

*Caringa Australia Limited is committed to ensuring that any person or organisation using Caringa's services or affected by its operations has the right to lodge a complaint or to appeal a decision of the organisation. All concerns that are raised will be addressed in ways that ensure access and equity, fairness, accountability and transparency.*

*The organisation will provide a complaints and appeals management procedure that:*

- *allows any person to make a complaint or provide feedback*
- *facilitates complaints by cultivating a supportive environment in which they can be made*
- *is simple, accessible and easy to use*
- *is effectively communicated and promoted to all clients and stakeholders*
- *is proportionate to the size of the organisation and the services it provides*
- *ensures complaints or appeals are fairly assessed and responded to promptly*
- *is procedurally fair and follows principles of natural justice*
- *complies with legislative requirements*

**Record of Policy Development**

Version	Date Approved	Date for Review
1	27/03/2019	27/03/2020

**Responsibilities and Delegations**

This policy applies to	All Caringa Staff and Volunteers
Specific Responsibilities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Chair of the Board of Directors- Investigating and Resolving complaints regarding members, Board of Directors, or CEO</li> <li>• Head of Complaints Unit- registering, allocating investigations to Complaints unit investigators</li> <li>• Client Services Manager- resolving complaints regarding Staff Members</li> </ul> See below for more specific details
Policy Approval	CEO, Board of Directors

**Policy Context- This policy relates to:**

Standards	NDIS Practice Standards
Legislation	<i>National Disability Insurance Scheme (Provider Registration and Practice Standards) Rules 2018</i> <i>National Disability Insurance Scheme (Complaints Management and Resolution) Rules 2018</i>
Contractual Obligations	N/A
Organisation Policies	Service Management
Forms, record keeping, other documents	Client Contact Form Feedback and Complaints Form Complaints Register Commonwealth Ombudsman- Better Practice Guide to Complaints Handling

## Definitions

**Complaint:** is an expression of dissatisfaction made to or about an organisation regarding its staff, services or products that warrants response or resolution.

**Complainant:** is an employee, client, advocate, entity or member of the public who expresses their dissatisfaction about an organisation to either the organisation itself or an external body.

**Escalation:** is the process of reporting complaints to the NSW Ombudsman or NDIS Q&S Commission if the complainant is not satisfied with the outcome of their complaint.

## Principles

Caringa will:

- ensure that all clients, and their families, carers and advocates are encouraged and supported to raise any concerns they have about the service or organisation
- consider all complaints it receives regardless of whether or not the complainant is a client of the organisation
- treat all complainants with respect, recognising that the issue of complaint is important to the complainant
- maintain confidentiality of parties involved, keeping any information private to those directly involved in the complaint and its resolution. Information will only be disclosed if required by law, or if otherwise necessary
- ensure support and advocacy is available to clients who make a complaint and require support
- resolve complaints, where possible, to the satisfaction of the complainant
- clients, families and advocates have access to the organisation's complaints management policy
- deal with all complaints in a timely manner, and aim to provide a formal response to the complainant within 28 days of the complaint being received
- keep parties to the complaint appropriately involved and informed of progress of the complaint
- ensure that Board of Directors, staff, volunteers and any sub-contractors are given information about the complaints procedure as part of their induction and are aware of procedures for managing client feedback and complaints
- ensure all service users, stakeholders and members are aware of the complaints policy and procedures
- ensure that all complainants are aware of and understand how to escalate their complaint to the appropriate External Body (NDIS Q&S Commission, or NSW Ombudsman)
- ensure that a complainant is not penalised in any way or prevented from use of services during the progress of an issue
- ensure that feedback data (both positive and negative) is considered in organisational reviews and in planning service improvements
- review and evaluate the accessibility and effectiveness of the complaints management system and continually improve its processes

## Procedures

### Information for clients and stakeholders

Caringa's complaints and appeals procedure will be documented for clients and stakeholders in Complaints Procedure which is made available, posted in each Caringa owned service site; on our website, and available to administration staff via Caringa's QMS. Easy read complaint procedure is provided (contained within Caringa's Client Welcome Pack, and discussed with every Caringa Client upon entry to Caringa Services).

All clients will be informed of their rights and responsibilities with regards to complaints and appeals at the earliest possible stage of their involvement with the organisation.

The Caringa's Complaint Procedure will contain information on the following:

- how to make a complaint or lodge an appeal, including an anonymous complaint
- contact person for lodging a complaint or appeal
- how the organisation will deal with the complaint or appeal, the steps involved and the timelines
- the rights of the complainant to an advocate, support person or interpreter
- how the person will be informed about the outcome of their complaint or appeal
- how to make a complaint to an external body including contact details

### Training procedures

Staff will be trained on the complaints management procedures during their induction, and as part of ongoing refresher training.

Managers and complaints handling unit members will undergo training for complaints management and resolution to support clients to throughout the complaint process and appropriately respond to complaints in an empathetic manner. This will include open communication strategies such as acknowledging the grievance without being defensive and making apologies while accepting responsibility for what occurred.

### Making a complaint

A person wishing to make a complaint may do so in writing or verbally, to:

- the staff member they were dealing with at the time
- the supervisor of that staff member
- the Manager of the Caringa Service
- the Board of Directors, Chair or
- NDIS Quality and Safeguards Commission (for an NDIS participant, or service)
- The NSW Ombudsman (for DoH funded services)

Complaints may be made by:

- submitting a completed Complaints form and emailing [feedback@caringa.com.au](mailto:feedback@caringa.com.au) The Feedback and Complaints form is available in hard copy in all 24/7 Accommodation and Caringa Community Hub locations and online from Caringa's QMS or Website.
- Written complaints may be sent to PO BOX 299 GRAFTON NSW 2460. The Customer Service Officer

will be responsible for receiving this correspondence and directing it to the appropriate person.

- Feedback and complaints via telephone may be made on 0266409300
- Anonymous complaints may be made by an anonymous suggestion page on Caringa's Website: [www.caringa.com.au](http://www.caringa.com.au)

If the complaint is about:

- The Service Caringa Provides, the complaint will normally be dealt with by a Team Leader
- a staff member, the complaint will normally be dealt with by a member of Caringa's Complaints Unit
- a Team Leader, the complaint will normally be dealt with by the relevant Manager
- A Manager / Coordinator, the complaint will normally be dealt with by the COO
- CFO or COO, the complaint will normally be dealt with by the CEO
- Chief Executive Officer the complaint will normally be dealt with by The Chair of Caringa's Board of Directors

### **Lodging an appeal**

Clients or their advocates may lodge an appeal if they disagree with a decision made by the organisation, or by a staff member. An appeal should be made in writing and submitted to the complaints unit, [feedback@caringa.com.au](mailto:feedback@caringa.com.au)

### **Procedure for complaints and appeals management**

Any staff member may be a recipient of a complaint, and is responsible for:

1. Receiving the initial complaint:
  - listening to the complainant, acknowledging the concern raised, and explaining the next steps to the complainant
  - Referring the complaint to the relevant team leader
  - Depending on the type and severity of the complaint, either discussing with the complainant an agreed upon resolution (for smaller matters), or referring the complaint on to the complaints unit for further investigation and action.
  - For smaller matters, the team leader will confirm the resolution and record both the complaint and resolution in a client contact note.

The Head of the complaints unit will be responsible for:

2. Processing the complaint or appeal:
  - registering the complaint or appeal in Caringa's complaint unit
  - informing the complainant that their complaint has been received and providing them with information about the process and time frame
3. Investigating the complaint or appeal:
  - examining the complaint within 2 business days of the complaint being received
  - investigating the complaint and deciding how to respond
  - informing the complainant by letter within seven days of the complaint being received of what is being done to investigate and resolve it, and the expected time frame for resolution

As far as possible, complaints or appeals will be investigated and resolved within 28 days of being received. If this time frame cannot be met, the complainant will be informed of the reasons why and of the alternative time frame for resolution.

4. Responding to and resolving the complaint:

- making a decision or referring to the appropriate people for a decision within 28 days of the complaint being received
  - informing the complainant of the outcome and the reasons for any decisions made
  - upheld (and if so what will be done to resolve it)
  - resolved (and how this has been achieved); or
  - if no further action can be taken, the reasons for this
- informing the complainant of any options for further action if required
- if an apology is in order, ensuring that the appropriate person makes the apology and informs the complainant what the organisation intends to do to avoid further grievance

5. Reviewing the complaint:

If the complainant is not satisfied with the investigation and proposed resolution of their complaint or appeal they can seek a further review of the matter by requesting a review from the head of the complaints unit.

6. Referral to external procedure:

A formal external complaints procedure may follow Step 4 if the complainant is still not satisfied with the outcome. The complainant will be referred to the NDIS commission for complaints related to NDIS service; or the NSW ombudsman for other complaints and provided information and support to make the complaint externally if necessary.

### **Complaints involving specific staff members or volunteers**

The Client Services Manager in consultation with head of complaints unit has delegated responsibility for resolving complaints or disputes involving staff members, or volunteers.

Internal complaints, where a staff member or volunteer makes a complaint concerning another staff member volunteer will be dealt with in accordance with the organisation's grievance, complaints and disputes policy.

External complaints by clients or stakeholders made against a staff member volunteer will be managed by the Client Services Manager who will:

- notify the staff member volunteer of the complaint and its nature
- investigate complaint and provide the staff member volunteer with an opportunity to respond to any issues raised
- attempt to mediate the dispute (if appropriate) and/or attempt to resolve the matter to the satisfaction of the outside party
- take any other action necessary to resolve the issue

Any disciplinary action against a staff member volunteer arising from a complaint will be taken in accordance with the procedures contained in Service Management Policy.

Complaints involving the CEO, will be managed by the Chair of the Board of Directors.

### **Complaints involving organisation members or Board of Directors members**

Complaints made against a member or Director of Caringa will be referred to the Chair of the board of directors. The Chair, or their delegate, will:

- notify the person about whom a complaint is being made of the complaint and its nature
- investigate the complaint and provide the member with an opportunity to respond to any issues raised
- attempt to mediate the dispute (if appropriate) and/or attempt to resolve the matter to the satisfaction of the outside party

Where the Chair is the subject of a complaint, the complaint should be referred to The Company Secretary.

If the matter remains unresolved, the Chair / Company Secretary will raise the matter at the next Board Meeting. Depending on the seriousness of the complaint, the Board of Directors] may:

- deal with the matter at its meeting  
or
- refer the matter to the process outlined in Caringa's constitution

### **Cooperation in external investigations**

If any person makes a complaint about Caringa to an external body (including police, Ombudsman, NDIS Quality and Safeguards Commission) The CEO or delegate will be responsible for liaising with the body responsible for investigating the issue. Caringa will fully cooperate in any investigation which may take place, this includes participating in early resolution, conciliation, and/or reporting to the body about resolution and corrective actions if required.

### **Record keeping**

A register of complaints and appeals will be kept electronically for a minimum of seven years after the complaint has been made. The register will be maintained by the Head of the Complaints Unit and will record the following for each complaint or appeal:

- Details of the complainant and the nature of the complaint
- Date lodged
- Action taken
- Date of resolution and reason for decision
- Indication of complainant being notified of outcome
- Complainant response and any further action

Copies of all correspondence will be kept electronically in secured files.

The complaints register and files will be confidential and access is restricted to Members of the complaints unit.

A statistical summary of complaints and appeals will also be kept in electronic format and maintained by Head of Complaints Unit. The Head of Complaints Unit will be responsible for preparing a report on any relevant trends identified, which may include (but are not limited to: geographic trends with respect to complaints received, complaint type, frequency, timing of resolution etc., at least quarterly to the CEO and Senior Management Team, The CEO will then share this information with the Governance and Risk Subcommittee of the Board of Directors.

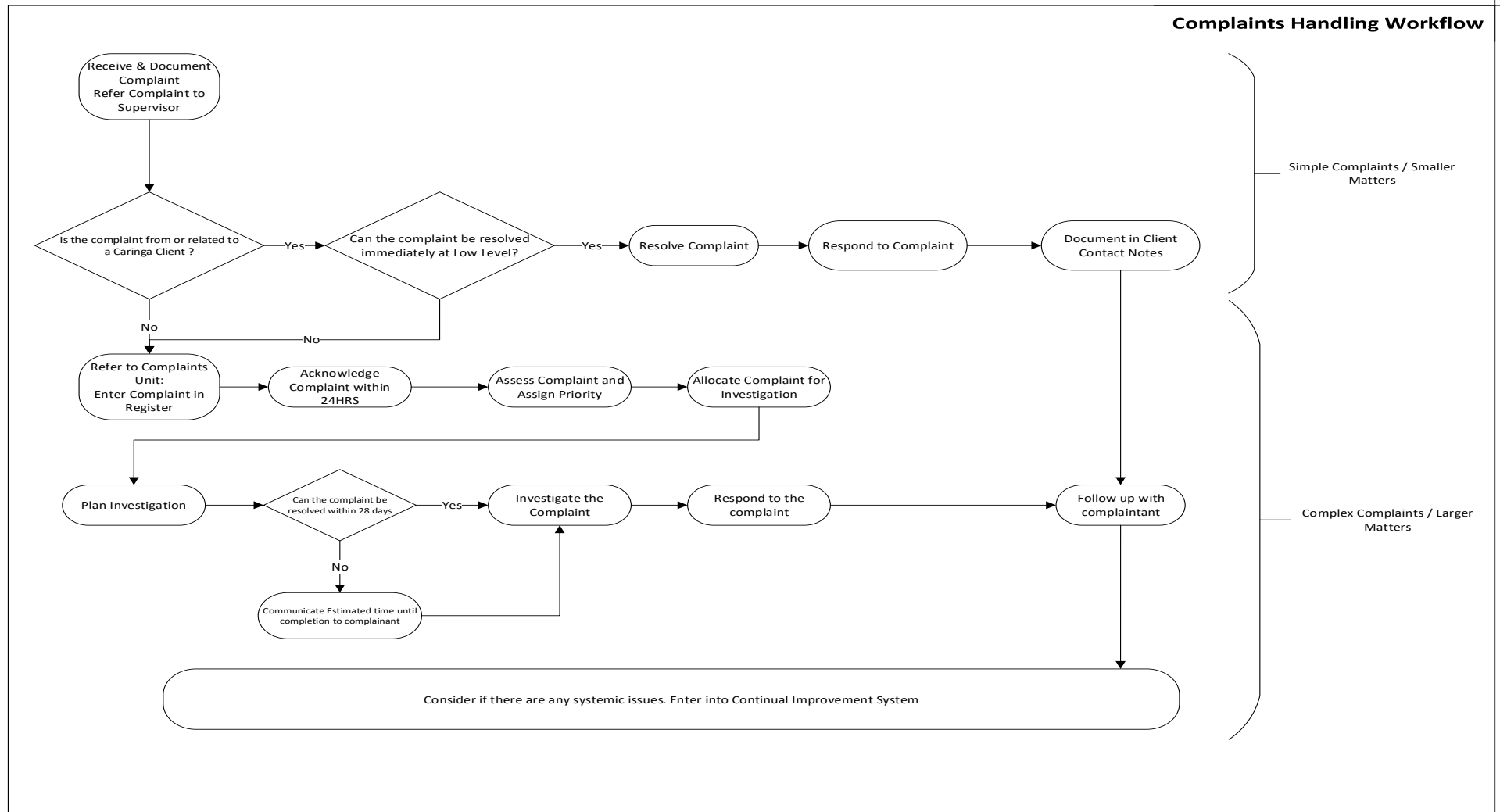
Results from this report will be reviewed by Senior Management and Governance and Risk Committee and used to:

- inform service planning by including a review of complaints and appeals in all service planning, monitoring and evaluation activities
- inform decision making by including a report on complaints and appeals as a standard item on staff and management meeting agendas
- Inform decision making with respect to Risk

### **Continuous improvement of the complaints management system**

The complaints management system will be reviewed and evaluated at least annually. This will include:

- review of all complaint and feedback policies and procedures
- client and staff feedback about the accessibility and effectiveness of the complaints management system
- Any Continual improvement actions with respect to the complaints management system will be recorded in Caringa's Continual Improvement System.



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