FEEDBACK AND COMPLAINTS POLICY

1 Context

1.1 Purpose

The Society upholds the rights of all external stakeholders to express feedback, compliments, and complaints; and is committed to maintaining a system which shall consistently, fairly, and timely address all such communications. The Society further acknowledges all forms of feedback as an opportunity to address issues, inform service improvements and maintain goodwill.

1.2 Scope

This policy applies to all oral or written complaints received from external stakeholders in relation to any of the Society's operations and applies to all employees, members and volunteers. The policy does not apply to internal disputes or grievances that only affect employees.

This policy applies to the management of feedback and complaints about Society programs and services, Society Personnel, and Society governing bodies by:

- anyone receiving services or assistance from the Society (Companions), their advocate, or an authorised representative.
- a member of the public
- customers of the Society's retail outlets
- other service provider agencies
- a government officer or agency
- an organisation, supplier, or business partner supplying goods or services to the Society
- anyone who donates money or services to the Society.

These complaints may concern but are not limited to:

- the conduct of a member, volunteer, and employee
- the provision of information
- the way in which the Society conducts its activities.
- the quality of service, communications, or treatment by the Society
- access to or promptness of a service.

Complaints may be received in any Society location. This policy outlines how complaints received in different locations should be managed.

This policy does not apply to feedback, grievances, or complaints by Society Personnel, which are managed according to the relevant internal grievance policy.

This policy does not apply to allegations of fraud and/or misconduct. Such issues are managed according to the relevant policy such as Fraud Risk Management Policy or Child Protection Policy.

This policy does not apply to eligible Whistleblowers making qualified disclosures. Such issues are managed in accordance with Whistleblower obligations.

Complaints that **cannot** be investigated pursuant to this policy and procedures include:

- matters relevant to the National Council or the Society operations in other States or Territories
- internal grievances or other issues raised by members, volunteers, or employees about each other.
- requests for services or support which are not currently provided by the Society.
- contractual disputes between the Society and third parties
- policy decisions made by the St Vincent de Paul Society's governing bodies.
- any industrial relations matters between the Society and unions/staff associations
- a criminal allegation or matters under criminal investigation or currently before a court or tribunal.
- reportable conduct investigations, including allegations involving risk of significant harm reported to government bodies or the Child Protection Helpline.
- any complaint that has been raised, investigated, and determined previously through the Society's complaints and review process.
- matters outside the control of the Society.

2 Roles and Responsibilities

Roles	Responsibilities
Territory Council	• Oversee policy compliance. • Demonstrate a culture of compliance with policy through Council. practices and operations. • Identify, lead, promote and participate in policy compliance activities in line with strategic goals and values. • The Complaints Officer appointed by the Territory President (a member of the Territory Council and usually the Vice-President of Conferences, Training and Recruitment) deals with complaints from Companions on the conduct of members and the service provided under a specific policy process. The Complaints Officer appointed by the Territory President works with the Director of Conference Support and the relevant Conference President.
CEO	• Lead the development of a policy compliance culture within the organisation. • Ensure policy compliance metrics are used, measured and progress tracked to Strategic Plan activities and subsequent organisational change.
Directors	• Provide quarterly policy compliance reporting (as relevant). • Support policy compliance activities and subsequent organisational change. • Orientate new staff members, students and volunteers to policy compliance systems. • Appoint Complaints Officer/s for their Directorate.
Complaints Officer	• Ensure complaints that can be resolved locally are resolved locally within 5 days, and in accordance with this Policy and Procedures. Ensure complaints that are serious, or cannot be resolved locally, are escalated to the Complaints Manager.
Complaints Manager/ Director People & Culture	• Ensure complaints that have been escalated because they are serious, or cannot be resolved locally, are resolved in accordance with this Policy and Procedure. The Director People & Culture is delegated the Complaints Officer.

Quality Improvement Specialist	• Maintains the Complaints Register and provides reports on complaints statistics and trends. • Monitors complaints for trends and opportunities for systematic improvement.
Staff, volunteers, and contractors.	• Promote and demonstrate commitment to policy compliance and assist with implementation of reporting and processes.

3 Policy Principles

The Society encourages all forms of feedback (including complaints) about the way it works, its interactions with the community, the programs, and services it provides, and its complaint handling processes.

The Society is committed to providing a transparent feedback and complaints management system that is accessible, responsive, efficient, fair, and integrated into the organisation's culture. Such a system provides accountability and supports the continuous improvement of services, processes, and systems.

If feedback or complaints are received at the local level (in person, phone, writing, email), as far as possible, and where appropriate, Society Personnel must endeavour to achieve an acceptable resolution without recourse to the formal complaints procedure is undertaken.

Where a complaint cannot be resolved at the local level, within five working days, the complaint will be escalated to the relevant Director and the Complaints Manager for assessment as to whether it should be processed through the formal complaints procedure. In serious matters, the complaint must be escalated to the relevant Complaints Manager immediately. These involve:

- any complaint involving a child or young person or a child protection issue.
- a criminal, or serious misconduct matter
- a notifiable incident or NDIS reportable incident
- a complaint from a government agency
- where the complaint is against the Chief Executive Officer or member of the executive team, and member of the Society's governing bodies.

The Society is committed to a transparent and robust review process. Complainants can access one internal review if the reasons for the review meet the Society's review guidelines.

3.1 Respectful and fair treatment

The Society will:

- take all feedback and complaints seriously and courteously.
- treat all complaints in a fair, objective, unbiased and non-judgmental manner.
- determine all complaints on their merits and facts, acknowledging any conflict of interest.
- act fairly and transparently and treat both those who make and those who are the subject of complaints with dignity and respect.
- adhere to all legal obligations in respect of and protecting the privacy and confidentiality of all parties.
- ensure that no one is adversely affected because they have made a complaint or a complaint has been made on their behalf.

3.2 Accessibility

The Society will:

- actively promote opportunities to provide feedback.
- ensure that information about providing feedback or making a complaint is easy to find and access at service sites and on the Society's website including:
    - areas covered by this policy.
    - how to make a complaint
    - how to make an anonymous complaint
    - how to appeal against the outcome of a complaint
    - how to escalate a complaint to external authorities
- provide appropriate support and assistance to anyone wanting to provide feedback or make a complaint.
- ensure that Members will be informed of the Society's complaint process with respect to Companions.
- ensure that the privacy of complainants will be preserved and the wishes of the complainant with regards to confidentiality respected
- take steps to ensure that people experiencing particular vulnerabilities (for example, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, people from CALD backgrounds, children and young people, and older people) are supported to provide feedback or make a complaint.
- respect the rights of people with disability and take reasonable steps to ensure that all individuals understand and can effectively exercise their right to complain. Where appropriate, information should be provided in easy read or another format that meets the needs of a person with a disability.
- communicate through a complainant's representative, where this is requested.

If complainants are still dissatisfied with the outcome of an internal review, they will be advised of any external mechanisms for example the Human Rights Commission, the Ombudsman, the Privacy Commissioner.

3.3 Good communication

The Society will:

- acknowledge receipt of a complaint or feedback
- let the complainant know who will be managing their complaint.
- keep the complainant or their representative informed about the status and progress of their complaint, including any delays.
- clearly communicate outcomes and decisions.

3.4 Accountability

The Society will:

- record, assess, and review feedback and complaints. In the case of complaints from Companions, a register will be maintained with appropriate recording of the complaint and follow up actions and feedback to the Companion.
- ensure each complaint is handled by trained and skilled staff.

3.5 Timeliness

The Society will:

- respond promptly and aim to resolve complaints quickly

- where possible, resolve complaints at the local level at the time the complaint is raised, so that a timely and responsive resolution is achieved
- provide an appropriate and timely remedy where appropriate.

3.6 Transparency

The Society will:

- provide a clear explanation of what actions have been undertaken and why, as a result of the feedback or complaint
- provide those making a complaint with access to the appeals procedure and/or external processes, should they be dissatisfied with the way the complaint process was handled by the Society.
- record, review, and report on complaints handling data as part of our commitment to continuous improvement.
- Complaints must be managed in a way that an actual or perceived conflict of interest does not arise.

4 Approval and Review

Related Documents			
Safeguarding Children and Vulnerable People Policy Member Dispute Commission Charter Risk Management Policy Code of Conduct Discipline Procedures and Performance Management included in the Enterprise Agreement Grievances Policy			
Authorisation			
Approved by:	Territory Council		
Please contact the owner for enquiries and proposed changes			
Responsible Officer:	Director, People & Culture		
Phone:		**Email:**	info@vinnies-cg.org.au
Review			
This policy will be reviewed in 3 years			
Record of Issues			
Version No	**Issue / Re-issue Date**	**Nature of Amendment**	
3.0	21/06/2023	New Template- Roles/Responsibilities and Terms	
3.1	23/10/2025	Email address updated	
Users must check Records Management System to verify that this is the current version before use. The versions maintained in the Records Management System are the official controlled documents and any downloaded or printed hardcopy is uncontrolled. No changes are to be made to this document without the agreement of the Owner and must be approved by the responsible manager before implementation.			

Appendix 1: Definitions

Relevant definitions include:

Advocate	An advocate is a person authorised or nominated by the complainant to act on behalf of the complainant.

Authority to Act	An authority to act is verbal or written authorisation by an individual for a friend, relative, community organisation, or advocate to act on their behalf when engaging with the Society.
Anonymous complainant	An anonymous complainant is any member of the public who chooses to remain anonymous when making a complaint through any means, including the Society's Integrity Hotline or email facility.
Children and Young Person	In this Policy document, 'Child' means persons between the ages 0-15, a 'young person' is any person between the ages 16-17. Children and young people may be people we assist, family members of people we assist, members (Mini Vinnies, High School Conferences), volunteers, employees, or members of the public (for example, customers of Society retail shops or activities where children and young people regularly or occasionally attend such as working bees with local schools or parish youth groups to pack Christmas hampers).
Complainant	A complainant is any member of the public, not working on behalf of the Society in any capacity, making a complaint.
Complaint	Expression of dissatisfaction made to or about the Society relating to its services or service quality, decisions, policies, procedures, charges or fees, personnel, or the complaint handling process itself, where a response or resolution is explicitly or implicitly expected or legally required.
Complaints Officer	The persons responsible for minor of local complaints resolution in their area of the organisation, as appointed by the relevant Director or President.
Complaint management system	All policies, procedures, fact sheets, practices, staff, hardware, and software used by the Society in the management of complaints.
Complaints Manager	The person(s) responsible for organisational complaints resolution. This is the Director People & Culture.
Delegated Person	A person authorised to act on behalf of the Society in dealing with a complaint, for example retail or service managers, Vinnies Services manager, or the relevant Conference or Council President.
Employee	An employee is a paid member of staff unless otherwise specified. This includes full-time, part-time, fixed-term, or casual staff.

External stakeholders	Service users, Participants, carers, Centre customers, companions and donors
Feedback	Feedback is any opinion, comment/ suggestion, compliment or expression of interest/ concern made directly or indirectly
Local Complaint	A minor complaint that can be resolved locally by the relevant Complaints Officer and within 5 days. Example: a complaint about an item sold in a retail centre that requires a refund to be processed.
Participant	A person who receives assistance through any of the Society's Special Works programs
Respondent	A respondent is an individual or group of Society employees, members or volunteers who are alleged by the complainant to be responsible for the circumstances leading to the complaint.
Serious Complaint	A major complaint that cannot be resolved locally by the relevant Complaints Officer within 5 days and requires escalation to the Complaints Manager. Example: a complaints about worker misconduct.

Appendix 2: External Complaints

National Bodies

Aged Care Quality and Safety Commission

- 1800 951 822
- https://www.agedcarequality.gov.au/
- info@agedcarequality.gov.au

Australian Charities and Not-for-profits Commission

- 13 22 62
- https://www.acnc.gov.au
- online complaint form

Australian Human Rights Commission

- 1300 656 419
- https://www.humanrights.gov.au
- infoservice@humanrights.gov.au

Commonwealth Ombudsman

- (02) 6276 0111 or 1300 362 072
- ombudsman@ombudsman.gov.au
- http://www.ombudsman.gov.au/

Department of Social Services

- 1800 634 035
- online complaint form
- complaints@dss.gov.au

National Disability Insurance Agency (Complaints about the NDIS)

- 1800 800 110
- https://www.ndis.gov.au
- online complaint form
- feedback@ndis.gov.au

NDIS Quality and Safeguards Commission (Complaints about NDIS providers)

- 1800 035 544
- www.ndiscommission.gov.au
- complaint contact form
- contactcentre@ndiscommission.gov.au

In the Australian Capital Territory

ACT Auditor General (Complaints about use of public resources)

- (02) 6207 0833
- actauditorgeneral@act.gov.au
- http://www.audit.act.gov.au/

Human Rights Commission

- (02) 6205 2222 or TTY: (02) 6205 1666
- human.rights@act.gov.au
- http://www.hrc.act.gov.au

Office of the Public Advocate ACT

- (02) 6207 0707
- pa@act.gov.au
- http://www.publicadvocate.act.gov.au/

Official Visitor Scheme

- 1800 150 036
- ptg@act.gov.au
- https://www.ptg.act.gov.au/resources/visitor-scheme

ACT Ombudsman

- 1300 362 072
- ombudsman@ombudsman.gov.au
- http://www.ombudsman.act.gov.au/

ACT Civil and Administrative Tribunal (ACAT)

- (02) 6207 1740
- tribunal@act.gov.au
- http://www.acat.gov.au/

In New South Wales

Anti-Discrimination Board of NSW

- (02) 9268 5544
- 1800 670 812 (Toll-free for regional NSW only)
- http://www.antidiscrimination.justice.nsw.gov.au
- complaintsabd@justice.nsw.gov.au

Department of Communities and Justice (DCJ) (Complaints about DCJ funded services)

- (02) 9377 6000
- facs@yourfeedback.nsw.gov.au
- https://www.facs.nsw.gov.au/about/contact/complaints

Office of Children's Guardian (Complaints about the Society's investigation of reportable conduct matters)

- (02) 8219 3600

- ocg@yourfeedback.nsw.gov.au

NSW Ombudsman (Complaints about NSW government-funded services)

- 02 9286 1000
- 1800 451 524
- http://www.ombo.nsw.gov.au
- Online complaint form
- nswombo@ombo.nsw.gov.au

Attachment A: Feedback and Complaint Form

Feedback and Complaint Form

[Insert Service Name]

This form is to be completed by the person, or on behalf of the person, who is giving feedback or making a complaint.

We welcome your feedback and complaints. We like to know when we get something right but we need to know when we could do better.

You can provide feedback to any of our personnel after you have completed it and they will ensure it is actioned appropriately. If you would like help completing this form, please ask a staff member, family, or friend to assist.

It is your right to make a complaint. You will not be treated adversely for making a complaint.

<table>
<tr><td>Feedback □</td><td>Complaint □</td><td>Date</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="3">PERSONAL INFORMATION: By providing personal information to the Society, you consent to the use, storage, and disclosure of that information as described in the Society's Privacy Policy [available on Vinnies' website] for the purposes of registering your feedback and/or investigating and responding to your complaint.

We do accept anonymous complaints, however, by providing your name we will be able to investigate more thoroughly and we will be able to provide you feedback.</td></tr>
<tr><td>Name:</td><td colspan="2"></td></tr>
<tr><td>Advocate's Name (if applicable):</td><td colspan="2"></td></tr>
<tr><td>Phone/Mobile:</td><td colspan="2"></td></tr>
<tr><td>Email/Address:</td><td colspan="2"></td></tr>
<tr><td>Preferred method of contact</td><td>Phone</td><td>Email</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="2">Preferred language:</td><td>Interpreter required: Yes No</td></tr>
</table>

FEEDBACK/COMPLAINT DETAILS: Please provide a summary of your feedback/complaint below.	
Date/s and time incident occurred:	
Location/s where the incident occurred:	

Description - Tell us what happened, who was involved, where it happened, and your main concern(s). Attach another page if you need more space and include copies of any documents that support your complaint:

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Name of individuals involved (if known):

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Name of any witnesses (if known):

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How would you like us to resolve this matter:

Do you want follow-up contact about your feedback: Yes NO

Complainant Signature Advocate's Signature (if applicable) Date

…… …… …../…../…..

Complaints Procedure

The St Vincent de Paul Society welcomes feedback and complaints. We are committed to handling feedback and complaints fairly, efficiently, and effectively.

Despite our best intentions, we know that sometimes things do not go how we would like them to. We would like to hear from you if this happens. If you have a concern or complaint about any of the services we provide, the standard of the service, or the actions of our staff or volunteers, please let us know.

You can submit this form by:

- Handing it in to any Vinnies staff member
- Post: PO Box 51 Deakin West, ACT, 2600
- Email: info@vinnies-cg.org.au

What happens once I provide Feedback/Complaint?

- If you have given us your contact details we will acknowledge receipt within five working days of receiving your feedback/complaint. If you have not received an acknowledgement after five days, please contact us directly as we may not have received it.
- We will enter your complaint details onto our secure complaints register.
- Our intention is to resolve all complaints within 25 working days. If this is not possible, we will inform you of the anticipated timeframe.

Need further help?

- If you are a non-English speaking person, call Translating and Interpreter Service (TIS) on 131 450.
- If you have an hearing or speech impairment, contact us through the National Relay Service: 1800 555 677
    - TTY users phone 133 677.
    - Speak and Listen users phone 1300 555 727 then ask for 02 9568 0273.
- If you need someone to assist you to fill in the form, ask any Vinnies volunteer or staff member

Is there a Review or Appeal process?

Yes, if your complaint is assessed as a matter which needs to be investigated and you are not satisfied with the outcome of the complaint investigation, please contact the Complaints Officer within 25 working days of receiving the outcome of your initial complaint on:

- Post: Complaints Manager, St Vincent de Paul Society Canberra/ Goulburn, PO Box 51 Deakin West, ACT, 2600
- Email: info@vinnies-cg.org.au
- Phone: (02)6282 2722

Need more information?

St Vincent de Paul Society has a Feedback and Complaints Policy, which is available on our website.

NDIS

If your complaint is about a Vinnies services which is also an NDIS provider, you are also able to contact the NDIS Quality and Safeguard Commission on 1800 035 544. Or complete an online form https://www.ndis.gov.au/contact/feedback-and-complaints

Attachment B: Authority to Act and Disclose

AUTHORITY TO ACT

I, _____ (name of complainant)

authorise _____ (name of authorised person/s)

to act on my behalf in relation to the complaint I have made to the Society.

I understand that the Society will deal directly with

_____ (name of authorised person/s)

in relation to this complaint.

AND/OR

AUTHORITY TO DISCLOSE

I authorise _____ (name of authorised person/s)

to:

☐ Provide information and documents to the Society in connection with the Society's assessment, investigation, and conciliation of my complaint.

☐ Receive information and documents from the Society about my complaint including responses provided by the respondent/s and correspondence from the Society.

☐ Discuss my complaint with the Society.

I understand that I can withdraw my authority to act or disclose at any time by contacting the Society.

I understand that the Society will use and store my personal information under the Privacy Act 1988 (Cth).

Signed: _____

Name: _____

(name of complainant)

Date: _____