

Australian Standard[®]

Complaints handling

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Australian Consumers Association
Australian Council of Allied Health Professions
Australian Federation of Consumer Organizations
Department of Consumer Affairs, N.S.W.
Insurance Council of Australia
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PREFACE

This Standard was prepared by the Standards Australia Committee on Complaints Handling, in response to the call from professional and other organizations for assistance in what is now accepted as an essential component of quality management. It is also regarded as one of the components of competitiveness in domestic and international markets.

The objectives of this Standard include the provision of a complaints handling process for those making and receiving complaints and to serve as a reference document on current best practices for handling complaints. The Standard is subject to any statutory or other legal obligations imposed on organizations.

Use of the principles embodied in the Standard will assist organizations to identify deficiencies in any current complaint handling procedures and therefore opportunities for improvement.

An expected outcome for sole traders, small business and other organizations which implement complaints handling processes in accordance with the Standard would be continuous improvement in consumer satisfaction, both with complaints handling and with products and services. This in turn will have benefits for organizations and the communities they serve and also demonstrate to governments the capacity of business and the professions to deal with complaints using a self-regulatory approach.

The essential elements of an effective complaints handling process are contained in Section 2 of the Standard. Sections 3, 4 and 5 are guidelines dealing with the implementation of the process, the actual complaint handling and disputes.

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STANDARDS AUSTRALIA

Australian Standard
Complaints handling

SECTION 1 SCOPE AND PURPOSE

1.1 SCOPE This Standard sets out the essential elements for the management of complaints from inception to satisfaction or final determination, as the case may be, irrespective of the nature of the complaint or the size of the organization receiving the complaint. It further provides guidelines for the implementation of a complaints handling process.

Section 2 contains the essential elements while Section 3 contains implementation guidelines, and it is recognized that smaller organizations may need to use this Section selectively. Section 4 details complaint handling guidelines and Section 5 deals with disputes.

This Standard is for all large or small organizations. However, application of the elements in some cases will be different for small organizations and the Standard needs to be applied with the requisite degree of discretion to ensure that it is appropriate in the circumstances.

For example, the collection of data on complaints need only be rudimentary for small businesses, involving for instance, some form of manual collection and classification. Such a process, despite its simplicity can still highlight systemic problem areas which require remedial action.

However, some issues covered in this Standard such as commitment, fairness, responsiveness, charges and remedies apply, regardless of the size of the enterprise.

The importance of this Standard as it relates to small business is that it provides a yardstick which can be used to design a complaints handling process for their particular circumstances.

1.2 PURPOSE The purpose of this Standard is to provide a complaints handling framework for the complainants as well as complaint recipients. It will serve as a reference document on issues where a common interpretation is desirable.

A comprehensive complaints system should:

- (a) Increase the level of consumer satisfaction with the delivery of products and services and enhance the consumer/provider relationship.
- (b) Recognize, promote and protect consumers' rights, including the right to comment and complain.
- (c) Provide an efficient, fair and accessible mechanism for resolving consumer complaints.
- (d) Provide information to consumers on the complaints handling process for the services and products of the organization.
- (e) Monitor complaints in an endeavour to improve the quality of products and services.

1.3 GENERAL Any complaints handling policy should include a positive attitude towards consumers and commitment to resolving complaints. This should be based on the premise that—

- (a) a consumer has a right to complain and to have the complaint handled;
- (b) complaints provide feedback about a product or service experience; and



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