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Premier and Cabinet Circular

PC039 – COMPLAINT MANAGEMENT IN THE SOUTH AUSTRALIAN PUBLIC SECTOR

Effective from November 2023

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Purpose

This circular outlines the standard required by all public sector agencies for establishing and maintaining an effective complaint management system (CMS).

These systems help ensure service interactions with the public are measured and improved, and support government's broader accountability.

Context

Effective complaints management is an important way to be accountable to the public. Complaints have a valuable role to play in driving improvements to practices, procedures and systems in public administration.¹ A well-managed, and transparent complaints handling model can build trust between public sector organisations and customers.

Effective complaint management practices also help to identify and mitigate poor business processes thereby managing costs, simplifying work practices and reducing effort for customers.

These standards align with the Australian Standard, [AS 10002:2022](#) Guidelines for Complaint Management in Organizations².

Authority and accountability

Position	Accountability and Responsibilities
Chief Executive	Accountable for establishing a CMS and policy within their agency to deal with complaints and customer feedback.
Executive Director Directors Managers	Responsible for the CMS process being promoted, visible and accessible to departmental staff and to customers. Ensure complaint and feedback data is collected, investigated and used to improve service interactions.
Team Leaders Supervisors	Compliance to the CMS policy through the provision of training, support and timely advice to employees who are in receipt of and managing complaints.
Agency staff	Adherence to CMS policy and any related localised agency procedures.

Application

All South Australian public sector agencies, as defined under the *Public Sector Act 2009*, are required to establish and maintain an effective and responsive CMS, including an overarching complaints management policy that conforms to the principles of [AS](#)

¹ [Audit Survey Report: Assessment of state agencies' complaints management systems](#). SA Ombudsman (June 2018)

² AS 10002:2022 can be purchased from SAI Global Limited at <https://infostore.saiglobal.com/>

[10002:2022](#). All business units with a direct customer service responsibility must have a complaint handling procedure that conforms to its agency policy.

Definitions

Agencies are encouraged to use definitions that clearly describe what is expected from staff in terms of responding to customer complaints and feedback.

A **complaint** is an expression of dissatisfaction made to or about an agency, related to its products, services, staff or the handling of a complaint. A response or resolution is explicitly or implicitly expected or legally required.

Feedback is an opinion, comment or expression of interest or concern, made directly or indirectly, explicitly or implicitly to or about the agency, about its products, services, employees or its handling of a complaint. A response is not explicitly or implicitly expected or legally required. Feedback can be either positive or negative.

A **complaint management system** includes policies, procedures, practices, staff, hardware and software used by an agency for the management of complaints and feedback.

Principles

An effective and responsive CMS includes:

- ensuring the complaint policy and process is easily accessible to staff and the public on the agency website and at service locations
- creating and growing an agency culture that values customer feedback and supports transparent and fair complaints management practices
- informing customers about their right to complain
- assisting people to make complaints, in particular, individuals who are Aboriginal, culturally and linguistically diverse, disadvantaged or vulnerable
- making information about the complaints process widely available in a variety of formats and providing avenues for review and escalation
- adequately resourcing and training employees to manage complaints to ensure the provision of timely responses
- collecting, monitoring and evaluating complaints and feedback data to inform service improvements.

[AS 10002:2022](#) offers detailed guidance on creating and implementing consistent complaints management practices. It is expected that each agency develops and implements a CMS that is fit for purpose and responds to the specific needs of their customers.

Exemptions

This Circular does not apply to:

- complaints that are the subject of an administrative appeal or other form of legal redress
- complaints concerned with workplace conduct.

Monitoring and Compliance

Agencies are required to assess and monitor the performance of their CMS on an annual basis to assist in identifying trends, measuring customer service quality and making service improvements.

Preferably, agencies should implement a performance reporting model to demonstrate the link between service improvements and the performance of their CMS.

Performance indicators should be fit for purpose, relevant to the agency, and include measures that assess the effectiveness, efficiency and customer responsiveness of their systems. Examples of suitable performance measures can be found in Appendix 3 of the SA Ombudsman's audit survey (June 2018).

This performance information can also be used to inform agency annual reports, as per PC013 – Annual Reporting Requirements.

Distribution and publication

This circular will be published on the [DPC website](#) along with all other circulars and Chief Executives will be advised when the circular is published or updated.

Document Control

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For more information

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W <https://www.dpc.sa.gov.au/resources-and-publications/premier-and-cabinet-circulars>