

AUSTRALIAN DOCTORS FOR AFRICA

Policy: **COMPLAINTS HANDLING**

Date last approved: **10/2024**

Date of next review: **10/2027**

Approved by: **Board**

1 PURPOSE AND SCOPE

1.1 Purpose

The purpose of this policy is to ensure that any person or organisation that is associated with Australian Doctors for Africa (ADFA), or is affected by its projects, is treated justly, fairly and in a timely manner by providing a straightforward process for dealing with complaints of any nature. This includes reports related to sexual exploitation, abuse and harassment (SEAH), and whistleblowers. (Note: Due to the complex nature of addressing complaints related to Child Safeguarding, specific policy and procedures have been developed and are available on the ADFA website.)

ADFA recognises that the handling of complaints is very sensitive in the countries in which it operates, in that people may have different cultural expectations to those of Australia. However, as part of its role, ADFA works closely with its in country staff and partners to devise ways to promote transparency and encourage local people to voice their concerns and grievances directly to ADFA, and without fear of reprisal. ADFA also commits to providing appropriate assistance to survivors, which may include medical, social, legal and financial assistance, or referrals to such services.

1.2 Scope

This policy applies to:

- complaints relating to ADFA board members, staff, in country partners, volunteers and consultants (representatives of ADFA); and
- any complaint, grievance or expression of dissatisfaction about the standards of service, actions or lack of action, and conduct of a representative of ADFA.

2 POLICY STATEMENT

2.1 Guiding Principles

ADFA has adopted the following principles for complaints handling:

- **Accountable** – ADFA is accountable to all its stakeholders and is committed to stakeholder engagement and responding to complaints in an effective and clearly defined manner.
- **Privacy, safety and dignity** – The process for the handling of complaints will protect the privacy, safety and dignity of complainants (particularly our most vulnerable and disadvantaged stakeholders), those about whom the complaint is made and others impacted by the complaint.
- **Visible** – Information as to how and where to complain is available on the ADFA website (<https://ausdocafrica.org/complaints>) and is provided locally during in-country visits, in a format appropriate to our stakeholders.
- **Responsive** – The complaint will be investigated within five working days of receipt and, where possible, the complaint process will be completed within one month.

- **Objective** – All complaints will be handled in an equitable, fair and unbiased manner using evidence submitted by all parties. No person will be victimised, discriminated against, or suffer consequences in lodging or assisting with information concerning a complaint.
- **Confidential** – Only the people directly involved in a complaint have access to the information relevant to that complaint. Details will be kept completely confidential unless natural justice or the law requires disclosure. Disclosure of details in these circumstances will be determined by the person handling the complaint in conjunction with the complainant.
- **Procedural fairness** – Any ADFA representative against whom a complaint is made is entitled to receive sufficient details of the nature and circumstances of the allegations to allow them to fully respond to the allegations.
- **Self-resolution** – Opportunity may be given for the complaint to be resolved between affected parties without direct intervention from other ADFA representatives.
- **Standards** – ADFA will measure its complaints handling response against standards of best practice for a volunteer specialist medical charity operating in an African environment.
- **Sensitivity** – All complaints will be dealt with appropriately, with seriousness and sensitivity to cultural expectations.

2.2 Policy Awareness

All ADFA board members, staff, in-country partners, volunteers and consultants, operating within Australia or overseas, are responsible for ensuring this policy is effectively communicated and followed, and for carrying out their duties in line with this policy and the Complaints Handling Procedure.

2.3 What complaints are covered by this policy?

The Whistleblower Policy, PSEAH Policy and Human Resource Management Policy outline the complaints which can be dealt with via the Complaints Handling Procedure.

Beyond the issues raised in those policies, this policy also applies to any complaint, grievance or expression of dissatisfaction about the standards of service, actions, or lack thereof, or conduct of any representative of ADFA.

2.4 Who can complain?

Complaints can be made by ADFA beneficiaries and their family members, partner organisations, stakeholders, program participants including hospitals, international colleagues, or members of the community.

Complaints can also be made by representatives of ADFA (whistleblowers) who wish to make a complaint about other ADFA staff, volunteers or board members as it relates to the delivery of their responsibilities as ADFA representatives, as outlined in the *ADFA Policy - Whistleblower*.

3 COMPLAINTS HANDLING PROCESS

All procedures applicable to the handling of a complaint are outlined in the ADFA Complaints Handling Procedure, which is available on the ADFA website <https://ausdocafrica.org/complaints/>.

In the first instance, all complaints should be directed to:

the ADFA CEO (ceo@ausdocafrica.org) or the Chair of the Board (chair@ausdocafrica.org); or

via telephone: +61 8 6478 8951; or

in writing: Chief Executive Officer or Chair of the Board
 Australian Doctors for Africa
 Suite 1, 219 Onslow Road
 SHENTON PARK WA 6008
 AUSTRALIA

Complaints that do not fall within the scope of the policy (for example, complaints against an employee of another organisation) will be referred to an appropriate organisation or service provider. This may include the organisation which the individual is involved with, or a third party. ADFA may seek the advice of ACFID in these situations and refer the complaint to ACFID, if appropriate, for resolution. This type of complaint will be recorded in ADFA's Complaints Register to allow reasonable follow-up of the complaint after it is referred onwards. Reasonable follow-up includes a phone call or email to the complainant which will confirm whether the referral has resulted in a response. Non-response will result in ADFA referring the matter to ACFID.

4 ESCALATION TO ACFID

If a complaint cannot be resolved under the Complaints Handling Procedure, it may be escalated to the Australian Council for International Development (ACFID), or if any complaint entails an alleged breach of the ACFID Code of Conduct, complainants have the ability to lodge a complaint directly with the ACFID Code Committee at <http://www.acfid.asn.au/code-of-conduct/complaints>, or via:

Email: Chair, ACFID Code of Conduct Committee at code@acfid.asn.au.

Post: Chair, ACFID Code of Conduct Committee c/- ACFID, Private Bag 3, Deakin ACT 2600.

In the event of a complaint being lodged with the ACFID Code Committee, ADFA will comply with:

- the complaints handling process as set out in the ACFID Code of Conduct Guidance;
- the Code Committee's requests for information, within all reasonable time limits;
- any corrective and disciplinary action agreed with the Code Committee; and
- measures requested to be put in place to minimise the risk of the breach recurring.

5 REFERENCES

- ACFID Code of Conduct
- ADFA Procedure – Complaints Handling
- ADFA Policy – Child Safeguarding
- ADFA Policy – Gender Equality
- ADFA Policy – Human Resource Management
- ADFA Policy – Prevention of Sexual Exploitation, Abuse and Harassment
- ADFA Policy – Whistleblower

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Reviewed: September 2014; October 2016; May 2020; October 2021, September 2024