

Self-advocacy toolkit

A guide to making complaints for carers



About this toolkit

There are approximately 958,500 carers living in NSW[1]. Carers come from all walks of life, cultural backgrounds and age groups.

Carers and the people they care for often have contact with many government and non-government systems, services and supports to enable them to live independently, and participate in their community, education and work. Sometimes, however, carers and the people they care for experience challenges accessing the services and supports that they need. In other cases, the services and supports they can access may not be safe or high quality.

In these instances it is important that carers know what options are available for raising concerns and making complaints to ensure their rights and the rights of the person they care for are upheld, and that they feel confident to do so.

This toolkit complements the Carers NSW Know Your Rights fact sheet series. It aims to provide carers with information and resources to support them through the process of raising concerns or complaints and appealing decisions to uphold their rights and the rights of the person they care for. The toolkit contains:

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A carer is any individual who provides unpaid care and support to a family member or friend who lives with a disability, mental illness, drug and/or alcohol dependency, chronic condition, terminal illness or who is frail.

Fact sheet 1:

What is self-advocacy?



Self-advocacy is about speaking up for your needs, rights and preferences. You can also self-advocate on behalf of the person you care for.



If you, or the person you care for, are unhappy with a service, feel you have been treated unfairly, or want something to change or improve, **you have the right to make a complaint**. Carers NSW has developed a series of fact sheets about your rights in different service settings or situations.



You can download individual 'Know Your Rights' fact sheets [here](#) or scan the QR code.



Self-advocacy can look like:

Asking for a review of a decision or an outcome.

Letting someone know you're unhappy with a service or want something to change.

Making a formal complaint.

Making a complaint



There are a lot of ways you can make a complaint. You might want to speak to the person who the complaint is about, to see if you can find a solution together.

Other times, you might be more comfortable speaking to someone you don't know, but who can still help you solve the problem, like a complaints team. In some cases, you might want to speak with an agency whose job it is to hear about and investigate complaints.

You can make a complaint:

Over the phone



In-writing



In-person




Online

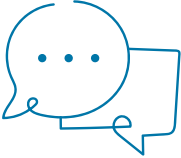


Fact sheet 2:


What to expect when making a complaint




When you make a complaint, you will usually be asked to talk about what happened or give a reason why you want something to change. If you are raising concerns about an incident or event, you may be asked to give key information like:


- 
- dates and times
 - who was involved and;
 - anything else that is important to know

For complaints about a decision or outcome you might need to give evidence such as:

- 
- medical reports from a healthcare worker or specialist
 - previous applications
 - notes from meetings and;
 - history of correspondence i.e. emails, letters or phone calls.



If you are taking your concerns to a complaints agency, they will ask you if you have raised concerns or made a complaint before. You might be asked to give information about this complaint, how it was handled and whether you were happy with the outcome.



Before you make a complaint, know what you want to achieve - perhaps an apology, a meeting with a decision-maker, a change to the way a service is delivered, a different person to work with, a refund or compensation. Complaints that include suggestions about how things might be done better are more likely to be listened to and acted upon.

Resource 1: Planning your complaint



Before you make a complaint, it can be helpful to think about what you want to say and the information you might need.



The following questions and prompts can be useful when preparing your complaint. You can also download this checklist to help you prepare.



What do you want to raise in your complaint?

Think about what you want to say when you make a complaint. Write down key details like dates, times and other relevant information. If you have made a complaint in the past, include some information about what happened and whether anything has changed.



What do you want to change?

Having a clear idea of what you want to happen can help the people responding to your complaint better understand how to help you. What you want to change may not always be possible, but there may be other ways to resolve your concerns.






Does the person you care for consent to you making a complaint on their behalf?

If you are making a complaint on behalf of the person you care for, it is important to speak to them before you raise your concerns, where appropriate. If you are raising a complaint with a complaints body, you will be asked if you have permission to raise concerns on behalf of the person you care for. You may want to ask the person you care for whether there is anything they want you to raise specifically.



Thinking about important information

When you make a complaint, you might be asked to give important information that helps identify you or the person you care for. Some examples are:

-  Customer Reference Number (or CRN)
-  Aged Care ID
-  NDIS Reference Number

Before you make your complaint, have this information ready so you can provide it any time when requested.



Checklist:

Preparing your complaint



Use this checklist when planning your complaint or raising a concern.

☐

I have checked with the person I care for that they are happy for me to make a complaint.

☐

I know who to contact to make a complaint or raise a concern and how to do it.

☐

I have thought about what I want to say and what I want to change.

☐

I have written down important information like dates, times and other details.

☐

I have copies of documents like reports or emails for me to refer to if I need to.

☐

I have important information on hand to help identify me or the person I care for i.e. Customer Reference Number (CRN), Aged Care ID or NDIS Reference Number.

Fact sheet 3:

Tips for effective communication



Consider these tips when making a complaint, attending a meeting or raising a concern.



Think about how you're feeling - Raising a concern or complaint can be stressful and frustrating. Before you make your complaint take a moment to consider how you're feeling. It's okay to feel angry, anxious or upset. See if you can talk to a trusted person in your life before you raise a concern or ask to have them support you during the call or meeting.



Know why you're there - Feel confident in your right to make a complaint but remember to have a clear idea about the issues you want to raise and what you want to change.



Present your points clearly - Be specific about what you want to say. It can be helpful to present one or two points at a time. Have examples or evidence to back up your points.



Be assertive - Good communicators are clear and honest about what they want but they also listen carefully and hear what others have to say. Speak calmly and respectfully and avoid raising your voice.



Consider other perspectives - Things may be done a particular way for reasons that you hadn't considered. Try not to dismiss other people's point of view.



Resource 2: Recording your complaint



Use this resource to record important information when making a complaint or raising a concern.



Date and time of the complaint and/or meeting:



Name and position of the person I made the complaint to:



Call receipt number or code:



Summary of conversation:

Resource 3: Letter template



You can use the following letter template below or scan the QR code to download an editable version.



[Full title of the person you are writing to]
[That person's position]
[That person's address]

[Date]

Dear [name of person receiving complaint],

My name is [introduce yourself] and I am/was a carer for [describe your caring situation].

I am writing to you to raise a formal complaint following a recent [incident/event/decision]. My complaint is that [include relevant information regarding complaint/concern].

This situation has caused me and/or the person I care for [include information about the impact this has had on you or the person I care for].

I am seeking [an apology, explanation, meeting, review].

I understand you are required to respond to my complaint and look forward to hearing from you in due course.

Yours sincerely,



[insert name]

[insert signature]

Fact sheet 4:




Support with making complaints



-  If you need information, support or advice about your rights or making a complaint, there are people you can contact for help.
-  Individual advocacy provides one-to-one support, working with you or the person you care for to solve an issue or address a concern you have.

Who can I contact?



-  For information, advocacy and legal support on issues related to aged care, you can contact Seniors Rights Service on 1800 424 079.
-  The National Disability Advocacy Program (NDAP) funds disability advocacy support services in each state and territory. Contact Disability Gateway on 1800 643 787 to request advocacy support or visit the National Disability Advocacy webpage to find a local advocate.
-  Read or download the 'Know Your Rights' fact sheet series to learn more about complaints agencies that can provide information and advice about your issue or concern.

Raising a concern to make change

You can also make a complaint or raise a concern with the aim to create changes or improvements in systems, services, policies and legislation. This is called systemic advocacy. Carers NSW has developed resources to support carers looking to engage in consultation opportunities that inform government policies and reform. Download the resources or scan the QR code.





AN **AUSTRALIA** THAT **VALUES** AND **SUPPORTS** ALL **CARERS**