



**Government  
of South Australia**

**Premier and Cabinet Circular**

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

***November 2018***

## Purpose

This Premier and Cabinet (PC) Circular requires all South Australia 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/NZS 10002:2014).<sup>1</sup>

## Scope

This Circular is applicable to South Australian public sector agencies as defined in the *Public Sector Act 2009*. Refer to Appendix 1.

## Background

Effective complaints management in government is an 'integral part of performance management and customer satisfaction .... complaints have a valuable role to play in driving improvements to practices, procedures and systems in public administration.'<sup>2</sup>

A well-managed, and transparent complaints handling model can build trust between public sector organisations and their customers and clients. Effective complaints management is a key part of an overall customer experience program.

Where mistakes are made, research demonstrates that customers who experience a well-handled complaint process, have higher than average satisfaction rating, suggesting that the complaints handling process has a direct impact on customer satisfaction<sup>3</sup>.

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

## Definitions

Agencies are encouraged to use definitions that clearly describe what is expected from employees 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, employees or the handling of a complaint, where a response or resolution is explicitly or implicitly expected or legally required.

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<sup>1</sup> AS/NZS 10002:2014 can be purchased from SAI Global Limited at <https://infostore.saiglobal.com/>

<sup>2</sup> [Audit Survey Report: Assessment of state agencies' complaints management systems](#). SA Ombudsman (June 2018)

<sup>3</sup> [Customer Satisfaction Measurement Surveys](#). (2016 & 2017)

**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, employees, hardware and software used by an agency for the management of complaints and feedback.

This Circular does not apply to

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

## **Policy**

All South Australian public sector agencies are required to establish and maintain an effective and responsive CMS, including an overarching complaints management policy that conforms to the principles of *AS/NZS 10002:2014*.

Further, all business units with a direct customer service responsibility must have a complaint handling procedure that conforms to the agency policy.

An effective and responsive CMS includes:

- ensuring the complaint policy and process is easily accessible to employees 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 those who are Aboriginal, culturally and linguistically diverse, disadvantaged or vulnerable people,
- 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, including to the agency's CMS.

The Australian Standard 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.

Other CMS resources include:

- [An audit survey assessment of state agencies complaints management systems - SA Ombudsman \(June 2018\)](#)
- [Complaint Management Framework – SA Ombudsman \(March 2016\)](#)
- [Managing unreasonable complainant conduct practice manual 2nd edition – NSW Ombudsman \(2012\)](#)
- Relevant agency service charter

## Reporting

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.

It is recommended that agencies 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, be 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 *DPC Circular 13 – Annual Reporting Requirements*.

For further advice or assistance please contact:

*Better Services Program*

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Issue date: November 2018

Review date: November 2021

## **Appendix 1 – Definition of Public Sector Agency, *Public Sector Act 2009***

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 and agency or instrumentality of the Crown; or
  - ii) subject to control of 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 un 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.