



MANAGING COMPLAINTS POLICY AND PROCEDURE

Applies to: Staff Members, clients and stakeholders,
Management Committee members and Volunteers/Students.

Specific responsibility: Manager and Management Committee.

Version: 12

Date approved: 11th Dec 2024

Next review date: Dec 2027

Policy context: This policy ensures that all clients, staff members, management committee and community partners have the right to have all complaints heard and responded to in an appropriate manner

Legislation / Standards or other external requirements	- National Disability Insurance Scheme Act 2013 - National Disability Insurance Scheme (Provider Registration and Practices Standards) Rules 2018 - National Disability Insurance Scheme (Code of Conduct) Rules 2018 - National Disability Scheme (Protection and Disclosure of Information) Rules 2013 - Privacy and Personal Information Act 1998 - Children and Young Persons (Care and Protection) Act 1998, including Keeping them Safe – Chapter 16A - Health Records and Information Privacy Act 2002 - Commonwealth <i>Privacy Act 1988</i>. - Freedom of Information Act 1982 - National Disability Insurance Scheme (Incident Management & Reportable Incidents) Rules 2018 - NDIS Quality and Safeguards Framework
Contractual obligations	- Employment Agreements - Client Service Agreements and Schedule of Supports - NDIS Service Registered Service Provider obligations - DoE (Sector Capacity Building project contract) Funding Terms and Conditions (Funding Agreement)

1.0 POLICY STATEMENT:

Early Connections - Manning and Great Lakes (EC-MGL) is committed to ensuring that any person or organisation using EC-MGL services, who may be affected by its operations has the right to lodge a complaint or to appeal a decision of the organisation and to have their concerns addressed in ways that ensure access and equity, fairness, accountability and transparency.

The organisation will provide a complaints and appeals management procedure that:

- is simple and easy to use
- is effectively communicated and promoted to all clients and stakeholders
- ensures complaints or appeals are fairly assessed and responded to promptly

- is procedurally fair and follows principles of natural justice
- complies with legislative requirements

2.0 PRINCIPLES

Early Connections - Manning and Great Lakes will:

- consider all informal and formal complaints it receives
- treat all complainants with respect, recognising that the issue of complaint is important to the complainant
- maintain confidentiality of parties involved, keeping any information private to those directly involved in the complaint and its resolution
- ensure advocacy is available to clients, staff or stakeholders, who make a complaint and require support
- resolve complaints in a timely manner
- keep parties to the complaint informed of progress of the complaint
- ensure that Management Committee members, staff, volunteers and students are given information about the complaint's procedure as part of their induction and are aware of procedures for managing client feedback and complaints
- ensure all services users, stakeholders and members are aware of the complaints policy and procedures
- ensure that a complainant is not penalized in any way or prevented from using services during the progress of an issue
- ensure that feedback data (both positive and negative) is considered in organisational reviews and in planning service improvements

3.0 PROCEDURE

3.1 Informal complaints, compliments or suggestions:

Complaints may be made informally by talking to a staff member. Informal comments or suggestions can be:

- a) lodged using our "Feedback Form" form (Appendix 1).
- b) Using QR Code, displayed at each centre reception and on each staff member's email signature (Appendix 2). The QR code directs to www.earlyconnections.com.au website and offers the opportunity for compliments, complaints and suggestions.
- c) Directed to any staff member. The staff member will ask the complainant if they would like to use our "Feedback Form", QR Code or have the staff member pass the information on to the Manager. They will also explain our managing complaints procedures and ask if a formal complaint is requested.
- d) By phoning or emailing the Manager directly for a confidential conversation: Ph: (02) 6552 7222, E: manager@earlyconnections-mgl.org.au
- e) The complainant will be asked if they require feedback or follow-up following any needed actions (if any).
- f) The staff member or Manager (whichever appropriate) will give feedback to the complainant where it is requested.

3.2 Formal Complaints:

Complainants can escalate an informal complaint to a formal complaint or initiate this in the first instance.

- a) A formal complainant must first put their complaints in writing, in order to make the terms or basis of any complaint as clear as possible. Those involved with a complaint will have the opportunity to

present their point of view. Complaints will be investigated as soon as practicable after being received. All complaints will be treated seriously and investigated. Support can be offered to assist with this step in the process.

- b) The complaint will be forwarded to the President or in their absence a member of the executive committee. All complaints will be minuted at the next Committee Meeting.
- c) The Manager and President (or executive committee representative) will discuss the complaint and where appropriate the Manager will respond as deemed necessary. The Manager and President will:
 - Consider the nature and details of the complaint.
 - Give all involved an opportunity to prepare and present information in regard to the complaint.
 - Maintain appropriate records of the complaints/disputes meeting. Hold records in a secure place (on cloud system in file viewable by Manager only as well as in locked
 - Respect the confidential nature of information relating to the complaint.
 - Review all relevant information and documentation submitted by people involved in the complaint.
 - Inform the complainant that they can be supported by an advocate or support person of their choice.
 - Meet individually with all the people mentioned in the complaint to gather information.
 - Call all parties together to meet as a group to endeavor to resolve issues/dispute.
 - Endeavor to resolve issues by mutual agreement.
 - Formulate a written resolution plan to be distributed to all parties.
 - Review the situation regarding the resolution within the following month.
 - Keep the written complaint, all records and evidence of the resolution in a "Complaints File" kept in a secure computer file, only accessible by the Manager and Committee.
- d) If a complaint cannot be managed as above, the President will form complaints (subcommittee) and arrange a time to meet, inviting all personnel mentioned in the complaint. The above process will be followed by the sub-committee and actions decided upon.

3.3 Complaints made about a staff member, volunteer or student (either by a client/stakeholder, or by another staff member), will be managed by the Manager who has delegated responsibility for resolving complaints or disputes involving staff members, volunteers or students. The Manager will:

- a) notify the staff member, volunteer or student of the complaint and its nature
- b) investigate the complaint and provide the staff member, volunteer or student with an opportunity to respond to any issue raised
- c) attempt to mediate the dispute (if applicable) and/or attempt to resolve the matter to the satisfaction of the outside party
- d) take any other action necessary to resolve the issue

Any disciplinary action against a staff member, volunteer or student arising from a complaint will be dealt with in an appropriate manner that will be based on the seriousness of the issue. Any further proceedings will align with the Disciplinary & Termination Policy and in consultation with the Management Committee.

Complaints involving the Manager will be managed by the President of the management committee.

3.4 Complaints involving Management Committee members, or members of association

Complaints made against a member of the Management Committee will be referred to the President. The President or their delegate will:

- notify the person about whom a complaint is being made of, the complaint and its nature

- investigate the complaint and provide the members with an opportunity to respond to any issues raised
- attempt to mediate the dispute (if appropriate) and/or attempt to resolve the matter to the satisfaction of the outside party

Where the President is the subject of a complaint, the complaint should be referred to other office bearers.

If the matter remains unresolved, the President or notified office bearer will raise the matter at the next Management Committee meeting. Depending on the seriousness of the complaint, the Management Committee may:

- deal with the matter at its meeting
- or
- refer the matter to the process outlined in Early Connections - Manning and Great Lakes constitution

3.5 LODGING AN APPEAL

Complainants or their advocates may lodge an appeal if they disagree with a decision made by the organization. An appeal should be made in writing and submitted to the Manager or President within 7 days of the decision.

- A sub-committee will be formed to navigate ongoing actions, which may involve mediation, or external advice being sought.
- In the event that the complaint continues to be unresolved to the satisfaction of all parties, the sub-committee will refer the matter to the committee, accompanied by a full report on the situation.
- The complaints sub-committee (or Management Committee) will advise the complainant and other relevant parties, of any decisions they have made relating to the complaint. Where appropriate the Complaints Sub-committee (or Committee), will set in place relevant mechanisms and/or procedures to monitor progress.
- Complainants should be made aware that they may wish to contact the **NDIS Quality and Safeguards Commission Ph: 1800 035 544**, where complaints are in relation to the provision of NDIS supports. From NDIS Quality and Safeguards Commission “How to make a Complaint” brochure:

Where to go with a complaint

I'm not happy with NDIS funded services	➡ The NDIS Commission	➡ 1800 035 544
I'm not happy with the NDIA's actions or decisions	➡ NDIA or Commonwealth Ombudsman	➡ 1800 800 110 www.ndis.gov.au www.ombudsman.gov.au
I'm not happy with a service provided by another agency or body	➡ Your state or territory complaints body	➡ Find links on the NDIS Commission website www.ndiscommission.gov.au

3.6 REVIEWING THE COMPLAINT

If the complainant is not satisfied with the investigation and proposed resolution of their complaint or appeal they can seek a further review of the matter by:

a) EXTERNAL MEDIATION

An external mediation company may be engaged to work with the complainant and EC-MGL in attempts to manage the complaint.

b) REFERRAL TO EXTERNAL PROCEDURE

A formal external complaints procedure may follow if the complainant is still not satisfied with the outcome. The complainant will be referred to the Ombudsman.

3.7 RESOLVING THE COMPLAINT

- Making a decision or referring to the appropriate people for a decision within 14 days of the complaint being received,
- informing the complainant of the outcome or following up to see if the complainant is satisfied with actions.
- Resolution agreed upon by both parties or
- Referral to management committee for further action where required
- Informing the complainant of any options for further action if required.

3.8 RECORD KEEPING and REACHING A RESOLUTION

A register of complaints and appeals will be kept in a register/file in a locked cupboard (accessible only by Manager/President) and also logged on Quality Management spreadsheet kept in Manager's storage drive. The register will be maintained by the Manager and will record the following for each complaint or appeal:

- Details of the complainant and the nature of the complaint
- Date lodged
- Action taken
- Details of resolution and reason for decision
- Indication of complainant being notified of outcome
- Complainant response and any further action
- Date of closure

Copies of all correspondence will be kept in the register/file. The complaints register and files will be confidential, and access is restricted to the Manager/Management Committee.

A summary of any complaint will be reported by the Manager at the following Management Committee Meeting.

Results from this report will be reviewed by the Manager and the Management Committee and used to:

- inform service planning by including a review of complaints and appeals in all service planning, monitoring and evaluation activities
- inform decision making by including a report on complaints and appeals as a standard item on staff and management meeting agendas

DOCUMENTATION

Documents related to this policy	
Related policies	- Client & Community Feedback Policy - Inappropriate Workplace Behaviour and Complaints Policy and Procedure - Privacy Policy - Access to Confidential Information - Employee Performance Appraisal Policy - Termination of Employment
Forms, record keeping or other organisational documents	- Survey Actions/Analysis Forms - Compliments, Suggestions and Complaints Form - Complaints/Disputes Quality Management Register

Reviewing and approving this policy		
Frequency	Person responsible	Approval
Every three years	Manager and Management Committee	Management Committee

Policy review and version tracking			
Review	Date Approved	Approved by	Next Review Due
6	October 2014	Management Committee	October 2015
7	July 2016	Management Committee	July 2017
8	Feb 2017	Management Committee	Feb 2018
9	July 2018	Management Committee	July 2019
10	Apr 2019	Management Committee	Apr 2020
11	Aug 2020	Management Committee	Aug 2023
12	Dec 2024	Management Committee	Dec 2027

Management Committee:
Dec 2024



Compliments, Suggestions and Complaints

Early Connections is committed to providing high quality services. We welcome all feedback (**Compliments, Suggestions and Complaints**) from our clients and those who have contact with us, to help us improve the services we provide.

We value your feedback – including complaints. We view complaints as an opportunity to improve our supports. If you have a complaint, we will respond to it promptly and sensitively. We will treat your complaint in confidence and respect your privacy. Please let us know about your experience with Early Connections by completing our form below.

Feedback Form

NATURE: Tick appropriate			
Compliment ☐	Suggestion ☐	Informal Complaint ☐	Formal Complaint ☐

Who is submitting Feedback today?			
Parent/Carer/Guardian ☐	Staff Member ☐	Community Member ☐	Other ☐

CONTACT DETAILS			
Date:		Address:	
First name:		Contact Ph No:	
Surname:		Email:	

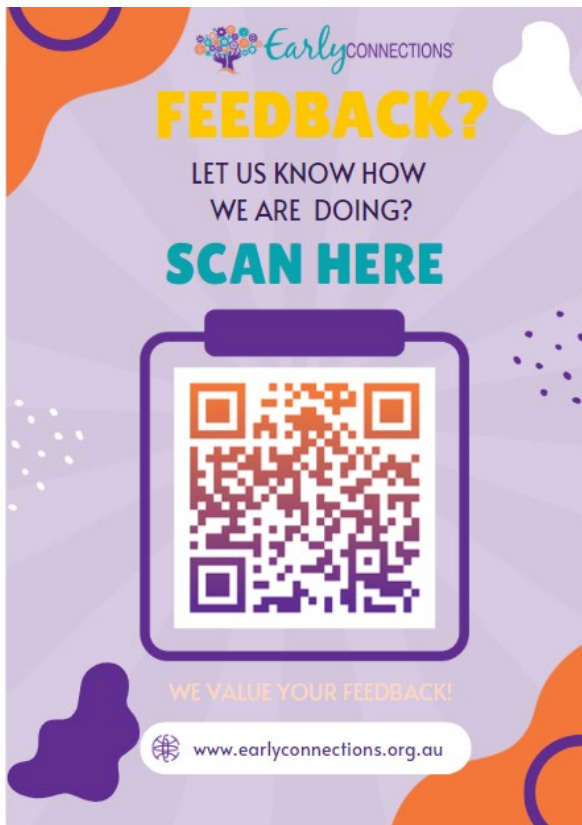
What does your Feedback relate to?			
Service Delivery ☐	EC Staff member or Student ☐	EC Committee ☐	
Service Policy or Procedure ☐	EC Management ☐	Other ☐	

How would you rate your experience with Early Connections – MGL?				
Extremely Dissatisfied ☐	Dissatisfied ☐	Somewhat Satisfied ☐	Satisfied ☐	Extremely Satisfied ☐

DETAILS
Please write clear details of your compliment, suggestion or complaint. In the event of a Complaint, please refer to our Managing Complaints Policy. If you would like a copy of this please ask our Admin team, call us on 65527333, or email admin@earlyconnections-mgl.org.au.

Please contact the Manager for immediate discussion if needed – manager@earlyconnections-mgl.org.au

Appendix 2:



Feedback QR Code poster



T. 02 6552 7333
E. manager@earlyconnections-mgl.org.au
33 Florence Street, Taree NSW 2430
earlyconnections.org.au



We would love
your feedback



Follow us on
our socials



Staff Email Signature sample