
Homelessness Support Services: Complaints and Appeals Policy

August 2022

Policy Name:	Homelessness Support Services: Complaints and Appeals Policy		
Version:	V1.0		
Approved by:	CEO	Issue Date:	August 2022
		Review Date:	August 2025

Homelessness Support Services: Complaints and Appeals Policy

1.0 Purpose

The Women's Housing Company (WHC) Homelessness Support Service (HSS) is committed to effectively and professionally receiving and responding to complaints and appeals from clients and stakeholders.

This policy describes how WHC's HSS manages complaints raised about the homelessness support services delivered by WHC, and appeals lodged against decisions made by the WHC, with a consistent, transparent and systematic approach.

2.0 Scope

This policy applies to HSS staff, contractors, students and volunteers.

2.1 Definitions

A **Complaint** is an expression of dissatisfaction with a specific service delivered by the WHC, where the complainant is unhappy with the standard or type of service or the conduct of a WHC staff member.

Complaints can be made by telephone, in writing by email or letter, or in person.

Complaints can be made directly by a person receiving a service from the WHC or by an advocate on behalf of a person receiving a service from the WHC.

Complaints can be made anonymously, however the WHC may not be able to fully investigate the matter, may not be able to take appropriate action to resolve the matter and will not be able to respond to the complainant.

An **Appeal** is a request for a review of a service delivery decision made by the WHC.

3.0 Policy statement

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

3.1 The importance of complaints and appeals

Feedback, including complaints and appeals, is considered an important part of the HSS's operational and program planning and its quality improvement program.

Responses to complaints and appeals are delivered in a consistent and timely manner.

The resolution of the complaint and appeal to the satisfaction of the complainant is a goal of the complaints process.

Board members, staff, students and volunteers are aware of the HSS's procedures for managing complaints and appeals through orientation and induction processes.

The HSS welcomes information and feedback from clients and stakeholders to improve the quality of its products and services.

3.2 Communicating the complaints and appeals policy

Information is available to clients and stakeholders about mechanisms to communicate complaints and appeals on the WHC website, in new client orientation packs and included in resources and publications, as appropriate.

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Information to be included includes:

- How to make a complaint or an appeal to the HSS
- The complaints and appeals process, confidentiality, timelines and management of complaints and appeals
- The process for pursuing the complaint through an external body in the event that a satisfactory resolution of the complaint/appeal cannot be reached via the WHC's internal processes.

Clients of the HSS should also be advised of the WHC's Community Housing: Complaints and Appeals Policy that sets out the right of applicants and tenants to provide feedback about a tenancy or property service provided by the WHC, or to appeal a decision made by the WHC in regard to tenancy or property issues. If a HSS client is also a tenant of the WHC, the client may lodge their complaint via either the HSS or Community Housing avenues.

3.3 Receiving complaints

All staff can receive complaints either verbally or in writing from a client or stakeholder. The process for accepting and recording a complaint is accessible to all staff and is done via Complispace Assurance. The person taking details of a complaint is also responsible for acknowledging it in writing within three (3) business days.

The Manager – Homelessness Support Services (hereafter 'the Manager') will be advised of complaints as they arise through Complispace to assist in effective management of the Specialist Homelessness Services (SHS) program. The Manager will be responsible for managing the resolution of complaints and appeals that are recorded in Complispace.

Where a complaint involves allegations of misconduct such as criminal activity, assault, fraud and corrupt behaviour, the CEO, WHC must be immediately informed by the Manager and the matter should be dealt with by reference to the WHC Whistleblower Policy.

3.4 Collection, monitoring and reporting information about complaints

Information regarding complaints is collated in a complaints register within Complispace. This information is discussed as part of regular supervisory meetings between the CEO and the Manager. Where appropriate (for example in the case that complaints provide evidence of systemic and widespread issues), the Manager and/or the CEO, may bring complaints or appeals to the attention of the WHC Board.

The Manager analyses complaints for trends and provides recommendations for action to be taken. Recommendations are discussed at Executive Team meetings.

3.5 Responding to complaints

The response to a complaint will be coordinated by the Manager. However, all staff may be involved in responding to a complaint either through communication with the complainant, reviewing documentation or implementing practice changes as a result of a complaint.

The WHC aims to resolve complaints promptly, and wherever possible within 21 business days. Where an investigation or outcome is expected to exceed 21 business days, the person handling the complaint will advise the complainant of progress to date, reasons for the delay, and the anticipated date of resolution. At the end of the investigation, a letter will be issued to advise the outcome.

The complaints register is regularly reviewed to inform service planning and continuous quality improvement processes.

3.6 Complaints involving staff

Any complaint involving staff members (excluding the Manager) are investigated by the Manager. The Manager will coordinate a response to the complaint.

Responding to the complaint may involve:

- Investigating the complaint and providing the staff member with an opportunity to respond to issues raised
- Attempting to mediate the dispute (if appropriate)

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- Taking further action necessary to resolve the issue (e.g. external mediation and dispute resolution services)
- Providing relevant staff with feedback and additional training, linked in with their Performance Development Plan process.

Any disciplinary action against a staff member arising from a complaint will be taken in consultation with Human Resources of the WHC.

Complaints involving the Manager will be triaged to the CEO. The process for complaints involving the Manager is the same as for complaints involving other staff, except the CEO facilitates the resolution.

3.7 Complaint escalation – internal and external

3.7.1 Complaint escalation – internal appeal

The internal escalation process involves the lodgement of an appeal by the complainant. An **Appeal** is a request for a review of a service delivery decision made by the WHC. Appeals must be lodged within 30 business days of being notified of the resolution of a complaint or other decision.

Requesting an appeal provides the opportunity for the WHC to reflect on whether the decision was made based on full and accurate information and in accordance with relevant legislation and/or policies and procedures. Appeals cannot be made in regard to the content of a HSS policy, however can be made in regard to the way in which a policy has been applied.

Appeals can be made by telephone, in writing by email or letter, or in person. Information on how to lodge an appeal is located on WHC's website.

Appeals can be made by a client of the WHC or by an advocate on behalf of the client.

Appeals cannot be made anonymously.

To ensure consistent, impartial and appropriate review of decisions and responses, and to identify trends and opportunities for service improvement, all appeals are reviewed by a senior staff member not involved in the original decision-making process.

Any WHC staff member can receive an appeal and is responsible for recording and registering this in the Complispace system. The staff member taking the details of the appeal is also responsible for acknowledging it in writing within three (3) business days.

The WHC aims to respond to appeals promptly, and wherever possible within 21 business days. Where a review is expected to exceed 21 business days, the person handling the appeal will advise the appellant of progress to date, reasons for the delay, and the anticipated date of response. At the end of the review, a letter will be issued to advise the outcome.

3.7.2 Complaint escalation – external

If the complainant finds their complaint has not been handled to their satisfaction through internal complaint and appeal processes of the WHC, the complainant can submit their complaint to the following external bodies:

1. The Department of Communities and Justice (DCJ)

A complaint can be made to DCJ as the funding body for services provided by the Homelessness Support Services programs of the WHC. This can be done via:

- The online form accessible via this DCJ webpage: [Feedback and complaints \(nsw.gov.au\)](https://www.dcj.nsw.gov.au/feedback-complaints) or
- By email to DCJ: dcj@yourfeedback.nsw.gov.au

2. NSW Ombudsman

A complaint to the NSW Ombudsman can be submitted online by following the procedures outlined on the NSW Ombudsman's website: [How to make a complaint - NSW Ombudsman](https://www.nswombudsman.nsw.gov.au/how-to-make-a-complaint).

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4.0 Related Policies and other documents

Client Feedback Policy

Community Housing: Complaints & Appeals Policy

Whistleblower Policy

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