

## Complaints

### Policy

Date effective: 31 January 2017

#### 1. Policy statement

The complaint mechanism is intended to reinforce Department of Housing and Community Development's ('the Department') accountability for services provided.

#### 2. Purpose

The purpose of the complaint mechanism is to enhance the quality of service to clients by seeking effective and rapid resolution of disputes.

#### 3. References

The Department's complaint management process reflects the minimum standards of:

International Standard ISO 10002 - 2006

The Australian Standard AS 4269 - 1995

The process also follows the guidance of the Northern Territory Ombudsman:

Office of the Ombudsman NT – Complaints Management

Related policies:

Appeals Policy

#### 4. Scope

Any client of the Department has the right to complain. Complaints may also be made by members of the public, advocacy agencies and community organisations. Complaints may be received in any form, including verbal complaints, anonymous complaints, and complaints sent through a third party.

##### 4.1. Distinguishing between a complaint and an appeal

- A complaint is dissatisfaction with a service provided by the Department.
- An appeal is dissatisfaction with a decision made by the Department.

If a client is unhappy with the resolution of a complaint, they may be able to appeal the outcome. Refer to the Appeals Policy for further information, or contact the Investigations and Appeals Unit.

## 5. Roles and Responsibilities

Role	Responsibilities
Front - line staff	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Resolve complaints at first point of contact if possible</li><li>• Inform Manager of all complaints, even those believed to have been resolved</li></ul>
Manager	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Retain final responsibility for complaints, but not if the complaint is escalated to the Investigations and Appeals Unit</li><li>• Retain responsibility for documenting a complaint, even if this is delegated</li><li>• Ensure they are impartial to a complaint before coming to a final decision</li></ul>
Investigations and Appeals Unit	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Provide advice on dealing with a complaint</li><li>• Provide interpretation of Complaints policy</li><li>• Retain records of any precedents which arise not covered by policy</li><li>• Gain responsibility for a complaint if it is escalated to an appeal</li><li>• Advise on potential policy and procedure revisions</li></ul>

## 6. Policy details

Department of Housing staff will maintain a thorough electronic record of each stage of a complaint.

### 6.1. Client rights

Clients should be kept informed of their right to complain as well as the complaints process. A complaint can be withdrawn at any stage. There is no financial cost for making a complaint.

### 6.2. Responsibility for complaints

Responsibility for a complaint lies with the relevant Manager. If a member of staff is unable to deal with a complaint then it must be referred to the Manager. If the Manager was involved in a decision which led to the complaint then the responsibility should be transferred to an impartial staff member of equal or higher seniority. Any complaint received by the wrong section of the Department (for example: if the complaint was wrongly addressed) should be forwarded to the relevant Manager.

Complaints received through an oversight office such as the Minister for Housing and Community Development or the Northern Territory / Commonwealth Ombudsman should be referred to the Investigations and Appeals Unit.

### 6.3. Responding to complaints

Department of Housing staff should make every attempt to resolve a complaint at the first point of contact. If a complaint cannot be resolved at this point, a written response should be provided within a reasonable period of time. The response should include information on how to appeal a Department decision. Any complaint made in writing should be responded to in writing. If the complaint is received face-to-face or over the telephone it should be documented by the receiver as it is heard or as soon as possible.

The response to a complainant may not outline the actions taken by the Department if this information would breach the privacy of a client.

### 6.4. Vexatious complaints

If a complainant is believed to be making false or vexatious complaints, the Manager has the discretion to declare a complaint vexatious and to inform the complainant that the complaint will not be pursued. However the Manager retains responsibility for investigating all valid complaints and should document any decisions made.

### 6.5. Anonymous complaints

Anonymous complaints should be investigated as thoroughly as all other complaints, whilst recognising that it may be impossible to provide a response to the complainant or resolve the issue to normal departmental standards.

## 7. Document change control table

Release Date	Version Number	Approved by (position)	Section amended	Category
31/01/2017	1.01	Director Policy	all	Editorial amendments
2/09/2013	1.00	Executive Director, Housing Operational Client Support	all	New separate policy derived from Housing Services Operational Policy Manual, Chapter 16