



**Government  
of South Australia**

**Department of the Premier and Cabinet Circular**

**DPC CIRCULAR 039 – COMPLAINT MANAGEMENT IN THE  
SOUTH AUSTRALIAN PUBLIC SECTOR**

*July 2015*

## Purpose

This Department of the Premier and Cabinet (DPC) Circular requires all South Australian public sector agencies to establish and maintain an effective complaint management system (CMS) that conforms to the principles in the *Australian/New Zealand Standard: Guidelines for Complaint Management in Organizations* (AS/NZS10002:2014).

## Scope

This policy is applicable to South Australian public sector agencies. The definition of 'public sector agency' in the *Public Sector Act 2009* can be found in Appendix 1. If further clarification is required, it may be appropriate to seek Crown Law advice.

It is not intended that this policy would apply to complaint handling processes that are an agency's core function, for example consumer complaints, although complaints concerning the way in which the agency exercises that function would be within scope of this policy.

## Definitions

For the purpose of this policy, a **complaint** is an expression of dissatisfaction or concern made to or about a South Australian public sector agency by, or on behalf of, an individual client, group (including other public sector agencies) or member of the public, related to its products, services, staff or the handling of a complaint where a response or resolution is explicitly or implicitly expected or legally required.

This Circular does not apply to:

- complaints are the subject matter of an administrative appeal or other form of legal redress
- internal complaints or workplace complaints regarding workplace conduct.

The **Australian Standard** referred to in this Circular is the *Australian/New Zealand Standard: Guidelines for Complaint Management in Organizations* (AS/NZS10002:2014), issued by Standards Australia and Standards New Zealand in October 2014. The Australian Standard is recognised by private and public sector organisations across Australia and New Zealand, and is based on the *International Standard ISO 10002:2004, Customer Satisfaction – Guidelines*.

The Australian Standard can be purchased from SAI Global Limited at <http://infostore.saiglobal.com/store/>.

A **complaint management system** (CMS) refers to the policies, procedures, practices, staff, hardware and software used by an agency to manage the receipt, processing and outcome of complaints.

## Why does effective complaint handling matter?

In the ten *Economic Priorities*, the Government has pledged to “establish the most responsive and efficient public sector in the nation” by 2017. As the first step, the Government has committed to high standards of service excellence across the public sector.<sup>1</sup> This complements target 32 in *South Australia’s Strategic Plan*, which aims to lift customer satisfaction with Government services.

The Government’s *Modern Public Service* policy outlines how service standards will be raised. One of the actions announced in the policy is the development of the Charter of Public Service Guarantee (the ‘Charter’), which will ensure citizens have a clearer understanding of the service standards that they can expect and how to initiate service recovery if those standards are not met. The Charter is due for release in 2015.

In November 2014, the Ombudsman found that effective complaint management is integral to lifting service standards across the public sector. Five recommendations to improve complaint management were included in the Ombudsman’s report, *An Audit of State Government Agencies’ Complaint Handling*.

As recommended by the Ombudsman, the annual reports of all agencies will state how many and what complaints have been received, as per section 3.22 of *DPC Circular 13: Annual Reporting Requirements*.

This Circular implements another recommendation of the Ombudsman that the Government issue a DPC Circular requiring all agencies to have in place a complaint management system that conforms to the principles of the Australian Standard.

## Policy

All South Australian public sector agencies are required to:

- establish and maintain an effective CMS that is consistent with the principles in the Australian Standard

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<sup>1</sup> See *Economic Priorities – South Australia: the Best Place to do Business*.

- ensure information on how to lodge a complaint is easily accessible to staff and the public on the agency website and at service locations
- inform complainants about their right to refer unresolved complaints to an appropriate external body such as the Ombudsman
- report the number and type of complaints received each year, as per section 3.22 of *DPC Circular 13: Annual Reporting Requirements*.

Adherence to the Australian Standard will ensure all agencies have in place a CMS that:

- informs citizens about their right to complain about a service and what to expect if they make a complaint, including the resolution of their complaint
- ensures complaints are handled in a fair, transparent and timely manner
- monitors and evaluates the handling of complaints to inform service improvements.

The Australian Standard offers guidance on implementing consistent requirements for complaint handling. However, it is expected that each agency will develop and implement a CMS that is 'fit for purpose', and consistent with its governance, structure, culture and modes of service delivery.

The audit report of the Ombudsman released in November 2014 report also provides useful advice to assist agencies in relation to their CMS.

## Related Documents

Ombudsman SA, *An Audit of State Government Agencies' Complaint Handling* (November 2014), [<http://www.ombudsman.sa.gov.au/wp-content/uploads/An-audit-of-state-government-agencies-complaint-handling.pdf>]

The Australian Standard can be purchased from SAI Global Limited at <http://infostore.saiglobal.com/store/>

For further advice or assistance please contact:

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**APPENDIX 1 - Public Sector Act 2009 Definition of 'Public Sector Agency'**

The *Public Sector Act 2009* (Part 1 Section 3 (1)) defines a public sector agency as:

- (a) a Minister; or
- (b) a chief executive of an administrative unit; or
- (c) an administrative unit; or
- (d) an employing authority; or
- (e) any other agency or instrumentality of the Crown; or
- (f) a body corporate —
  - (i) comprised of persons, or with a governing body comprised of persons, a majority of whom are appointed by the Governor, a Minister or an agency or instrumentality of the Crown; or
  - (ii) subject to control or direction by a Minister; or
- (g) a person or body declared under subsection (3) to be a public sector agency; or
- (h) a subsidiary of a Minister or a person or body referred to in a preceding paragraph,

but does not include —

- (i) a person or body declared under an Act not to be part of the Crown or not to be an agency or instrumentality of the Crown; or
- (j) a person or body declared under subsection (3) not to be a public sector agency;