

EXTERNAL COMPLAINTS POLICY



External Complaints Policy

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1. Purpose

This policy is intended to ensure that Carrie's Place handle complaints fairly, efficiently, and effectively.

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

Carrie's Place is committed to ensuring that any person or organisation using Carrie's Place services or affected by its operations has the right to lodge a complaint or to appeal a decision or the organisation. All concerns that are raised will be addressed in ways that ensure access and equity, fairness, accountability, and transparency.

Our complaints management system is intended to:

- Enable us to respond to issues raised by people making a complaint in a timely and cost-effective way.
- Provides feedback that can be used by the Organisation to deliver quality improvements in our services.

2. Scope

This policy applies to the workforce including volunteers, contractors, and our governing body, receiving or managing complaints from the public and clients made to or about us, regarding our products services and staff, or our complaint handling process.

3. Definitions:

- **Complaint:** is an expression of dissatisfaction made to or about an organisation regarding its staff, services or products that warrants response or resolution.
- **Complainant:** is an employee, client, advocate, entity, or member of the public who expresses their dissatisfaction about an organisation to either the organisation itself or an external body.
- **Escalation:** is the process of reporting complaints to the NSW Ombudsman if the complainant is not satisfied with the outcome of their complaint.

4. Organisational Commitment

The Organisation expects its workforce at all levels to be committed to fair, effective and efficient complaint handling.

- ensure that all clients, and their families, carers and advocates are encouraged and supported to raise any concerns they have about the service or organisation
- consider all complaints it receives regardless of whether or not the complainant is a client of the organisation
- treat all complainants with respect, recognising that the issue of complaint is important to the complainant
- maintain confidentiality of parties involved, keeping any information private to those directly involved in the complaint and its resolution. Information will only be disclosed if required by law, or if otherwise necessary

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- ensure support and advocacy is available to clients who make a complaint and require support
- resolve complaints, where possible, to the satisfaction of the complainant
- clients, families, and advocates have access to the organisation's complaints management policy
- deal with all complaints in a timely manner, and aim to provide a formal response to the complainant within five working days of the complaint being received
- keep parties to the complaint appropriately involved and informed of progress of the complaint
- ensure that Governance Committee members, staff including volunteers are given information about the complaint's procedure as part of their induction and are aware of procedures for managing client feedback and complaints
- ensure all clients, stakeholders and members are aware of the complaints policy and procedures
- ensure that all complainants are aware of and understand how to escalate their complaint to the NSW Ombudsman
- ensure that a complainant is not penalised in any way or prevented from use of services during the progress of an issue
- ensure that feedback data (both positive and negative) is considered in organisational reviews and in planning service improvements
- review and evaluate the accessibility and effectiveness of the complaints management system and continually improve its processes

5. Procedures

5.1 Information for clients and stakeholders

Carrie's Place complaints and appeals procedure will be documented for clients and stakeholders in the Client Service Charter which is made available in the client's handbook and will be accessible in the client consultation rooms. For clients with specific communication needs this can be translated via Carrie's Place internet: <https://carriesplace.org.au>

All clients will be informed of their rights and responsibilities with regards to complaints and appeals at the earliest possible stage of their involvement with the organisation.

The Client Service Charter will contain information on the following:

- how to make a complaint or lodge an appeal, including an anonymous complaint
- contact person for lodging a complaint or appeal
- how the organisation will deal with the complaint or appeal, the steps involved and the timelines
- the rights of the complainant to an advocate, support person or interpreter
- how the person will be informed about the outcome of their complaint or appeal
- how to make a complaint to an external body including contact details

5.2 Training procedures

Staff will be trained on the complaints management procedures during their induction, and as part of ongoing refresher training.

Managers will undergo training for complaints management and resolution to support clients to throughout the complaint process and appropriately respond to complaints in an empathetic manner. This will include open communication strategies such as acknowledging the grievance without being defensive and making apologies while accepting responsibility for what occurred.

5.3 Making a complaint

A person wishing to make a complaint may do so in writing or verbally or via the Carrie's Place website – Carriesplace.org.au to:

- the staff member they were dealing with at the time
- the Manager of that staff member
- the Program Manager for the relevant program
- the Chief Executive Officer
- the Chair of the Governance Committee, or
- The NSW Ombudsman

Complaints may be made by:

- submitting a completed Feedback and Complaints form into the Suggestion Box located at reception. The Feedback and Complaints form is available in hard copy and online via Carrie's Place website – carriesplace.org.au
- Written complaints may be sent to Carrie's Place, P O Box 310. East Maitland, NSW 2323 or via email to; info@carriesplace.org.au.
- The CEO will be responsible for receiving this correspondence and directing it to the appropriate person.
- Feedback and complaints via telephone may be made on 02 4934 2585
- Anonymous complaints may be made by completing the complaints form on the Carrie's Place website: carriesplace.org.au

If the complaint is about:

- a staff member, the complaint will normally be dealt with by the Program Manager.
- a Program Manager, the complaint will normally be dealt with by the CEO.
- the CEO the complaint will normally be dealt with by the Chair of the Governance Committee.

5.4 Lodging an appeal

Clients or their advocates may lodge an appeal if they disagree with a decision made by the organisation, or by a staff member, related to their support and service. An appeal should be made in writing or email and sent to the CEO via info@carrieplace.org.au.

5.5 Procedure for complaints and appeals management

Any staff member may be a recipient of a complaint, and is responsible for:

5.5.1 Receiving the complaint:

- listening to the complainant, acknowledging the concern raised, and explaining the next steps to the complainant
- Depending on the type and severity of the complaint, either discussing with the complainant an agreed upon resolution (for smaller matters), or referring the complaint on to their Manager for further investigation and action.

The person managing the complaint will be responsible for:

5.5.2 Processing the complaint or appeal:

- Completing the Complaint Process Tracking Form
- registering the complaint or appeal in the Complaints Register
- informing the complainant that their complaint has been received and providing them with information about the process and time frame

5.5.3 Investigating the complaint or appeal:

- examining the complaint within two (2) working days of the complaint being received
- investigating the complaint and deciding how to respond
- informing the complainant by letter within 5 working days of the complaint being received of what is being done to investigate and resolve it, and the expected time frame for resolution
- As far as possible, complaints or appeals will be investigated and resolved within five (5) working days of being received. If this time frame cannot be met, the complainant will be informed of the reasons why and of the alternative time frame for resolution.

5.5.4 Responding to and resolving the complaint:

- making a decision or referring to the appropriate people for a decision within five (5) working days of the complaint being received
 - informing the complainant of the outcome and the reasons for any decisions made
 - upheld (and if so what action will be completed to resolve it)
 - resolved (and how this has been achieved); or
 - if no further action can be taken, the reasons for this
- informing the complainant of any options for further action if required
- if an apology is in order, ensuring that the appropriate person makes the apology and informs the complainant what the organisation intends to do to avoid further grievance

5.5.5 Reviewing the complaint:

If the complainant is not satisfied with the investigation and proposed resolution of their complaint or appeal they can seek a further review of the matter by contacting the CEO or the Chair of the Governance Committee.

5.5.6 Referral to external procedure:

A formal external complaints procedure may follow Step 4 if the complainant is still not satisfied with the outcome. The complainant will be referred to the NSW Ombudsman and provided information and support to make the complaint externally if necessary.

5.6 Complaints involving specific staff members [or volunteers]

The CEO has delegated responsibility for resolving complaints or disputes involving staff members or volunteers.

Internal complaints, where a staff member or volunteer makes a complaint concerning another staff member or volunteer, will be dealt with in accordance with the Organisation's Grievance, Complaints and Disputes Policy.

External complaints by clients or stakeholders made against a staff member or volunteer will be managed by the Program Manager who will:

- notify the staff member or volunteer of the complaint and its nature
- investigate the complaint and provide the staff member or volunteer with an opportunity to respond to any issues raised
- attempt to mediate the dispute (if appropriate) and/or attempt to resolve the matter to the satisfaction of the outside party
- take any other action necessary to resolve the issue

Any disciplinary action against a staff member [or volunteer] arising from a complaint will be taken in accordance with the procedures contained in Organisation's Disciplinary Policy.

Complaints involving the CEO will be managed by Chair of the Governance Committee.

5.7 Complaints involving organisation members or Governance Committee members

Complaints made against a member of the Governance Committee will be referred to the Chair of the Governance Committee. The Chair, or their delegate, will:

- notify the person about whom a complaint is being made of the complaint and its nature
- investigate the complaint and provide the member with an opportunity to respond to any issues raised
- attempt to mediate the dispute (if appropriate) and/or attempt to resolve the matter to the satisfaction of the outside party

Where the Chair is the subject of a complaint, the complaint should be referred to other Governance Committee members.

If the matter remains unresolved, the Chair will raise the matter at the next Governance Committee meeting. Depending on the seriousness of the complaint, the Governance Committee may:

- deal with the matter at their meeting

or

- refer the matter to the process as per the Organisations Constitution.

5.8 Cooperation in external investigations

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If any person makes a complaint about Carrie's Place to an external body (including police, NSW Ombudsman) The CEO will be responsible for liaising with the body responsible for investigating the issue. Carrie's Place will fully cooperate in any investigation which may take place. This includes participating in early resolution, conciliation, and/or reporting to the body about resolution and corrective actions if required.

5.9 Record Keeping

A register of complaints and appeals will be kept in the Complaints Register in the Organisation's Share Point folder (Under CP Management) for a minimum of seven years after the complaint has been made. The register will be maintained by the Executive Officer and will record the following for each complaint or appeal:

- Details of the complainant and the nature of the complaint
- Date lodged
- Action taken
- Date of resolution and reason for decision
- Indication of complainant being notified of outcome
- Complainant response and any further action

Copies of all correspondence and the Complaint Process Tracking Form will be kept in the Share Point folder (Under CP Management) in their respective folders – filed by the complainant's surname_name_date).

The complaints register and files will be confidential, and access is restricted to Carrie's Place Management.

A statistical summary of complaints and appeals will also be kept in alongside the Complaints register and maintained by the Executive Officer. The Executive Officer will be responsible for preparing a report on nature of complaint (category) and number of complaints and dates for the CEO and the Governance Committee.

Results from this report will be reviewed by the CEO and the Governance Committee] and used to:

- inform service planning by including a review of complaints and appeals in all service planning, monitoring and evaluation activities
- inform decision making by including a report on complaints and appeals as a standard item on staff and management meeting agendas

5.10 Continuous improvement of the complaints management system

The complaints management system will be reviewed and evaluated annually. This will include:

- review of all complaint and feedback policies and procedures
- client and staff feedback about the accessibility and effectiveness of the complaints management system
- implementation of a continuous improvement plan based on the review and feedback received