

Policy Name: Complaints Policy	Policy No.: COM-001
	Pages: 11
Policy Owner: Senior Vice-President, Communications and Digital Transformation	Initial Issue Date: March 2017
Reviewed By: Executive Team	Effective Date: March 2017
Approved by: Executive Team	Next Review Date: April 2029

1. PURPOSE

YMCA Hamilton | Burlington | Brantford (YMCA HBB) is committed to service excellence in the delivery of YMCA programs and services and in supporting our charitable mandate. The YMCA values complaints and concerns as opportunities to strengthen relationships, improve service quality, identify systemic issues, and enhance accountability.

YMCA HBB recognizes that stakeholders have the right to raise concerns or complaints through a transparent, timely, and fair process. This policy is intended to provide a clear framework for responding to public complaints in a respectful, consistent, and responsive manner.

YMCA HBB recognizes that when a person has a complaint about the YMCA, the manner in which the complaint is addressed is critical to maintaining trust and supporting ongoing positive relationships with our organization.

2. SCOPE

This policy applies to complaints received from members, participants, parents, guardians, caregivers, former participants, donors, community members, partners, volunteers, and other stakeholders regarding YMCA activities, programs, services, policies, staff, volunteers, or operations. Complaints may also be submitted by an individual acting on behalf of another person where appropriate.

This policy serves as a companion to the organization's Whistleblower Policy and Accessibility Policy.

This policy does not govern complaints submitted by employees or volunteers in their capacity as YMCA workers. Those matters are addressed through the Employee Complaint Resolution Procedure or Whistleblower Policy, as applicable.

Certain concerns may require review under other YMCA policies or procedures, including matters involving workplace conduct, child protection, harassment, violence, privacy breaches, safeguarding concerns, or legal or regulatory obligations. In such cases, the YMCA may redirect or manage the matter under the appropriate policy or process.

3. POLICY STATEMENT

YMCA Hamilton | Burlington | Brantford is committed to ensuring that complaints are addressed promptly, fairly, impartially, and respectfully. Complaints and concerns are recognized as valuable feedback and opportunities to improve services, policies, procedures, relationships, accessibility, and organizational accountability.

3.1 Guiding Principles

- It is in the interest of all parties that complaints are addressed promptly and resolved as quickly as possible.
- Review of complaints will be fair, impartial, respectful, empathetic, and responsive to all parties involved.
- Complaints will be handled in a manner that is accessible, inclusive, culturally respectful, and responsive to individual circumstances.
- The YMCA recognizes that individuals may experience barriers or discomfort when raising concerns and is committed to creating a safe and respectful process.
- Complainants are advised of their options to escalate concerns to a more senior staff person if they are dissatisfied with the treatment or outcome.
- Complainants will be provided with clear and understandable reasons for decisions relating to complaints and updates during review processes where appropriate.
- Complaints are used to support continuous improvement of services, policies, procedures, and customer experience.
- Complaints are valued as opportunities to improve services, policies, accessibility, relationships, and customer experience. Concerns raised in good faith contribute to organizational learning, accountability, and continuous improvement.

4. DEFINITIONS

Complaint

A complaint is an expression of dissatisfaction regarding a YMCA service, program, action, lack of action, decision, or the manner in which YMCA employees or volunteers carry out their duties.

Complaints may arise when a person believes:

- The YMCA has failed to do something agreed upon or reasonably expected.
- A YMCA policy or procedure has not been followed.
- A YMCA policy or procedure is unfair or inadequate.
- An error has been made.
- YMCA employees or volunteers acted in an inappropriate or wrongful manner.

Complaints may also relate to customer service experiences, communication concerns, perceived unfair treatment, accessibility barriers, or conduct that is inconsistent with YMCA values.

A complaint is distinct from an inquiry, feedback, or suggestion.

Concern

An issue or circumstance that may require attention but may not require a formal complaint process.

Inquiry

A request for information or clarification.

Feedback

Comments intended to recognize good service or suggest improvements.

Suggestion

An idea intended to improve YMCA services, programs, or operations.

Informal Complaint

A concern that may be resolved directly with YMCA staff or management without initiating the formal complaint process.

Formal Complaint

A complaint submitted for formal review under this policy.

Complainant

An individual who submits a complaint under this policy.

5. POLICY DETAILS

5.1 Informal Complaint

Individuals who have a complaint or concern are encouraged to discuss the matter with the staff member most closely connected to the concern or situation, either in person, by phone, by email, or through another accessible communication method where appropriate.

Complainants are not required to address concerns directly with the individual involved if they are uncomfortable doing so. Concerns may instead be raised with a Supervisor, Manager, or General Manager responsible for the applicable program or service area.

This informal process may resolve many inquiries or matters involving misunderstanding, communication concerns, or simple errors that can be corrected quickly and respectfully.

Every effort will be made to resolve complaints in a timely manner.

Staff receiving complaints are expected to respond with empathy, professionalism, active listening, cultural sensitivity, trauma-informed approaches where appropriate, and a commitment to respectful resolution.

When receiving a verbal complaint, staff should seek to understand the concern and may attempt to resolve the issue immediately. Where follow-up is required, basic contact information including name, phone number, and email address should be recorded.

5.2 Formal Complaint

A formal complaint may be submitted if a concern cannot be resolved informally or if the person prefers to proceed directly through the formal complaint process.

Formal complaints may be submitted:

- In person
- By telephone
- By email
- By mail
- Through the YMCA's online contact form
- Through another accessible communication method upon request

Complaints received through any YMCA channel will be forwarded to the Communications Office for centralized intake and directed to the appropriate department for review and response.

Where a formal complaint is made verbally, the YMCA will document the complaint in writing and, where reasonably possible, confirm the documented information with the complainant before proceeding with the review.

Comments submitted through surveys, social media, online reviews, or suggestion boxes are valued and may be used to improve YMCA services; however, they do not ordinarily initiate the formal complaint process.

Formal complaints may be submitted to:

Mail

Senior Vice-President, Communications
YMCA Hamilton | Burlington | Brantford
79 James Street South
Hamilton, ON L8P 2Z1

Email

feedback.hbb@ymcahbb.ca

Please provide your contact information when submitting a complaint. Anonymous complaints may be reviewed where sufficient information is provided; however, the YMCA may be limited in its ability to investigate or respond fully without contact information.

The YMCA is committed to providing an accessible complaint process. Accommodation and communication supports may include interpreters, alternate formats, verbal complaint submissions, assistance completing complaint forms, or other reasonable accommodations based on an individual's needs.

Submitting a complaint will not negatively affect an individual's access to YMCA programs or services.

5.3 Process

Once a formal complaint has been received, the YMCA is committed to reviewing it promptly, fairly, consistently, and respectfully. We recognize that raising a concern may be difficult or stressful, and we will make reasonable efforts to ensure the complaint process is supportive, accessible, and responsive to individual circumstances.

What You Can Expect

Throughout the complaint process, the YMCA will:

- Acknowledge receipt of your complaint within **2 business days**.
- Provide an estimated timeframe for review where reasonably possible.
- Keep you informed if additional time is required.
- Review the complaint fairly and impartially.
- Treat everyone involved with dignity and respect.
- Explain the outcome of the review and the reasons for any decisions, subject to privacy, confidentiality, legal, or other applicable limitations.

The YMCA aims to resolve formal complaints within **10 business days** of receiving them. If this timeline cannot be met, you will be informed of the reason for the delay and provided with a revised timeframe.

Formal complaints are received through the Communications Office and directed to the appropriate department for review and response. Departments may communicate with complainants by email, telephone, written correspondence, or another appropriate communication method.

Formal complaints received through the feedback email account will be acknowledged, assessed and directed by the Communications Office, including where a YMCA employee has been included on or copied on the correspondence. Being copied does not transfer responsibility for administering the complaint to that employee.

Where appropriate, the Communications Office will consult the responsible employee or department before a substantive response is issued. The matter may instead be referred directly to another YMCA leader where an immediate response is required, there is a potential conflict of interest, or the complaint concerns the conduct of the employee included in the correspondence.

Depending on the nature of the complaint, the YMCA may:

- Review relevant documentation.
- Interview individuals involved.
- Consult subject matter experts.
- Review applicable policies, procedures, or legislation.
- Consider any additional relevant information necessary to reach a fair and informed decision.

Where appropriate, the YMCA will make reasonable efforts to ensure all parties involved are treated fairly and have an opportunity to provide relevant information.

Complaints involving safeguarding concerns, child protection, workplace harassment or violence, discrimination, abuse, privacy matters, legal or regulatory obligations, or other critical incidents may be escalated immediately and managed under the appropriate YMCA policy, procedure, or legislative requirement.

Where a complaint cannot be resolved at the departmental level, it may be escalated to the appropriate Vice-President. A Vice-President may involve the President & CEO where appropriate.

Where substantially the same matter becomes subject to a formal legal, regulatory, tribunal or other external proceeding, the YMCA may suspend or conclude its review under this policy. The complainant will be advised of that decision, and the matter will be managed through the applicable process in consultation with the appropriate YMCA leader or advisor.

Suspending or concluding the complaints process does not limit any continuing YMCA responsibilities related to safety, safeguarding, accommodation, non-reprisal, record preservation or other legal obligations.

Complaints involving the President & CEO, Board members, or Board policy will be referred to the Chair of the YMCA Board.

5.3.1 Complaint Resolution Process Summary

Step	Process Stage	Description	Timeline
1	Discuss with Staff	Individuals are encouraged to raise concerns directly with the staff member most closely connected to the situation, where appropriate and comfortable to do so. Complaints may also be shared by any of the submission methods outlined in Section 5.2.	As soon as possible
2	Escalate to Management	If the concern is not resolved, or if the individual is uncomfortable speaking directly with the staff member involved, the concern may be escalated to a Supervisor, Manager, or General Manager responsible for the program or service area.	Ongoing
3	Submit a Formal Complaint	If the matter remains unresolved, a formal written complaint may be submitted by email or mail to the YMCA Communications Office for review and assignment to the appropriate department or Vice-President. Verbal complaints will be documented in writing by the YMCA.	Complaint acknowledged within 2 business days
4	YMCA Review and Resolution	The YMCA reviews the complaint, gathers relevant information, and works toward resolution in a fair, respectful, and timely manner.	YMCA aims to resolve complaints within 10 business days
5	Appeal Process	If the complainant is not satisfied with the outcome, a written appeal may be submitted to the President & CEO or designate.	Appeal submitted within 10 business days of the decision
6	Complaints Involving the President & CEO, Board members, or Board policy	Complaints involving the President & CEO, Board members, or Board policy may be directed in writing to the Chair of the YMCA Board.	As required

The YMCA is committed to ensuring the complaint process is accessible, respectful, and responsive. Accessible formats, communication supports, and accommodation will be provided upon request.

5.4 Appeals

If a complainant is not satisfied with the findings or corrective action, a written appeal may be submitted to the President & CEO or designate within 10 business days of receiving the decision.

Appeals will be reviewed by an individual not directly involved in the original review process, where feasible. Appeals should identify the reason for the appeal, including any new information or concerns regarding the fairness of the original review.

5.5 Confidentiality/No Retaliation

Information related to complaints will be shared only with individuals who require the information to review, investigate, respond to, or resolve the matter, unless disclosure is required by law or necessary to address safety concerns.

The YMCA will make reasonable efforts to protect the confidentiality of individuals involved in a complaint process.

No individual who raises a complaint or participates in a complaint review process in good faith shall experience retaliation, harassment, or adverse treatment. Any form of retaliation may result in corrective action.

5.6 Respectful Behaviour

The YMCA is committed to maintaining a respectful complaint process.

Employees are expected to treat complainants with courtesy, professionalism and respect.

Likewise, individuals making complaints are expected to communicate respectfully. Abusive, threatening, discriminatory or harassing behaviour toward YMCA staff or volunteers may result in reasonable measures being taken to protect employees while ensuring legitimate complaints continue to be reviewed fairly.

5.7 Unreasonable Complaints

The YMCA recognizes that individuals may express concerns passionately or repeatedly. A complaint will not be considered unreasonable simply because a person is persistent, emotional or critical.

However, where complaints become abusive, threatening, frivolous, repetitive without new information, or are made in bad faith, the YMCA may establish reasonable limits on future communication while continuing to meet legal and procedural obligations.

5.8 Records

YMCA HBB maintains a centralized process for recording and tracking formal complaints. Complaint information may be reviewed to identify trends, recurring issues, accessibility barriers, service improvements, training opportunities, operational risks, and opportunities to strengthen policies, programs, and services.

Certain complaints may be identified as significant where they involve safety, legal or regulatory obligations, child protection, privacy, or other high-risk matters requiring additional review or oversight.

A complaint may be considered significant where it involves:

- Operational, physical, or safety concerns

- Hazardous conditions or substances
- Privacy or documentation concerns
- Significant service failures
- Complaints involving children or vulnerable individuals
- Conduct concerns involving YMCA employees or volunteers
- Matters requiring the involvement of municipal, regulatory, or partner agencies

Where required by legislation or YMCA policy, certain complaints may also be managed through additional reporting processes, including Serious Occurrence reporting in licensed child care programs.

Information recorded may include:

- Description of the complaint
- Individuals involved in the review or resolution
- Timelines
- Resolution outcomes
- Corrective actions taken

The Board may periodically receive summary information regarding complaint trends, categories, response timelines, recurring issues, significant complaints, and improvements implemented as a result of complaint feedback.

5.9 Continuous Improvement

Complaint information is used to strengthen YMCA programs, services, policies, and the overall customer experience by identifying:

- recurring concerns;
- service improvements;
- accessibility enhancements;
- training opportunities;
- policy improvements;
- operational risks; and
- opportunities to improve the overall customer experience.

The YMCA views complaints as an important source of feedback that supports continuous improvement and accountability.

6. ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

- Staff and volunteers are responsible for responding respectfully to concerns, documenting complaints appropriately, and supporting timely resolution where possible.
- Supervisors, Managers, and General Managers are responsible for supporting complaint resolution and escalating matters where required.

- The Communications Office, under the oversight of the Senior Vice-President, Communications and Digital Transformation, is responsible for the centralized intake, assignment, tracking, and administrative oversight of formal complaints and feedback.
- The Chief Operating Officer may be consulted or involved in complaints concerning operational divisions, including matters escalated by a Vice-President or Senior Vice-President, or referred by the President & CEO.
- Vice-Presidents and Senior Vice-Presidents are responsible for reviewing complaints assigned to their areas, supporting escalated or significant complaint reviews, and overseeing any legislative or regulatory reporting requirements applicable to their programs or services.
- Leaders responsible for reviewing complaints are expected to ensure impartiality, timely communication, appropriate documentation, and follow-up.
- The President & CEO, or designate, is responsible for reviewing appeals submitted under this policy.
- The Chair of the YMCA Board is responsible for complaints involving the President & CEO, Board members, or Board policy.
- All staff and volunteers share responsibility for contributing to a respectful, accessible, and service-oriented complaint resolution culture.

7. RELATED POLICIES OR REFERENCES

- Whistleblower Policy
- Accessibility Policy
- Accessibility Standards for Customer Service
- Business Guidelines & Code of Conduct Policy
- Privacy Policy
- Data Breach Policy
- Information Security & Password Policy
- Safeguarding Children and Youth Policy
- Workplace Violence, Harassment, and Sexual Harassment Policy
- Employment Procedures
- Child Care and Early Years Act, 2014, and Ontario Regulation 137/15, including sections 45 and 45.1 regarding parent issues and concerns

8. COMMUNICATION AND IMPLEMENTATION

- 8.1.** The policy will be shared through appropriate internal/external channels, including the MyHBB intranet and other internal communications as required to support awareness and understanding.

YMCA HBB will make reasonable efforts to ensure this policy is publicly available on the YMCA website and available in accessible formats upon request.

- 8.2.** Questions about this policy may be directed to the Policy Owner.

9. REVIEW/REVISION HISTORY

Date	Revision No.	Revision Type	Reference Section(s)
August 2026	2.0	Full policy rewrite and modernization	Full policy
March 2017	1.0	New Policy	N/A

10. DOCUMENT CONTROL

This document is for internal use only at YMCA Hamilton | Burlington | Brantford (YMCA HBB). YMCA HBB accepts no responsibility for use of this material by individuals or organizations outside of YMCA HBB.

Printed copies of this document are considered uncontrolled and may not reflect the most current version. The official version of this policy is maintained electronically on [MyHBB Policies](#) and should be consulted prior to use.