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COMPLAINTS AND APPEALS POLICY

1. Introduction

- 1.1. The Complaints and Appeals Policy of Northside Community Service Ltd (NCS) ensure that relevant parties understand their rights and responsibilities when making complaints or appeals at NCS.
- 1.2. This policy ensures that employees, non-employees delivering services, stakeholders and participants understand their roles and responsibilities when dealing with complaints or appeals at NCS.

2. Purpose

- 2.1. This policy aims to ensure that all complaints and appeals are investigated in a thorough, transparent, fair, sensitive, and objective manner.
- 2.2. This policy outlines the process and principles that NCS holds when dealing with complaints and appeals.

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2.3. The Complaints and Appeals Policy include the following key components:

- 2.3.1. [Complaints and Appeals](#);
- 2.3.2. [Open Disclosure and other principles in managing complaints](#);
- 2.3.3. [How to lodge a complaint or appeal](#);
- 2.3.4. [Responding to a complaint or appeal](#);
- 2.3.5. [Notifiable Events](#);
- 2.3.6. [External Supports](#);
- 2.3.7. [Service Improvement](#);
- 2.3.8. [Record Keeping](#); and
- 2.3.9. [Privacy and Confidentiality](#).

3. Scope

- 3.1. This policy applies to all employees of NCS, non-employees delivering services, stakeholders and participants, whilst they are engaging with NCS services, either within NCS facilities or off-site.

4. Policy Owner and Review Requirements

4.1. Policy Owner

- 4.1.1. The owner for the Complaints and Appeals Policy is the Executive Manager Shared Services.

4.2. Review Requirements

- 4.2.1. This policy is to be reviewed biennially.

5. Policy Statements

5.1. Complaints and Appeals

- 5.1.1. A complaint relates to how NCS delivers its services, whereas an appeal addresses specific decisions made by NCS in the course of service delivery. Both complaints and appeals may be raised through informal or formal channels.
- 5.1.2. To uphold the right to a fair and transparent process, NCS implements the following safeguards when managing complaints and appeals, but is not limited to:

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- 5.1.2.1. Complaints involving an employee will be handled by a more senior staff member who is not the subject of the complaint, to avoid any conflict of interest in the review process; and
- 5.1.2.2. Appeals are reviewed and responded to by employees that are senior to, and separate from, the employee involved in the decision being appealed.
- 5.1.3. To uphold individual rights and ensure best practice in complaint resolution, NCS recognises that complainants have the option to escalate their concerns to an appropriate external body if they are not satisfied with the internal handling or outcome of their complaint. For more information see section 5.6 of this policy.
- 5.1.4. Complaints that are assessed unreasonable or vexatious will be managed in accordance with the guidelines outlined in this policy and may be referred to an external Legal Party for further management.

5.2. Open Disclosure and other principles in managing complaints

- 5.2.1. NCS adopts the principles of *the Australian Open Disclosure Framework* which guide how complaints are handled to ensure fairness and continuous improvement, including but is not limited to:
 - 5.2.1.1. Responding to complaints promptly and maintaining honest, respectful dialogue throughout the process;
 - 5.2.1.2. Recognising and validating the concerns raised by the complainant;
 - 5.2.1.3. Assessing the complaint;
 - 5.2.1.4. Providing a well-reasoned and transparent outcome, including any actions taken or proposed;
 - 5.2.1.5. Ensuring the complainant is informed of the resolution and checking in to confirm satisfaction or address any remaining concerns; and
 - 5.2.1.6. Reflecting and evaluating the outcomes.
- 5.2.2. If an issue arises during the provision of care or services, such as an adverse event, incident, or service failure, NCS is committed to:
 - 5.2.2.1. Communicating with the affected client and/or their nominated representative in a timely, open, and honest manner;
 - 5.2.2.2. Providing clear information about what occurred, the steps being taken to address the issue, and any immediate actions required;

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- 5.2.2.3. Maintaining ongoing communication throughout the resolution process to ensure the client is kept informed of progress and outcomes; and
- 5.2.2.4. Offering opportunities for the client to ask questions, express concerns, and receive appropriate support.

5.3. How to lodge a complaint or appeal

- 5.3.1. NCS is committed to ensuring that all clients, their families, or nominated representative have accessible and fair avenues to raise concerns. Complaints and appeals may be submitted through the following means, including but not limited to:
 - 5.3.1.1. Complaints or appeals may be lodged by clients, their representatives, support services, or any other relevant stakeholders. NCS also accepts anonymous complaints; however, only those that include contact details will receive a direct response or outcome notification;
 - 5.3.1.2. Submissions must be made in writing. This includes letters, emails, **Enquiry and Feedback form** via NCS website, or other documented formats that clearly outline the concern or appeal; and
 - 5.3.1.3. All NCS employees are authorised to receive complaints or appeals.
- 5.3.2. Upon receiving a complaint, NCS employees must engage with the complainant in a respectful and professional manner and make a genuine effort to resolve the concern promptly, where appropriate, based on the nature and complexity of the issue raised.
- 5.3.3. All complaints and appeals must be documented and logged using the **Safe at Northside LogIt Form**.
- 5.3.4. Not all decisions made by NCS are subject to appeal. When an appeal is submitted, NCS will assess its eligibility and provide the appellant with a formal written notice confirming whether the appeal can proceed.
- 5.3.5. If a complainant is not satisfied with the initial response, or if they choose to lodge a formal complaint from the outset, the matter will be escalated to a senior NCS employee for further action. The complaint will be assessed to determine its nature, complexity, and appropriate handling. For more information, please refer to NCS **Complaints and Appeals Procedure**.

5.4. Responding to a complaint or appeal

- 5.4.1. The complaint or appeal will be escalated to a NCS Manager/Supervisor and the Executive Manager of Quality and Compliance for review and advice.

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- 5.4.2. The complainant will be offered an opportunity to meet with a NCS representative in person to discuss the details of their complaint or appeal. They will be encouraged to have a support person present during the meeting.
- 5.4.3. Following the review and investigation, a NCS representative will communicate the outcome of the complaint or appeal to the complainant.
- 5.4.4. The response and/or outcome of the complaint or appeal will be documented and stored securely in accordance with NCS privacy and record keeping requirements.
- 5.4.5. If the complainant or appellant remains dissatisfied after the completion of NCS' formal complaints and appeals process, they will be advised of available external avenues for further review. For details on these options, refer to Section 5.6 of this policy.

5.5. Notifiable Events

- 5.5.1. In accordance with relevant regulatory requirements, NCS is required to report specific types of complaints and incidents to the appropriate external authorities. Upon receiving a complaint or appeal, NCS will assess whether the matter qualifies as a notifiable event. For more information please see:
 - 5.5.1.1. **Early Education Notifiable Events Procedure**
 - 5.5.1.2. **Community Programs Notifiable Events Procedure**
 - 5.5.1.3. **Aged and Community Care Notifiable Events Procedure**

5.6. External Supports

- 5.6.1. Northside acknowledges that individuals may seek further resolution if they are dissatisfied with the outcome of a complaint or appeal handled internally. Depending on the nature of the service or the type of complaint, there may be opportunities to escalate the matter to an appropriate external authority, including but not limited to:
 - 5.6.1.1. *Office of the Australian Information Commissioner (OAIC)*: If you think that NCS has mishandled personal information, you can lodge a written complaint with the Office of the Australian Information Commissioner. More information can be accessed via the *Office of the Australian Information Commissioner* - Lodge a privacy complaint with us, or make a phone call 1300 363 992.
 - 5.6.1.2. *ACT Human Rights Commission*: The Commission includes the Public Advocate & Children and Young People Commissioner and the Discrimination, Health Services,

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Disability and Community Services Commissioner. More information can be accessed via the *ACT Human Rights Commission*, or make a phone call (02) 6205 2222, or email human.rights@act.gov.au

- 5.6.1.3. *Community Services Directorate*: The Directorate funds a number of organisations to provide services on its behalf. Concerns or complaints should generally be referred to the service provider but can be escalated via mail, phone, email or face-to-face. For more information contact via phone 133472.
- 5.6.1.4. *ACT Civil & Administrative Tribunal (ACAT)*: An independent body that hears and determines a range of cases and disputes. More information can be accessed via the *ACT Civil & Administrative Tribunal (ACAT)*, or make a phone call (02) 6207 1740.
- 5.6.1.5. *Children's Education and Care Assurance (CECA)*: The ACT Regulatory Authority, *Children's Education and Care Assurance (CECA)*, can receive complaints about education and care services operating in the ACT. You can contact CECA by phone 02 6207 1114 for general enquiries or 02 6207 9309, or email complaintsCECA@act.gov.au
- 5.6.1.6. *Aged Care Quality and Safety Commission (ACQSC)*: If you have a concern or complaint that you have not been able to resolve by talking with us, the Aged Care Quality and Safety Commission (the Commission) can support you with information and options. More information can be accessed via the *Aged Care Quality and Safety Commission (ACQSC)*, or make a phone call 1800 951 822.
- 5.6.1.7. *National Regulatory System for Community Housing (NRSCH)*: If you have a complaint or are dissatisfied with the standard or type of service provided by a registered community housing provider a complaint may be lodged online via email quality@act.gov.au or contact via phone 02 62075474. More information can be accessed via the *National Regulatory System for Community Housing (NRSCH)*.
- 5.6.1.8. *Translating and Interpreting Service (TIS National)*: People who have difficulty speaking or understanding English can contact Translating and Interpreting Service (TIS National) via 131 450
- 5.6.1.9. *Human Services Registrar*: help community care and protection service providers and disability service providers understand and follow ACT laws. Phone (02) 62075474 or email quality@act.gov.au

5.7. Service Improvement

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- 5.7.1. NCS is committed to using insights gained from complaints and appeals as a valuable source of feedback to inform and improve service delivery.
- 5.7.1.1. NCS will maintain an effective complaint handling process that is fair, accessible, responsive, and contributes to ongoing quality improvement in service delivery.
- 5.7.2. NCS is committed to continuous quality improvement, to ensure that high quality services and support are provided to those engaged with NCS. Effective management of complaints and appeals will include, but is not limited to:
 - 5.7.2.1. Ensuring that every person involved in a complaint or appeal process is treated with dignity, respect, and fairness; and
 - 5.7.2.2. Respecting and upholding the privacy of individuals who submit complaints or appeals, and maintaining confidentiality throughout the process wherever possible and appropriate.

5.8. Record Keeping

- 5.8.1. All complaints and appeals received by NCS must be formally recorded through NCS's incident reporting system using the **Safe at Northside LogIt Form**.
- 5.8.2. A designated NCS representative will maintain comprehensive complaints and appeals registers to support accurate tracking, management, and reporting.
- 5.8.3. NCS employees are responsible for maintaining accurate and complete records throughout the complaints and appeals process. Records must include, but are not limited to:
 - 5.8.3.1. A clear record of the complaint or appeal, including the date, nature of the issue, and the individual or party raising the concern;
 - 5.8.3.2. All relevant documentation and notes gathered during the handling of the complaint or appeal, such as interview summaries, witness statements, and any correspondence or evidence provided; and
 - 5.8.3.3. A detailed account of the resolution process, including the final decision, actions taken, and communication provided to the complainant or appellant.
- 5.8.4. If the complainant is receiving services from NCS, all documentation related to their complaint or appeal, including correspondence, investigation notes, and outcomes, must be securely stored within their individual client record in accordance with privacy and confidentiality requirements.

5.9. Privacy and Confidentiality

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- 5.9.1. The complaints and appeals process, including identifying information pertaining to the complaint or appeal, will be managed in accordance with the NCS **Privacy and Confidentiality Policy**.

6. Roles and Responsibilities

- 6.1. NCS is responsible for:
- 6.1.1. Ensuring that this policy follows the requirements of the Open Disclosure Framework;
 - 6.1.2. Ensuring policies are subject to regular review.
- 6.2. Executive Manager is responsible for:
- 6.2.1. Ensuring a fair and supportive process is followed;
 - 6.2.2. Taking all complaints and appeals seriously;
 - 6.2.3. Where disclosed, all matters of misconduct are reported to the relevant regulatory bodies;
 - 6.2.4. Ensuring all NCS employees are notified of any changes to policies and procedures; and
 - 6.2.5. Ensuring policies and procedures are kept available and accessible to employees.
- 6.3. Managers/Supervisors are responsible for:
- 6.3.1. Addressing complaints and appeals promptly, escalating complex cases, and fostering a supportive team environment; and
 - 6.3.2. Supporting employees to understand and follow policies and procedures.
- 6.4. Employees are responsible for:
- 6.4.1. Following policies and procedures;
 - 6.4.2. Treating others with dignity and respect at all time;
 - 6.4.3. Ensuring the privacy and confidentiality of others;
 - 6.4.4. Raising issues promptly; and
 - 6.4.5. Co-operating in investigations.

7. Associated Northside Forms & Documents

7.1. Associated Northside Documents

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- 7.1.1. Enquiry and Feedback Form
- 7.1.2. Safe at Northside LogIt Form
- 7.1.3. Privacy and Confidentiality
- 7.1.4. Early Education Notifiable Events Procedure
- 7.1.5. Community Programs Notifiable Events Procedure
- 7.1.6. Aged and Community Care Notifiable Events Procedure

7.2. Additional Associated Documents

- 7.2.1. Australian Open Disclosure Framework
- 7.2.2. Office of the Australian Information Commissioner (OAIC)
- 7.2.3. ACT Human Rights Commission
- 7.2.4. Community Services Directorate
- 7.2.5. ACT Civil & Administrative Tribunal (ACAT)
- 7.2.6. Children's Education and Care Assurance (CECA)
- 7.2.7. Aged Care Quality and Safety Commission (ACQSC)
- 7.2.8. National Regulatory System for Community Housing (NRSCH)
- 7.2.9. Translating and Interpreting Service (TIS National)
- 7.2.10. Human Services Registrar

8. Definitions

- 8.1. NCS: Northside Community Service, including all programs operated by the organisation.
- 8.2. Employee: means a person who is hired to perform work for NCS either on a full-time, part-time, or casual basis in exchange for payment.

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- 8.3. Non-employee delivering services: Contractors, sub-contractors and consultants employed by NCS, apprentice or trainee, student gaining work experience, and volunteer, whilst they are on NCS property or engaged in NCS business.
- 8.4. Client/s: is/are the person receiving NCS services in any program areas such as Early Education, Aged and Community Care, Housing, Community Programs, and other shared program areas.
- 8.5. Appeal: is a formal request for the review or reconsideration of a decision made by NCS. Appeals may be lodged by clients, participants, stakeholders, or their representatives when they believe a decision was incorrect, unfair, or not in accordance with NCS policies or procedures.
- 8.6. Appellant: is the person appealing or whom the appeal is being made on behalf of.
- 8.7. Complaint: is an expression of dissatisfaction made by client, applicant, stakeholder/participant or their nominated representative with the services provided by NCS. Reasons for complaints might include but not limited to:
 - 8.7.1. Inappropriate behaviour by Northside employee;
 - 8.7.2. Northside employee not following the Policy;
 - 8.7.3. Poor delivery of service from Northside employee such as not returning phone calls, not recording changes in circumstances, or not sending out appropriate forms;
 - 8.7.4. Fail to provide a service or an aspect of a service;
 - 8.7.5. Provide an inconsistent or inaccurate service such as responding differently in different circumstances or providing incorrect advice on Northside Policy.
- 8.8. Complainant: is the person who makes the complaint.
- 8.9. Notifiable Events: are the certain events or incidents that damage, or have the potential to damage, the reputation of the sector and cause harm to those involved.
- 8.10. Representative: is the person assisting an applicant or client or acting on behalf of an applicant or client, including but not limited to a client advocate, a family member, or a nominated representative of the applicant or client.
- 8.11. Vexatious Complaints: are the complaints initiated without sufficient grounds or evidence with the intention of causing disruption, harm, or damage to a person or NCS.
- 8.12. Service User: a person or group of persons who use or access a NCS service.