

Reaching your target audience

The principles of effective complaints handling

**30th Anniversary of the
Commonwealth Ombudsman**

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About Centrelink

- Established in 1997 to remove complexity for Australians accessing government services
- Centrelink is part of the Human Services portfolio delivering payments and services on behalf of 25 policy departments and agencies.

Centrelink customers

- Retirees
- Families
- Single parents
- Youth
- Students
- Recent migrants
- Job seekers
- People needing help in a crisis
- Carers
- Farmers or self employed
- People with a disability or short-term incapacity

Feedback

What is feedback?

- complaints
- compliments
- suggestions
- tip offs
- general enquiry
- intention to claim

Feedback can be received:

- face-to-face
- by telephone
- by letter
- by fax
- by email
- through the media

Centrelink and the Commonwealth Ombudsman

- Centrelink values the insights the Commonwealth Ombudsman can bring to its service delivery and consults with the Ombudsman's Office about service delivery issues in regular bi-monthly meetings
- The relationship with the Ombudsman's office is constantly evolving. Centrelink will continue to build on its relationship with the Ombudsman's Office to ensure quality service delivery for customers.

Key elements in the Centrelink Customer Feedback Framework

- Centrelink's Customer Charter
- Statement of Commitment to Listening and Responding to Customer Feedback
- Chief Executive Instruction
- Customer Feedback Protocols - taskcards

The 10 principles

1. We welcome feedback and use it to help us improve the way that we provide services to customers and the community.
2. We support a customer's right to make a complaint about any aspect of Centrelink services or payments, and to seek a review of a Centrelink decision.
3. We will work with customers to resolve their complaints as quickly as possible either at first point of contact or by referral to the right parts of Centrelink for resolution
4. Inconvenience they experience in their dealings with us and provide an appropriate solution wherever possible.
5. We will treat customers in accordance with the commitments we make in our Customer Service Charter, and when investigating complaints provide reasonable opportunities for customers to fully state their case.
6. We will not discriminate against, or otherwise disadvantage, anyone who provides feedback or lodges a complaint.
7. We will treat customers sensitively when they provide us with feedback, and understand that they may be faced with particularly difficult personal circumstances.
8. We will ensure customers are informed of their rights to access the review and appeals systems.
9. We will protect customers' privacy and confidentiality in accordance with legislation.
10. We will accept anonymous feedback from customers.

Who handles customer feedback

- All employees
- Customer Relations Units (CRUs)
- Area Service Recovery Units (SRUs)
- Designated Managers
- Customer Experience Branch

Recent developments

- Area Review
- ANAO Audit & JCPAA Recommendations
- Previous consolidations
- Other feedback
- Existing expertise and infrastructure

CRUs: The changes

Before:

11 Area based teams

Stand alone systems

Localised networks

CRU responsibility

Centralised support

Specialist

Timeliness

Now:

4 CC based teams

Semi-integrated systems

Dispersed networks

All employees

Localised support

Generalist

Outcomes (resolution)

Customer complaint categories

Top five Centrelink complaint categories in 2005-06 were:

1. Unacceptable service
2. Disagreement with legislation/policy
3. Centrelink advice misleading/incorrect
4. Delay in new claim
5. Customer record incorrect

Complaint classifications

Tier 1 – First contact resolution

Tier 2 – May be actioned by a Designated Manager at the network office or Area level.

Tier 3 – May be actioned by a Designated Manager at the Area (including Call Centre management) or National Support Office level.

Customer and community complaint outcomes for 2005–06

Key Performance Indicators—internal measures	2005–06	
Key Performance Indicator	Target (%)	Result (%)
Proportion of Tier 1 complaints finalised within one working day	90	99.88
Proportion of Tier 2 complaints finalised within three working days	90	91.01
Proportion of Tier 3 complaints finalised within five working days	90	81.40

Escalation process

1. Not resolved at first contact – usually by network office or CRU staff
2. Escalation to designated manager or service recovery unit
3. Escalation to external reviews and appeals

Difficult customers

Centrelink guidelines for dealing with difficult customers comprise of two elements:

1. Prevention
2. Response to actual incident

Responses to difficult customers and complaints

- An apology (where appropriate)
- An amendment or correction to the customer's record
- Referral of the matter for formal investigation
- A change of servicing arrangement
- A referral to a specialist or other senior employee (or other agency where appropriate)
- A written response to explain what can be or has been done to address their issue(s)
- A review of a decision by an appropriate body
- An invitation to seek compensation for financial loss

Media and Complaints

- Complaints sometimes bypass all recovery channels and are aired in the media
- Perception that organisations are more likely to change a decision if their reputation is publicly impacted
- How can we be proactive about better engaging these customers?

Talkback strategy

- Regular spots on national, metropolitan and regional talkshows
- Deliberate strategy to talk to customers, answer questions and deal with complaints and criticism publicly
- Shows Centrelink as customer-focused, open and accountable
- Built on idea that customers are going straight to the top to Mr Fix-it
- Underpinned by the hank@centrelink.gov.au mailbox for people lost in the system
- Strategy also builds rapport with presenters with positive spin-offs – often report back with positive outcomes from follow-ups

Relevant employee training

- Introductory customer feedback induction materials
- Information package to support to the release of the Statement of Commitment
- CRU employees training on feedback and complaints handling and database training
- Technical and procedural training and making good decisions training for all Call Centre network employees.
- Ethics training for all Centrelink employees

Impact on overall customer service delivery

- Centrelink uses its customer complaint data to address identified systemic customer service delivery issues

e.g. identifying and rectifying technical self service issue

e.g. employee training

Why is feedback important to Centrelink

- Centrelink places great importance on feedback, as it supports the quality of service we provide to customers
- Feedback helps Centrelink to better identify and understand emerging customer service issues and trends, and to improve our products and services