

# Policies and Procedures

## External complaints



## 5. External complaints policy

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Shelter WA models its complaints handling system on the principles of fairness, accessibility, responsiveness, efficiency, and integration into organisational culture.

People making complaints will be:

- Provided with information about Shelter WA's complaint handling process and how to access it;
- Listened to, treated with respect by staff and actively involved in the complaint process where possible and appropriate; and
- Provided with reasons for Shelter WA's decision/s and any options for redress or review.

Shelter WA will ensure that systems to manage complaints are easily understood and accessible to everyone, particularly people who may require assistance. If a person prefers or needs another person or organisation to assist or represent them in the making and/or resolution of their complaint, Shelter WA will communicate with them through their representative, if this is their wish.

Shelter WA will inform people who make complaints to or about us about any internal or external review options available to them (including any relevant Ombudsman or oversight regulatory bodies).

#### 5.1 Procedure

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#### 5.2 External Complaints Procedure

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Shelter WA staff and Board will deal with complaints as follows:

- **Step 1** - Shelter WA aims to resolve complaints at the first level, the frontline. Wherever possible staff will be adequately equipped to respond to complaints, including being given appropriate authority, training, and supervision.
- **Step 2** - Where this is not possible, it may be decided to escalate the complaint to a more senior manager within the organisation. This second level of complaint handling will provide for the following internal mechanisms:
  - Assessment and possible investigation of the complaint and decision/s already made, and/or
  - Facilitated resolution (where a person not connected with the complaint reviews the matter and attempts to find an outcome acceptable to the relevant parties).
- **Step 3** - Where a person making a complaint is dissatisfied with the outcome of the review of their complaint, they may seek an external review of the decision. Shelter WA will ensure that complaints are recorded in a systematic manner and will continually monitor the complaint management system to ensure its effectiveness and continuous improvement.

A complaint is an expression of dissatisfaction made to or about Shelter WA in relation to:

- Shelter WA services;
- Shelter WA members; and/or

- Shelter WA Staff handling a complaint where a response or resolution is explicitly or implicitly expected or legally required.

A dispute is an unresolved complaint escalated either within or outside of the organisation. A grievance is a clear, formal written statement by an individual staff member about another staff member or a work-related problem.

When responding to complaints, staff and/or Board members (paid and volunteer) act in accordance with complaint handling procedures as well as any other internal documents providing guidance on the management of complaints. Staff should also consider any relevant legislation and/or regulations when responding to complaints and feedback.



### Stage 1 - Receive

Unless the complaint has been resolved at the first level, Shelter WA will record the complaint and its supporting information. The record of the complaint will document:

- Contact information of the person making a complaint and the date received;
- Issues raised by the person making a complaint and the outcome/s they want;
- Any other relevant information, and
- Any additional support the person making a complaint requires.

Any person providing a verbal complaint will be directed to complete the required forms. All complaints must be lodged on the Complaints/Feedback form available on the Shelter WA website which is automatically emailed to the CEO.

### Stage 2 - Acknowledge

Shelter WA will acknowledge receipt of each complaint promptly and directly to the complainant and preferably within 10 working days. When appropriate Shelter WA may offer an explanation or apology. Consideration will be given to the most appropriate medium (e.g. email or letter) for communicating with the person making a complaint and Shelter WA would be guided by the complainant’s preferred method of contact.

### Stage 3 - Assess and Investigate

#### Initial assessment

After acknowledging receipt of the complaint, Shelter WA will confirm whether the matters raised in the complaint are within Shelter WA’s control to resolve. Shelter WA will also consider the outcome sought by the person or persons making the complaint and, where there is more than one issue raised, determine whether each issue needs to be separately addressed. When determining how a complaint will be managed, Shelter WA will consider:

- How serious, complicated or urgent the complaint is;
- Whether the complaint raises concerns about people’s health and safety;
- How the person making the complaint is being affected;
- The risks involved if resolution of the complaint is delayed, and

- Whether a resolution requires the involvement of another organisation.

Shelter WA will ensure that the person who may be subject of the complaint is not involved in the investigation of that complaint and will ensure there is no conflict of interest.

### **Investigating the complaint**

After assessing the complaint, Shelter WA will consider how to manage it and may:

- Give the person making a complaint information or an explanation;
- Gather information about the issue, person or area that the complaint is about; or
- Investigate the claims made in the complaint.

Shelter WA will keep the person making the complaint up-to-date on progress, particularly if there are any delays. Shelter WA will also communicate the outcome of the complaint using the most appropriate medium. Which actions Shelter WA decide to take will be tailored to each case and consider any statutory requirements.

### **Stage 4 - Determine Outcome and Provide Reasons for Decision**

Following consideration of the complaint and any investigation into the issues raised, Shelter WA will contact the person making the complaint and advise them:

- The outcome of the complaint and any action taken;
- The reason/s for the decision;
- The remedy or resolution/s that Shelter WA have proposed or put in place, and
- Any options for review that may be available to the complainant, such as an internal review, external review or appeal.

### **Stage 5 - Close the Complaint**

Shelter WA will keep records about:

- How Shelter WA managed the complaint;
- The outcome/s of the complaint (including whether it or any aspect of it was substantiated, any recommendations made to address problems identified and any decisions made on those recommendations);
- Implement any outstanding actions to be followed up; and
- Analyse and report outcomes to the CEO or Chair.

Shelter WA aims to investigate and resolve all complaints within a maximum of 28 days from receipt of a written complaint. If this time frame cannot be met, the person will be informed of the reasons why and of the alternative resolution time frame.