Complaints about family, child and relationship services

Summary

- If you are unhappy about the way a Victorian family, child or relationship service has treated you, you have a right to complain.
- As a first step to resolving any complaint, it is a good idea to try to work it out directly with the person or organisation involved.
- Complaints about any practitioner in Victoria who claims to be offering a healthcare service can be made to the Victorian Health Complaints Commissioner.
- Complaints about how Child Protection has treated you or your family can be made by contacting the Department of Health & Human Services' Complaints, Integrity and Privacy Unit.
- If you cannot resolve your child protection complaint directly with the department, you can contact the Victorian Ombudsman.

If you are unhappy about the way a Victorian family, child or relationship service has treated you, you have a right to complain. When making a complaint, it is best to be clear about what the issue is you are complaining about and how you would like it resolved. It is also best to start by trying to resolve it directly with the person involved. In this doesn't work, there are a number of other ways to get help.

You have a right to complain about a family, child or relationship service if you believe:

- you were given unsatisfactory service
- you did not receive enough information or choice
- you were denied respect, dignity or privacy.

General advice for making a complaint

To get the best outcome, it is a good idea to take the following steps to getting your complaint resolved.

Step 1. Discuss your complaint with the staff member or case worker involved. There might have been a simple misunderstanding or miscommunication that can be cleared up with a quick conversation. Perhaps an apology from that person will be enough to resolve the issue.

Step 2. Ask the person involved who their direct manager is and take your complaint to that person.

Step 3. If you still cannot resolve the complaint, many organisations have complaint-handling procedures that you can follow to formalise your complaint. This will usually involve lodging a report about what happened, why you are dissatisfied and what you would like to happen to resolve the complaint.

Step 4.

If you cannot resolve your complaint at the organisational level, it is time to refer it to an official complaints handling body such as the Office of the Health Complaints Commissioner or the Victorian Ombudsman.

Tips for making a complaint

Here are some tips for getting the best out of the complaints handling process:

- Keep written notes to support your complaint – who was involved, when the incidents(s) in question took place and what you have done to try to resolve it.
- Try to stay calm when talking about your issues. You will get your point across more effectively if you are not angry or frustrated.

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- If you are taking your complaint to a complaint-handling unit within the organisation or an outside authority, it is often better to write rather than call, particularly if your complaint is complex or if you need to provide supporting documentation.
- Stick to the main facts when making your complaint and provide only details that are relevant to the complaint.
- You will no doubt be asked what you would like the organisation to do to resolve the problem, so think about this beforehand. You might want the organisation to review a policy or provide a written apology. Keeping your request realistic is more likely to lead to a satisfactory resolution of the complaint.

**Health Complaints Commissioner**

Complaints about any practitioner in Victoria who claims to be offering a healthcare service can be made to the Victorian Health Complaints Commissioner. This includes complaints about counsellors, psychologists and social workers.

The Health Complaints Commissioner offers a free and confidential service and can help you make your complaint known to the relevant practitioner. The office can also provide conciliation, both formally and informally.

Complaints to the Health Complaints Commissioner can also include complaints regarding right of access to your health information and health privacy concerns.

When you contact the office of the Health Complaints Commissioner, an assessment officer will:

- listen
- give information
- help you to take your complaint to the service provider
- refer your complaint to the Health Complaints Commissioner for further action if necessary
- put you in touch with other people who can help if needed.

To contact the Office of the Health Complaints Commissioner, call **1300 582 113**, or [make a complaint online](https://www.health.vic.gov.au). **Betterhealth.vic.gov.au**

**Making a complaint about child protection services**

The Victorian Government’s child protection services are managed by the Department of Health & Human Services and so any complaints about child protection can be forwarded to the department’s Complaints, Integrity and Privacy Unit.

Telephone: **1300 884 706** (cost of a local call)

For additional information or to fill out an online complaint form, go to the Department of Health & Human Services website.

When handling complaints, the department is committed to:

- providing information that is helpful, accurate and easy to understand
- being courteous and considerate in its communication
- promptly referring requests to the appropriate person
- responding to requests within a reasonable time
- keeping you informed of progress or delays.

The complaints unit can arrange an interpreter to help with language services. You may ask someone else to lodge a complaint on your behalf. However, they must have your permission to do this.

Lodging a complaint and seeking a resolution can sometimes involve sensitive issues. The department can provide assistance and support throughout the process of making a complaint.

If you require an interpreter, contact the Victorian Interpreting and Translating Services, call **(03) 9280 1955**.

**Victorian Ombudsman**

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If you are unhappy about the way the Department of Health & Human Services has treated you, or how it has handled your complaint, you can take it to the Victorian Ombudsman.

The Victorian Ombudsman can investigate complaints made about decisions, actions or inaction by the department.

To make a complaint via the Victorian Ombudsman, you can call (03) 9613 6222 or toll-free (regional areas only) on 1800 806 314.

You can write to:

Victorian Ombudsman
Level 2570 Bourke Street
Melbourne VIC 3000

Alternatively, you can submit an online complaint via the Victorian Ombudsman website.

**Where to get help**

- [Health Complaints Commissioner](#)
- [Department of Health & Human Services complaints](#)
- [Victorian Ombudsman](#)

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**This page has been produced in consultation with and approved by:**

Department of Health and Human Services

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