased manner.

We will ensure that the person handling a complaint is different from any worker whose conduct or service is the subject of the complaint.

Conflicts of interest, whether actual or perceived, will be managed responsibly. In particular, internal reviews of how a complaint was managed will be conducted by a person other than the original decision maker.

Responding flexibly

Our workers are empowered to resolve complaints promptly and with as little formality as possible. We will adopt flexible approaches to service delivery and problem solving to enhance accessibility for people making complaints and/or their representatives.

We will assess each complaint on its merits and involve people making complaints and/or their representative in the process as far as possible.

When appropriate the complaint will be dealt with under the complaint procedure.

Confidentiality

We will protect the identity of people making complaints where this is practical and appropriate.

Personal information that identifies individuals will only be disclosed or used by us as permitted under the relevant privacy laws, secrecy provisions and any relevant confidentiality obligations.

Manage the parties to a complaint

Complaints involving multiple agencies

Where a complaint involves multiple organisations, we will work with the other organisation/s where possible, to ensure that communication with the person making a complaint and/or their representative is clear and coordinated.

Subject to privacy and confidentiality considerations, communication and information sharing between the parties will also be organised to facilitate a timely response to the complaint.

Where our services are contracted out, we expect contracted service providers to have an accessible and comprehensive complaint management system. We take complaints not only about the actions of our staff but also the actions of our service providers.

Empowerment of workers

All workers managing complaints are empowered to implement our complaint management system as relevant to their role and responsibilities.

Workers are encouraged to provide feedback on the effectiveness and efficiency of all aspects of our complaint management system.

Managing unreasonable conduct by people making complaints

We are committed to being accessible and responsive to all people who approach us with feedback or complaints. At the same time our success depends on:

- our ability to do our work and perform our functions in the most effective and efficient way possible
- the health, safety and security of our workers, and
- our ability to allocate our resources fairly across all the complaints we receive.

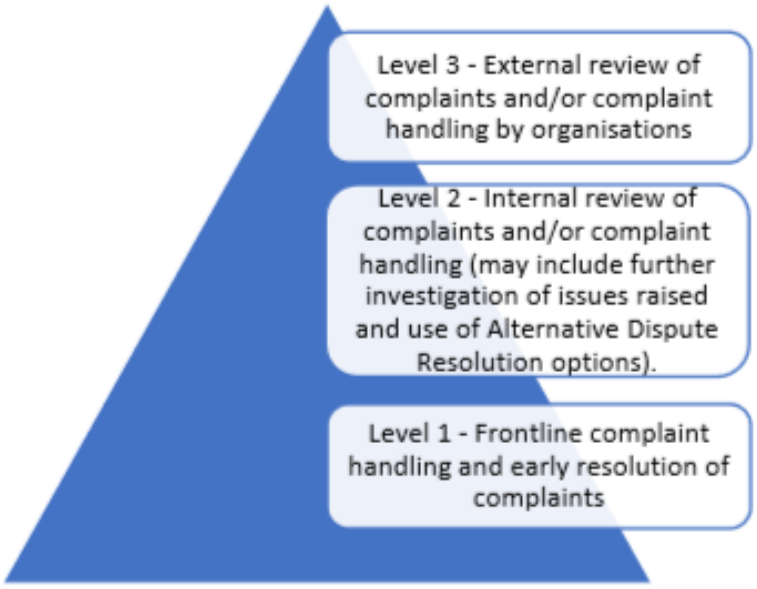
When people behave unreasonably in their dealings with us, their conduct can significantly affect the progress and efficiency of our work. As a result, we will take proactive and

decisive action to manage any conduct that negatively and unreasonably affects us and will support our workers to do the same in accordance with this policy.

Alternative avenues for dealing with complaints

We will inform people who make complaints to or about us about any internal or external review options available to them (including any relevant Ombudsman or oversight regulatory bodies).

The three levels of complaint handling



Level 1

We aim to resolve complaints at the first level, the frontline. Wherever possible workers will be adequately equipped to respond to complaints, including being given appropriate authority, training and supervision.

Level 2

Where this is not possible, or the initial complaint investigation identifies significant risks / complexity the team leader needs to escalate the complaint to a more senior worker within our organisation. This second level of complaint handling will provide for the following internal mechanisms:

- assessment and possible investigation of the complaint and decision/s already made, and/or
- facilitated resolution (where a person not connected with the complaint reviews the matter and attempts to find an outcome acceptable to the relevant parties).

Level 3

Where a person making a complaint is dissatisfied with the outcome of our review of their complaint, they may

a) Advise the Lifeline South Coast CEO or Board chair, or

b) seek an external review of our decision (by the Australian Charities and Not-for-Profits Commission for example).

Accountability and learning

Analysis and evaluation of complaints

We will ensure that complaints are recorded in a systematic way so that information can be easily retrieved for reporting and analysis by management and the Board.

We will maintain a complaint register detailing:

- dates of the complaint and resolution
- whether the complaint required a formal investigation
- if/which external parties became involved
- a brief outline of the complaint, maintaining confidentiality

The register will be reported to the CEO and Board at each meeting

Monitoring of the complaint management system

We will continually monitor our complaint management system to:

- ensure its effectiveness in responding to and resolving complaints
- identify and correct deficiencies in the operation of the system, and
- monitoring may include the use of audits, complaint satisfaction surveys and online listening tools and alerts.

Continuous improvement

We are committed to improving the way our organisation operates, including our management of the effectiveness and efficiency of our complaint management system. To this end, we will:

- support the making and appropriate resolution of complaints
- implement best practices in complaint handling
- recognise exemplary complaint handling by staff
- regularly review the complaint management system and complaint data, and
- implement appropriate system changes arising out of our analysis of complaints data and continual monitoring of the system.

RELATED DOCUMENTS

Whistleblower Policy

Complaint Procedures Manual

Customer Feedback Procedures

Worker Feedback Procedures

Complaint Register