



Complaints, Feedback and Incident Management Policy

Version 1

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Related Documents

Document	Name
Policy	
Procedures, Manuals etc	Complaints and Incident Management Procedure

Document history

Version/s	Reviewer/s	Version Date	Comments

1. Introduction

1.1 Purpose

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

This policy provides guidance for people who wish to make a complaint and to our staff, on the key principles and processes of our complaint management system.

It also provides advice on how general feedback and compliments will be handled.

1.2 Scope

This policy applies to all Lifeline Australia staff (paid and volunteer), contractors and our Board. We / us refers to Lifeline Australia and its wholly owned subsidiary company. The policy refers to the process of receiving or managing complaints from the public and clients made to or about us, regarding our services and staff, or our complaint handling process. This policy also applies to Lifeline Centres delivering services under the auspices of Lifeline and should be used in conjunction with their own internal complaint handling procedures.

Lifeline is a member-based model, encompassing 40 Centres around Australia, all of which operate as separate entities. This means that each Lifeline Centre's individual Board of Governance oversees and has responsibility for all operational matters. Therefore, Lifeline Australia does not have direct control over Member staff or volunteer matters. We do, however, require all Lifeline Member organisations to act in accordance with acceptable complaints and grievance handling processes. We also require all Lifeline Centres to adhere to this policy in relation to our 13 11 14 crisis support service and online chat services.

Internal complaints and grievances (those being made by paid or volunteer staff), should be directed to their Centre manager in the first instance, or Lifeline Australia Practice Manager or Human Resources Manager for confidential management.

1.3 Organisational commitment

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

Who	Commitment	How
CEO	Promote a culture that values complaints and their effective resolution	<p>Report to the Board on our complaint handling.</p> <p>Provide adequate support and direction to key staff responsible for handling complaints.</p> <p>Regularly review reports about complaint trends and issues arising from complaints.</p> <p>Encourage all staff to be alert to complaints and assist those responsible for handling complaints to resolve them promptly.</p> <p>Encourage staff to make recommendations for system improvements.</p> <p>Support recommendations for service, staff and complaint handling improvements arising from the analysis of complaint data.</p>
Staff whose duties include complaint handling	Demonstrate exemplary complaint handling practices	<p>Ensure those who make complaints are heard and treated with empathy, discretion and respect. Assist people to make a complaint, if needed.</p> <p>Comply with relevant policy and associated procedures.</p> <p>Provide regular feedback to the Leadership Executive or the Board on issues arising from complaints.</p> <p>Provide suggestions to Leadership Executive on ways to improve our complaints management system.</p> <p>Implement changes arising from individual complaints and from the analysis of complaint data as directed by management.</p> <p>Take a supportive, no-blame approach when dealing with staff involved in complaints.</p>

All staff	Understand and comply with our complaint handling practices.	<p>Ensure those who make complaints are heard and treated with empathy, discretion and respect.</p> <p>Be aware of our complaint handling policies and procedures.</p> <p>Assist people who wish to make complaints to access our complaints process.</p> <p>Be alert to complaints and assist staff handling complaints to resolve matters promptly.</p>
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2. Terms and Definitions

Complaint

An expression of dissatisfaction made to or about us, our services, staff or the handling of a complaint where a response or resolution is explicitly or implicitly expected or legally required. (AS/NZ 10002:2014). This includes complaints made directly to us, and complaints made through social media forums.

Complaint handling/management system

All policies, procedures, practices, staff, hardware and software used by us in the management of complaints and incidents.

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. Feedback also includes compliments about the service or individuals.

Grievance

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

Policy

A statement that sets out how we should fulfil our vision, mission and goals.

Procedure

An instruction that sets out how our policies will be implemented and by whom.

3.Guiding principles

An effective complaint handling system must be modelled on the principles of fairness, accessibility, responsiveness, efficiency and integration into organisational culture.

3.1 Facilitate complaints

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

Any concerns raised in feedback or complaints will be acknowledged within one working day and feedback provided within 15 working days. (as in AS/NZ 10002).

People making complaints will be:

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

We will ensure that people making complaints are not adversely affected because a complaint has been made by them or on their behalf.

Anonymous complaints

Anonymous complaints are welcomed and will be investigated as far as possible, however, a lack of identifying information may hinder our ability to fully investigate the complaint or provide feedback. Regardless of the ability to report back our findings, Lifeline Australia is committed to identifying systemic causes and actioning learnings from our investigations, and investigate all complaints received.

Accessibility

We will ensure that information about how and where complaints may be made to or about us is well publicised on our website. We will ensure that our systems to manage complaints are easily understood and accessible to everyone, particularly people who may require assistance. We will ensure that multiple avenues are available in which to make a complaint, such as through an online form, in writing and by phone.

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).

No charge

Complaining to us is free.

Make a complaint or provide feedback

Feedback and complaints can be received in several ways:

- Complete an online Complaints & Feedback form on the Lifeline Australia website: <http://www.lifeline.org.au/About-Lifeline/Contact-Us/Enquiry/default.aspx>
- Write a letter to PO Box 173, Deakin West ACT 2600.
- Participate in a client satisfaction survey or program evaluation facilitated by Lifeline Australia.
- Ask to make a complaint during a call or chat with a crisis supporter. The information will be documented on your behalf.

3.2 Respond to complaints

Early resolution

Where possible, complaints will be resolved at first contact with us. These will still be logged as a complaint and documented accordingly.

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

Responsiveness

We will promptly acknowledge receipt of complaints, usually within one working day.

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 the complaint.

We will advise people as soon as possible when we are unable to deal with any part of the 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 the complaint and the reason for our delay.

Objectivity and fairness

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

We will ensure that the person handling a complaint is different from any staff member whose conduct or service is being complained about.

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.

Complaint handling will be overseen by the Lifeline Practice Governance Committee, which includes a permanent independent member who has no association with Lifeline and whose role on the committee is to provide objective and independent evaluation of complaint reporting and analysis.

Responding flexibly

Our staff 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.

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.

3.3 Manage and resolve the complaint

Resolution

We will provide feedback and outcomes in relation to the complaint made, where this has been requested by the person making the complaint. The feedback will address their concerns and as appropriate, provide general information in relation to corrective actions. No information will be disclosed about the identity of persons involved in the complaint, nor specific detail in relation to outcomes for individual members of staff or the organisation.

Complaints involving multiple agencies

Where a complaint involves multiple organisations, we will work with the other organisations where possible, to ensure that communication with the person making a complaint 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 a complaint involves multiple areas within our organisation, responsibility for communicating with the person making the complaint and/or their representative will also be coordinated.

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 staff

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

Staff 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. However, we will ensure our staff and volunteers are protected from unfair, unreasonable or abusive behaviour, and if we are unable to work with you directly to resolve your complaint we will refer to an external organisation to facilitate this.

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.

The three levels of complaint handling:

Level 1

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

Level 2

Where this is not possible, we may decide to escalate the complaint to a more senior person 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 seek an external review of our decision (by the Australian Charities and Not-for Profits Commission for example).

4 Accountability and learning

4.1 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 the Leadership group and the Board.

We will run regular reports on:

- the number of complaints received
- the outcome of complaints, including matters resolved at first contact
- issues arising from complaints
- systemic issues identified, and
- the number of requests we receive for internal and/or external review of our complaint handling.

Regular analysis of these reports will be undertaken to monitor trends, measure the quality of our customer service and make improvements.

Both reports and their analysis will be provided to our CEO, Leadership Group and our Board for review, on a regular basis and no less than twice a year.

4.2 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

monitoring may include the use of audits, complaint satisfaction surveys and online listening tools and alerts.

4.3 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 and reward 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.