

Section: <b>Employee &amp; Volunteer Practices</b>	<b>External Complaints</b>	<b>4-010</b>
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**POLICY STATEMENT**

SCI Ontario is committed to providing an effective, transparent and fair complaints management process for members of the public. SCI Ontario values feedback as a means to help inform areas of improvement in our services, business practices and policies and procedures.

**PURPOSE**

The purpose of this policy is to ensure a process to receive and respond to external complaints from the public about SCI Ontario's services, programs or business operations and employee or volunteer conduct.

**SCOPE**

This policy applies to all employees, volunteers and members of the public as it relates to the management of external complaints.

This policy is meant to provide overarching guidelines and procedures for external complaints to the organization. More detailed information on client complaints can be found in the Client Complaint Policy and on donor complaints in the Resource Development Complaint Policy. This policy does not cover the process for employees or volunteers making a complaint, which is covered in the Employee Complaint Policy.

**DEFINITIONS**

**Appeal**- when a complainant is not satisfied with the resolution of a formal complaint and identifies in writing to the CEO they would like to challenge the decision.

**External stakeholders** - members of the public who are not employees or volunteers and are engaged with the organization in some capacity. This could include; clients and family members, donors, members, funders, vendors, community and corporate partners, or other interested individuals.

**Formal Complaint**- refers to a complaint that is communicated through structured channels of the organization, along the lines of established authority. A formal complaint requires written documentation by the employee and they are tracked by the organization.

**Informal Complaint**- refers to a complaint that is communicated casually and takes place outside of formal channels and does not flow in line of authority. It is generally oral and may include simple glances or gestures.

**Examples of external complaints** may include dissatisfaction with;

- Quality, quantity or level of service provided by the organization in services , programs or business operations,
- Conduct of an employee or volunteer as it relates to their work on behalf of the organization,
- Response to initial informal complaint discussed with a direct employee or volunteer or manager,
- Not receiving a tax receipt for a donation.

**RESPONSIBILITY**

It is the responsibility of the **Senior Manager, Human Resources** to oversee the complaint management process for formal external complaints including;

- Providing initial response to all complaints received through [complaintoffice@sciontario.org](mailto:complaintoffice@sciontario.org),
- Forwarding the complaint to the correct internal program so it can be investigated, resolved and responded to,
- Overseeing the tracking of formal external complaints which is done at the program level
- Analyzing formal external complaint data and providing a report to Senior Management and the Board of Directors on an annual basis,
- Ensuring the use of formal complaint data to help inform quality improvement initiatives and the organizational risk management plan.

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It is the responsibility of **Directors** to identify a **lead for complaints** within their programs who will manage external complaints including investigation, resolution, and written response to complainants, and tracking formal complaints at a program level.

It is the responsibility of the **Chief Executive Officer (CEO)** to respond to requests for appeals when formally requested by complainants. This includes the investigation, final decision and notification of appeal decision. The CEO is also responsible for presenting the formal complaint data to the Board of Directors on an annual basis.

**GUIDELINES**

- Where possible and appropriate, it is encouraged that members of the public attempt to speak directly to the individual involved first, to determine if there is a misunderstanding and/or simple resolution to the complaint.
- Complaints will be responded to in a timely and professional manner.
- Privacy of the complainant and other personnel involved will be respected and only information that is required to investigate the complaint will be shared with appropriate parties as required.
- A complainant has the right to raise concerns without fear of negative repercussions. No complainant will be penalized for using this process.
- The complainant will be kept informed of progress on the complaint and be informed of reasons for decisions made.
- Complaints involving accusations of fraudulent activity, breach of legislative requirements or serious wrong doing will follow the Whistleblowing Policy.

**PROCEDURES**

1. Complaints from members of the public can be made through a number of avenues in the organization including; to the employee directly, to the manager of the service/program involved, or through the complaint office at [complaintoffice@sciontario.org](mailto:complaintoffice@sciontario.org).
2. Complaints made directly to the employee will attempt to be resolved at this level where possible and appropriate. If this is not possible the employee will promptly notify their Supervisor to accelerate it to the next level of management at which time it is considered a formal complaint.
3. Complaints made to SCI Ontario through [complaintoffice@sciontario.org](mailto:complaintoffice@sciontario.org), will initially be handled by the Senior Manager, Human Resources, who will acknowledge the receipt of the complaint and direct the complaint to the Complaint Lead for the service/program involved within two business days.
4. The Complaint Lead will promptly contact the complainant to obtain further information and oversee the investigation, decision and resolution as it relates to the complaint.
5. The Complainant will be advised in writing what SCI Ontario can do to address the complaint, including actions and timelines.
6. If the complainant is not satisfied with the proposed resolution they may take it to the next level of management up to an including the Director of the service/program involved.
7. The respective Director will attempt to mediate any unresolved issues and provide a final decision in writing to the complainant. The response to the complainant will include steps to initiate an appeal in the event the individual is still not satisfied with the outcome.
8. At any time throughout the complaint process an employee may consult with HR to assist in the investigation or resolution of the complaint.
9. All formal complaints (resolved and unresolved) will be logged by the Complaint Lead at the Service/Program level using the Complaint Tracking Tool and forwarded to the Senior Manager, Human Resources on a quarterly basis by the 15<sup>th</sup> of the month following the end of a quarter. The Senior Manager, Human Resources will review the data and provide a written analysis to Senior Management on an annual basis to identify trends, areas for improvement and actions to be taken to address systemic issues.
10. The CEO will provide a report to the Board of Directors on an annual basis on the number, type and resolution of external formal complaints.

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11. If a complaint involves accusations of fraudulent activity, breach of legal requirements or serious wrong doing the employee will follow the Whistleblowing Policy.
12. A complainant has the right to raise concerns without fear of negative repercussions. No complainant will be penalized for using this process. If it is found that a complainant has been subject to negative repercussions as a result of using the complaints procedures, the employee will be subject to disciplinary action in accordance with SCI Performance Management Policy.

**Appeals**

1. In the event that the complainant is not satisfied with the resolution proposed by the Director of the service/program involved, they may request consideration of the issue by an appeal to the Chief Executive Officer. The complainant is notified in writing of the decision of SCI Ontario and advised of their right to appeal within thirty (30) days from when it was communicated.
2. The Chief Executive Officer will undertake an investigation to consider the appeal and make a decision. The Chief Executive Officer will advise the complainant in writing of the decision within thirty (30) days of receiving the appeal request.
3. SCI Ontario must advise a client who is receiving services in a program funded through the Ministry of Health –Long Term Care, which categories of complaints may be further appealed to the Health Services Appeal and Review Board in the event that they are not satisfied with the outcome of the appeal at the agency level.

**TOOLS REQUIRED**

External Stakeholder Complaints (Ref. RD 1-009)

Internal Complaints (Ref. HR 4-009)

Whistleblowing (Ref. HR 4-011)

Client Complaint (Ref. CS 2-002)

Complaint Tracking Tool (Ref. HR form)

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