

GUIDE TO HARM PREVENTION POLICY TEMPLATE

ABOUT THIS POLICY AREA

This policy guides how the organisation protects the safety and wellbeing of clients.

A written harm prevention policy is required as part of meeting Standard 6 (Protecting safety and wellbeing).

Standard 6 — protecting safety and wellbeing

The organisation develops, implements and reviews policies and procedures for minimising the risk of harm to clients.

Policy checklist

The following checklist will help you check that an existing policy covers this area adequately.

The policy should:

- describe the way you assess risk of harm and take into account risks from:
 - other clients
 - actions (or inaction) of staff in the organisation
 - physical surrounds
 - the nature of the service
 - the clients themselves, to themselves and to other clients, and to people beyond the organisation
- explain how clients are informed about the ways their safety and wellbeing will be protected and any actions they are required to take or not take while using the service
- describe the way the organisation is equipped to minimise and promptly respond to aggressive behaviour or physical threat
- outline other strategies to respond to risk, including:
 - prominent listing of emergency numbers
 - ensuring first aid kits are available and staff are trained in first aid
 - how health issues such as hygiene and infectious illness are dealt with
 - providing safe environments for children
- contain clear procedures and actions
- indicate the timing of any actions
- show when it was approved
- show when it was last reviewed.

COMPLETING YOUR HARM PREVENTION POLICY

Using the policy template

The template provides some example statements. You can adapt these statements and include them in your policy or write your own statements to better suit the operations and services of your organisation.

To customise the policy template, click on the shaded sections <<Insert text>> and insert the information that is specific to your organisation.

When you have completed the policy template, delete the shaded instruction sections such as: [Refer to the harm prevention policy template guide for questions and/or examples to consider when customising this section.](#)

For further information on using the policy guides, refer to the information in *Using the policy templates and guides*.

Guidelines for each section of your policy

1. Purpose

When identifying the purpose of the policy, consider how it might apply to your client group/s and others using the organisation's services, premises or other facilities, including staff, volunteers and board or management committee members. Consider also the widest possible range of situations that might cause harm and where the organisation could minimise harm and/or the impact of harm. Do you need to make specific statements to ensure you are inclusive of particular groups, such as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, Australian South Sea Islanders, people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds and people with a disability?

2. Scope

To determine the scope of the policy, consider the following questions:

- Does this policy apply to all your organisation's services and to all clients and agencies?
- Are the risks of harm for staff, volunteers, board or management committee members and other stakeholders also taken into account?
- Does your organisation's responsibility for harm minimisation extend beyond harm resulting from the provision of services and the use of premises, vehicles and other facilities within the organisation's direct control? Are you concerned also with minimising harm and/or the impact of harm that has occurred elsewhere? Where do you draw the line on this responsibility?

3. Policy statement

If you are adopting the policy statement in the template, consider whether there are any additional commitments your organisation wants to make.

In identifying the actions your organisation will take to implement this policy, you should include the following:

- assessing the risk of harm and taking into account all potential risks in the service environment
- identifying and documenting the range of circumstances within and outside the service where the safety or wellbeing of clients may be compromised

- taking action to reduce the potential for harm to clients and to ensure their safety within the service
- informing clients about the ways their safety and wellbeing will be protected, and any actions they are required to take or not take while using the service
- minimising the risk of aggressive behaviour or physical threat
- minimising the range of other health and safety risks that could arise in the service environment
- reviewing your approach to harm prevention regularly, and particularly after any critical incident within your service.

4. Procedures

The procedures describe how your organisation achieves the aims and goals you have outlined in your purpose, scope and policy statement.

These procedures relate to how you will prevent harm to clients where this is directly related to the delivery of your services. You have an obligation to minimise the risk, reduce the effect, and prevent future incidents occurring.

Many procedures applying to the safety of clients will also apply to employees, volunteers and management. They should therefore be part of any workplace health and safety policy, and can be recorded as part of that policy or as a separate set of procedures related to risk assessment and critical incident responses.

4.1 Assessing and reviewing the risk of harm

The first step in protecting the safety and wellbeing of your clients is to understand how, where and when they may be at risk of harm. Take into account risks from:

- other clients
- actions (or inaction) of staff in the organisation
- physical surrounds
- the nature of the service
- the clients themselves, to themselves and to other clients, and to people beyond the organisation.

Describe your procedure for identifying and assessing risks of harm and list any checklists that you use.

How often do you do this risk assessment? For example:

- following a critical incident
- annually
- when you start a new project
- when there is new intake of volunteers or clients.

Identify the range of circumstances within and outside your service where the safety or wellbeing of your clients may be compromised (potential and actual risks of harm) and also the range of actions you have agreed to take to reduce the incidence of actual harm occurring.

List the potential and actual risks of harm to clients, and the range of actions you can take to reduce the incidence of each, particularly to the target group for your service and for the

nature of the service you provide. It may be useful to think through these under types of incidents that could cause harm:

- threat to personal safety or wellbeing (including from accidents, assault, harassment)
- threat to psychological health
- threat to physical health
- inadequate policy guidelines
- lack of adequate supervision
- lack of adequate support
- loss of confidence in the service
- inability to access a needed service.

List these here, or reference where these are documented in a related risk assessment or workplace health and safety policy.

4.2 Informing clients about harm prevention rights and responsibilities

Clients have a right to be protected from harm to their safety or wellbeing, and they have a responsibility to play an active role in protecting themselves and others from harm.

Explain how clients are informed about the ways their safety and wellbeing will be protected, and any actions they are required to take or not take while using the service. There should also be a section in your client service charter addressing risk of harm, harm prevention, and response.

4.3 Minimising and responding to aggressive behaviour and physical threat

Describe the way your organisation is equipped to minimise aggressive behaviour or physical threat, and promptly respond to aggression to prevent harm being caused. Specific circumstances in which there may be a greater risk of physical or emotional harm from aggression or physical threat should be identified and appropriate risk-minimisation responses implemented.

Particular circumstances where a higher risk may occur include:

- service provision to clients affected by drugs, alcohol or mental illness
- youth services
- other clients with complex and multiple needs
- organisations with poor supervision, inadequate support or inadequate training of staff.

4.4 Minimising and responding to other risks to safety and wellbeing

Other strategies to prevent and/or minimise the risk of harm to clients and ensure their safety within your service should relate directly to the risks of harm you identified above.

List your harm prevention and minimisation strategies (or, if appropriate, reference where these are documented in a related risk assessment or workplace health and safety policy). Be as specific as possible. For example:

- for risk of physical injury to clients:
 - adequate control of aggressive behaviour and physical threat (see above)
 - building kept in good condition, with regular condition inspections
 - ensuring first aid kits are available and all staff trained in basic first aid
 - evacuation procedure provided in a prominent place
 - prominent listing of emergency numbers

- providing safe environments for children.
- for risk to physical health:
 - hygiene procedures
 - preventing the spread of infectious illness
 - health checks and vaccination programs
 - health education
 - nutritional advice and support
 - no smoking policy
 - policy on the monitoring, use and compliance of prescribed medications.

5. Other related policies and documents

List the other policies related to the harm prevention policy. The policy should be linked to:

- harm response policy
- client service charter.

6. Review processes

Consider how often the policy should be reviewed and the process for doing this:

- **frequency of review:** Most policies benefit from an annual review. The experience of implementing the policy is used to decide which changes are necessary. Consider reviewing your harm prevention policy as part of an annual review of your organisation's client service related policies or, if your organisation is small, perhaps over a three-year period. Critical incidents may prompt you to review the policy ahead of schedule.
- **responsibility for the review:** In most organisations, the person accountable for client service would be responsible for reviewing this policy. In small organisations, this may be the coordinator or manager. In larger organisations, this may be a client service manager or administration manager.
- **process for the review:** Decide which particular staff, volunteers, external people and organisations will provide input to the policy review, and how clients will be involved.
- **decision-making process:** Who will review draft changes to the policy and approve changes? What will be the timeframe for the review process?
- **documentation and communication:** What records of the policy review process are needed? How will changes to the policy be communicated to staff implementing the policy? In a small organisation, this may be as simple as noting the changes at a staff meeting. In a larger organisation, an email memo may be needed.
- **key questions for the review:** Is the policy being implemented? Are procedures being followed? Is the policy clear? What has changed that may prompt a change to the policy (for example, new client service procedures, expansion of services or activities, widening eligibility criteria)? Have particular stakeholders had difficulty with any aspect of the policy? Can their concerns be resolved? How does the policy compare with that of similar organisations?