

# Complaints Resolution and Feedback Policy

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## Complaints Resolution and Feedback Policy

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*Note: this Policy is for service users of NCNS programs and services.*

### Policy Statement

Nepean Community & Neighbourhood Services (NCNS) is committed to ensuring that any person or organisation using its services or affected by its operations has the right to lodge a complaint or to appeal a decision of the organisation.

NCNS recognises that clients and stakeholders need avenues to give feedback or raise complaints with the organisation and are entitled to have their concerns addressed in ways that ensure access and equity, timeliness, accountability and transparency.

NCNS will provide a complaints and appeals procedure that:

- Allows any person to make a complaint or provide feedback
- Facilitates complaints by cultivating a supportive environment in which they can be made
- Is simple, accessible and easy to use
- Is effectively communicated to and promoted to all clients and stakeholders
- Is proportionate to the size of the organisation and services provided
- Ensures complaints or appeals are fairly assessed and responded to promptly
- Supports the quality improvement of services delivery and operations
- Complies with legislative requirements

Complaints may refer to services provided by staff (including volunteers), use of facilities and resources, or matters concerning the NCNS Board.

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Where complaints, grievances or disputes arise that are initiated by staff, volunteers or Board members with each other, these are dealt with separately under the Internal Disputes Policy.

For the purposes of this policy, the person making the complaint will be referred to as 'the complainant'. Please note this policy does not cover situations where a complaint involves abuse or is of a criminal nature. In these situations, the relevant authorities are to be notified immediately.

## Scope

This policy applies to all Board members, staff, volunteers, students and service users of NCNS.

## Policy Principles

NCNS will:

- Ensure that all clients and their families, carers and advocates are encouraged and supported to raise any concerns they have about the service or organisation
- Consider all complaints it receives, regardless of whether or not the complainant is a client of the organisation
- Treat all complainants with respect, recognising that the issue of complaint is important to the complainant
- Maintain confidentiality of all parties involved, keeping any information private to those directly involved in the complaint and its resolution. Information will only be disclosed if required by law, or if otherwise necessary
- Ensure support and advocacy is available to clients who make a complaint and require support
- Deal with all complaints in a timely manner and aim to provide a formal response to the complainant within 28 days of the complaint being received
- Keep parties to the complaint appropriately involved and informed of the progress of the complaint
- Ensure that all complainants are aware of and understand how to escalate their complaint to relevant external complaints bodies

- Ensure that Board members, staff and volunteers are given information about the complaints procedure as part of their induction and are aware of procedures for managing client feedback and complaints
- Ensure that feedback data (both positive and negative) is considered in organisational reviews and in planning service improvements
- Review and evaluate the accessibility of the complaints management system and continually improve its processes.

## Policy context

This policy relates to:

Legislation	NSW Community Services (Complaints Reviews and Monitoring) Act 1993
Organisation policies	See under 'Related documents'

## Definitions

**Complaint:** is an expression of dissatisfaction made to or about an organisation regarding its staff, services or products that warrants response or resolution. A complaint may be a written or verbal statement.

**Complainant:** is an employee, client, advocate, entity or member of the public who expresses their dissatisfaction about an organisation to either the organisation itself or an external body.

**Escalation:** is the process of reporting complaints to the relevant external body, e.g. the NSW Ombudsman (1800 451 524) if the complainant is not satisfied with the outcome of their complaint.

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## Procedures

### 1. Information for clients and stakeholders

The complaints and appeals procedure of NCNS will be documented for clients and stakeholders in a Complaint Information Sheet which is made available to service users and to the public through our website <https://www.nepeancommunity.org.au/>.

All clients will be informed of their rights and responsibilities with regard to complaints and appeals at the earliest possible stage of their involvement with the organisation.

The Complaints Information Sheet contains information on the following:

- how to make a complaint or lodge an appeal, including an anonymous complaint
- contact person for lodging a complaint or appeal
- how the organisation will deal with the complaint or appeal, the steps involved and the timelines
- the rights of the complainant to an advocate, support person or interpreter
- how the person will be informed about the outcome of their complaint or appeal
- how to make a complaint to an external body including contact details

### 2. Making a complaint - Facilities or resources

If you have a complaint that relates to maintenance of facilities or resources, details of the complaint are taken in writing by the staff member receiving it and referred to the Team Leader or Program Manager for follow up action.

If it is more than a matter requiring maintenance, such as policy and procedures, you are asked to present the complaint in writing (see 3.1 (a) below).

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### 3. Making a complaint - Services and staff

3.1 If you have a complaint about services provided by NCNS staff or volunteers, their behaviour, or breaches of policy and procedures:

- a) You can make a complaint in person, by phone, by email or letter, or by completing a **Complaints and Feedback – Written Complaint** form. Written complaints should be forwarded to the address detailed in Section (c) below, or by email to the Managing Director at [manager@nepeancommunity.org.au](mailto:manager@nepeancommunity.org.au).
- b) In cases where verbal complaints are made, the staff member who first becomes aware of the complaint will note this on the **Verbal Complaints** form, and forward to the Managing Director and/or Operations Manager within 48 hours.
- c) Should the complaint be about services provided by the Managing Director or a member of the Board, the complaint should be put in writing, marked CONFIDENTIAL, and addressed to:

The Chairperson  
Nepean Community & Neighbourhood Services  
PO Box 7599, South Penrith NSW 2750

Or by email to:  
[Chair@nepeancommunity.org.au](mailto:Chair@nepeancommunity.org.au)

Where the Chair is the subject of a complaint, the complaint should be referred to the Board Secretary.

- d) Except where the Managing Director is involved, all complaints in the first instance will be referred to the Operations Manager or Managing Director and discussed with the staff member, volunteer or Board member involved. If the complaint cannot be simply resolved through discussion the complainant may refer the matter to the Chair of the Board.
- e) The Board will establish a Complaints Subcommittee that will convene a meeting within 14 days with the complainant or their representative and all other parties involved in the complaint. A copy of the written complaint or the notated verbal complaint must be circulated to all parties before the meeting.
- f) The Complaints Subcommittee will have delegated authority to work towards a mutually acceptable resolution of the problem. The

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Subcommittee may decide to:

- schedule more than one meeting to resolve the matter
  - appoint a mediator to assist in the resolution to the matter
  - if the matter involves a paid employee carrying out their duties, then the employee's industrial agreement disputes procedure may be referred to
  - refer the matter to the full Board for resolution.
- g) All meetings of the Complaints Subcommittee must be documented in the style of minutes and these minutes must be tabled at the following Board meeting. The minutes must list the names of all present, the purpose of the meeting and the outcome. All Board decisions are final. All proceedings of the meeting must be kept confidential unless agreed otherwise by those attending the meeting.
- 3.2 Any disciplinary action against a staff member or volunteer arising from a complaint will be taken in accordance with the procedures contained in the NCNS Disciplinary Policy.
- 3.3 Complaints involving the Managing Director will be managed by the Board Chair.

#### **4. Making a complaint - User groups and clients**

- 4.1 With regard to complaints between user groups:
- NCNS encourages groups to come to a mutually acceptable agreement between themselves
  - in the event of not reaching an agreement, the group/s are to put in writing their complaint and address it to the Company Secretary for action as stated in procedure 2 above.
- 4.2 In terms of complaints by staff about user groups or members of the user group, the Managing Director will be informed and if the complaint cannot be simply resolved, the Managing Director will inform the Board and action as per procedure 2 d, e and f above will be initiated.
- 4.4 Complaints between clients - If a client has a complaint against another client that is impacting on a program or group, the two clients will be asked to attempt to resolve their conflict amicably. If they are unable or unwilling to resolve their conflict, then both parties will be asked to withdraw from the program or group until the conflict is resolved.

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## **5. Cooperation in external investigations**

If any person makes a complaint about NCNS to an external body (including police, the NSW Ombudsman), the Managing Director will be responsible for liaising with the body responsible for investigating the issue. NCNS will fully cooperate in any investigation which may take place. This includes participating in early resolution, conciliation, and/or reporting to the body about resolution and corrective actions if required.

## **6. If you are not happy with the decision**

If you are not happy with the decision, you can contact the NSW Ombudsman. The Ombudsman is an independent watchdog whose job is to protect the rights of people using or accessing community service providers. You can discuss your complaint with them:

NSW Ombudsman: 1800 451 524 or (02) 9286 1000 or  
[nswombo@ombo.nsw.gov.au](mailto:nswombo@ombo.nsw.gov.au) or [www.ombo.nsw.gov.au](http://www.ombo.nsw.gov.au)

## **7. Record keeping**

A register of complaints will be maintained. Complaints will be kept for a minimum of seven years after the complaint has been made. The register will be maintained by the Operations Manager and will record the following for each complaint:

- Details of the complainant and the nature of the complaint
- Date lodged
- Action taken
- Date of resolution and reason for decision
- Indication of complainant being notified of outcome
- Complainant response and any further action

The complaints register and files will be confidential and access is restricted to the Managing Director and Operations Manager.

## **8. Promotion of Complaints Resolution and Feedback Policy**

The Managing Director will ensure that this policy is promoted and that a copy of this policy is displayed in each of NCNS's locations.



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## Related Documents

- Access and Equity Policy
- Code of Conduct
- Code of Ethics
- Conflict of Interest Policy
- Children’s Complaints Policy
- Complaints Information Sheet
- Complaints and Feedback Form – Verbal
- Complaints and Feedback Form – Written
- Internal Disputes Policy
- Partnerships Policy
- Privacy and Confidentiality Policy
- Records Management Policy
- Staff Disciplinary Policy (Underperformance & Misconduct)

## Policy Review

Version	Date reviewed	Amendment notes	Next Review Date
Created V.1	February 1998		
V.2	June 2004		
V.3	January 2007		January 2009
Review	August 2009		
Review	June 2010		June 2012
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Review	June 2016		July 2019
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V.4 Ratified	April 2023	Ratified by the Board 19 April 2023.	April 2025

## Date

*19 April 2023*