

Policy No: 4.6 Client Feedback

Applies To:	Version No:
Specific Responsibility:	Date approved: June 2026
Operations	Next review date: June 2029

Policy Context: This policy relates to	
Standards or other external requirements	
Legislation or other requirements	Legal Profession Uniform Law Application Act 2014 – Sch 1 Legal Profession Uniform Law_ Australian Solicitor Conduct Rules 2015 Victims Charter Act 2006 Victims of Crime Commissioner Act 2015.
Contractual obligations	Victims Legal Service CLC Accreditation
Scope	Staff and volunteers, including students. Henceforth referred to as ‘staff and volunteers’

Purpose

This policy outlines how SMLS receives, records, investigates and responds to client feedback and complaints. It aims to ensure concerns are managed fairly, promptly, confidentially and consistently while supporting continuous improvement of services.

Complaint Handling Principles

SMLS is committed to:

- Accessibility and inclusion;
- Fairness and procedural fairness;
- Respectful communication;
- Timely responses;
- Confidentiality and privacy;
- Continuous improvement.

Policy

1. SMLS welcomes client feedback, including complaints, as an opportunity to improve service quality, accessibility and responsiveness to client needs.
2. SMLS is committed to the provision of accessible, appropriate and effective legal services, so that our client's needs are met and confidence is maintained in the service.
3. SMLS is committed to full compliance with external obligations and professional standards as required by legislation.
4. SMLS recognises that there will be occasions when service users are not satisfied with the service provided or the inability to provide a service. Pursuant to the Client Charter, every client has the right to complain if unhappy with the service and have this dealt with fairness, confidentially, and care.
5. A complaint may be made in writing in English or in the client's preferred language as outlined in the Client Charter. Where reasonably practicable, SMLS will facilitate access to interpreter or communication support services. Complaints may be

submitted to the nominated SMLS email addresses: info@smls.com.au or info_narrewarren@smls.com.au

6. Any staff or volunteer has the right to be notified as soon as practicable of a complaint against them. They also have the right to expect that the complaint will be dealt with fairness, confidentially and care.
7. SMLS will acknowledge your complaint and respond within 14 working days.

Procedure

1. If a client makes a verbal complaint, including over the telephone, the person receiving it makes a written record (file note) of the complaint.
2. The client should be asked whether they wish to follow the formal complaints process. If so, the person receiving the call should advise the client to put the complaint in writing and email it to either info@smls.com.au or info_narrewarren@smls.com.au
3. Clients seeking assistance as victims of crime will be informed regarding their entitlement to complain about an agency if the victim considers SMLS has not upheld the Victims' Charter principles. They will also be informed of their right to have that complaint reviewed by the Victims of Crime Commissioner if they are dissatisfied with SMLS response to their complaint.

Informal/Verbal complaints

- If the client does not wish to follow the formal complaint procedure, the complaint should be forwarded at first instance to a Manager or Principal if it relates to legal advice provided or, the CEO if the complaint relates to conduct of an individual.
- The CEO and/or supervisor must communicate the nature of the complaint to the person being complained about.
- No formal response is required, however the Manager or Principal, in consultation with the CEO, may require the subject of the complaint to undertake training, professional development, shadowing of other staff or performance management.

Formal complaints

- The complaint must be in writing.

- The written complaint will be forwarded within a reasonable time to the Principal and the CEO.
- The CEO and Principal will discuss the complaint with the subject and their manager
- The subject of a complaint will be given the opportunity to be heard, explain the details of the matter, and to present their version of events
- Their manager will provide a written response to the substance of the complaint to the CEO and Principal
- At the conclusion of the investigation, the CEO will provide a written response to the complainant
- Information about the process and timeframe for addressing the complaint will be provided. Additional information may be required to properly assess the complaint.
- The response will include a description of the actions taken, and any findings made, and if appropriate, the outcomes or solution.
- The CEO keeps records of all client complaints. We use this information to review and improve our services. The CEO will notify the Chairperson of any complaints involving possible serious misconduct, or when a complaint has progressed to an external oversight agency.

Confidentiality and Complaints Made by Third Parties

- SMLS will manage complaints in a confidential manner.
- Where a complaint is made by a family member, support person or other representative, SMLS may be restricted in the information it can provide due to confidentiality and privacy obligations. SMLS may provide general information about the complaints process but will not disclose information about a client's matter without the client's consent. Where appropriate, SMLS may request written authority from the client before discussing the matter with the third party.

External complaints

Complaints about lawyers may be made to:

*The Legal Services Commissioner
Level 9, 330 Collins Street*

Melbourne VIC 3000

Phone: 1300 796 344 (local call within Victoria) or 9679 8001

Web: www.lsc.vic.gov.au

Complaints under the Victims' Charter

- [Victims' Charter Act 2006](#) in Victoria sets out the legal principles on how the criminal justice system, and agencies that work with victims of crime, should respond to victims of crime.
- Read more information on the Victims of Crimes Commissioner's website – [Understanding the victims' charter](#).
- Victims can also complain directly to the Victims of Crime Commissioner (VOCC). Call 1800 010 017 or email enquiries@vocc.vic.gov.au.
- For further information on how the VOCC assesses and investigates complaints please refer to the VOCC page [Assessing and investigating complaints](#).