

**POLICY TITLE: Feedback, Complaints and Appeals Policy**

Policy Category:	Consumer Support Services
Date Authorised by Exec:	October 2015
Review Responsibility:	GM Mallee, GM Support Services Bendigo, GM IAP, Executive Director Program Development
Date Last Reviewed:	July 2015
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Version:	V3 ~ created March 2006
Related Policies:	Consumer Participation Policy, Charter of Consumer Rights and Codes of Practice and Conduct, Client Privacy and Confidentiality Policy, Equal Opportunity Policy.
Related SOP:	Clients’ Rights and Appeals Procedures.
Related Forms:	Client Complaint Form, Complaint Resolution Feedback Form, Complaint Letter template, Disability Services Commissioner Brochure, Complaints Diagram handout, Complaint Resolution Survey, HHS webpage, Appeals Issue Resolution Process Form.
Related Standards:	Human Services Standards, Community Care Common Standards, NCHS, AHA Performance Standards 3.1 (Tenants’ rights), 3.6 (Complaints and Appeals)

**PURPOSE:**

To outline the manner in which a complaint or appeal can be made and feedback can be provided while upholding Haven; Home, Safe (HHS)’s <sup>1</sup>clients’ rights, safety and wellbeing. Ensure that services are delivered and reviewed within the context of continuous quality improvement.

**BACKGROUND INFORMATION:**

For the purpose of this policy, a complaint is when someone complains about an element of the service as it pertains to them.

*Informal complaints* - A complaint made by external agencies or individuals over minor issues or where they do not yet wish to use the formal procedures. Whilst they will be encouraged to deal with the matter informally at first, they do have the right to use the formal procedures at any time.

*Formal complaints* – A complaint must be dealt with as a formal complaint when a complainant remains unsatisfied once an initial response has been given by the member of staff they are liaising with; or if the issue is considered to be of a serious nature (by either the organisation or individual or the member of staff); or if it is regarding the conduct of a member of staff or simply if they wish to make a formal complaint without going through the informal route first.

HHS views all complaints made as a tool for regular monitoring of its service, and is committed to ensuring no support user is adversely treated as a result of making a complaint. HHS seeks to work with tenants and community in a collaborative partnership to resolve difficulties or issues within best practice guidelines consistent with the *National and Community Housing Standards* and HHS’s Purpose and Vision Statement.

<sup>1</sup> “Clients” may include any person who has applied or is applying for housing or support services from HHS. This may also include neighbours of surrounding properties or advocates of same. HHS explicitly accepts the role of client advocate whether statutory or voluntary.

**POLICY:**

HHS is committed to ensuring all clients have access to information and methods to:

- Provide feedback about HHS programs, services and processes
- Make a complaint and have it addressed appropriately
- Lodge appeals and resolve issues
- Access appropriate contact information for advocates and external avenues to lodge complaints and appeals.

HHS values and respects individuals, -community members and stakeholders; recognising their right to provide feedback or lodge complaints/appeals while being heard in an open and respectful manner.

It is HHS's aim to improve service delivery and to affirm the organisation's belief that all clients have the right to formally complain and appeal against any action taken by the organisation with regard to the management of the client's case. This includes HHS's staff commitment to resolving issues in a practicable and timely manner, consistent with HHS's Purpose and Vision Statement.

This policy includes all clients and stakeholders wishing to provide feedback on areas which can be improved, working well, make a complaint or appeal decisions.

The service also requires staff at all levels to ensure feedback, complaints and appeals raised are managed in a transparent manner; one that is fully respectful and fair to the complainants/appellant and which respects their privacy and confidentiality. HHS's aim is to achieve a positive outcome, where possible, within the bounds of HHS' policies and procedures.

**PROCEDURES:**

HHS will actively promote ways in which its clients and stakeholders can provide feedback and make complaints to the service and/or seek external support/assistance eg. Via Homeless Advocacy Service, Tenants Union, Advocacy & Rights Centre.

**Feedback**

All feedback must be logged on the *Feedback, Complaint and Appeals Register* with periodic briefings provided to the CEO and the Executive.

**Complaints**

All clients entering the service will be made aware of their rights to complain and lodge an appeal. Clients will be provided with written and verbal information and made aware of all posted procedures in public areas (i.e. offices and website).

All complaints are taken seriously and appropriate consideration will be given to how HHS's service delivery and customer relations can be improved.

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Complaints should be addressed within a framework of issue resolution and as quickly as possible. If mediation is required, then all parties should be fully supported to work through a successful outcome where possible.

Ongoing review and analysis may set directions for further service improvement or identify service gaps within HHS and the broader service network.

A complaint can be made in any of the following ways:

- In person
- In writing, via e mail, letter of fax
- By telephone.

Every effort should be made by staff to assist clients where necessary to accurately describe the nature of their grievance and the circumstances leading to its occurrence.

All complaints will follow the step by step complaints process via worker, team leader and line manager as appropriate.

All complaints will be documented and placed on the *Feedback, Complaints and Appeals Register*, with appropriate action steps taken to resolve the complaint.

#### Appeals

If a client is not happy with the outcome of the Complaints Issue Resolution Process or they wish to appeal, then HHS offers an internal Appeals Procedure as per the Appeals Issue Resolution Process.

The Appeals Form will be made available on request to staff or by contacting (03) 5444 9000 to request the *Appeals Issue Resolution Process Form*.

For all housing related complaints, there is a right of appeal offered through the Housing Registrar.

#### Appeals Statement

- HHS values the right of any client to appeal any decision made and applied by HHS which they believe to be incorrect, unfair or discriminatory.
- Clients may submit an appeal through the HHS Appeal Process if they do not agree with a decision made.
- As part of the resolution process it is understood that advocates or voluntary mediators may be utilised to support those involved.
- If clients disagree with a decision or explanation they have been given, then they have the right to seek clarification, communicate their position and state their disagreements.
- Initially clients can ask for the decision to be reconsidered by the person who made the original decision. Clients can also provide additional information they might have that may help clear up any misunderstandings; this is restricted to the Appeals stage.
- Policy and procedures within HHS are subject to appeal if an individual believes a decision made by HHS in relation to their issue or application, eligibility or allocation is incorrect.
- Issue resolution will be sought in a timely and appropriate manner.
- HHS will review the Appeal Process periodically to ensure it is an easy-to-understand process and assists the Resolution Process.