

						<b>Complaints &amp; Feedback Policy</b>

## 1. POLICY PRINCIPLES

Carers Link has a standardised, accountable, transparent, and accessible complaint and feedback management system that:

- embraces the important role of the feedback cycle in informing and improving service delivery and customer relations
- is effectively communicated and promoted to all customers and stakeholders
- informs customers, their carers and advocates of their right to complain at the time of entry to the service, and provides annual reminders about the process at care plan review meetings and when other yearly tasks are undertaken
- ensures complainants know there will be no negative repercussions if they exercise their right to lodge a complaint
- ensures complainants are listened to and have their concerns acknowledged
- at the time the complaint is made, provides details to complainants of how their complaint will be handled and the timeframes involved
- manages complaints in a confidential manner
- ensures that customers are aware of their right to complain to external agencies
- addresses complaints and feedback fairly and in a timely manner; and
- informs processes and opportunities to improve future service delivery and satisfaction.

## 2. SCOPE

This policy and its procedures applies to all Carers Link staff, contractors and volunteers and refers to feedback and complaints about Carers Link services, programs, staff and/or management. Complaints and feedback can come from customers, family members, carers, advocates, staff, other service providers or the general community.

## 4. DEFINITIONS

**Advocate** - For the purposes of this policy, an advocate is a person making a complaint *on behalf of* a service user or supporting a service user to complain

**Complainant** - The person making the complaint

**Customer** - For the purposes of this policy, a customer is the person receiving Carers Link services and includes their carers and support people

**Participant** – From the perspective of the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS), a person with disability who receives supports or services from an NDIS provider.

## 5. PROCEDURES

### 5.1 Procedural guidelines provided by the NDIS Commission and the Aged Care Quality and Safety Commission

The NDIS *Effective Complaint Handling Guidelines for NDIS Providers* recommend the Four A's as a useful approach to complaints management.

- i. Acknowledgement
- ii. Answers
- iii. Action
- iv. Apology

#### (i) Acknowledgement

It is important customers feel that their concerns have been understood and the impact on them is recognised. Acknowledgement can include:

- genuinely listening to the complainant without interrupting
- empathising
- making sure the complainant feels comfortable talking to you, and being aware whether you are feeling defensive and how this might be perceived
- acknowledging how the situation has affected that person
- rectifying the situation by asking the complainant what a good outcome would look like for them, and
- notifying them regularly and promptly of the steps that will be taken in response to their complaint, ensuring that commitments aren't made which cannot be fulfilled

#### (ii) Answers

People want to know why something has or hasn't happened, or why a decision was made. They need to understand what has happened in order to better understand how they can move on in resolving their concerns.

Answers should include a clear explanation that is relevant to the concerns raised, but **ONLY** IF you know the facts.

#### (iii) Actions

People want you to take steps to address their concerns. This may be in relation to their specific complaint, or more broadly about systems to ensure that similar issues won't occur for others.

An action plan can be implemented focusing on the following:

- what will be done
- who will do it
- when it will be done
- how the progress of the complaint and outcomes will be communicated to the complainant and the participant if the complaint has been lodged on their behalf, and

- how the progress of the complaint actions will be oversighted.

It is very important to follow up with the complainant / any affected participant, to make sure they are satisfied with the actions being implemented. This is also a good opportunity to seek their feedback on the complaints management process.

#### **(iv) Apology**

An apology may be part of, or the sole outcome a complainant is seeking. It is important to remember who should provide the apology and the form it will take. The following should be considered when delivering an apology:

- timeliness
- sincerity
- being specific and to the point
- accepting responsibility for what occurred and the impacts caused, if Carers Link is at fault
- explaining the circumstances and causes (without making excuses), and
- summarising key actions agreed to as a result of the complaint.

**The Aged Care Quality and Safety Commission** has the following complaints resolution tips for service providers:

- make it easy to complain – tell people from the outset how to do it
- listen carefully to someone’s concerns – repeat them back to check you’ve understood
- ask what they want to achieve and note it down
- see the complaint as an opportunity to improve care. Complaints are part of providing a good service - *it's how you respond that matters*
- nominate someone senior, like a service manager, to handle the complaint
- actively involve the customer in the process. Their needs and preferences must always be put first. If appropriate, also speak with their nominated representative
- seek permission to refer the customer to an advocate if they indicate they want support
- work towards a resolution immediately. Your initial response will have the greatest impact on the outcome
- be clear about what you will do to resolve their concerns and provide timeframes for actions
- give regular updates even when there is little to report. This shows the issue is being taken seriously and hasn’t been forgotten
- provide a clear outcome at the end of the process, including any findings and actions taken. Ask for feedback about your handling of the complaint
- apologise if things have gone wrong. It can help resolve matters quickly and improve your relationship with the people who lodged the complaint.

## **5.2 How Carers Link’s complaints management procedures comply with the above guidelines**

### **5.2.1 Staff Education**

All Carers Link staff are given training on the Carers Link complaints management system at induction. This training covers the following:

- Carers Link's commitment to addressing complaints in a responsive and timely manner
- the importance of the feedback cycle in informing and improving service delivery
- complaint management responsibilities, including facilitating the customer's complaint lodgement process
- complaints documentation
- the fact that complaints are managed confidentially and
- the reassurance which must be given to customers that there are no negative repercussions when they lodge complaints

Carers Link maintains adequate staffing levels (including the Chief Services Executive's role as Complaints Manager) to ensure complaints are dealt with professionally and in a timely manner.

### **5.2.2 Access to information about Carers Link's complaints management process**

Every service user is advised of their right to complain and reminded of this through a variety of mediums. We ensure knowledge of the complaints system is accessible through:

- including a [F005 - Comments, Compliments and Complaints \(CC&C\) Information Sheet](#) in customer welcome packs
- providing the CC&C Information Sheet to field staff for distribution
- displaying the CC&C Information Sheet in the Carers Link office
- keeping the CC&C Information Sheet in the Carers Link group home
- facilitating the lodgement of complaints through the Carers Link [website](#)
- [making this Policy available on the Carers Link website](#)
- providing the CC&C Information Sheet on request
- implementing a feedback process (see 5.3)
- newsletter reminders of this policy and its procedures; and
- regular reminders of the right to an advocate. Should a customer choose to formally nominate a person to advocate on their behalf they can use the [F006 Support person/advocate form to do so.](#)

### **5.2.3 Responding to and resolving complaints in a timely manner**

All Carers Link staff treat complaints and concerns with respect and in a manner that minimises dispute. When a complaint is made:

- staff must seek permission from the complainant to report the complaint to their immediate supervisor
- only if asked, field staff may assist someone to make a complaint and submit the completed complaints form to their supervising Lifestyle Planning and Support Coordinator (LP&SC). In providing assistance, the worker must not apply any interpretation when documenting the complaint. Events must be written down exactly as the complainant describes them
- complainants will be advised of the process Carers Link will undertake and the timeframes which will apply – see table below.
- the LP&SC will report the complaint to the Chief Services Executive (CSE), who is Carers Link's Complaints Manager, within 24 hours, preferably as soon as is practicable after the complaint has been made

- the CSE will either allocate the complaint to a LP&SC to be investigated or may personally investigate the complaint
- the CSE will ensure the complaint is logged in the R01 – Corrective and Preventative Actions Quality Improvement Register (see section 5.2.4 below)
- the CSE may inform the Director and / or Commercial Manager about the complaint, depending on its level of seriousness
- at times, and definitely if the complainant requests it, the CSE may refer the results of the complaint's investigation to the Director or Commercial Manager for discussion with the complainant or their representative