



DC Department of Behavioral Health Office of the Ombudsman Frequently Asked Questions

What is a complaint?

A complaint is a concern initiated by a consumer or an individual on behalf of a consumer about a DC Department of Behavioral Health (DBH) service that is or is not being received.

How is a complaint different from a grievance?

A complaint can be given in writing or by phone. It is an informal, process that actively involves the consumer and a representative of the Office of the Ombudsman working with the provider to resolve the complaint.

A grievance is a formal process. It can be initiated verbally, however all communication is in writing. There are specific forms that must be completed to formally initiate the process. The grievance process involves a written request for answers to consumer concerns. The response must be in writing and provided within a specific timeframe. Once a grievance is filed, current services must remain in place until the outcome of the grievance is determined

How can the DBH Office of the Ombudsman help me?

We will assist you by working with your DBH provider to resolve your complaint utilizing agency established policy and procedures. As we work with you and the provider/staff person, we will identify next steps and work with you to ensure these take place as quickly as possible. If your concern is regarding a program outside of the DBH jurisdiction, we will refer you to the appropriate agency.

What if I don't want to file a complaint?

You have the right to self- determination. If you do not wish to file a complaint that is your choice. It may be that your concern is more appropriate as a grievance or a fair hearing. If you prefer you can report your concerns to a supervisor with the agency that you are affiliated with and they should be able to assist. The Ombudsman's Office is available with additional resources as needed.

Is filing a complaint the same as requesting a Fair Hearing?

No it is not. A Fair Hearing is conducted by the Office of Administrative Hearings (OAH). You can call the OAH at (202) 442-9094 for additional information on how to request a Fair Hearing.

Questions about Accessing Services with DBH

What is a Core Services Agency?

A Core Services Agency (CSA) is a provider that offers mental health services based upon your individual need. These services can include the following: an assessment, medication management, counseling, skill building services in the community, support during a Crisis, Day Services and more intensive community services for youth and adults.

What do I need to enroll with a Core Service Agency (CSA)?

To enroll in a service or with a Core Service Agency (CSA), you must call 1-888-793-4357 (1-888-7WE-HELP). Prior to making the call, you will need the following information: a note book to take notes from your call, your address, insurance provider, Medicaid/Medicare identification number, date of birth, social security number. There are additional questions regarding your need for service that will be asked as well.

What should I expect when I call the Access HelpLine?

When you call the Access HelpLine (AHL), you can expect your call will be answered by a DBH Care Coordinator. The coordinator, will ask a number of questions, including but not limited to: contact information, age, the service you are requesting, insurance information and agency you would like to receive treatment from. The coordinator will match you with an agency that is appropriate for your service needs. This is done by adding your name to the intake schedule for the identified agency. They will end the call by providing you with the date and time for the intake appointment. If that agency does not accept direct referrals from DBH, you will be given the contact information for the identified agency to schedule your intake appointment.

I'm having difficulty getting through to the Access HelpLine. What can I do?

You have the option to contact a DBH provider directly to find out if they provide the needed service. Once you have that information it will be important to know if the provider accepts your insurance and if the agency is accepting new consumers. Please be advised that each provider has their own unique intake process; however the agency can assist you with linkage to their agency. You can obtain a list of providers and their phone numbers by clicking [here](#).

If you continue to have difficulty getting through the Access Helpline, contact the Office of the Ombudsman at 844-698-2924

I had an intake appointment two weeks ago and I've had no contact with the provider since then.

Now what?

Each Core Service Agency (CSA) has their own intake process. At the time of your intake, the intake process and accompanying timelines should have been provided to you. It is important to ask questions and confirm information regarding intake at that time. If the information provided is not being followed, call the provider and request to speak with the intake coordinator. If this effort is not successful, your next call should be to the Clinical Director or a supervisor. If your efforts to obtain information on next steps from the CSA are not successful, please contact the Office of the Ombudsman, at 1-844-698-2924 for assistance.

How can I access services for substance use?

You can contact the Access and Referral Center (ARC) 202-727-8473. They will provide additional information about services available for referral. Please see the DBH website for additional information. <https://dbh.dc.gov/page/apra>

My SUD provider doesn't accept my insurance anymore. How can you help?

You can contact the Access and Referral Center (ARC) 202-727-8473 and they will refer you to an agency that accepts your insurance.

My provider told me I have to pay a co-pay to receive services. Is this true?

Most D.C. residents who qualify for Medicaid or the Alliance do NOT have a co-pay for behavioral health services provided by DBH or a DBH approved provider. There may be a minimal cost for medication for those with Medicaid, Alliance or a higher cost in the case of private insurance.

I am a parent / legal guardian / advocate / probation officer; can I enroll my client with a DBH provider?

If you are the legal guardian or parent of a child/adolescent under age 18, yes; you can enroll your child in services with a DBH provider through the AHL. If you have custody of a child through a court order, it will be necessary for you to provide a copy of the court order at the time of intake with the provider.

If you are the legal guardian of adult, yes, you can enroll that person in services with a DBH provider. You must provide documentation of the court order awarding you legal guardianship of the individual.

If you are a probation officer, advocate or other professional working with a child or adolescent, the parent must be on the phone with you, when the call to the AHL is made.

If the individual is adult, you must have the adult on the phone when the call is made to the AHL to enroll in services. Please note, the adult will be asked by the AHL Care Coordinator, if s/he would like for you to remain on the phone during the call.

Who Can File A Complaint/What Types of Complaints Can I File?

I am a court appointed guardian/probation/parole officer/social worker. Can I file a complaint on behalf of my client?

Yes. You can file a complaint on behalf of your client. If your client is not committed to DYRS or CFSA, it may be necessary to obtain consent from the legal guardian or parent to move forward with the complaint. Each case is different, please contact the Office of the Ombudsman to discuss your specific situation and available options.

Can I make a complaint about a D.C. Government agency or Federal Government agency to the DBH Ombudsman?

If the DC Government agency is the D.C. Department of Behavioral Health, yes, you can. If the complaint is regarding a different agency, we will refer you to the appropriate office at the identified agency to address your concern directly. We cannot accept a complaint about a federal agency because that is not within our jurisdiction. We can help you to contact the appropriate ombudsman office.

If your concern is regarding consumer safety, compliance or fraud, the Office of the Ombudsman can accept the complaint. These complaints are frequently forwarded to the DBH Accountability Administration.

Can I file a complaint with your office about my employer?

If your complaint is related to an allegation of fraud or the provision of services offered by DBH or one of the certified providers, yes, you can file a complaint with our office. Issues related to Human Resources, such as benefits should be directed to your employer or the D.C. Department of Employment Services (DOES).

What Happens When Thing Go Wrong?

My provider has discontinued my ACT/CBI/Day services. Can I file a complaint?

Yes, you can file a complaint. However, in this situation, filing a grievance is more appropriate. By filing a grievance, your services must remain in place until the grievance is resolved.

My provider does not maintain contact with me. Who should I call?

Once you completed the intake process, a staff person should have been identified to support you during this recovery period. This may include a physician, therapist, community support worker (CSW), Peer Specialist or other staff. You and your assigned staff person; at your initial meeting will determine the method and frequency of your contact with each other. The contact should be based on the goals that you have established in your treatment plan. If you do not have regular face to face contact with your assigned staff person, contact the supervisor for the staff person and request a meeting. If you are unable to meet with the supervisor, speak to the Clinical Director for the agency. If these efforts are not successful, place a call to the Office of the Ombudsman at 1-844-698-2924 for assistance. This process also applies if you are assigned an ACT case manager or a CBI worker.

My child needs a service that is not offered by his/her current CSA. I do not want to change CSA's.

What can I do?

You do not have to switch CSAs to obtain a service for your child. At your request, the treatment team at your CSA, will evaluate your child to determine the appropriateness of receiving an additional/specialty service. The team will explain to you why your child does or does not meet the criteria for the requested service(s). If the child is appropriate for the service, the CSA will locate a provider that provides the service and is accepting referrals. Once the referral is submitted, the CSA will provide information on next steps. The CSA will also be responsible for assisting with the coordination of care for your child.

If the team says your child does not meet criteria and you disagree, request to speak to the supervisor and/or clinical director. If this is not effective and you still believe that the service(s) is needed you can contact the Office of the Ombudsman, 1-844-698-2924, for assistance.

Even with my request, a therapist has not been provided for my child. What should I do?

If you request therapy services for your child, the provider will assess your child for the appropriateness of therapy as a service. The assessment will also provide a recommendation for the type of therapy based your child's symptoms and presentation. Your current provider will assign a therapist or place your child on a wait list; if one is not readily available. If you believe the anticipated time for getting a therapist is too long you may do one of the following. If you wish to remain with the current CSA, you may ask your provider to reach out to other agencies to identify a provider that has therapist readily available. You may also contact the Access HelpLine to switch to another CSA that has therapy services readily available. If your child is part of a Managed Care Organization, such as Amerigroup, AmeriHealth, Trusted or HSCSN, your child may be able to receive therapy services with a provider in the MCO's network.

I want to change my community support worker. What can I do?

Obtain the name and contact information of your community support worker's supervisor. Contact the supervisor to request a meeting to discuss the requested change. If you do not agree with the decision, you can request to speak with the Clinical Director for the agency. If you are still unable to obtain or disagree with the resolution, you can contact the Office of the Ombudsman, 1-844-698-2924, to request assistance.

The supervisor at my CSA won't return my calls at my provider. Now what?

If the supervisor for your assigned worker does not return your calls or will not meet with you, obtain the name and contact information for the Clinical Director. If the Clinical Director does not respond to you, you may contact the Office of the Ombudsman, 1-844-698-2924, to request help to resolve your concern.

What if I need services in another language?

Each provider will make the appropriate arrangements to accommodate any client who may need assistance in communicating in a different language. The Access HelpLine will also provide assistance in communicating in a different language.

How long should I wait before contacting the Office of the Ombudsman?

A waiting period is not required to contacting the Office of the Ombudsman. The Office of the Ombudsman encourages consumers to utilize the complaint/grievance process within their provider agency to resolve any dissatisfaction with services. We, however will accept your call and assist in resolving your complaint, regardless of efforts to resolve the issue with your provider prior to contacting our office.