

# Principle 4: Taking ownership



## What taking ownership means

Our organisation will:

- make sure frontline staff who manage your complaint are appropriately trained and skilled
- have one person (or one team) responsible for managing your complaint and giving you their contact details
- generally, have our frontline staff resolve your complaint themselves, and escalate serious or complex complaints to a more appropriate officer or team, and
- inform you if your complaint is transferred to another person or team.

## Why taking ownership matters

People want a dedicated, easily contactable person or team to take ownership of their complaint. If they are transferred, put on hold or required to repeat details of their complaint, they may become frustrated or angry, and the complaint may escalate. Taking end-to-end ownership for the complaint provides consistency that helps build trust with the complainant. It can also provide increased job satisfaction for your frontline staff.

## How to take ownership

Generally, frontline staff will resolve or finalise most complaints. A complaint should be assigned to one person (or team) and their contact details provided to the complainant. The assigned case officer is responsible for communicating with the complainant to provide updates, answer questions and explain the outcome. If the complaint needs to be escalated, the new case officer should review complaint records to minimise the need for the complainant to repeat the details of their complaint.



## Referral to other agencies

If you need to refer a complainant somewhere else, explain why your organisation cannot deal with it and ask the complainant if they would like your help to find who can best assist them. You could:

- request the person's permission to forward their complaint to the most suitable organisation – known as a 'warm referral'
- identify the most suitable organisation and provide contact information to the complainant, or
- invite the complainant to contact you again if they cannot find or access another organisation.



## Staff training and support

Equip staff to take ownership of complaints by training staff in:

- the 6 Principles for Effective Complaint Management
- your organisation's policies and procedures for complaint management
- the extent and limitations of their authority to resolve complaints
- referral options and escalation pathways, and when to use them
- effective communication strategies
- managing complaints from people with diverse needs, who may need extra support, or who are experiencing trauma or distress
- responding to complex, challenging behaviours, including threats of (self) harm, or unreasonable conduct, and
- signs of vicarious trauma and the importance of self-care.

Managers are responsible for arranging debriefing opportunities to promote wellbeing and identify staff who may need additional support. Your organisation should encourage staff to access one-on-one confidential psychological support from an employee assistance provider, when they need to.

Monitor the quality and consistency of complaint management to assess the adequacy of staffing levels, the need for additional or refresher training, and as part of a continuous improvement process.



## Case example

### Complaint

An organisation received a complaint from Hareem about poor service and delays in dealing with an urgent issue that was still not finalised. Hareem had asked for his complaint to be transferred from the initial staff member managing the complaint, because they went on a long period of leave without informing him. After this, Hareem sent emails and made phone calls to the organisation to try and find out what was happening with his complaint, but no one got back to him.

Even though Hareem's complaint was still 'open,' and he hadn't spoken to anyone, the organisation sent him a survey asking about his experience. Hareem responded to the survey about his dissatisfaction. He still did not receive a follow up.

Jason, a senior manager, reviewed Hareem's complaint. He contacted Hareem, listened to his concerns and promised to examine the issues raised. He provided his contact information, advised he would now be managing Hareem's complaint, and would reply within 2 weeks.

Jason's review showed Hareem's complaint was transferred to 3 different staff members, including once at his request. Records indicated staff had not responded to Hareem when he asked who was dealing with his complaint or how he could reach them.

After reviewing the records, Jason finalised the original issue and complaint. Jason apologised to Hareem, provided him with an outcome to his original complaint and acknowledged that too many staff had been involved in the complaint with no handover occurring. He told Hareem that staff were being retrained on case reassignment and proactive communication when complaints are transferred between staff members. The organisation also introduced an additional procedure for reassigning cases when staff went on long periods of leave.

### Analysis

While the organisation did not effectively manage Hareem's initial complaint, in the internal review process, Jason took ownership. He advised Hareem he would deal with the matter, providing his contact details, and thoroughly investigating Hareem's concerns and what had occurred. He then personally provided a response to both the original issue and the complaint, apologised to Hareem and told him the organisation was going to address the issue through staff training. The organisation also updated its procedures.

## Additional resources

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- 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 2. Information and accessibility](#), 2024
- NSW Ombudsman, [6 Principles for Effective Complaint Management Information Sheet 3. Communication](#), 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
- NSW Ombudsman, [Apologies – A Practical Guide, 2nd edn, March 2022, Apologies – A Practical Guide](#)
- Standards Australia, [Guidelines for Complaint Management in Organizations \(AS 10002:2022\)](#), 2022

## Contact details

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**Web** [www.ombo.nsw.gov.au](http://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.