

Helpful tips: Handling complaints

As a peak complaints resolution body, The Health and Disability Services Complaints Office (HaDSCO) can provide education and training in the prevention and resolution of complaints.

This service is delivered through:

- Provision of quality information and reports to various organisations including the Minister for Health
- Presentations and outreach to professionals e.g. service providers and lawyers
- Tailored educational packages
- Multi agency workshops

This information sheet provides some helpful tips for complaints management.

For more information or details regarding educational opportunities contact hadsco via mail@hadsco.wa.gov.au or visit hadsco.wa.gov.au

Preparing the organisation:

- Produce a Complaints Management Manual and train staff so they understand procedures
- Provide staff training in customer service, complaint management and how to deal with difficult conversations
- Utilise staff areas for the promotion of policies e.g. staff information boards
- Provide complaint forms in accessible areas
- Consider developing a dedicated complaint resolution team
- Utilise support networks within professional member organisation or peer groups i.e. the Australian Medical Association
- Identify insurance requirements. Many professionals are required to consult with their insurer when they receive a complaint. They can provide legal and practical advice
- Familiarise the organisation with relevant legislation
- Provide complaint facilities online i.e. an online complaint form
- Develop a complaint database to capture complaint information
- Familiarise the organisation with details of external agencies which can provide help such as HaDSCO

Taking and dealing with written complaints

If the complaint is complex, encouraging the complainant to provide a complaint in writing can often be the most effective option for the following reasons:

- Emotions can influence rational thought: setting out points in a written format can help the complainant to submit a clear and concise complaint

- It enables the complainant to ensure all important details are provided
- It allows planning and reflection
- It allows the service provider time to review the complaint, consult documents and provide a thorough response

HaDSCO encourages complainants to complete an official complaint form. The HaDSCO complaint form can provide guidance when producing in-house complaint forms. Visit hadsco.wa.gov.au to download a copy.

When taking a complaint in writing, try to encourage the complainant to provide all the necessary information. In general, encourage the complainant to utilise the following template:

Return address
<p>Recipient's name Recipient's address Date</p> <p>Dear Name of Recipient,</p> <p>RE: Subject line</p> <p>Details of who was involved and contact information Details of the consumer (e.g. name, short history if relevant) if complaining on someone else's behalf A summary of what happened, include relevant dates and locations Copies of any relevant documents Details of what is hoped to be achieved by making a complaint. A list of questions that require a response</p> <p>Yours sincerely/faithfully</p> <p>Signature</p>

Handling complaints in person

Dealing with a complaint in person can often be the quickest route to resolution. However, depending on the circumstances and the personalities involved, it can also be the most stressful and unconstructive.

When dealing with a complaint in person, it is important to consider the following:

- When the best time to discuss a complaint face-to-face would be.
- Making an appointment or set up a scheduled meeting
- How much time should be allocated to the meeting
- Ensure the meeting area is private and comfortable
- Taking time to gather information and consider concerns in depth
- Providing a response to issues in writing a week prior to the meeting, this can then be discussed during the meeting

- Seeking advice from insurers

Handling complaints via the telephone

When dealing with a complaint over the telephone, consider preparing well a head of time.

Things to be considered may include:

- When is the best time to discuss a complaint?
- Offering to call back at a different time that is mutually convenient
- How much time to allocate to the call
- Ensure the call won't be disrupted by other work commitments
- Taking time to gather information and consider concerns in depth
- Providing a response to issues in writing a week prior to the call, this can then be discussed

Always ensure staff are fully trained in effective complaint management and empathetic. This can ensure a more effective resolution process and complaints may be resolved quicker.

HaDSCO: Supporting improvement through complaint resolution

hadsco.wa.gov.au