

**COMPLAINTS
MANAGEMENT
FRAMEWORK**
FOR COMMUNITY
HOUSING
PROVIDERS
2022



COMMITMENT
ENABLING
RESPONDING
IMPROVING

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This Framework was developed for the Community Housing Providers of South Australia by the Community Housing Council of South Australia. The Council was funded by the South Australian Office of Housing Regulation to develop a sector wide complaints management framework. The NSW Registrar of Community Housing and the NSW Community Housing Industry Development Strategy have kindly allowed CHCSA to revise their framework developed in 2016 as a template for this South Australian resource. The Australian/New Zealand Standard, Guidelines for complaints management in organisations (AS/NZS 10002:2014) has been used as a primary resource, and information from various State Ombudsman guidance on best practice have been sourced to develop this framework

THE PURPOSE OF THE FRAMEWORK

Making a mistake is normal, facing the consequence of unhappy, dissatisfied, irate tenants is inevitable, and how you respond to fixing the problem is the key to innovation and improvement.

Complaints are important because they assist organisations to be accountable and guide services to achieve the highest standard possible. Providing valuable feedback, complaints should be used to improve services and systems.

The development of this framework has been informed by the Australian and New Zealand Standard Guidelines for Complaint Management in Organisations¹. The framework is designed to assist registered community housing providers (CHPs) to understand good complaints management practice, and to identify and address any gaps in their current practice. According to the Standard, complaints are defined as the:

Expression of dissatisfaction made to or about an organisation, related to its products, services, staff or handling of a complaint, where a response or resolution is explicitly or implicitly expected or legally required.

This framework is intended to assist CHPs to integrate the essential components of an effective complaints management system.

It provides a guide for CHPs in managing complaints from tenants, applicants or other people in relation to their housing services. It does not apply to staff grievances with their employer or whistle-blower action.

The essential components of an effective complaints management system include firstly, clear commitment from the governance and leadership team². This provides the basis for the second component, where the responsible managers can develop the system to enable receipt of complaints and including the promotion or facilitation of complaints and feedback. The third component builds on this system to empower staff to efficiently and confidently respond to complaints through training, supervision and robust arrangements. The fourth component of a sound complaints management system includes the recording and analysis systems and processes in response to complaints resulting in a cycle of continuous improvement.

This framework includes the overview of the complaints management approach contained in the body of this document and a range of templates, fact sheets, tools and useful information to assist in the establishment and review of an effective complaints management strategy approach.

COMMITMENT: System and Expectations—Staff and Culture—Commitment to Improvement

ENABLING: Promoting Complaints Processes—Policies and Procedures—Roles and Responsibilities

RESPONDING: Establishing an Easy-to-Follow Approach—Staff Training and Development

IMPROVING: Continuous Improvement—Performance Indicators—External Reporting

1. Australian and New Zealand Standard Guidelines for Complaint Management in Organisations (AS/NZS 10002:2014)

2. Complaint Management Framework, NSW Ombudsman, June 2015

Good Complaints Management—at a glance

Visibility and Transparency

Ensure that tenants, applicants and other people affected by your service know how they can complain.

Accessibility

Empower frontline staff to have the skills to assist people to clarify issues and identify if there is a complaint.

Responsive Communication

Acknowledge issues and complaints immediately, communicate progress regularly and include when the next action will be delivered or known, to promote de-escalation.

Resolve

Be outcome rather than process focussed. Engage others involved in the solution to act to achieve resolution. Internal services such as maintenance must have clear, customer focussed, timely, efficient systems in place to minimise escalation to complaints.

Objectivity and Fairness

Retribution, adverse consequences or negative communication directed towards complainants should not be tolerated.

Continuous Improvement

Record all queries, including compliments, all requests for service, all tenancy issues and complaints to track progress and provide data to inform continuous improvement.

THE BASICS

What is a Community Housing Complaint?

Determining whether an issue is a complaint is important to assist in taking the correct action. The action may also result in referring the matter to another authority where the CHP does not have the power to act, for example referring to the local council or police.

When a tenant, neighbour or related party reaches out with an issue or feedback to the CHP the first step is to understand what is being said, then direct the person to the correct pathway. The person may present as making complaint but actually be lodging an appeal, requesting a service, or advising of a tenancy issue. For example:

- A CHP may receive a call from a tenant who says they wish to make a complaint about their rent charge, when it would be better for the tenant to request an appeal of their rent calculation.
- A tenant whose property has a plumbing problem may make a complaint because they are not aware that they need to lodge a maintenance request.
- A CHP may receive a call from a neighbour complaining about the loud music of a tenant, which also alerts the CHP to a tenancy management issue in the portfolio.

While this framework has been designed to assist CHPs in managing complaints only, it is important to be able to distinguish between complaints and other matters. Other matters may result in a complaint, if not promptly and effectively managed and resolved. The following definitions are suggested to help staff categorise issues raised by tenants, applicants and community members so they can determine the best response.

General enquiry

A general enquiry is a request for information. Enquiries may come from tenants or applicants for housing assistance, or guardians or advocates on their behalf. Enquiries may also come from other community members or stakeholders.

Request for service

A request for service is where an applicant, tenant, guardian or advocate, contacts their housing provider or related contractor, such as a maintenance contractor, to ask for something. This could be to request maintenance work or to request a transfer application form. Staff receiving these requests for service have an important role in categorising them and forwarding and maintaining follow-up with them to the appropriate team. Requests for service can escalate into complaints where the frontline staff or service area do not manage the request in a timely manner or where communication is poor.

Tenancy issue

Tenancy issues are issues raised by tenants or other community members about their neighbours or neighbourhoods. This includes issues such as noise, vandalism, or anti-social behaviours. These are not considered to be complaints as they do not relate to dissatisfaction with the CHP's services. However, a tenancy issue can result in the CHP assisting in resolving the matter. The matter can also include CHP response or assistance while also referring directly to local council. Tenancy issues can become complaints when the complainants are not satisfied with how a CHP has handled the issue. Therefore, CHPs need to keep records of these issues as they are raised, and respond to them through their tenancy management processes.

Tenancy management issues that are not resolved at the CHP level may be taken to the South Australian Civil and Administrative Tribunal (SACAT). Tenants and CHPs can make applications to SACAT on matters such as refusal of an application for membership, breaches of the tenancy agreement, access to the premises, and the calculation or imposition of any rent, levy, charge or subsidy where not prescribed in the tenancy agreement.

Complaint

A complaint is an expression of dissatisfaction with a housing service which requires resolution or response. Complaints can be made to the CHP by applicants, tenants, or by guardians or advocates on their behalf or other people affected by the CHP service. For instance, a member of the public or a contracted tradesperson might complain about a tenant's behaviour or asset management issue.

Appeal

An appeal is a request for a review of a decision that impacts on a client's housing. This includes decisions relating to eligibility, offers of accommodation, rent assessment, transfers, pets or tenant charges. The review will consider the merits of a decision relating to a housing service.

A merits review means that the person conducting the review puts themselves in the position of the original decision maker and considers the evidence from a fresh perspective. The person conducting the review will then decide whether the correct decision was made in the first place, or whether a preferable decision should be made.

Appeals may be made by applicants, tenants, or guardians or advocates on their behalf. Appeals can be lodged with the CHP or can be lodged externally with SACAT.

Feedback

Feedback refers to opinions or comments, positive or negative, given to an organisation about its services. Feedback generally does not require a response. Organisations can choose to manage negative feedback as a complaint. Feedback can also include dissatisfaction about matters that are beyond the control of the organisation such as government policy or changes to regulations.

It is important to make a note of all feedback received, and pass it on to relevant staff. Feedback can highlight areas for policy or process improvements. It may also be a catalyst for change not only within the organisation but externally in instances where feedback is about policy or regulatory matters. Equally it is important for staff morale to acknowledge and share positive feedback.

Regulatory Requirements

The National Regulatory System for Community Housing (NRSCH) places a high priority on appropriate management of complaints. The first performance outcome of the National Regulatory Code states:

- Tenants and Residents—the community housing provider is fair, transparent and responsive in delivering housing assistance to tenants, residents and other clients.

As part of the National Regulatory System for Community Housing—Evidence Guidelines, Performance Requirement 1(f) sets out the following performance thresholds that CHPs are required to meet:

- All applicants, tenants/residents receive information to enable the applicant, tenant/resident to make informed decisions about managing complaints and appeals.
- Complaints and appeals are managed so that there are no significant and ongoing or repeated failures in promptness or fairness
- The type, number and outcome of complaints and appeals are reviewed regularly to inform the fair, transparent and responsive delivery of the complaints and appeals systems.

In South Australia, the Office of Housing Regulation (OHR) ensures CHPs demonstrate their ongoing compliance with the National Regulatory Code.

This involves OHR undertaking regular compliance reviews of CHP's complaint and appeals policies and procedures, complaints and appeals data, accessibility of complaint and appeal information to tenants, and decisions on appeals and complaints in relevant tribunals/bodies.

OHR may also investigate how a CHP has managed a complaint or appeal against the NRSCH performance thresholds listed above.

Further information on Evidence Guidelines can be found on the NRSCH [website](#).

The NRSCH has also published a range of [fact sheets](#) relating to complaints management.

COMMITMENT

DEVELOPING A CULTURE WHICH VALUES COMPLAINTS

> Guiding Principles

People focus

Everyone has the right to complain. Demonstrate a strong organisational commitment to a respectful people-focused and proactive approach to seeking and receiving complaints. This includes, wherever possible, actively including complainants in the complaints process.

Objectivity and fairness

Each complaint should be treated in an objective and unbiased manner, including, for example providing review of complaint outcome with someone other than the original decision-maker.

Equity

Ensure all complaints are addressed in an equitable manner in accordance with the organisation's complaints management policy. The policy should include how to identify and manage the behaviour of unreasonable complainants.

No detriment

Take all reasonable steps to ensure people making complaints are not adversely affected by making a complaint. That no charge is applied to make a complaint.

Approach

As part of good corporate governance, the governing and leadership teams are responsible for developing a complaints management system.

To achieve the organisation's corporate purpose and comply with the regulatory requirements to be transparent and responsive to tenants, the organisational leadership should develop a complaints management system which addresses the following.

System and expectations

- Support the development of a system that promotes the right to complain including documentation of complaints management approach, how to complain, promotion of complaints and feedback, handling of complaints and the analysis and implementation of change in response to complaints.
- Ensure the organisation can receive and respond to complaints promptly and fairly
- Develop a complaints policy which is readily available about how complaints can be made to the organisation and how they will be managed.
- Advise all staff that people making complaints are not to be victimised.

Staff and culture

- Ensure that frontline staff are well trained, supervised and resourced in the management of complaints.
- Recognise and reward good complaint handling by staff.

Commitment to improvement

- Make staff aware that complaints can be a valuable source of feedback on the organisation's systems, services and staff.
- Develop a 'no blame' culture where disclosure of mistakes is encouraged because staff understand that complaint handling is about fixing issues and improving systems.
- Actively implement changes to services, systems, practices, procedures and/or products where weaknesses are identified through the management and analysis of complaints.
- Promote to staff and the public the improvements resulting from correct handling and analysis of complaints, so people can see the tangible benefits flowing from complaints.

The objectives of the complaints management system should be met through appropriate policies, procedures, data collection and staff resourcing. In a large organisation this process can be delegated to the management team who can also take responsibility for establishing continuous improvement cycles.

Planning

CHPs should consider their complaint managements systems in the context of their strategic and risk management planning. Where a situation that may increase complaints is foreseen, strategies to mitigate this should be considered. Good communication with tenants and stakeholders, before (where possible) and during the event, explaining their rights and the CHP's obligations, offers a solid foundation to manage any issues arising. Acting to reduce the likelihood of complaints in advance of the known event can save valuable resources.

Example of situations that may give rise to an increase in the number of complaints include:

- Tenants moving into newly constructed properties with defects that involve maintenance issues.
- Tenants being relocated to make way for a redevelopment.
- The CHP is growing rapidly or diversifying its business, which may lead to frontline and management resources being stretched temporarily.
- New tenant services are introduced by the provider.
- Internal restructure and/or staff turnover.

Good complaints management practices should support the organisation's risk management planning, and vice versa.

Your complaints management system not only provides you with information about how well your staff respond to complaints but also whether there are flaws in other systems, for example the maintenance section, your tenant communication, tenant support processes.

Well trained and highly responsive frontline housing officers will not succeed in managing requests for services if the other teams demonstrate poor customer service or systems.

Continuous Improvement

Incorporating complaints management into the continuous improvement cycle for the organisation is the most efficient and effective mechanism to embed good practice. When complaints management commitment is agreed by the governance team there are two cyclical review processes which assist the organisation to maintain the system.

Data Management and Analysis Cycle

Firstly, regular reviews of the complaints reporting tool. The approach to review is dependent on the size of the organisation. For larger organisations it is useful to have a management-level of review monthly or bi-monthly (depending on the size of the organisation and number of complaints),

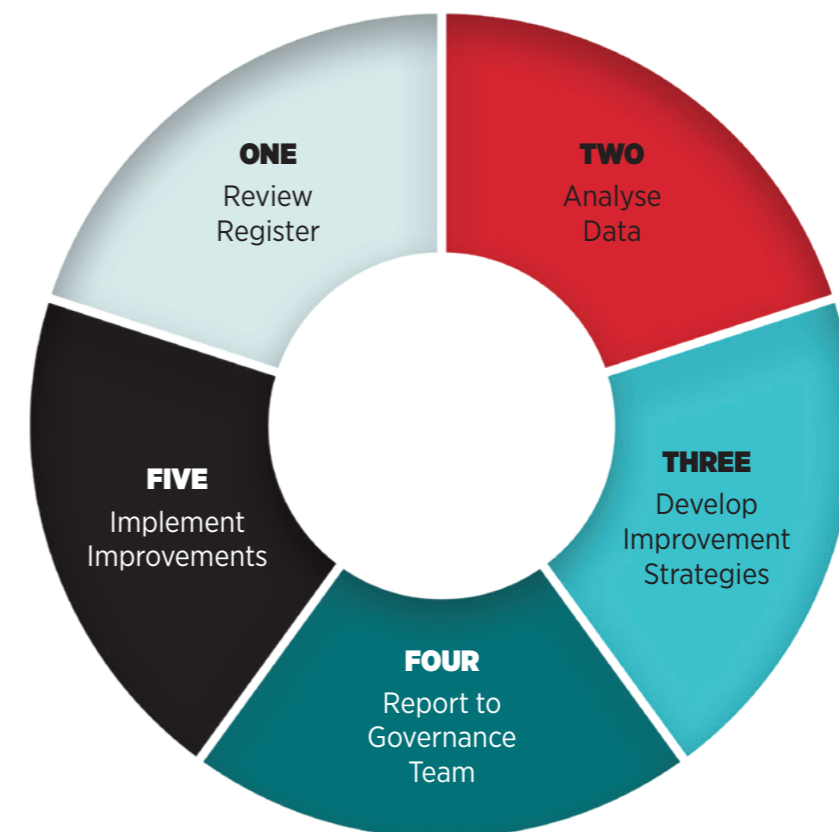
with regular reports to the Board including recommendations for responses to trends and issues. For smaller organisations less frequent reviews may be required where there are a small number of complaints. This may become the responsibility of the leadership team with less frequent, generally bi-annual, reports to the governing team.

Policy and Procedure Cycle

The second cycle is to regularly review policy and procedures. This process needs to be in line with the organisational policy and procedural guidelines and it is recommended that three-yearly reviews are appropriate for complaints.

Further Resources

[Business Processes, Procedures and Standards](#) and [Better Practice Complaint Handling Guide](#).



ENABLING

MAKE IT EASY FOR PEOPLE TO MAKE COMPLAINTS AND PROVIDE FEEDBACK

▶ Guiding Principles

Visibility and Transparency

Ensure all people have easily available information about how and where a complaint can be made.

Accessibility

Ensure that people are provided with appropriate assistance and representation as required to make complaints.

Work Health and Safety

Staff involved in complaints management have access to appropriate policies, procedures and practices to safely manage this aspect of their jobs and are protected, including provision of identity protection if required.

Conduct of Parties

Clear expectations regarding behaviour required of both staff and complainants is made explicitly available.

Resolution

An organisation's policy, procedures and practice should drive a genuine attempt to resolve the issue where possible, rather than simply providing a response.

Approach

Commitment to effective complaints is essential however it is only the first step in establishing good organisational practice. It is imperative that this commitment is translated into making it easy for people to complain through an effective promotional strategy and establishing sound

systems and processes for complaints to be received and well managed. This is normally delegated to someone on the management team. If multiple people are involved it is important to identify one person to be charged with a central coordinating role.

Promoting complaints processes

Facilitating complaints

Encouraging a safe environment for complaints requires:

- publicising complaints handling policy on your organisational website and through other reference material available to the public
- providing flexible and varied methods for the making of complaints, such as
 - in person
 - over the phone
 - in writing
 - online
 - social media channels
- integrating complaints and feedback with frontline service initiatives including those aimed at vulnerable groups
- being proactive in seeking feedback from tenants and in particular vulnerable groups through visits and outreach programs especially in rural and remote areas and Aboriginal communities (where applicable)
- encouraging complaints and feedback from representatives and advocates who may support vulnerable groups

It is important to consider what the barriers are for people to make complaints and to review and address these concerns.

See additional information [Appendix 9](#).

RESPONDING

Policies and Procedures

Written resources include policy and procedural information. Examples of these are included in this framework in [Appendix 1](#) and [2](#). Importantly roles and responsibilities of key staff need to be specified for managers and staff. CHPs should consult with key stakeholders in the development and review of policies, procedures and systems for managing complaints. Key stakeholders can include operational and management staff, tenants, applicants and neighbours. See additional information [Appendix 1](#) and [2](#).

Roles and Responsibilities

To support efficient and effective complaints management it is important to allow resolution of a complaint to be achieved at the lowest possible level. To do this staff need to be empowered to respond to complaints and understand when to escalate the matter. Clarifying roles and responsibilities for all people within the organisation will assist to clarify this matter. One person should be nominated to hold overall responsibility for the complaints management approach and governance reporting. The policy template offers additional information [Appendix 1](#).

Staff Training and Support

Providing staff training and ongoing awareness of complaints management practice will enable staff to gain and maintain the confidence to manage complaints. Where complaints are discussed and identified as a positive reflection of effective organisational systems, promotion of complaints process and empowerment of clients, staff will see the receipt and successful management of complaints as a benefit to the organisation. For further information about staff development see [Appendix 6](#). It is also important to note that complaints can be time consuming and staff will be more able to positively respond to complaints when their effort is noted and supported as part of their workload management.

Further Resources

Society for Consumer Affairs Professionals Australia (SOCAP) website ([Small Business Complaints Management Toolkit](#)) and NSW Ombudsman [Complaints Handling Resources](#).

Effective complaints management anticipates areas of high risk and manages the risk. For example:

- Being clear about rights and responsibilities of residents and ensuring tenants agree to work within the parameters prior to signing of tenancy contract allows the CHP to revisit this where there are issues.
- Regular and close review of contract and property can iron out behavioural and asset-based issues.
- High visibility of housing officers and community development staff can assist in supporting all tenants to live well within their community, and to quickly address and assist with issues such as mental health, drug and alcohol, domestic violence or physical or cognitive decline.

EMPOWER AND RESOURCE STAFF TO MANAGE COMPLAINTS

Guiding Principles

Empowerment of staff

Complaints management training should be provided for all relevant staff, including any special role their position has in managing and/or reporting on complaints. Staff should be encouraged to provide feedback regarding problems with the organisation, its products, services or systems including the complaints management framework.

Privacy and disclosure

Personally identifiable information should be managed and only be disclosed in compliance with obligations under privacy legislation.

Responsiveness

Complaints should be managed in a timely manner and given appropriate priority in accordance with the urgency of the matters raised. All complaints should be dealt with efficiently. Expectations of the complainant should be managed through clear communication.

Communication

Organisations should keep complainants informed of the status of their complaint, and should clearly communicate the results of the complaint. Clearly specified timeframes should be communicated to complainants. Early communication can also be used to set realistic expectations around what the organisation can and cannot influence.

Complaint involving multiple parties

Where a complaint involves multiple parties, due consideration and planning should be put in place to ensure effective communication is maintained, while ensuring privacy and confidentiality obligations.

Approach

Complaints management should focus on resolution of the issue raised, rather than simply following procedure. Staff need clear guidance about the type of complaints that they should escalate to senior staff, and which complaints they can deal with directly, including the resolution options available to them.

It is important to note that while a CHP will aim to address and resolve the vast majority of complaints raised with them, and that most complainants will behave responsibly, there will be some people who persist in making complaints beyond the CHP's ability to respond. At times, a small number of people may behave unreasonably when making a complaint. This includes aggressive, threatening, or verbally abusive behaviour towards staff; contacting the organisation excessively; making inappropriate demands on the time and resources of the organisation; or refusing to accept the organisation's decisions and recommendations about the complaint. This is known as serial or unreasonable complainant conduct. These complaints still require resolution, but managing these complaints will require specific strategies. Tips for managing unreasonable complainant conduct are included at [Appendix 13](#).

Managing expectations is a critical aspect of complaint resolution. It is important that complainants are made aware of your organisation's expected response timeframes. Where a response or resolution is taking longer than anticipated, communicate this with the complainant, explain the reasons, and provide a revised timeframe.

Establishing an easy-to-follow approach

Three levels of complaints management

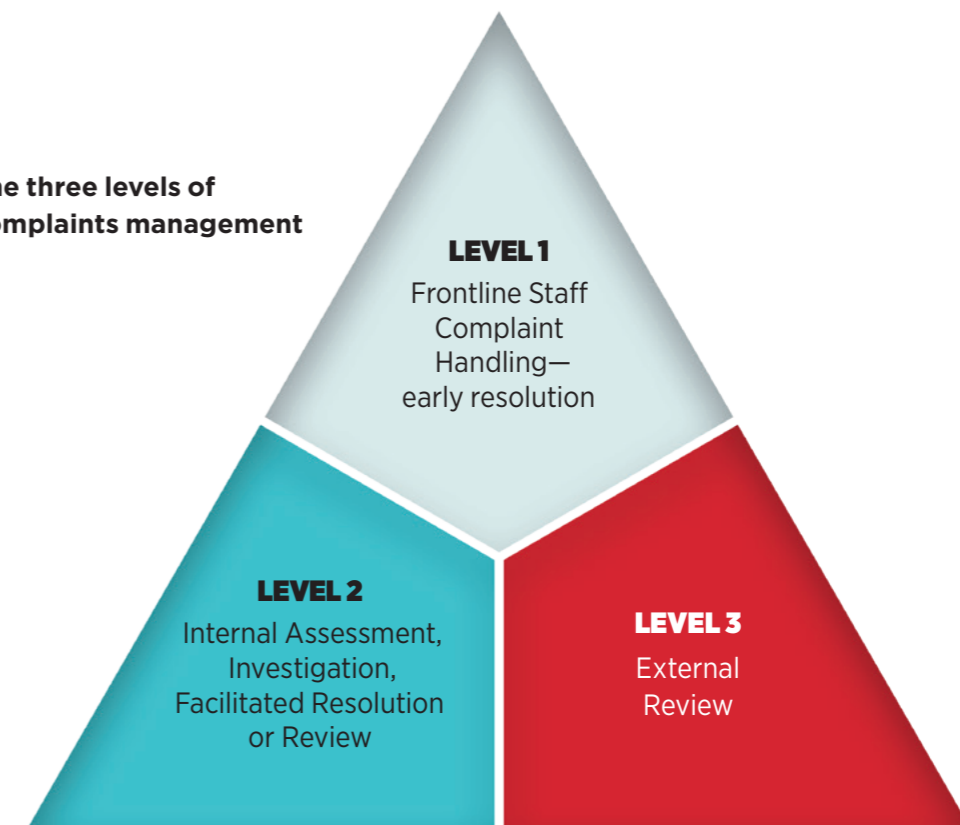
Effective complaints management systems contain a three-tiered approach, two internal levels and one external level of review. The aim is to resolve the majority of complaints at the

frontline level but to have systems in place for matters to be escalated where necessary. This model was developed as part of the AS/NZ 10002:2014 Standard.

Level 1: Frontline Staff Complaint Handling—early resolution

To achieve early resolution, frontline staff must be adequately equipped to respond to complaints, including having the appropriate authority, training, and supervision. Frontline staff also need clear guidance around the type of complaints that they should escalate to senior staff, and complaints which they can deal with directly, including the resolution options available to them.

The three levels of complaints management



Level 2—Internal Assessment, Investigation, Facilitated Resolution or Review

Although frontline staff should be able to resolve many complaints, the seriousness of some complaints or the level of a complainant’s dissatisfaction with how their matter has been handled, may warrant the complaint being handled at a more senior level. The second level should provide an internal assessment which considers issues such as the nature of the matters alleged, the complainant’s desired outcome, and the options available for redress. This would be followed by internal investigation, review, and facilitated resolution.

Some CHP’S may choose to treat complaints primarily through a Level 2 response. In these circumstances, the role of frontline staff in complaints management is to escalate any issue immediately to the **senior staff member** responsible for complaints management.

The CHP’S **Board usually in collaboration with the Chief Executive** have ultimate responsibility for the services it provides. Where CHPs are unable to resolve a complaint at Level 1 or 2 internally, the Board can provide an additional level of review. The Board may investigate a complaint and review the organisation’s response and/or appoint an independent investigator to review the complaint. Note that this does not replace the recommended Level 3 external review below.

Level 3: External Review

Level 3 occurs when external assessment, investigation, or review, can be accessed where internal avenues have not resulted in matters being addressed satisfactorily.

The following agencies have specific roles as Level 3 external avenues:

- SA Civil and Administrative Tribunal (SACAT)—SACAT can hear and determine tenancy matters under the Residential Tenancies Act 1995. It can make legally binding and enforceable decisions on a wide range of tenancy disputes such as rental bond, rent increases, unpaid rent, termination of tenancy agreements, compensation, repairs and other breaches of the residential tenancy agreement.
- Office of Housing Regulation—investigates complaints about the compliance of registered community housing providers with community housing legislation. More information is available in the **NRSCH fact sheets** relating to complaints management.

Levels of complaints management

Ideally complaints should resolve when the complainant is informed of the outcome of the complaint. This is a Level 1 complaint. However, in a small number of cases, the complainant may not be satisfied and the complaint will need to be reviewed internally. This is considered to be a Level 2 complaint. It is useful to identify how many complaints are resolved at Level 1 and Level 2 and how many are escalated beyond these Levels to a formal Level 3 external review. This will allow the organisation to consider how effective complaints management processes are, and take time to ensure that processes and staff training are supporting as many complaints as possible to be resolved at Level 1.

The complaints management process



Complaints management process

Stage	Step	Process and Approach
Receive	Receive complaint/ issues	Receiving a complaint includes assisting complainant, seeking wherever possible early resolution, recording information clearly and communicating next steps clearly. This is the first stage of the Level 1 frontline staff complaints handling early resolution. Assisting people who may need assistance, or are unsure of whether they are making a complaint to communicate their issue and make a complaint. Anonymous complaints can be lodged and require follow-up.
	Clarify what the issues are	All issue types can escalate to a complaint if poorly managed by the frontline officer or the other services within the organisation. Determine if the issue or any part of the issues discussed is: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • a general enquiry • a request for service • a tenancy issue • a complaint • an appeal.
	Register complaint (enquiry or request)	Wherever possible early resolution at first point of contact should be managed. An assessment should be made regarding whether the interaction should be recorded as part of the complaints management system. Register issues as per organisational process. Where a complaint is made formally it should be registered and receive a unique identifier and, at a minimum, record: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • complainant’s contact details • issues raised • outcome sought • any other information required to properly respond to the matter • any support requirements for complainant.

Stage	Step	Process and Approach
Assess	Determine action required	<p>Listen carefully and record all information presented and/or consider any documented evidence provided.</p> <p>Assessing a complaint firstly requires consideration of whether one issue was raised or multiple issues. Where more than one issue is raised the issues need to be separated and dealt with individually. Then the issue needs to be assessed based on criteria such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • severity • complexity • health and safety considerations • likely impact on individual, public and organisation • potential to escalate • the need for immediate action • outcomes sought • determining who or what areas within the organisation need to be involved. <p>Establish if more information is required and explain next steps to the complainant/inquirer.</p> <p>Explain next steps and approximate timeframe and expected date of next action or follow-up if required.</p> <p>Offering a first step in the process is extremely effective in calming the situation. This goodwill is, however, easily eroded if follow-up and good communication is not maintained as agreed.</p>
	Refer	<p>Decide whether the matter should be referred at this stage to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • a supervisor or manager • another section or area within your organisation for action • an external service or authority.

Stage	Step	Process and Approach
Investigate	Level 1 inquiry	<p>When assessment has been made the frontline staff member needs to consider how the issues raised are to be addressed. This may include informal inquiries, formal inquiries or formal investigation into the complaint.</p> <p>A key to effective resolution is to respond to the matter as quickly as possible and tailor response to address the underlying cause of the complaint.</p> <p>Where the matter can be managed at Level 1, the frontline staff member needs to arrange:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communication with other parties involved, including <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – other people involved in the complaint issue – other sections or areas involved with resolving the complaint internally – external bodies where action and/or cooperation is required to resolve the matter – record progress of all actions including joint action plans with internal or external service providers – communicate progress and any delays in progress to complainant at agreed timeframes. • Collection of relevant information and evidence including from complainant to enable effective review and decisions making regarding the matter. • Determine appropriate resolution action <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – apology – redress – explanation. <p>Ensuring complainants are informed about the progress of their complaint can also provide assurance that their complaint is being managed seriously and effectively.</p>
	Level 2 and Level 3— investigation and review	<p>Where the matter needs to be escalated to a Level 2 or 3 complaint, immediately the frontline staff member needs to refer the matter to their supervisor or appropriate manager.</p> <p>Where the matter is escalated because Level 1 has not been successfully resolved, the matter can be referred by the frontline staff or the complainant.</p> <p>Formal investigation or review of the matter can then be undertaken.</p> <p>Inform the complainant if the matter is now being managed elsewhere and who is the contact person.</p>

IMPROVING

Stage	Step	Process and Approach
Resolve	Action plan	<p>To resolve the complaint a clear plan of action should be recorded and include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Steps undertaken to address the complaint. • The outcome of the complaint. • Options if the complainant is dissatisfied with the outcome.
	Action	<p>Communicate plan to complainant—this can be directly or through letter only.</p> <p>Where discussion of the matter occurs, it is important to follow up with a final letter to close the matter formally.</p> <p>The letter to the complainant should include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • actions undertaken by the organisation • outcomes of complaint • reasons for decisions being made • remedies or resolutions that have been offered • other options or remedies available to the complainant such as internal or external review, appeal or complaining to an external authority through the Office of the Housing Regulator or possibly SACAT. <p>When resolved and no further action Complaints Manager or section head Manager to send complaint satisfaction survey to complainant and follow up return.</p> <p>The resolution of complaint will then feed into the reporting system which will allow the organisation to understand the number, type and response to individual complaints as well as any broader patterns and systemic issues which can be improved.</p>

Further Resources

[Appendix 1: Complaints Policy](#); [Appendix 2: Procedure Guide](#); [Appendix 3: Charter for Complaints Management for CHP](#); [Appendix 4: Complaints Management Rights and Responsibilities for Tenants](#); [Appendix 5: Complaints Management Letters](#); [Appendix 9: Removing Barriers Fact Sheet](#); [Appendix 12: Managing Complaint Apology Fact Sheet](#); [Appendix 13: Unreasonable Conduct by Complainants Fact Sheet](#).

ANALYSING COMPLAINTS IMPROVING SYSTEMS AND PROCESS

Guiding Principles

Accountability

Organisations should define clearly roles and responsibilities for managing complaints and the complaints management system.

Continuous Improvement

Organisations should treat complaints, and trends in complaints, as a strategic opportunity for organisational learning and continuous improvement.

Prevention of ongoing disputes

The complaints management system should be developed and implemented to minimise the risk of complaints escalating into ongoing disputes.

Approach

Continuous improvement

Complaints data should be regularly reviewed to identify potential service improvements and areas for staff training. The organisation needs to collect, analyse and report on complaints to ensure that complaints are used to inform organisational learning and continuous improvement. This may include ongoing regular reviews and an annual review.

Reviewing a complaints and appeals system relies on maintaining records such as:

- The number of complaints and appeals.
- The issues complained or appealed about.
- The time taken to resolve complaints.
- The outcomes of complaints and appeals.

Some organisations use integrated risk, assurance and complaints management software to monitor trends in complaints and response times.

Data collection and analysis should be accompanied by regular internal reporting. For instance, some organisations report monthly to their Board to identify trends, ongoing issues and opportunities for service improvement. Internal reporting also ensures there is oversight of the complaints management system. This could be part of a broader rolling internal audit program.

Measurable and reportable benefits of a well-run complaints management system can include:

- Lessons from complaints are used to improve service and reputation.
- Plans for organisational change consider impact on complaints management.
- Staff skill gaps and training needs are identified.

Performance indicators

Organisations should evaluate their policy and procedures against relevant performance indicators that are able to drive organizational review and improvement. Reporting against performance indicators is also part of registration requirements under the NRSCH.

Treating a decrease in complaints as a positive indicator may lead to a reluctance to identify or receive complaints. Alternative indicators should be developed which focus instead on the resolution of complaints and which provide opportunities for organisational improvement.

Tenant satisfaction surveys provide a key opportunity for quality assurance by testing client experience of your complaints management process.

Potential performance indicators include:

- Proportion of complaints resolved within identified timeframes.
- Proportion of complaints satisfactorily resolved.
- Average length of time to resolve complaints.
- Length of time for initial response.
- Trends in the number of complaints in relation to a specific issue, to test effectiveness of resolution.
- Level of tenant satisfaction with complaints procedures.
- Level of tenant awareness of complaints procedures.

External reporting

Reporting externally on how complaints are managed provides an important opportunity to promote your complaints policy and procedure, encourage feedback from tenants and applicants and other users, and celebrate positive outcomes of complaints.

Celebrating positive outcomes of complaints can foster a positive complaints culture, where complaints are seen as opportunities for service improvement and tenants and applicants are confident in exercising their right to complain.

You might consider reporting on complaints management:

- online through your website
- in your annual report
- in regular newsletters or letters to tenants, applicants and neighbours
- by providing formal feedback to your tenant advisory group
- by acknowledging positive complaints resolution or good customer service through staff awards.

Further Resources

Refer to [Appendix 3](#).



APPENDIX 1: COMPLAINTS POLICY

The complaints policy is an important document that will guide and drive the organisation's approach to managing complaints. It should be made publicly available, and it is important that staff are encouraged to be familiar with the document.

This section provides a short description of each of the key elements of a complaints management policy.

Template:

<Logo> Organisational Name

Complaints Management Policy

1. Objective

This policy provides guidance on (organisation's) approach to complaints management in accordance with the requirements of the National Regulatory System for Community Housing.

Our Organisation is committed to the highest standards for good governance and ethical behaviour and wishes to maintain an environment where complaints about our organisational services can be received, managed and reported in a transparent and efficient manner.

2. Scope

This policy applies to (for example):

- tenants and potential tenants
- officers, employees and volunteers
- contractors, suppliers and associates and their employees, and
- members of the public.

3. Responsibilities

(The policy needs to identify key roles and responsibilities for managing complaints. This needs to include identification of who is responsible for a complaint when it is received, who is responsible for ongoing communication with the complainant, and who is responsible for complaints when they are escalated internally. Over page is an example of how this can be structured.)

Role	Responsibilities
Officers	Officers include the Board Directors (and the company secretary of a company or other identified officers such as the Chief Executive). The Board is responsible to establish and maintain policy and a director be required undertake an investigation of a complaint. (May require further detail regarding role of other specified officers).
Chief Executive	Ensuring the policy, procedures, and approach to complaints management is established, monitored and reviewed, including sound promotion of the approach allowing easy accessibility to information to the public. This role is also responsible to appoint a manager who is responsible for ensuring that a clear process is established and staff have access to appropriate training to manage complaints efficiently and in a timely manner. That complaints are recorded, reported and acted upon in a systematic manner.
Manager responsible for complaints management	Establish clear processes for complaints management. Ensure staff are trained and able to receive support and guidance regarding complaints management processes and organisational expectations. Monitor the complaints management system and processes, and report on all complaints received against agreed performance criteria to the governance and leadership team.
Operational Managers	Support staff to manage complaints. Manage Level 2 complaints management processes as required.
Staff Handling Complaints	Follow policy and procedure to manage complaints efficiently and effectively. Refer matters internally (either to appropriate section or to relevant manager) as required to ensure resolution of complaints.

4. Definitions

Term	Definition
Complainant	Person, organisation or representative making a complaint.
Complaint	Expression of dissatisfaction made to or about an organisation, related to its products, services, staff or handling of a complaint.
Disputes	Unresolved complaints escalated internally or externally.
Feedback	Opinions, comments and expressions of interest or concern, made to or about the organisation, its products, services, staff or its handling of a complaint.

5. Policy Principles

This section details the organisation's approach to managing complaints. It should outline the organisation's position on key issues. Examples of the types of topics to be described are listed below, please note this is not exhaustive and inclusions will vary depending on the size, structure and culture of the organisation.

5.1. Visibility and transparency

Describe commitment to ensure that tenants, applicants and other people affected by your service know how they can complain through promotional information, good communication and a culture which encourages openness and transparency.

5.2. Identifying complaints

Describe organisational expectation to listen carefully to customers and the general public to establish whether an issue is actually a complaint. Explain the difference between a general enquiry, request for service, tenancy issue and complaint.

5.3. Accessibility

Describe the expectations of frontline staff to assist people to make a complaint, including how you manage accessibility and language barriers.

5.4. Communication and Responsiveness

Specify expectations about timeliness to acknowledge issues and complaints immediately. Reinforce importance of communication of progress regularly including next action and outcome.

5.5. Resolving complaints

Explain expectations regarding outcome rather than process focus, include importance of referral to other service areas within the organisation. Describe how to refer matters to the management and internal review of complaints as required.

APPENDIX 2: PROCEDURE GUIDE

5.6. Objectivity and fairness

Explain zero tolerance for retribution, adverse consequences or negative communication being directed towards complainant and that due process is followed.

5.7. Managing external appeals

Explain approach of organisation to the referral and monitoring of external appeal processes when they occur.

5.8. Continuous Improvement

Outline the importance of recording all queries, including compliments, all requests for service, all tenancy issues and complaints to track progress and manage issues and complaints. Include information about how data is used to inform continuous improvement within in the organisation.

6. References

Related Frameworks	
Related Procedures	Complaints Management Procedure(s)
Related Documents	Charter for Complaints Management Tenants' Rights and Responsibilities <Organisational guide to complaints management>
Relevant Acts and Regulations	

The following headings are sample headings for your organisation's complaints management procedure. You may need to develop a number of procedures for example you could have a separate procedure for:

- Unreasonable Complaints
- Data Management and Reporting

Below the headings are points and resources which can guide you in developing your organisation's procedure.

Template:

<Logo> Organisational Name

Complaints Management Procedure

1. Introduction

This procedure describes how <Organisation's name> promotes, receives, assesses, manages and resolves complaints.

2. Scope

We take complaints management seriously. Complaints allow us to assist our tenants when they are dissatisfied and importantly to continuously improve our service. This procedure describes the process and expected behaviours we follow in managing complaints.

3. Definitions

Term	Definitions
Appeal	Request for a review of a decision made about a person's housing.
Complainant	Person, organisation or representative making a complaint.
Complaint	Expression of dissatisfaction made to or about an organisation, related to its products, services, staff or handling of a complaint, where a response or resolution is explicitly or implicitly expected or legally required.
Disputes	Unresolved complaints escalated internally or externally.
Enquiry	Request for information or clarification relating to a housing matter or the service.
Feedback	Opinions, comments and expressions of interest or concern, made to or about the organisation, its products, services, staff or its handling of a complaint.
Request for service	Request for a service which is part of the contractual arrangement to be undertaken, including maintenance, asset management and community activities.
Tenancy issue	Issues raised by tenants or other community members about a neighbour's behaviour or neighbourhood.

4. Procedure

Consider the following points when developing the procedure:

4.1. Receiving complaints

Clarify who in your organization has the responsibility for receiving and recording complaints, and how staff should keep records of complaints received, including whether the complaint was verbal or written.

Determine how you will record and respond to complaints received anonymously.

Note that to effectively manage complaints, relevant information must be recorded, including:

- the date the complaint was lodged
- the complainant's contact details
- any special assistance required by the complainant to interact with the CHP (such as an interpreter)
- the product or service the complaint relates to, whether the issue has been raised previously
- whether complainant received a response, and the outcome sought

Include how to offer the services of a tenant advocate and the opportunity to have an advocate present at meetings.

Consider assigning a unique number to each complaint to make it make it easier to track for both complainants and staff.

4.2. Assessing complaints

Initial Assessment and assigning complaint

Explain process to determine if the issue is a complaint, an appeal, a request for service, general enquiry, feedback, a tenancy issue, or a mixture. Explain that part of the complaint may need to be dealt with separately or delegated to the appropriate staff.

Include consideration of whether your organisation has responsibility for addressing the issues raised or whether a referral is needed to another agency such as Local Council, Mental Health Service or Police to manage or assist with the matter.

Describe process to assess the seriousness of the complaint to determine who is best placed to manage it. For example, is it an issue about day-to-day service delivery which can be solved at frontline staff, or does it allege serious breaches that potentially risk reputational harm to the organisation and therefore should be escalated immediately to a more senior manager?

Include processes to manage level of vulnerability or need, literacy and English language skills, levels of family support or networks.

Identify role of staff member to manage and resolve complaint when assigned.

APPENDIX 3: CHARTER FOR COMPLAINTS MANAGEMENT FOR CHP

4.3. Investigate Complaints

Describe options available to investigate and seek resolution of complaint, including collecting relevant information from complainant, other relevant parties including internal service area.

Include timeframes to acknowledge receipt of complaints promptly and how best to respond to the complaint—in person, by telephone, email, letter social media.

Refer to the use of letters to formalise communication process, how to access the templates, expectations regarding use of plain English, who signs letters and timeframes for sending.

Reinforce organisation’s privacy and confidentiality rules.

Internal Investigation of Complaints

Describe how Level 2 investigation occurs including how this is arranged, by whom and the process to be followed. Include process for recording investigation.

4.4. Resolution of complaints

Describe the development of a plan of action.

Describe possible undertakings or actions which could be considered.

Describe communication process.

4.5. Addressing unreasonable conduct by complainants

(If this issue is not included in a separate procedure, note the process here—refer to Appendix 13 for relevant information).

4.6. Record keeping

Include information about the organisational record keeping system and how this needs to provide up to date status of complaints and that this is used to report organisational complaints management performance.

Establish criteria for responding to requests for client records.

This may also include records of how staff training is undertaken.

Complaints reporting process and continuous improvement approach can be described here.

5. References

Related Policy	Complaints Management Policy
Related Documents	Charter for Complaints Management Tenants’ Rights and Responsibilities <Organisational guide to complaints management>
Relevant Acts and Regulations	

This Charter for Complaints Management was developed by the Community Housing Council of SA, the peak body for community housing providers in South Australia. The community housing sector upholds the highest ethical standards and complies with legislative and regulatory requirements to offer the best possible service to community.

This Charter provides a clear statement of sound practice in complaints management and requires that:

- everyone has the right to provide feedback and to complain
- information is made easily available for people to provide feedback and complain
- feedback is an opportunity for improvement
- all complaints are treated seriously with objectivity, fairness and equity
- anyone can receive assistance to make complaints, this may include appropriate access, language or advocacy
- no complainant is adversely affected by making a complaint
- complaints incur no fee
- complaints are responded to in a timely and efficient manner with an intent to resolve issues rather than process routinely
- clear communication is used to inform the complainant of realistic expectations of process, timeframes and outcome
- complainants are provided with ongoing status updates and the outcome of the complaints process
- confidentiality is maintained and personally identifying information will only be disclosed where it is legally required
- staff are appropriately trained to manage complaints
- review of complaints informs ongoing organisational learning and continuous improvement

APPENDIX 4: COMPLAINTS MANAGEMENT RIGHTS AND RESPONSIBILITIES FOR TENANTS

I have the right to:

- make a complaint
- access information so that I understand how to make a complaint
- be listened to and understood
- be treated with respect
- have access to assistance appropriate to my needs and abilities and have access to representation if I choose when making a complaint
- complain free from reprisal or fee, and to have complaints dealt with fairly and promptly
- clear communication about what to expect, the ongoing status of my complaint and the outcome of the complaints process
- have my personal information protected

I have the responsibility to:

- communicate in a respectful manner
- provide clear information and evidence regarding the issues I am raising
- communicate honestly about the issues I am raising
- not cause harm to anyone or property
- listen to the persons assisting with my complaint
- be available for appointments or home visits which I have agreed to
- aim to resolve the issues which I am raising
- inform staff of changes in my circumstances relevant to my complaint
- respect the confidentiality and privacy of others

APPENDIX 5: COMPLAINTS MANAGEMENT LETTERS

Example letters—please amend to suit the matters raised and the individual complaint

Level One: Acknowledgement Letter

<Name>

<Address>

<Date>

Dear <recipient>

Your recent complaint—reference number <0000>

Thank you for your complaint which we received on date and have logged with the above complaint reference number.

We are sorry that you feel you have been given poor service and hope we can resolve your complaint to your satisfaction.

I understand that you are unhappy with <explain your understanding about what the complaint is about based on the information you have>. You would like us to put this right by <explain what the complainant wants to happen to put things right>.

I will be investigating <change to the named person and post if this is different> your complaint and will contact you to discuss the matter further.

Attached is a leaflet which explains our complaints procedure. We aim to resolve a complaint within <XX> working days. However, sometimes it can take a little longer. I <or named contact> will keep in touch with you to let you know how your case is progressing.

Yours sincerely

<Relevant Manager Name>

<Relevant Manager Job Title>

Level One: Closure Letter

There should be only one letter to deal with all the issues, regardless of how many different things are being complained about.

<Name>
<Address>

<Date>

Dear <recipient>

Your recent complaint—reference number <0000>

Thank you for taking the time to tell us about your complaint. We are committed to improving our services and therefore fully investigate all complaints that we receive.

After reviewing what you have told us, my understanding of your complaint is as follows:
<Insert bullet points itemising each aspect you will cover in the main body of this reply, i.e. **the nature of the complaint**, including what the complainant is seeking by way of redress.>

-
-

<Then answer and address in sufficient detail each aspect of the complaint listed above, i.e. **what you have done to investigate the complaint and what your findings are**. Bullet format is not recommended for this.>

I have taken/I plan to take <delete as appropriate> the following action in order to resolve your complaint <insert bullet point for each action undertaken, if appropriate>:

- insert apology
- insert any lessons from the complaint, e.g. how you are now doing things differently to prevent the situation reoccurring.

This concludes our complaints process. If you feel that I have not resolved your complaint to your satisfaction, please let me know why and provide any additional information you may have. I will either investigate further or refer your information to the appropriate party.

Yours sincerely

<Relevant Manager Name>
<Relevant Manager Job Title>

Level Two: Acknowledgement Letter

<Name>
<Address>

<Date>

Dear <recipient>

Your recent complaint—reference number <0000>

I understand you are not satisfied with the response you have received about your complaint. I have therefore referred your complaint to the <state name and position> for review as part of the second level of our complaints process. I am sorry that we have not been able to resolve your complaint and hope that we can do so now.

I understand that you are not happy <explain the reason for the complainant still being unhappy>. <Name> will investigate your complaint further and will contact you personally as part of the process.

We aim to review and, where possible, resolve your complaint within <XX> working days but sometimes it may take a little longer. <Named person> will keep in touch with you and let you know if this is the case.

I have attached a copy of our complaints leaflet and you can find more information about our complaints process at website link.

Yours sincerely

<Relevant Manager Name>
<Relevant Manager Job Title>

Level Two: Response Letter

<Name>

<Address>

<Date>

Dear <recipient>

Your recent complaint—reference number <0000>

Thank you for taking the time to tell us about your complaint. <Name of organisation> is committed to investigating customer complaints and to improving services for our customers. I have carried out a review of your complaint and the decision made in respect of your complaint, dated <00-00-0000>.

My understanding of your original complaint is as follows: <Include the original complaint and why the complainant was unhappy with the level one response. Itemise each point to be covered in the reply.>

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

Following my review of your complaint and our Level One response I consider that: <Address each reason for requesting a review in sufficient detail. If appropriate, also address any relevant additional points to the original complaint.>

<Clearly state here what actions you propose to take, or have taken, and include an apology if appropriate, as well as learning points. Also identify any requested actions that you will not be taking and a reason why, if necessary.>

This concludes my review of your complaint. If you feel that your complaint has not been fully addressed, or that it has not been dealt with to your satisfaction, you may have the right to contact <include an external body>, who will try and help to resolve your complaint. If you would like more information on how to do this, please let me know.

Yours sincerely

<Relevant Manager Name>

<Relevant Manager Job Title>

APPENDIX 6: STAFF DEVELOPMENT

Complaints management in social housing is a complex, challenging, time consuming, and at times confronting task. It is therefore critical that staff responsible for this task receive adequate training and that the culture of the organisation supports good complaints management.

Section 6.4.5 of the Standard (AS/NZS10002:2014) states that all staff who handle complaints should be appropriately trained in complaints management and the implementation of complaints management procedures relevant to their role, including specific training on receiving and resolving complaints from disadvantaged and vulnerable people.

Dedicating appropriately trained staff to this area of a CHP's business can significantly save time and reduce staff stress. Training in best practice decision making can improve decision making procedures and overall housing

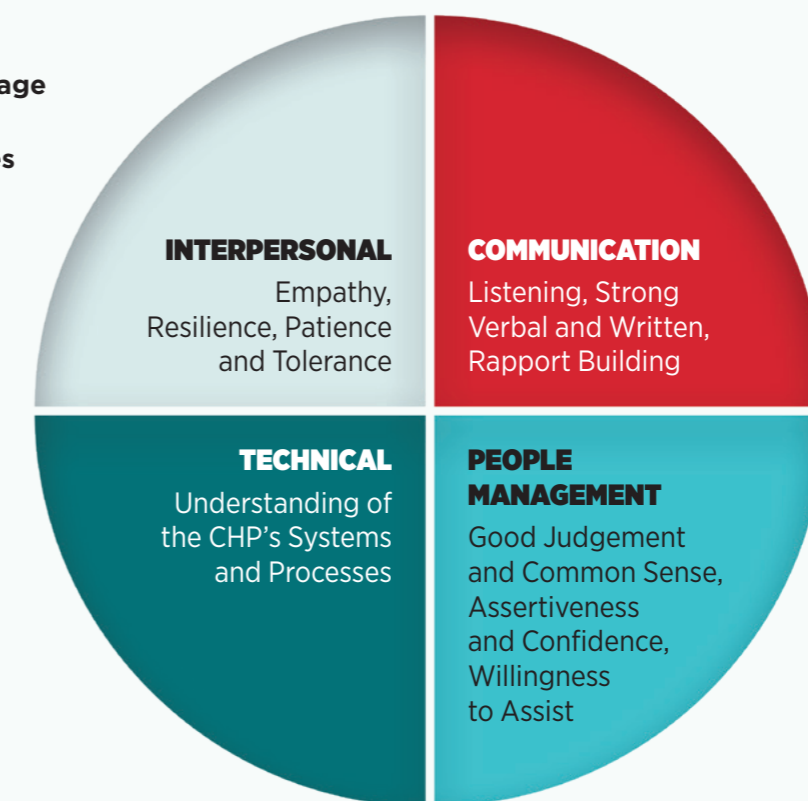
management practices, in effect improving services generally and reducing the need for clients to make complaints. A level of training in complaints management is desirable for all staff, since complaints can be received through many channels.

Skills

A staff member who may receive a complaint needs to be well trained in dealing with clients, issues, and procedures. They also need to be continually refreshing their knowledge and understanding of complaints handling policies and procedures.

Appendix F of the Standard states that staff also need to be empowered with correct level of authority to determine and implement the best course of action.

To effectively manage complaints, the following attributes are desirable:



APPENDIX 7: DATA COLLECTION AND PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT

Knowledge

Knowledge in the following areas is recommended for staff involved in complaints management:

- Negotiation techniques
- Procedural fairness
- Language and cultural differences which may affect the complaint process
- Mental distress and its effect on behaviour
- Power imbalance and its effect on negotiations
- Referral options, pathways and process alternatives

Staff development checklist

Has your organisation included:	Tick
Complaints management policy and procedure in staff induction training?	
Clarified which issues are handled at the frontline, which need to be escalated to senior staff, and what authority staff have in resolving complaints?	
Training in how to remove barriers to support people to complain?	
Support and train staff to de-escalate issues so they can be resolved at the frontline?	
Resourcing and support to allow staff to manage and resolve complaints?	
Educated your maintenance and other relevant contractors about your organisation's complaints management policy and procedure and their role in managing complaints?	
Provision of training in best practice decision making to housing management, rent review, property management and other relevant staff to proactively improve housing management services?	
Setting up a system for identifying training needs among staff who undertake complaints management activities?	
Ensuring all staff know how to record complaints and document relevant feedback and issues, and that relevant staff have systems in place to analyse and act on this data to inform continuous improvement?	

Data collection regarding complaints management is an important component of data collection for CHP organisations because it provides valuable information. Data collection can include both subjective and objective information.

- Individual complaints data which allows the provider to retain an accurate record of the complaint, evidence, action and resolution. This information can track progress, timeframes and persons involved in the complaint and persons assisting to resolve the complaint. The information is also useful to assist in complaints which are reviewed, appealed or escalated beyond the organisation.
- Consolidated data which tracks the overall information providing actual numbers, trends in management against targets, timeframes, escalation rates, as well as types of complaints and other characteristics which provide the organisation with useful feedback. This consolidated data can include subjective information such as rates of satisfaction of complainants in the process. This data provides the organisation with information to establish learnings, identify areas for improvement and forms a valuable impetus for continuous improvement.
- Effective management of complaints is a regulatory requirement for CHPs. Collection of accurate, well organised data which can be easily consolidated allows easier reporting of this information. Coherent consolidated data can also be used by CHPs to share performance externally via Annual Reports, website or other publicly available sources.

The examples provided in this framework are based on the work developed by the Community Housing Industry Association NSW and the UK Housing Quality Network. There is an example of a consolidated data tool and an example of performance management. Refer to links on the CHCSA website for the examples of data collection and performance management Excel documents.

The first example provides a reporting structure to record complaints received against a range of metrics. This can be modified to meet specific organizational information requirements. Part of this data collection set includes summary information regarding satisfaction based on a survey sent to complainants when the complaints matter has been finalised. The report provides summary graphs on linked worksheets. Conditional formatting can be added if required by organisation to identify performance against targets which are established by the organisation. Ideally the data collected for this reporting tool should link and directly populate the report but a manual approach is appropriate especially where the number of complaints are small. Where a manual approach is adopted one person should be nominated to be responsible for completion and review of this task.

The second example provides a performance against complaints standards toolkit. This document is a very comprehensive set of 12 standards which each have multiple action areas. Each action area has a corresponding section for completion on evidence, improvements identified and progress to date options. This toolkit is designed to assist providers to identify whether systems and processes are in place and working effectively. The scoring against progress to date is linked to a graphing feature. This document is a useful internal tool for planning, development and governance purposes.

APPENDIX 8: SMALL ORGANISATIONS FACT SHEET

Small organisations are less likely to receive many complaints and are unlikely to have the staff resources to establish a comprehensive complaints management system, according to the Standard Guidelines for Complaints Management in Organisations (AS/NZS 10002:2014).

Fact Sheet

Managing complaints is, however, an essential component of effective governance and practice. To streamline implementation and manage complaints with ease it is useful for the senior officer(s) to build on the experience of other organisations and to include the following into complaints practice.

1. **Welcome complaints**—using existing information avenues to advise people that they are welcome to complain, such as a simple sign in your office, a brief statement on correspondence such as invoices, include as part of initial meeting and information issued to applicants.
2. **Develop a clear process**—use a simple flow chart to assist staff to follow complaints processes.
 - a. Receive
 - b. Assess
 - c. Manage
 - d. Resolve
3. **Staff awareness**—ensure staff are aware that all complaints are welcome and that there is a clear process to follow which includes:
 - a. Clear acknowledgement of complaint and ongoing communication with complainant.
 - b. How to manage expectations for complainant.
 - c. Ensuring complaints are resolved at the lowest possible level.
 - d. When to escalate to higher level internally or externally to organisation.
 - e. How to register the complaint and record progress.
 - f. Inform the complainant of resolution.
4. **Review complaint data**—by maintaining accurate records your organisation will be able to easily review what complaints have been received, check for any trends or patterns, make logical adjustments to systems and report on complaints performance to the regulator. Reviews can be scheduled on once or twice per annum basis.

APPENDIX 9:

REMOVING BARRIERS FACT SHEET

Barriers to making a complaint

Many people feel uncomfortable or have difficulty making complaints and this is particularly so where a dissatisfied client may feel disempowered. Tenants, applicants and others can face significant barriers to raising issues or making a complaint. It can be difficult and intimidating for anyone to make a complaint, and this can be intensified for people living with disability, living in a regional or remote area, being aged, coming from a linguistically or culturally diverse background or having life experiences which inhibit their ability or faith in the system to complain.

Barriers to making a complaint might include:

- Tenants may be afraid or concerned they could be evicted.
- Applicants may be concerned that their place on the waiting list will be affected by making a complaint.
- Tenants and applicants may not want to appear critical.
- Tenants and applicants may face language or cultural barriers, or be living with disability, making it harder to fill out forms, raise an issue over the phone or have the confidence to complain.
- Online forms can be too complicated for some people to use; online forms also rely on literacy and computer skills as well as internet access.
- Staff may fail to identify an issue as a complaint and manage it appropriately, and/or the CHP's systems for identifying and diagnosing complaints may need improvement.

Lowering barriers

There are a number of actions that CHPs can take to lower barriers for tenants, applicants and other stakeholders to make a complaint. CHPs should consider the following elements of an accessible complaints system.

Does your organisation's approach to complaints management:

- Encourage feedback from tenants and applicants, whether positive or negative?
- Allow complaints to be made over the phone?
- Allow complaints to be made in writing?
- Provide access to a translating and interpreting service for non-English speakers?
- Allow complaints to be made online, through your website and social media pages?
- Ensure that anyone in the organisation has the capacity to receive a complaint?
- Allow people to make a complaint anonymously if they wish?
- Enable people to use an advocate to help or represent them in the complaint process?

We all have a legal obligation to ensure that everyone is able to access services fully, including having the right to complain. Complaints should be made available through multiple channels, minimising the potential for cultural, linguistic or technology literacy barriers.

To make your organisation accessible there are both practical and cultural things you can do.

1. Welcome complaints through your promotion and through your culture. Steps should be taken to reduce the potential for, or perception of, intimidation. (For instance, by ensuring that people can make their complaint to anyone in the organisation.) This relies on staff training to ensure that everyone in the organisation has the capacity and capability to receive a complaint.
2. Be curious.
 - a. Always listen and take the time to understand what is being said. Sometimes people will make statements which may not appear to be a complaint but actually are. Such as, "My housing officer is so cranky at the moment". Alternatively, sometimes they may say they are making a complaint and they are actually asking something different. Such as, "I want to make a formal complaint about the hard rubbish that spilled over my path from next door."
 - b. Always ask what is needed and how best to achieve this. This may include when it is suitable, how best to communicate and whether someone else such as an interpreter or advocate is required.
 - c. Always consider what is possible and seek ways to solve the problem rather than just following the process. This may include being flexible about how a person can make a complaint where a standard practice does not work.
 - d. Help people to navigate the system.
3. Provide information and support in ways which best meet your tenants' needs, including:
 - a. Offering information in a range of ways:
 - i. Large print
 - ii. Simple English
 - iii. Language other than English
 - iv. Audio or braille
 - b. Meeting your community's communication needs:
 - i. accessing an AUSLAN interpreter
 - ii. Using the Telephone Interpreter Service
 - iii. Accepting a complaint from a carer/third party
 - iv. Using Teams, Zoom or other virtual options
 - v. Organise National Relay Service (NRS) assistance

CHPs can help lower barriers for complainants by promoting access to advocates who can assist the complainant with the complaint process.

Relevant advocacy organisations include:

- [Disability Advocacy](#)
- [ARAS \(Aged Rights Advocacy Service Inc.\)](#)
- [RentRight SA](#)

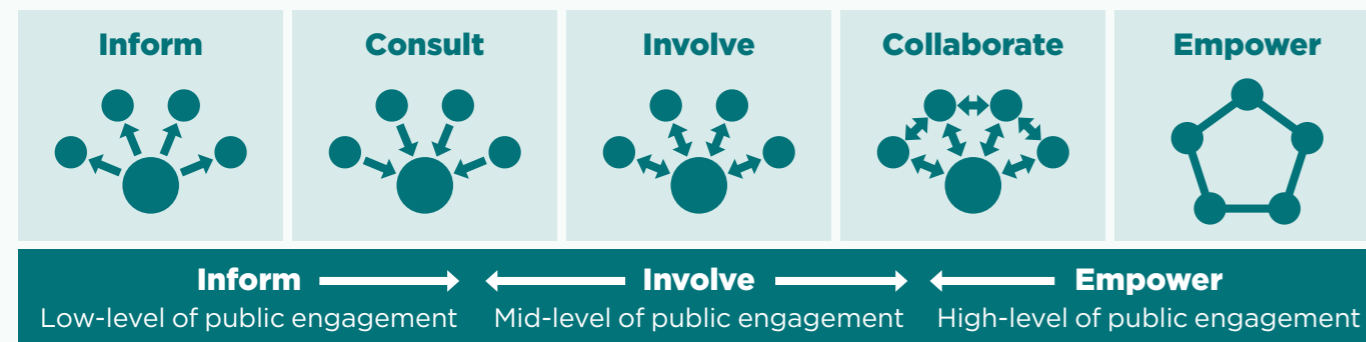
The following Acts apply in South Australia:

- Equal Opportunity Act 1984 (SA)
- Public Interest Disclosure Act 2018 (SA)
- Racial Vilification Act 1996 (SA)
- Australian Human Rights Commission Act 1986 (Cth)
- Racial Discrimination Act 1975 (Cth)
- Disability Discrimination Act 1992 (Cth)
- Sex Discrimination Act 1984 (Cth)
- Age Discrimination Act 2004 (Cth)
- Fair Work Act 2009 (Cth)

APPENDIX 10: STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT FACT SHEET

Approaches to consultation should be designed to foster clear communication channels and engagement with stakeholders. Best practice and widely recognized principles and values for stakeholder engagement have been developed by the International Association for Public Participation (IAP2).

A widely used tool for considering appropriate engagement approaches is IAP2's Public Participation Spectrum, an internationally recognised standard for approaches to management. The spectrum outlines five levels of engagement: Inform, Consult, Involve, Collaborate and Empower.



A good practice approach to complaints management will engage stakeholders on the first three levels of the spectrum.

Level	Inform	Consult	Involve
Participation objective	To provide stakeholders with balanced and objective information to assist them in understanding the problem, alternatives, opportunities and solutions.	To obtain stakeholder feedback on analysis, alternatives and decisions.	To work directly with stakeholders throughout the process to ensure that stakeholder concern and aspirations are understood and considered.
Stakeholder groups	Tenants, applicants and neighbours.	Tenants, potentially through tenant advisory group or tenant committee.	Operational and management staff. Tenants, potentially through tenant advisory group or tenant committee.

The spectrum can be used to define the role of stakeholders in the consultation, and to define the level of influence that stakeholders will have on the outcomes.

Engagement principles

The following principles are a guide to help inform approaches to stakeholder engagement. A good practice approach to engagement will consider the following:

- There should be agreement in advance about the purpose, expectations and intended outcomes of the engagement.
- Participants should be aware of what they can and cannot influence.
- Information should be provided to inform participants' inputs. The quality of participation is highly dependent on the quality and timing of information provided.
- Targeted communications should provide information and promote participation. A variety of engagement techniques should be used to maximise visibility, accessibility and opportunities to participate.
- Engagement mechanisms should maximise people's ability to participate. Whenever possible, stakeholders should be engaged early in the process, rather than just to comment on a finalised policy.
- Adequate time, team support and resources should be made available to support the engagement process.
- Participants should be aware of how their inputs will be used and given feedback on outcomes.

Involving tenants

A valuable approach to working with tenants is through existing tenant advisory groups or committees, to discuss the development, review and improvement of complaints handling policy and procedures.

A tenant advisory group can be formed to guide the establishment of key performance indicators and benchmarks. Reporting regularly to tenants on complaints management performance also increases visibility and transparency of the complaints management process.

APPENDIX 11: PROMOTING YOUR COMPLAINTS POLICY FACT SHEET

Promoting your complaints policy is important to ensure tenants, applicants and other community members are aware of the process for making a complaint. This assists in lowering real or perceived barriers to making a complaint.

Promoting the complaints policy also allows an organisation to set expectations around what complainants can reasonably expect you to address, and issues that should be referred elsewhere.

Tenants and applicants should be informed of their right to complain about their housing services, and the process for doing so, during the application process, at the start of their tenancy and throughout a tenancy. Applicants should be referred to Advice and Advocacy Services for support where necessary.

The Office of Housing Regulator monitors how CHPs make information on complaints and appeals readily available to tenants.

Your organisation could consider:

- Inclusion of information about complaints in regular newsletters.
- Provision of brochures or information booklets on complaints management.
- Display of posters in your offices.
- Ensuring information about your complaints policy and process can be easily accessed on your website.
- Provision of information on your complaints policy available in appropriate languages.
- Housing Officers to discuss with new and existing tenants.

Organisations may prefer to promote their complaints policy as 'feedback' or 'complaints and compliments' to show that they are willing to receive feedback of all types.

The following checklist identifies some of the key issues and processes that should be promoted to tenants, applicants and other stakeholders.

Workshop write-up	
Framework and toolkit development	
Framework and toolkit development	
Framework and toolkit development	
CHP second workshop	
Framework and toolkit development	
CHP tenants second focus group	
Workshop write up	
On leave	
Framework and toolkit development	

APPENDIX 12: MANAGING COMPLAINT APOLOGY FACT SHEET

Why apologise?

Many complainants demand no more than to be listened to, understood, respected and, where appropriate, provided with an explanation and apology. An apology which is sincere and timely can often resolve the issue or complaint, avoiding escalation of a dispute and the significant associated time and resource costs.

Wording an apology

The most appropriate form and method of communication of an apology will depend on the circumstances of the particular case, the harm suffered, and what is hoped to be achieved by giving the apology (for example restoration of reputation, acknowledgement of the wrong done, reconciliation or an assurance that a problem has been addressed or will not recur).

The most effective apologies incorporate the following ten elements which can be grouped under the six headings—recognition, responsibility, reasons, regret, redress and release.^{3,4}

Recognition

- **Description of the wrong**—a description of the relevant problem, act or omission (the wrong) to which the apology applies.
- **Recognition of the wrong**—an explicit recognition that the action or inaction was incorrect, wrong, inappropriate, unreasonable, harmful, etc.
- **Acknowledgement of the harm**—an acknowledgement that the affected person has suffered embarrassment, hurt, pain, damage or loss.

Responsibility

- **Acceptance of responsibility**—an acknowledgement/admission of responsibility for the wrong and harm caused.

Reasons

- **Explanation of the cause**—a simple, plain English explanation of the reasons for or cause of the problem,⁵ or a promise to investigate the cause (which could include a reference to any mitigating circumstances, e.g. whether the act or omission was not discretionary or was unintentional).

3. NSW Ombudsman <https://www.ombo.nsw.gov.au/news-and-publications/publications/fact-sheets/state-and-local-government/apologies/apologies>

4. Australian and New Zealand Standard Guidelines for Complaint Management in Organisations (AS/NZS 10002:2014)

5. Complaint Management Framework, NSW Ombudsman, June 2015

APPENDIX 13: UNREASONABLE CONDUCT BY COMPLAINANTS FACT SHEET

Regret

- **Apology**—an expression of sincere sorrow or remorse, e.g. that the action or inaction was wrong or at the very least an expression of regret.
- **Sincerity of communication**—a form or means of communication of an apology is very important as such matters can indicate or emphasise the level of sincerity of the apologise.

Redress

- **Redress includes action taken or proposed**—a statement of the action taken or specific steps proposed to address the grievance or problem, by mitigating the harm or offering restitution or compensation.⁶

Complaint redress options

Communication with the complainant, either verbally or in writing, which may include:

- Explaining why the problem occurred
- Giving reasons for decisions
- Apologising
- Reaching agreement with the complainant through mediation or other resolution approaches.

Rectification of the problem, which could include:

- Stopping an action that should not have been started or cancelling an intended action.
- Changes to processes or services to ensure the problem does not happen again.
- Ensuring compliance with obligations.
- Correcting records.

Mitigation to reduce adverse consequences, which could include:

- Providing assistance and support.
- Refunding fees or charges.
- Waiving fees or debts.

Satisfaction of the concerns of the complainant, such as by:

- Publicly acknowledging the mistake
- Committing to improving systems, procedures or practices
- Taking disciplinary action.

Compensation, including reimbursement of funds or a goodwill gift for the worry or distress caused to the complainant.

Release

- **Request for forgiveness**—a release from blame (an optional element).

Most complainants act reasonably and responsibly in their interactions even when they are experiencing high levels of distress, frustration, and anger about their complaint.

However unacceptable behaviour does occur in a very small number of cases and can include:

- being aggressive and verbally abusive
- threatening harm and violence or bombard of offices
- making inappropriate demands on staff time and resources
- a refusal to accept decisions and recommendations in relation to their complaints

Unreasonable conduct by a complainant is any behaviour by a current or former complainant which, because of its nature or frequency raises substantial health, safety, resource or equity issues for the organisation, staff, other service users and complainants or the complainant themselves.

It is important to note that the unreasonable conduct is about the behaviour rather than the person and does not preclude any valid issues raised being addressed by the organisation.

The types of unreasonable conduct and strategies to manage can include:

- **Unreasonable persistence**—which is continued, incessant conduct that has a disproportionate and unreasonable impact on staff or resources. Examples include multiple and repeated phone calls, visits, letters, emails; unwillingness or inability to accept reasonable and logical explanations; pursuing ongoing reviews or seeking different people within or outside our organisation in an attempt to get a different outcome.

Strategies

Say “no”, be prepared to advise that a complaint will not be investigated further, an unproductive telephone call will be terminated, only one internal review will be undertaken, or no further correspondence on the complaint will be answered. The complainant may need to be told that they have reached the end of the line.

6. National Regulatory System—Community Housing, Complaint Handling Fact Sheet, Information for Community Housing Providers, November 2018

- **Unreasonable demands**—are expressly made by a complainant that have a disproportionate and unreasonable impact on staff or resources. Examples include insisting on talking to a senior manager when this is not appropriate or warranted because the matter has been carefully explained to the complainant; instructing how the complaint should be handled and the level of priority required; emotionally blackmailing staff, intimidating or harassing staff; insisting on outcomes which are not appropriate for the situation such as asking for someone to be fired or prosecuted.

Strategies

Establishing limits, for example, which issues will be investigated, who will investigate the complaint, how it will be investigated, the possible outcomes, and how communication should occur between the complainant and the organisation.

- **Unreasonable lack of cooperation**—when a complainant is unwilling or unable to cooperate, resulting in a disproportionate and unreasonable use of resources. Examples include refusing to follow or accept our instructions; constantly sending poorly defined, disorganised or irrelevant information; alternatively withholding or providing too little information to manage the complaint.

Strategies

Setting conditions—for example, the complainant should be informed that they are required to define the complaint issue, identify supporting evidence, provide key correspondence or documents, be truthful in dealing with the agency, or explore some other avenue before the complaint will be investigated.

- **Unreasonable arguments**—include any arguments that are not based on any reason or logic, that are incomprehensible, false, or inflammatory, trivial, or delirious, and that disproportionately and unreasonably impact upon staff or resources. Examples include providing arguments which are not able to be sequenced, conspiratorial, misleading; contradictory or defamatory.

Strategies

Identify arguments and set aside. Limits should be placed on what the organisation will examine and the style of communication that is expected. If it becomes clear the complaint is groundless, it should be declined.

- **Unreasonable behaviours**—is conduct that is unreasonable in all circumstances because it unreasonably compromises the health, safety and security of staff, service users or the complainant themselves. Examples include aggression or physical violence, verbal abuse or threatening correspondence including derogatory, racist, or grossly defamatory remarks; threats of harm against self, staff or others with a weapon, bomb or other offensive device.

Strategies

Zero tolerance, a complainant can be told that communication will be terminated unless more moderate language is used, that threats are unacceptable and may be reported to the police, special contact arrangements with the complainant will be implemented to prevent or limit access to staff or others.

Controlling Contact

In some circumstances, senior management can decide that it is necessary to limit a complainant's access to the organisation. In this instance advice should be provided in writing, along with options for reviewing its appropriateness.

The restrictions can include:

- when a person can make contact
- who they can contact
- how to make contact.

A final step is to refuse access to a person or evict them—for example, where the person has made serious threats or been violent to staff or other clients, committed criminal acts on the property. Where the tenancy contract is clear about expectations of tenants their behaviour to people, property and conduct within the law, this will assist in these situations.

If possible and appropriate, alternative contact arrangements should be put into place, such as contact via an advocate or nominee for the complainant.

Providing a referral for professional support from a psychiatrist or social work service can also be considered.

As part of the risk management plan for the organisation, critical incident debriefing and stress management options to support staff should be accessible.

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