

Early Resolution Transfer Policy

Version 1.1– June 2026

Purpose

1. This document sets out the office of the National Health Practitioner Ombudsman's (the NHPO's) early resolution transfer policy.
2. Our office champions fairness by taking every complaint seriously and shining a light on systemic issues to effect positive change. We provide an independent complaints service that is free and open to all to ensure our health practitioner regulation system is accountable and fair.
3. We serve the public interest by identifying opportunities to address concerns early and less formally. This is why we finalise most complaints without the need for an investigation. We look for opportunities to use our early resolution processes, including our:
 - preliminary inquiry process
 - early resolution transfer process.
4. We are committed to efficiently resolving complaints by minimising delay and focusing on achieving practical outcomes.
5. Our early resolution processes are designed to make engaging with our office easier and more straightforward. In contrast, our investigations are more comprehensive, which means it can take longer to gather and assess the relevant information.

Early resolution principles

6. Our guiding principles when taking an early resolution approach are:
 - we are flexible and timely in our approach. Different approaches might be needed for different types of complaints and if a timely outcome is unlikely to be achieved through an early resolution process, it should not be used.
 - we work collaboratively and informally with the complainant and the organisation they have complained about to pursue positive and practical outcomes
 - we use our time as efficiently and effectively as possible, and encourage communication by phone wherever possible
 - we provide organisations that are the subject of the complaint with an adequate opportunity to resolve a person's concerns. Organisations must take ownership for resolving matters to prevent our office needing to undertake an investigation.

- we maintain our independence and impartiality at all times. We do not advocate for the complainant or the organisation that is the subject of the complaint. Instead, we make decisions based on evidence and without taking sides.

Early resolution transfer process

7. We handle all complaints in line with our Service Charter, values and legislation.
8. We may choose to use the early resolution transfer process if we determine that the complaint is within jurisdiction and the complainant has not yet made a formal complaint to the organisation that is the subject of the complaint.

When we may decide not to make an early resolution transfer

9. Matters that are not suitable for early resolution may include complaints:
 - where the organisation has already formally responded to the complaint
 - involving unclear or complex issues which require more detailed consideration or information gathering to establish facts
 - where it appears that an investigation is necessary as the Ombudsman is likely to make formal comments and/or suggestions for improvement to the organisation being complained about.
10. If we decide that a complaint is not suitable for transfer, we may choose to instead make preliminary inquiries or commence an investigation.

Transferring the complaint

11. Once it has been decided that an early resolution transfer is likely the best and most appropriate way to progress the complaint, we seek the complainant's consent to transfer it.
12. We contact the complainant directly to explain the early resolution transfer process, and why we believe it is the best way to address their concerns quickly and effectively.
13. We then request the complainant's consent either verbally or in writing to transfer the complaint to the relevant organisation.
14. If the complainant consents to the transfer, we contact the organisation directly to transfer the complaint. The complaint remains open with our office while the organisation responds to it. The organisation has 2 business days after the date it receives the complaint from our office to acknowledge receipt. It is then required to respond in full to the complaint within 20 business days. If the organisation is unable to meet the required deadline, it must contact our office to request an extension of time.
15. Once the complainant receives a response from the organisation, we assess whether the response is fair and reasonable.
16. We also seek the complainant's views on whether their concerns have been addressed and consider any further information they wish to provide. The complainant's satisfaction with the complaint response is a factor considered during this assessment, though it is not the deciding factor.

Possible outcomes

17. After our assessment, we may decide to not investigate and finalise the complaint or decide that the complaint requires further examination.
18. The outcomes of an early resolution transfer depend on the individual circumstances of the complaint. These may include:
 - a remedy for the complainant (for example, an update about the status of a matter or a better explanation of a decision)
 - agreed arrangements between the complainant and the organisation to progress the matter
 - improvements to the organisation's processes
 - our office deciding that the organisation has appropriately responded to the concerns raised
 - providing deidentified information about the complaint in submissions, own motion investigations or analysis of systemic issues to influence improvement in the National Registration and Accreditation Scheme.
19. If we believe, however, that a complaint requires further consideration, we may decide to:
 - make preliminary inquiries with the organisation¹
 - commence an investigation into the complaint.²
20. We let the complainant know the outcome of the early resolution transfer process (in writing wherever possible) with a detailed explanation of why this decision was made.

Privacy

21. We collect and use information in line with our Privacy Policy. We:
 - use the information gathered through the complaint process to manage or resolve concerns, or to address issues arising from the complaint
 - record all complaints and relevant information in our case management system
 - may disclose information publicly (either in data or a case study or story) in a de-identified format, such as in our Annual Report.
22. Please contact us with any questions about how we record complaints on 1300 795 265 or by [email](mailto:complaints@nhpo.gov.au) at <complaints@nhpo.gov.au>.

Policy review

23. The Ombudsman will review this policy every 5 years in consultation with staff and relevant stakeholders.

¹ Under s 7A of the Ombudsman Act 1976 (Cwlth).

² Under s 12 of the Ombudsman Act 1976 (Cwlth).

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Responsible work area	Complaints and Freedom of Information Branch
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To receive this document in another format phone 1300 795 265, using the National Relay Service 13 36 77 if required, or [email our complaints team](mailto:complaints@nhpo.gov.au) <complaints@nhpo.gov.au>.

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