



Complaints Handling Policy

1. Policy purpose

Metro Assist is committed to the rights of all its service users and other relevant stakeholders to complain. Complaints provides valuable insights to improve our services and allows us to promptly address any concerns or issues.

This policy is developed to ensure that we handle complaints fairly, efficiently, and effectively. It provides clear guidance to both our staff and individuals including children who wish to make a complaint, outlining the key principles and procedures of our complaint management system.

2. Scope

This policy applies to all staff (paid and volunteer), contractors and our board, who receive or manage complaints from the public, clients and their representatives and stakeholders.

These complaints may be made to or about us, concerning our services, staff, or our complaint handling process.

This policy excludes complaints from staff which are handled in accordance with Metro Assist Grievance Handling Policy.

3. Definitions

Complaints refer to an expression of dissatisfaction made to or about Metro Assist services, staff, or the handling of a complaint where a response or resolution is explicitly or implicitly expected or legally required. (AS/NZ 10002:2014). Complaints can be made by anyone, including children and can be made directly to Metro Assist.

A formal complaint refers to a complaint that cannot be resolved informally and requires investigation to substantiate the claim, determine the outcomes and appropriate management actions.

Complaint handling/management system

All policies, procedures, practices, staff, hardware, and software used by us in the management of

complaints.

Dispute

An unresolved complaint escalated either within or outside of our organisation.

Grievance

A clear, formal written statement by an individual staff member about another staff member or a work-related problem.

4. Organisational commitment and responsibilities

Metro Assist expects staff at all levels to be committed to fair, effective and efficient complaint handling. The following table outlines the nature of the commitment expected from staff/board and the way that commitment should be implemented.

Who	Commitment	How (Responsibilities)
Board	Provide oversight governance structure	Establish complaint handling policy and procedures. Oversight governance responsibility.
CEO	Promote a culture that values complaints and their effective resolution	Implement established policy and procedures. Report to the board on complaint handling. Regularly review reports about complaint trends and issues arising from complaints and ensure improvement actions are taken. Encourage all staff to be alert to complaints and assist those responsible for handling complaints to resolve them promptly.
HR Manager And Operations and Compliance Manager	Establish the system and provide support to staff in handling complaint	Update complaint handling policy and procedures. Provide adequate support and direction to key staff responsible for handling complaints. Support recommendations for service, staff and complaint handling improvements arising from the analysis of complaint data.
Staff whose duties include complaint handling including the CEO and the board directors	Demonstrate exemplary complaint handling practices	Treat all people with respect, including people who make complaints. Assist people to make a complaint, if needed. Comply with our policy and associated procedures. Encourage staff within their work area to be alert to complaints and assist those responsible for handling complaints to resolve them promptly. Handle complaints when they arise in accordance with the established policy and procedures. Provide regular feedback to leadership team on issues arising from complaints. Provide suggestions to leadership team on ways to improve our complaints management system. Implement changes arising from individual complaints and from the analysis of complaint data as directed by management.

All staff	Understand and comply with our complaint handling practices.	<p>Treat all people with respect, including people who make complaints.</p> <p>Be aware of our complaint handling policies and procedures.</p> <p>Assist people who wish to make complaints access our complaints process.</p> <p>Be alert to complaints and assist staff handling complaints resolve matters promptly.</p>
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5. Guiding principles and system

Metro Assist’s complaint handling policy is modelled on the principles of fairness, accessibility, responsiveness, efficiency, and integration into organisational culture and underpinned by the following principles and system.

5.1 Facilitating complaints

Person-centred

We are committed to seeking and receiving feedback and complaints about our services, systems, practices, procedures, products, and complaint handling processes. Any concerns raised through the provision of feedback or complaints will be dealt with within a reasonable time frame.

People making complaints will be:

- provided with information about our complaint handling process and how to access it
- listened to, treated with respect by staff and actively involved in the complaint process where possible and appropriate, and
- provided with reasons for our decision/s and any options for redress or review.

No detriment to people making complaints

We will take all reasonable steps to ensure that people making complaints are not adversely affected because a complaint has been made by them or on their behalf. Any form of retribution by a staff member towards a client arising from a complaint is not tolerated at Metro Assist. If a staff member is found to have acted in retribution, in any form, they will be subject to disciplinary action.

Anonymous complaints

We accept anonymous complaints if there is a compelling reason to do so and will carry out a confidential investigation of the issues raised where there is enough information provided. If a complaint is anonymous, with no evidence or basis for a follow-up provided, it will be reviewed and considered for business improvement opportunities, but no further action will be taken.

Accessibility

We will ensure that information about how and where complaints may be made to or about us is well publicised on our website. We will ensure that our systems to manage complaints are easily understood and accessible to everyone, particularly people who may require assistance.

If a person prefers or needs another person or organisation to assist or represent them in the making and/or resolution of their complaint, we will communicate with them through their representative if this is their wish. Anyone may represent a person wishing to make a complaint with their consent

(e.g. advocate, family member, parents or guardian, legal or community representative, member of parliament, or another organisation).

5.2 Responding to complaints

Early resolution

Where possible, complaints should be addressed promptly at the initial point of contact by our frontline staff. Complaints can vary significantly in severity and complexity. Therefore, we will provide our clients with both informal and formal avenues to voice their concerns, according to the severity and complexity of the issues.

Informal procedures will be used for addressing less severe allegations or issues stemming from miscommunication or misunderstanding. Responses may include offering an explanation or apology to the person making the complaint. These procedures prioritise swift resolution over extensive investigation and aim to foster agreement and mutual understanding to prevent future issues.

Irrespective of the severity of the complaint, our client retains the right to lodge a formal complaint at any time.

Responsiveness

We will promptly acknowledge receipt of complaints.

We will assess and prioritise complaints in accordance with the urgency and/or seriousness of the issues raised. If a matter concerns an immediate risk to safety or security the response will be immediate and will be escalated appropriately.

We are committed to managing people's expectations, and will inform them as soon as possible, of the following:

- the complaints process
- the expected time frames for our actions
- the progress of the complaint and reasons for any delay
- their likely involvement in the process, and
- the possible or likely outcome of their complaint.

We will advise people as soon as possible when we are unable to deal with any part of their complaint and provide advice about where such issues and/or complaints may be directed (if known and appropriate).

We will also advise people as soon as possible when we are unable to meet our time frames for responding to their complaint and the reason for our delay.

Objectivity and fairness

We will address each complaint with integrity and in an equitable, objective, and unbiased manner. We will ensure that the person handling a complaint is different from any staff member whose conduct or service is being complained about.

Conflicts of interest, whether actual or perceived, will be managed responsibly. In particular, internal reviews of how a complaint was managed will be conducted by a person other than the original decision

maker.

Responding flexibly

Our staff are empowered to resolve complaints promptly and with as little formality as possible. We will adopt flexible approaches to service delivery and problem solving to enhance accessibility for people making complaints and/or their representatives. We will assess each complaint on its merits and involve people making complaints and/or their representative in the process as far as possible.

Confidentiality

We will protect the identity of people making complaints where this is practical and appropriate. Personal information that identifies individuals will only be disclosed or used by us as permitted under the relevant privacy laws, secrecy provisions and any relevant confidentiality obligations.

5.3 Managing the parties to a complaint

Complaints involving multiple agencies

Where a complaint involves multiple organisations, we will work with the other organisation/s where possible, to ensure that communication with the person making a complaint and/or their representative is clear and coordinated.

Subject to privacy and confidentiality considerations, communication and information sharing between the parties will also be organised to facilitate a timely response to the complaint.

Where a complaint involves multiple areas within our organisation, responsibility for communicating with the person making the complaint and/or their representative will also be coordinated.

Where our services are contracted out, we expect contracted service providers to have an accessible and comprehensive complaint management system. We take complaints not only about the actions of our staff but also the actions of our service providers.

Empowerment and training of staff

All staff managing complaints are empowered to implement our complaint management system as relevant to their role and responsibilities.

Front line staff, team leaders and managers will be trained in handling complaints, with specific emphasis on addressing the concerns of all sensitive matters.

Staff are encouraged to provide feedback on the effectiveness and efficiency of all aspects of our complaint management system.

Managing unreasonable conduct by people making complaints

We are committed to being accessible and responsive to all people who approach us with feedback or complaints. At the same time our success depends on:

- our ability to do our work and perform our functions in the most effective and efficient way possible
- the health, safety and security of our staff, and
- our ability to allocate our resources fairly across all the complaints we receive.

When people behave unreasonably in their dealings with us, their conduct can significantly affect the progress and efficiency of our work. As a result, we will take proactive and decisive action to manage any conduct that negatively and unreasonably affects us and will support our staff to do the same in accordance with this policy.

If the complaint is inappropriate, vexatious, abusive by nature, or relates to suspected criminal activity, Metro Assist will decide whether to:

- not accept feedback or complaint, or
- Pass on the information to the authorities if it relates to criminal activity.

5.4 Alternative avenues for dealing with complaints

We will inform people who make complaints to or about us about any internal or external review options available to them (including any relevant Ombudsman or oversight regulatory bodies).

5.5 Complaint handling levels

<p>Level 1 Frontline complaint handling</p>	<p>We aim to resolve complaints at the first level, the frontline. Wherever possible staff will be adequately equipped to respond to complaints, including being given appropriate authority, training, and supervision.</p>
<p>Level 2 Escalation to the team leader/Manager/CEO</p>	<p>Where this is not possible, the complaint will be escalated to the team leader or a manager within the program areas or the HR Manager.</p> <p>This level of complaint handling will provide for the following internal mechanisms:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • assessment and possible investigation of the complaint and decision/s already made, and/or • facilitated resolution (where a person not connected with the complaint reviews the matter and attempts to find an outcome acceptable to the relevant parties). <p>We may engage an external agency to investigate the matter depending on the severity and complexity of the issues raised in a complaint.</p> <p>Complaints made against a staff member will be investigated and responded to by the employee’s manager, with the support of the Human Resources Manager as required, and in accordance with Metro Assist’s Performance Management Policy where appropriate. If the complaint is about a manager, it will be handled by the CEO and the HR Manager and if the complaint is about the CEO, the complaint will be escalated to the board.</p>
<p>Level 3 Escalation to the board for a review</p>	<p>If the complainant is not satisfied with the outcomes, or suggested resolution, the person can ask the Metro Assist Board to reconsider their complaint. The complaint will be reviewed by the Board in conjunction with all reports. In situations, we may decide not to follow up a request</p>

	for a review of a complaint where the outcome has been received. When this occurs, Metro Assist will advise the reason to the complainant.
Level 4 External review	Where a person making a complaint is dissatisfied with the outcome of our review of their complaint, they may seek an external review of our decision (by the NSW Ombudsman)

6. Accountability and learning

Analysis and evaluation of complaints

We will ensure that complaints are recorded in our complaint register so that information can be easily retrieved for reporting and analysis by management and the board of directors.

We will record:

- the number of formal complaints received.
- the outcome of complaints, including matters resolved at the frontline.
- issues arising from complaint.
- systemic issues identified, and
- requests we receive for internal and/or external review of our complaint handling.

Analysis of these reports will be undertaken to monitor trends, measure the quality of our service and make improvements. The periodic analysis result will be provided to our CEO and senior management for their review and action.

Formal complaints and actions taken will be reported to the Board as part of the CEO report.

Monitoring and Continuous improvement

We will continually monitor our complaint management system to:

- ensure its effectiveness in responding to and resolving complaints
- identify and correct deficiencies in the operation of the system, and
- monitoring may include the use of client satisfaction surveys

We are committed to improving the effectiveness and efficiency of our complaint management system and we will:

- support the making and appropriate resolution of complaints
- implement best practices in complaint handling
- recognise and reward exemplary complaint handling by staff
- regularly review the complaint management system and complaint data, and
- implement appropriate system changes based on our analysis of complaints data and ongoing monitoring of the system.

7. Complaint handling procedures

7.1 Receive

Unless the complaint has been resolved at the outset and is of minor and informal nature, we will record all formal complaints (both verbal and written) and supporting information. We will also assign a number to the complaint file.

The record of the complaint will document:

- Contact information of the person making a complaint and the date received
- Issues raised by the person making a complaint and the outcome/s they want
- Any other relevant information, and
- Any additional support the person making a complaint requires.

7.2 Acknowledge

We will acknowledge receipt of each complaint promptly, and preferably within 3 to 7 working days. When appropriate we may offer an explanation or apology. Consideration will be given to the most appropriate medium (e.g. email, letter) for communicating with the person making a complaint.

Once the complaint is received, Metro Assist staff who is managing the feedback will aim to contact the person and advise them of information such as next steps, expected timelines, alternative resources and any other information required in relation to your complaint.

Complaints that have been made by children will be handled with additional care and sensitivity, recognising their vulnerability and the potential impact of their experience.

7.3 Assess and investigate

After acknowledging receipt of the complaint, we will confirm whether the issue/s raised in the complaint is/are within our control.

We will also consider the outcome/s sought by the person making a complaint and, where there is more than one issue raised, determine whether each issue needs to be separately addressed. When determining how a complaint will be managed, we will consider:

- How serious, complicated or urgent the complaint is;
- Whether the complaint raises concerns about people's health and safety;
- How the person making the complaint is being affected;
- The risks involved if resolution of the complaint is delayed, and
- Whether a resolution requires the involvement of other organisations.

After assessing the complaint, depending on the severity of the complaint we will consider how to manage it. We may:

- Give the person making a complaint information or an explanation
 - Gather information about the issue, person, or area that the complaint is about and
- Or

- formally investigate the claims made in the complaint.

We may engage an external agency to investigate the matter depending on the severity and complexity of the issues raised in a complaint. Which actions we decide to take will be based on the nature of the complaint and any statutory requirements.

We will keep the person making the complaint up to date on our progress, particularly if there are any delays.

Where a complaint has been made against a staff member, they will be afforded procedural fairness and be entitled to fair and reasonable opportunity to respond to any complaints/allegations made against them.

7.4 Determine the outcome and respond

Following consideration of the complaint and upon completion of an investigation into the issues raised, we will contact the person making the complaint using the appropriate medium and advise them:

- The outcome of the complaint and any action we took;
- The reason/s for our decision;
- The remedy or resolution/s that we have proposed or put in place, and
- Any options for review that may be available to the complainant, such as an internal or external review.

7.5 Record keeping and close the complaint.

We will maintain our complaint register and keep records about:

- How we managed the complaint
- The outcome/s of the complaint (including whether it or any aspect of it was substantiated, any recommendations made to address problems identified and any decisions made on those recommendations), and any outstanding actions to be followed up, including analysing any underlying or root causes.

8. Policy variations and review

Metro Assist reserves the right to vary, replace, review or terminate this policy from time to time. This policy does not form part of any contract of employment or contract for services.

9. Document review and approval

This document shall be submitted to the Metro Assist Board or (or delegate) for review and approval in any of these conditions:

- Prior to initial release for circulation
- Upon receipt of any revision on Metro Assist internal policies or procedures that may affect the integrity of this document
- On a bi-annual basis, where there are changes to this document or not

Related Policies and Procedures

- Staff Grievance Handling Policy
- Work Health & Safety Policy
- Sexual Harassment Policy
- Staff Code of Conduct
- Privacy and Confidentiality Policy

Date received:

Complaint received by:

Staff Member Handling Complaint:

Action taken:

Date complaint closed:

Signature