



Telecommunications
Industry
Ombudsman

TIO Good Industry Practice Guide for Customer Service

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About this guide

We expect providers to give free, timely and effective customer service that supports consumers who use their products and services.

This guide outlines what we think is good industry practice when consumers are experiencing issues with customer service.

Good industry practice is different to minimum legal obligations for providers. These obligations are set out in the:

- [Telecommunications \(Consumer Complaints Handling\) Industry Standard 2018](#)
- [Telecommunications Consumer Protection Code 2019](#)
- [Telecommunications Act 1997](#)
- [Disability Discrimination Act 1992](#)
- [Telecommunications \(Consumer Protection and Service Standards\) Act 1999](#)

We expect consumers to participate with providers in finding ways to resolve their complaints.

The examples in this guide are not exhaustive. We always consider the individual circumstances of each complaint when deciding on a fair and reasonable resolution.

View our [Fairness Framework](#) to learn more.

Examples of Good Industry Practice for Customer Service

Good industry practice is providers supporting all consumers fairly and consistently before, during and after sales of their products and services.

1. Complaint handling processes

1.1 We expect providers' complaint-handling processes to ensure accessibility by:

- Including processes set out in plain language
- Being available on provider websites
- Being given to consumers when they ask for them
- Being free of charge
- Focussing on the needs and expectations of consumers
- Clearly explaining how and when consumers can complain
- Letting consumers complain by their chosen method, such as by telephone, letter, email, online or in store
- Specifying telephone numbers, email addresses and web addresses where consumers can complain
- Setting out in sequence each step in the complaint handling process
- Letting consumers authorise other people to handle complaints for them
- Training their staff to help consumers make, progress and resolve complaints. This includes where consumers vulnerable, speaking a language other than English, or are experiencing financial hardship.

1.2 We expect providers to be transparent in:

- Prioritising complaints
- Escalating complaints
- How providers manage complaints
- How providers classify complaints
- Escalating complaints to the TIO
- Preventing cancellation of consumer services while complaints are ongoing.

1.3 We expect providers to signpost internal dispute resolution and external dispute resolution services:

- Clear and accessible information about internal and external dispute resolution
- Before receiving complaints
- As part of published complaint-handling processes
- When providers receive complaints
- When providers close complaints.

1.4 We expect providers to be open to feedback about customer service:

- Give consumers a clear pathway to providing feedback about their complaint-handling processes
- Acknowledge consumer feedback when they receive it
- Accept and include feedback as a positive driver of good customer service.

1.5 We expect providers to review and continuously improve customer service:

- Periodically monitor and record in writing the actions they take to:
 - deal with problems they identify in their complaint-handling processes
 - share these problems with senior management when appropriate
 - report on complaint handling processes and outcomes as required
 - develop further training for their staff to reflect identified problems in their complaint-handling processes.
- Continuously improve their complaint-handling processes by:
 - periodically reviewing their complaint-handling processes
 - including consumer feedback in their reviews
 - developing further training for their staff in response to emerging issues and significant events, such as outages, breaches of personal information or new products and services.

2. Managing complaints

2.1 We expect providers to acknowledge complaints:

- Acknowledge they have received complaints from consumers via their chosen method of communication

- Set out timelines for:
 - appropriate investigations of complaints
 - telling consumers about their findings.

2.2 We expect providers to try to resolve complaints by:

- Responding to consumers' complaints with appropriate resolutions that acknowledge consumers' experiences
- Sharing with consumers the reasons supporting offered resolutions
- Showing flexibility when agreeing to resolutions with consumers.

2.3 We expect providers to communicate clearly:

- Recognise consumers are not telecommunications experts
- Communicate with consumers in plain English, or their preferred language where possible, about:
 - technical issues and processes
 - delays and the reasons for them before they happen
 - reschedule delayed actions as soon as possible.

2.4 We expect providers to adapt responses to consumers' different needs by:

- Adapting responses to the needs of consumers who:
 - are from an Indigenous background
 - are from language backgrounds other than English
 - are homeless
 - are elderly
 - experience or are impacted by domestic and family violence
 - face cultural, education or diversity barriers
 - have a disability (cognitive and/or physical)
 - have low levels of literacy or numeracy
 - have a chronic or serious illness (cognitive and/or physical)
 - have experienced long-term financial hardship
 - face crises and life events
 - live in rural or remote areas
 - experience other personal circumstances that may place them at risk or challenge.

2.5 We expect providers to follow up with consumers:

- Follow up regularly with consumers
- Give consumers clear windows of availability to contact them
- Regularly update consumers via their chosen method of communication.

2.6 We expect providers to apologise to consumers where appropriate:

- Promptly offer an apology after a consumer raises an issue
- Sincerely acknowledge the impact on consumers in an apology tailored to the unique circumstances of the complaint
- Following an apology with actions as required
- Avoiding defensive or conditional language in an apology.

3. Product and service knowledge

3.1 We expect providers to train their staff in current product and service knowledge:

- Train all staff dealing with consumers in current product and service knowledge
- Share product and service knowledge with consumers in plain English or their preferred language where possible
- In good faith, help consumers decide if products and services are suitable for them.

4. Compensation

4.1 Where consumers claim breaches of privacy, we expect providers to:

- Investigate alleged breaches appropriately
- Share with affected consumers information supporting the outcomes of their investigations

4.2 Where providers' investigations show privacy breaches, we may expect providers to:

- Offer consumers appropriate compensation
- Share information supporting their offers.

4.3 Where consumers experience unusual stress or inconvenience, we expect providers to:

- Listen to and acknowledge consumers' experiences
- Respond to consumers' claims for compensation for non-financial loss in a timely way
- Consider and offer consumers appropriate compensation for stress and inconvenience caused by the action or inaction of providers.

5. General customer service

5.1 We expect providers to:

- Avoid unnecessary wait times
- Give consumers options for contact
- Give response dates and times, and adhere to them
- Deal with issues promptly and appropriately to the urgency of the complaint.

5.2 We expect providers to communicate fairly by:

- Ensuring messages are consistent across all departments, such as sales, finance and complaints management
- Treating consumers with courtesy and respect
- Tailoring communication to individuals' needs.

5.3 We expect providers to exchange information:

- Give consumers clear information they can understand
- Tailor information for individuals' needs, such as using other languages, accessible fonts, and other modifications
- Ensure information is fit for purpose.

5.4 We expect providers to keep promises:

- Keep promises they make to consumers
- Tell consumers if things change
- Do not promise things providers cannot provide consumers.

References

For more information, please see our:

- [Good Industry Practice Guides](#)
- [Guidance Documents](#)
- [Terms of Reference](#)

Appendix

Our rules are called our [Terms of Reference](#). They say we can direct providers to compensate consumers up to:

- \$100,000 for complaints involving a privacy breach
- \$1,500 for complaints not involving a privacy breach.

For complaints not involving a privacy breach, we evaluate each claim for compensation in the unique context of individual complaints.