

Engage
Empower
Safeguard

Complaints about aged care services – Year in review

July 2023 – June 2024



Australian Government

Aged Care Quality and Safety Commission

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Foreword

Janet Anderson PSM, Commissioner

This is our second full year report exploring complaints that the Aged Care Quality and Safety Commission (Commission) receives about aged care services. This time, we review complaints received in 2023–24.

Everyone receiving aged care services has the right to safe, compassionate care. They deserve to be treated with dignity and respect. Providers and their governing bodies are responsible for protecting the rights of people in their care and delivering high-quality services. Our shared vision is for older people to trust and have confidence that aged care services will protect and improve their health, safety and quality of life.

Providers are also responsible for managing feedback and complaints about their own services. We want to empower people receiving care to speak up, offer feedback and raise concerns if something doesn't seem right. We also want to help providers to understand their obligations to enable and effectively manage feedback and complaints.

We can receive complaints about aged care services from anyone at any time. People often come to us because their provider's complaints process has not addressed their concerns or because they don't feel confident to speak with their provider. When we receive a complaint, we help the person who made the complaint and their provider to communicate. This helps people feel heard and respected. We then go to the provider to address the issues raised. We will decide from this how we need to get involved to make sure that the provider:

- fixes the issues
- regains the trust of people in their care
- stops the issues from happening again.



The first part of this report is an overview of complaints we received about residential care and home services between 1 July 2023 and 30 June 2024. The second part uses case studies and shares information for people receiving care as well as aged care providers.

Our focus is on building a system that puts the needs and voices of older people first. This will make sure that they receive the highest standard of care and support. Together, we can create better outcomes for older people and ensure that care is more supportive and compassionate.

J. M. Anderson

Janet Anderson PSM
Aged Care Quality and Safety Commissioner

October 2024

Message from the Complaints Commissioner

Louise Macleod

Complaints are a powerful tool that give a voice to older people and their representatives. Complaints give people a chance to share their experiences and concerns about aged care services. They show what is working well, what needs improvement, and what matters most to those using aged care in Australia.

We analyse the complaints we receive to help guide our regulatory and education activities. We encourage providers to do the same, that is, to analyse their own complaints and use feedback to improve the quality and safety of their services.

We want to be open and transparent about our complaints data and performance. This is why we publish complaints data on our website every month. We ask providers to join us in being more transparent about the complaints they receive about their services. Being open and transparent helps the community to have trust and confidence in their services.

Providers legally must manage complaints about the care and services they provide under the *Aged Care Act 1997* and the Aged Care Quality Standards (Quality Standards). Under Quality Standard 6, people receiving care have the right to feel safe and be supported to give feedback and make complaints.

Like any business providing services to the community, providers must have processes to receive and respond to complaints. They also need to use an open disclosure process when things go wrong. Open disclosure is the open discussion that a provider has with an individual or individuals receiving aged care (or their representatives) when something goes wrong that has harmed or had the potential to cause harm. Under Quality Standard 8, the governing body of a provider is responsible for delivering safe and quality care.



Handling complaints well starts outside the complaints process. Creating a whole-of-service approach is key to a positive complaints culture. From the governing body to management and frontline staff, everyone must be focused on what works best for individuals receiving care, and open to ways they can improve.

Our journey towards improving is not a race, and there is no finish line. Providers need to have an ongoing process of listening, working together with people receiving care, and improving services as part of everything that they do. By focusing on good communication and developing relationships, we can make significant improvements and deliver better outcomes for older people.



Louise Macleod
Complaints Commissioner

October 2024



**We would like your feedback
to help inform future reports.**

We are interested to know what data or information you would like to see – what would help you better understand and improve performance in managing complaints?

Email your suggestions to:
complaintsreportfeedback@agedcarequality.gov.au or

Write to us:
Aged Care Quality and Safety Commission
GPO Box 9819, in your capital city

Call us:
1800 951 822

Introduction

Resolving complaints is one of the Commission's core roles. We work closely with people making complaints and providers to:

- fix the problem (remedy)
- regain the trust of people in the care they receive (restore)
- stop the non-compliance from happening again (prevent).

When providers handle complaints well, every person receiving aged care in Australia should:

- be treated with dignity and respect
- have the freedom to make choices
- be protected from harm
- have confidence in the safety and quality of their care.

This applies to all aged care services, including residential care, home care, the Commonwealth Home Support Programme, and the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Flexible Aged Care Program.

Resolving complaints must be focused on the needs and rights of the person receiving care. It acknowledges the older person's right to safe, quality care and makes sure that their concerns are addressed.

An effective complaints process must be accessible, confidential, quick and fair. The process needs to be promoted, so that everyone knows how to provide feedback or raise a complaint. Providers must also support and encourage people receiving aged care to raise their concerns without fear of consequences.



Complaints about residential care

July 2023 – June 2024

In 2023-2024, there was an increase in the number of complaints we received about residential aged care services compared with the previous year. A complaint can be about more than one issue of concern that needs to be resolved.



Figure 1. Residential complaints we received by financial year

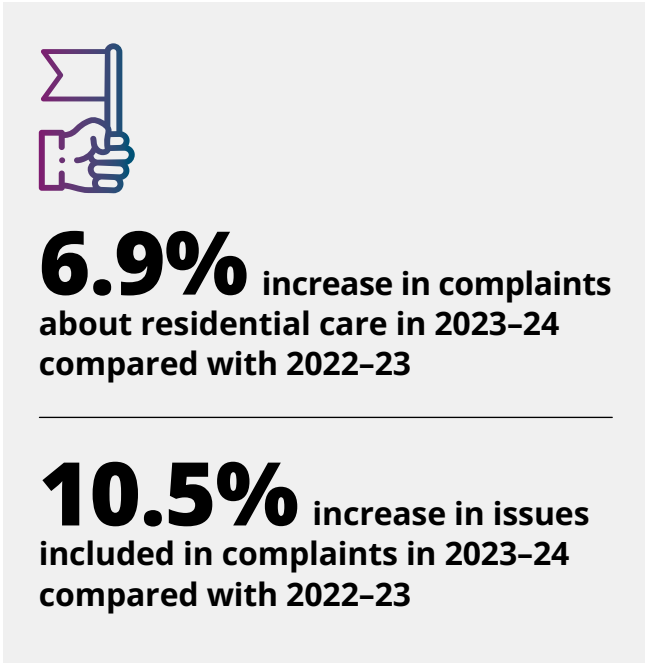


Figure 2. Increase in residential care complaints and issues compared with 2022-23

Residential complaints and issues by state and territory, rate of complaints 2023-24

	NSW	VIC	QLD	SA	WA	TAS	NT	ACT	Other*	Total
Complaints	1,724	1,288	1,135	538	484	168	17	39	34	5,427
Issues	5,286	2,924	2,548	1,352	1,200	409	52	147	104	14,022
Occupied Bed Days (OBD)	23,106,571	18,607,869	14,451,649	6,226,181	6,551,083	1,679,169	188,581	901,447	-	71,712,550
Rate per 10,000 OBD	0.7	0.7	0.8	0.9	0.7	1.0	0.9	0.4	-	0.8

Figure 3. Residential complaints and issues by state and territory, rate of complaints 2023-24

* Other – means that the person making the complaint did not select the state or territory that the service was delivered in.
OBD data extracted from Health EDW on 10 October 2024.

Summary of our handling of residential complaints 2023–24



5,427

Total complaints received

5,520

Total complaints resolved*

67

Days on average to resolve a complaint

67%

Complaints resolved within 60 days

0.8

Rate of complaints per 10,000 occupied bed days (OBDs)

The rate of complaints per 10,000 occupied bed days (OBDs) is 0.8 nationally. We can use this rate to compare the number of complaints between services while also keeping in mind the different size of each service. Providers should calculate their own complaint rates to compare with this rate. If there is a difference, it is important to understand why.

- Has an issue been raised about your service more than once that remains unresolved?
- Are there any problems with your complaints system?
- Are people receiving care confident that senior management and staff can resolve an issue quickly or do they feel they need to involve the Commission?
- Do people receiving care feel confident to be able to come forward and complain? Do they know how to make a complaint?
- Are you communicating well and using open disclosure to maintain good relationships with the people in your care? Open disclosure is the discussion a provider has with an individual or individuals receiving aged care when something goes wrong that has harmed or had the potential to cause harm.

Figure 4. Summary of our handling of residential complaints 2023–24

* Some resolved complaints included in this figure may be for complaints we received before 2023–24

Number of complaints about each residential service

Around 43% of services had more than one complaint made about them. Higher numbers of residential complaints about the same services may be because of ongoing issues or system-wide issues. These issues may need more focused attention by us to ensure that providers resolve them. Ongoing monitoring and engagement with providers with repeated complaints helps protect the safety and quality of residential care.

For services that we have not received any complaints about, this may be because:

- people receiving care, their family and representatives are satisfied with their care
- people have raised any concerns directly with staff and are satisfied with the way they are handled.

Other reasons for a service having no reported complaints could include that:

- they do not have a feedback and complaints process that is easy to use or accessible
- people in their care are not confident to speak up and raise their concerns
- they discourage people from making complaints
- people receiving care are not aware of the Commission’s role.

The Commission is putting additional effort into ensuring that providers are aware of their obligations to encourage feedback and facilitate complaints. Work is also underway to increase public awareness of the Commission’s role in complaints handling on behalf of older people receiving care and their families.

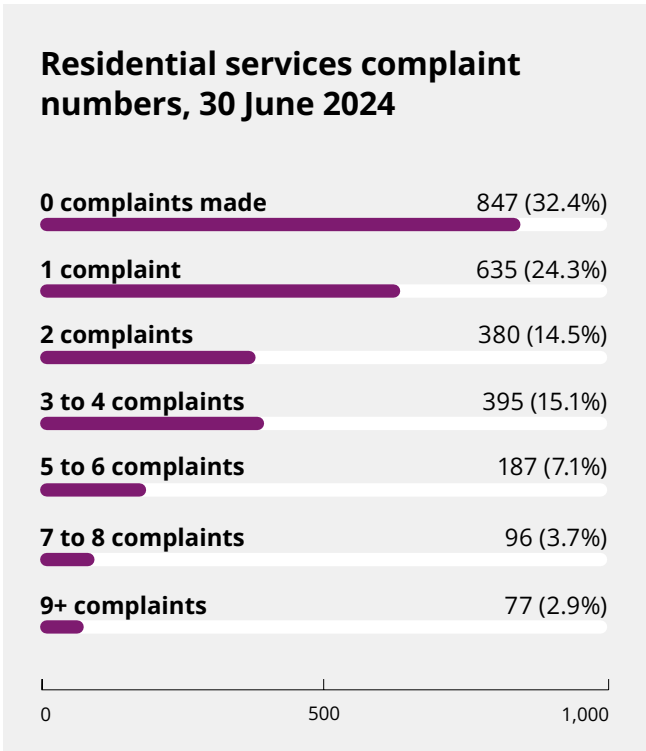


Figure 5. Number and proportion of services with different numbers of complaints

Note: Some providers have more than one service.

Residential complaints by provider size

Provider size	Providers that had a complaint	Complaints received	Complaints rate per 10,000 OBDS
Small operates 1 or 2 residential care services	557	1,401	0.2
Medium operates between 3 and 10 residential care services	128	1,124	0.2
Large operates 11 or more residential care services	51	2,877	0.4
Non-operational service*	N/A	25*	N/A
Total	736	5,427	0.8

Figure 6. Number of complaints and rate per 10,000 occupied bed days (OBDS) 2023–24

The complaints rate is the number of complaints we received per 10,000 occupied bed days (OBDS), Q1 to Q3 2023–24. Extracted from the data warehouse in July 2024.

The OBDS data for Q4 2023–24 was not complete and updated in the data warehouse as of 1 August 2024. Therefore, we have estimated OBDS for Q4 from the unique consumer counts in residential services. We have adjusted the OBD number by subtracting 0.05% from the estimation and by rounding to remove any inference of precision (OBD 17,938,000 Q4).

* We received 25 complaints in 2023–24 that were recorded against services that did not have an operational residential service as at 30 June 2024

Complaints about residential care by source

For some people, being able to make a confidential or anonymous complaint is important. It allows them to raise an issue while protecting their identity. If people choose to make a confidential complaint to us, their personal details are not given to the provider. People can also raise anonymous complaints, without revealing their identity at all.

Many anonymous complaints made about residential care are from staff or allied health workers. There are some limitations with anonymous complaints. We are not able to check back with the person who made the complaint to see if the complaint has been resolved. But anonymous complaints, including complaints from workers, are still an important source of information for the Commission about the care and services being provided to older people.

Residential complaints by source



Representative or family member	2,832 (52.2%)
Person receiving care	399 (7.3%)
Anonymous	1,497 (27.6%)
Others *	699 (12.9%)

Figure 7. Residential complaints by source

Complaint issues in residential care

Complaints about how medication was administered and managed was the number one issue raised with the Commission about residential care. The next most complained about issues were concerns about the personal and oral hygiene of the person receiving care and the number of staff. The most common issues stayed consistent across 2023–24.

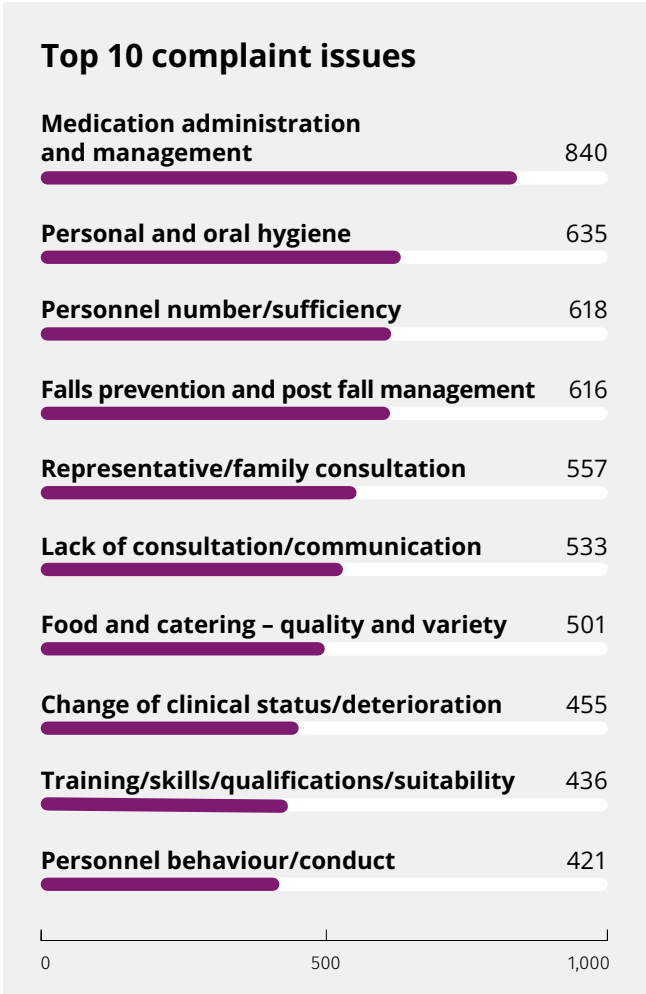


Figure 8. Top 10 residential care complaint issues, 2023–24

Complaints about home services

July 2023 – June 2024

Home services help older people stay independent in their homes. Home services can help with things like:

- personal care, such as showering and dressing
- transport
- preparing food
- shopping
- housework
- social activities.

The home services available to older people include:

- the Commonwealth Home Support Programme (CHSP) which helps people access basic support to live independently and safely at home
- Home Care Packages (HCP) which help people with more complex needs to live independently and safely at home for longer.

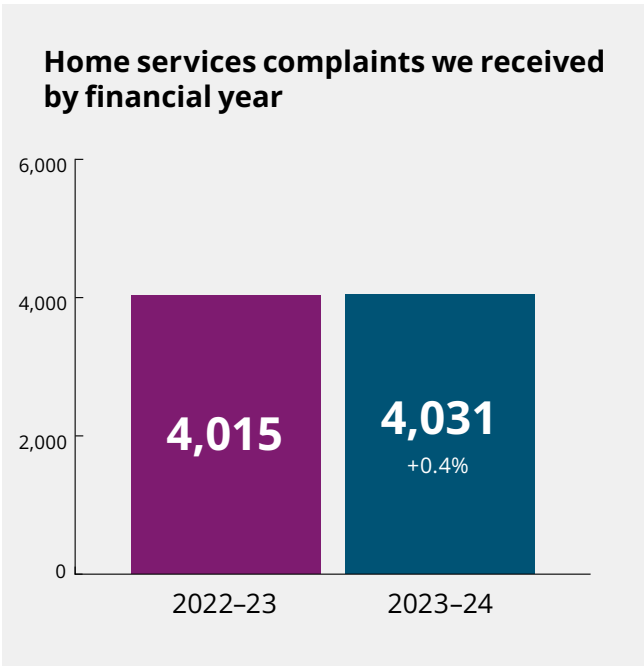


Figure 9. Home services complaints we received by financial year

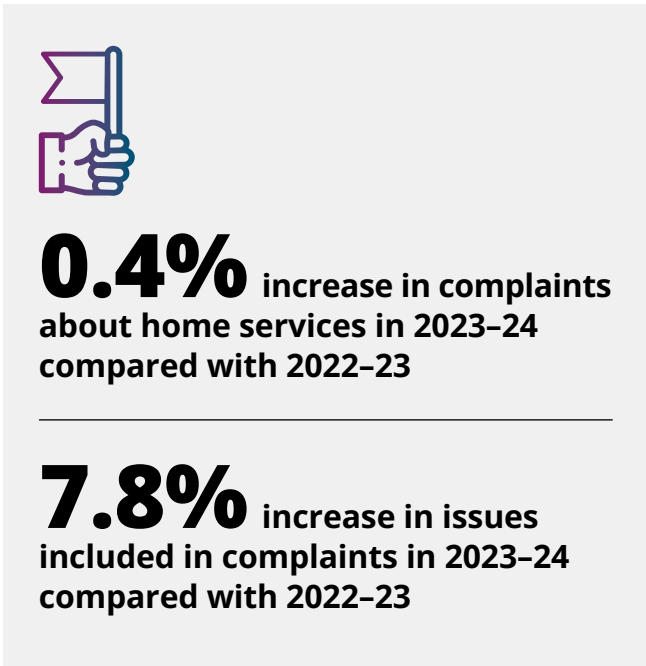


Figure 10. Increase in home services complaints and issues compared with 2022-23

Home services complaints and issues by state and territory, rate of complaints 2023–24

	NSW	VIC	QLD	SA	WA	TAS	NT	ACT	Other*	Total
Complaints	1,106	927	981	322	425	100	17	41	112	4,031
Issues	2,531	1,730	1,645	582	804	193	34	92	220	7,831
No. people who receive services	320,708	296,913	239,410	98,847	82,782	30,959	5,780	11,900	-	1,087,299
Rate of complaints per 10,000 people	34.5	31.2	41.0	32.6	51.3	32.3	29.4	34.5	-	37.1

Figure 11. Home services complaints and issues by state and territory, rate of complaints 2023–24

* Other – means that the person making the complaint did not select the state or territory that the service was delivered in.

Source: CHSP Consumer Data extracted from Health data portal (RBTIS) on 16 July 2024 and HCP extracted 16 July 2024 (consumer numbers derived from 2022–23 financial year). Distinct counted consumers from RBTIS as at 16 July 2024.

Summary of our handling of home services complaints 2023–24

**4,031****Total complaints received**

HCP = 3,639 CHSP = 392

4,165**Total complaints resolved***

HCP = 3,790 CHSP = 375

57**Days on average to resolve a complaint**

HCP = 58 CHSP = 47

68%**Complaints resolved within 60 days**

HCP = 67% CHSP = 75%

37.1**Rate of complaints per 10,000 people receiving care**

HCP = 132.3 CHSP = 4.8

The complaints rate for Home Care Packages (HCP) is higher than the rate overall for home services. Providers delivering HCP and CHSP should examine their own complaints data to see whether they can identify the same pattern and take steps to address it such as:

- closely monitoring how services are delivered and how satisfied people receiving care are to find any underlying issues
- focusing on improving service quality for those using Home Care Packages.

Home service providers should work with their boards, governing bodies and consumer advisory bodies to:

- look for trends in complaints
- share reports and findings
- develop action plans to keep improving.

Providers' internal complaints processes should be well known by those receiving care, easily accessible and regularly reviewed. Educating people about what is included and what is excluded from their Home Care Packages will also help give them a clearer idea of what to expect.

Figure 12. Summary of our handling of home services complaints in 2023–24

* Some resolved complaints in this figure may be for complaints we received before 2023–24.

Complaints about home services by source

The profile of complainants about home services is different from that for residential care, with a much higher proportion of complaints coming from those receiving services. However, the second largest group of complainants are representatives or family members showing that these people are closely involved and want to make sure that their loved one receives quality care.

Providers should develop strong communication channels with family members and representatives to address these people’s concerns quickly. This is part of an organisation’s strong complaints culture which is evident from:

- open and clear communication
- knowing where complaints come from
- addressing issues before they become complaints.

Given the higher number of complaints about HCP services than about CHSP, the Commission is considering what further action might be required to prompt HCP providers to work harder to anticipate and pre-empt any queries and concerns from the older people using their services.

Overall, this data shows that even though family members and people receiving care make most of the complaints in home services, providers need to communicate with all stakeholders. This will help to address concerns and improve the quality of their services. Providers should use this feedback to improve their services and better meet the needs of people receiving care and their families.

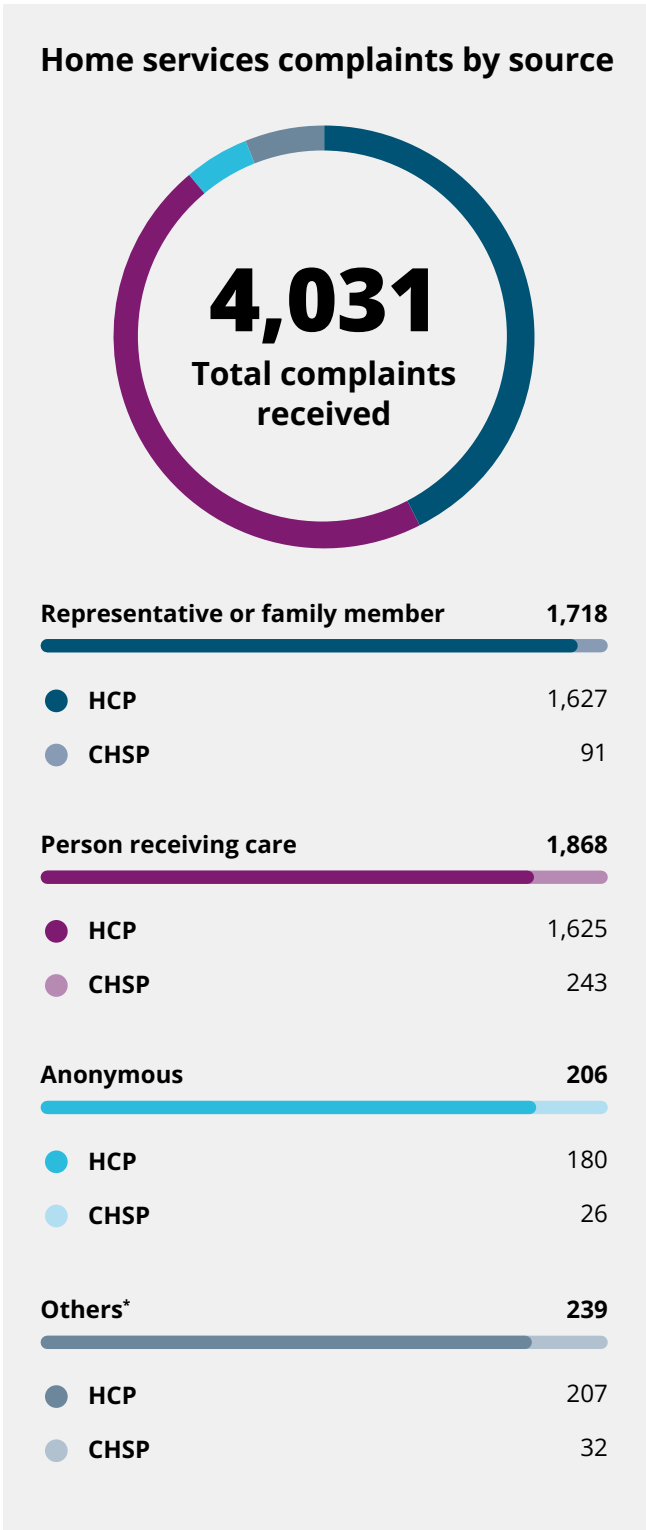


Figure 13. Home services complaints by source

* Others include external agencies, internal referrals, media, providers and other interested people.

Complaint issues in home services

Concerns about consultation and communication were the number one issue raised with us about home services. This shows that many older people, their family members and representatives are not happy with the level of communication and consultation from their providers. Addressing this issue would significantly reduce complaints.

Fees, charges and financial management issues are the second and third most common complaints. This shows that there needs to be better financial transparency and fairness in billing. Home service providers should review their pricing structures and financial management to improve how they handle these issues and ensure that adequate information is provided to older people receiving care.

The need for consistent care and coordination is also clear from this data. Service providers should look at improving the continuity and reliability of their care to make sure that people receiving care get the high standard of service they expect.



Figure 14. Top 10 home services complaint issues, 2023–24

Information for people receiving care

It is important to raise concerns

People receiving aged care should be confident that their care is high quality and safe. That confidence comes from having choice and control over how your care is provided. Older people have a lifetime of experience organising the services they need. You know what you want and how to get it. Whether it is arranging a medical appointment, booking a gutter cleaning service or enjoying a meal out with friends. This is the same when you use aged care services.

Every person receiving care has the right to share their opinions and be heard. Your voice matters. Whether it is about the quality of care, your interactions with staff and management, or parts of your daily routine. Your right to raise concerns is a key part of making sure that the aged care system works for you. Providers are not allowed to punish anyone for raising concerns or making complaints. We want to know if you feel that you have been punished in any way because you made a complaint. We will take it seriously.

You should feel safe and comfortable making a complaint or giving feedback to your provider. As a person receiving care, it is important for you to use your voice and speak up. The care you receive should always meet your needs, respect your dignity and support your rights.

Your provider's complaints system should be easy to use, confidential, fast and fair. Their complaints process should:

- support you to give feedback or make a complaint
- allow you to make a formal, informal, verbal or written complaint
- encourage you to give both positive and negative feedback about the care and services you receive
- respond to feedback and focus on resolving issues.



You can get support to provide feedback or make a complaint about your aged care service. Finding your voice to speak up can be challenging, especially if you feel vulnerable or uncertain. It is important to remember that you are not alone. If you find it difficult to raise concerns yourself, your family members, friends and other supporters also have the right to raise concerns for you.

They can help you to make sure your voice is heard. Their involvement can help resolve issues, especially if they have noticed something you have not. Asking them to speak up for, and with, you can mean better outcomes and a better aged care experience.

Also, at any time you can contact the Commission for help in getting problems with your care fixed. If you're uncertain or anxious about raising your concerns directly with your care workers or provider, the Commission can do this with you or on your behalf. The choice is yours. Contact information for the Commission is presented on [page 30](#) of this document.

Advocacy services like the Older Persons Advocacy Network (OPAN) can also help you to talk with your provider. They provide free, independent and confidential support for people receiving government-funded aged care services across Australia. They can help:

- provide you with information about your rights and responsibilities
- support you to make decisions that affect your quality of life
- discuss your options for taking action
- help you raise a concern with your provider or the Commission
- support you at any stage of a complaint process.

Reaching out and speaking up helps protect your wellbeing and make sure that your aged care experience is positive.

Learning from case studies

Case study 1

Personal hygiene and dignity

Complaint description

Selma* lives in a residential care service, and she contacted us for some advice and support. She uses a wheelchair because of her increasing frailty and poor balance. Selma was starting to get incontinence and felt that her personal hygiene needs were not being met. This affected her dignity and overall wellbeing.

Selma did not have any family support and she did not feel confident raising her concerns directly with the provider. She felt uncomfortable discussing such a sensitive and personal topic, particularly as she felt the provider was doing the best they could, and she did not want to be a bother.

What happened

We spoke to Selma about what she should expect from her provider, the support available to her through advocacy services, and how important it is that the service meets her needs. After learning about her rights, Selma was more convinced that she should speak up. But she still felt unsure if she would be able to manage on her own. Selma decided that she would like the support of an advocacy service to help her raise her concern with her provider.

With Selma's permission, we contacted the Older Persons Advocacy Network (OPAN) for her. OPAN contacted Selma and supported her to talk with her provider and arrange for them to meet. Together, they worked with the staff to revise her personalised care plan that made sure that Selma's personal hygiene needs were met. This improved her quality of life.

Case study 2

Lack of consultation and communication

Complaint description

Marco is in his late 70s living in his own home. Every month for a few years now, Marco has been getting help with his gardening through the Commonwealth Home Support Programme. He loves his garden, but it was becoming too much for him to manage safely on his own.

Marco had a good relationship with his usual gardener, but Paul retired at the end of last year. Marco was not happy with the new gardener as he often turned up late and sometimes didn't turn up at all. This meant that Marco's beloved garden was getting out of control. Marco contacted us to try and find out his options.

What happened

We provided Marco with:

- information about his service agreement
- his rights as a person receiving care
- some tips on contacting his home service provider.

Marco said he was happy to speak up and raise his concerns directly with his provider. He felt that he now had all the right information.

A few days later, Marco told us that he had contacted his home service provider, and the conversation went well. They discussed Marco's needs for a regular monthly service. The provider agreed to make sure that his gardener arrived on time and that he would be told about any last minute changes.

* These case studies are based on real experiences, but all names have been changed to protect privacy

Speaking up for yourself or getting the support of others to speak for you is a right. It is also an important way to make sure that you receive the safe and high-quality care that you deserve.

Finding your voice can make a real difference to your care, whether it is through:

- talking directly with your provider
- contacting advocacy services
- involving family and representatives.

By speaking up, you help create a culture of responsibility and ongoing improvement in aged care. This benefits you and everyone in the aged care community.



Key messages



People receiving aged care should be **confident that their care is high quality and safe.**



Every person receiving care has **the right to share their opinions and to be heard.**



You should **feel safe and comfortable making a complaint or giving feedback** to your provider.



You can ask for support to provide feedback or make a complaint about your aged care service.

Information for aged care providers

Using data to improve care

As providers of aged care, it is important to understand the information that comes from complaints and feedback. This is not just numbers, but key information about the experiences of older people receiving care. By analysing this data and thinking about key issues, you can:

- identify opportunities to improve
- make sure you are being transparent through open disclosure
- take steps to improve the quality of your care.

Encouraging discussions about complaints data

Senior leadership and governing bodies play a key role in improving aged care services.

To support meaningful discussions, consider these questions about your service:

1. What trends can we see in our own complaints data?
2. Look at the frequency and types of complaints over time. Are there any issues that happen regularly? Are certain areas or services underperforming?
3. Have we shared our complaints data with our governing body, consumer advisory group or staff? Are we open to shared problem-solving with the older people in our care?
4. Based on our complaints data: what have we improved and what can we do to improve? What specific areas need improvement? How can we fix these issues, and what is our timeline to do this? How will we monitor and communicate our progress? How will we ensure that the improvements last?
5. How are we encouraging open disclosure? Are we being open with residents and their families about issues and our efforts to resolve them? Open disclosure builds trust and shows you are committed to being accountable.

The data the Commission collects and shares also gives you a way to improve.



Focusing on open disclosure

When people receiving care, their family members or representatives raise concerns, you should:

- respond with honesty
- clearly explain what happened
- outline the steps you are taking to fix the issues
- keep communication channels open throughout this exercise and beyond.

Open disclosure is not just about admitting when things go wrong. It is also about creating an open, honest culture of ongoing improvement.

Open disclosure is:

- communicating with a person receiving care when things go wrong
- helping with any immediate needs or concerns and providing support
- apologising
- explaining the steps the service will take to stop it from happening again.

If the person receiving care would like them to be involved, open disclosure can include:

- their family
- carers and other support people
- representatives.

Honest and timely disclosures are ethical, moral and professional. They are also the first stage in creating a culture that encourages learning from issues to improve care and services.

Encouraging positive outcomes

By engaging with people receiving care and involving them in making decisions, you can build a stronger, more capable service. Dealing with the issues is vital, but it is just as important to focus on the positive outcomes from these efforts. For example, you can engage with older people to regularly ask for feedback through:

- surveys
- individual discussions
- focus groups
- informal conversations.

This feedback can also help you to identify what older people using your service enjoy and what they truly value.

You can also use group meetings, such as for consumer advisory bodies, to:

- talk about trends in complaints data
- share information
- develop action plans
- foster trust in your service

These groups can provide valuable perspectives. They can also help make sure that the changes you make meet their needs and expectations.

These processes help you identify areas where you can improve. They also empower older people by making them active participants in their care.

Encouraging positive organisational culture

A high performing aged care provider has an organisational culture that supports older people to be treated with dignity and respect. Good organisational culture can support:

- strong performance
- innovation
- high-quality, person-centred care.

Give some thought to how your service can strengthen its capability. Consider how your service can move beyond solving the immediate issues to building long-term capability.

- **Older people at the centre of care** – Governing bodies and executive teams should have the person receiving care at the heart of the provider's purpose. This should be part of how they make their decisions. This means 'doing with' not 'for'.
- **Obligations and accountabilities** – Providers should encourage a 'continuous improvement culture' across the organisation. The executive team and staff should act with integrity at all times. This means being open and honest about your organisation's culture, with:
 - each other
 - staff
 - regulators
 - the community.

For example:

- Do your policies and procedures support the culture you want?
- Do your policies and procedures encourage best practice?
- Do you regularly assess policies and procedures to make sure your organisation is always improving?

- **Collect knowledge** – Does the governing body and the executive team have appropriate ways to measure and track culture across the organisation? They can draw understanding from both qualitative (personal feedback) and quantitative (data) information sources. This may include:

- staff surveys
- internal complaints
- feedback from people receiving care and their representatives.

You might also include a focus on your code of conduct. Is it thorough, well understood and honoured by staff? How often is it reviewed to make sure it remains relevant?

- **Leadership and culture** – It is important to set the 'tone from the top'. This is about the character and behaviour that leaders of a provider show. Your leaders need to model appropriate behaviour at every level of the organisation. You might also include a focus on the Aged Care Code of Conduct. Is it well understood and honoured by staff? How often do you remind staff about the Code and the positive behaviours it reinforces?

Making these shifts will create a culture of dignity and respect. It will also help to achieve better outcomes and safe, compassionate and quality care for older people.

Learning from case studies

Case study 3

Medication management

Complaint description

Michael* contacted us to complain about his father Albert's care in a residential service. Michael was concerned that Albert's medication for Parkinson's disease was not being given to him at the correct time. He believed that this was causing problems with his father's mobility.

Albert's care plan says that he needs his first dose of medication when he wakes up. Michael told us that Albert's medication is often delayed until the set medications round later in the day. He has tried raising his concerns with staff at the service and was told that something would be done, but nothing happened. Michael was quite upset because it was affecting his father's mobility and wellbeing.

What happened

We gave the case to a complaints officer who assessed the issue raised in the complaint as time sensitive. This meant that we contacted the provider straight away.

The provider reassured the complaints officer that they would review Albert's medication management, and that they would speak with Albert and Michael. The complaints officer asked the provider to report back about Michael's concerns and what they had done to fix the issue.

The provider's Director of Nursing reviewed Albert's care plan and the records of when Albert's medication was being given. Records showed that Albert's medication was often delayed until mid-morning. The service applied stricter protocols to make sure that medication was given at the correct times. New staff had started supporting Albert and the provider reported that they were not yet familiar with the effective management of Michael's clinical condition. They provided more information and training to the new staff, highlighting how important it is to give medication on time.

We made sure the provider gave us copies of the updated protocols and training as proof of the changes they had made. Michael and Albert were encouraged to raise any further concerns. The service committed to checking in with Michael and Albert in 2 weeks' time to make sure the improved practice was being continued.

The complaints officer spoke with Michael and Albert who confirmed that medication was now being managed in a timely way. Michael's decision to speak up addressed his concern and led to a safer environment for Albert, as well as other residents.

* These case studies are based on real experiences, but all names have been changed to protect privacy

Case study 4

Fees and charges

Complaint description

Cheng was receiving a Level 2 Home Care Package (HCP) and her daughter, Amber, helped her manage her home supports. Supports included a regular cleaning service to do the heavier jobs such as cleaning the bathroom and toilet, and changing the sheets on Cheng's bed. Monthly statements from the provider were sent to Cheng, although she did not really understand them.

Cheng's health began to decline, and she needed some other services to manage safely at home. Amber and Cheng contacted the provider to ask for some more supports. The provider arranged to meet with Cheng and Amber to update Cheng's care plan and review her HCP budget. They agreed that, in a trial, Cheng would receive help with her personal care 3 times a week. Enough funds were in Cheng's HCP budget to start the trial. A second meeting was organised for 2 months' time to review how the new supports were working for Cheng.

Cheng was told 2 months later by her provider that her package was overspent by \$2,156. Cheng and Amber did not understand how this could happen, as they had been assured that there were enough funds. Amber lodged a complaint with us about how the provider was managing Cheng's HCP budget.

What happened

We raised the issue with the provider, and they agreed to review Cheng's budget. They told us that there had been delays in taking payments out of Cheng's home care package and they had not processed a backlog of charges. This had created an incorrect statement. They agreed they had not monitored or managed the package funds correctly.

The provider apologised to Cheng and agreed to immediately fix their error. They sat down with Cheng and Amber and checked how Cheng wanted to use the funds in her package, and talked about what she should expect to see in her invoices. The provider agreed to let Cheng know if they got behind in processing invoices and Amber agreed to help Cheng speak up if an invoice did not look right.

When we checked with Cheng, she was pleased with the outcome of her complaint as the issue was resolved. She also had a better understanding of how things work with invoices and now had a contact person at her provider to follow up with if she had any concerns. This would help her in the future as well.



Key messages



Senior leadership and governing bodies play a critical role in improving aged care services.



When people receiving care, their family members or representatives raise concerns, providers should:

- respond with honesty
- clearly explain what happened
- outline the steps you are taking to fix the issues
- keep communication channels open throughout this exercise and beyond.



By **engaging with people receiving care and involving them in making decisions**, you can build a stronger, more capable service.



To encourage change, you need **to create an organisational culture** that supports older people to be treated with dignity and respect.

Commission complaint handling performance

Resolving complaints about aged care services is a key function of the Commission. Strong complaints processes are essential to:

- encourage older people to trust and have confidence in aged care
- make sure we can use the information that complaints give us to support our regulation of aged care providers.

We understand that how we handle complaints is important to both providers and older people. Older people rely on us to manage complaints in a way that supports and promotes their safety and quality of life. Providers rely on us to be fair and reasonable. Both expect us to be professional, timely, open and honest in the way we handle complaints.

We have been working to improve not only our performance in handling complaints, but also how open and accountable we are in reporting on this performance.

Increase in volume and complexity

As the data in this report shows, we continue to receive an increasing number of enquiries and complaints. This indicates that there is a growing understanding by older people, their family members and representatives of:

- the rights of people receiving care
- the Commission's role
- how to get help to make a complaint.

This also shows a growing understanding of the value of speaking up and raising concerns.

Enquiries are an important part of the complaints process. Enquiries are often 'pre-complaints'. For example, people contact the Commission because they are unhappy with their provider, and they want advice on what they can do. They may contact us if they do not want to lodge a formal complaint yet.

The number of complaints and enquiries the Commission has received about aged care services has been growing steadily since 2019. There is also an upwards trend in the number of complaints received over that period.



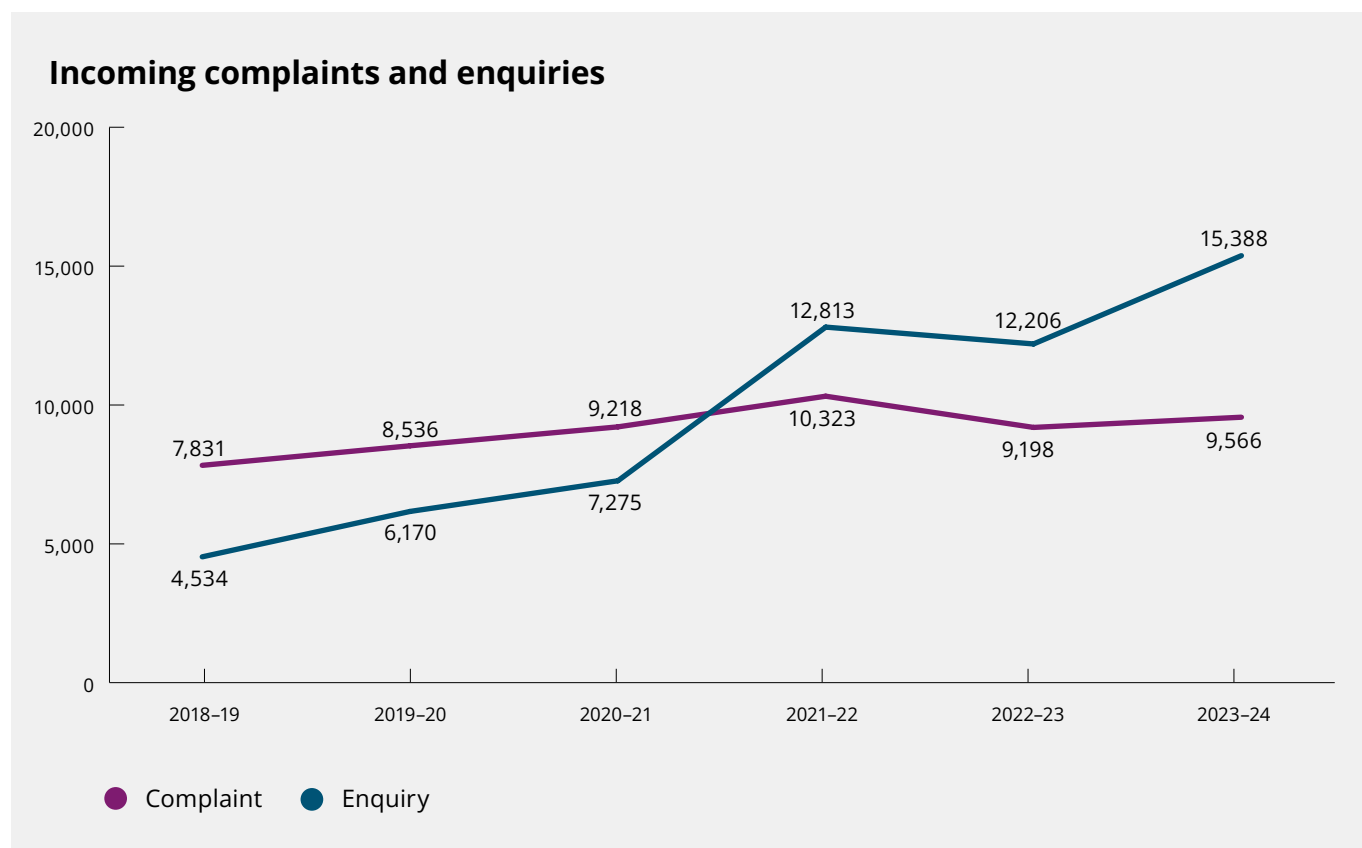


Figure 15: Complaints and Enquiries received between 2018–19 and 2023–24

Performance measures

In July 2023, we introduced 2 new complaints KPIs:

- we resolve complaints and enquiries within published service standards
- survey responses from the person making the complaint and the provider have an overall rating of satisfied or higher in line with published service standards.

Our published service standards are:

- finalise 80% of enquiries in 7 days
- finalise 80% of complaints in 60 days
- have 65% of complainant and provider survey responses with an overall rating of satisfied or higher
- have 80% of complaints finalised result in a positive outcome for the complainant.

In March 2024, we started collecting data about the types of outcomes achieved for people making complaints when a complaint is finalised. The range of outcomes can include:

- the provider giving a better explanation
- the provider giving a disclosure or apology
- the provider changing their policy and practice
- financial remedy
- changing a decision.

The results against the 3 performance measures for which 2023–24 data is available are shown in Tables 16–18.

Monthly key performance indicator results for 2023–24

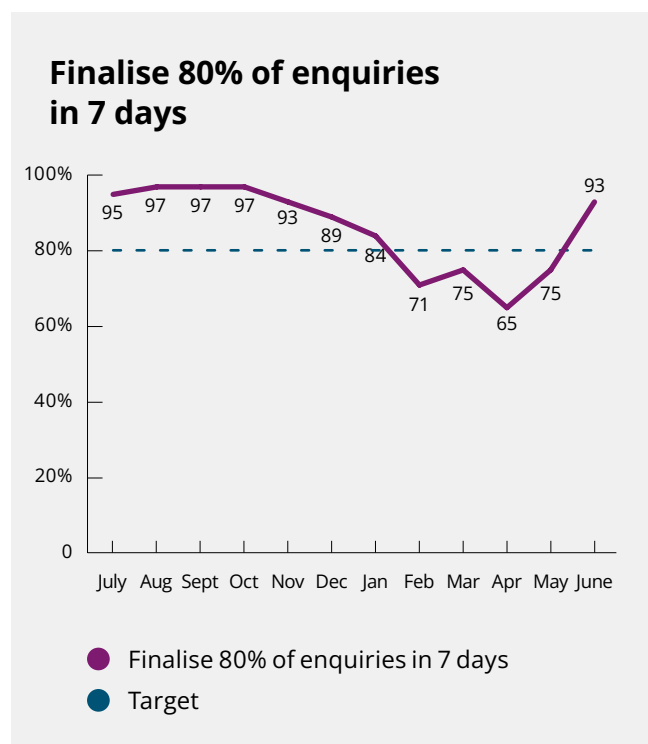


Figure 16: Finalise 80% of enquiries in 7 days for 2023–24

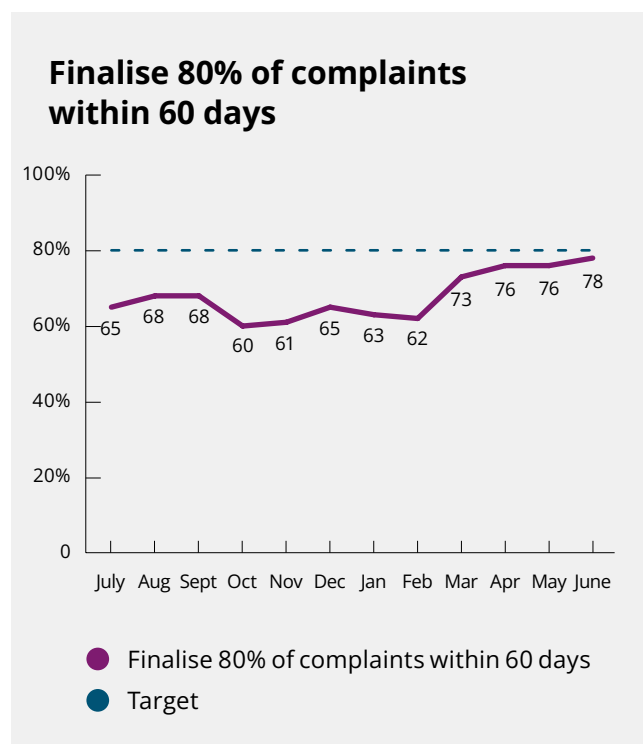


Figure 17: Finalise 80% of complaints within 60 days for 2023–24

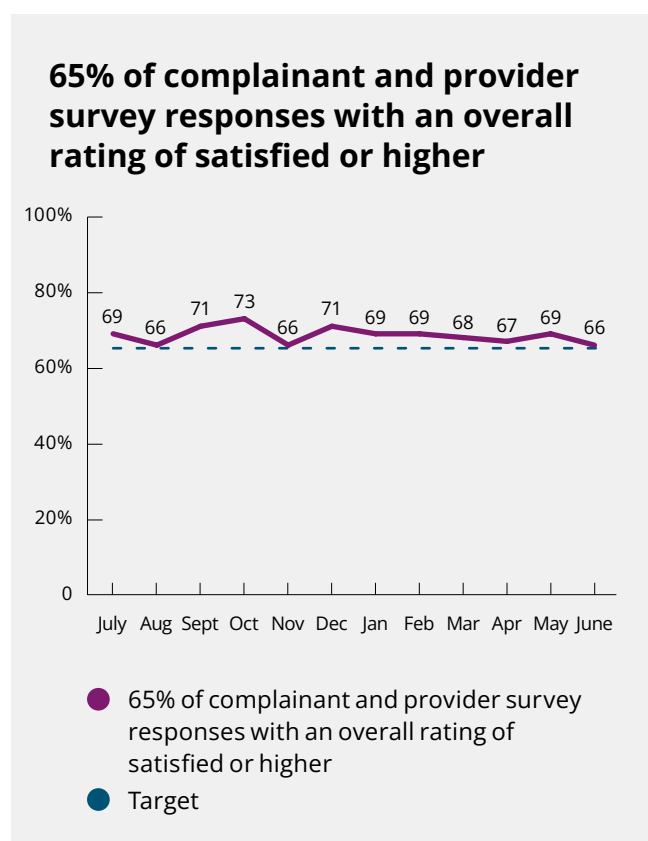


Figure 18: Have 65% of complainant and provider survey responses with an overall rating of satisfied or higher for 2023–24

Feedback

Once we finalise complaints, we ask for anonymous feedback from both the person who made the complaint (the complainant) and the provider involved.

We use the data to assess how happy the person making the complaint was with our performance. We value the feedback we receive, and use this to identify trends and improve our performance, including through staff training.

Where to learn more

If you're concerned about the care that you or someone else receives from an Australian Government-funded aged care service:

Phone

Call us for free between 9am – 5pm
Monday to Friday on:

- **1800 951 822** (all enquiries)
- **1800 844 044** (Food, Nutrition and Dining enquiries)
- **+61 2 9633 1711** if you're calling from outside Australia

Email

info@agedcarequality.gov.au

Website

www.agedcarequality.gov.au

The Commission provides a wide range of free resources to help both people receiving care and providers. You can download or order these online to:

- help people understand the ways they can provide feedback, raise a concern or lodge a complaint with providers or with us
- provide information to providers on good complaints handling
- support aged care staff to resolve concerns in the service and through us.



Resources for older people, their family members and representatives

- Do you have a concern or complaint [brochure](#) (and [poster](#))
- Service Charter – [Fact sheet](#)
- Top tips for consumers: making a complaint – [Fact sheet](#)
- A Little Yarn Goes a Long Way [Fact sheet](#) aimed at Indigenous people receiving care
- Right to seek review of complaint decision or Commission’s process - [Fact sheet](#)

Resources for providers

[Better practice guide to complaints handling in aged care services](#). The booklet has guidance on how to:

- create an effective complaints system focused on resolutions in aged care services and how to improve existing processes
- make sure you are complying with the Quality Standards
- encourage a positive, blame-free culture around complaints handling in aged care services by:
 - encouraging an understanding of the complaints process and how it affects the people involved
 - setting out the key areas of the effective management of complaints in a service including skills, procedures and policies.

Other [online resources](#) include brochures and posters to raise awareness of the importance of effective complaints handling procedures. They also aim to educate service provider staff and include:

- top tips for service providers – managing complaints
- resolving concerns about aged care
- a wide range of materials on open disclosure, including videos.



The Aged Care Quality and Safety Commission acknowledges the Traditional Owners of Country throughout Australia, and their continuing connection to land, sea and community. We pay our respects to them and their cultures, and to Elders both past and present.



Phone
1800 951 822



Web
agedcarequality.gov.au



Write
Aged Care Quality and Safety Commission
GPO Box 9819, in your capital city