



POLICY TITLE: **Client Complaints Management**

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Program: Open Support

Classification: Governance

Approved By: CEO St Vincent's Clinic

Responsible Manager: OS Operations Manager

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1. Purpose and Scope

This policy outlines the core principles and processes in place at Open Support to ensure that there is a consistent, fair and accessible mechanism for handling client complaints. This policy is applicable to all complaints made by clients, members of the public and from external organisations about the services provided by Open Support.

This policy does not apply to workplace grievances which should be managed according to the [SVHA Private Division Grievance Resolution Policy](#) or to the management of individual performance issues which should be dealt with according to the [SVPH Performance Management Policy](#).

All Open Support employees and volunteers must adhere to the principles and requirements as set out in this policy when receiving and managing client complaints at Open Support.

2. Policy Statement

2.1 Definitions

2.1.1 Complaint

A complaint is defined as an expression of dissatisfaction with a service offered or provided or a concern that provides feedback regarding any aspect of service, from a client, member of the public or an external organisation that identifies issues requiring a response.

2.1.2 Informal (Frontline) Complaint

An informal complaint is one received by a staff member or volunteer in the course of their day to day activities. Frontline complaints are usually verbal. It is the aim that such complaints are resolved at the point of contact wherever possible.

2.1.3 Formal Complaint

A formal complaint is one received in writing or a verbal complaint that is complex in nature and/or cannot be resolved at the point of contact and requires escalation to a more senior member of staff or the Open Support Quality Manager.

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2.1.4 Complainant

The person making the complaint or the person for whom a third party is making the complaint on behalf of.

2.1.5 Workplace Grievance

A workplace grievance is a written or oral statement made by a staff member or volunteer regarding a concern arising in the workplace, including but not limited to:

- The interpretation and application of Open Support policies and procedures;
- Workplace interpersonal conflict;
- A Work Health and Safety issue such as discrimination or harassment

Workplace grievances are not included in the scope of this policy. Refer to the [SVHA Private Division Grievance Resolution Policy](#)

2.2 Core Principles for Complaints Management

2.2.1 Commitment

The CEO, Open Support General Manager and Senior Management is committed to an integrated process that delivers an open and transparent complaints management system to allow for an effective and timely response to client concerns and prompt action to improve services to clients.

2.2.2 Accessibility

- Open Support encourages and enables feedback to be provided about the services provided by ensuring the complaints process is easily understood and accessible.
- Information with respect to how to make a complaint or raise a concern will be available via the Open Support Client Rights and Responsibilities Charter, the Open Support Website and in other service specific information.
- For clients receiving services that are funded through the Department of Social Services, additional information about how to lodge a complaint with the Aged Care Complaints Commission must also be provided.

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- A generic feedback email address (info@opensupport.org.au) will be provided to all clients and will be regularly monitored by a nominated staff member.

2.2.3 Confidentiality

- All complaints will be dealt with in confidence with only relevant information provided to relevant parties on a need to know basis. Staff must act in accordance with the Privacy Act (1988) and the Privacy and Personal Information Act (1998).
- Information pertaining to complaints will be stored in a secure manner within Riskman. If a complaint is made by a client, no details or correspondence relating to a complaint will be held within the client file. A complaint reference number should be noted within the client file to allow authorised individuals to access relevant information if required.
- For any complaint made by a third party, the person on behalf of whom the complaint is being made, must provide consent before any information is provided to the third party in response.

2.2.4 Responsiveness

- All complaints will be investigated in a timely and professional manner according to the principles of natural justice and procedural fairness.
- Frontline complaints received by staff or volunteers during the course of their daily duties should be resolved at the point of contact wherever possible.
- If the complaint cannot be resolved by the staff member or volunteer in the first instance, the issue should be referred to the Service Coordinator and/or the Open Support Quality Manager.
- Where the decision is made to escalate a complaint, the complainant should be informed and appropriate contact details provided.

2.2.5 Transparency & Accountability

- All complaints, whether formal or informal should be recorded and entered into Riskman. This applies to complaints that are resolved at point of contact and to complaints that are escalated for further management.

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- All relevant parties must be kept appropriately informed of any outcomes and recommendations that may arise from a complaint investigation.
- All complaints must be treated consistently, regardless of the source or format.
- Some complaints may raise issues that require mandatory notification to a range of external agencies. Advice should be sought from the Open Support Senior Management team in such circumstances.

2.3 Responding to Informal (Frontline) Complaints

- All staff and volunteers have a responsibility to listen to and respond impartially to a complainant.
- When responding to a complaint the staff member or volunteer should:
 - Listen to the person making the complaint and give them time to give their version of events without interruption;
 - Demonstrate empathy and understanding of the person's point of view
 - Avoid responding in a defensive manner
 - Identify and clarify the concerns raised;
 - Establish the outcomes being sought by the person;
 - Inform the person of how their concerns will be investigated and managed. Explain that the complaint will be recorded in the electronic complaints management database;
 - Take a conciliatory approach and offer an apology or expression of regret where appropriate;
 - Offer solutions that may reasonably be delivered or implemented in order to resolve the concerns. Provide an estimated timeframe of when the person may expect action or feedback;
 - Take action to implement the solution in a timely manner;
 - Follow up with the person to check whether the complaint has been resolved;
 - Inform relevant staff of the outcome of the complaint.
- If the complaint cannot be resolved at the time by the staff member or volunteer taking the complaint, they must refer the matter to a more senior member within 48 hours.

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2.4 Documenting Complaints

- Details of all complaints must be recorded in the relevant Feedback Module of Riskman as soon as possible after the complaint has been received, regardless of outcome, source or format of receipt.
- Details of complaints or correspondence relating to complaints must never be stored within a client's service file.
- Complaints should be documented accurately as a report of allegations rather than as a statement of fact or personal opinion.
- Information should be objectively stated and de-identified as far as practicable for staff members or volunteers who are the subject of the complaint.
- Any records of interviews with persons involved conducted during investigation, should be countersigned by the person being interviewed to ensure accuracy and procedural fairness.
- All written complainants will be provided with a written acknowledgement and response within 5 working days.
- Written acknowledgements and responses must be approved by the Open Support CEO and/or the Open Support General Manager prior to being sent to the complainant.

2.5 Complaint Management Timeframes

- Frontline informal complaints should be resolved at the point of service wherever possible.
- Formal complaints or informal complaints that have been escalated should be formally acknowledged within 5 working days of receipt.
- The target for complaint finalisation is 14 working days from the date of acknowledgement.
- If the complaint cannot be finalised within the target timeframes, complainants must be kept informed of progress and revised timeframes at least on a weekly basis.

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3. References

- SVPH Management of Customer Feedback Policy
- Privacy Act 1988
- Privacy and Personal Information Act 1998
- SVHA Private Division Grievance Resolution Policy
- SVPH Performance Management Policy

4. Appendices

- 4.1 [Open Support Complaints Management Flowchart](#)
- 4.2 [Making a Complaint - Guide for Clients](#)
- 4.3 [Complaints Form](#)

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