



Complaints & feedback policy & procedure

Objective

The Country Counsellor aims to provide a safe, supportive, effective service to clients and the community. The experience of clients is at the centre of our practice and value feedback and complaints as an opportunity to improve service delivery and ensure we are responsive to client wellbeing, values, and needs.

All complaints and feedback relating to the services delivered by, and actions of, The Country Counsellor staff will be recorded on a Complaints & Feedback Form and logged in the Complaints & Feedback Register.

Definitions

Complaint - anything which a client or community member thinks is unsatisfactory or unfair or which makes them unhappy with our service.

Feedback - any reaction to services delivered by The Country Counsellor or our conduct in providing these, both positive and negative.

Procedural fairness - the key principles of procedural fairness include: All people involved in the incident will be informed about what has happened or alleged to have happened. They will have the opportunity to explain their view of the incident. Corrective action will be based on relevant facts and circumstances. The investigator and decision maker will be impartial and even-handed.

Complaint and feedback submission, recording, and reporting

1. Complaints and feedback can be provided by staff and clients, client family members or carers, and community members,
2. We welcome and address all complaints and feedback, including that which is made anonymously,
3. The Country Counsellor staff actively seek feedback and complaints informally, every 3 sessions and/or at the end of a counselling process,
 - a. Feedback and/or complaints provided by clients during a session are noted in the secure client file in The Country Counsellor practice management software, and
 - b. Logged in the Complaint & Feedback register
4. Where a client, or person associated with a client, advises staff of a complaint verbally or in writing via email, the receiving staff member is to complete a Complaint & Feedback Form and submit to the Principal Counsellor.
5. All actions taken associated with the complaint should be included in the Complaint Report Form.
6. Complaint report forms are to be completed and submitted as soon as practical, and no longer than 24 hours, after complaint being raised,
7. The Principal Counsellor is the authorised person to liaise with any relevant agencies, including the NDIS Commission. They have responsible for notifying:
 - Client's carers, guardians, family members, or emergency contact,

Incident identification, recording, and reporting (continued)

- For NDIS participants, the NDIS Commission within 24 hours of becoming aware of the complaint,
 - Relevant agencies, if and when appropriate (e.g., SA Police, Department of Child Protection, the Australian Counselling Association),
 - Ensuring the client's secure file is updated with relevant information regarding the complaint in The Country Counsellor's practice management software.
9. All complaints, with summary of actions, outcomes, follow up and corrective actions, will be recorded in the Complaints Register,
10. Where a complaint identifies a risk or potential hazard for clients, staff, or the community, it will also be noted in the risk register and managed accordingly,
10. Person/s involved in the complaint will be provided with appropriately disclosed progress updates, including on completion of the complaint investigation and associated corrective actions.

Client & staff support & involvement

1. Staff will undertake welfare checks with the complainant at the time of complaint and in the days/weeks following. If additional support is required outside the scope of The Country Counsellor, referrals will be made at the request of the client,
2. Where the complaint relates to a staff member, they will be informed as soon as possible after the complaint is received. They will be supported to respond to the allegations, and welfare checks will be undertaken by the Principal Counsellor,
3. Impacted person/s will be involved, to the degree they're comfortable, in the assessment, investigation, and corrective actions associated with the complaint,
4. Clients are provided accessible verbal and visual information about the complaint & feedback process on intake. Information is also provided on The Country Counsellor's website and in consulting rooms.

Complaint & Feedback management timeframes

- Complainants will receive an acknowledgement of their complaint or feedback within 1 working day of submission,
- The Country Counsellor will work collaboratively with the complainant and relevant personnel to agree preferred outcomes within 7 days of complaint or feedback submission,
- Complaint or feedback resolution will be within 28 days of submission, unless extenuating circumstances apply,
- Complainant and relevant person/s (e.g., involved staff, external agencies) will receive feedback about outcomes within 7 days of complaint or feedback closure.

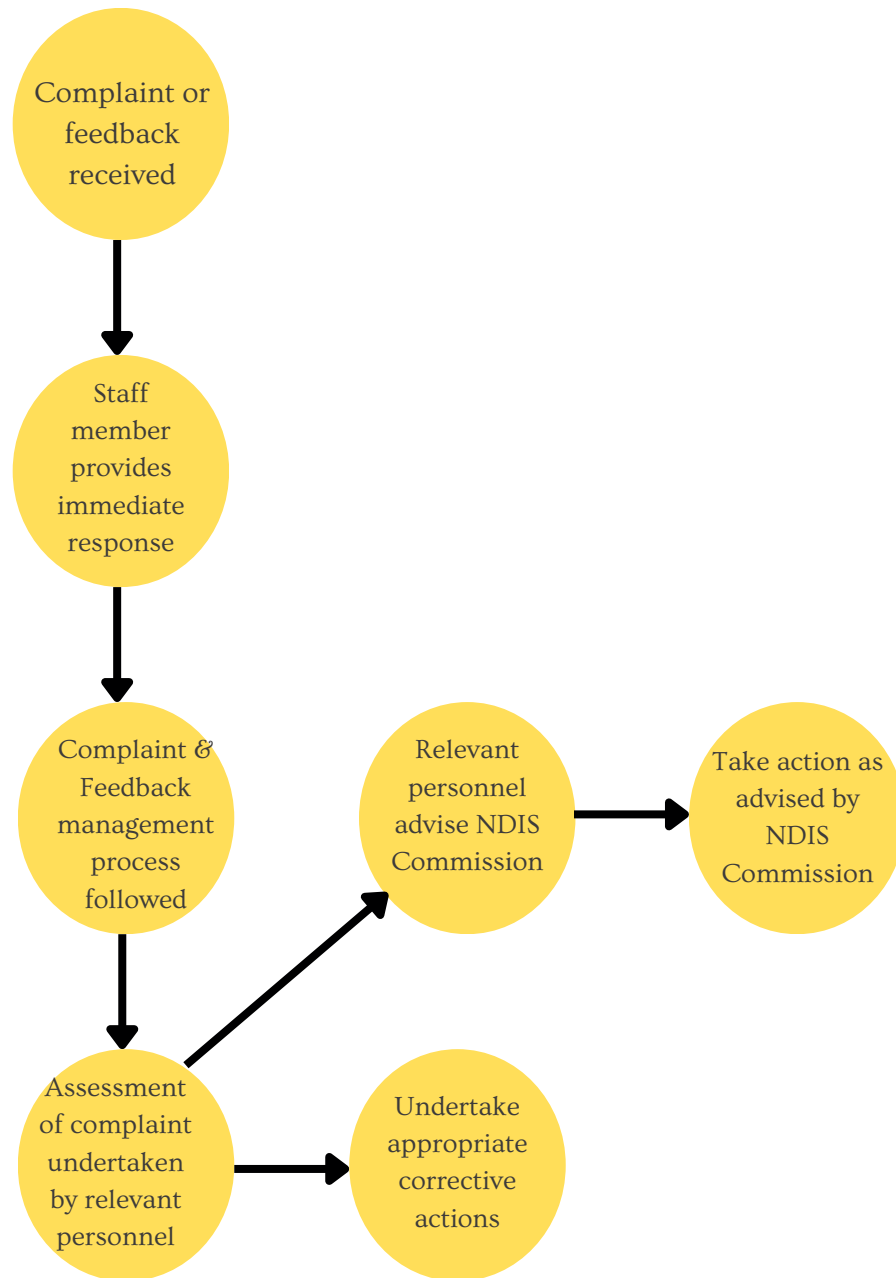
Complaint & feedback assessment

1. The Principal Counsellor will undertake an investigation of the complaint & feedback, in collaboration with the impact person/s and staff member/s involved. Person-centred practice, procedural fairness, and continuous improvement are key principles in the course of all complaint investigations,
2. If the Principal Counsellor is involved in the complaint, an independent person with the skills and experience to undertake an assessment will be engaged,
3. If the complaint relates to an NDIS participant, The Principal Counsellor will notify the NDIS commission and comply with NDIS processes,
4. Investigation will include a review of:
 - Known or suspected contributing factors,
 - If the complaint could have been prevented,
 - Impact of the complaints on clients and staff,
 - Effectiveness of the management and/or resolution of the complaint,
 - What, if any, systemic changes to The Country Counsellor processes need to be taken to prevent similar incidents occurring in future or to minimise impact,
 - Whether other person/s or agencies need to be notified of the complaint,
 - Corrective actions required to be undertaken by The Country Counsellor.
 - Corrective actions will be taken when:
 - an issue could have been prevented or impact minimised by an action or inaction of staff,
 - there is an ongoing risk to clients,
 - an action by staff may prevent or minimise the risk of the complaint recurring
 - Improvements to be implement in The Country Counsellor service delivery and/or processes resulting from the complaint.
5. Where the feedback is positive, a review will be undertaken to determine if the feedback can inform a continuous improvement process.

Documentation and information storage

- Complaint & Feedback Report Forms and the Complaint & Feedback Register are saved in a secure governance folder on The Country Counsellor's OneDrive which is hosted by AWS in Australia,
- Correspondence associated with a complaint will also be saved in the secure governance folder (e.g., emails, meeting minutes, statements, discussion notes),
- Access to the file is restricted by password and provided to relevant staff,
- Complaint & Feedback Report Forms only use personal and sensitive information where necessary. Where possible, client details are noted as initials only,
- Transmission of complaint report forms to other agencies (e.g., the Australian Counselling Association, NDIS Commission) will only occur if formally requested and will be done such that privacy and confidentiality is maintained.
- Documentation will be kept for a minimum of 7 years from the date the record is made,
- If a complaint involves an allegation relating to a staff member, records associated with the allegation will be kept in the secure governance folder,
- Access to complaint documentation will only be provided to staff members who have an approved business purpose to do so.

Complaint & Feedback management procedure - at a glance



Underpinned by

