



Complaints Resolution Policy and Guide Residential and Community Services



Whiddon

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Document Control

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Document Review

Date	Description of review	Initiated by	Version
25th June 2019	Review of content New branding template Changes to organisational positions and structure Updates re the new Aged Care Standards Inclusion of The Charter of Aged Care Rights Inclusion of Whiddon Complaint resolution contract section 17 Removal of the Investigation report sample Removal of the older Charter of Aged Care Rights Minor updated to positions in the role and responsibilities section Inclusion of Open disclosure Inclusion of Relationship Based Care Copy of Poster 'Have Your Say' Inclusion internal and external complaints mechanism	GMCG	1.2
4/2/2020	Inclusion of current information relating to disability services	GMCCOS	1.3
27/11/2024	NDIS inclusions/ Scheduled review AGED CARE ACT 1997 - SECT 56.4 / Complaints resolution mechanisms	GMCR&C	1.4

Introduction

Whiddon My Life care model inspires relationship based care; that is, Whiddon acknowledges the dignity and autonomy of residents, clients and their families and actively seeks to enhance their quality of life, especially through the development of supportive relationships.

Our complaint handling policy is aligned to our aspiration of supporting people to have the life that they choose whilst in our care. Complaints are viewed as an opportunity to listen to what people want and how we can improve our care, environments and services.

Conversely we encourage our clients to provide our teams with complaints, compliments and suggestions. Telling us what we are doing right is important, making suggestions on how we can improve care and services is both appreciated and constructive.

Application of Policy

This policy applies to all teams, registered nurses, allied services and managers of Whiddon that have responsibility for the care of residents and clients.

Please note that this is not the Employee Grievance Policy and Process. The Employee Grievance policy is located in My Staff Room in the People and Culture portal.

Purpose

Complaints help to improve the quality of aged and community care services we provide. To have a transparent and accessible complaint handling process is essential; therefore the purpose of this policy is to guide employees in implementing effective processes in handling a complaint.

The Whiddon Way promotes and supports all employees to have a positive attitude, this includes the way in which our teams respond to and manage complaints.

Policy

To maintain clarity and consistency throughout the policy, the terms "consumers," "residents," "clients," "elders," and "NDIS participants" will collectively be referred to as "consumers," all such references encompass these groups equally.

Whiddon is committed to providing excellent services and care. To this end all complaints will be acknowledged in a professional and timely manner, all complaints will be investigated and if appropriate and required, corrective actions or improvements will be implemented. The complainant will be provided with written feedback within an agreed timeframe or if appropriate a phone call and or meeting. All correspondence will be documented.

Further, no complainant will be subject to reprisals, harassment or intimidation as a result of making a complaint.

Compliments

Compliments are an expression of praise, commendation, or admiration: There is a powerful positive energy created by giving/receiving a compliment. A sincere compliment boosts one's moral. It is always well appreciated when residents, clients and or their representatives make the time to provide positive feedback to staff and managers. Compliments need to be acknowledged in writing by the

service manager or by a simple phone call or face to face exchange in a timely manner.

At Whiddon we require that all compliments be recorded in eQstats, this process facilitates a balanced view when looking at complaints and the overall performance of a service.

Complaint Handling and Aged Care Legislation

As of 1 July 2019 the Commonwealth Government introduced the new Single Quality Framework Aged Care Standards.

There are eight new standards, Feedback and Complaints is a standard on its own and has great importance in supporting clients and residents to live enriched lives:

The Aged Care Standards

1. Consumer Dignity and Choice
2. Ongoing Assessment and Planning with Consumers
3. Personal Care and Clinical Care
4. Services and Supports for Daily Living
5. Organisations service environment

6. Feedback and Complaints - I feel safe and encouraged and supported to give feedback and make complaints. I am engaged in process to address my feedback and complaints and appropriate action is taken.

7. Human Resources
8. Organisational Governance

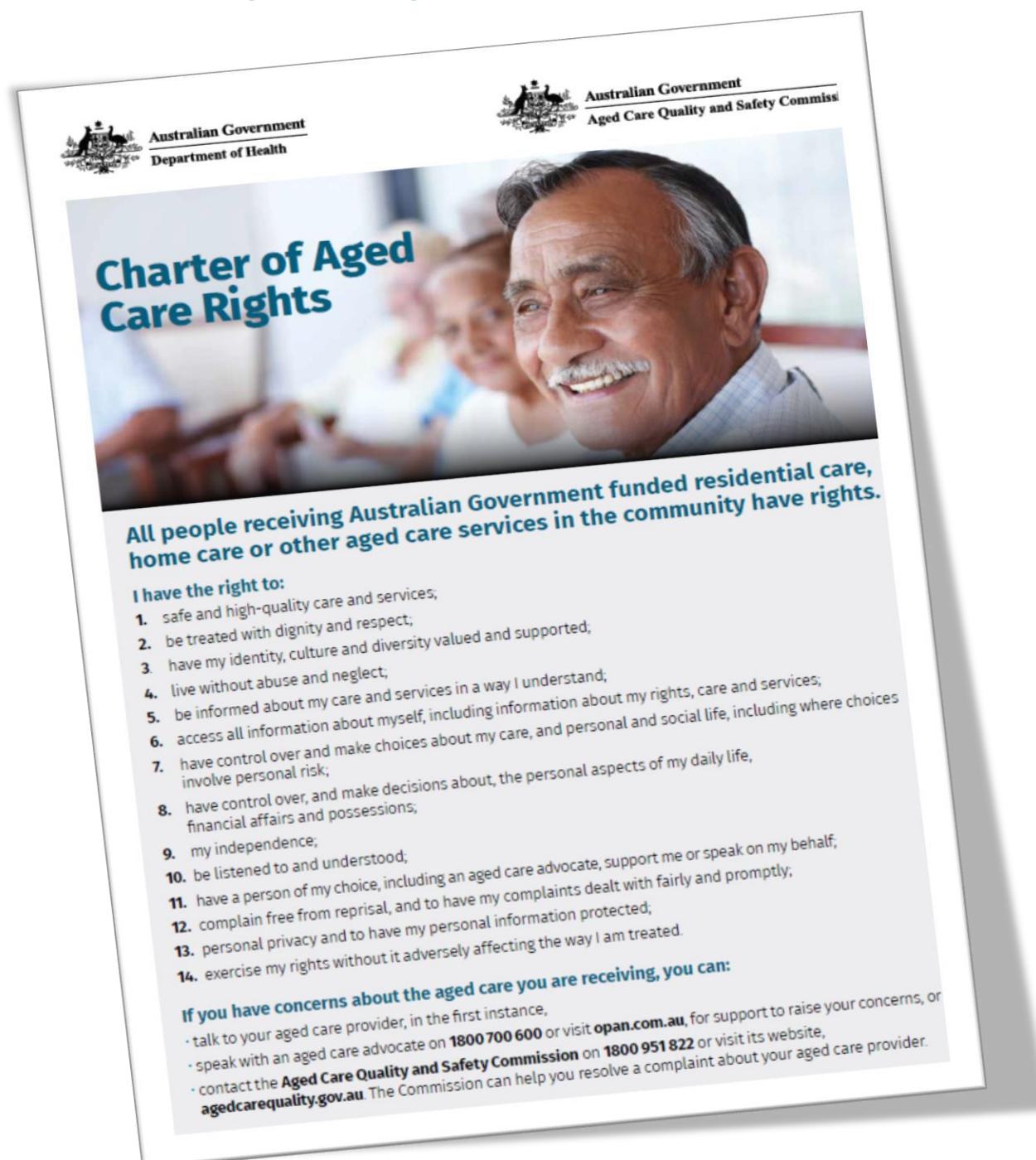
Whiddon Requirements

The organisation demonstrates the following:

- a) Consumers and their family, friend's carers and others are encouraged and supported to provide feedback and make complaints.
- b) Consumers are made aware of and have access to advocates, language services and other methods for raising and resolving complaints.
- c) Appropriate action is taken in response to complaints and an open disclosure process is used when things go wrong
- d) Feedback and complaints are reviewed and used to improve quality care and services. At Whiddon all of our services are required to:
 - Establish Whiddon's system for handling complaints. The system is to be accessible, confidential, prompt and fair. The Whiddon system should also be well publicised within the service.
 - Management and team members must have appropriate knowledge and skills to perform their complaint handling roles effectively.
 - Ensure that resident and client agreements specify the complaint resolution mechanism and that consumers understand the process.

Further to the changes to the Aged Care Standards the Commonwealth Government has released the New Charter of Aged Care Rights effective 1 July 2019. It is noted that consumers have the right to complain without reprisal and that their complaints are dealt with fairly and promptly.

The Charter of Aged Care Rights



Complaint Handling and Disability Legislation

The National Disability Insurance Scheme (Complaints Management and Resolution) Rules 2018 required registered NDIS providers to have an effective system for management and resolution of complaints about the supports or services they provide.

A guiding principle of the National Disability Insurance Scheme Act 2013 is that people with disability have the same rights as other Australians to pursue any grievance.

Registered NDIS providers are obliged to give people procedural fairness when dealing with a complaint. Guidelines have been developed by the NDIS Commission titled NDIS (Procedural Fairness Guidelines) 2018.

All NDIS providers have a responsibility to ensure they are delivering safe and quality supports and services to people with a disability. All providers must comply with the NDIS Code of Conduct.

Open disclosure

At Whiddon, we take every precaution possible, to provide safety, an environment that is nurturing and gives people a sense of belonging. However, from time to time, despite our best efforts, events or errors may occur either directly or indirectly involving a resident or client. This often results in feelings being hurt, or worse, there may be an adverse outcome. Should any such incident, error or event occur, we appreciate and understand that it could be confusing in the least, sometimes heartbreaking and even traumatising. Sometimes it is via the complaints process that we are made aware of such events.

We believe under such circumstances, the resident, client and their family deserve “open disclosure”, that is an explanation of what went wrong, why it went wrong, how it went wrong, a heartfelt apology and an expression of regret from an appropriate staff member of Whiddon. Our teams will demonstrate action providing some comfort that it will not happen again or likely not happen again.

We will always respect our residents and client’s autonomy and put their welfare and wellbeing first. To us, open disclosure is so much more than recording facts and having a follow-up conversation. We shall apply the principles and measures of open disclosure if ever one of our residents and clients has suffered physical, physiological or psychological upset, due to any actions we have taken, or not taken. That is, we shall ensure our response to the individual, their family and support person is respectful, appropriate, kind, and sympathetic and where possible, empathetic, truthful, apologetic, regretful and very well informed. (See Whiddon Open Disclosure policy)

The Whiddon Way- Listening, Understanding and Making a Real Difference

Whiddon has a transparent and accessible complaint handling process. We recognise the importance of listening and understanding the nature of complaints raised by our clients, residents and their representatives. We want to make a real difference in the quality of clients and resident’s lives.

It is therefore understood that implementing an effective, easy to understand and easy to access process for handling complaints is important; responsive complaint management has the capacity to have potential benefits which include but not limited to;

- improve the quality of care being delivered
- gain insights into the needs and wants of residents and clients

- address minor issues before they become major issues
- build positive relationships with residents, clients and their representatives

Complaints provide learning opportunities that look at why something happened and how it can be improved. The traditional approach of looking at what happened and who is to blame creates barriers to good complaint management. Whiddon employees are supported to:

- Be progressive and innovative by being brave and open to new ideas
- Create exceptional impact through listening, understanding and making a real difference
- Nurture relationships and communities by coming together as one family

The Whiddon Way promotes a healthy workplace culture and this is central to effective complaint management.

Continuous Improvement

Whiddon incorporates client, resident and other's feedback as part of our continuous improvement cycle. (See policy Continuous Improvement)

A continuous improvement approach to complaint management:

- Encourages regular, ongoing feedback from clients /residents about the quality of service they receive.
- Uses a collaborative approach with complainants to find timely resolutions to complaints through open communication and transparent processes.
- Learns from complaints by considering these in the development of risk management, service delivery and team development systems.

Risk Management

- Serious complaints correspondence will be referred to the Executive General Manager Care Services or the most relevant Executive General Manager as practicable.
- Serious complaints with a high Severity Assessment Code (SAC) 1 will be referred to the relevant Executive or the Chief Executive Officer and or Board.
- All SAC 1 complaints are notified to the executive and Board in monthly reporting frameworks.

Complaints Resolution

Whiddon is committed to working with residents, clients and or their representatives to resolve complaints and to this end has specifically described the resolution process in contracts.

It is desirable that complaints are resolved via a process of negotiation at local level and not escalated to the point where mediation is required. However, from time to time mediation is required to assist all key stakeholders to move forward.

AGED CARE ACT 1997 - SECT 56.4

Complaints resolution mechanisms

(1) The approved provider must:

- (a) establish a complaints resolution mechanism for the * aged care service; and
- (b) use the complaints resolution mechanism to address any complaints made by or on behalf of a person to whom care is provided through the service; and
- (c) advise the person of any other mechanisms that are available to address complaints, and provide such assistance as the person requires to use those mechanisms; and
- (e) comply with any requirement made of the approved provider under rules made for the purposes of [subsection 21\(2\)](#) of the * Quality and Safety Commission Act.

(2) If the * aged care service is a residential care service, the complaints resolution mechanism must be the complaints resolution mechanism provided for in the * resident agreements entered into between the care recipients provided with care through the service and the approved provider (see [paragraph 59 - 1\(1\)\(g\)](#)).

(3) If the * aged care service is a home care service, the complaints resolution mechanism must be the complaints resolution mechanism provided for in the * home care agreements entered into between the care recipients provided with care through the service and the approved provider (see [paragraph 61 - 1\(1\)\(f\)](#)).

Complaints Handling Roles and Responsibilities

Position	Complaint Handling Process
Assistant in Nursing-Residential Care	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Listen n to the complaint raised. If you can assist the person immediately then do so. E.g. find missing clothing, assist the person to the bathroom 2. Listen, introduce and redirect the person to the most senior person on shift or report the incident to the most senior person on shift. or 3. Provide the person with a “Have Your Say” form (which offers the person a number of options) 4. If they wish, you can show them where they can securely put the sealed completed form 5. Raise an incident record in eQstats no matter how small the issue is 6. Complete steps 1 to 6 with as much information as you can 7. Ensure that the service manager is identified to receive an email in Step 6
Community Employee Care	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Listen to the complaint raised. If you can assist the person immediately then do so e.g. find missing clothing, warm up a meal. 2. If the person is not satisfied or you cannot assist them, then direct them to the Care Co-ordinator. 3. You can provide the person with a “Have Your Say” form (which offers the person a number of options) 4. Raise an incident record in eQstats no matter how small the issue is. 5. Complete all mandatory fields with as much information as you can 6. Ensure that the community care coordinator is identified to receive an email in the final step of the incident report.
Community Coordinator Care	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Acknowledge the complaint – call, write, email 2. Investigate the complaint – use the complaint investigation

Position	Complaint Handling Process
	<p>template</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 3. Implement corrective actions 4. Provide professional feedback to the complainant 5. Raise an incident record in eQstats no matter how small the issue is if this has not be done already; If it has been raised go to Step 7 and 8 6. As required ensure to inform the area manager. Update the care plan to reflect any changes 7. Pass on any directives to care staff 8. Update changes to client details in ComCare /care plans/roster etc. 9. If the complaint is serious such as SAC1 or SAC 2 inform the General 10. Manager Community Care
Registered Nurse Residential Care	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Listen to the complaint raised. If you can assist the person immediately then do so <p>or</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 2. Listen, redirect and introduce the person to the most senior person on shift or report the incident to the most senior person on shift. <p>(Manager) And /or</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 3. Provide the person with a “Have Your Say” form (which offers the person a number of options) 4. If they wish you can show them where they can securely put the sealed completed form 5. Raise an incident record in eQstats no matter how small the issue is. Complete steps 1 to 6 with as much information as you can 6. Ensure that the service manager is identified to receive an email alert in Step 6 of eQstats
Care Services Manager / Clinical Coordinators	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Listen to the complaint raised. If you can assist the person immediately then do so .If you require time to investigate the issues; discuss the time frame that you require and establish when you will be able to provide

Position	Complaint Handling Process
	<p>feedback.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Acknowledge the complaint • Investigate the complaint • Implement corrective actions • Provide professional feedback within the agreed timeframe <p>2. Raise the incident record in eQstats no matter how small the issue is if this has not be done already</p> <p>3. If it has been raised go to Step 7 and 8</p> <p>4. As required ensure a senior staff member has ;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Updated the care plan • Passed on any directives in handover • Update changes to resident details in Autumn Care <p>Inform the Director of Care Services</p>
Residential Services Manager	<p>1. Listen to the complaint raised. If you can assist the person immediately then do so .If you require time to investigate the issues; discuss the time frame that you require and establish when you will be able to provide feedback</p> <p>2. The Service Manager is to :</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Acknowledge the complaint b. Investigate the complaint c. Implement corrective actions d. Provide professional feedback within the agreed timeframe e. Meet with the complainant whenever possible to ensure that they are satisfied with the outcome. <p>3. Raise an incident record in eQstats no matter how small the issue is if this has not be done already. If it has been raised go to Step 7 and 8.</p>

Position	Complaint Handling Process
	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 4. As required ensure a senior staff member has <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Updated the care plan b. Passed on any directives in handover c. Updated changes to the residents details in Autumn Care 5. If you cannot assist the person then redirect, introduce (if possible) the person to the Residential Regional Managers /Operations Manager and or the Executive General Manager Care Services <p>If the complaint is serious such as SAC1 or SAC 2</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 6. The manager is to undertake a formal approach and undertake a complaint investigation process 7. Inform the appropriate Residential Regional Manager /Operations Manager

The Stages of Complaint Handling

An effective complaint handling process is fair, accessible, responsive, and efficient and contributes to continuous improvement in service delivery. The aim is for clients and residents, families, representatives and staff to have confidence in the complaint handling system. Some complaint may require managers to investigate the issues involved. However, most of the time a complaint can be resolved using other means such as conciliation. No matter the approach, and especially when an investigation is required, it's important to have a plan.

Whiddon requires that regular contact with the complainant should be maintained throughout the process. It is especially important to keep the complainant informed if their complaint is taking longer to resolve than first advised.

The Pathway

- *Acknowledge* the complaint quickly. e.g. call them, send a formal letter, email a formal them
- *Assess the complaint*, give it priority, and start to think about which resolution pathway you may take.

Where required: User the Complaint Investigation Report to guide you

- Plan the type of information you may need to collect to assess the complaint, and how you will collect it
- Investigate the complaint to help inform your resolution approach.
- Respond to the complainant with a clear decision.
- Follow Up any complaints.
- Consider if there are any systemic issues.

Acknowledgement

A complaint must be acknowledged quickly. This demonstrates that the complainant will be treated with respect and this acknowledgement can be an important tool in managing the complainant's expectations. The acknowledgement should:

- Outline the complaint process in a manner that the complainant can understand
- Invite the resident, client, or other complainant and their representatives to participate in the resolution process
- Provide contact details and where possible the name of a contact person
- Reassure that confidentiality will be respected during the process
- Give an estimate of how long it's likely to take to resolve the complaint and when the complainant will next be contacted.

Written acknowledgement can be beneficial, but is not always necessary. If the complaint is made by telephone and cannot be resolved straight away, it might be more efficient to talk to the complainant about how the complaint will be handled and when they will next be contacted. Ensure this phone call is documented in eQstats as an incident event, including as much detail as possible.

Similarly, a complaint that is made by letter and can be resolved quickly can sometimes be acknowledged and resolved at the same time. Some complaints can be resolved quickly through open communication or an apology. Sometimes the scope of a complaint is not clear and clarification is needed.

Assessment

The assessment should include:

- clarifying the complaints and issues raised by the complainant
- determining the level of risk to the wellbeing, safety and health of clients, residents and staff identified in the complaint (if this complaint is an allegation of sexual, physical or undue force – please see the Mandatory Reporting policy – this is a reportable incident and must comply with legislation immediately)
- Deciding whether priority should be given to dealing with one or more aspects of a complaint.
- Asking the complainant how they would like to see their complaint resolved.

Often what the complainant is seeking will be straightforward — for example, an apology or small change in services. Some complainants want to raise awareness of a problem or ensure that other people will not find themselves in the same situation.

The best way to establish a complainant's expectation is to ask them what they are trying to achieve. What would resolve this complaint for them? Understanding this may be the key to managing a complaint well.

Some problems might not be easy to resolve, or the complainant may seek an inappropriate or disproportionate outcome. It's important to explain why a request cannot be met, and it's equally important to offer an alternative solution, if possible.

Ask complainants what they need to fix the problem and discuss options like a conciliation discussion. The complainant may also offer solutions that are acceptable to the service manager.

Planning

To assist in working out how to manage a complaint, it can be useful to prepare a plan. Use the Complaints Investigation Report.

The plan should:

- define the complaints that are to be examined
- identify the resolution the complainant is seeking and whether this expectation can be met
- provide an estimate of the time it will take to resolve the complaint Identify who should be interviewed, what statements may be required.
- note any special considerations that apply — for example, if there is sensitive or confidential information involved.

The amount of detail in your plan should reflect the complexity and seriousness of the issues you are

trying to resolve. A written plan will focus attention and ensure that important matters are not overlooked. It's important to remain flexible and make adjustments to the plan as circumstances change and new information becomes available.

Please note: This is a document that can be subpoenaed if the complaint becomes litigious or it may be sent to the Aged Care Complaints Commission or the NDIS Commission as evidence of the investigation and actions taken and or recommended. It must be detailed, objective and accurate.

Investigation

The purpose of an investigation by the service manager is to gather relevant information that can be used to identify an appropriate solution which will resolve the complaint/issue. Not all complaints require a formal investigation to be resolved. At Whiddon when a serious complaint that has been received via the Aged Care Complaint Commissioner, the NDIS Commission or via a legal representative or other advocacy groups the lead investigator is required to initiate Complaint Investigation Report to be completed by the lead investigator (Usually this is the service manager) and uploaded into eQstats in step 6.

Follow up / closing the loop.

It's good practice to ask complainants for feedback on how their complaint was handled and resolved. Encourage complainants to consider providing feedback when responding to their complaint.

If a complainant is not happy with the outcome, consider other options.

- Involve your direct line manager
- Request a review of the complaint by the Clinical Governance team
- Discuss the option of external conciliation

If a claim made by the complainant has not been accepted, this should be noted and explained.

Outline any alternative options available to the complainant, including internal review and key persons that could be contacted and the external complaint mechanisms such as the Aged Care Complaint Commission.

Complaints Handling Timeline Guide

Time Frame	Expected action
Day 1 Complaint Received	Acknowledge; receipt of the complaint in writing /phone /email, outline the complaint process invite the complainant and their representatives to participate in the resolution process provide contact details and where possible the name of a contact person reassure that confidentiality will be respected during the process negotiate and estimate how long it is likely to take to resolve the complaint and when the complainant will next be contacted.
Day 1	<p>Assessment; clarifying the complaints and issues raised by the complainant determining the level of risk to the wellbeing, safety and health of complainants and staff identified in the complaint deciding whether priority should be given to dealing with one or more aspects of a complaint asking the complainant how they</p> <p>would like to see their complaint resolved.</p>
Day 2	<p>Planning; define the complaints that are to be examined identify the resolution the complainant is seeking and whether this expectation can be met list the possible source and types of</p> <p>information that need to be gathered include complainants, staff and the complainant, if different to the complainant, to achieve a mutual resolution provide an estimate of the time it will take to resolve the complaint note any special considerations that apply</p> <p>— for example, if there is sensitive or confidential information involved.</p>
Day 2-7	<p>Investigate; Start the process of investigation- All complex complaints which includes SAC 1 & SAC2 Types (complaint via the Aged Care Quality and Safety Commission,, the NDIS Commission or complaints that were sent to the Whiddon Executive and or Board, complaints that are a risk to clients, staff and or the company) must be treated as a high risk matter and a Complaint Investigation report is required.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify the schedule of evidence to be reviewed and collected • Describe the complaint in detail including times and dates • Identify the issues to be investigated i.e. Issue 1

Time Frame	Expected action
	<p data-bbox="675 322 820 351">/Issue2 etc.</p> <ul data-bbox="627 389 1370 586" style="list-style-type: none"> <li data-bbox="627 389 1209 418">• Write your investigation plan (dot points) <li data-bbox="627 456 1246 486">• Articulate your findings for each of the issues <li data-bbox="627 524 1370 586">• Articulate your Actions and or recommendations for each of the issues
Day 7-23	<p data-bbox="601 627 1370 723">Outcome /Follow Up; Provide the complainant with a written response or a phone call /email (document all actions and outcomes)</p> <p data-bbox="601 757 1370 822">Ask the complainant if they are satisfied with the outcome; if they are the complaint can be closed.</p> <p data-bbox="687 855 1370 987">If they wish to pursue the complaint further, provide them with the relevant GM and or Executive management landline only details and the external agency numbers.</p> <ul data-bbox="639 1021 1370 1086" style="list-style-type: none"> <li data-bbox="639 1021 1370 1086">• Complete the eQstats case file including uploading all evidence and reports. <p data-bbox="601 1120 1370 1184">Consider if this complaint requires a Continuous Improvement Plan.</p>

Recording and documenting complaints

Complaint, comments, suggestions and compliments must be recorded and documented in eQstats. All documentation must be uploaded into eQstats in Step 7. Record all complaints, no matter how minor. At Whiddon we recognise that all types of complaints and comments can help identify areas for improvement.

Compliments and feedback can help identify what's being done right and provide a balance to complaints. Recording of complaints, comments, suggestions, and compliments must be logged into eQstats as an incident and all documents (letters etc.) must be loaded in Step 7.

Sample: eQstats Reporting Step One (one of eight steps)

Step .01

Step .02

Step .03

Step .04

Step .05

Step .06

Step .07

Step .08

Q1. Your information

Name of person reporting

Emilia Graham

Record created date

28/February/2017

What is your daytime phone number?

98276612

Work location

Corporate Office

Email Address

e.graham@whiddon.com.au

Q2. Witness details

Were there any witnesses to the incident?

☐ Yes

☒ No

Q3. Who did the incident involve?

The involved person is:

☐ Person Reporting

☐ Contractor

☐ Client

☐ Staff Member

☒ Visitor or other

☐ Volunteer

☐ Non person event

First Name

Mage

Last Name

Smith

Daytime phone number

123456789

Email

m.smith@bogbond.com.au

Gender

Female

Timeframe for Resolution

Handling complaint in a timely manner can help reduce the risk of a complaint escalating and becoming more serious. At Whiddon most internal complaints can be resolved within 7 -21 working days.

'Quick Fix' Complaint

If a complaint can be resolved at the point of service ('on the spot') all effort should be made to do so. This will help create a culture where problems and issues are addressed within the service, quickly and effectively. As an example this may be as simple as locating a lost item that has been misplaced, or making a cup of tea. It is important to record this in eQstats whenever possible. Serious Complaints

These types of complaints cannot be resolved on the spot; they need to be escalated to the most senior person on shift or directly to the manager. This includes but not limited to; complaints about care, about staff, about food quality or about fees and charges. On occasions complaints may be received via an external agency such as the Aged Care Quality and Safety Commission or the NDIS Commission. These are managed by Regional Managers/Operations Managers in collaboration with the service managers and their teams in a timely and professional manner and are SAC rated as 1 or 2. The Executive General Manager Care Services must be notified of such complaints.

Relationship Based Care

Whiddon promotes a culture that is grounded by relationship based care and requests that all teams communicate with empathy, patience and respect. This culture will enhance the ongoing relationship between the complainant and Whiddon.

Sometimes a complainant just wants to feel heard. The acts of listening, looking into a complaint, identifying a resolution, and following up, confirm to the complainant that they were taken seriously.

Effective Communication Skills Guide

Open, regular communication is vital in effective complaint handling. People communicate in a range of styles and body language plays a role too. Positive language can assist cooperation from a complainant in resolving an issue or problem.

Effective communication skills for complaint handling include:

Listening

- Focusing on the complainant without interrupting helps to build an understanding of the issues underlying the complaint and the feelings involved. Effective listening lets the complainant know that they have been heard. Confirming what has been heard by reflecting the complainant's information in your own words is a good way of offering reassurance that a complaint is being taken seriously. This is known as active listening. It can also help complainants feel validated and respected.

Body Language

An ability to understand and use nonverbal communication such as expressions, movement, gestures and eye contact can provide a better understanding of how a complainant feels and how they communicate. Most face-to-face communication actually occurs through body language. It helps to look at nonverbal communication cues as a group, rather than focusing on individual gestures or expressions. Awareness of the body language that you use with the complainant is also important as it impacts how the complainant responds to you. For instance, if you are crossing your arms across your body you could be seen by the complainant as not being open to their issue.

Managing stress

Stress can hamper effective communication by disrupting the ability to think clearly. It often leads to misunderstandings. Signs of stress include sweating, clenched hands, tense muscles and shallow breathing. It can help for staff to respond to signs of stress in complainants and offer support or consider continuing the discussion later. Effective communicators also recognise stress in them and develop ways to deal with it.

Emotional awareness

Emotions affect how people understand each other. A lack of awareness of the feelings involved in a conversation, including a lack of self-awareness, increases the chance for misunderstandings, which can make complainants and staff frustrated and angry.

Patience

It's important to give complainants enough time to express their complaints. Remaining focused and not interrupting shows an openness to listen to complaint and attempt resolution. Communication lines can be broken when complainants feel rushed misunderstood or staff appears to want to get out of a conversation.

Key Points to Consider

- Thank the complainant for bringing the problem to your attention.
- Show a positive, professional and polite attitude.
- Ask the complainant what they need to fix the problem. While a complainant may not be happy with a proposed resolution, they may come up with a solution you have not thought of.
- Use empathy. Try to put yourself in the complainant's shoes and consider their point of view. How do you think you'd feel if you were in their position? Think about the feelings and emotions of the complainant.
- Ask the complainant to stop any unreasonable behaviour.
- Ensure complaint handling team members have good communication skills. A negative choice of words, tone, body language and attitude can fuel the anger of an already upset complainant. Complaint handling staff should be calm and in control of their feelings and temper.
- Consider the complainant's history in the service and what resolutions and strategies may have assisted this complainant in the past.
- Offer information that may help the complainant better understand the situation.
- Offer an apology. You can say "I'm really sorry about..." without accepting blame or admitting fault. Depending on the situation, be prepared to say "I made a mistake", "I don't know and I will find out", "What do you think?" and "Let's work together to resolve this problem".
- Mirror the language of your complainant (where the language is not abusive or threatening). This shows that you understand their level or degree of dissatisfaction. By mirroring language you are defining the problem in the same context as the complainant. This creates understanding and empathy with the complainant.

- Taking notes can show the complainant that you are taking the complaint seriously. Explain that you are taking notes to ensure that the facts are correct for your records. Notes may also help you clarify some of the issues and provide a framework and guide for other questions. The notes will also provide important documentation for your complaint file. You can also read your notes back to the complainant to confirm that you have understood the complaint
- Respect the complainant's privacy and dignity, and confirm with them whether they agree to you raising their issue with others if necessary.
- Be flexible. Lack of flexibility can frustrate complainants. Be prepared to treat each complaint as an individual case. Be prepared to handle exceptional and unusual cases with exceptional and unusual solutions.
- Be honest. Tell the complainant what you can fix and what you cannot fix and why. Give the complainant realistic expectations about what can be done to address the problem. Do not make promises that cannot be delivered.
- Look for common ground and mutual interests when trying to resolve a complaint. For example, "I know that we both want this issue to be sorted out to ensure your mum gets the best level of care".
- State the reason before you say "no", e.g. when policies prevent you from fixing problems in the way a complainant wants you to. Inform the complainant what they can do if they are not satisfied with the outcome including information on internal review processes and options for external resolution, including the Complaint Commissioner.
- Be creative. Be imaginative. Create solutions which could at first appear impossible but that might work. Agree to a trial of the proposed solution for a period of time and then review its effectiveness.
- Escalate the complaint to a more senior staff member where appropriate. This can demonstrate to a complainant that the service is taking their issues seriously.
- Bring in external people or stakeholders to brainstorm possible solutions. They are not as close to the situation and may be able to offer fresh ideas and solutions.
- Bring in an external person to help provide some objectivity to the issue. An advocacy service or a professional mediator could help resolve the situation before it escalates.
- Where a complainant remains unhappy, offer an internal review or provide information on advocacy services and the Complaint Commissioner.

Unhelpful approaches to complaints handling

- Avoiding or ignoring complainants
- Being defensive or blaming others
- Making assumptions
- Passing the complainant from one staff member to another
- Promising what you cannot deliver
- Giving standard responses or offering standard solutions
- Fighting with or interrupting the complainant
- Getting caught up in irrelevant detail
- Engaging in unreasonable behaviour
- Retaliating against the complainant
- Blaming or accusing the complainant or treating them adversely

- Bombarding the complainant with endless questions, paperwork or intimidating forms
- Interrogating the complainant or questioning their motives
- Underestimating the power of feelings in complaint handling
- Making excuses
- Arranging for staff to come and relieve you from your ongoing meeting with the complainant, thereby cutting the meeting short
- Having a negative attitude
- Accepting abuse, threats or harassment – staff have rights, and an incident must be recorded in eQstats
- Taking complaint personally
- Talking in negative terms to other staff or complainants about complainants
- Forgetting that not all complaint can be resolved to the satisfaction of the complainant

At Whiddon:

- We provide the complainant the internal and external complaint handling information sheets
- We advertise the complaints policy and key personal office contact details on posters, publications and websites
- We actively seeking feedback as part of ongoing conversations
- We frequently remind residents and clients of the different formats that complaints are welcome to be received in
- Complainants and their representatives are encouraged to raise complaints compliments and ideas with local managers
- We provide a safe and secure suggestions box provide a 'Have Your Say' form to capture complaint details
- We accept anonymous complaints via mail or a phone call
- We have an internal appeals system for dissatisfied complainants
- We have senior members of staff available to hear complaints at all times
- We encourage and support regular care and family conferences
- We have a culture that reminds service management and staff of how valuable feedback is
- We train staff to be proactive in listening to potential and actual complaints
- We promote the internal and external processes
- We promote local advocacy services
- We provide all information in plain, friendly language

Assisting complainants

It is important to assist complainants with accessibility needs where required. This can include providing assistance related to:

- Literacy and language skills
- Cultural and linguistic backgrounds

- Physical, mental, cognitive and sensory abilities.

“The Whiddon Way” means that our staff go the extra mile; client’s, residents individual needs are catered for — their care is individualised. “Some complainants may have difficulty making a complaint either verbally or in writing and should be offered help from staff to communicate their complaints. Where English is not the first language, a family member, friend or professional translation service can be used to facilitate complaint handling.

The National Relay Service (NRS) provides a free service to assist conversations with people who are deaf or have a speech or hearing impairment. The NRS can enable conversations over the internet using web browser technology (including on smartphones, PCs and tablet computers) and over the telephone.

Aged and disability care advocacy services can assist any complainant or representative to make a complaint, including complainants with mental or cognitive impairments.

Continuous Improvement and Complaints

Recording a complaint and looking at them collectively can show patterns and trends in a service and provide opportunities to make improvements to policies, procedures and systems.

Continuous improvement is an essential part of an effective complaint handling system.

At Whiddon all services have access to eQstats and are required to log in all complaints, compliments and ideas.

Analysing trends

At Whiddon we look for commonalities and trends in complaints so we can identify low and high risk processes and practices and work on systemic solutions to problems.

Trend analysis of complaint assists in:

- Improving service quality
- Complaints can provide information to service providers about: practices that have been observed mistakes that have been made, what needs to improve.

Access to internal and external complaint mechanisms

Australian Government standards for aged and community care require that service providers ensure complainants and other interested parties have access to external complaint mechanisms and advocacy support at any time.

Residents and clients and their representatives need to know who they can complain to when the service is unable to resolve their complaint, and who can support them at the time of making a complaint.

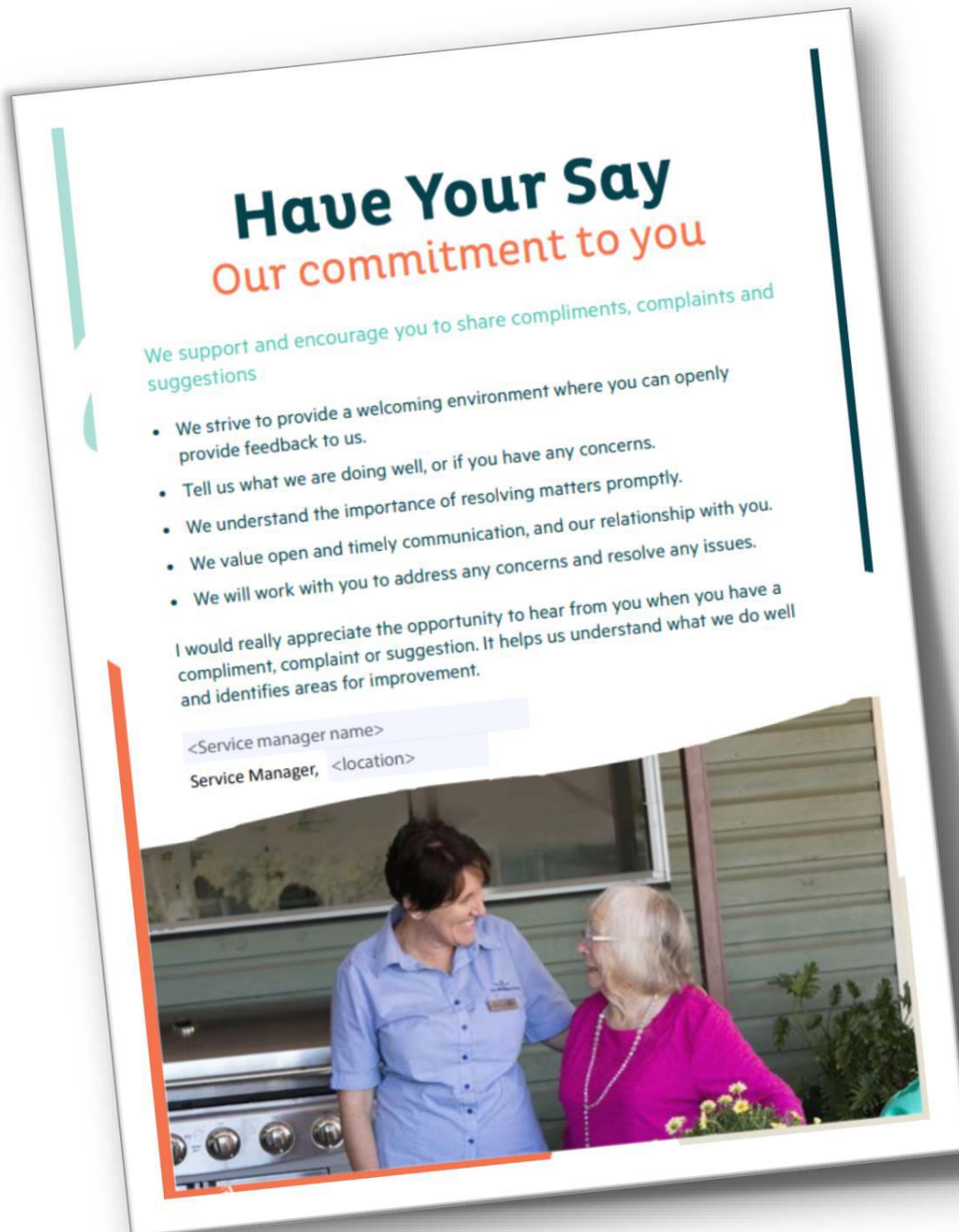
Support includes access to advocacy services, the Aged Care Quality and Safety Commissioner and the NDIS Commission.

Residents and clients can also choose to make a complaint to the Aged Care Quality and Safety Commissioner. If they do not feel comfortable making a complaint directly to Whiddon. Residents and clients can also choose to get help from an advocacy service. Every service must have a supply of brochures available on how to access to external and internal complaints services and supports. At

Whiddon we have “Have Your Say” posters and Brochures which provide residents, clients and others with information on how to raise a complaint, suggestion or compliment.

Every service is to ensure that they have posters on display, a supply of ‘Have Your Say’ brochures and a locked and secure mail box for the collection of ‘Have your Say’ brochures and or letters.

The Poster



The Brochure

Please share your feedback with us

Service name: _____ Date: _____

I would like to share:

☐ a compliment
☐ a complaint
☐ a suggestion

I am:

☐ a resident/client
☐ a family member
☐ a representative on behalf of a resident/client
☐ a staff member
☐ other (please specify) _____

Leave your feedback

Follow up

Please provide your details if you would like us to contact you in regards to your feedback.

Name: _____

Telephone: _____

Email: _____

 Please detach this form and place in the Have Your Say mailbox located in reception, hand to a staff member or post to:
Have Your Say Whiddon Support Services
81 Belmont Road, Glenfield NSW 2167
You can also email your feedback to haveyoursay@whiddon.com.au

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Whiddon also acknowledges the Effective Complaint Handling Guidelines for NDIS Providers.