



Health and Disability Services
Complaints Office



Information Sheet

Helpful tips for handling a complaint

The Health and Disability Services Complaints Office (HaDSCO) is an independent Statutory Authority providing an impartial resolution service for complaints about health, disability and mental health services in Western Australia and the Indian Ocean Territories. This includes HaDSCO's education and training role in the prevention and resolution of complaints.

This service is delivered through:

- consultation;
- presentations;
- awareness raising; and
- by providing educative tools including brochures; information sheets and guidelines.

This information sheet provides some helpful tips for service providers for handling complaints.

Things to consider when handling a complaint

Preparing the organisation

Dealing with a complaint effectively, utilising sound complaint handling policies and procedures, can assist a service provider in successfully handling a complaint at the local level. This can include:

- Producing a Complaints Management Manual and training staff so they understand procedures.
- Providing staff training in customer service, complaint management and how to deal with difficult conversations.
- Using staff areas for the promotion of policies e.g. staff information boards.
- Providing complaint forms in accessible areas.

- Considering developing a dedicated complaint resolution person and/or team.
- Familiarising the organisation with relevant legislation.
- Providing complaint facilities online where possible.
- Developing a database to capture complaint information.
- Familiarising the organisation with details of external agencies which can provide assistance, such as HaDSCO.
- Providing support networks for staff including professional member organisation or peer groups.

Handling complaints in person or by telephone

Dealing with a complaint in person or by telephone can often be the quickest route to resolution. However, depending on the circumstances, including dealing with and responding to emotions and feelings, it can also be the most stressful and ineffective.

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

- The best time to discuss the complaint.
- Offering to call back at a different time that is mutually convenient.



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- Making an appointment or setting up a scheduled meeting.
- How much time should be allocated to the call or meeting.
- Ensuring the call will not be disrupted by other work commitments.
- Ensuring the meeting area is private and comfortable.
- Taking the time to listen and understand the situation.
- Gathering and clarifying information and considering concerns in depth.
- Resolving the complaint immediately if possible, or initiating further action to handle the complaint.

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:

- Setting out points in a written format can assist the complainant to submit a clear and concise complaint.
- It enables the complainant to ensure all important details are provided.
- It allows time for planning and reflection.
- It allows the service provider time to review the complaint, consult documents and/or relevant staff and provide a thorough response.

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

Return address

Recipient name and address

Date

Dear Name of Recipient

SUBJECT LINE

- Details of persons involved, including the details of the service provider
- Details of the consumer if complaining on the behalf of another individual (e.g. name, short history if relevant)
- A summary of what occurred that includes relevant dates and locations
- Copies of any relevant documents
- Details of what is hoped to be achieved or the outcome being sought by making a complaint
- A list of questions that require a response

Yours sincerely/faithfully Signature

HaDSCO requires complainants to complete a complaint form. The HaDSCO complaint form can provide guidance when producing in-house complaint forms. Visit hadsco.wa.gov.au/Make-a-Complaint to download a copy.

Providing access to a transparent complaint handling process and managing complaints in an efficient and positive manner is an essential part of delivering an effective health, disability and mental health service.

Regularly reviewing the complaint management process is important in determining its efficiency and effectiveness. This process of review will support a service provider in ensuring it has in place a fit for purpose complaint management system. That is, one that is varied to fit the service provider's circumstances and is proportionate to the number and type of complaints it receives.