FEEDBACK AND COMPLAINTS POLICY:

1. Purpose

Sydney North Health Network (SNHN) is committed to continuous improvement as part of its values and recognises the importance of feedback - positive and / or negative - and complaints received from consumers, families, clinicians and the community.

This policy sets out the principles that guide the organisation's response to the external feedback we may receive in the form of suggestions, compliments and complaints.

2. Scope

The policy applies to the management of all feedback—suggestions, compliments and complaints—received concerning the operations of the SNHN and our employees. This also includes the SNHN Board, contractors and subcontractors.

The *Internal Conflict Management Policy and Procedure* applies to all employees of SNHN and is the mechanism to create a positive workplace environment and to address employees' concerns, issues or grievances.

3. Policy Statement

This policy has been developed to provide effective and fair, organisation-wide guidance for the receipt, capture and response to feedback and complaints regarding SNHN operations.

This policy aims to:

a. Ensure an accessible mechanism for feedback or complaints is available to consumers families, clinicians and the community and includes a process for receipt.
b. Ensuring fair, unbiased reporting of complaints and no negative consequences occur for complainants resulting from making a complaint.
c. Ensure a copy of SNHN *Feedback and Complaints Policy* is available on the SNHN website or be provided through e-mail or postal mail if requested.
d. Address complaints, where possible, at the first point of contact
e. Collect sufficient information to allow for assessment and assigning priority to the complaint by a person or team that specialises in the complaint topic.
f. Ensure parties providing feedback or complaints are dealt with in an effective, professional, fair and consistent manner.
g. Enable the SNHN to have a standard approach to the management of feedback and complaints.
h. Assist employees to understand and be aware of their responsibilities about feedback and complaints and be empowered to manage feedback and complaints in a consistent, systematic and responsive manner.
i. Ensure social equity for the complainant, enabling access to any relevant supports if these are required by the complainant in the process of making their complaint, such as interpreters or disability supports or similar.

j. Link the SNHN feedback and complaints management process to the quality improvement program.

The policy is based on the principles of:

i. Fairness - ensuring all parties are provided equal opportunity and treated with respect.
ii. Effectiveness – enabling the feedback or complaint to be resolved to mutual satisfaction of both parties where possible.
iii. People focus – the complainant may be actively involved in the complaints process as far as practicable and appropriate in the circumstances.
iv. Accessibility – the policy and procedures are easily accessible by all.
v. Responsiveness – complaints will be addressed and managed in a timely manner.
vi. Privacy – the SNHN adheres to the privacy laws and maintains an ethical approach when managing a complaint; and
vii. Efficiency – ensuring a transparent process is always used.

4. How feedback – suggestions and compliments, and complaints - will be used by SNHN

Feedback - Suggestions and Compliments

Suggestions and compliments are encouraged from consumers, families, clinicians and the community. All feedback will be acknowledged by SNHN within 2 business days of its receipt. Feedback will be dealt with as appropriate to its content, context and implications. Feedback will be used constructively as part of the SNHN commitment to continuous quality improvement. The Governance Manager will maintain a record of suggestions, compliments or comments, in accordance with the appropriate procedure developed. All suggestions will be provided to the appropriate Board committee for consideration and in accordance with relevant policies.

Complaints

Complaints from consumers, families, clinicians and the community provide unique information about the quality of the services from an external perspective. The management of a complaint provides the opportunity for complainants to have their issues resolved effectively, ensures that any identified risks are managed appropriately, and that action is taken to minimise or eliminate those risks. This will be done in accordance with the appropriate procedure developed which significantly will require that all complaints received are forwarded immediately to the relevant nominated Executive Team member who will allocate the complaint to an Employee to act as the case manager for that complaint going forward being the contact point with the complainant including acknowledging the complaint within 2 business days of its receipt. Depending on the nature of the complaint, the complaint can be escalated to the CEO or the Board Chair.

Feedback and complaints data in the SNHN may be used to:

a. Improve the safety and quality of service provision.
b. Support and maintain good relations with the community.
c. Evaluate the quality of programs and services.
d. Inform decision making about future service delivery; and
e. Enhance the 'learning' experiences of the organisation.

5. How Feedback and Complaints can be made

Where informal resolution of a complaint is not possible, the complainant may lodge a formal complaint with SNHN. Consumers, families, clinicians and the community may make a complaint via any of the following mechanisms:

a. On-line: through the SNHN website feedback and complaints or contact us page.
b. A face-to-face meeting.
c. In writing to Sydney North Health Network, PO Box 1083, Chatswood 2067 or by email to: admin@snhn.org.au.
d. Telephone: reception (02) 9432 8250 or a direct call to an employee.

Complaints will be considered, and any issues raised investigated. SNHN will respond to the complainant detailing any findings and make recommendations regarding appropriate action and/or system improvements, as appropriate. *See responsibilities below.*

6. Responsibilities

Effective feedback and complaint management requires a whole-of-organisation approach with clear points of accountability for reporting, investigation and feedback, as follows:

The Board, Chief Executive Officer, Executive Team and Managers are responsible for:

a. Encouraging an environment where complaints are taken seriously and managed effectively and thoroughly.
b. Ensuring an effective feedback and complaint management system is in place for SNHN Board, employees, consumers and stakeholders.
c. Implementing policies and procedures to support employees, including training on feedback and complaint management processes.
d. Ensuring appropriate resources are available and used for effective feedback and complaint management.
e. Reporting to the SNHN Board or relevant Governance Committee where necessary.

Nominated Executive Team member in relation to each complaint is responsible for:

a. Allocating a complaint as soon as received to an Employee to be the case manager for that complaint and point of contact for the complainant.
b. Ensuring all complaints are acknowledged by the allocated case manager within two days of receipt by SNHN and a written response setting out outcomes is sent to complainant.

c. Ensuring that all complaints are investigated by SNHN. An investigation may include:
    - clarifying the details provided in a complaint
    - analysing information from relevant file notes, correspondence and/or other sources
    - reviewing details of the complaint
    - reviewing previous administrative decisions or actions
    - interviewing complainants, employees and/or other individuals involved in the complaint
    - reviewing relevant policies, procedures, practices and/or legislation
d. Monitoring and risk rating of the complaint.
e. Ensuring appropriate lessons are learnt and actions are implemented to eliminate or minimize similar issues from occurring.
f. Ensuring all employees are trained appropriately.

Managers are responsible for:

a. Ensuring that all complaints received are reported to the appropriate nominated Executive member (for allocation to a case manager) and the Legal Counsel as soon as possible and no later than 2 days after the complaint has been made.
b. Understanding, complying with and managing individual complaints in accordance with this Policy.
c. Supporting and empowering employees to resolve complaints promptly and in accordance with the complaint management procedures to minimise the need for escalation.
d. Ensuring all feedback, compliments and complaints are entered into the appropriate register and updates on the handling of complaints are entered in a timely manner until the case is closed.

Governance Manager is responsible for:

a. Oversight of complaint handling process through a central Feedback and complaint register for monitoring and tracking complaints and reporting on actions and decisions.
b. Ensuring the promotion of awareness of the complaint management procedures.
c. Ensuring prompt notification to the CEO by the appropriate Executive Team member of any serious complaints.
d. Ensuring 'trended complaints and compliments data is reported to the appropriate Board Committee at least bi-annually'.

SNHN Employees are responsible for:

a. Adhering to the principles, process and procedures that support this policy.
b. Handling feedback and complaints in a professional and timely manner, whilst at all time respecting confidentiality and privacy to the extent practicable and appropriate.
c. Not discussing complaints except with individuals required to be informed.
d. If requested by an Executive member to act as the case manager for a complaint, to do so by committing to resolving complaints at the lowest level to reduce the potential for escalation of concerns, acting as the point of contact with the complainant including acknowledging the complaint within 2 business days of its receipt and a written response setting out outcomes is sent to complainant—noting that (depending on who

the complainant is) an accompanying conversation may also be necessary with the complainant prior to sending them the written response.

e. Raising the complaint with the relevant responsible parties.
f. Reporting the complaint to an Executive member.
g. Treating complaints with respect and not ever dismissing a complaint as frivolous.
h. Being familiar with, and have an understanding of the appropriate Policy and Procedure; and
i. How to receive and give feedback and understand how to process a complaint

7. References

Internal

- SNHN Privacy Policy
- SNHN Feedback and Complaints Procedure
- SNHN Complaint/Feedback Form
- SNHN Incidents Register
- SNHN Feedback and Complaints Register
- SNHN Internal Conflict Management Policy and Procedure

External

- The Privacy Act 1988 (Commonwealth)
- Disability Discrimination Act 1992

8. Definitions

Executive Team. Includes CEO, CFO and General Managers.

9. Approvals & Review

Version	Date Approved	Owner (title)	Approver (title)	Next Review Date	Comments
01	*June 2016*	Lynelle Hales (CEO)	Board	June 2018	
02	September 2018	Lynelle Hales (CEO)	Board	June 2021	*Reviewed by FARM May 2018*
03	28 July 2021	Lynelle Hales (CEO)	Board	June 24	*Reviewed by FARM July 2021*
04	26 February 2025	Kevin Barrow	Board	February 2028	*Reviewed by FARM February 2025*