

Feedback and Complaints Policy

1. Purpose

Inala Community House (ICH) is committed to providing high quality services to service users, stakeholders and the broader community and welcomes complaints and feedback as an opportunity to continuously evaluate and improve its activities and accountabilities. ICH values hearing the voice of those who use its services as a key element of continuous improvement.

ICH encourages an environment in which service users and stakeholders can provide feedback or raise concerns without fear of being adversely affected through the provision of services or victimisation.

Separate grievance mechanisms are available to workers. The grievance process for workers is included in the ICH *Grievance Policy*.

2. Scope

This policy applies to all employees, Board members, volunteers, students, trainees and contractors. For the purposes of this policy, these persons shall be referred to as workers.

This policy also applies to all service users and other stakeholders such as other organisations, support persons, members of the community, etc.

3. Definitions

Feedback:

Feedback is defined as all information relating to ICH performance and is either a positive or negative reaction or response to a particular process, service or activity. The following definitions are provided:

- A comment may be an explanation or reaction, a suggestion, or a statement of fact, opinion, attitude, conclusion or judgement,
- A negative reaction or response relates to the experience of someone not meeting their expectation and believing that this has impacted their choice or service experience.
- A compliment is an expression of praise or commendation

Complaint:

A complaint is an expression of dissatisfaction with ICH support or service, including how a previous complaint was handled, for which a response or resolution is explicitly or implicitly expected. Complaints may refer to conduct, services provided, administration or

discrimination. A complaint can also be made about the conduct of another person associated with the organisation, this may include other service users.

Complainant:

A complainant is any service user, community member or stakeholder who has contact with ICH and has made a complaint regarding the organisation, its programs and services, workers or other stakeholders employed by or in contact with ICH.

Allegation: a claim that an illegal act or other action which breaches ICH's requirements (e.g. the Code of Conduct) has occurred. Allegations are always investigated and sometimes an external authority undertakes the investigation such as the police.

Concern: a notification that a person is worried that something is not working, has gone wrong or is otherwise not as it should be.

Involved Party/Parties:

The individual, group, service or organisation to which the complaint refers, or whose actions they are in relation to. In situations of a complaint against the organisation or program, a delegated officer (e.g. the Service Manager or Chief Executive Officer) will be the responsible representative for the complaint.

4. Policy

4.1 Principles

Principles underpinning this policy are:

- Focusing on supporting people during the feedback and complaint processes

All stakeholders have a right to be provided with services that are accountable and should be supported to provide feedback or make a complaint. Feedback and complaints processes should be sensitive to individual needs, preferences or abilities (e.g. culture, language, age).

- Ensuring that feedback and complaints processes are accessible, transparent and fair

ICH seeks to ensure that feedback and complaints processes are open, transparent and accessible for all stakeholders. ICH also seeks to ensure that these processes are conducted fairly and in an unbiased manner by adhering to procedural fairness and natural justice principles. All parties should be informed, listened to, and allowed the right of reply. ICH will seek to ensure that all feedback and complaints are handled promptly, efficiently and in a timely manner.

- Ensuring that the process is safe for parties involved and that human rights are upheld

All stakeholders have a right to complain about the service they are receiving without fear of retribution, victimisation or other disadvantage in access to and in receiving services. ICH will take all reasonable steps to ensure that service users will not be disadvantaged as a result of making a complaint.

ICH will promptly respond where a risk of harm, abuse or neglect is identified.

Complaints are handled confidentially where possible and information collected is stored in line with the *Privacy Act 1988* and the *ICH Privacy Policy*.

Human rights will be considered throughout the complaint process.

- Focusing on improving the quality of services

ICH recognises that robust feedback and complaints processes are an important part of quality service management and help safeguard service users and other stakeholders. ICH recognises that feedback and complaints can be used to review and improve the quality of services provided.

4.2 Feedback, Complaints and Internal Review

The purpose of this policy is to provide clear guidelines for service users and other stakeholders who have a right to provide feedback or complain about the services they receive. All stakeholders will be informed of their rights to provide feedback and/or make a complaint in relation to the services they receive and the contact that they have with ICH workers.

Inala Community House will aim to:

- Make information available to service users and other stakeholders about providing feedback and making a complaint or appealing the outcome of a complaint
- Listen to comments, including both negative and positive
- Recognise that negative comments are not always complaints
- Ensure complaints are handled in a fair and timely manner
- Create an environment where feedback and complaints are seen as a means to continually improve ICH services, and the organisation
- View any feedback or complaint as an opportunity to ensure that ICH remains aware of service user and community needs, and remains relevant to the needs of the community

4.2.1 Feedback

Feedback is usually provided to workers in contact with the service user or stakeholder. Feedback can be provided in multiple ways including in writing, via telephone, in person, through surveys, during meetings or via other methods. All feedback provided is documented and used for reviewing and improving ICH's services.

4.2.2 Complaints and Internal Reviews

Complaints

ICH recognises different levels at which complaints may be handled. The ICH *Feedback and Complaints Procedure* outlines each of these levels and appropriate decision makers and timeframes applicable.

Prior to making a complaint, ICH prefers that issues or concerns are raised in a respectful and transparent manner between stakeholders to try and resolve the issue. ICH will aim to resolve any issues at the point of contact prior to a complaint being lodged.

ICH maintains the right to assess whether an issue is of such a serious nature that formal complaint procedures are to be initiated immediately, without the use of mediation or dispute avoidance.

A complaint may be lodged by a stakeholder who is dissatisfied with services provided by ICH or alternatively by a person who makes a complaint on their behalf. Where a person makes a complaint on behalf of another, the person to whom the complaint refers must be involved in the complaint to the extent reasonably possible. The complainant (acting on behalf of the person involved) may be included in the complaint handling process depending upon their role in the involved person's life.

All complaints received are treated seriously and actioned promptly to try and resolve the issue. ICH will seek to support the complainant by:

- Providing reasonable assistance which reflects any special needs or preferences of the complainant
- Ensuring that the complaint handling process is clearly communicated
- Providing assistance to access supports and complaints processes in the community (where relevant), for example the Queensland Police Service or legal advice agencies

Anonymous complaints will be accepted however ICH may be unable to properly assess and respond to the complaint if there is not enough information provided. To maintain their anonymity, a person may choose to use an alias and provide some contact information.

ICH will assess each complaint based upon the seriousness, frequency and consequences. ICH will act immediately if there appears to be a high risk of harm, neglect or abuse. Any allegation of a criminal offence against a person will be referred to the police.

ICH may choose not to action complaints which are already being dealt with by another body, that are impractical to investigate or those which appear vexatious, frivolous or which do not have any firm grounds. In these cases, the complainant shall be informed of the decision and the grounds for this.

Internal Reviews

ICH has an internal review process which may be used where a complainant is unsatisfied with the outcome of their complaint. An internal review request must be lodged within 21 days of a decision being made.

Stakeholders may also contact relevant external agencies to make a complaint or to lodge an appeal, these may vary dependent upon the services provided.

Support Person

Throughout the complaint process, the complainant and the involved party may choose to have a support person or representative present.

Inappropriate Conduct

All involved parties in a complaint are expected to behave in a respectful and appropriate manner. Inappropriate conduct creates risks to parties involved (e.g. health and safety) or unreasonably hinders the complaint process. ICH is committed to addressing valid issues however it will manage any unreasonable conduct in a way which ensures that the process is safe for all people. ICH will not tolerate conduct which presents a health and safety risk to any workers or other parties relevant to the process.

4.2.3 Human Rights

ICH will consider if any human rights are impacted throughout the complaint handling process. If a complaint involves human rights and ICH does not respond within 45 days or if the complainant is unsatisfied with the outcome, the complainant may refer the complaint to the Queensland Human Rights Commission.

4.2.4 Confidentiality

All complaints received are confidential in nature however disclosure of complaints may be required in some circumstances in accordance with legal or funding requirements. Where possible, the identity of the complainant shall be protected when complaints are required to be disclosed. It may be required that relevant Departments or other governmental agencies be informed, where this is necessary, the Chief Executive Officer shall provide this notification, or this may be delegated to the Service Manager.

ICH may also disclose information about the complaint to other external parties who may assist in responding to or managing the complaint handling process.

4.3 Service Specific Policies

Some Services may require specific feedback or complaint handling policies and procedures. These must be compliant with the ICH *Feedback and Complaints Policy* except where separate legal or service requirements exist.

4.4 Responsibilities

The complainant must:

- Be clear about the issue and provide all information relating to the issue
- Be clear about their desired outcome
- Cooperate in the complaint handling process and not act in an unreasonable manner
- Inform ICH if they wish to withdraw from the complaint handling process

The Board and CEO will ensure that:

- All feedback, complaints and appeals are handled in a fair, transparent and timely manner
- Ensuring that complaints involving human rights are handled in accordance with the ICH *Human Rights Policy*
- Ensuring that workers assigned to handle complaints have the capability to undertake a complaint resolution process
- Regularly reviewing and analysing complaints data to identify any trends or opportunities for improvement
- Ensure that notification is provided to relevant external bodies in accordance with law or funding requirements

Managers will ensure that:

- Feedback and complaints are appropriately documented, monitored and reviewed
- Information for service users and stakeholders is available within the service
- Opportunities for continuous improvement are identified
- Complainants will not be disadvantaged or victimised as a result of making a complaint
- Workers assigned to handle complaints have the capability to undertake a complaint resolution process

Workers must:

- Familiarise themselves with this policy particularly when handling a complaint
- Report all feedback and complaints to the relevant Service Manager (or in accordance with Service requirements)

- Provide information about feedback and complaints processes to service users
- Support service users to provide feedback or make a complaint
- Maintain confidentiality of all complaints
- Ensure that feedback and complaints processes are confidential, impartial, transparent and accountable for all parties.
- Refer complaints which are out of scope to the appropriate person

5. Review

This policy should be reviewed every 2 years or after a formal complaint is initiated.

This policy remains in effect unless otherwise determined by resolution of the Board of Directors.

6. Related Documents

Policies

ICH Privacy Policy

ICH Human Rights Policy

ICH Service User Protection Policy

Procedures

ICH Feedback and Complaint Procedure

Other Documents

ICH Child and Youth Risk Management Strategy

Legislation

Privacy Act 1988

Human Rights Act 2019