

Customer Complaint Management

Guideline

QH-GDL-450-2:2017

1. Statement

The Customer Complaints Management Guideline (the guideline) provides advice on best practice for customer complaint management within the Department of Health (the department). The guideline supports the Customer Complaint Management Policy and Standard.

2. Scope

This guideline applies to all employees, contractors and consultants within the department's divisions and commercialised business units. The guideline is intended for work areas that may from time to time, receive complaints or feedback in relation to the products and/or services they provide. Compliance with this guideline is not mandatory, but sound reasoning must exist and be documented for departing from the recommended principles and practices within the guideline.

3. Requirements

The following provides best practice guidance for customer complaints management in the department. It is acknowledged that work areas may already have established processes and procedures in place for managing complaints, or may already be required to receive and manage complaints in accordance with legislation. These guidelines are not intended to replace existing processes and procedures if they are consistent with this framework and operating effectively or prescribed by other legislation.

3.1 Establish a system for customer complaint management

Work areas should plan and design an effective and efficient customer complaint management system that is fair, and is seen to be fair. Subject to relevant legal and privacy obligations, the customer complaint management system should allow for the intra-departmental sharing of de-identified complaint data to enable improvements.

3.2 Provision of support in the making of a complaint

The customer complaint management system should take into account people who might require assistance or alternative pathways, and provide support and practical assistance to people to make a complaint, if required.

3.3 Early resolution and timeframes

Where possible, complaints should be managed and resolved at the first point of contact within the department and a timeframe for resolution should be agreed with the complainant as soon as practicable. The table below provides general guidelines for resolution of complaints depending on their complexity.

Classification	Description	Timeframe
Simple	A complaint that is resolved at the point of service.	Resolved immediately at point of service.
Standard	A complaint that usually has only one single issue or concern.	Resolved within 20 working days of receipt.
Complex	A complaint that has multiple issues and/or is serious in nature and usually requires an extensive investigation.	Resolved within 60 working days of receipt.

3.4 Receipt of customer complaint

The work area should record the complaint with its supporting information. It should also assign a unique identifier to the complaint file.

The record of the complaint should identify the following as a minimum:

- a) The complainant's contact information
- b) Issues raised by the complainant
- c) The outcome sought by the complainant
- d) Any other information required to properly respond to the matter
- e) Any support requirements needed by the complainant.

3.5 Tracking of customer complaint

The work area should track the progress of each customer complaint until its finalisation. An up-to-date status should be made available to the complainant upon request and/or at regular intervals. Consideration should be given by the work unit to the most appropriate medium.

3.6 Acknowledgement of customer complaint

The work area should promptly acknowledge receipt of a customer complaint. Consideration should be given to the most appropriate medium for communicating with the complainant, taking into account departmental policy regarding correspondence and the needs and the expressed views of the complainant. For example, using the same medium by which the complaint was made or by a medium requested by the complainant (such as by way of post, phone or email).

3.7 Managing the customer complaint

3.7.1 Initial Assessment

After receipt, the work unit should assess whether there is more than one issue raised in the complaint, and if so, whether each issue needs to be separately addressed.

To determine how a complaint should be managed, it should be assessed in terms of criteria such as:

- a) severity
- b) health and safety implications
- c) complexity
- d) impact on the individual, the general public or the department
- e) potential to escalate
- f) the need and possibility of immediate action
- g) jurisdiction if applicable
- h) the outcomes sought by the complainant
- i) whether other agencies or areas within the department need to be involved.

3.7.2 Consideration

After the initial assessment, the work area should appropriately consider how to address the issues raised in the complaint. This could include working with the complainant to see if the issues can be appropriately addressed, informal inquiries, or a formal investigation into the complaint. The nature and scope of any enquiry or investigation will depend on the circumstances of each case, including any statutory requirements, the issue complained about, the parties involved, and the likely outcome.

3.7.3 Addressing the customer complaint

The work area should handle all complaints in a manner intended to lead to their effective resolution as quickly as possible. Wherever possible, complaint outcomes should be tailored to the underlying cause of each complaint.

3.7.4 Communicating with the complainant

The work area responsible for the overall management of the complaint should actively communicate its progress to the complainant, particularly where progress has been delayed. The work area should communicate the outcome of the complaint to the complainant using the most appropriate medium taking into account the complainant's needs and express views of the complainant.

Following consideration of the complaint, the work area should contact the complainant to advise:

- a) what actions were taken by the department in response to the complaint
- b) the outcome(s) of the complaint
- c) the reasons for any decisions that have been made
- d) any remedy or resolutions that have been offered
- e) information about other remedies that may be available to the complainant, such as seeking an internal or external review, appeal or complaining to an external complaint management body.

3.8 Closing the complaint, review and record keeping

At the time of closing the complaint, the work area should record the following:

- a) steps taken to address the complaint
- b) the outcome of the complaint
- c) any undertakings or follow up action required.

Information recorded in closing a complaint may assist the department to respond to any further reviews or appeals, as well as lead to quality improvements.

3.9 Monitoring implementation of recommendations/remedies

The work area should put in place systems/processes to ensure implementation of outcome(s) are properly monitored and reported to the Business Unit Manager and communicated to the responsible Deputy Director-General as per locally established procedures.

3.10 Collection of information

The work area should develop systems and processes for identifying, gathering, classifying, maintaining, storing, securing and disposing of complaint related records. The use and maintenance of these records is the responsibility of the work area.

3.11 Analysis and evaluation of complaints

All complaints should be classified and then analysed to identify systemic, recurring and single incident problems and trends. Analysis and evaluation should be undertaken by the work unit

annually as a minimum, and more frequently if the work unit receives a high volume of complaints or feedback.

3.12 Review of complaint management system

Business Unit Managers should review their complaint management system at least annually to ensure its continued suitability and efficacy. An effective review can identify opportunities for service improvement and inform decisions regarding resource needs. A record of the review should be maintained.

3.13 Unreasonable and/or unacceptable complainant conduct

There may be occasions where the conduct of a complainant may be considered unreasonable or unacceptable. For example they may be aggressive, threatening and verbally abusive towards staff. Complainant conduct may be considered unreasonable or unacceptable where it involves behaviour which, because of its nature or frequency, raises substantial health, safety, resource or equity issues for the department and its staff or other service users.

Key principles for dealing with unreasonable or unacceptable complainant conduct should include the following:

- a) Recognition that complaints must comply with the law and reasonable community standards;
 - b) Instruction and training to complaint handlers to ensure focus is placed on observable conduct and the content of communications, not the individual;
 - c) A willingness to modify communication with the complainant depending on the complainant's conduct;
 - d) Recognition that all parties to a complaint have certain rights and responsibilities;
 - e) Communication with complainants to advise them of their right to communicate with the department and the way in which service will be provided to them, subject to their reasonable compliance with acceptable standards of conduct;
 - f) Recognition that a healthy and safe work environment for staff requires regular risk assessments
- e) Complainants who are internal (i.e. employees, contractors and consultants of the department) are obliged to conduct themselves in line with the Code of Conduct for the Queensland Public Service.

4. Legislation

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

5. Supporting documents

- Department of Health Customer Complaint Management Standard
- Department of Health Customer Complaint Management Guideline
- *AS/NZS 10002:2014 Guidelines for complaint management in organizations*
- *Queensland Ombudsman's Guide to Developing Effective Complaints Management Policies and Procedures (2006)*

6. 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.	AS/NZS 10002:2014 <i>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.	AS/NZS 10002:2014 <i>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>
Complaint Management Framework	Comprised of the Complaint Management Policy, Complaint Management Standard and Complaint Management Guideline.	NA
Customer	A consumer of the department's products and/or services	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.	NA
Further Action	The complaint was accepted and the complainant received a response and/or outcome advice after the complaint was finalised.	NA
No Further Action	It was not possible and/ or appropriate to accept, consider and/or respond to the complaint. This may be due to insufficient information to follow up, vexatious, threatening or abusive complaints.	NA
Vexatious Complaint	A complaint without grounds made to cause annoyance, frustration or worry.	Oxford Dictionary

Version Control

Version	Date	Comments
1.0	5 July 2017	Endorsed first version