

BETTER PRACTICE GUIDE TO COMPLAINT HANDLING IN AGED CARE SERVICES

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Every aged care service should have an effective complaint management system in place. This is a system which (i) allows fast and effective feedback handling, (ii) enhances ongoing relationships between providers and their clients/client's family, and (iii) facilitates continuous service improvements for providers. This booklet elaborates how providers can create an effective resolution-focused system to enhance existing processes and encourage a positive, blame-free complaint management culture.

A POSITIVE APPROACH TO MANAGING COMPLAINTS

Providers can adopt a continuous improvement approach:

- Encourage feedback about the quality of services;

- Find timely resolutions using collaborative and open communications and processes; and
- Incorporate learning from complaints into the development of risk management, service delivery and staff development systems.

A BETTER APPROACH TO COMPLAINTS MANAGEMENT

To ensure a fair, accessible, responsive and efficient process that contributes to continuous improvement in service delivery, consider these five steps:

1. Quick Acknowledgement (either verbal/written format) which includes:

- Outline of the complaint management process;
- Invitation for the complainant/resident to be part of the resolution process;
- Name/contact details of person(s) in charge of managing the complaint;
- Reassurance of confidentiality; and
- Estimation of time taken to resolve the issue, including when the complainant will next be contacted.

2. Assessment of the Complaint's Complexity

Assessment of the complaint is a crucial step and should include determination of the risk level to the wellbeing, safety and health of residents and staff identified in the complaint. Staff should have the authority to resolve straightforward issues and escalate matters requiring more detailed examination. This can be done by:

- Planning: Defining the concerns to be examined; identifying resolutions sought and if it can be met; listing the possible sources/types of information required; including parties involved wherever possible (including the complainant) to seek insights

- on how to resolve the matter; determining when the matter can be resolved; and
- Investigating: With impartiality, confidentiality, transparency and timeliness about the complaint.

3. Offer a Clear Response

- A response can be made through a conversation or a written explanation if the matter is serious, complex or disputed; and
- Thought should be given when an apology is offered so that it can share the proposed actions to satisfy the complainant and also communicate how the provider is committed to improvements.

4. Follow Up On How the Complaint Was Managed/Resolved

- Encourage complainants to provide feedback on how their issues were managed/resolved; and
- Activate an internal review comprising staff previously not involved in handling the complaint or appoint mediators if the complainant is not satisfied with the solution.

5. Consider Improvements

- A repeated complaint may point to a service problem so identify processes, policies or staff training that can be improved.

AN EFFICIENT COMPLAINTS MANAGEMENT SYSTEM

This includes:

- Clearly written policies and procedures (for complaints management, documenting complaints, comments, suggestions and compliments);
- Open empathetic communication between complainant and service provider; and
- Continuous reviewing of mistakes made to improve processes.

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