

Feedback Policy

Effective Date: April 2025

This policy applies to:

All employees of Guide Dogs Victoria

1. General

Guide Dogs Victoria (GDV) is committed to providing safe, timely, efficient, effective, equitable, person centred services to clients with low vision and blindness. Our organisation recognises the fundamental right of our clients to speak up about the services and supports that they receive and to provide feedback either informally or formally about their experiences with Guide Dogs Victoria in line with our values. Compliments and complaints provide valuable feedback on the level of client satisfaction with our services, as well as insight into the overall view our stakeholders have of their interactions with our organisation, providing opportunities to continually improve GDV services.

2. Purpose

The purpose of this policy is to describe how any person can provide feedback and complaints about any aspect of Guide Dogs Victoria's operations and the process that Guide Dogs Victoria will take to address or respond to feedback.

It applies to all stakeholders of the business, including clients, families, carers, advocates, donors, staff, other service providers, government agencies and members of the community.

Guide Dogs Victoria also has obligations in relation to incident management systems and reportable incidents that may apply to a complaint. Refer Guide Dogs Victoria *Workplace Incident Management and Reporting Procedure*.

3. Definitions

Compliment - an expression of praise, encouragement or gratitude about an individual, a team, an event, a product or a service.

Complainant - a person who makes a complaint, or has a complaint made on their behalf.

Complaint - an expression of dissatisfaction made to or about an organisation, related to its products, services, people, events or the handling of a complaint, where a response or resolution is explicitly or implicitly expected.

Employees includes all permanent, casual and contracted employees.

External Funding Agencies includes

- NDIS Quality and Safeguards Commission at <https://www.ndiscommission.gov.au/contact-us/makeacomplaint> or infoservice@humanrights.gov.au
- Aged Care Quality and Safety Commission at <https://www.agedcarequality.gov.au/contact-us/complaints-concerns/make-complaint>
- Department of Education and Training Victoria at <https://www.vic.gov.au/make-complaint-about-child-care-or-childrens-services>
- TAC and Workcover at <https://www.tac.vic.gov.au/clients/working-together/contact-us/complaints-and-compliments/complaints-form> or complaints@tac.vic.gov.au

Feedback – a person's written or expressed thoughts, reactions, or feelings in relation to a service or product received.

Procedural Fairness – a principal that requires a fair and proper procedure be used when making a decision.

Stakeholder includes clients, families, carers, advocates, donors, staff, other service providers, government agencies and members of the community.

Volunteers includes all volunteer roles

4. Policy

- Guide Dogs Victoria respects each person's right to feel safe and comfortable to provide feedback or make complaints about the organisation or its services.
- Feedback and complaints are taken seriously as they provide Guide Dogs Victoria with valuable information about clients' and others' satisfaction, and an opportunity to improve upon all aspects of service delivery.

- Guide Dogs Victoria's complaints management and resolution system ensures people can easily make a complaint and have it managed fairly and quickly.
- Guide Dogs Victoria prioritises the safety and wellbeing of children and young people and recognises the role of families and communities in helping them to understand and use this policy.
- All information Guide Dogs Victoria collects to manage feedback or complaints is handled in accordance with Guide Dogs Victoria's *Privacy Policy*.
- Guide Dogs Victoria uses its *Client Handbook*, website and *Feedback Form* to provide clients, families, carers and all other stakeholders with information about this policy, in an easy-to-understand format. Information provided includes how to make a complaint to Guide Dogs Victoria and to other external bodies, how complaints will be addressed, and external advocacy and support services that can assist people in the complaints process.
- Clients and their supporters are provided with information about Guide Dogs Victoria's feedback and complaints processes when they first access the service in ways that suit their individual communication needs. Written information can be provided in different languages or explained verbally by staff. Staff can also help clients access interpreters or advocates where required.
- Feedback and complaints are recorded and monitored to identify opportunities for improvement using Guide Dogs Victoria's *Feedback Register*.

5. Providing Feedback

Providing feedback to Guide Dogs Victoria is voluntary.

Feedback can be provided at any time, in any way, by any stakeholder, through:

- a staff member
- email, mail or phone
- Guide Dogs Victoria's *Feedback Form*
- Guide Dogs Victoria's website
- Consumer Advisory Committee meetings (involving clients and other stakeholders)
- staff collection of feedback after a person interacts with the service (e.g. initial assessment and planning reviews, exit interviews, etc.)
- client satisfaction surveys and

- staff and stakeholder satisfaction surveys.

All feedback will be responded to by the relevant staff member or department representative, entered into the applicable file in Salesforce (client, donor, volunteer) and a copy forwarded to the Quality Manager for inclusion in Guide Dogs Victoria's *Feedback Register*.

6. Complaints Management

People can make a complaint about any aspects of Guide Dogs Victoria's services, including breaches of its policies and procedures, Code of Conduct.

Guide Dogs Victoria's complaints management process can be simplified into five steps:

1. Complaint Lodgement

To lodge a complaint, people are encouraged to speak directly to a staff member first, in an attempt to resolve the matter without recourse to Guide Dogs Victoria's complaints procedures.

Staff must:

- listen openly to the concerns being raised by the complainant
- ask the complainant what outcome they are seeking
- inform the complainant of the complaint process and how to formally make a complaint to Guide Dogs Victoria, funding agency or other complaints body and the time the process takes
- be empathic towards the person and action all commitments made and
- action situations that pose an immediate threat or danger or require a specialised response.

All complaints must be entered into the applicable file in Salesforce (client, donor, volunteer) and reported to the Quality Manager for inclusion in Guide Dogs Victoria's *Feedback Register*.

If the complaint cannot be resolved promptly, it must be referred to the Senior Manager. The Senior Manager will advise the person of their right to lodge a formal complaint if they have not already done so, with the assistance of a support person or advocate if they wish. A *Feedback Form* will be made available to the individual to lodge their complaint, however it is not mandatory that they use the form.

Formal complaints can be lodged:

- directly with a staff member, either verbally or by providing a completed *Feedback Form*
- by email to: feedback@guidedogsvictoria.com.au or
- by phone on 1800 988 626

- in writing to: Guide Dogs Victoria, 2-6 Chandler Highway, Kew VIC 3101.

Mail and phone submissions as well as the *Feedback Form* can be used to make anonymous complaints.

Complaints and feedback can be lodged by a third party on behalf of another person, if their consent or the consent of their legal representative has been provided.

At any time, people can make a complaint to the applicable external funding agency or other external complaints bodies.

Staff must assist people making a complaint, where this is required.

People making or impacted by a complaint must be encouraged to use an advocate of their choice to act on their behalf if they wish. The advocate may be a family member or friend, or sourced (with assistance from staff if required) through the applicable advocacy pathways.

If a complaint alleges actual or possible criminal activity or abuse or neglect, it must be actioned in accordance with Guide Dogs Victoria's *Workplace Incident Management and Reporting Procedure*.

Staff must take all reasonable steps to ensure complainants or people with disability affected by complaints are not adversely affected or fear retribution because a complaint has been made by them or on their behalf.

Complaints made to Guide Dogs Victoria, external funding agencies and other complaints bodies can be withdrawn at any time.

2. Record

The Quality Manager records all information relevant to complaints, in its original and simplest form, in Guide Dogs Victoria's *Feedback Register*.

3. Acknowledge

All complaints must be acknowledged by the person receiving the complaint within 2 working days or sooner if possible. However, where a complaint has been submitted anonymously, a response is not possible.

The person responding to the complaint must set realistic expectations regarding complaint resolution and refer the matter to other organisations where they are identified as being more suitable to handle it. Acknowledgements must provide timeframes for resolution where possible.

4. Resolve

Investigation of a complaint must not be conducted by a person about whom the complaint has been made, or a person who has a conflict of interest in the matter. If required, the Guide Dogs Victoria **Whistleblower Protection Officer** will determine the appropriate person to undertake the investigation.

The complainant must be involved and kept informed of the progress of the complaint during the resolution process. Any disparities identified must be discussed with the complainant and additional information may be requested when required. A timeframe within which further information is to be provided should be clearly communicated with the complainant.

Any necessary extensions to the timeframe must be communicated to the complainant with an explanation of the need.

Complaint investigation must focus on the identified complaint matters only. All parties involved in a complaint must be provided with procedural fairness and with the support and information necessary to participate in the complaints process.

All decisions or actions regarding complaint investigation must be forwarded to the Quality Manager to record in the Guide Dogs Victoria's *Feedback Register*.

5. Communicate Resolution

Guide Dogs Victoria will respond to all complaints as soon as possible and within 28 days from acknowledgement.

The person responding to the complaint should discuss the outcome of a complaint investigation verbally with the complainant, where possible, followed by a written response.

If the complainant and the person responding to the complaint are unable to resolve the issue, or if the complainant is dissatisfied with the decision, the complainant may bring it to the attention of the next level of management, continuing to the Whistleblower Protection Officer (CEO) and if necessary, progressing to the GDV Board Chair or an appropriate external agency.

Support must be provided to assist complainants' understanding of correspondence regarding complaints, where this is required (e.g. interpreters, referral to advocates, etc.).

Options for responding to a complaint may include, but are not limited to:

- explaining processes

- rectifying an issue
- providing an apology
- ongoing monitoring and
- training or educating staff.

Once resolved, complaint outcomes must be relayed to the appropriate area within Guide Dogs Victoria in order to improve service delivery.

If a complaint cannot be responded to in full within 28 days of acknowledgement, an update must be issued to the complainant. The update must provide the date by which a full response can be expected. The update should be provided verbally in the first instance then confirmed in writing.

7. Feedback and Complaint Review

Feedback and complaint review includes identifying, monitoring and acting upon trends and systemic issues identified through the analysis of feedback and complaint information.

The purpose of analysing feedback and complaint data is to learn from patterns, to safeguard the safety and wellbeing of individual clients, as well as improve the quality of services.

The *Feedback Register* is reviewed by the Quality Governance Committee. The Quality Manager is responsible for monitoring the *Feedback Register* in order to analyse and report on trends.

Reviews consider:

- the causes, handling and outcomes of feedback and complaints
- processes, timeframes and record keeping practices associated with feedback and complaint management and
- feedback provided by staff and clients about Guide Dogs Victoria's feedback and complaint management.

Where preventative or improvement measures are identified, these are tracked in the *Continuous Improvement Plan*.

8. Responsibilities

The **Whistleblower Protection Officer** is responsible for:

- Reviewing any unresolved complaints escalated to them and determining the appropriate person to undertake the complaint investigation.

The Quality Manager is responsible for:

- Maintaining a confidential register of feedback and complaints
- Monitoring the Feedback Register in order to analyse and report on trends
- Tabling the *Feedback Register* for review by the Quality Governance Committee

The Senior Manager is responsible for:

- Advising complainants of their right to lodge a formal complaint if they have not already done so, with the assistance of a support person or advocate if they wish.

Managers and Team Leaders are responsible for:

- Investigating and responding to complaints referred to them.
- Ensuring corrective actions are implemented.

Employees and Volunteers are responsible for:

- Adhering to the policy

9. Related Documents

Client Handbook

Feedback Form

Feedback Register

Workplace Incident Management and Reporting Procedure

Privacy Policy

Whistleblower Policy