

# Customer complaint management

Department of Health Policy

QH-POL-450:2017

## 1. Statement

The Department of Health (the department) is committed to delivering high quality services to Queensland's public health system. The department values the benefits of effectively managing feedback from our customers. We believe our customers should be able to provide feedback (both positive and negative) about our services and the way we provide them. Business enhancement, accountability and accessibility are central to an effective customer complaint management system.

The intent of our customer complaint management system is to continually improve and provide better services to our customers.

## 2. Purpose

This policy sets the overall direction for customer complaint management in the department and supports compliance with s219A of the *Public Service Act 2008*. The policy is supported by a Customer Complaint Management Standard, which outlines the roles and responsibilities for customer complaint management in the department, and a Customer Complaint Management Guideline which provides best practice guidance about how to successfully manage customer complaints consistently, fairly, reasonably and on time.

## 3. Scope

This policy applies to all employees, volunteers, contractors and consultants within the Department of Health divisions and commercialised business units. It applies to customer complaints:

- received from both external customers (e.g. the public) and internal customers (e.g. intra-department business areas providing services to other intra-department business areas or Hospital and Health Services)
- received about the products, services or staff of the department, including whether an action or decision limits human rights
- received anonymously
- received via any means where a response or resolution is reasonably expected. It is the responsibility of business areas to determine if correspondence or contact with the department contains a customer complaint under this policy.

This policy *does not* apply to:

- complaints about the products, services or staff of Hospital and Health Services or the Queensland Ambulance Service
- complaints covered by existing statutory or policy obligations, for example; regarding corruption, fraud or right to information/privacy, complaints made by public servants regarding their employment/employer or any other type of complaint already addressed by subject specific legislation and/or policies
- enquiries from a customer about a departmental service or action of the department, or its staff.

## 4. Principles

This policy aims to support and contribute to high performance, engagement with partners and continual improvement. The principles outlined below underpin the department's approach to customer complaint management.

Principle	Department's commitment
<b>Human rights</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The department will respect, protect and promote human rights in our decision-making and actions in relation to customer complaint management.</li> <li>• Staff handling complaints will properly consider human rights that are relevant to an action or decision taken by the department in response to a customer complaint.</li> </ul>
<b>People focus</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Everyone has a right to complain.</li> <li>• The department proactively seeks and receives feedback and complaints.</li> <li>• People making complaints are treated with respect.</li> <li>• Complainants are not adversely affected because of a complaint made by them or on their behalf.</li> <li>• The department will accept complaints from representatives of customers, including family members, friends and other people or organisations that act in support of the person.</li> </ul>
<b>Visibility, transparency and access</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Information about how and where a complaint can be made is made available on the department's websites and made available (both in writing and verbally) at service locations.</li> <li>• A complaint may be made to any employee of the department in person, by phone, email, letter or using the online form on the department's websites.</li> <li>• The department will provide all reasonable and practical help and support to make it easy for all complainants to make a complaint by recognising the particular needs of people, including people with disability, people living in regional and remote areas, the aged and people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds.</li> <li>• A complainant will not be charged a fee to complain.</li> </ul>
<b>Responsiveness</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The majority of customer complaints should be resolved at the point of contact, with training and guidance provided by management.</li> <li>• Customer complaints are acknowledged promptly and responded to fairly, reasonably and in a timely manner. Timelines are determined based on complexity as detailed in the Standard.</li> <li>• Anonymous customer complaints are accepted and treated like any other complaint.</li> <li>• Staff are aware of the policy and procedures available on the department's websites and intranet.</li> <li>• Adequate resources, including trained staff, are available to manage complaints.</li> <li>• Customer complaints are recorded and tracked, timeframes for resolution are monitored and complainants are entitled to reasonable progress reports.</li> </ul>

Principle	Department's commitment
<b>Objectivity and fairness</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Complaints are taken seriously and are handled fairly, objectively and without bias.</li> <li>Complaints are assessed and categorised on nominated criteria.</li> <li>Personal information is managed in line with the <i>Information Privacy Act 2009</i> and ethical obligations.</li> <li>Complaint managers may refuse to investigate a customer complaint if it is considered to be abusive, trivial or vexatious.</li> <li>The principles of natural justice and provision of avenues for review are applied to all complainants.</li> <li>Reviews of decisions will be made by people other than the original decision maker.</li> </ul>
<b>Feedback</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Adequate and timely feedback is provided to all complainants about the progress of their customer complaint, the outcome reached by the department and the reasons for the department's decision.</li> <li>Complainants are notified of available review mechanisms. If a complainant is unsatisfied with the outcome of their customer complaint they may request an internal review. If a complainant remains unsatisfied with the outcome after internal review, they may seek external review.</li> <li>The department will seek regular feedback about the way it manages customer complaints.</li> </ul>
<b>Remedies</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Appropriate remedies that are fair to both the complainant and the department are offered. Complainants are able to request a remedy that is considered as the first option.</li> <li>Informal resolution and compromise are attempted wherever possible.</li> <li>Similar remedies are offered to all persons in a similar situation.</li> <li>If a customer complaint cannot be resolved at the point of contact, it can be referred for further assessment, investigation or review.</li> <li>If a customer complaint is unable to be resolved internally, it may be referred for external review by an agency such as the Queensland Ombudsman.</li> </ul>
<b>Accountability, learning and prevention</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The customer complaint management system is reviewed regularly to ensure relevance and effectiveness.</li> <li>Mechanisms are in place to gather and record information to meet reporting requirements, identify customer complaint trends, monitor the time taken to resolve customer complaints and identify potential business improvements.</li> <li>Potential system improvements revealed by customer complaints are identified by the area responsible and reported regularly to the executive.</li> <li>Information about customer complaints in the department will be published annually.</li> </ul>
<b>Skills Development</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Managers will provide opportunities for skills development to staff who manage customer complaints.</li> </ul>

## 5. Legislation

- *Public Service Act 2008*
- *Information Privacy Act 2009*
- *Hospital and Health Boards Act 2011*
- *Public Records Act 2002*
- *Human Rights Act 2019*

## 6. Supporting documents

- Department of Health Customer Complaint Management Standard
- Department of Health Customer Complaint Management Guideline
- Quick Guide for Customer Complaint Management
- *AS/NZS 10002:2014 Guidelines for complaint management in organisations*
- Queensland Ombudsman's online Policy and Procedure Guide
- Queensland Government Guide: Handling human rights complaints.
- Department of Health human rights complaints guide

## 7. Definitions

Term	Definition	Source
Complaint	Expression of dissatisfaction made to, or about, the department, related to its products, services, staff or the handling of a complaint, where a response or resolution is explicitly or implicitly expected or legally required.	<i>AS/NZS 10002:2014 Guidelines for Complaint Management in Organisations</i>
Complainant	Person, organisation or their representative (including clients, consumers, service users, customers, etc.) who is apparently directly affected by the service or action of the department, making a complaint.	<i>AS/NZS 10002:2014 Guidelines for Complaint Management in Organisations</i>
Customer Complaint	A complaint about the service or action of a department, or its staff, by a person who is apparently directly affected by the service or action. It includes, for example, a complaint about any of the following: (i) a decision made, or a failure to make a decision, by a public service employee of the department; (ii) an act, or failure to act, of the department; (iii) the formulation of a proposal or intention by the department; (iv) the making of a recommendation by the department; (v) the customer service provided by a public service employee of the department.	<i>Public Service Act 2008</i>
Customer Complaint Management Framework	Comprised of the Complaint Management Policy, Complaint Management Standard and Complaint Management Guideline.	NA

Term	Definition	Source
Complaint Management System (CMS)	The systems, processes and procedures used to manage customer complaints. The CMS must comply with the requirements outlined in the Australian Standard.	NA
Customer	A consumer of the department's products and/or services. This definition applies to both external customers (e.g. the public) and internal customers (e.g. employees, contractors and consultants).	NA
Enquiry	Contact or correspondence from a customer seeking information.	NA
External Review	A review of the management of a complaint by an entity external to the department e.g. Queensland Ombudsman	NA
Further Action	The complaint was accepted and resulted in remedial or improvement action.	NA
Human rights	Human rights mean the rights stated in part 2, divisions 2 and 3 of the <i>Human Rights Act 2019</i> .	<i>Human Rights Act 2019</i>
Internal Review	An internal review is an objective, independent and impartial merits review of the complaints process and outcome. It is not a re-investigation.	
No Further Action	The complaint was accepted and resolved immediately at the point of service.	NA
Vexatious Complaint	A complaint without grounds made to cause annoyance, frustration or worry.	<i>Oxford Dictionary</i>

## Version Control

Version	Date	Comments
3.0	10 December 2019	Policy review, incorporating requirements of the <i>Human Rights Act 2019</i>
2.0	21 February 2019	Policy review, incorporating recommendations from the Queensland Ombudsman
1.0	5 July 2017	Endorsed first version