

## COMMUNITY SUPPORT SERVICE AGENCY COMPLAINTS POLICY

**POLICY:** Effective April 1, 2004,

***Community Support Service (CSS) agencies that receive Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care funding must have a written client complaints policy and procedures. This policy must include informing the client about agency services to be provided, the client "Bill of Rights" as described in s.3 of the Long-Term Care Act, 1994, how to contact the agency with questions or complaints and how to make an appeal of service decisions. This complaints policy must be integrated into the agency's quality improvement system.***

### ***POLICY EXPLANATION:***

All CSS agencies are expected to demonstrate responsiveness to client concerns. They are expected to have an easily accessible, written client complaints system and to integrate this system into a quality improvement strategy for the agency.

Community support services are long-term care services that are accessed directly by the public and provide assistance to seniors and persons with physical disabilities to enable them to remain in the community.

Community support services include services such as meal services, escorted transportation, friendly visiting, adult/Alzheimer day programs, attendant care outreach, caregiver supports, home help/homemaking, home maintenance services and specialized services for the deaf/hard of hearing and the visually impaired. They include supportive housing for the physically disabled, persons with HIV/AIDS, and the elderly. They also include community Acquired Brain Injury (ABI) services such as specialized supportive housing, ABI outreach, and ABI independence training.

Community support service agencies funded by the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care to provide community support services under the *Long-Term Care Act, 1994*, ("the Act") are "approved agencies" under the Act as defined in s.2(1) and s.5. The Act, under s.39, specifically requires approved agencies to establish a complaints process. In s.27, the Act also requires agencies to establish a quality improvement (QI) system.<sup>1</sup>

For this CSS Agency Complaints Policy, a **complaint** is defined as negative feedback to an agency or service provider, whether it is written or verbal. Requests for information are not considered complaints. However, a statement of concern or a statement of a problem would be considered a complaint for purposes of this policy.

The Ministry recognizes that implementation of this complaints policy and procedures needs to be made understandable and easily accessible to various cultural groups, including Aboriginal communities.

## **I. Role of the CSS Agency - Client Complaints Policy and Procedures**

### **A. A CSS agency complaints policy must address the following elements:**

1. A CSS agency must ensure the following information is given to a client at the time services are begun:
  - list of services and amount of services to be provided to client,
  - instructions for receiving or using services, e.g. hours of service, instructions for handling hot/cold meals (meals-on-wheels), instructions for accessing community transportation services, etc.,
  - agency policy for service eligibility, amount of service, and for ending service,
  - the client Bill of Rights under the *Long-Term Care Act, 1994*, s.3, by giving the client a full copy of the Bill of Rights,
  - agency contacts for asking a question or making a complaint (either verbal or written), and
  - information as to how to initiate an appeal within the agency about services provided, and if necessary, an appeal to the Health Services Appeal and Review Board (HSARB). This information should include the type of issues that are appealable to HSARB and those that are not.<sup>ii</sup>
2. Integration of an agency's complaints policies into the agency's broader Quality Improvement (QI) system, as required by s.27 of the *Act*.

Note: QI measures might include anonymous client satisfaction surveys, which could provide information on such things as client care outcomes, complaints and compliments. This information could enhance the complaints data reported to the Ministry on the annual service plan (See II, 1 below)

### **B. Procedures related to the complaints policy should include:**

1. Written procedures for handling complaints on a timely basis.

Note: s.39(2) of the *Act* requires complaints to be reviewed and responded to within 60 days. Best practice suggests that most CSS agency complaints would be responded to within a week.

2. Written procedures for handling a complaint within the agency and advising the client of the option of appealing to the Health Services Appeal and Review Board if a complaint is unresolved at the agency level and is open to an appeal under the *Long-Term Care Act, s.39(1), #1-4*.

The CSS agency is responsible for documenting the complaint in writing and giving the client a written response to complaints described in s.39(1)#1-4.

3. A systematic logging process for recording and tracking details of client complaints (verbal and written) such as type of service involved; nature of complaint (See s.39(1) of the *Act*); action(s) taken and current status.

4. The complaints log and data must be kept confidential and completely separate from a client's service record.

## **II. Role of the CSS Agency - Reporting Complaint Information to MOHLTC**

1. CSS agencies are to report complaint information in their annual service plan submission to the MOHLTC Regional Office. Complaint information is to include information about the following items:
  - By individual service provided, the trends the CSS agency has identified from complaints received,
  - How the CSS agency addressed these trends in the past year, and/or their plans for required follow through in subsequent years, and
  - How the trends in complaints may have changed in the last year
2. CSS agencies must have the following written policies and procedures available for the ministry to review:
  - agency procedures for complaints and appeals,
  - information given to clients at the time services are initiated (See IA1 above)
  - agency quality improvement (QI) system and how complaints fit into the QI system

## **III. Role of MOHLTC Regional Office Regarding CSS Agency Complaint Information**

The role of the MOHLTC Regional Office is to review CSS agency client complaint information submitted as part of the annual service plan. Ministry staff will discuss with the CSS agency any trends requiring follow up.

CCAC Branch  
Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care  
March 31, 2004

---

<sup>i</sup> *The Long-Term Care Act, 1994*, can be accessed at [www.e-laws.gov.on.ca](http://www.e-laws.gov.on.ca) (click on Consolidated Law, Statutes and Associated Regulations) or by contacting the Ontario Government Bookstore, 880 Bay Street, Toronto ON M7A 1N8, phone: 416-326-5300 or 1-800-668-9938

<sup>ii</sup> See s.39 of *The Long-Term Care Act, 1994*, which identifies six types of complaints, of which the first four can be appealed to HSARB