

DEALING WITH COMPLAINTS POLICY



Purpose

Affordable Community Housing Limited (ACHL) aims to provide a high quality, professional service to its clients; where a client considers ACHL has failed to do so, they have every right to make a complaint. Complaints are a valuable feedback mechanism and ACHL welcomes the opportunity to improve its services.

ACHL respects the right of its clients to complain, or provide compliments or suggestions about the service they receive. ACHL will not treat clients differently because they have made a comment or complaint.

This document outlines ACHL's policy in dealing with and resolving complaints about ACHL from clients, which includes applicants for housing assistance or tenancies managed by ACHL.

Subject of complaints

Clients may make a complaint about:

- the services ACHL provides
- the way they have been treated by staff
- the manner in which their personal information has been used, disclosed or dealt with, including health information.

Making a complaint is different to disagreeing with a decision ACHL has made. Client appeals about an ACHL decision are dealt with according to the ACHL Appeals Policy.

Tenant complaints relating to neighbour disputes and nuisance and annoyance will be dealt with according to the ACHL Neighbour Disputes policy.

Where clients complain to ACHL about issues that fall outside our jurisdiction - such as Centrelink fraud, child abuse or drug dealing - ACHL will advise them of the appropriate body to lodge a complaint with e.g. Centrelink, Child Protection Agency, Ombudsman, NSW Police.

Informal complaints

Clients may make a complaint verbally to an ACHL staff member in person or on the telephone. This would usually relate to minor matters and may be resolved to the client's satisfaction in this instance.

If talking does not resolve the matter, or if the client prefers, they also have the option of lodging a formal, written complaint. ACHL encourages written complaints in order to monitor client issues and ensure any possible improvements to ACHL processes are identified and appropriate action can be taken.

Formal complaints

ACHL encourages clients to lodge their formal complaint by using our complaint form, available from ACHL offices or on our website: www.achl.org.au.

ACHL staff may assist the client to lodge their complaint. We will take into account culture and language issues and will ensure it is easy for clients to access the complaints and appeals systems. An interpreter service will be provided if required.

When a client lodges a complaint, it will be placed in a register at ACHL showing:

- The client's name and address
- Details of the complaint and any supporting documentation
- The date of the incident complained about
- The date the complaint was lodged
- Whether the complaint is to be kept confidential

If the complaint is about a member of staff, it will be investigated by a more senior officer than the person being complained about. The identity of the client making the complaint will be kept confidential as a matter of course.

All complaints received by ACHL will be dealt with promptly. As soon as possible after the complaint is lodged, ACHL will write to the client to acknowledge receipt and inform them of ACHL's intention to investigate and respond within 28 days. ACHL may also keep the client informed about the progress of their complaint during this period if necessary or advisable.

When the complaint has been investigated or the 28 day period is over, the ACHL Housing Services Co-ordinator will write to the client advising them of the outcome of the complaint or, if it is not finalised, what further investigation is required and how much longer it may take.

Further investigation

If the client is not satisfied with the outcome of their complaint, or believes ACHL has not handled their complaint properly, they have the right to approach the Registrar, Community Housing Division. Not all complaints can be dealt with by the Registrar; each complaint will be assessed to determine the appropriate action to take on the issues raised. The client can access the Community Housing Division online complaint form at www.rch.nsw.gov.au.

Clients may also contact the NSW Ombudsman: www.ombo.nsw.gov.au or 02 9286 1000. If their complaint is about a privacy issue, they can contact the Administrative Decisions Tribunal: www.lawlink.nsw.gov.au/adt or 02 9286 1000.

Staff training

All ACHL staff members involved in dealing with complaints will be trained in the complaints management procedure and the skills of communication/listening, investigating, problem solving, conflict resolution, conciliation and mediation.

Improving ACHL services

When a complaint has been finalised, the ACHL complaints register will be updated to include the outcome of the complaint and any internal recommendations for changes to ACHL procedures, processes or services.