

1.0 PURPOSE

Autism Queensland (AQ) is committed to the proactive, transparent, fair and timely management of complaints and feedback. AQ recognises effective feedback management is integral to quality client service and values all feedback. This includes complaints and positive feedback which serves to inform what is being done well, what the community values, as well as improvements required.

The purpose of this Policy is to ensure:

- fair, accountable, transparent and responsive management of complaints;
- prompt handling of complaints as close to the source as possible;
- effective monitoring and resolution of complaints;
- identification and implementation of business improvements.

2.0 SCOPE

This Policy applies to all employees of AQ. A reference to “employees” or “staff” includes permanent, fixed-term, temporary and casual employees, directors, contractors, volunteers and other representatives acting on behalf of AQ in any capacity.

This Policy also applies to all clients who access services provided by AQ, including children and young people under the age of 18.

3.0 DEFINITIONS

Complaint: an expression of dissatisfaction, issue, concern or feedback made to or about an organisation regarding its staff, services or products that warrants response or resolution.

Complaints Manager: person assigned to manage a complaint. This could include an Executive Officer, Manager, Team Leader or Coordinator.

Complainant: 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: the process of reporting complaints to the relevant governing body within the organisation or external to the organisation (e.g. NDIS Commission) if the complainant is not satisfied with the outcome of their complaint.

Feedback: information about reactions to a product, a person’s performance of a task, etc, which is used as the basis for improvement.

Incident: an act, omission, event or circumstance that injures or harms, or has the potential to injury or adversely impact:

- a client (who may be a person with disability);
- an employee;
- a visitor (e.g. family member of the client, tradesperson, employee of another agency);
- property;
- the functioning or reputation of AQ.

Compliment: An expression of thanks, praise, commendation, accolade or tribute regarding a person, team, or experience.

4.0 POLICY

AQ welcomes and encourages feedback, including complaints. All issues or concerns raised will be treated seriously and managed with a view to continuous improvement.

Positive feedback is also welcomed as a way of building on strengths.

Anybody can make a complaint and will be given the opportunity to provide feedback via surveys, regular catch-ups, support plan reviews or through the website.

The *Client Service Charter*, *Clients' Rights Policy* and *Complaints & Feedback Management Information Easy Read* is available on the AQ website and will be provided to all clients and stakeholders at the earliest stage possible of their involvement with AQ and/or upon first contact with a service. Assistance with translation and interpreting services will be provided.

5.0 PRINCIPLES

AQ is committed to the following complaints management principles:

- **Efficiency** - acknowledgement of any complaint within 48 hours;
- **Effectiveness** – resolve complaints quickly, fully and with minimal disruption to service delivery
- **Fairness** - provision of a free and accessible complaints process that supports natural justice and procedural fairness for all persons with no reprisals or detriment from making a complaint;
- **Support** - people have the right to be supported by a friend, advocate, interpreter or community elder;
- **Accessibility** - provision of information about where to lodge a complaint, how to make a complaint and how complaints will be managed, including referring complaints to external agencies, where required;
- **Anonymity** - opportunity for complaints to be made anonymously, with complainants advised of the limitations of an anonymous complaint;
- **Acknowledgement** - of employees or teams where positive feedback has been received.
- **No Consequences** – the complainant and other persons will be protected from any repercussions, reprisals or victimisation occurring as a result of providing information relating to a complaint
- **Transparency** - provision of clear information about what can or cannot be achieved by a complaints process, and providing assistance to anyone who wishes to make a complaint.
- **Confidentiality** - responding to complainants in a respectful, fair, objective and timely manner, that respects the confidentiality of personal information, and is only disclosed to the those required to deal with the complaint;
- **Open Communication** – regularly communicating with parties about the progress of the complaint;
- **Clear Outcomes** - providing a clear explanation of the final decision, any recommendations, review options and any available external review mechanisms;
- **Accurate Record Keeping** – maintaining accurate records of complaints, correspondence, investigations, actions consistent with the *Data Collection and Records Management Policy & Procedure*;
- **Continuous Quality Improvement** - inform the continuous improvement of AQ's services, procedures and practices or the workplace environment for employees through the use of the approved Complaints Management System to monitor and review progress of complaints;
- **Safety** – abusive, aggressive, bullying or disrespectful behaviour towards employees will not be tolerated.

6.0 ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

The Executive Leadership Team is responsible for:

- establishing a system that manages complaints effectively and efficiently;
- ensuring all staff are appropriately trained in complaints management;
- reviewing recommendations, and providing management responses, made through investigation reports, internal reviews or any complaint management process that relates to business process improvement;
- ensuring recommendations made through investigation reports, internal reviews and any complaint management process are implemented, within agreed timeframes;
- ensuring ongoing continuous improvement of service delivery by making changes to process where the trends and issues identified indicate a change to service delivery process is required;
- referring matters to an external agency for action if/when necessary.

Employees are responsible for:

- welcoming and encouraging feedback as part of continuous improvement.
- ensuring they are up to date with training on complaints & feedback management procedures
- ensuring all feedback is handled in accordance with this Policy and the *Complaints & Feedback Management Procedure*;
- documenting and maintaining accurate feedback management records via the AQ Complaints Management System.

7.0 REPORTING

A complaint does not need to be formally lodged to be deemed a complaint. All issues and concerns, whether informal or formal, must be entered into the AQ Complaints Management System. Complaints are assigned to a complaints manager in accordance with the *Complaints & Feedback Management Procedure*.

Reports or allegations of suspected harm or risk of harm to a child will be actioned immediately in accordance with the *Child Safeguarding Policy*.

8.0 EXTERNAL COMPLAINTS

Complaints about AQ may also be directed externally to bodies including, but not limited to:

- Australian Competition and Consumer Commission (ACCC)
- Department of Transport and Main Roads
- Fair Work Ombudsman
- NDIS Quality and Safeguards Commission
- Office of the Australian Information Commissioner
- Office of the Queensland Ombudsman
- Queensland Civil and Administrative Tribunal (QCAT)
- Queensland Government – Department of Education
- Queensland Government – Department of Seniors, Disability Services and Aboriginal Torres Strait Islander Partnerships
- Workplace Health and Safety Queensland

9.0 TRAINING

Complaints & Feedback Management Training is mandatory for all staff. This must be completed during the onboarding process and then biennially.

10.0 RELATED DOCUMENTS

Legislation

Child Protection Act 1999 (Qld)

Education (Accreditation of Non-State Schools) Act 2017 (Qld)

National Disability Insurance Scheme Act 2013 (Cth)

Privacy Act 1988 (Cth)

Internal

Child Safeguarding Policy

Client Diversity and Inclusion Policy

Client Safeguarding (Adult) Policy

Client Service Charter

Clients' Rights Policy

Code of Conduct

Complaints & Feedback Management Procedure

Complaints & Feedback Management Information Easy Read

Performance Management Policy

Privacy Policy

School Complaints & Feedback Management Guidelines

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