

Title: Complaints Handling Policy and Practice		No: 43631
Practice Owner: Executive Manager, Clinical Practice and Quality		
Practice Operational Delegate: Senior Manager, Clinical Governance and Quality		
Date approved: June 2013 Reviewed: February 2016 October 2016 September 2023		Suggested Review date: September 2025
Reference or source: Victims Charter Act 2006 Health Complaints Act 2016		
Purpose: To underpin complaint handling with a philosophy of continuous improvement and practice transparency and to outline a respectful and equitable approach to responding to and resolving complaints.		
Application: All Organisation	Type: Policy and Practice	Policy Group: Quality Services

1. Background

- 1.1. Family Life welcomes complaints as a way of improving service delivery and informs clients and participants about the complaint process.
- 1.2. Clients have the right to make a complaint about the service *provided* or refused by the organisation.
- 1.3. Family Life acknowledges everyone's right to express an opinion about our services. Complaints provide valuable feedback about the level of satisfaction of individuals engaging with our organisation, and along with other sorts of feedback, provide the opportunity to improve service delivery and engagement with our stakeholders.
- 1.4. As a victim services organisation Family Life will ensure that all complainants are treated with courtesy, dignity and respect ensuring that any individual's diverse needs are taken into account.

2. Scope

- 2.1. Family Life provides a range of services through different funding channels. This policy and practice is written to satisfy the requirements of all funding channels and to ensure the provision of high quality services. It applies to all Family Life activities and encompasses complaints made by

Clients, Volunteers, Customers and members of the public. For employee complaints please refer to 43100 Workplace Conduct Policy

3. Objectives

- 3.1. Family Life will deliver high quality services.
- 3.2. The complaints process will foster access and equity, fairness, transparency, accountability and best practice standards to all participants in Family Life activities
- 3.3 The complaints process is procedurally fair, follows principles of natural justice and complies with legislative requirements
- 3.4. Complainants will feel respected and confident their concerns have been acknowledged and considered.

4. Fostering a safe learning culture

- 4.1. The work Family Life does is complex in nature. Uncomplimentary client and participant feedback and complaints are not necessarily indicative of poor practice, particularly in the context of working with people who have, and continue to experience adversity in their lives. However, all feedback does present an opportunity for continuous service improvement and hence Family Life staff are encouraged to be open and appreciative of all types of feedback, and sharing of concerns or complaints, in the interest of providing the best service we can.
- 4.2. Transparency in complaint management supports learning and resilience.
- 4.3. Principles of natural justice are utilised in investigation, except where complaints are of a criminal nature, in which case such complaints are referred to police.

5. Complaints Policy

5.1. A complaint can be defined as an expression of dissatisfaction in relation to Family Life's services, products, staff or processes or the handling of a complaint, where a response or resolution is explicitly or implicitly expected. Complaints can be received in several ways, including the following:

- Verbally in person and/or on the telephone;
- In writing via an email and/or a letter or via the Family Life website;

5.2. All Family Life participants, including but not limited to Clients, Volunteers, Members of the Public and Stakeholders have the right to make a complaint about the service provided or refused by Family Life.

5.3. All complaints are treated with respect and dealt with in a timely and courteous manner.

5.4. All clients are provided with the *Client Information* brochure when they commence a Family Life service which includes information about how to make a complaint. Clients and other Family Life participants, can also

access the complaints process via the Family Life website.

5.5. If clients are not satisfied with the service, they are initially encouraged to discuss their grievances with the practitioner. Volunteers and Customers of Family Life are initially encouraged to discuss their grievances with the Store Manager.

5.6. It is the responsibility of the practitioner/Store Manager to notify their line manager and the line manager will then notify the Senior Manager Clinical Governance Quality as per the process timeline

5.7. If the complaint remains unresolved or the person feels their complaint requires further attention, the complainant will be guided to the next most Senior Manager as appropriate.

5.8. The client feedback and satisfaction survey process may also sometimes identify complaints. These complaints are assessed for seriousness and escalated accordingly and then the normal complaints process is followed.

5.9. All unresolved complaints ultimately internally escalate to the CEO for resolution. The CEO may refer to an external grievance process where necessary.

5.10. The CEO and Senior Managers determine and implement corrective action arising from complaints.

5.11. If the complainant remains unsatisfied by the action taken by Family Life, a complaint may be made by the complainant to the relevant regulating authority of the service provider to which Family Life will provide such details. This may include:

Department of Social Services

<https://www.dss.gov.au/contact/feedback-compliments-complaints-and-enquiries/complaints-page>

Department of Families, Fairness and Housing

<https://www.dffh.vic.gov.au/making-complaint>

6. Complaints Process

6.1 Family Life will seek to resolve complaints efficiently and fairly and to the satisfaction of the complainant using the complaints handling process. This process is supported by the Senior Manager, Clinical Governance and Quality and is overseen by the Executive Manager, Clinical Practice and Quality.

6.2 An important component in complaint resolution is the initial gathering of accurate information regarding the issue and the complainant. If the complaint is received verbally then the respondent at Family Life must record the following details:

- Contact details of the Complainant and their relationship to Family Life;
- Nature of the complaint;

- Dates and parties involved including the relevant department or program;
- The resolution being sought; and
- Any other relevant information.

6.3 Where complaints are received verbally, there may be an opportunity to immediately resolve the complaint by providing an explanation or additional information. In cases where the complaint has immediately been resolved, the SMCGQ is required to still be notified as per 6.4.

6.4 Once a complaint (verbal or written) is received by a member of staff at Family Life, the appropriate line manager is to be advised within 1 business day of the staff member becoming aware of the complaint. The manager is to inform the Senior Manager, Clinical Governance Quality within 2 business days of becoming aware of the complaint.

6.2. All complaints must be acknowledged within 3 working days of receipt and all attempts made to close out complaints within 2 weeks.

6.3. If a response/resolution is likely to take longer than 2 weeks, the complainant will be notified of such.

6.4. The complainant must be provided with feedback about how the complaint was managed.

6.5. If a complaint refers to a Board Member it will be immediately forwarded to the executive of the Board for action.

6.6. All feedback received that is not in the form of a formal complaint but requires an acknowledgement and/or an opportunity to improve service provision should be discussed with the SMCGQ to identify the most appropriate way to respond to the feedback.

7. Client Complaints

7.1. Clients have the right to make a complaint about the service provided or refused by the organisation.

7.2. All complaints are treated with respect and dealt with in a timely and courteous manner.

7.3. All clients are provided with the Client Information brochure when they commence a Family Life service which includes information about how to make a complaint. Clients can also access the complaints process via the Family Life website.

7.4. If clients are not satisfied with the service, they are encouraged to discuss their grievances with the practitioner.

7.5. If the complaint remains unresolved, the client may ask to speak with the Team Leader, Program Manager or Director, Services. The complainant will be guided to the next most senior manager as appropriate.

7.6 Refer to 5.9 for management of unresolved complaints

8. Opportunity Shop Complaints

- 8.1. Volunteers and members of the public have the right to make a complaint about the interaction or service provided.
- 8.2. All complaints are treated with respect and dealt with in a timely and courteous manner.
- 8.3. Complainants can access and should be informed of the complaints process via the Family Life website.
- 8.4. Complainants are encouraged to discuss their grievances with the store manager in the first instance.
- 8.5. If the complaint remains unresolved, the complainant may ask to speak with the Social Enterprise Manager. The complainant will be guided to the next most senior manager as appropriate.
- 8.6. Refer to dot point 5.9 for management of unresolved complaints

9. Complaint review and consultation

- 9.1. A register of complaints will be securely maintained centrally in accordance with Family Life's privacy policy [44300 Privacy](#).
- 9.2. The purpose of the register is to record and analyse patterns in complaint management to measure performance and support continuous improvement and safe service delivery.
- 9.3. Complaints are recorded in the central complaints register directly by the responsible Team Leader/Manager as per the complaints process flowchart.
- 9.4. The Senior Manager Clinical Governance and Quality, or appointed delegate, is responsible for maintaining the register and generating periodic reports for review by Senior Managers, the CEO and Board if applicable.
- 9.5. The CEO and Senior Managers determine and implement corrective action arising from complaints.

10. Record of Complaint

10.1. Client Complaints

- 10.1.1. Client Complaints must be recorded in the client's case notes on CSnet.
- 10.1.2. All client complaints are also recorded in a central register. The purpose of the central register is to monitor performance and resolution of complaints, to identify trends and opportunities for continuous improvement within the organisation

10.2. Non-client complaints

- 10.2.1. All non-client complaints are also recorded in the same central register for the same purpose as noted in clause 10.1.2.
- 10.2.2. Documentation relating to complaints should be passed

securely to:

10.2.2.1. The manager responsible, if the complaint is escalated;

10.2.2.2. The SMCGQ, or delegated senior manager, when the complaint is resolved, for secure and central document retention.

The SMCGQ will collaborate with the Senior Manager regarding what information is to be held on CSNET pertaining to the complaint in order to ensure privacy and confidentiality of staff has been considered.

11. Complaint acknowledgement & Management

11.1. Whilst every complaint is managed individually, an acknowledgement and a response letter template have both been developed to support staff in providing timely and consistent responses to complainants Refer Appendix 1. These templates are a guide and can be modified by the individual respondent to address the nuances of the complaint received.

11.2. To support effective communication between the complainant and respondent, all written correspondence must be developed in consultation with the Senior Manager, Clinical Governance Quality.

Appendix 1

Acknowledgment letter

Dear xxxxx,

I am writing to acknowledge your complaint received on xxxxx via xxx to xxxx regarding xxxxx.

I am sorry for the distress this matter has caused and thank you for making me aware of the issue.

I have forwarded the matter to the relevant managers who will investigate your feedback as a priority and will be in contact with you by xxxxx. I appreciate your patience whilst we investigate the matter.

Yours sincerely,

Xxxxxx

Response letter

Dear xxxxx,

I write in response to your email dated xxxx to xxxx, whereby you raised concerns regarding xxxxxxx. I sincerely apologise for the distress this matter has caused you and appreciate the opportunity to address them.

Family Life takes matters such as these you have raised seriously and endeavour to respond to complaint investigation findings in a timely and thorough manner. We have completed a thorough investigation of the complaints you raised with us and also undertaken an internal quality review and consultation.

Matters raised and findings

Xxxxxx

(Include any continuous improvement initiatives that has resulted from the complaint).

If you are still not satisfied, you may wish to escalate the matter to xxxxxx (this may be the Senior Manager or an external body depending on the stage and circumstances of the complaint).

Yours Sincerely

xxxxxx