Ombudsman
New South Wales

Principle 2: Information and accessibility

What does information and accessibility mean

Our organisation will:

- make it easy for you to make a complaint
- help you if you need assistance to lodge a complaint
- have easy-to-access information about our complaint processes in different formats and mediums, including:
  - how to complain, for example, online, email, in person or in writing
  - what to expect from the process, for example, next steps and timeframes
  - who to contact for more information, and
  - examples of how complaints have helped improve our services.

Why information and accessibility matter

Accessibility is the extent to which a service or program is available to as many people as possible, when they need it. An accessible organisation encourages people to voice their concerns about their services and programs, reassuring them they will not be disadvantaged or face detrimental action for lodging a complaint. They will also proactively assist people who need help to lodge a complaint.

NSW and Commonwealth laws promote accessibility and fairness. Discrimination laws make it unlawful to discriminate against a person based on their disability, race, sex, gender, marital status, age and sexual orientation. This includes the failure to make 'reasonable adjustments' to accommodate a person with disability.

How to show your organisation is accessible

Publicly available information

Your organisation should provide publicly available information about the ways complaints can be made, and the support that is available. Provide clear and simple information about your complaint management processes so people can easily engage and participate in your complaints process, including:

- what complaints you can and cannot respond to
- how and where complaints may be made
- the timeframes to acknowledge and respond to a complaint
- the assistance available for complainants who need it
- what complainants can expect from the process
- what information you need from complainants to assess their complaints, and
- internal and external review options.

Publish this information on your organisation's website.

Recognising barriers

Be aware that there are personal, cultural and structural barriers that may prevent people from making a complaint. Support your frontline staff to genuinely understand these barriers and develop strategies to support people with a range of needs to access your complaints process.

People who are experiencing distressing circumstances or have diverse needs may be reluctant to complain because of their past adverse experiences with government agencies or service providers. They may fear detrimental action is taken against them if they make a complaint.

Groups within our community that may need additional information and support to make a complaint include:

- people with disability
- people with mental illness
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people
- people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds
- people living in remote or regional communities
- children and young people
- older people
- people experiencing social or economic disadvantage, and
- people who have experienced trauma directly or indirectly, for example, through intergenerational trauma.

Train your staff to proactively ask all people accessing your services if they need assistance with the complaint process. Offer assistance as part of routine practice. If a support person is involved, ask them what the complainant's preferred method of contact and communication is.

Flexible and multiple complaint channels

To include all people, provide multiple and flexible methods for making a complaint, including:

- in person
- over the phone
- via email, text message, letter or online complaint form
- via social media, including Facebook and X (formerly Twitter)
- through authorised representatives, including family, friends, Members of Parliament, legal representatives, advocates and Aboriginal liaison officers, and
- anonymously.

Social media is a powerful tool that allows the NSW Government to connect with customers and communities in an immediate, familiar and accessible way. To use it effectively, you will need to regularly monitor your organisation's social media accounts.

Integrate social media complaint channels with your existing formal complaint channels for a more effective process. Make sure that you manage all channels in a single complaint management system.

Using social media is more cost effective and can improve complainant outcomes by:

- increasing transparency
- increasing complainant trust, and
- reducing negative word-of-mouth feedback.

Providing information in a range of formats

Make your complaint management processes more accessible by:

- ensuring digital content meets the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) 2.1 to Level AA standards
- providing a toll-free phone number
- providing information about how to use a teletypewriter (TTY) and the National Relay Service (NRS) for people who have speech or hearing impairment
- enabling access to interpreting and translating services such as the Translating and Interpreter Service (TIS) or allowing a person to bring a support person who can translate for them
- offering information in alternative formats including large print, resizing option for those with screen readers, braille, audio or graphic formats and sign language (AUSLAN)
- linking to online translation and text format readjustment tools on your website home page, and
- printing and distributing hard copy posters or information sheets in community languages, plain English and accessible formats.

Case example

Complaint

Lewis called a transport organisation about a complaint he had made over a month earlier about a bus driver who had been rude to him and several other passengers.

Jonathan answered the call and determined that Lewis's original complaint was made by telephone, but his colleague had asked Lewis to submit the complaint in writing. He explained this to Lewis who advised he finds it difficult to write, and he has no access to a computer.

Jonathan explained to Lewis that he could either tell him about the issue over the telephone and he would document it and then read it back for accuracy, or Lewis could visit one of the organisation's offices and speak to a colleague who would document the conversation and provide follow up. Lewis decided to visit an office with a support person. Jonathan asked Lewis where he lived and provided 3 options of the nearest offices.

When Lewis came in the following week, the interview took place in an office with enough chairs to accommodate Lewis, his support person, and the complaint officer, Kat. Kat met with Lewis and recorded the supporting information for his complaint. She read it back, checked with Lewis that it was correct and then gave Lewis a copy for his records. She explained the next steps in the process and provided her contact details to Lewis. Lewis said he would like updates via telephone.

Kat followed up on Lewis's complaint and called Lewis with updates.

Analysis

Jonathan provided options that made it easy for Lewis to lodge his complaint. He listened to Lewis's accessibility needs. His solutions incorporated a choice of 2 channels of communication for managing the complaint – on the phone or in person. He then allowed Lewis to choose the one that best suited him.

Before Lewis's appointment at the office, staff made sure suitable facilities were available to accommodate Lewis and his support person. Kat, the complaint officer, considered Lewis's barriers to making a complaint (that is, having to write), listened to his concerns and documented the information to present to Lewis. She read it back to him to ensure all the concerns raised were recorded and provided Lewis with a copy of the complaint.

Kat kept Lewis informed about the process and course of action to deal with the complaint, including the next steps, timeframes and a contact point – making Lewis feel heard and involved in the process.

Additional resources

- NSW Ombudsman, Effective Complaint Management Guidelines, 2024
- NSW Ombudsman, 6 Principles for Effective Complaint Management Information Sheet 1. Respectful treatment, 2024
- NSW Ombudsman, 6 Principles for Effective Complaint Management Information Sheet 3. Communication, 2024
- NSW Ombudsman, 6 Principles for Effective Complaint Management Information Sheet 4. Taking ownership, 2024
- NSW Ombudsman, 6 Principles for Effective Complaint Management Information Sheet 5. Timeliness, 2024
- NSW Ombudsman, 6 Principles for Effective Complaint Management Information Sheet 6. Transparency, 2024
- Standards Australia, *Guidelines for Complaint Management in Organizations* (AS 10002:2022), 2022
- W3C, Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) 2.1, Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) 2.1
- Anti-Discrimination NSW: https://antidiscrimination.nsw.gov.au
- National Relay Service: www.accesshub.gov.au/about-the-nrs
- Translating and Interpreting Service: www.tisnational.gov.au/en
- Advocacy: www.ideas.org.au
- AUSLAN interpreter: Home – Deaf Connect https://deafconnect.org.au/services/interpreting

Contact details

Level 24
580 George Street
Sydney NSW 2000

Toll free (outside Sydney metro)
1800 451 524

Email info@ombo.nsw.gov.au

Web www.ombo.nsw.gov.au

National Relay Service 133 677

Telephone Interpreter Service (TIS)
131 450
We can arrange an interpreter
through TIS or you can contact
TIS yourself before speaking to us.