



## WELCOME TO NOVA FOR WOMEN AND CHILDREN

This folder contains information you may need to know during your participation with NOVA. If you have any questions your support worker will be able to assist you.

## COMPLAINTS

NOVA welcomes information and feedback from you which will enable the organisation to improve the quality of services. Nova management will visit you at an arranged time during your participation with Nova to provide you with an opportunity to voice any concerns you might have with the service or with your worker.

You have a right to complain about the service you are receiving without fear of retribution and can expect complaints to be dealt with fairly and promptly.

The manager and staff will take steps to ensure that you feel comfortable to continue accessing the service after making a complaint.

You have the right to use an advocate of your choice to negotiate on your behalf with the staff and/or management of NOVA. This may be a family member or friend, worker from another service you are involved with.

Person/s affected by the complaint will be fully informed and given the opportunity to respond.

## COMPLAINTS ABOUT YOUR SUPPORT WORKER

- Try to raise the problem with the worker concerned. The issue cannot be worked out if the worker doesn't know there is a problem.
- You can speak to another worker or manager about the issue concerning you. The issue will be investigated and you may be encouraged to raise the issue with your worker, or a meeting with your worker and yourself will be arranged with the manager present or alternatively you may meet with the manager to discuss the issue further.

- If the problem cannot be worked out, then you will have the option of changing your support worker. This will be monitored by the manager on a monthly basis for a specific timeframe that is agreed upon by yourself and the new worker.
- If the issue is resolved the manager will schedule a 6 week review meeting to check that you are comfortable with the outcome and progress.

#### COMPLAINTS ABOUT ANOTHER OCCUPANT IN NOVA

- It is important if you are experiencing difficulties with another occupant to raise the issue with your worker. They will assist you to reach a resolution to the problem.
- If this is not possible Nova managers and staff will investigate/address the issues and take appropriate action.

#### **If you still feel the matter has not been satisfactorily resolved**

1. If the issue is still not satisfactorily resolved, you may raise the issue with a member of the Nova board of Management. You can put your complaint in writing and address it to: **The Chairperson, Board of Management, NOVA for Women and Children, PO Box 2080, Dangar NSW 2309**
2. You will be informed of the outcome of your complaint and will be asked for your feedback on the complaints procedure.

#### COMPLAINTS FROM NEIGHBOURS/COMMUNITY MEMBERS RE A NOVA OCCUPANT

Nova provides all Nova property neighbours with information of the service and contact details.

Nova property neighbours will contact Nova if

- They have concerns for the occupant or
- They wish to complain about the occupant or
- They wish to complain about the property condition

Nova will listen to the complaint from the neighbour/community member and reassure the person that the appropriate action will be taken. Feedback will be provided to the complainant if appropriate. The worker must complete a complaint form and forward it to the manager/s for signing.

Nova managers will, with each complaint visit the property if it is deemed safe to do so. If this is not safe the client will be contacted via phone or mail to arrange a meeting at the Nova office.

Dependant on the nature of the complaint, identification of support needs and the outcome of the discussions, appropriate action will be put in place. If all avenues have been exhausted Nova will adhere to occupancy legislation and resolve the matter via the CTTT.

If community members or neighbours are not satisfied with the outcome of their concerns/complaints, Nova will provide the contact details of the Housing Registrar and other appropriate bodies.

#### CONFIDENTIALITY OF COMPLAINTS

AS FAR AS POSSIBLE, THE FACT THAT YOU HAVE LODGED A COMPLAINT AND THE DETAILS OF THAT COMPLAINT WILL BE KEPT CONFIDENTIAL AMONGST STAFF DIRECTLY CONCERNED WITH ITS RESOLUTION. YOUR PERMISSION WILL BE OBTAINED PRIOR TO ANY INFORMATION BEING GIVEN TO OTHER PARTIES WHICH IT MAY BE DESIRABLE TO INVOLVE IN ORDER TO SATISFACTORILY RESOLVING THE COMPLAINT.

COMPLAINT LETTER FORMAT TO THE BOARD OF MANAGEMENT

Below is an example of how to address a letter regarding a complaint that you have not been able to resolve to your satisfaction after following steps 1 and 2 of the complaints procedure (above).

Please remember to mark the envelope **Confidential**.

Chairperson

Board of Management

NOVA for Women and Children

PO Box 2080

Dangar NSW 2309

Date

Dear Chairperson

I would like to meet with you or another member of the Board to discuss a problem I am having with my participation in NOVA.

Please contact me by phone on.....

Or by writing to me at .....

Yours Sincerely

.....

## CLIENT ADVOCATES

### WHAT IS AN ADVOCATE?

An advocate is a person who, with authority from you, represents your interests.

You may use an advocate of your choice to negotiate on your behalf. This may be a family member, friend or advocacy service. Advocates will be accepted by NOVA as representing your interests.

Advocates may be used during reviews and complaints or for any other communication between you and NOVA.

### PROCEDURE FOR APPOINTING AN ADVOCATE

If you wish to use an advocate you should inform NOVA in writing of the name of the person you wish to negotiate on your behalf.

## REFERENCES

To protect your privacy *NOVA workers will not give any information about you or your occupancy unless directly authorised by you to do so.*

For example, we sometimes receive phone calls from commercial organisations asking for references or occupancy details. This may be in relation to obtaining credit and be to your benefit; however it may also be someone looking for you who you do not wish to know your information.

**So please, if you need us to give information of any kind to another agency you need to contact us prior to the organisation making the request.**

## APPEALS AND REVIEW OF DECISIONS

You can request that a decision be reviewed by contacting the manager who will initiate a meeting to discuss the issues. You can nominate an advocate to assist with your appeal.

You may ask for a decision to be reviewed or lodge an appeal if you believe that, in your case:

- Individual circumstances warrant a review
- The decision is contrary to policy, or involved poor interpretation of policy: or
- The procedure used to reach the decision was incorrect: or
- The information used to reach the decision was incorrect.

The review will

- Reassess the application in light of new information and documentation presented
- Consider whether Nova Women’s’ Accommodation and Support’s policies have been applied correctly and fairly and
- Provide an outcome to the appeal or review. This outcome may either:
  - Uphold or cancel the original decision
  - Amend the decision to include options that are sensitive the individual need

NOTE: Decisions cannot be reversed where there would be an adverse outcome for another client.

#### LEVELS OF REVIEW

1. **Internal review:** Conducted as per relevant policies of Nova Women’s’ Accommodation and Support. All appeals and review of decisions must go through an internal review before an external review can proceed.
2. **External Review:** Depending on the issue, appeals and or reviews will be referred to the Community Services Commissioner (NSW Ombudsman’s Office) or to the Housing Appeals Committee of Housing NSW. Clients also have access to their local parliamentary representatives.
3. **Mediation Services:** Dispute resolution claims can be lodged through the Community Justice Centre.

#### SAFETY AND SECURITY

NOVA for Women and Children has a policy of providing accommodation which is safe and secure. As many of NOVA’s occupants are escaping domestic violence, it is important that we inform you of safety and security measures you can take to maximise your safety. It is your decision whether you follow these procedures or not.

#### AT HOME

If you are concerned about domestic violence or any other violence -

- Get a silent phone number, and change this if it is discovered.
- Have police or 000 entered on speed-dial
- Keep screen security doors locked at all times
- It is advisable not to give the address of the property or your phone number to your ex-partner, or anyone who you believe will give this information to your ex-partner.
- If you do need to contact your ex-partner you may choose to do this through a third party. For example a friend, relative or solicitor.

#### ACCESS ARRANGEMENTS

For access and hand-over arrangements for children it is not advisable to have ex-partners or someone acting on their behalf to come to the house.

It is advisable to –

- Use an Access Centre if available.
- Meet in front of a police station, or at least in some public place.

**Call the police first if you believe you are in any danger.**

#### GOING TO COURT

- Arrange child care for your children on the court date
- Wait in an area away from your ex-partner (e.g. DV Safety Room)
- Try not to engage in any conversation with him, and try not to respond to any harassment from him
- Use the solicitor if necessary to negotiate with him
- Contact court security officer if situation seems threatening
- Ask court staff not to put your address on any court papers sent to him

#### ENTERING AND LEAVING THE COURT

- Don't wait around in front of the court
- At some courts it is possible to enter and leave from separate entrances
- Contact court security officer if necessary to escort you to your car when leaving
- Ask court security officer to detain ex-partner for 10 minutes while you leave.