

THE AGENCY FOR CO-OPERATIVE HOUSING

POLICY MANUAL

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CROSS REFERENCE:

2.1: Client-Service Standards,
2.2: Bilingual Services,
2.3: Communications,
2.4: Confidentiality and Access to Information,
2.5: Privacy,
2.6.2: Staff Guidelines for Handling Disputes,
3.3.1: Procurement

REVIEW CYCLE:

2 Years

AUTHORITY:

Board of Directors

DUE FOR NEXT REVIEW:

March 2011

SUBJECT:

Complaints and Dispute Resolution

1. Policy

- 1.1 The Agency is committed to openness, accountability and excellent communication with clients, stakeholders and the general public, and, in consequence, to the development of a clear process for dealing with disputes and complaints. In addition, the Agency's agreement with CMHC requires it to have a complaints process for the use of the housing co-operatives whose agreements it oversees.
- 1.2 The purpose of this policy is to establish a transparent and effective way of dealing with disputes that will serve the best interests of both the Agency and its clients and stakeholders. Clients and stakeholders will appreciate good treatment and their complaints will help the Agency to improve its service.
- 1.3 Anyone dealing with the Agency must receive friendly, respectful treatment, a timely response and clear, accurate information in the official language they choose about decisions, service matters and the Agency's complaints procedure. Clients are welcome to dispute decisions through an established process and encouraged to protest substandard service and to provide feedback and advice for improvement.

- 1.4 The Agency expects individual staff members and out-partners to respond promptly, courteously and professionally to clients and stakeholders who bring complaints before the Agency and to work through all disputes with clients in a collaborative manner that does the Agency credit.
- 1.5 Staff attitudes are fundamental to building the degree of trust essential for the delivery of excellent service and the resolution of disputes. Within the constraints imposed by program guidelines and client operating agreements, frontline Agency staff will have the training, support and authority to reverse decisions, if necessary, in order to resolve disagreements without reference to higher organizational levels.

2. Definition of Clients and Stakeholders

When the policy refers to clients and stakeholders, it means the five groups described below:

- client housing co-operatives;
- organizations that provide services to housing co-ops;
- members of housing co-ops and persons seeking to become members;
- the general public;
- CMHC and any other government clients.

3. Complaints outside this Policy

- 3.1 The Agency will normally refer complaints from members about their housing co-operatives to CHF Canada or its website or to a local federation, if the co-op is a member. However, Agency staff will deal with any complaints about any breaches of program guidelines or of a co-op's operating agreement (e.g., concerns respecting the administration of program subsidies).
- 3.2 The Agency's Procurement Policy sets out procedure for resolving disputes with suppliers.
- 3.3 Disputes between the Agency and CMHC will be resolved with reference to their agreements.
- 3.4 The Agency's agreement with CMHC requires the Agency to refer any complaints under the federal *Privacy Act*, the *Access to Information Act* or the *Official Languages Act* to CMHC for resolution.

4. The Complaints Process

Agency staff will guide the person who has contacted them through the steps listed in Appendix A: “If you have a complaint...” The Agency will post this procedure on its website, together with appropriate contact information, to ensure that clients and stakeholders can make use of the process.

5. Role and Authority of the Client Service Champion

5.1 The Agency believes that the presence of a Client Service Champion will allow more information to come forward about any concerns and will help to resolve disputes before problems become entrenched.

5.2 The Client Service Champion will

- listen to client and stakeholder concerns and complaints;
- ensure that clients and stakeholders are aware of the Agency’s process for registering complaints and resolving disputes;
- investigate concerns and complaints about Agency service and provide recommendations for resolution or information about other sources of help;
- where appropriate, involve other staff in investigating and resolving complaints about Agency decisions;
- find appropriate outside resources where necessary to help mediate disputes with the Agency;
- ensure that clients and stakeholders are informed about the decision that concludes an investigation;
- prepare periodic reports on complaints, disputes and their resolution, including any suggestions for improved processes and services;
- arrange regular training for staff in issues management.

5.3 If the Client Service Champion and the CEO of the Agency deem it appropriate, from time to time the Agency may use an outside expert in mediation and conflict resolution to provide advice, training, mediation or other services to support the dispute-resolution process.

6. Confidentiality

The Agency will preserve its clients and stakeholder's trust and encourage good communication by keeping confidential the material gathered in dealing with complaints. If outside mediation or support is needed, all parties will sign an agreement confirming that the entire dispute-resolution process will remain private among the parties. Correspondence and discussions among the complainant, the Agency's representatives and the outside mediator may not be used in subsequent legal or other proceedings by any party.

7. Logging of Complaints and Evaluation of the Process

7.1 The Client Service Champion will log all complaints referred for dispute resolution from co-operatives that want their complaint reviewed by someone other than their Agency relationship manager, as well as all complaints received from other parties. When the dispute-resolution process is complete, parties whose complaints have been referred to the Client Service Champion will be invited to evaluate their experience and level of satisfaction with the process and to suggest ways to improve it.

7.2 The Client Service Champion will summarize these evaluations in a periodic report to the CEO and the Board of Directors, including any suggestions for improvement from complainants.

8. Reporting to CMHC

Every year, as part of the Agency's annual report on operations, the CEO will provide CMHC with a summary report on complaints received from program clients, and how the Agency resolved them. The report will preserve co-ops' anonymity as much as possible.

Appendix A: If you have a complaint...

Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC) has entrusted the Agency with the job of administering federal co-op housing programs in PEI, Ontario, Alberta and B.C. The Agency knows that our decisions and our service will not always please every co-op, co-op member or other stakeholder. We can't promise to make everyone happy, but we do commit ourselves to dealing with complaints fairly and openly.

The Agency must follow CMHC's program guidelines, our own client-service standards and our Bilingual Services and other policies. Read these documents on our website to learn what the Agency can do and what it promises for your co-op.

If you have a problem with the Agency, this guide will help you find the best way to solve it. Please read it carefully and follow the steps set out.

Where to find information and help

- You may consult the guidelines for the different housing programs the Agency looks after on the Agency's website <www.agency.coop>. The Agency has **no power** to change these guidelines.
- If you make a complaint under the federal *Access to Information Act*, *Official Languages Act* or *Privacy Act*, the Agency cannot deal with it. Under our agreement with CMHC, we must pass on these complaints to CMHC.
- If you have a human-rights complaint, you are welcome to use our process but you may also ask for help from your provincial human-rights commission.

If you are a housing co-op member with a complaint about your co-op...

- If you think your co-op is not following its operating agreement with CMHC (about subsidies, for example), you may call the Agency and ask to speak with your co-op's relationship manager.
- For all other problems, please see "Having a problem with your housing co-op?" on the Co-operative Housing Federation of Canada website <www.chfc.coop>.
- You can talk to CHF Canada at 1-800-465-2752, its Ontario Region at 1-800-268-2537 or to your local federation of housing co-ops, if your co-op is a member of these organizations. The CHF Canada website has contact information for local federations at <www.chfc.coop>.

If you have a complaint about the Agency...

We want to hear from you. We have set up a friendly, confidential process to help with your problem.

If your complaint is about a breach of privacy or confidentiality by the Agency...

- Call the Agency's Privacy Officer at 1-866-660-3140, extension 610
- Or dial 0 and ask for our Privacy Officer
- Explain the problem

The Client Service Champion will work with you to address your complaint. All complaints about breaches of privacy or confidentiality will be reported to the Agency's Chief Executive Officer.

If you have any other complaint about the Agency...

Here are the steps to take.

Step 1: Collect your information

The Agency needs to know

- what is your complaint?
- is it about a decision or about our service?
- who is the problem with?
- when did it happen?
- what would you like the Agency to change?

Collect all your documents (letters, information, agreements) so that you can answer these questions.

If your complaint is on behalf of a federation or any stakeholder other than a housing co-op, go directly to Step 3.

Step 2: Call your co-op's relationship manager

Even if your problem is with the relationship manager, please speak to them first, in case the problem is due to a misunderstanding. Provided your co-op is a member, you may ask your federation or CHF Canada to make the call for you. Be sure to give them all the information listed above.

Step 3: Call the Client Service Champion

If you can't solve the problem directly with your co-op's relationship manager, you can talk to the Agency's Client Service Champion at 1-866-660-3140. The job of the Client Service Champion is to work with clients to resolve complaints and problems with our service. The Client Service Champion will help you by

- making sure you have all of the background information you need, including information from the Agency's own files
- hearing your complaint or problem
- telling you
 - how soon the Agency will get back to you (never more than two days later)
 - how long you will wait for a full response (not more than four weeks from when the Agency first hears your complaint)
- investigating what happened, telling you how we can resolve it and sometimes suggesting either
 - mediation by the Client Service Champion or a mediator from outside the Agency, or
 - a review of relevant Agency policies and practices that could help resolve the problem
- if we think it would be helpful, or at your request, giving you a written report on what happened. If a service problem can't be fixed or a decision changed, the report will say why.

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- apologizing to you on behalf of the Agency, if appropriate, and describing any changes to decisions or service that the Client Service Champion will pursue as a result of your complaint.

The Client Service Champion will also tell you if the Agency cannot act on your complaint because of agreements or laws the Agency has no power to change.

Step 4: Involve the CEO

If the Client Service Champion can't resolve your problem, you may appeal to the Agency's CEO. The CEO will review the steps taken by the Client Service Champion and decide what more, if anything, can be done.

Step 5: Appeal to the Board

If the problem has still not been resolved to your satisfaction, you may wish to appeal to the Agency's Board of Directors. The Board will review your case and make a final decision. You may contact the Board through the CEO.