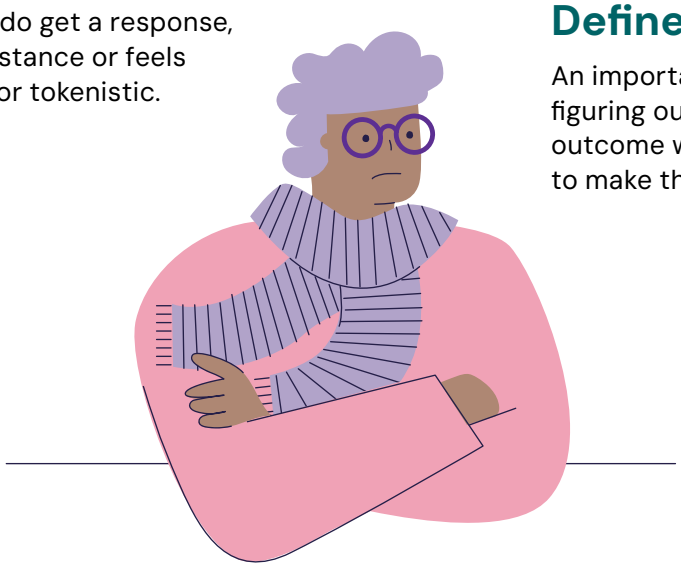
I've left the service or hospital, and I want to make a complaint about a negative experience.

Where do I start?

It would help if you prepared yourself. Making a complaint can be emotionally taxing; you must re-tell your negative or even traumatising experience.

As an advocacy organisation, we often hear from consumers that:

- Filling out an online form with no assistance can feel impersonal and cold.
- Consumers can struggle to talk to someone who doesn't relate to their experiences.
- Waiting a long time for a response can be difficult and stressful.
- When they do get a response, it lacks substance or feels dismissive or tokenistic.



Before you begin the complaint process

- Be prepared for the process to take a while before you get a response.. While services are required to acknowledge the complaint within three days and respond to the complaint within 30 days, this response time frame is not outlined in the act and therefore not law.
- Know that the first response you get isn't the end of the road- you have options, including making a complaint to specific government agencies. These agencies are defined in the next fact sheet.

Define the outcome you want

An important part of the complaints process is figuring out what outcome you want. The intended outcome will guide your steps and prepare you to make the right decisions.

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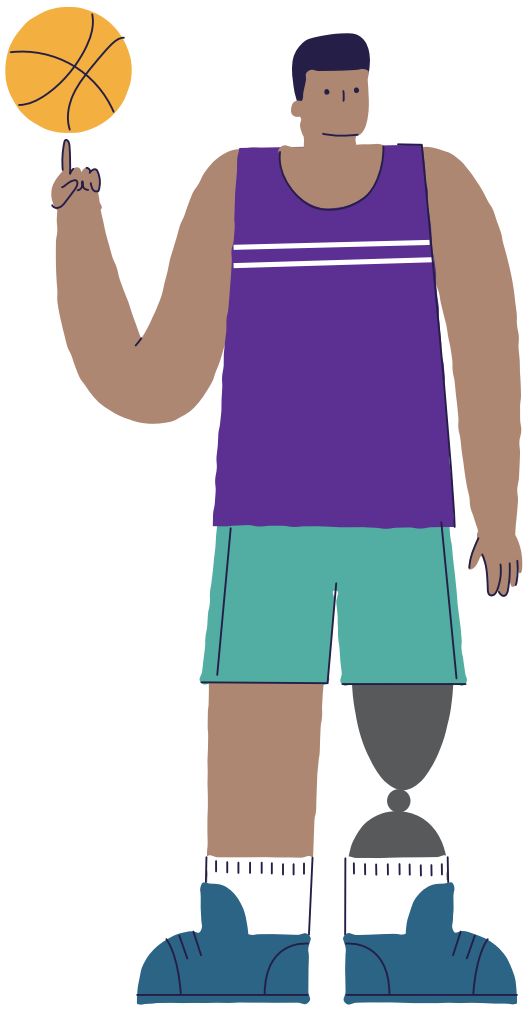
Some common outcomes include:

Improving the service through feedback

In processing your experiences and moving forward, you might want to provide feedback to the service. Some people do this to help the service improve and make sure other people don't have similar experiences.

Accountability

Sometimes, as consumers, we seek accountability and/or compensation. If this is your desire, it's important to know how rare and unlikely this is. Understanding the limitations of accountability will help set your expectations.



Some helpful hints and tips in preparing to undertake a complaints process:

Be specific

The more detail you can include in the complaint, the more impactful it will be.

If you can, Include dates, times, names, names of people of witnesses, and the sequence of events.

Have supports in place

Be aware that the process may take a toll on you emotionally- have your supports in place. These supports can include friends, family, or peer support workers who can provide emotional support and guidance.

Pace yourself

A complaint doesn't need to happen immediately- you have three years to submit a complaint.

Take your time and take breaks whenever you need them.

VMIAC Resources

VMIAC's peer support program Check-in has created the resource 'We are wiser than we know'- Words and thoughts by people navigating the system.

Ask for help

Advocates, support workers, psychosocial recovery coaches, workers at Mental Health and Wellbeing Commission or Health Complaints Commissioner can help you put together your complaint. However, many of these will have wait times.

Advocates like VMIAC or another disability advocacy organisation can work with you to determine what you want to include in your complaint.

Advocates work from a rights-based perspective. This means that they will also assist you in linking your experiences to rights that may have been breached.

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