



## Dispute Resolution Policy

ACT Mental Health Consumer Network (the Network) is committed to managing disputes in a fair, respectful, trauma-informed and timely way. As the peak systemic advocacy body for consumers in the ACT, we recognise that disagreement can arise in the course of our work and that how disputes are handled is critical to safety, wellbeing, trust and reputation.

Disputes are uncommon within the Network; however, this policy ensures there is a clear, proportionate and consistent process when they do occur. This policy supports early resolution wherever possible and sits alongside the Network's Risk Management Policy and Feedback and Complaints Policy.

Any mention of a specific staff role also includes anyone acting in that role or in a higher position, such as a coordinator.

### Scope

This policy applies to disputes involving:

- Paid staff
- Volunteers
- Board members
- Members of the Network
- Stakeholders, partners and funders
- Members of the public interacting with the Network

It applies to disputes between individuals, or between individuals and the Network, where the matter is not best addressed through another existing policy (for example, workplace bullying, serious misconduct or formal complaints).

### Principles

The Network's approach to dispute resolution is guided by the following principles:

- Respect and dignity for all parties
- Trauma-informed practice and recognition of power imbalance
- Natural justice and procedural fairness
- Early, informal resolution where appropriate
- Proportionality – the process used should match the nature and seriousness of the dispute
- Confidentiality, to the extent possible
- Accessibility and reasonable adjustments for people with lived experience
- No disadvantage or retaliation for raising a dispute in good faith

### **What is a Dispute?**

A dispute is a disagreement, conflict or unresolved concern between two or more parties connected with the Network that may impact relationships, safety, wellbeing, effective work or reputation. Disputes may involve values, expectations, communication, behaviour, roles, decision making or perceived harm.

### **Relationship to Feedback and Complaints**

Some matters raised with the Network may be more appropriately managed under the Feedback and Complaints Policy, particularly where a person is dissatisfied with the Network’s actions, decisions or services. Where a matter could be either a dispute or a complaint, the CEO will determine the most appropriate pathway, in consultation with the parties where possible.

### **Roles and Responsibilities**

#### *Board*

The Board is responsible for oversight of serious or escalated disputes, including disputes involving the CEO, Board members, or significant organisational risk.

#### *Chief Executive Officer (CEO)*

The CEO is responsible for managing disputes in line with this policy, determining appropriate processes, ensuring fairness, and maintaining records. Where a dispute involves the CEO, the Board Chair assumes this role.

#### *Staff and Volunteers*

All staff and volunteers are expected to act respectfully, raise concerns early where possible, and participate in dispute resolution processes in good faith.

### **Dispute Resolution Pathway**

Dispute resolution at the Network generally follows a staged approach. Not all disputes will require every stage.

### *Stage 1: Informal Resolution*

Where appropriate and safe, parties are encouraged to address the issue early through respectful conversation, clarification of expectations or informal support from a supervisor or coordinator. This stage would ideally be resolved within 14 days, and may include facilitated conversation by the CEO.

### *Stage 2: Supported or Mediated Resolution*

If a dispute cannot be resolved informally, or involves a power imbalance, a more structured process may be used. This may include:

- Separate discussions with each party
- A facilitated meeting
- Internal or independent external mediation, where appropriate

### *Stage 3: Formal Resolution*

Where a dispute remains unresolved, is serious in nature, or poses a risk to people or the organisation, the CEO may implement a formal process. This may include written statements, findings and organisational action.

## **Types of Disputes and Specific Considerations**

### *Staff-to-Staff Disputes*

These disputes will usually be managed through supervision, supported discussion or mediation. Where needed, external advice may be sought. Workplace health and safety and industrial obligations will be considered.

### *Staff or Volunteer and Board Member*

These disputes should be referred directly to the CEO or Board Chair (depending on who is involved). Particular care will be taken to manage power imbalance and role boundaries.

### *Volunteer Disputes*

Disputes involving volunteers will be managed proportionately and with regard to the volunteer role, supervision arrangements and wellbeing considerations.

### *Member-to-Member Disputes*

The Network may support respectful resolution where disputes arise in Network-facilitated spaces. The Network is not responsible for resolving private disputes between members outside its activities but may set behavioural expectations or boundaries.

### *Stakeholder or Public Disputes*

Disputes involving stakeholders or members of the public may overlap with

feedback or complaints. The Network will consider reputational risk, safety and relationships, and may limit engagement where behaviour is unsafe, disrespectful or unreasonable.

### **External Support and Advocacy**

Parties to a dispute are encouraged to seek independent support if needed. This may include advocacy organisations, unions, or support persons. The Network will facilitate reasonable access to support people during formal processes.

### **Confidentiality and Records**

Information related to disputes will be handled sensitively and shared only on a need-to-know basis. Records will be kept securely and separately from personnel files where appropriate. De-identified information may be used for organisational learning and risk management.

### **Risk and Safety**

Disputes that raise concerns about safety, wellbeing, legal exposure or reputational risk will be managed in line with the Risk Management Policy. The Network may pause or alter dispute processes to address immediate risk.