

Summit Community Services Inc
POLICY AND PROCEDURE MANUAL
FEEDBACK, COMPLAINTS AND APPEALS POLICY

RELATED POLICY/S:

Governance – Corporate Governance Policy
Governance – Incorporation and Constitution Policy
Governance – Policy Development Policy
Governance – Board Responsibilities Policy
Governance – Conflict of Interest Policy
Governance – Board Code of Conduct and Ethics Policy
Governance – Organisational Risk Management Policy
Governance – Board Development Policy
Governance – Succession Planning Policy
Governance – Membership Policy
Governance – Delegations of Authority Policy
Governance – Reducing the Risk of Fraud and Corruption Policy
Governance – Whistleblower Policy
Governance – Reputation of the Community Housing Sector Policy
Governance – Board Meeting Policy
Governance – Strategic Business Planning Policy
Housing Management – Feedback, Complaints and Appeals Policy

1. POLICY

Summit Community Services Inc welcomes and values feedback - such as complaints and compliments - from people who use the service, tenants, stakeholders and the community. Complaints will be treated in a confidential manner and issues that are raised will be dealt with fairly and equitably. Summit Community Services Inc will respond to complaints by dealing with issues raised as quickly as possible. Irrespective of a complaint outcome, complainants will be provided with all the reasons for any decisions made. Any response will be provided to the complainant by the most appropriate means, and not necessarily in writing.

All workers employed by Summit Community Services Inc are responsible for accepting, recording and dealing with complaints, compliments and suggestions for improvement that are received by the organisation. The Management Board oversees the Summit Community Services Inc feedback management process and may be contacted directly if required. However, please note that the Management Board are not responsible for undertaking internal complaints investigations.

Summit Community Services Inc will use the complaints it receives to improve its service delivery. Summit Community Services Inc will also use information received from compliments to acknowledge workers who have provided exceptional service.

Summit Community Services Inc will continually review its feedback arrangements to ensure that they remain accessible to those seeking to provide feedback of any nature.

2. SCOPE

Summit Community Services Inc aims to achieve excellence in service delivery. To accomplish this, Summit Community Services Inc will strive to continually improve the services it provides. Complaints, compliments and suggestions for improvement are the most immediate and effective forms of feedback that will assist efforts to improve the organisation.

Summit Community Services Inc is an organisation that welcomes and values feedback. Summit Community Services Inc acknowledges that sometimes errors are made. However, Summit Community Services Inc uses the opportunity to correct these and to improve and enhance the service. Summit Community Services Inc would also like to acknowledge workers who are providing excellent service.

The Summit Community Services Inc “Our Complaints Handling Charter” is a public statement which details how the organisation views complaints and the process of meeting and responding to expectations and concerns.

3. PRINCIPLES

Summit Community Services Inc feedback and complaints management system is built on the following principles:

Accessibility	Summit Community Services Inc will widely publicise its feedback and complaints management system and how to access it. Where required, workers will provide further assistance to enable people who need additional help to lodge feedback and make complaints.
Confidentiality	All workers will protect the privacy and confidentiality of complainants, enabling complaints to be lodged without fear of negative consequences and no one will suffer such consequences because they lodge a complaint. Anonymous feedback can be accepted, but this may limit the response that can be provided.
Fairness and Equity	All complaints will be judged on merit and not be biased in favour of the complainant or any worker involved. Those lodging complaints will be given the opportunity to have their complaints handled by an officer not previously involved in the original issue.
Regular Review	Summit Community Services Inc will regularly review the feedback handling process to ensure the accuracy of record keeping.
Openness and Accountability	Information will be published in the Summit Community Services Inc Annual Report about the: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • quantity of feedback received; • common areas of complaints and compliments; • average time taken to resolve complaints and level of satisfaction with the complaints process.

4. PRIVACY

Personal information that is provided as a result of feedback will be treated in accordance with the Privacy Act 1988 to protect confidentiality. Only general information, such as statistics and common areas of complaints and compliments, will be made available publicly in Summit Community Services Inc Annual Report. For further information as to how privacy will be protected in relation to complaints, please refer to the *SCS Inc Whistleblowers Policy and Procedures*.

5. FEEDBACK, COMPLIMENTS OR SUGGESTIONS

To make a compliment or suggestion for improvement, feedback can be provided to any Summit Community Services Inc worker or Management Board member in person, by phone or in writing:

In person:

Summit Community Services Inc office
Suite 2, 116 Barwan Street
Narrabri NSW 2390
Phone: 02 6792 1478

In writing:

Summit Community Services Inc
PO Box 509
Narrabri NSW 2390

Fax: 02 6792 4860

Email: admin@summitcsi.com.au

Details of any compliments or feedback received are entered on the Summit Community Services Inc Feedback Register.

Summit Community Services Inc also operates an "Ideas Box" for people who use the service, tenants, stakeholders, workers and the community to provide feedback on service delivery. Ideas/suggestions forms placed in central areas at each of our sites. Forms can also be posted or emailed on request. Completed forms should be placed in the Ideas boxes. Forms are collected on a fortnightly basis and if a response to the feedback is required, it will be provided within 10 working days. Ideas and suggestions are also entered on the Summit Community Services Inc Feedback Register.

6. ANONYMOUS COMPLAINTS

Complainants may choose to lodge a complaint anonymously. In the event that SCS Inc receives an anonymous complaint, it will be investigated and acted upon in accordance with the complaints management process. SCS Inc will not be able to communicate or provide information to the complainant.

7. COMPLAINTS

To make a complaint, Complainants are asked to follow these steps:

Step 1

In the first instance, Complainants are encouraged to talk to the person who normally provides the services that the complaint is about e.g. If the complaint is about housing, then speak with the Manager - Housing Programs or for people with a disability; speak with the Manager - Disability Programs. In most instances complaints can be resolved locally and quickly. If the Complainant is not comfortable with that approach they can choose the person to which they make the complaint.

In some instances the complaint may need to be referred to other organisations, if mandatory reporting laws apply. For example a matter concerning a possible criminal offence will be referred to the police.

Step 2

If the Complainant is not satisfied with the response, they can make a complaint verbally, or in writing to:

- The worker they were dealing with at the time, or
- The supervisor of that worker, or
- The General Manager or
- The Management Board

All complaints must be recorded on a Complaints Registration Form. Complainants are encouraged to use this form to make complaints. A worker or third party can assist complainants complete the form. Complaints are then submitted to the General Manager or Management Board for designation to a Complaints Handler.

Step 3

If a Complainant remains dissatisfied with the handling of their complaint, they will be advised they can also contact the appropriate external body. These may include:

- NSW Ombudsman
Phone: 02 9286 1000
Toll free: 1800 451 524 (outside Sydney metro)
Web: www.ombo.nsw.gov.au
Email: nswombo@ombo.nsw.gov.au
- Registrar of Community Housing
Toll free: 1800 330 940 (outside Sydney metro)
Web: www.rch.nsw.gov.au
Email: registrar@facs.nsw.gov.au
- Anti Discrimination Board NSW
Phone: 02 9268 5544
Toll free: 1800 670 812 (outside Sydney metro)
Email: complaintsadb@agd.nsw.gov.au
- **For People with a Disability**
NDIS Quality and Safeguards Commission
Phone: 1800 035 544
or TTY 133 677 (Interpreters can be arranged)
or National Relay Service and ask for 1800 035 544
Web: <https://www.ndiscommission.gov.au/>
Writing:
NDIS Quality and Safeguards Commission
PO Box 210
Penrith NSW 2750

If you are unhappy with the NDIS Commission:
Commonwealth Ombudsman
Phone: 1300 362 072
Indigenous Line: 1800 060 789
Web: <http://www.ombudsman.gov.au/making-a-complaint>
Writing:
Commonwealth Ombudsman
GPO Box 442
Canberra ACT 2601

7.1 Complaints management

Acknowledgement

The General Manager / supervisor (or “Complaint Handler”) will contact the Complainant within 24 hours and acknowledge the receipt of the complaint.

Where the General Manager is the subject of a complaint, the Chairperson or a delegated Management Board member will assume the role of Complaint Handler.

Answers and Actions

The Complaint Handler will review the complaint within 7 days of the complaint being received. They may contact the person for more information. The Complaint Handler will decide how to respond to the complaint and make sure action is taken.

A letter will be sent to the person within 14 days of the complaint being received explaining what is being done to investigate and a proposed resolution to their complaint.

Summit Community Services Inc aims to investigate and resolve all complaints within a further 28 days of receipt of the Complaint Registration form. If this time frame cannot be met, the Complainant will be informed of the reasons why and of the alternative time frame for resolution. All complaints must be dealt with:

- Seriously
- Quickly
- Confidentially; and
- Without stopping the Complainant’s right to use Summit Community Services Inc services

Complainants have the right to access a support person at all stages of the complaints resolution process. Documentation associated with complaints and details of actions taken are filed on the Complaints Register.

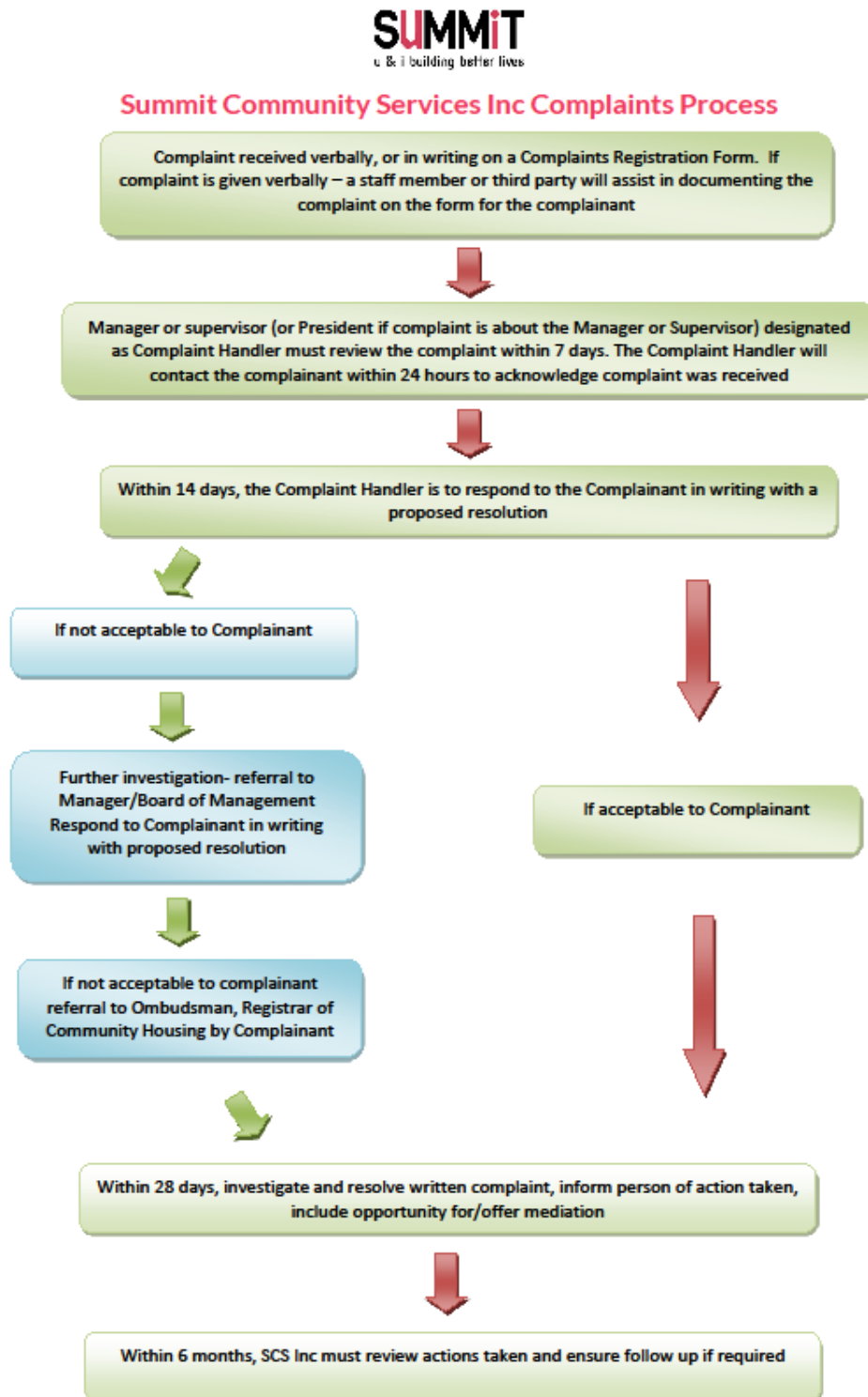
Apology

An apology may be part of, or the sole outcome of, a complaint. Apologies may be provided by the person complained about, as well as a senior worker of SCS Inc.

Review

Within six months of the complaint being resolved, the General Manager or delegate must review the actions taken to ensure adequate follow up and review of the complaints management process.

7.2 Complaints process flowchart



7.3 Unreasonable demands / behaviours

Summit Community Services Inc recognises that complaints are a valuable source of feedback to assist with efforts to improve our services. However, there may be occasions when

Summit Community Services Inc has to deal with unreasonable demands or behaviours from people who use the service. This may include:

- where a complainant raises the same issues that have been investigated previously, or pursues a complaint without presenting new evidence;
- unreasonable persistence regarding outcomes, apologies or resolutions;
- unreasonable demands relating to timeframes for resolution; and
- complaints that are frivolous or vexatious, or not made in good faith (i.e. complaints raised without substance or to cause disruption to operations or provocation, including to annoy or harass workers).

In such instances, complaints may not be registered and Summit Community Services Inc, with the General Manager's discretion, may take action to minimise or control its dealings with people who use the service engaging in this kind of behaviour. If this occurs, Summit Community Services Inc will ensure that the complainant is given clear advice and reasons as to why such action is taken. Summit Community Services Inc will also inform the complainant of other external complaint avenues to pursue.

8. TRAINING

Summit Community Services Inc will support workers by improving their understanding and capacity to deal with complaints. Practical strategies include:

- A new worker induction program that incorporates effective complaint handling
- Providing workers with professional training
- Inviting guest speakers with expertise, at no cost to the service, e.g. advocacy services
- Using team meetings as a basis for running a discussion on complaint case studies and communication exercises
- Discussing issues in the news, newsletters and industry publications
- Using a mentoring system to assist new or existing workers learn new skills
- Sharing ideas with other service providers at forums, network meetings and service visits
- Arranging participation in external training courses for complaint handling workers.

9. RECORD KEEPING

Record keeping is fundamental to complaints management and the resolution process.

Records will be maintained for:

- Information about the complaint
- Actions taken to resolve the complaint
- The outcome of any action

Records will be held confidentially and securely for 7 years and will be made available to the Commissioner or quality auditor if required. Individual identifiers such as name, address etc are generally to be kept confidential unless required to be accessed in line with the Privacy Act 1988.

10. RESPONSIBILITIES

GENERAL MANAGER

The General Manager is responsible for feedback and complaints management across Summit Community Services Inc, although responsibilities arising out of the implementation of Feedback and Complaints processes are delegated to all workers throughout the

organisation. The General Manager is responsible for ensuring workers; understand the feedback process, are properly trained and are able to respond appropriately to feedback and complaints. The General Manager will provide a summary report on all Feedback and Complaints at the monthly Management Board meeting.

MANAGERS AND SUPERVISORS

Managers and Supervisors are responsible for ensuring their workers understand, are properly trained and respond appropriately to feedback and complaints.

WORKERS

All workers are responsible for implementing the relevant Feedback and Complaints processes as delegated and work in accordance with this Policy.

11. EXPLANATION OF TERMS

COMPLIMENT

A compliment is an expression of satisfaction about workers, services or service providers on a specific occasion or relating to a particular matter. However, a compliment may also be in relation to a general feeling of satisfaction with an organisation due to the service received over a period of time.

FEEDBACK

Feedback includes complaints, compliments and suggestions for improvement about a particular service, experience or event - not simply a statement of overall opinion about services. Feedback received can be in many forms, including (but not restricted to):

- Verbal
- Written correspondence to the organisation, including letters, emails and facsimiles;
- Specific written correspondence to an external agency

COMPLAINT

The definition of a complaint (which is consistent with Australian Standard ISO 10002-2006) is an:

“Expression of dissatisfaction made to an organisation, related to its products (including services), or the complaints-handling process itself, where a response or resolution is explicitly or implicitly expected”.

A complaint is not:

- a request for information or explanation of policies; or
- a disagreement with a decision that has a formal avenue of appeal.

If there is disagreement with a decision that has a formal avenue of appeal (such as housing allocation), information will be provided about the appeal process and no complaint will be recorded. Refer to Housing Management – Complaints and Appeals.

However, if a disagreement includes a complaint about the service provided by an organisation during its decision-making, a separate complaint may be recorded and investigated as appropriate.

In some circumstances, it may be appropriate to allow a review process to take its course before addressing a related complaint. In such cases, the complainant will be advised accordingly.

COMPLAINANT

The person making the complaint.

COMPLAINTS HANDLER

The worker designated responsibility for handling the complaint, usually the General Manager or a supervisor.

12. REVIEW

Summit Community Services Inc monitors and evaluates Governance policies and procedures on an annual basis or when changes in the workplace, work activities or legislation occur. Workers and Management Board will be regularly asked to contribute feedback.

13. REFERENCES

Organisation	Publication	Website
NSW Ombudsman	Handling complaints about community services	www.ombo.nsw.gov.au
NDIS Quality and Safeguards Commission	Effective Complaint Handling Guidelines for NDIS Providers	Effective complaint handling [all providers] NDIS Quality and Safeguards Commission (ndiscommission.gov.au)
NDIS Quality and Safeguards Commission	National Disability Insurance Scheme (Complaints Management and Resolution) Rules 2018	Federal Register of Legislation - National Disability Insurance Scheme (Complaints Management and Resolution) Rules 2018

14. ATTACHMENTS

Attachment Number	Attachment
1	Ideas / suggestions form
2	Complaint Registration form
3	Complaints & Appeals Register
4	Feedback Register
5	Summit Community Services Inc Complaints Handling Charter
6	Summit Community Services Inc Feedback, Complaints and Appeals Brochure
7	Summit Community Services Inc Feedback, Complaints and Appeals Brochure (Aboriginal)
8	Feedback information – plain English

Legislation

Privacy Act 1988
National Disability Insurance Scheme (Complaints Management and Resolution) Rules 2018
Residential Tenancies Act 2010

Resources and Guidelines

National Community Housing Standard 3.6 Complaints and appeals
National Disability Insurance Scheme Practice Standards and Quality Indicators November 2021 Version 4