

Complaints Policy

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Policy owner: Director Corporate Services

Purpose

To provide a process for clients, tenants and others to register dissatisfaction with any service delivered or action taken (or not taken) by Unison in relation to a problem or issue for which Unison has responsibility.

- To ensure information is readily available on complaints and appeals
- To ensure complaints are dealt with in a fair and consistent way and complainants are provided support and informed of outcomes in a timely manner.
- To identify opportunities for improvement through the monitoring and review of complaints.

Scope

This policy applies to all complaints received by Unison.

Complaints can be made by a current tenant or client, prospective tenant or client, a neighbour, another agency or member of the public, or via a complainant's representative or advocate.

This policy does not apply to disputes between staff members, complaints by contractors, disputes between tenants, occupational health and safety matters, incidents or neighbourhood disputes outside of the Residential Tenancies Act.

Principles

Unison welcomes and values feedback and is committed to using it to respond to the needs of tenants and clients and improve service delivery. Accordingly, Unison will:

- provide clear information about how people can make a complaint or lodge an appeal
- support tenants and clients to make a complaint in a way that is accessible to them
- respond to complaints promptly and fairly
- respect the privacy and confidentiality of tenants and clients, including those who make a complaint, and those who are the subject of a complaint
- not take any adverse action in respect of a tenant or client simply because they made a complaint
- keep records of complaints made and actions taken
- review complaints and identify opportunities for improvement.

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Unison has a responsibility to ensure staff and other clients or tenants using the service feel safe and respected, in an environment free from violence or threatening behaviour. Rude, aggressive or threatening behaviour will not be tolerated.

Complainants are responsible for providing a clear idea of the problem and solution being sought and giving Unison all relevant information from the beginning.

When gathering information about the issue from the complainant, staff will ensure client/tenant rights are upheld and the service is non-discriminatory. Where appropriate staff will:

- inform the client/tenant of relevant advocacy services that may assist them in the complaints process, particularly if the client/tenant does not feel comfortable discussing the complaint with staff
- where required, provide an interpreter.

Application

Making a complaint

Concerns or issues should be first raised with the service accessed (e.g. through the Place Manager, IAP worker, receptionist, helpdesk), who will work with the complainant to resolve the matters raised. The Team Leader (in Place Management), the Senior Worker (in IAP and PRAP) or the Manager (in Asset Management and Corporate Services) is responsible for the management of complaints made directly to the service.

A complaint may be made in writing (hard copy or electronic), in person at a Unison office or over the phone. The complaint will be recorded in the relevant tenant/client/customer system. For more details, refer to the Complaints Procedure.

Unison is committed to providing an initial response to complaints within 5-10 days, and to complete the complaints process within 30 days - see Unison Customer Commitment brochure.

Escalation process

Where the complainant has already raised the issue with the local service but is not satisfied with the response they received, and/or wishes to formally register their dissatisfaction, they may escalate their complaint to the Unison Complaints Officer (CO).

The complainant will be encouraged to put their complaint in writing if possible (using the feedback form on the website, email or letter), though complaints over the phone will also be accepted (tel: 9349 0250). It is helpful if the complainant details what actions they took so far, responses they received from Unison, and outcome they are seeking.

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Unison will determine whether the complaint is to be managed through the Central Complaints Process – if not, it will be referred to the relevant Team Leader or Senior Worker or Manager. In making this determination, Unison will consider whether the issue has already been raised with Unison and the type and severity of allegations made. At the discretion of the CO, specific complaints may also be managed through the Central Complaints Process, for example complaints relating to staff conduct or complaints made to the CEO.

In line with the definitions of the Housing Registrar, complaints that are managed through the Central Complaints Process are classified as "formal complaints" where the complainant is a tenant or prospective tenant (or an advocate) in Victoria, or "informal complaints" where the complainant is a neighbour, a client or prospective client, a customer (owners corporations), a member of the public or a tenant or prospective tenant in South Australia.

Where an agency (e.g. Housing Registrar, DHHS) contacts Unison in writing to seek information regarding a complaint they have received that relates to services provided or actions taken (or not taken) by Unison, this will be managed through the Central Complaints Process. Unison will classify those requests as enquiries in the complaints register.

Management of the complaint

Whether the complaint is managed by the local service or by the Complaints Officer (through the Central Complaints Process), management of the complaint will follow similar steps:

- Contact the complainant to gather more information if required
- Acknowledge the complaint and provide information about the complaint process to the complainant
- Record the complaint in the relevant system (tenant/client/customer system or central complaints register on SharePoint)
- Assess/Investigate allegations
- Take appropriate action
- Advise the complainant of the outcome
- Record resolution in the relevant system

For more details, refer to the Complaints Procedure.

Where a complaint is made about a Unison staff member, that person's involvement in the management of the complaint will be limited to providing information.

Where necessary, the Director Corporate Services will decide who will manage a complaint.

Privacy

Information provided by the complainant may need to be shared with relevant staff in Unison, or with a contractor, to investigate and resolve the issues.

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Unison will not share a complainant's identity with any other tenant or clients without the complainant's consent and will not share actions taken relating to other tenants or clients with the complainant.

Appeal process

Internal appeal

If a complainant is not satisfied with the response of Unison after the complaint was managed by the Team Leader/Senior Worker/Manager, they can escalate the matters through the Central Complaints Process.

If they are not satisfied with the response after the complaint was managed through the Central Complaints Process, they can ask for a review by an independent Manager. They should contact the CO and ask for the Complaints internal appeal form.

External appeal

If the complainant is not satisfied with the way Unison has resolved their complaint, or if it has not been resolved promptly (within 30 days), they have the option to take their complaint to an external oversight body.

Tenants or prospective tenants in Victoria can contact the Office of the Housing Registrar. Complaints that fall under the Housing Registrar's jurisdiction are those where:

- The complaint is made by a tenant or prospective tenant (or someone authorised to act on their behalf), and is about a rental housing matter; and
- The complaint is about a service delivered or decision made by an individual registered agency about a rental housing matter; and
- The complaint has already been directed formally to the registered agency and after 30 days the agency did not resolve the complaint to the complainant's satisfaction, and the complainant now wishes to refer it to the Registrar for resolution.

For information on the Housing Registrar's role, refer to www.housingregistrar.vic.gov.au/Information-for-tenants/Making-a-complaint

Tenants and owners' corporations may wish to refer the matters to the Civil & Administrative Tribunal. Refer to the Practice Note on Alternative Dispute Resolution on the VCAT website www.vcat.vic.gov.au and the housing dispute information on the SACAT website www.sacat.sa.gov.au/types-of-cases/housing

People who use services funded by the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) like Transitional Housing (THM), the Initial Assessment and Planning (IAP), the Private Rental Access Program (PRAP) or services by the Housing Support Worker (HSW) can refer a formal complaint to the DHHS Complaints Unit. Refer to <https://dhhs.vic.gov.au/making-complaint>

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Other appeals pathways may be relevant, including the Office of the Australian Information Commissioner for matters relating to privacy www.oaic.gov.au/individuals/how-do-i-make-a-privacy-complaint and the Human Rights Commission (Vic) or Equal Opportunity Commission (SA) for matters relating to discrimination www.humanrightscommission.vic.gov.au/ and <https://eoc.sa.gov.au/>

Communication of the Complaints Policy

Information on the Unison complaints policy will be communicated to clients and tenants through a variety of methods to ensure clients and tenants are aware of the process and their rights. This includes:

- Outlining the complaints process to tenants and clients at the start of service (intake, tenancy sign-up).
- Display of complaints brochures and posters in Unison offices.
- Distribution of complaints brochure to relevant support agencies
- Presentation of the Unison Complaints process to the Tenant Advisory Group
- Information available on the Unison website
- Information available from Unison staff members.

Reporting and Monitoring, Continuous Improvement

Unison will consider opportunities for improvement arising out of feedback received and monitor the management of complaints.

Unison will also periodically measure overall satisfaction with housing services and satisfaction with Unison staff through the Tenant/client Satisfaction Survey.

Training and consultation

Staff will be notified of any changes to the complaints policy and procedure. This is to ensure clarity and understanding of the process and responsibilities of all involved.

Consultation will be conducted with the Tenant Advisory Group if significant changes are proposed.

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Step 1

Making a complaint

- Contact the relevant service (e.g. Place Manager, receptionist, helpdesk) or use feedback form on the website
- Explain your concern or issue
- Outline the outcome you wish to have

Step 2

Management of the complaint

- Person managing the complaint contacts you to acknowledge your complaint and gather more information if required
- Investigates concerns
- Takes action to remedy issues
- Notify you of the outcome

Step 3

Escalation - Central Complaints Process

- If you are not satisfied with actions taken by Unison, or type and severity of concerns is serious, contact the Complaints Officer using the feedback form on the website
- Complaint managed through the Central Complaints Process
- Same process as per Step 2

Step 4

Appeal process - internal

- Complete the Complaints Internal Appeals Form
- Review of resolution process and outcomes by an independent manager
- Notify complainant of the outcome

Step 5

Appeal process - external

- Contact external agency or tribunal

Review of policy

This policy will be reviewed every three years as delegated by the responsible Director