

CHS Alliance Membership Complaints Policy

Approved by CHS Alliance Governing Board: July 2020

1) CHS Alliance's Commitment to Complaints Handling

The CHS Alliance exists to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of organisations working to relieve the needs of people and communities vulnerable to risk and affected by disaster, conflict or poverty, including by supporting the rights of such people and communities. (Article 5 of the CHS Alliance Statutes, 2019)

The CHS Alliance has *The Core Humanitarian Standard on Quality and Accountability* (CHS) at the centre of its work. This Complaints Policy is consistent with CHS Commitment 5: “Communities and people affected by crisis have access to safe and responsive mechanisms to handle complaints,” with complaints being “welcomed and addressed.” Organisations have a responsibility under Commitment 5 to put in place a “complaints-handling process for communities and people affected by crisis” that covers “programming, sexual exploitation and abuse, and other abuses of power.”

The Alliance is committed to supporting its members to put in place effective complaints mechanisms for communities and people affected by crisis. Good complaints handling systems are a key element in supporting an organisation's claims about quality and accountability. Mishandled complaints can undermine people's confidence in organisations and potentially compromise security.

The Alliance aims to support its members to develop and improve their own safe and responsible complaints mechanisms for communities and people affected by crisis. These mechanisms must enable the effective management of complaints in a timely manner, as well as ensure a fair appeals process. Article 27 of the CHS Alliance Statutes notes that:

It is the responsibility of member organisations to handle and respond to complaints about them. Complaints received by the CHS Alliance about members are handled in alignment with Board-approved CHS Alliance complaints policy.

2) Purpose of the CHS Alliance's Complaints Policy and Mechanism

The CHS Alliance's Complaints Policy and Mechanism reflect the Alliance's support role towards its members, particularly in terms of putting in place effective complaints mechanisms. The CHS Alliance acts neither as a regulatory body nor as an ombudsperson.

The CHS Alliance complaints mechanism complements – and does not replace – the Alliance members' own handling of complaints. The Alliance's mechanism exists to improve complaints handling by its members to meet CHS Commitment 5's Quality Criterion: “Complaints are welcomed and addressed.” Further details about how the mechanism operates are contained in the procedures accompanying this policy.

The mechanism allows people to raise complaints when a CHS Alliance member's handling of a complaint, and its subsequent appeal, was unsatisfactory, unsafe and/or not in line with CHS Commitment 5. The mechanism is designed for the Alliance to work with the complainant and the member organisation to assess the complaints handling process and make recommendations for how the organisation could make improvements.

The purpose of this Complaints Policy is to clarify the CHS Alliance's approach in receiving and handling complaints about its members, the types of eligible complaints, and the intended outcomes.

In filing any complaints, complainants agree to their complaint being handled at the discretion of the CHS Alliance, in line with this policy and its complementary procedures.

There are numerous ways in which complaints – or appeals against the outcomes of complaints – can be pursued against CHS Alliance member organisations or their staff. To avoid duplication, complainants will need to disclose what, if any, other avenues have been – or are being – pursued to address the complaint. Given the CHS Alliance’s limited role, using the CHS Alliance’s Complaints Policy should be seen as a last resort for complaints against CHS Alliance members or their staff.¹

Intended Outcomes of the Complaints Policy

The CHS Alliance aims to work with the member organisation and complainant to address and resolve the complaint through a facilitated process. The process of responding to a complaint filed with the CHS Alliance may lead to recommendations to improve the member’s complaints mechanisms or other improvements within the organisation. The CHS Alliance Complaints Policy and its complementary procedures are not intended to result in any form of restitution or compensation for the complainant or for communities or people affected by crisis.

CHS Verification Processes: As part of the CHS Alliance’s aim to support members’ complaints mechanisms, proposals for improvements identified during the handling of complaints may be relevant for the member’s next CHS verification processes.

- If an organisation is following self-assessment, recommendations will be proposed that should be considered in the next validated self-assessment process.
- If an organisation is pursuing, or has received, third party verification and/or certification, the CHS Alliance reserves the right to notify any relevant certifying bodies, as those bodies have a responsibility to look into how organisations handle complaints. Such proposals/notifications will be made with the full knowledge of the Alliance member while ensuring confidentiality around the specifics of the complaint.

3) Scope of the Complaints Policy

The CHS Alliance’s Complaints Policy applies *only after* the member organisation’s complaints handling process and appeals processes have been completed and the outcome reported to the complainant.² Exceptions may be made when the complaint falls into categories 3 or 4 below.

Given the purpose of the CHS Alliance Complaints Policy, the following complaints related to a CHS Alliance member organisation or staff of a CHS Alliance member organisation will be welcomed:

3.1 What complaints are covered by this policy?

1. **Unsatisfactory complaints process:** Complaints regarding a completed internal complaints *process* that was viewed as inadequate for the communities or people affected by crisis, which were the focus of the complaint. Complaints must have already been filed and addressed through the CHS Alliance member organisation, in line with their complaints policy. Note: The *process* includes both the handling of the complaint and the appeal process. The inadequacy does *not* relate to the outcome of either process.

¹ This policy does not apply to complaints against CHS Alliance Secretariat staff, consultants, or other representatives. Such complaints are covered by a separate procedure available [here](#).

² In cases where the member organisation does not yet have a complaints mechanism in place, the CHS Alliance will receive complaints that fall within the defined Scope of this policy and work with that organisation to appropriately respond to the complaint and put in place a complaints mechanism. In such cases, the time frames for responding may be adjusted.

2. **Inadequate follow-up/process:** Complaints regarding sexual exploitation and abuse or other abuses of power against a person or persons affected by crisis where the complainant found the follow-up/investigation by a CHS Alliance member did not adequately follow the organisation's adopted policy.
3. **Well-founded fear of retaliation:** Complaints regarding sexual exploitation and abuse (SEA) or other abuses of power against a person(s) affected by crisis where a complainant has a well-founded fear of retaliation by the CHS Alliance member organisation.
4. **No complaints mechanism in place:** Complaints about a CHS Alliance member or their staff only when that member does not yet have in place a complaints mechanism that is accessible for communities and people affected by crisis.³

3.2 Timeframe for Submitting Complaints: Given the complexity of pursuing older complaints, particularly in terms of identifying relevant individuals and information, complaints should be filed within one year following the outcome of a CHS Alliance member's complaints process.

3.3 What complaints are *not* covered by this policy?

Not all complaints can be handled by this mechanism, given the CHS Alliance's role as a membership organisation supporting the implementation of the CHS. The following complaints cannot be covered by the CHS Alliance:

1. **Complaints that have *not* been filed and followed up through a CHS Alliance member's internal complaints mechanism**, unless the complaint is being submitted as a "well-founded fear of retaliation" or "no complaint mechanism in place"
2. **Complaints by staff of CHS Alliance members regarding contractual issues or working conditions:** these should be addressed by the member's internal human resources policies, systems, and human resources' complaints mechanisms.
3. **Complaints concerning partners of CHS Alliance members** (e.g. an organisation that has been sub-contracted by a CHS Alliance member or is an operational partner of a CHS Alliance member), as these organisations fall outside the sphere of the CHS Alliance's influence.
4. **Contractual disputes with a CHS Alliance member organisation** (e.g. related to (potential) employment or service contracts).
5. **Complaints about the type, quantity, quality, or timeliness of aid** provided by a CHS Alliance member organisation or other organisations.
6. **Complaints concerning organisations that are not CHS Alliance members**, as these organisations fall outside the sphere of the CHS Alliance's influence.
7. **Complaints against CHS Alliance Secretariat staff:** there is a separate [complaints procedure](#) to be used for any complaints against CHS Alliance Secretariat staff

Malicious complaints: Malicious complaints are those filed with malicious intent and/or with the intention of harming an individual or an organisation. The Alliance operates under the assumption that all complaints are made in good faith and are not motivated by intent for personal gain, personal interest, or as part of a grudge. Should the process reveal a complaint to be malicious, any processes underway must be stopped immediately and the subject of the complaint cleared. Complaints lodged for genuine reasons, but which are subsequently considered to be unfounded, shall not be treated as malicious.

³ This category is included as temporary measure and as a way to further support Alliance members that do not yet have their own complaints mechanism in place. It is hoped that these cases will be relatively limited, particularly given the aim to support all CHS Alliance members to have their own public facing complaints mechanism.

4) Who can Complain

Any individual or entity can submit a complaint in good faith and without malicious intent. The complaint must fall within the scope of this policy, as outlined above. It is understood that the person lodging a complaint explicitly or implicitly expects a response or resolution to any complaint filed.

The CHS Alliance is committed to making the process of filing a complaint as easy, accessible, and transparent as possible. CHS Alliance staff will assist those wanting to make a complaint that falls within the scope of this policy. Further details can be found [here](#).

5) Principles and Commitments Guiding Complaints Handling by the CHS Alliance

The CHS Alliance considers the following guiding principles and commitments to be essential for efficient, effective, and professional complaints handling:

- **Accessibility:** Complaints can be filed in a manner that makes it as easy as possible for a complainant (e.g. in person, by phone, via e-mail, by post, online, etc.).
- **Confidentiality:** In order to protect the privacy and safety of all concerned, confidentiality can be critical to achieving a satisfactory outcome. The subject of the complaint, related facts, the identity of the complainant or alleged victim/survivor, and witnesses, as well as any procedural records, are managed in a confidential manner by the CHS Alliance. When addressing a complaint through a facilitated process between a complainant and a member organisation, the complainant will be asked for consent before any identifiable information is disclosed.
 - The CHS Alliance will work to the best of its ability – and in good faith – to ensure confidentiality. There is a similar expectation that the individual filing the complaint will also respect confidentiality to ensure a safe and fair process to all involved in the complaint. Should a complainant violate confidentiality, the CHS Alliance reserves the right to adjust or end the complaints process.
- **Ensuring safety:** The safety of the complainant, alleged victim or survivor, witnesses, subject of a complaint, and staff is paramount. In cases of serious allegations of sexual exploitation and abuse or other abuses of power, the CHS Alliance Secretariat will work with the implicated member to ensure the safety of those concerned.
- **Non-retaliation:** Any attempt of retaliation against a complainant filing a complaint with the CHS Alliance is considered gross misconduct and the CHS Alliance will take appropriate action against such behaviour.
- **Objectivity:** All complaints will be handled in an impartial, equitable, and objective manner.
- **Respect:** Anyone filing a complaint will be treated with respect and courtesy by CHS Alliance Secretariat staff, Board members, members of the Complaints Committee, and any individuals involved in handling the complaint. If it is considered that the complainant is abusive towards, or harasses CHS Alliance staff, Board members, members of the Complaints Committee, or any individuals involved in handling the complaint, the Alliance has the right to adjust or end the complaints process.
- **Right to Appeal:** Complainants and member organisations have a right to appeal the outcome of complaints handled through the Alliance's complaints mechanism. If the process to achieve an outcome did not satisfactorily follow this policy and its complementary procedures, an appeal can be made within 30 days of the outcome. The Board Complaints Committee will review appeals and take a final decision within three months.
- **Timeliness:** Complainants have the right for a complaint filed with the CHS Alliance to be acknowledged and addressed in a timely manner, as outlined in the Procedures.

This Policy is complemented by a set of Procedures, including terms of reference for the different CHS Alliance bodies involved in implementing the policy. More details can be [found here](#).

6) Revision of the Policy

The CHS Alliance Secretariat and its Board will consider the Policy at regular intervals and, at minimum, when a new CHS Alliance Strategy is adopted. The Complaints Policy will be revised if, and when, it is seen as necessary by the Secretariat and Board.

7) Annexes

- How to file a Complaint with the CHS Alliance
- Complaints Handling Procedures