

## Complaining about Centrelink decisions and service

**If you are not happy with Centrelink's administrative procedures or service delivery (as opposed to a Centrelink decision) it is possible to lodge a complaint.**

A complaint can be made to:

- Centrelink Customer Relation Units;
- your local Federal Member;
- the Minister for Family and Community Services;
- the Commonwealth Ombudsman;
- the Privacy Commissioner.

### Customer Relation Units

Centrelink's Customer Relation Units (CRU) are responsible for recording and monitoring feedback about Centrelink staff.

The CRU investigates complaints against local Centrelink offices and Centrelink staff. If a complaint is made against a local office, the CRU will contact the local office for an explanation and may request an investigation. A CRU staff member or someone from the local office will contact the complainant, usually within a day of the complaint being received.

The CRU is a worth contacting if you believe you have been treated unfairly, or are unhappy with the service provided by Centrelink.

It is important to remember that complaining to a CRU is different to lodging an appeal against a Centrelink decision. To lodge an appeal you should request a review of a decision by an Authorised Review Officer (see the factsheet 'Centrelink has got it wrong! I want to appeal!'). It is, however, possible to appeal a decision and complain to the CRU at the same time.

To contact a CRU, telephone 1800 050 004.

### The local Federal Member

You may also complain to your local Federal Member of Parliament or to a Federal Senator. The Federal Member's office or Senator may write to Centrelink or contact the local Centrelink office by telephone to follow up the initial complaint. Centrelink often responds quickly to queries from its local Federal Member so this may be a quick way to deal with a problem.

If the complaint is about a Centrelink policy matter the local Federal Member may write to the Minister for Family and Community Services, or the Minister for Community Services, rather than contact Centrelink directly.

To find out contact details for local Federal Members, contact the Australian Electoral Commission on 132 326.

### **The Minister for Family and Community Services**

The Minister for Family and Community Services is responsible for the Social Security policy portfolio but does not make decisions about an individual's Social Security entitlements.

The Ministers' office will usually handle complaints by asking Centrelink to provide a report detailing how the case was handled and why Centrelink took the course of action that it did. The Minister or a senior member of his or her staff will then send a written reply to the person who lodged the complaint.

The Minister's address is:

Minister for Family and Community Services  
Parliament House  
CANBERRA ACT 2600

### **Commonwealth Ombudsman**

The office of the Commonwealth Ombudsman investigates complaints from people about Commonwealth Government Departments, agencies, programs and/or staff. The Ombudsman has offices in most capital cities.

The Ombudsman has extensive powers of investigation, including the power to review Centrelink files and the power to require a Centrelink officer to provide written or oral information on oath.

The Ombudsman can recommend that Centrelink:

- changes an action or a decision;
- changes the way that something was done or changes its policy;
- give reasons for its conduct;
- pay compensation.

The Ombudsman's role is to impartially review and investigate complaints about Commonwealth Government departments or agencies such as Centrelink. Although the Ombudsman cannot make decisions about Social Security entitlements, it may investigate that a particular decision made by a Centrelink officer was wrong or unreasonable. The Ombudsman can recommend that any such conduct/decision be corrected but it cannot force implementation of the recommendation.

To complain to the Commonwealth Ombudsman you should first contact your local Ombudsman office by telephone.

### **The Privacy Commissioner**

The Privacy Commissioner has the power to investigate complaints about privacy breaches. Centrelink is bound by privacy laws and Centrelink staff may be subject to severe penalties if they break these laws. Privacy laws set out what personal information Centrelink can collect, how the information can be collected, to whom Centrelink can disclose the information and under what circumstances.

The Privacy Commissioner can be contacted on 1300 363 992.