

Houselink Community Homes Participant Complaint Policy

Purpose

This policy applies to all members/participants, (hereafter called Participants), who wish to make formal complaints regarding Houselink Community Homes' (hereafter called Houselink) programs, access to service, support service delivery, maintenance or property concerns, conflict with another Participant or conflict with a Houselink staff personnel. Accordingly, Houselink has a Participant Complaint Policy (Complaint Policy) to ensure that there is an accessible and fair process to hear and respond to complaints. Houselink is committed to ongoing service improvement and tracking of these formal complaints will assist the Board and senior management with ongoing quality improvement initiatives.

Policy Statement

Houselink provides permanent affordable housing, supports and programs to enable people with mental health challenges to stay housed, connected, healthy and in charge of their own lives.

We wish to provide our Participants with the best possible service and programs. We, however, acknowledge that Participants will occasionally have complaints about our rules, expectations and the way we operate or provide access to our programs and services. We are open to and welcome the opportunities to engage in such dialogue with Participants and view it as a valuable and informative way to continually improve upon our service. The Board of Directors does not respond to individual complaints. It is committed to reviewing trends of these complaints annually and to work together with our Participants in regards to service improvements.

Houselink is an organization that complies with the Human Rights Code. Houselink will not tolerate any behaviours such as any kind of prejudice, racism, discrimination or harassment. Participants have the right to make complaints without discrimination or reprisal. Houselink will respond to the complaints of all Participants, including those with disabilities, in accordance with the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA) 2005. Participants are encouraged to use our anti-discrimination/harassment guidelines (appendix 1) if the complaint is of this nature.

Nothing in this policy prevents or discourages a Participant from seeking legal recourse through the Landlord and Tenant Board, the Human Rights Tribunal of Ontario (appendix 2 - contact information), or other legal avenue that may be available.

Complaints will be resolved as quickly as possible, within the timelines described in this protocol and ideally within one month of the complaint being made.

Definition of terms

Complaint – is an expression of dissatisfaction, discontent or resentment about a program, person, process, service, or treatment.

Confidentiality – Houselink respects Participants' confidentiality. Only persons who are directly involved in the complaint, or support persons permitted by the Participant, have access to information. Houselink will strive to maintain the utmost degree of privacy during the investigation procedure. Only those parties involved, directly named, or those who have further information to offer may be disclosed to inform the process, in the interest of achieving the best possible outcome.

Frivolous/Vexatious Complaints - Frivolous complaints are those that, upon investigation, are found to have no basis. Vexatious complaints are those that are made in order to annoy. Houselink will view negative feedback and complaints seriously. Responding to frivolous or vexatious feedback and complaints requires resources. Therefore, if a Participant is found to be giving negative feedback or making complaints that are frivolous or vexatious, Houselink will provide support, when possible, to address the cause of the vexation.

Appeal – is a request to examine, with the intention of overturning the decision of a prior ruling. Many Houselink programs already have their own built in appeals processes, specific to those programs. For example, the Peggy Birnberg fund has its own appeals process. Therefore, appeals of such a process are not covered in this policy.

Anonymity - A Participant may choose to remain anonymous or not contactable by omitting his/her name or contact information on a written submission of complaint. Houselink will investigate anonymous submissions that request or require resolution, but the results may be limited by an insufficient amount of verifiable information.

Feedback – is an opinion or suggestion that is given by someone to say what can be done to improve upon a program, process or service. It can be positive. It can be negative. It can also be neutral.

Informal conflict resolution

Whenever possible, we suggest that the Participant should try to informally resolve conflicts on their own if they feel comfortable and safe to do so. They can do this with the help of support staff. Addressing the issue directly with the person who provided you the service is an important step. This provides staff an opportunity to stop the behaviour or take necessary steps to address the issue and offer reparation(s) such as an apology. Mediation is also another option to resolve a conflict.

If the Participant has any ideas on how to improve upon programs or services to make Houselink better, please attend Town Halls, the Participant Advisory Forum, Social Recreation Committee meetings, or house/building meetings.

If the Participants feel they have been discriminated against or harassed because of gender, sexual orientation, race or any of the violations of the Human Rights Code then they are encouraged to use the Houselink Anti-Discrimination/Anti-Harassment procedure. Any staff can help with the application process.

If the Participant is not satisfied with the outcome, then he or she can call the Ontario Human Rights Commission.

How to register a complaint

Instructions on how to submit formal complaints:

1. Use the Participant Complaint Form (appendix 3) to write down the nature of the complaint. The complaint can be about a program. It can be about a staff, a student/volunteer or another Participant. It can also be about a maintenance/property or service concern. The Participant can request an action be taken as a result of the complaint. Submit the written complaint directly to the manager of the department or program the complaint is about. Complaint forms can be found on the Houselink website (www.houselink.on.ca), 805 Bloor Street West reception, 1678 Bloor Street West reception or please ask a staff for assistance.
2. Participants can make a complaint in-person or by telephone. Please call the supervisor or manager for the program/maintenance department. Feel free to discuss the matter over the telephone or make an appointment to meet in-person. Be sure to tell them that you are wishing to lodge a formal complaint. **All managers are required to act in the capacity of Complaint Officers for their departments.** Managers will assist in filling out the form, for documentation purposes.
3. The Participant can make a complaint by email. Please send emails to: inquiries@houcelink.on.ca. Emails will be forwarded to the manager of the program or service that the complaint relates to.
4. If the Participant wishes to remain anonymous, they can submit the complaint form in the mail. Envelopes are also available at the front desk at 805 Bloor Street West, 1678 Bloor Street West, 1117 Danforth Avenue 40 Oak Street or any of our other offices, every day during business hours. Please fill out the complaint form, seal the envelope and return it to any administrative or front desk staff. As stated previously, anonymous complaints will be investigated. However, the results may be limited by the insufficient amount of verifiable information.

What will happen after the complaint has been submitted?

1. Upon receiving a Participant complaint, the manager of the department that the complaint is about will get in touch (except in cases where they wish to be anonymous) to acknowledge receipt of the complaint. This should occur within [5] business days of receiving the complaint. This could be done via email, telephone or letter.
2. The manager will record the date and time of the conversation with the Participant and take down any further statements they wish to make (See appendix 4).
3. The manager will inform the Participant of Houselink's procedure for addressing complaints and the steps that will be taken to investigate the complaint. A discussion and an agreement on possible next steps, such as conflict resolution, may occur.
4. The manager will then begin an investigation of the outlined concerns, speaking with other parties involved and gathering facts and information as necessary. The investigation should be conducted within [21] business days of receiving the complaint.
5. At the end of the investigation the manager will fill in the Investigation Form, detailing the investigations, findings and recommendations. The manager will inform the Participant of the results and any recommendations that will be implemented to resolve the matter.
6. If the recommendation includes Houselink Conflict Resolutions Policy, then the manager shall follow the steps outlined Conflict Resolution Policy (see appendix 5)

7. The manager will follow up to ensure that the recommendations are implemented and there is satisfaction in the outcome.
8. The manager will forward a satisfaction survey (appendix 6) to the Participant to be completed and returned to the manager for inclusion in the notes on the investigation.
 - a. If the Participant is satisfied with the investigation and the outcome implemented, then the matter can be considered addressed and closed.
 - b. If the Participant is not satisfied by the outcome of the investigation, the manager will discuss the appeals process and next steps {see *Appeals Process below*}.
9. The manager will upload documentation of all actions taken and will ensure that the records concerning the complaint are kept strictly confidential.
10. If the Participant indicated that they wish to access the appeals process, the manager will inform the Executive Director or designate of the pending appeal. The manager will pass on all records to the Executive Director or designate.

The Appeals Procedure

If the Participant is not satisfied by the resolution of the initial complaint then they may formally request an appeal. This must be submitted in writing (see appendix 7 – appeals form). The Executive Director or designate will have [10] business days to reply to the request.

In the participant has not submitted their appeal within [10] business days of the manager informing them of the outcome and recommendations in regards to their complaint, then the complaint is considered addressed and closed.

What will happen during the appeal?

1. upon receipt the Participant's appeal notice, the Executive Director or designate will contact the Participant to review the previous recommendations. This can be done in person or by telephone.
2. If the Executive director determines that the previous investigation is complete and the resulting decision was appropriate, then the findings will be considered final and the previous recommendations will then be determined to be the correct solution. The recommendations will be implemented and be further monitored by the Executive Director or designate with a follow-up check – in with the Participant about the matter.
3. However, if it is determined, by the Executive Director or designate, that the investigation process was done inappropriately and/or flawed, then a new investigator will be assigned to investigate the complaint and [10-15] business days will be given to complete the work.

Please be aware that sometimes the solution might not be the one that you are expecting or hoping for. The Conflict Resolution Policy is here to assist in maintaining a peaceful community. We hope that everyone involved in all conflicts will do their part to ensure successful outcomes.

Complaints About Manager

If the complaint is about a Manager, the complaint should be submitted directly to the Executive Director or delegate. The Executive Director will respond to the complaint fairly, expeditiously and adhering as closely as to the procedures above.

If the complaint is about service provided by the Executive Director, it should be submitted to the Board President.

The Board President will ensure that the Executive Committee of the Board of Directors is informed of any complaints about the Executive Director.

Final Documentation

All complaints will be documented in a Complaint Form.

The investigating manager will document the investigative process and their conclusions in a report.

Complaint Forms and all related documentation will be scanned and uploaded to the Senior Management folder and there should be maintained a central file. Information relating to complaints may be used to examine patterns of complaints.

Annually, the Executive Director will provide an annual summary of all complaints to the Board of Directors.

Implementation of this policy

Houselink Community Homes will ensure that this policy is widely disseminated to all Participants. It will be included in the staff and Tenant handbook. All new employees, tenant, volunteer and students must be trained on the content of this policy as part of the orientation process. All managers will take part in conflict resolution training and their role in adhering to this policy as Complaint Officer for the various departments they lead. It is the responsibility of every manager to ensure that all his/her employees are aware of the policy.

Thank you, we appreciate the time you are taking to help us improve our services.