



Feedback and Complaints Policy

Purpose

This policy describes Playgroup NSW's (PGNSW) approach to managing feedback and complaints.

Scope

While this policy has a focus on our complaints handling process, it covers all forms of feedback (complaints, compliments and suggestions) that PGNSW receives from service users and other external stakeholders.

For the purpose of this policy, 'service user' refers to any person who has engaged with PGNSW services. This ranges from a PGNSW member attending regular playgroups to a person who may only attend one group or public event hosted by PGNSW. Other external stakeholders may include a support person or advocate for a service user, our funding bodies, service delivery partners, philanthropic partners, or a member of the public.

This policy does not cover staff complaints about co-worker behaviour which is addressed in the [Personal Grievance Policy](#).

For complaints which raises a concern for the safety or wellbeing of a child or young person, first refer to the [Child Safety and Wellbeing Policy](#).

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Policy Principles

PGNSW strives to deliver high quality services to everyone who interacts with our organisation. Feedback (positive and negative) provides valuable information.

Compliments tell us what we do well. Suggestions and complaints are an opportunity to improve our services.

Our feedback and complaints system aims to:

- Provide information about our feedback and complaints process to anyone seeking our services that is readily available, clear, up to date and easily accessible
- Foster a supportive service culture that encourages open and honest feedback without the fear of repercussions
- Make it easy for service users and external stakeholders to provide feedback or make a complaint, including anonymously
- Ensure an advocate or support person is offered to anyone who needs assistance to make a complaint, both internally and to external agencies
- Empower staff to resolve issues at the first point of contact
- Manage and resolve complaints in a fair, timely and transparent way
- Record and analyse feedback and complaints data so we can identify ways to do things better.

Procedures

1. Seeking Feedback

We actively seek feedback from our service users and other stakeholders through a variety of means, including targeted periodic satisfaction surveys and evaluations of programs and events. Feedback may also be provided by a service user or stakeholder at any time, either verbally, in writing, or by any communication method preferred.

2. Promoting this Policy

Information on how to give feedback or make a complaint is available on the PGNSW website and for new members as an easy read flyer. This includes how to make a complaint, what to expect after making a complaint and how to escalate it to an external agency if not satisfied with our handling of the matter.

Staff should explain our complaints process verbally to a service user who express their dissatisfaction about any aspect of our service. Be aware of support needs for families from a culturally diverse background, people with a disability and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, for example, an interpreter or advocate may be required.

3. What is a Complaint?

A complaint is an expression of dissatisfaction, made to or about an organisation, about its products, services, staff or processes, where a response or resolution is explicitly or implicitly expected or legally required.

Apart from clearly stating that they are dissatisfied or unhappy about a matter, a complainant may also phrase their complaint as a question which requires a response. They use phrases such as *“I don’t think it’s fair, I disagree with your decision, or I don’t understand why”*.

Expressing a concern, an opinion or asking for information without expecting a formal response or remedy is not considered a complaint. Some examples are below:

Scenario	Complaint	Non - complaint
Website usability	Advising that an online form is confusing and keeps crashing, and asking for it to be fixed so they can submit it.	Sharing that they found the form a bit hard to follow.
Response time	Saying they have been waiting a long time for a reply to an email or phone enquiry and it is unacceptable.	Phoning to check if there is an update on an application or other form to be processed.
Policy clarity	Reporting that a PGNSW policy or form is unclear or misleading, and asking if it will be fixed.	Asking staff to explain any part of PGNSW policies.
Staff interaction	Reporting that a staff member was rude and dismissive.	Advising they spoke with a staff member but was not sure if they understood everything and is seeking clarification.
Service availability	Reporting they showed up at a scheduled event or group which was cancelled but they had not been told.	Advising that they noticed the group changed its regular hours and wanted to check if others had been informed.
Social media comment	Stating that PGNSW did not provide a good service in a social media post.	Making a general comment on social media without tagging or directing it at PGNSW.

4. Receiving a Complaint

Complaints may be about PGNSW services, a policy, or the behaviour and competence of staff.

A complaint could be received by any employee, volunteer, the CEO or Board members directly. Everyone has a responsibility to manage and attempt to resolve complaints as quickly and fairly as possible.

Any person can raise a complaint (including anonymously) by:

- Telling any staff member in person, via phone call or email
- Sending an email to feedback@playgroupnsw.org.au
- Writing a letter to Playgroup NSW, PO Box Q403, Queen Victoria Building NSW 1230
- Completing the online Feedback and Complaints Form (external) on our website
- Asking any staff member or volunteer to assist them to complete the form or write a letter.

5. Responding to a Complaint

To guide the appropriate response, PGNSW categorises complaints by their level of severity, urgency and complexity as shown in the **table on pages 7 - 8**.

The examples given are not an exhaustive list but provide guidance on appropriate actions to take and the expected timeframes to resolve the complaint. PGNSW aims to resolve 90% of all complaints within the timeframes stated.

5.1 Attempt to resolve the issue at first contact

Complainants usually expect acknowledgement, an apology, answers and action. The first staff member to receive a verbal complaint should make every effort to:

- Apologise early, as it can help to dissolve a difficult situation by simply saying, *"I'm sorry you are unhappy with the service you received"*
- Find out precisely why a person is unhappy, this may not be clear
- Listen well, communicate courteously and express empathy
- Ask the complainant what they expect will happen
- Give the complainant information about PGNSW complaints handling process, including their right to have an advocate to assist them or complain to an external agency at any time
- Discuss options for resolving the issue and agree on timeframes for completing actions.

If you determine you cannot resolve the matter quickly, explain what happens next. This will depend on the category of the complaint – see the **table on pages 7 - 8**.

5.2 Acknowledge a written complaint early

All written complaints need to be acknowledged within 2 business days, either by a return email or phone contact by a staff member assigned by the CEO to handle the complaint.

When letting the complainant know their complaint has been received, include:

- Your name, position and contact details
- Information about PGNSW complaints handling process
- How long it might take to complete actions (provide a realistic timeframe)
- How they will be kept informed about the progress towards resolution
- What information is needed from them
- What will happen next.

5.3 Anonymous Complaints

Although PGNSW cannot contact anonymous complainants, we will investigate the issues raised where sufficient detail has been provided.

6. Notifying Management

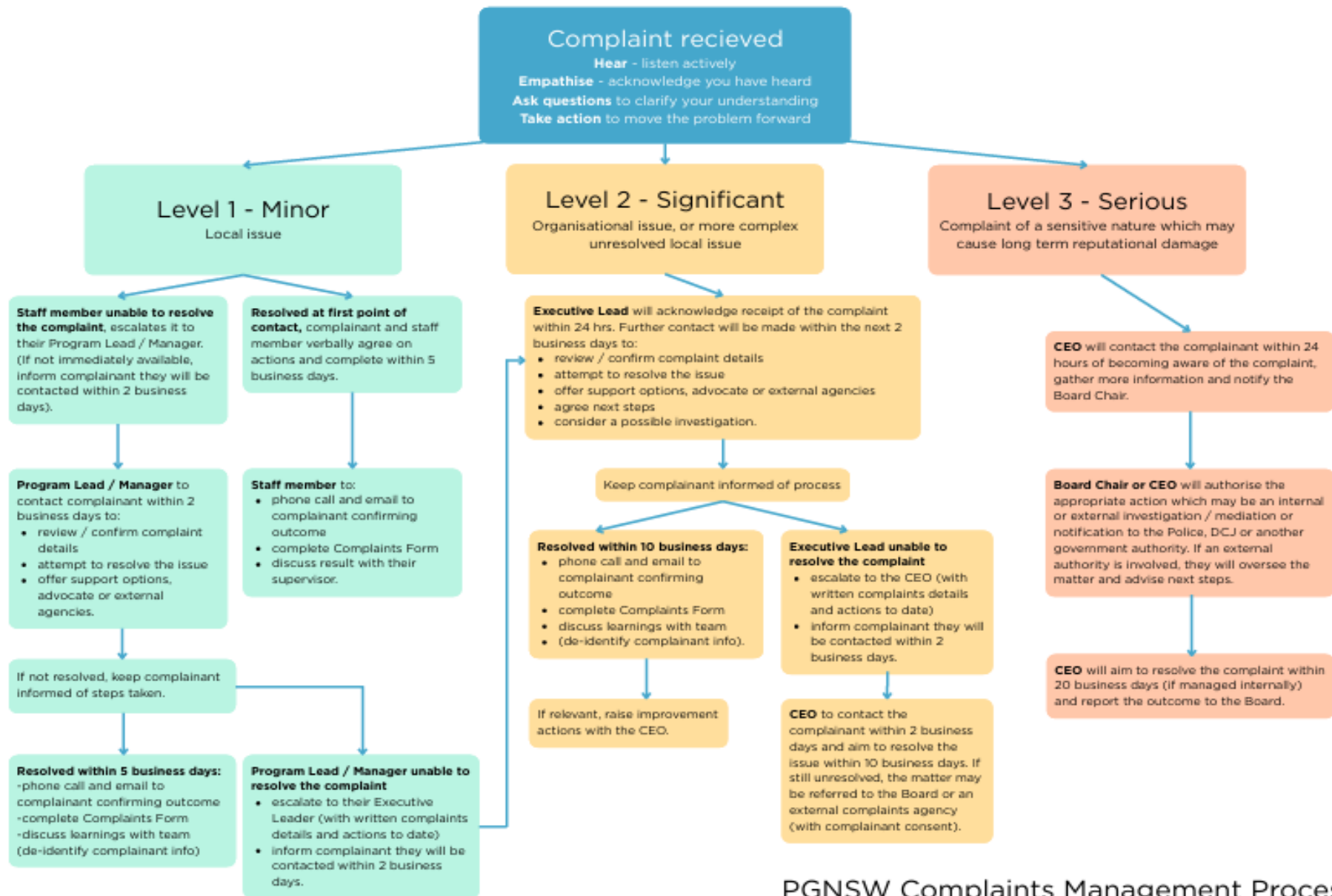
All complaints must be reported to your direct manager or Program Lead within the timeframes stated in the table.

Level 2 complaints are also reported to the Executive Leader in your reporting line (i.e. the person your manager or Program Lead reports to).

Level 3 complaints must be immediately reported to the CEO via phone call or email (in addition to notifying your manager and their Executive Leader).

<p style="text-align: center;">Level 1 (minor)</p> <p>A simple issue that can be informally and quickly resolved at a local level.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Level 2 (significant)</p> <p>Complaint is of a more complex nature and may require an investigation to resolve the matter.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Level 3 (serious)</p> <p>Complaint is of a sensitive nature and may cause long term damage to PGNSW reputation.</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">Aim to resolve within 5 business days</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Aim to resolve within 10 business days</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Aim to resolve within 20 business days</p>
<p>Examples:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Difference of opinion or no rapport with a staff member. • Delays to accessing a service. • Lack of communication or information provided. 	<p>Examples:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Requests to review a decision if a person feels they have been unfairly excluded from our service. • Claims a staff member was deliberately rude, unprofessional or unresponsive to their needs. • Complaints about how a complaint is being managed. • Complainant strongly disagrees with any other PGNSW policy or procedure and is requesting a formal written response. 	<p>Examples:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Allegations of a serious privacy breach (unauthorised disclosure of sensitive personal information placing the person at risk of serious harm) • Allegations that staff have placed the health and safety of any person at serious risk through negligent behaviour. • Allegations of staff misconduct or criminal activity such as fraud, corruption, assault, discrimination. • The complainant has contacted national media with damaging claims about PGNSW. • Complainant has contacted their local Member of Parliament (MP) or an external agency to complain about PGNSW.

<p style="text-align: center;">Level 1 (minor)</p> <p style="text-align: center;">A simple issue that can be informally and quickly resolved at a local level.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Level 2 (significant)</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Complaint is of a more complex nature and may require an investigation to resolve the matter.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Level 3 (serious)</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Complaint is of a sensitive nature and may cause long term damage to PGNSW reputation.</p>
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<p>Key actions and timeframes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staff member receiving the complaint comes to an agreement with the complainant on how to resolve the issue within a timeframe, usually within 5 business days. • If you are unable to resolve the complaint immediately or it is more complex, escalate it to your Program Lead or Manager. • If still unresolved after 5 business days, the Program Lead or Manager to escalate to their Executive Leader. 	<p>Key actions and timeframes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Notify your Executive Leader immediately. • Executive Leader will acknowledge receipt of the complaint within 24 hours via email or phone. • Executive Leader will then contact the complainant within the next 2 business days and aim to resolve the complaint within 10 business days. • If still unresolved after 10 business days, the Executive Leader may escalate it to the CEO. 	<p>Key actions and timeframes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Notify the CEO immediately. • CEO will contact the complainant within 24 hours to gain more information before determining the appropriate action. • CEO will immediately notify the Board Chairperson and provide regular updates. • The CEO and Board Chair will decide whether to investigate internally or refer the matter to an external investigator or mediator. • If the matter involves alleged criminal activity, the CEO will report to the Police (and other relevant authorities) who will advise the next steps.



PGNSW Complaints Management Process

9. Investigating Complaints

Some complaints will be resolved quickly, while others may require a thorough investigation to determine the cause and impact. If a formal investigation is required, the CEO will assign the most appropriate person to conduct it. The [Investigation Report Template](#) is used to record the outcome of a complaint which is investigated internally.

10. Complaints about Staff or the Board

If a staff member is the subject of the complaint they receive, the complaint needs to be escalated to the next line of management regardless of the complaint category level.

Complaints made about staff will be managed in line with procedural fairness guidelines, including informing the staff member about the complaint and listening to their point of view. A complaint that involves an allegation of staff misconduct will be investigated following the process outlined in the [Performance and Misconduct Policy](#).

Complaints about the CEO or a Director will be referred to the Board Chair, who will facilitate the investigation and resolution. Where the Board Chair is the subject of a complaint, the Board will assign another person to undertake the appropriate action.

11. Resolving Complaints

PGNSW aims to resolve complaints as quickly as possible and within the timeframes set for each complaint level.

Complaints which are not initially resolved by a staff member, may be escalated to their manager, an Executive Leader, the CEO and lastly the Board of Directors.

Depending on the nature of a complaint, the options for resolution may include:

- Attempting to mediate the dispute internally if appropriate
- Engaging external mediation and dispute resolution services
- Providing information or referral to an alternative service if available
- Providing the complainant with contact information for external agencies if the complaint is not resolved to their satisfaction (see **External Complaints Agencies**).

Once an agreement has been made or PGNSW has taken all reasonable actions to fix the issue, the complainant will be informed of the outcome via a phone call and follow up email.

Alternatively, a complainant may decide to lodge a complaint with the CEO or Board directly or go to an external agency at any time. Any complaint reported to an external authority such as the [NSW Ombudsman](#) will be overseen by that authority and PGNSW will be advised of any further actions to take.

12. Recording Feedback and Complaints

It is important to note that PGNSW has two different versions of the Feedback and Complaints Form. The online Feedback and Complaints Form (external) available on our website is a simplified form for service users to complete. This same version is printed and displayed at our Wagga office.

The staff Feedback and Complaints Form (internal) is available on the PGNSW Intranet. It records similar information for compliments and suggestions, but the form requires more information in relation to complaints.

All forms completed online, either via the website or the staff intranet, feed into the same Feedback and Complaints Register.

12.1 Recording Complaints

Complaints received by staff must be recorded using the Feedback and Complaints Form (internal) as soon as possible after you have resolved the complaint or escalated it to the next line of management.

Once you complete and submit the form, it will automatically go to the following level of management for their review and/or action:

- Level 1 - your manager or Program Lead
- Level 2 - your manager/Program lead and the relevant Executive Leader
- Level 3 - your manager/ Program Lead, the relevant Executive Leader and the CEO.

If a complaint is not already closed off when an Executive Leader receives it, then it is the responsibility of that person to oversee the complaint until resolution. This may mean supporting the manager to resolve the complaint or doing it themselves.

Once the complaint is closed off, the responsible person will:

- Ensure all relevant sections of the form are completed, and
- Email the completed form to feedback@playgroupnsw.org.au

12.2 Recording Compliments and Suggestions

Compliments or suggestions provided verbally to staff should also be recorded using the Feedback and Complaints Form (internal). Once the form is completed, email it to feedback@playgroupnsw.org.au and your manager or Program Lead to review.

If the feedback is a compliment, then the manager / Program Lead will share the feedback with the Marketing Team who will assess if the compliment can be used as a testimonial for PGNSW website or other publication, subject to service user consent.

Compliments and suggestions are not categorised by levels, but if the manager or Program Lead is the subject of the compliment they receive, it should be escalated to the next line of management for their review.

13. Incidents vs. Complaints

Complaints categorised as Level 3 (serious) may sometimes be investigated and managed as an incident instead. For example, an allegation of staff misconduct might be raised through our complaints process, but this would typically be the result of an incident (i.e. a finite event which needs a coordinated management response).

Another example is a serious privacy breach. Due to the seriousness of these matters, they are given as examples of both Level 3 complaints and Level 3 incidents so we can ensure they receive an urgent management response.

However, the matter should only be recorded once, typically as an incident, and not double handled. The complainant should be kept informed by only one PGNSW manager.

For more information on incidents, refer to the [Incident Management Policy](#).

14. Unreasonable Complainant Behaviour

Unreasonable behaviour involves strong aggression, relentless persistence or arguments, and making unreasonable demands. Verbal abuse by a complainant is unacceptable behaviour and should be managed in line with our [Incident Management Policy](#).

PGNSW may also decline to deal with a complaint that is vexatious or frivolous, outside of our authority or control, or the complainant is or has been involved in legal proceedings, or is currently under investigation by some other person or body.

15. Social Media Complaints

The Marketing Team monitors external websites for feedback and takes appropriate action to resolve any publicised concerns. In the event that one of PGNSW's social media platforms receives a complaint, the comment will be addressed as soon as possible. Complaints that are slanderous or vexatious will be removed from the platform.

16. Record Keeping

All feedback (compliments, suggestions and complaints) is recorded in a centralised Feedback and Complaints Register, stored in a secure location on SharePoint which is only accessible to the CEO and Executive Leaders.

Feedback and complaints forms and any other records made about a complaint (e.g. emails or case notes) must also be stored in this confidential folder and not on staff desktops or working folders. Each complaint, compliment and suggestion is given a unique ID number which correlates with the ID number in the register. Any accompanying records should also use the same ID number in the document title.

The Feedback and Complaints Register, completed forms and associated information such as investigation reports, must be retained for a minimum period of 7 years from the day the record was made. For more information about records retention see the [Records Management Policy](#).

17. Learning from Feedback and Complaints

Survey data is collated into reports for the CEO and Board annually. This information is reviewed in all service planning, monitoring and evaluation activities. Summaries of the results of stakeholder surveys (de-identified) may be published in PGNSW annual report.

Complaints may highlight risks that require corrective actions to prevent recurrence, such as staff training or reviewing policies.

Compliments are shared at team meetings to celebrate achievements and determine if a practice can be replicated.

Suggestions specific to a program are reviewed by the Program Lead and Executive Lead to assess if local changes are needed. If a significant change to a system or policy is appropriate, it would be escalated to the CEO for a decision. In some cases, the CEO may raise this with the Board.

Feedback and complaints are also a standard agenda item at staff meetings, prompting discussion about what can be learned and what improvements can be made. Any personal information is de-identified.

18. External Complaints Agencies

If a complainant is dissatisfied with our handling of their complaint and wants an independent review of any decisions we made, inform them of the following options.

External agency	What they do
<p>Australian Government Department of Social Services Phone: 1800 634 035 Website: https://www.dss.gov.au/</p>	<p>Deals with complaints about services funded by the department, including playgroups.</p>
<p>NSW Ombudsman Phone: (02) 9286 1000 or 1800 451 524 Website: http://www.ombo.nsw.gov.au/</p>	<p>Deals with complaints about services run or funded by the NSW government. Complaints can relate to the unreasonable conduct of staff, unfair policies, unreasonable delays to access a service.</p>
<p>NSW Ombudsman Aboriginal Unit Phone: 1800 451 524 Website: http://www.ombo.nsw.gov.au/</p>	<p>Support and assistance to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to make a complaint in relation to community services, housing and disability services.</p>
<p>NSW Fair Trading Phone: 13 32 20 or (02) 9619 8671 Website: https://www.nsw.gov.au/departments-and-agencies/fair-trading/</p>	<p>Deals with complaints about a product or services sold by NSW businesses. Fair Trading also administers the Charitable Fundraising Authority and receives complaints about authority holders.</p>
<p>NSW Anti-Discrimination Board Phone: (02) 9268 5544 or 1800 670 812 Website: https://antidiscrimination.nsw.gov.au/</p>	<p>Investigates complaints about the types of discrimination covered by the NSW Anti-Discrimination Act.</p>
<p>Multicultural Disability Advocacy Assoc Phone: (02) 9891 6400 Telephone Interpreter Service: 13 14 50 Website: https://mdaa.org.au/</p>	<p>Advocacy support for people from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds with disability, their families and carers.</p>
<p>Intellectual Disability Rights Service Phone: (02) 9265 6300 or 1300 665 908 Website: https://idrs.org.au/</p>	<p>A specialist legal information and advocacy service for people with intellectual disability.</p>

Roles and Responsibilities	
Board of Directors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Review data related to risk, incidents and complaints to ensure these are appropriately managed. May become involved in the management of a Level 3 complaint if appropriate.
CEO	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Manage and report to the Board immediately on any Level 3 (serious) complaints. Regularly report feedback and complaints trends data to the Board. Ensure an effective, fair and transparent complaint management system is in place.
Executive Lead, Finance Data and Risk	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Monitor the feedback@playgroupnsw.org.au email account. Maintain the Feedback and Complaints Register. Provide a summary report of feedback and complaints to the CEO for each Board report. Provide aggregated complaint data and trend analysis to the Board annually (or as requested).
Executive Leaders	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Manage or oversee the resolution of a Level 2 (significant) complaint. Encourage a culture where complaints are handled in a proactive and timely manner. Monitor and review high level organisational complaint data and manage trends or hot spots. Monitor the implementation of corrective actions resulting from complaints.
Managers and Program Leads	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Manage or oversee the resolution of Level 1 (minor) complaints. Immediately escalate a Level 3 complaint to the CEO and/or an Executive Leader. Provide guidance and support to your team. Review learnings from complaints (de-identified) with your team.

Roles and Responsibilities	
All Staff	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promptly notify your manager of Level 1 and 2 complaints. • For Level 3 complaints, immediately phone your manager and if they are not available, phone the CEO and/or an Executive Leader. • Treat each person making a complaint with respect for their dignity and confidentiality throughout the process. • Only share information on a need-to-know basis internally and external to the organisation. • Record all compliments, suggestions and complaints using the Feedback and Complaints Form (internal). • Cooperate with the investigation of complaints (if required). • Actively participate in any training provided.
All Volunteers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Be aware of this policy. • Direct complainants to a Community Coordinator or the PGNSW website Feedback and Complaints page.

Supporting Information	
Internal Documents	<p>Child Safety and Wellbeing Policy</p> <p>Feedback and Complaints Form (internal)</p> <p>Feedback and Complaints Form (external)</p> <p>Feedback and Complaints Register</p> <p>Personal Grievance Policy</p> <p>Incident Management Policy</p> <p>Investigation Report Template</p> <p>Records Management Policy</p>
External References	<p>Community Services (Complaints Reviews and Monitoring) Act 1993 (NSW)</p> <p>NSW Ombudsman Effective Complaint Management Guidelines</p>

Policy Review History			
Policy Approver		CEO	
Policy Owner		Executive Lead, Finance Data and Risk	
Next Review Due		December 2028	
Version	Effective Date	Change Description	Approved By
1.0	December 2025	This is a new policy and management system that captures all types of feedback, not just complaints.	CEO