



**Council  
to Homeless  
Persons**

# Organisational policy

## Complaints

[chp.org.au](http://chp.org.au)



## 3.16 Complaints

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### Policy statement

People have the right to make a complaint about any aspect of the work delivered by CHP. CHP aims wherever possible, to identify and address issues as they emerge with a view to resolution. Where an issue escalates to become a complaint, CHP aims to investigate and respond to the complaint in a timely and appropriate manner.

CHP is committed to actively responding to and learning from complaints.

At any point in the process, the complainant has the right to have their complaint referred to an external regulatory body.

### Procedure

This policy relates to complaints made by people external to CHP, including but not limited to consumers of the Homelessness Advocacy Service (HAS), CHP members, organisations and community members.

CHP employees, Board members and volunteers should refer to the grievance policy for advice in relation to internal complaints.

There a range of things a person might make a complaint to CHP about, including but not limited to:

- service they have received as a client of HAS
- service they have received as a CHP member
- training delivered by, or on behalf of, CHP
- an article in Parity
- a CHP forum or event they have attended
- comments attributed to CHP in the media

- a public submission
- the CHP website
- a lack of courtesy or unfair treatment
- a breach of the right to privacy
- CHP policies or procedures

## Definition

For the scope of this policy, a complaint is defined as any expression of dissatisfaction or concern made to CHP by, or on behalf of, an individual client, government body, group or member of the public, that relates to services delivered by CHP, or the performance and/or conduct of staff, or the complaints handling process itself.

## Principles

This policy is based on the following principles:

- The focus is on identifying and addressing issues as they emerge with a view to resolution.
- Complaints are dealt with fully, fairly and within a reasonable time frame.
- People are encouraged to voice their concerns at the point of service as soon as they feel dissatisfied. Staff may then be able to resolve the matter without delay.
- Wherever possible, complaints should be resolved at the point from which they originate.
- Complainants and respondents have the right to have a support or advocate assisting the process.
- Complainants have a right to an interpreter and CHP will facilitate access if one is needed.
- Complainants who are hearing impaired have a right to use deaf sign interpreters and/or TTY and CHP will facilitate access if either is needed.
- CHP will provide a culturally safe environment for complainants.

## Process issues

In the first instance, where a person feels comfortable to do so, the complainant should speak with the relevant CHP staff member. For example, with the HAS Advocate if the complainant is a HAS consumer,

support work or case manager. If the complaint is resolved to the complainant's satisfaction the process is concluded (as is the case at any subsequent stage).

If the complaint is unable to be resolved at this stage, the complaint is then forwarded to the relevant Manager.

If the complaint is unable to be resolved by the relevant Manager, or relates to the conduct of that Manager, or the complainant does not feel comfortable talking to the Manager, a complaint may be made directly to the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of CHP. If the issue cannot be resolved by the CEO, or if the complaint relates to the CEO, then the complaint is escalated to the Chair of the CHP Board.

If an employee providing advice to a complainant is unsure what level the complaint should go to, or when it should be escalated, they should seek the advice of the CEO.

If the complaint is unable to be resolved through these processes, then the complainant will be provided with information about external bodies that may be able to further assist with the complaint.

At all times the complaint process is to remain confidential to only the parties involved.

A complaint may be made in person, telephone, email or in writing.

Complainants have the right to have a support or advocate to assist in the complaint process.

## **Making a complaint**

External complaints may be made electronically (by e-mail), by letter or fax, in person and by telephone. If someone calls CHP to make a complaint the person taking the call should connect them to the relevant staff member.

Anyone who enquires about the complaints process or wants to make a complaint should be advised that the complaints policy can be found on the CHP website. Hard copies of the complaints policy are to be mailed, emailed, or provided on request.

If employees receive a complaint about their work, they should immediately inform their line manager. They also must tell the complainant that the issue can be raised directly with the employee's line manager and provide the relevant contact details. The employee will then agree on a plan with the line manager to attempt to resolve the matter. This will include consideration of whether attempts to resolve the complaint may be made by the employee; or if the line manager or CEO is required to attend discussions with the employee and the complainant.

The employee and/or line manager will take all agreed steps to attempt to resolve the matter.

Where the complainant is not satisfied with this response:

- The employee will inform the complainant that they can address the concern/s with the relevant line manager or CEO.
- Where the line manager is already involved, the line manager will inform the complainant that they can address their concern with the line manager, who may in turn refer it to the CEO.
- If a complaint is referred to the CEO, CHP will respond to the complainant in writing.
- If a complaint is received in relation to the CEO, the complaint is to be submitted to the Chair of CHP Board, who will be responsible for following up, consistent with CHP policy.
- If the complaint is not resolved by way of the above processes, the complainant is to be encouraged to contact an external complaints or advocacy body.
- The Chairperson, CEO or delegate is to manage the relationship with any external complaints or advocacy bodies.
- Where the funding body has been notified of a complaint, the process will be managed by the CEO or delegate.
- The key external complaints and advocacy bodies that can assist complainants are:
  - [Department of Families, Fairness and Housing complaints process](#)
  - [The Victorian Ombudsman](#)
  - [Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission](#)
  - [VCAT Human Rights Lists](#)
  - [Disputes Settlement Centre of Victoria](#)

In the event that an external complaint is received directly by the CEO, the CEO will acknowledge the complaint and refer it to the line manager for follow up; or follow it up directly if no line manager is involved.

If the complaint is in relation to governance issues, the CEO or the Board, the CEO will refer the complaint to the Chair of the Board.

## **Making a complaint**

The process for following up complaints will involve:

- initial contact should be made as soon as is practical but at least within 1-3 working days
- initial contact should ideally be made by telephone; or in writing via email or letter if assessed as appropriate.

The purpose of this contact is to:

- obtain specific details of the complaint – include what is the complainant unhappy about, who was involved, any other relevant circumstances, how they believe the issue or action fell short of their expectations of the CHP employee/s and what outcome the complainant ideally seeks
- document this information that includes timelines and actions
- provide the complainant with an outline of the process to be followed, including timelines.

If a complaint involves allegations of criminal misconduct, it will be referred to Police and the Board Chair will be notified by the CEO.

In all other cases, the line manager in consultation with the CEO will ensure investigation of the alleged concerns, which may involve any or all the following:

- initial discussion with the relevant staff member and any other parties as necessary
- a meeting with the complainant and staff member to attempt to clarify and resolve the complaint and clarify any further action required
- during discussion, all parties have an opportunity to put forward their understanding of events and any supporting information.

Employees will be always treated fairly and respectfully by the organisation.

Employees are entitled to seek independent advocacy and support during the process e.g., union representative or legal representation

All complaints are to be handled and responded to promptly and with transparency, within the bounds of confidentiality and privacy as prescribed in CHP's Privacy policy.

No person will have access to information about the external complaint unless they are directly involved; are responding to the complaint; supporting information that is required from them; or they need to be informed for risk management or duty of care purposes, as in the case of the CEO or Board Chair.

Accurate notes of all conversations (including dates, people involved and outcomes) will be] taken by the designated staff member and kept in the complaint file.

All parties will be provided with written minutes of meetings in which they have participated.

If the complaint has been made in writing, a formal written response will be provided by CHP.

Until the matter is determined, work will continue normally in accordance with custom and practice existing before the complaint, unless criminal matters are alleged, in which case CHP reserves the right to stand an employee down with pay where it is assessed that there may be a duty of care requirement to do so. Employees may be offered EAP or other support as agreed with their manager.

## **Outcomes of complaints**

For complaints that are resolved to the complainant's satisfaction at the first stage, i.e., the complainant speaking to the relevant staff meeting and resolving the issue, no further communication is required. The relevant staff member is to discuss the issue with their line manager in supervision to identify any potential areas for improvement by the employee or the organisation. If the complainant is a client of HAS the relevant HAS advocate should ensure the issue and resolution is entered in the client's case notes.

If the complaint is unable to be resolved at this stage and needs to be referred to a line manager, the relevant staff member is to email the line manager a summary of the issue and any correspondence relating to the complaint. The relevant line manager is responsible for creating a file for the complainant in the Complaints register folder, saving all relevant correspondence and completing the complaints register table. The complaints register table records the name of the complainant, summary of the complaint and any response. The outcome of the complaint is recorded once the process has been finalised. Note: the Complaints register folder is in the Management section on the S: drive, which only managers can access.

The relevant line manager or CEO is also responsible for ensuring there is a written response to the complainant and ensuring the relevant staff member remains informed about the process. There should be discussion between the line manager and CEO to determine who should write to the complainant. Each case will be different and there may be the need for more than one written response, but the written response will include an acknowledgement of the complaint, any outcomes stemming from the complaint and if required any next steps.

All complaints provide an opportunity to identify potential areas for improvement by the employee or the organisation. Depending on the nature of the complaint, this opportunity can be explored in supervision or in broader quality improvement processes. A copy of the Complaints Register is included with the papers the board members receive ahead of each meeting and the board discuss specific complaints as required. Further, the CEO will ensure there is discussion of any complaint that raise issues relating to clinical safety.

## **Appeals**

If the complainant wishes to appeal the outcome of a complaint, the request is submitted in writing to the relevant line manager or CEO. The CEO will review the appeal and determine what the next steps will be taken on a case by case basis. If required, the CEO will consult with the Board Chair. The CEO will ensure the complainant is kept informed about the status of their appeal. If the matter is unresolved, the CEO may assist with referral to an external agency to review the appeal and outcomes of the complaint.

## Social media

As a rule, CHP will not consider criticisms of the organisations made on social media as a complaint that needs a response. However, such scenarios will be considered on case by case basis to determine the most appropriate response.

## Compliments

CHP may also receive compliments and positive feedback. Any such correspondence can, at the discretion of the staff member receiving it, be placed in the Compliments folder on the S: drive (note: all staff have access to this folder), however doing so is not mandatory.

## Complaints flowchart

First level resolution	Issue or complaint is resolved in an informal manner at first contact or soon thereafter.
Second level resolution	If the issue is not resolved at the first level, the complaint is referred to a manager. The relevant line manager or CEO records the complaint in the Complaints Register.
Third level resolution	If the issue is not resolved at the second level, it is referred to the CEO.
Fourth level resolution	If the issue is not resolved at the third level, it is referred to the Chairperson of the Board.
Fifth level resolution	If the issue is not resolved at the fourth level, the complainant is encouraged to contact an external complaints or advocacy body, such as Consumer Affairs Victoria or Disputes Settlement of Victoria. The Chairperson, CEO, or a delegate will manage the relationship with any complaints or advocacy bodies.
Sixth level resolution	If the issue is not resolved at the fifth level, the complaint is referred to a funding body. Where a funding body has been notified of a complaint, the process will be managed by the CEO or a delegate.

The complaints process can begin at any level shown.



## Responsibility

It is the responsibility of the CEO to ensure that:

- all employees are aware of their obligations and responsibilities in relation to handling external issues, complaints and appeals
- any issue, complaint or appeal brought to the attention of the CEO is handled in the most appropriate manner in line with agreed timelines.

## Related policies and documents

- Staff ethical code of conduct policy
- Board of Directors code of conduct policy
- Risk management policy