

A Guide for Providing Feedback, Making a Complaint or Appealing a Decision

Introduction

The Northern Territory Pensioner and Carer Concession Scheme (the Scheme) provides financial subsidies to eligible members for electricity, water, sewerage, council rates, waste collection, travel, public transport, spectacles, motor vehicle registration and driver's licence renewals.

This guide is to assist Members and potential Members to provide feedback, make a complaint or lodge an appeal against any decision made by the Scheme that you are not happy with.

Please read this guide in conjunction with other information on the Scheme on our website, which will give you more information about the pensioner and carer concessions. It's important that as a Member or potential Member you understand the rules that govern the Scheme before making a complaint or an appeal.

Overview of the guide

This guide will help you:

- give feedback on any aspect of the Scheme to staff at the Pensioner and Carer Concession Unit
- understand everyone's responsibility in avoiding a complaint in the first place
- find the best option to raise complaints
- raise a complaint about a specific action or decision
- escalate a complaint to a formal appeal when other options have been exhausted.

Understanding complaints

As a current or potential Member of the Scheme, a complaint is an instrument to express your dissatisfaction about a particular decision, action or service taken by staff at the Pensioner and Carer Concession Unit.

For example, you may make a complaint against a decision not to approve your application to become a member of

the Scheme or not to provide you with a concession where you believe you are entitled.

We highly value members' complaints and feedback as it helps us to continually improve the Scheme and ultimately provide you with a better service. And this benefits all of us.

The purpose of a complaints process

The Scheme is one of the most charitable in Australia providing a wider range of concessions than comparable schemes in other states.

Given the generous nature of the Scheme, it's reasonable to expect that some Members' experiences won't always meet their expectations. We see these experiences as valuable feedback to help us improve our administration of the Scheme and make improvements where necessary.

The Pensioner and Carer Concession Unit is committed to setting and achieving high standards in our service delivery, but with a large number of transactions across a wide range of concession categories, we may not always get it right every time. We take every concern raised by Members and aspiring Members seriously and our focus is on ensuring you get a full response to the issue.

Everyone's responsibilities

We both have responsibilities in creating a successful, mutually beneficial concession process.

Our responsibilities include:

- ensuring all of our staff understand the Scheme's rules so we can answer your questions and provide you with sound advice
- being open to requests from Members for more information in assessing a concession claim
- resolving your concerns or queries as quickly as we can through open and honest communication
- observing your right to a fair, impartial and prompt investigation of any complaint or appeal.

Ask questions first

Before embarking on a complaint, it is important to first seek feedback from the Pensioner and Carer Concession Unit to gain an understanding of the reasons behind the decisions taken.

The purpose of seeking feedback is not to justify the decision; but rather to give you helpful advice and guidance to rectify your application so you will be successful in the future.

We may also use the feedback as an opportunity to improve the quality of our own documentation and processes.

Informal complaint process

After you've sought feedback following a decision you are unhappy with, you may still be concerned that the process was flawed or the treatment of your request was inaccurate or unfair. These concerns may arise from poor communication leading to misunderstandings about how the decision was taken.

For this reason, it's always a good idea to first raise concerns informally with the Manager of the Pensioner and Carer Concession Scheme Unit. You can do this by calling 1800 777 704 or send an email to pensionconcessionunit@nt.gov.au.

Making a formal complaint

If you remain dissatisfied after the informal approach, you may choose to make a formal complaint. You should do this directly to the General Manager, Programs and Engagement at Territory Families. And remember, it's important to document all relevant information to support your case.

You should outline the complaint in a letter or email and include the following information:

- information about your application to become a Member or seek a concession including all relevant dates and locations if applicable
- a brief summary of the problems or concerns you have
- an outline of your dealings with us on this matter that gave rise to the complaint

- details of any related phone calls you've had, copies of any letters and emails you've sent or received and the names of people at the Pensioner and Carer Concessions Unit and our Front Counter staff you've been dealing with
- a summary of the information you were given and why this doesn't resolve the problem or complaint
- an explanation of what you'd like us to do, such as provide more information, investigate specific facts or take a particular course of action
- your contact details including address, phone numbers and email address and your membership ID number if you have one.

Your right to raise a complaint

We won't stop processing additional concession applications from you just because you've made a complaint about a decision in another area.

We recognise the right of all Members to be treated fairly, impartially and consistently at all stages of the concession decision process.

This includes maintaining ethical standards of behaviour throughout that process.

As a Member or aspiring Member, your responsibilities are to:

- take the time to read and understand the rules and eligibility requirements of the Scheme before making a complaint or appeal
- keep us informed if your circumstances change and provide us with all the information we need to make an assessment of your request
- act with integrity, courtesy and respect when dealing with us.

When you address your letter or email to the General Manager at Territory Families, your letter will be acknowledged within five business days and you'll be advised of the next steps. This could involve a meeting to try to resolve the issues raised or a commitment by us to further examine the issues you've raised and get back to you.

We will attempt to address your complaint as quickly as possible. The time required to do so will depend on the nature and complexity of the issues raised. Where the process is likely to be lengthy, the General Manager will advise you in writing of how long the process is anticipated to take.

Most complaints can be addressed within four weeks, however if the complaint is complex or there is an unavoidable delay, you will be advised of any extended timeframe.

Once the General Manager has investigated your complaint, you'll be given a written response that will outline the internal review of the process and list findings and conclusions. The letter may state the decision made and, where appropriate, what additional steps will be taken to resolve the situation.

If you remain unsatisfied there are a number of other options to pursue your complaint.

Northern Territory Civil and Administrative Tribunal

NTCAT is the new 'super tribunal' for the Northern Territory. It is designed to be a one stop shop for reviewing a wide range of administrative decisions and resolving certain civil disputes.

NTCAT is designed to:

- promote the best principles of public administration
- resolve disputes through high quality processes and the use of mediation and alternative dispute resolution procedures wherever appropriate
- be accessible to all, especially people with special needs
- ensure efficient and cost-effective processes for all parties involved

- use straight forward language and procedures
- act with as little formality and technicality as possible and to be flexible in the way in which it conducts its business.

You can find out more about NTCAT at www.ntcat.nt.gov.au/

Mediation

If you are unable to reach a satisfactory outcome with the Territory Families' internal complaints process and decide the NTCAT isn't for you, the Community Justice Centre may be able to help resolve a dispute without going to court.

The Community Justice Centre was established by the Northern Territory Government to provide mediation services to the community to help people resolve their own disputes without legal action. The service is free, confidential, voluntary, timely, and easy to use.

Mediation is about people coming together to discuss the issues in dispute. It allows all people in dispute to have a say in the outcome and come up with their own solutions to the problem. It provides a way of settling a dispute without legal action, which can be time consuming, physically and emotionally exhausting and expensive.

If you wish to try to resolve the matter through mediation, you first need to approach Territory Families and seek agreement to participate.

Ombudsman

The Ombudsman of the Northern Territory may investigate a complaint into an administrative action of all public authorities in the Northern Territory including Territory Families.

To take a complaint to the Ombudsman:

- call 1800 806 380
- email: nt.ombudsman@nt.gov.au
- write to: GPO Box 1344 Darwin NT 0801.

A complaint may be made about any decision, recommendation, action or inaction by the Pensioner and Carer Concession Unit and Territory Families within the Ombudsman's jurisdiction. For example, you may complain about:

- the process we used to make a decision
- a delay in taking any action
- any requirement that we have placed on you to provide information that you believe is unreasonable
- a harsh or wrong decision
- any other action taken by us.

The Ombudsman can make recommendations to Territory Families but does not make enforceable orders. The Ombudsman may decline to deal with your complaint if you have not first taken your complaint to us or where the Ombudsman considers there is a more appropriate forum for dealing with the dispute.

Complaints to the Ombudsman must set out why you remain dissatisfied with the outcome, define how the action was wrong or harsh, and make it clear what outcome you are seeking.

In taking a complaint to the Ombudsman, you should provide copies of all relevant communications with the Pensioner and Carer Concessions Unit and Territory Families

You may need to ask us for all relevant information that you need and you may consider using a Freedom of Information request for this purpose. More information on FOI requests can be made from the Information Commissioner of the Northern Territory at <https://infocomm.nt.gov.au/> or by calling 1800 005 610.

A complaint to the Ombudsman can be made by completing an online complaint form. Follow the links from www.ombudsman.nt.gov.au.

If you are still unsatisfied after this process, you may wish to progress your complaint through the formal judicial process. You should only proceed to this step once you've first tried in good faith to resolve the matter with the Pensioner and Carer Concessions Unit, Territory Families, the NTCAT, via mediation and through the Ombudsman.

Mutual trust and respect

As a Member or aspiring Member of the Scheme, you have the right to be treated fairly, impartially, consistently and equitably while dealing with us.

You also have the right to have complaints investigated promptly and without disadvantage. Making a legitimate complaint will not jeopardise your ability to simultaneously seek additional pensioner or carer concessions from us.

Equally, as a Member or potential Member you have a responsibility to attempt to resolve complaints with us before seeking external intervention.

You're also expected not to waste time and resources by making frivolous and vexatious complaints.

The Pensioner and Carer Concessions Unit and its Members and aspiring Members should at all times aim to conduct business from a foundation of mutual trust and respect.