

CHCCOM001

Provide first point of contact

Release 1

Learner guide

Aspire Version 1.2



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Version	Release date	Modification
Release 1, version 1.1	April 2017	First release
Release 1, version 1.2	January 2019	Minor corrections as part of our continuous improvement program.

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Before you begin

This learner guide is based on the unit of competency *CHCCOM001 Provide first point of contact*, Release 1. Your trainer or training organisation must give you information about this unit of competency as part of your training program. You can access the unit of competency and assessment requirements at: www.training.gov.au.

How to work through this learner guide

This learner guide contains a number of features that will assist you in your learning. Your trainer will advise which parts of the learner guide you need to read, and which practice tasks and learning checkpoints you need to complete. The features of this learner guide are detailed in the following table.

Feature of the learner guide	How you can use each feature
Learning content	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Read each topic in this learner guide. If you come across content that is confusing, make a note and discuss it with your trainer. Your trainer is in the best position to offer assistance. It is very important that you take on some of the responsibility for the learning you will undertake.
Examples and case studies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Examples of completed documents that may be used in a workplace are included in this learner guide. You can use these examples as models to help you complete practice tasks and learning checkpoints ▶ Case studies highlight learning points and provide realistic examples of workplace situations.
Practice tasks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Practice tasks give you the opportunity to put your skills and knowledge into action. Your trainer will tell you which practice tasks to complete.
Video clips	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Where QR codes appear, learners can use smartphones and other devices to access video clips relating to the content. For information about how to download a QR reader app or accessing video on your device, please visit our website: www.aspirelr.com.au/help 
Summary	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Key learning points are provided at the end of each topic.
Learning checkpoints	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ There is a learning checkpoint at the end of each topic. Your trainer will tell you which learning checkpoints to complete. These checkpoints give you an opportunity to check your progress and apply the skills and knowledge you have learnt.

Foundation skills

As you complete learning using this guide, you will be developing the foundation skills relevant for this unit. Foundation skills are the language, literacy and numeracy (LLN) skills and the employability skills required for participation in modern workplaces and contemporary life.

The following table outlines specific foundation skills noted for your learning in this learner guide.

Foundation skill area	Foundation skill description
Learning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Understanding your job role, organisational procedures and legal responsibilities ▶ Managing your work and seeing how well you are going and making goals for yourself at work ▶ Seeking professional development opportunities for continuous improvement
Reading	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Understanding how documents are presented and being able to navigate through documents ▶ Understanding industry- and job-specific terminology ▶ Interpreting key information in relevant documents ▶ Understanding routine workplace checklists and documentation
Writing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Planning, drafting and writing reports and documents ▶ Communicating through written letters, email and online ▶ Recording progress; reporting incidents
Oral communication	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Clarifying instructions ▶ Providing information ▶ Supporting others through encouragement, negotiation and conflict resolution ▶ Using body language to model desired behaviour and responding to others' body language
Numeracy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Calculating costs, weights, measurements of height and distance ▶ Interpreting measurements
Teamwork	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Working well with other people by cooperating, collaborating, encouraging and building rapport
Planning and organising	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Planning your workload and commitments ▶ Implementing tasks ▶ Completing work on time ▶ Knowing how to deal with hazards and risks
Making decisions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Understanding and applying decision-making processes ▶ Reviewing the impact of your decisions
Problem-solving	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Identifying problems ▶ Working out how to fix a problem using problem-solving processes and reviewing the outcome
Innovation and creation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Recognising opportunities to develop and apply new ideas ▶ Generating ideas by thinking of new ways to do something ▶ Making suggestions to improve work

Foundation skill area	Foundation skill description
Technology and digital literacy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Efficiently using digitally based technologies and systems correctly and safely ▶ Accessing, organising and presenting information ▶ Using equipment correctly and safely

What do you already know?

Use the following table to identify what you may already know. This may assist you to work out what to focus on in your learning.

Topic	Key outcomes	Rate your confidence in each section
Topic 1 Greet and observe people	1A Greet people in a pleasant, respectful and accepting way	<input type="checkbox"/> Confident <input type="checkbox"/> Basic understanding <input type="checkbox"/> Not confident
	1B Respond to distressed people and seek assistance as required	<input type="checkbox"/> Confident <input type="checkbox"/> Basic understanding <input type="checkbox"/> Not confident
	1C Respond to diverse people and behaviour	<input type="checkbox"/> Confident <input type="checkbox"/> Basic understanding <input type="checkbox"/> Not confident
	1D Discuss concerns or problems with supervisor	<input type="checkbox"/> Confident <input type="checkbox"/> Basic understanding <input type="checkbox"/> Not confident
Topic 2 Collect routine information	2A Collect and document information	<input type="checkbox"/> Confident <input type="checkbox"/> Basic understanding <input type="checkbox"/> Not confident
	2B Discuss reasons for contact with the service	<input type="checkbox"/> Confident <input type="checkbox"/> Basic understanding <input type="checkbox"/> Not confident
	2C Explain and uphold rights and responsibilities of the person with support needs	<input type="checkbox"/> Confident <input type="checkbox"/> Basic understanding <input type="checkbox"/> Not confident

Topic	Key outcomes	Rate your confidence in each section
Topic 3 Identify priority of need	3A Identify urgency and nature of need and refer accordingly	<input type="checkbox"/> Confident <input type="checkbox"/> Basic understanding <input type="checkbox"/> Not confident
	3B Identify and respond to issues of personal safety within scope of role	<input type="checkbox"/> Confident <input type="checkbox"/> Basic understanding <input type="checkbox"/> Not confident
	3C Recognise situations beyond scope of role and seek assistance	<input type="checkbox"/> Confident <input type="checkbox"/> Basic understanding <input type="checkbox"/> Not confident
Topic 4 Provide service information	4A Provide current, relevant and culturally appropriate service information	<input type="checkbox"/> Confident <input type="checkbox"/> Basic understanding <input type="checkbox"/> Not confident
	4B Help people contact other agencies or services for further information	<input type="checkbox"/> Confident <input type="checkbox"/> Basic understanding <input type="checkbox"/> Not confident
	4C Confirm information needs have been met	<input type="checkbox"/> Confident <input type="checkbox"/> Basic understanding <input type="checkbox"/> Not confident



Topic 1

In this topic you will learn how to:

- 1A Greet people in a pleasant, respectful and accepting way**

- 1B Respond to distressed people and seek assistance as required**

- 1C Respond to diverse people and behaviour**

- 1D Discuss concerns or problems with supervisor**

Greet and observe people

People who make contact with your service by telephone or in person are seeking information or some other form of support. As the first point of contact, you have the responsibility of determining what kind of support the person needs. You may then be able to provide the support directly, refer them to someone within your own organisation, or to another organisation that is best able to provide the support required.

The techniques you use will be different depending on whether a person makes contact by telephone or in person. However, the basic skills you need to apply are similar. How you apply these skills can significantly affect the person's level of satisfaction and may lead to a negative impact on the person with support needs, their family, or others. In this topic you will learn about listening to and acknowledging people with support needs, responding to distressed people, and reporting your observations.

1A Greet people in a pleasant, respectful and accepting way

Your organisation is likely to have standard policy and procedures in place that guide you on how to greet and address people accessing your services. You should follow these carefully. How you greet a person may well lay the foundation for how the interaction continues.

It is important to be able to put people at ease while you are working with them. You need to be able to develop a positive relationship based on trust and respect. Having effective communication skills will help you to do this.



As a support worker, it is essential that you greet and engage with people in a pleasant, respectful and accepting way in order to:

- ▶ give the person a sense of importance and satisfaction with your service
- ▶ show deference and respect towards a person's individual or cultural differences
- ▶ demonstrate your acceptance of the person's values even if they are different to yours.

Role of the support worker

All health and community services organisations have a primary objective to support the people who come to them for help. Often people with support needs make contact with community services organisation at a point when they feel they have no other options; for example, they may reach the point where they are no longer able to care for their partner who has dementia. When these people make contact with a community services organisation, they are often unsure of where to turn and do not understand the system. They may be confused about what they perceive as a complicated set of processes. People with support needs may be distressed, upset and/or feeling guilty.

The types of services provided, types of people accessing the services, and the role of the support worker are further described below.

Types of services

Health and community services workers may be working in one of many different services such as aged care, home and community care, disability services, alcohol and other drugs, family and domestic violence, mental health, housing, community development, community work, youth work and juvenile justice, children's services, child protection or employment services. Some organisations provide services directly to people; for example, they may provide access to emergency housing. Other organisations provide information only and possibly referrals to other service providers.

People accessing services

People accessing health and community services may be individuals who are seeking help for themselves; for example, an abused woman seeking help from a women's support service. They may be those who are seeking help for a family member or a friend. They may also be workers from other health and community services organisations who are seeking information for the people they support.

Some people are required to make contact with your organisation by way of a court order or as a requirement to be eligible to receive government welfare payments.

Role of the support worker

In your role, you are the first person that a person seeking support has contact with; this could be by phone or in person. Your first task will be to greet the person in a welcoming manner that indicates acceptance, care and a desire to help. Some people may be experiencing distress, anger or other emotions which may make it difficult for you. In these circumstances your organisation's policies and procedures will inform you of what action you should take. Sometimes you will need to contact your supervisor to inform them of the situation and take appropriate action.

Introduce yourself

When greeting a person with support needs for the first time, it is critical that you introduce yourself so the person knows your name, and how you can help them.

Depending on the person's condition, you may need you to tell them who you are and where you are from every time you meet. This is particularly the case if the person has a memory support need such as dementia or an acquired brain injury.

Here is a process you could follow.

Introduce yourself

Stop what you are doing to greet the person and do so with warmth and sincerity.

Make sure you are wearing your name tag or identification badge.

Confirm the person's name and look them in the eye.

Provide the person with a moment to respond and take in their surroundings.

Introduce yourself with your name, organisation (if necessary), the purpose of your visit (if applicable) and the assistance you can provide.

Develop rapport

There are micro skills you can use for developing rapport as soon as you meet a person with support needs. Gerard Egan, in his book *People Skills*, outlined some micro skills that have proved successful in developing rapport with others. He used the acronym SOLER. Here is what SOLER stands for.

SOLER

S - Sit or stand SQUARELY to the person - usually at a 5 o'clock position so as not to startle them.

O - Use an OPEN posture at all times to ensure you do not set up any physical barriers to communication. For example, don't cross your arms.

L - LEAN slightly toward the person to show you are interested and engaging in the conversation with them.

E - Maintain appropriate EYE contact. You will need to consider any cultural needs here. For example; you would make less eye contact with an indigenous Australian.

R - Take a RELAXED approach. If you are relaxed then the other person will be as well.

Respect different values

Values are the rules and beliefs by which each of us live and that guide our behaviour. Our values are influenced by our culture, religion, experiences, family, friends and teachers. The following explores the impact our own values have and the need to accept the differences in other's values.

The diversity of people with support needs requires you to suspend all judgements and assumptions and take the time to listen to each individual, their needs, requirements and communication preferences. All people deserve to be treated with respect and not judged according to your own beliefs, values or standards of behaviour.

Impact of values

- ▶ You may have many different values; for example, acceptance, composure, faith, honour, and honesty. Our own values can sometimes affect our efforts to understand a person's needs and provide the assistance they require; it is important to always maintain an awareness of this possibility so that you can avoid it.

Acceptance of values

- ▶ Not everyone has similar values. The way you greet others should be consistently polite and pleasant regardless of whether their values contradict yours. For example, you may believe that a mother should stay with her baby for the first three months. That value should not impact the support you offer to a woman who wants to apply for a place in your childcare centre for her young baby.

Eliminate discrimination

Unfortunately, some people face discrimination based on their socioeconomic situation or cultural, linguistic or religious differences. Treating a particular group as less worthy of respect than others is a form of discrimination and should be eliminated.

When we assign the same characteristics to all members of a particular group, we are stereotyping them. For example, we are stereotyping when we think, feel or say that, 'all people with mental illness ...', or 'all old people ...' To be prejudiced means to think or feel less favourably about someone or a group without any reason. Stereotypes and prejudice often lead to discrimination; to treating someone less fairly than another person because of some difference.

All individuals should be treated with respect and the same care and concern as you would provide anyone else. Here is more information about discrimination and the types of people you may support.

People you support

Depending on your service, you may work with people who:

- ▶ have physical or intellectual disabilities
- ▶ are teenage mothers
- ▶ are of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander descent
- ▶ are unemployed
- ▶ are HIV-positive or have AIDS or another disease
- ▶ have been or are in prison
- ▶ come from a non-English speaking country.

Legislation

Anti-discrimination legislation prohibits discrimination in a range of areas, on the basis of any of the following attributes:

- ▶ sex
- ▶ relationship status
- ▶ pregnancy or breastfeeding
- ▶ parental status
- ▶ gender identify
- ▶ religious belief or activity
- ▶ political belief or activity
- ▶ sexuality
- ▶ age
- ▶ race
- ▶ impairment
- ▶ family responsibilities
- ▶ association with, or relation to a person who identifies with the above attributes.

Communication skills

When a person makes contact with you, they should become your priority. Stop what you are doing and give the person your undivided attention. Listen carefully to what they are saying and take notice of their body language, as this will help you to understand their emotional state.

Listening is not just about hearing the words the speaker is saying – it is about understanding what the speaker is trying to communicate. We hear with our ears; we listen with our mind. How a person expresses and communicates their need/s is very individual and varied, as shown in the following.

Individual expression and communication depends on:

- ▶ the urgency of their need/s, either real or perceived; for example, they may need help immediately or within a week
- ▶ their emotional state – for example, they may be angry or frightened
- ▶ their physical state – for example, they may be ill, hungry or speech impaired
- ▶ their cultural background – their communication style may be based on accepted religious beliefs and practices or what they consider to be norms of social etiquette
- ▶ their English language skills
- ▶ their understanding of how your service operates – they may or may not be familiar with the type of support your service can provide.

Listen

One of the most important skills you need when engaging with an individual is active listening. Make sure the environment has as few distractions as possible and you both have time to talk. Remember, people with support needs may have a long history of not being heard. To hear what they are saying, you need to put your own opinions aside and see things through their eyes. The following listening strategies may help.

Listening strategies

- ▶ Face the person you are listening to, if it is culturally acceptable.
- ▶ Observe their body language.
- ▶ Be patient and don't interrupt
- ▶ Don't finish their sentences for them.
- ▶ Don't assume you know what they are going to say.
- ▶ Repeat things back to them to make it clear you understand.
- ▶ Summarise the points they make.
- ▶ Ask the person to repeat things if you don't understand.
- ▶ Give information based on fact. Don't give opinions.

Active listening

Active listening should be utilised when communicating with people accessing your service. There are two parts to active listening:

- ▶ Take the time to really understand what the speaker is trying to communicate. This includes being empathetic, respectful, accepting and giving your full attention to the speaker.
- ▶ Clarify with the speaker that what you have heard and understood is actually what they intended to communicate.



Empathy

Empathy is the ability to appreciate or understand the feelings of the person accessing your service. You cannot fully understand how they feel because you will never be in their exact situation; however, you can identify with and acknowledge their situation.

To be empathetic, you need to be genuine in your desire to help and in your interest in the person. Being empathetic does not mean that you agree with the person, but that you acknowledge their situation. When listening to the person, 'listen' to their nonverbal communication as well as to the words they are actually saying. Nonverbal communication is often called 'body language'.

Body language

Body language forms between 50 and 80 per cent of human communication. Body language can show many things, such as whether a person is nervous, afraid, angry, anxious, or in pain. We can generally tell when someone is happy; that is, not feeling any discomfort or concern, and feeling at peace with their current situation. For example, think about someone asking you what the time is. If they are not under any pressure, they are likely to have a smile on their face and ask in a calm manner, 'Excuse me, do you have the time?' What if that same person is running late for an important meeting and their car has broken down? Although they may ask exactly the same question, they are likely to be very agitated, they may be wringing their hands, and their face and body may look tense.

Read body language

The following gives some examples of body language and their possible meanings. These are a guide only and care must be taken not to make assumptions. Instead, use this information as one piece of a jigsaw puzzle that helps you understand a person's emotional state.

Body language	Meaning
Standing with hands on hips	Readiness, aggression
Arms folded across chest	Defensiveness, reluctance
Shoulders hunched, hands in pockets	Dejection
Hands clasped behind back	Anger, frustration, apprehension
Playing with hair	Lack of self-confidence, insecurity
Tugging or pulling at ear	Indecisiveness
Rubbing eyes	Feeling upset, tiredness, disbelief
Nail biting	Frustration, suppression, nervousness
Clench fists	Hostility, defensiveness
Finger-pointing	Aggression, threatening
Wringing hands, crossing or uncrossing feet/legs	Nervousness, concern, stress, anger
Blinking rapidly, tense facial muscles	Fear, vulnerability, anxiety

Verbal cues

The way a person speaks can also provide some clues about their emotional state. For example, the tone, pitch, volume, inflection, rhythm and rate of speech can provide useful information about how a person is feeling. Think about how you use your voice when you express sarcasm, anger, affection, fear, happiness or confidence.

Here are some examples of emotions that a person's voice might reveal.



Tone

A flat tone may indicate that the person would rather be elsewhere. An abrupt tone may mean irritation.

Pitch

A high pitch can indicate nervousness, excitement, fear or anger. A low pitch can indicate despair, sadness or loneliness.

Volume

A loud voice can indicate anger or aggression.

Inflection

Usually a rising inflection means a question and a falling inflection means finality. Inflection is also used to express sarcasm or doubt.

Rate

A fast rate of speech can indicate excitement, happiness or anger. A slow rate of speech can indicate sorrow or exhaustion.

Use questions

It is important to understand how to use questions to help you collect the information you need in order to assist a person with support needs. Asking the wrong types of questions could result in incomplete information, which in turn could mean a person does not receive the support they require.

There are three different types of questions, described below.

Open questions

Open questions are used to encourage the other person to speak. These questions often include or start with the words what, why, when and who, and are used to encourage the other person to say what they know or feel.

For example:

- ▶ Can you tell me how this happened?
- ▶ Can you describe what you are feeling?

Closed questions

Closed questions are used to obtain 'yes' or 'no' answers, specific information and to also constrain the conversation if necessary. For example, when people are angry they may talk fast and ramble on. Asking a closed question can help to get them to stop talking, listen and focus on facts. For example:

- ▶ Has this happened before?
- ▶ Do you have anywhere to sleep tonight?

The responses to your questions reflect a person's understanding of what you ask, and in some cases may be what the person thinks you want to hear.

Clarify questions

Clarifying questions demonstrate to the person that you are listening and taking the time to understand their needs. You would usually use a clarifying question in response to something a person says. Examples of clarifying questions include:

- ▶ How did that happen?
- ▶ Can you give me an example so that I can understand better?

By listening carefully, observing body language and repeating back to the person what you believe they are saying, you are demonstrating that you are listening and trying to understand their point of view. This also enables the person to correct your understanding if necessary.

Example

Greet people in a pleasant, respectful and accepting way

Linda is the receptionist in a Home Support Programme service. Her key role is to greet people who come into the office or contact her by phone. She provides them with the information they are seeking or refers them to an appropriate person, either within the service or at an external organisation/agency.



Linda hears the door opening, so she stops what she is doing and looks up with a warm smile. As the person comes up to her desk, Linda says, 'Good morning, I'm Linda, what can I do for you?' and indicates that the person should take a seat.

The person sits down and, speaking softly, says that she's concerned about her elderly mother, who doesn't seem to be managing. Linda notices that the person's eyes are puffy and bloodshot and she looks as if she's been crying. Linda knows from her training that many people with support needs feel guilty about not being available to help their elderly parents. Linda gently says that sometimes elderly people are able to manage better by using some of the services provided by a Home Support Services organisation. She then asks clarifying questions, such as, 'Can you tell me about the ways you think your mother isn't managing?'

Linda's interaction with the person is professional, friendly and informal. She gives the person her undivided attention and acknowledges her concerns, is prepared to listen and asks clarifying questions.

Practice task 1

1. Describe a process that you could use to introduce yourself to people with support needs for the first time.

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2. Describe two factors that may determine a person's individual expression and communication.

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3. Describe how you could use active listening to greet people accessing your service for the first time.

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Click to complete Practice task 1

1B Respond to distressed people and seek assistance as required

There may be times when you are confronted by people with support needs, who are upset or angry. This could result from a misunderstanding or the person feeling that they have no control over a situation.

As a support worker, you should respond to distressed people in a relaxed and calm manner in an attempt to diffuse tension, prevent aggressive behaviours, and solve the person's issue or concern as quickly as possible.

Your ability to recognise signs of distress can enable you to adjust your own behaviour, manage the situation and obtain support quickly. There will also be times when you need to recognise what is usual behaviour and what is not. For example, when dealing with a person who has an acquired brain injury it may be usual for them to behave in ways that would otherwise indicate distress.

It can be challenging to understand what some people say, as:

- ▶ they may use words that you do not understand; for example, terms used by their doctor or psychiatrist
- ▶ they may have an accent, a speech impairment or may not speak English well
- ▶ their speech may be slurred or they may jumble their words, forget what they are saying or ramble
- ▶ they may be crying or exhibiting other signs of distress, making it difficult to understand them or to focus on their communications
- ▶ they may have a medical conditions and exhibit distracting behaviours, such as constantly repeating words or movements.

Understand emotional states

Emotional states are characterised by an un-perceived co-occurrence of two or more different emotional feelings, eliciting an instant physiological response to a situation. In other words, a person's emotional state brings out a certain set of feelings that come about with a particular activity or under certain circumstances.

Identifying a particular emotional state can be difficult because people can experience several different emotions at the same time. Learning to understand the emotional states of yourself and others, and how to deal with them, will help you to make better decisions about service needs and form positive relationships with the people you support. Following are some examples of emotional states.

Emotional states	
▶ Distressed	▶ Anxious
▶ Fearful	▶ Angry
▶ Kind	▶ Expectant
▶ Amused	▶ Happy
▶ Disgusted	▶ Mixed feelings

Recognise behaviours

People with support needs may be anxious, overwhelmed, at risk of losing control or may have lost control over their own emotions and behaviour. They may be affected by feelings of mistrust, shame, anger or avoidance.

The way you respond to distressed people can either reduce or increase the likelihood of aggressive or violent behaviour. Be observant of cues about a person's emotional state. The following gives examples of emotional indicators you may observe in people with support needs.

Verbal

- ▶ Abusive language
- ▶ Direct threats
- ▶ Fast, non-stop talking
- ▶ Shouting/yelling

Behaviours

- ▶ Grinding teeth
- ▶ Fists clenched or clenching and unclenching
- ▶ An inability to sit still
- ▶ Uncontrolled gesturing
- ▶ Flaring nostrils

Intuitive

- ▶ Your own sense that there is something wrong
- ▶ Your own feeling of suspicion
- ▶ Your own fear or apprehensiveness

Signs of distress

The people you support will display certain emotions and behaviours that indicate when they are experiencing distress. While such emotions or behaviours could be symptomatic of other conditions, as a support worker you should be aware of, and recognise, any mood or behavioural changes that suggest the person you support is under pressure.

Signs of distress could be physical, emotional, mental, or behavioural. Here are some examples of these.

Physical signs

- ▶ Physical signs of distress include anxiety, insomnia, fatigue, depression, high blood pressure, skin conditions, weight gain, muscle tension, nausea, stomach ulcers, Irritable Bowel Syndrome, or increased susceptibility to infections or viruses.

Emotional signs

- ▶ Emotional signs of distress include negative thoughts, disappointment in self, heightened emotional reactions, increased sensitivity, loneliness, loss of motivation, lack of self-confidence, or mood swings.

Mental signs

- ▶ Mental signs of distress include confusion, lack of concentration, poor memory, or indecision.

Behavioural signs

- ▶ Behavioural signs of distress include changes in diet, increased smoking or drinking of alcohol, consumption of stress-related medication, nervous behaviour, arriving late to work, or taking more time off.

Causes of distress

A person can become distressed if their needs are not being met, they are forced to do something they do not wish to do, or they feel they are unable to control events in their life. For example, a person's welfare payments may have been stopped because the person has not complied with the conditions of payment. This may lead to a situation where the person is unable to pay their rent and risks becoming homeless.

People who are distressed may feel misunderstood or wronged.

It is not unusual for distressed people to want to:

- ▶ be taken seriously
- ▶ have the situation rectified
- ▶ have something done so that the situation does not arise again
- ▶ be treated with respect
- ▶ be acknowledged and listened to.

Deal with behaviours of concern

Research suggests that distressed behaviour and behaviours of concern are displayed more frequently by persons who are depressed or experience chronic pain. Such behaviour may include nonverbal facial expressions or body postures which are typically labelled as 'sad' or 'defeated', and verbal responses involving self-deprecation or complaints.

As a support worker, you should develop and use a number of strategies and techniques to deal with problems and challenging behaviours and situations, including distressed or aggressive behaviour, or people with a cognitive impairment. Use assertive communication and conflict avoidance techniques to ensure you provide the best possible support to a person while maintaining your own personal safety, and the safety of others.

Your organisation's procedures will guide you on how specific behaviours should be managed.



Respond to distressed behaviour

A support worker's focus should be on understanding the person's needs or situation from their perspective so that appropriate support can be provided. Here are some tips on responding to distressed behaviour.

Respond to distressed behaviour

- ▶ Give the person your undivided attention.
- ▶ Be aware of your own body language; for example, tapping a pen on the desk may indicate boredom.
- ▶ Be respectful; avoid lecturing or telling the person what to do.
- ▶ Speak in a calm and relaxed manner.
- ▶ Do not take comments personally – you may be seen as the person who controls the authority or power.
- ▶ Avoid retaliating, as this may aggravate the person's emotional state.
- ▶ Be sensitive and empathetic, and not judgmental.
- ▶ Be aware of cultural and linguistic differences.
- ▶ Control your own emotions – do not allow yourself to become frustrated, angry or upset.
- ▶ Use listening and questioning skills to determine what the person's needs are; use open questions.

Respond to aggressive behaviour

Some people may become verbally or physically aggressive when confronted with frustration in situations that they perceive as beyond their control. Anger and frustration become displaced from those situations to you. It is important to remember that the person's anger is not a personal attack, even though it may be directed at you.

You should follow your organisation's policies and procedures for managing aggressive behaviour and use communication and problem solving skills to respond appropriately. When faced with a person who is behaving aggressively, consider the following.

How to manage verbally aggressive behaviours:

What to do:

- ▶ Acknowledge the person's anger and frustration, for example, 'I hear how upset you are.'
- ▶ Rephrase what the person is saying and identify their emotion, for example, 'I can see how upset you are because you feel you are not receiving enough support.'
- ▶ Allow the person to ventilate, get the feelings out, and tell you what is upsetting them.
- ▶ Reduce stimulation by inviting the person into your office or other quiet space, to talk.
- ▶ Tell the person that you are not willing to accept their verbally abusive behaviour, for example, 'When you yell at me I find it hard to listen.'
- ▶ Tell the person they are violating your personal space and to please move back if they are getting physically too close.
- ▶ Help the person problem-solve and deal with the core issue when they become calmer.

What not to do:

- ▶ Do not get into an argument or begin shouting at the person.
- ▶ Do not become hostile or punitive yourself.
- ▶ Do not describe their behaviour or ask for reasons for it.
- ▶ Do not look away or ignore the situation.
- ▶ Do not give away your own rights to a safe workplace.

How to manage physically aggressive behaviours:

What to do:

- ▶ Prevent total frustration by quickly and calmly acknowledging the intensity of the situation, for example, 'I can see you are upset and I want to help you resolve this issue.'
- ▶ Explain to the person clearly and directly what behaviours are acceptable, for example, 'you have the right to feel this way but damaging property is not going to help you.'
- ▶ Remain in an open area where other people are present.
- ▶ Get necessary help from others, such as work colleagues or your supervisor
- ▶ Call the police if the behaviour becomes dangerous or threatens the safety of you or others around you.

What not to do:

- ▶ Do not ignore warning signs that the person is about to explode.
- ▶ Do not ignore threats of violence
- ▶ Do not threaten, dare, taunt or push the person into a corner.
- ▶ Do not touch the person.

Report aggressive behaviour

If a person demonstrates behaviour that threatens the safety of themselves, you, or others around you, you must respond accordingly. Follow your organisation's emergency procedures for seeking assistance. The following outlines who to report to and how to report your observations.

Who do you report to?

You will usually report observations of aggressive behaviour to:

- ▶ your immediate supervisor
- ▶ the person's case manager
- ▶ a clinician (for example, a psychologist)
- ▶ an authorised representative of another support service.

If a person's behaviour is threatening anyone's personal safety, including their own, you may need to contact:

- ▶ the police
- ▶ the ambulance service
- ▶ a hospital.

How should you report?

When reporting your observations, ensure that:

- ▶ they are accurate and specific to the person, and not clouded by your own values
- ▶ you only report what you actually see and hear; do not give opinions or make assumptions
- ▶ the words you use to report are not ambiguous
- ▶ to avoid misunderstandings, explain exactly what the person did or said and the context of the situation.
- ▶ you avoid using jargon or language specific to the service you work in, in order to prevent misunderstandings
- ▶ your observations are not generalisations based on previous service users, prejudice or stereotyping.

Respond to people with a cognitive impairment

Some people you support may exhibit signs of distress because of cognitive impairment, such as intellectual disability, dementia, mental illness or brain injury resulting from an accident, illness, or substance abuse. A cognitively impaired person may have difficulty with one or more of the basic functions of their brain, such as perception, memory, concentration and reasoning skills. This may lead to communication difficulties, aggressive or impulsive behaviours, paranoia, lack of motivation or other behaviour which may not be usual or appropriate for the situation.

Communication is very important and you must use special skills required to respond to a person with a cognitive impairment so that the messages can be sent and received correctly. Here are some strategies and techniques you can utilise when communicating.

Communication strategies

- ▶ Show warmth and maintain a positive attitude.
- ▶ Remain calm and patient; avoid insisting that the person is wrong about something and instead redirect the conversation or switch to a different activity.
- ▶ Work with the person's support network, including family, friends or carers, and ask them how the person can be helped to communicate with you.
- ▶ Talk to the person in a place that is quiet and does not have a lot of distractions, and make sure the person can see you.
- ▶ Face the person you are speaking to and look them in the eye.
- ▶ Listen to the person and if they are having trouble expressing their feelings or needs, help them by asking for more information to clarify missing words.
- ▶ Listen to the person's non-verbal cues and body language.
- ▶ Ensure the person has their eyeglasses or hearing aid if necessary.
- ▶ Use gestures when appropriate, such as pointing to objects or demonstrating an action.

Communication techniques

- ▶ Speak slowly, using simple words and phrases to prevent confusion, especially for a person with dementia.
- ▶ Discuss one thing at a time and keep the messages as short and simple as you can to avoid overwhelming the person with too much information.
- ▶ Draw pictures or write things down for the person if this helps them understand what you are saying.
- ▶ Let the person draw pictures or write things down for you if this makes it easier for them to tell you what they need.
- ▶ Repeat the information as often as needed.
- ▶ Ask one question at a time and listen to or observe for the answer.
- ▶ Ask 'yes' or 'no' questions so the person can clearly clarify their needs.
- ▶ Communicate with touch and a calm voice when you want to tell a person that you care and they cannot understand the spoken word.

Assertive communication

Assertive communication is clear in its intent, involves standing up for your own rights and feelings, but respecting the rights and feelings of others at the same time. When you communicate assertively, you communicate honestly but appropriately given the situation.

You can communicate assertively with the people you support by:

- ▶ clearly expressing your feelings and rights
- ▶ acting in your own best interests but still considering the needs and rights of others
- ▶ developing trust and equality in your professional relationships
- ▶ asking for assistance when you need it
- ▶ maintaining direct eye contact with the person you are speaking to, keeping your posture open and relaxed and using facial expressions that show interest
- ▶ resisting giving in to interruptions until you have completed a conversation
- ▶ listening and letting people know you have heard what they said
- ▶ asking questions for clarification.

Conflict avoidance techniques

Whenever you deal with people who are distressed, aggressive, or who have a cognitive impairment, it is critical that you avoid confronting issues that will aggravate, frustrate, confuse, or discourage the person you support.

Conflict avoidance can be used as a temporary measure to spend more time researching or investigating an issue, or as a means of disposing of a matter altogether.

Conflict avoidance techniques include:

- ▶ changing the subject
- ▶ redirecting the conversation
- ▶ putting off a discussion until later, or until the person has calmed down
- ▶ not bringing up the subject in contention.

Example

Respond to distressed people and seek assistance as required

Julie is a customer service officer in a not-for-profit organisation that provides emergency housing. Julie has noticed that one of the men waiting to be seen by a case worker is very agitated and has gone from mumbling to himself to complaining loudly about the waiting time. As the person walks up to the service desk, Julie takes the initiative and before the person says anything, she says, 'Thank you so much for waiting, I'm so sorry for the delay. Please take a seat and tell me how I might be able to help you'.



She observes that he is suddenly unsure about what to say. Suddenly the person starts crying and says he has nowhere to stay that night. Julie realises that the person's initial anger gave him something to focus on rather than having to think about his situation.

Julie maintains a calm attitude. As she pushes a box of tissues towards the person, she explains the purpose of her organisation and asks the person if he minds if she asks some questions so that she can better understand his situation and then see what resolution she can provide. Julie asks open questions, such as, 'Where have you been living recently?' These questions provide her with the information about the person's situation and also give her the opportunity to observe the person while he talks. She can observe whether the person's emotional state changes when she talks about the different aspects of his situation. Julie is ready to adjust her communication strategy if needed, or to ask questions that can bring out more information than the person reveals at first.

Practice task 2

1. Explain what is meant by distressed behaviour.

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2. Identify two verbal behaviours identified in a person who is distressed.

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3. Identify three things you should do to manage verbally aggressive behaviours.

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[Click to complete Practice task 2](#)

1C Respond to diverse people and behaviour

Community services work is based on a set of core values. These include that every person has a right to be treated with respect and dignity, to equal opportunity and social justice, to be as self-determining and independent as possible, and that no person should be discriminated against on the grounds of race, ethnicity, colour, age, gender, sexual preference or disability.

As a support worker, it is essential that you learn to respond appropriately to diverse people and behaviour in line with organisational requirements when providing information and services.



Recognise diversity

Some points to consider when supporting people of diverse backgrounds and abilities are outlined below.

Social background

- ▶ Be aware that person's personal circumstances may influence their behaviour.
- ▶ Treat all people as equal and avoid making assumptions, either positive or negative, based on their social background.
- ▶ Recognise social disadvantage and work to increase social justice and inclusion wherever possible.

Cultural background

- ▶ Consider both cultural and ethnic backgrounds.
- ▶ Consider how culture may affect expectations and behaviours; for example, concerning gender roles, age and time.
- ▶ Learn as much as possible about an individual's cultural and ethnic background so you can provide appropriate services.
- ▶ Respect all cultural and religious beliefs.
- ▶ Use appropriate cross-cultural communication strategies and/or interpreters when necessary.

Physical abilities

- ▶ Recognise that most people with physical disabilities do not have intellectual disabilities as well.
- ▶ Work with a person-centred focus so the person has the opportunity to make decisions and choices about the services that best suit their needs.
- ▶ Focus on what the person can do, not on what they can't do.

Mental abilities

- ▶ Treat people with intellectual disabilities with the same respect and courtesy as you treat others.
- ▶ Avoid talking to people in an overly simplistic and patronising way.
- ▶ Encourage decision-making and self-determination as much as possible.

Respect cultural backgrounds

Australia is home to people from many different cultures and countries. These different cultures make Australia and the workplace interesting. The cultural differences you encounter might mean there are different languages or ways of behaving that affect communication. You need to know how to change your communication to suit the culture of the people you are working with. For example, when Japanese people greet each other they generally shake hands or bow to each other.

You can find out information about a person's culture from the person or their family and friends, reading their care plan, asking colleagues or finding information from the library and Internet. Even when you do know about a person's culture, you should never use stereotypes to form opinions about them. Treat each person as an individual and understand that there is diversity within cultural groups.

Here is some more information on respecting different cultures.

Respect Indigenous Australians

- ▶ Indigenous Australians are a diverse cultural group. Many issues arise from the impact of colonisation, the stolen generation, government involvement in their lives, displacement from their lands and other hardships. To work effectively with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, you need to understand the impact of their history, culture and current issues. This understanding needs to be developed as the foundation on which all communication is built.

Respect refugees or new citizens

- ▶ Australia accepts thousands of humanitarian entrants into the country. Most are refugees fleeing war and political instability. Nearly all migrants will experience some sense of 'culture shock' as almost everything is new and unfamiliar. Usual practices and accepted norms of behaviour are different and constant cultural negotiation is required when interacting with the dominant culture.

Respect cultural practices

Each culture has its own unique ways of communicating. What you consider rude, someone else may consider the usual way to communicate. Similarly, gestures and other body language that you consider usual, others may find offensive. The following are some examples of cultural differences you may find useful in helping to understand how to appropriately respond to people from different cultural backgrounds.

Personal space

A lot of people prefer to stand at least an arm's length from the person they are speaking with. If someone enters into their personal space, they may feel intimidated or uncomfortable. However, people from some cultures tend to stand closer and are quite comfortable with less personal space.

Touch

Different cultures have different 'rules' about who can touch whom. In most cases touching is inappropriate and, unless specifically required, for example, in the case of a distressed person needing assistance, touch should be avoided.

Eye contact

In some cultures, making direct eye contact can be seen as disrespectful, especially if it is prolonged. In some cultures, direct eye contact is avoided to show respect.

Hand gestures

Gestures that you may consider harmless may be considered offensive in some cultures; for example, the 'thumbs up' gesture that is commonly used to indicate 'okay' is considered rude in Middle Eastern cultures.

Nodding

For many people, nodding the head means 'yes', 'I understand' or 'I hear you'. However, in some cultures, it may mean 'no'. People from some cultures may nod their heads to avoid appearing disrespectful.

Smiling

Smiling can also be misinterpreted. While in Australian culture smiling generally means happiness, in some cultures it can also be used to demonstrate anger, embarrassment or sadness.

Polite conversation

Conversation is normally a two-way exchange where each person takes their turn at talking and listening. However, in some cultures it is acceptable for people to talk over each other. Conversation styles of different cultures may be direct or roundabout. In Indigenous Australian culture, among others, direct questioning is avoided.

Congruence

Some people do not consider it polite to disagree with someone they perceive to be in authority. Questions that have 'yes' or 'no' answers may then always get positive answers, regardless of the person's actual preference. This is often called gratuitous concurrence.

Questioning

Direct questioning may also be considered impolite and an indirect questioning style is more appropriate. Indirect questions tend to use words such as 'Can you tell me ...' before a closed question, allowing the other person the opportunity to say 'no'.

Accommodate for language differences

The 2011 Australian census showed that 20 per cent of Australians speak a language other than English at home. In certain areas or workforce sectors, the percentage is much higher. There are over 200 languages spoken in Australia, with 17 languages predominant.

You need to be aware of the English language comprehension levels of the people you support, and adjust your communication methods accordingly. Remember that a person may be able to speak English clearly but may not be able to read complex documents or terminology. Some people will need time to examine the language used or to have someone translate it for them.

Here are some tips on how to accommodate language differences.

Tips for accommodating language differences

- 1 Always check the information you want to convey has been correctly understood.
- 2 Make sure the person with support needs has the opportunity to ask questions, express concerns or consult an interpreter if necessary.
- 3 If you are preparing a message for several people, write a draft and have a typical audience member read it to check that your meaning is clear.
- 4 Written messages may sometimes be inadequate or inappropriate. You may need to telephone rather than email a message to someone who does not read English well.
- 5 When speaking with someone for whom English is a second language, speak clearly and slowly and do not shout. Remember that strong accents do not necessarily mean poor English skills.
- 6 Be careful when using slang or idioms. There are many expressions that are part of our everyday speech but do not have a literal meaning, and this can be very confusing to a person unfamiliar with colloquial English.
- 7 Avoid acronyms, even common ones like 'ASAP', and abbreviations like 'uni' or 'this arvo' unless you are sure the people you are talking to understand.

Communicate appropriately

Diversity in the workplace may make communication challenging between support workers and the people accessing their services. It is essential that you communicate in a way that responds positively to individual and cultural differences.

Clear and effective communication requires strong cognitive empathy, which is understanding how a person is feeling and thinking. Communicating effectively by understanding, reading and responding to the emotional cues in different cultures and environments underpins the important link between diversity and emotion in the modern workplace. You must learn to understand how the people you support perceive certain interactions and consider preparing your communications in a variety of formats to suit individual preferences.

Your ability to understand diverse perspectives quickly will contribute to the development of positive relationships with the people you support.

Here are some communication tips.

Communication tips

- ▶ Use active listening skills and verbal encouragers to show you are listening, and ask questions to clarify information.
- ▶ Ensure your body language gives the person your full attention and is appropriate according to their cultural preferences.
- ▶ When speaking, be patient, polite and use suitable industry terminology, avoiding jargon or colloquial language.
- ▶ Build rapport by showing empathy, interest and understanding in your conversations.
- ▶ Accommodate for language differences by obtaining a translator or using technology to translate business communications.
- ▶ When interacting with a person who is part of a group, be aware of your susceptibility to stereotype, as this could lead to false or negative assumptions about the individual.
- ▶ Be aware of negatively biased tendencies you may have and make a conscious effort to learn more about a particular group.
- ▶ Where appropriate, seek input from people representing diverse groups or perspectives during decision-making processes.
- ▶ Request peer feedback as to any potential patterns of preference you may be displaying in your communication technique.

Overcome potential barriers to communication

There are a range of potential barriers to effective communication with people in need of support. Practical concerns can be overcome when you respond intuitively and empathically, adjusting your own interpersonal communication style to meet the individual needs of the people you support.

Here are some examples of potential barriers to effective communication.

Educational barriers

Educational barriers include acting on stereotypes or false assumptions, literacy and numeracy deficiencies, or lack of knowledge about the subject. You should clarify a person's literacy levels before furthering your interaction by asking open questions. Communicate with people on their level and encourage them to ask questions when they don't understand.

Do not assume a person has a particular level of competency as you may inadvertently discourage further communication if the person does not want to admit their lack of knowledge. Conversely, try not to over explain concepts that the person has already grasped as this could indicate a lack of respect for their knowledge base.

Psychological and physical barriers

Psychological barriers includes fear of rejection or failure, an inability to self-motivate, anxiety, lack of confidence, failure to follow through, or a fear of public speaking. Psychological barriers are often overcome with professional intervention.

Physical barriers may include issues relating to a person's physical abilities, such as hearing loss, stuttering, blindness, or neurological disorders such as Tourette Syndrome, aphasia, dyslexia, ADHD or autism. You should ensure you have the tools and resources necessary to communicate effectively with people who have physical disabilities.

Cultural barriers

Cultural barriers may include cognitive, behavioural or emotional constraints. Cognitive constraints may include differences in the way we frame our world or perceive our environment. Role assumptions based on physical, personal, gender or age differences vary between cultures. Unless these assumptions are addressed the professional relationship may suffer.

Behavioural constraints may include differences between verbal and non-verbal approaches to communication. Different cultures interact in different ways. Make sure you use words and non-verbal cues that aren't going to be misunderstood or offensive to the person with support needs. Learn what is acceptable and what is not before you begin interacting with a particular person.

Emotional constraints may include differences in what we perceive to be acceptable levels of emotional display based on culture. While some cultures find certain displays of emotion unacceptable, other cultures will consider it to be a natural part of their communication process. Again, learn what is acceptable and what is not before you begin interacting with a particular person and make sure you adjust your own communication style accordingly.

Encoding barriers

Encoding relates to the process of selecting and organising symbols to convey meaning. If you are trying to communicate with a person who is preoccupied, emotional or distracted, you must recognise the ineffectiveness of the interaction. You might need to consider changing your approach, or mirroring some of the person's positive behaviours so that they can relate to you, and to what you are saying. During the first point of contact, it is essential that you build rapport before you start giving out information.

Information barriers

Providing too much or too little information about a subject can lead to difficulties in communicating with the people accessing your services. You should be well informed and equipped to answer any questions, or at least know where to source the information requested. Don't try to present information to a person that you do not fully understand yourself. This will be detrimental to the professional relationship as the person will be less likely to trust what you say from then on. Confusing the person will cause them to shut down and stop listening.

Physical distractions

Physical distractions relate to the environment in which you and a person are interacting. For example, if the environment is too noisy, the information you are trying to present may be lost, misunderstood or not fully received. Consider moving to a quieter and more suitable environment to ensure you can give, and receive, yours and the person's full attention.

Example

Respond to diverse people and behaviour

Mrs Kieselbach is an 80-year-old woman who was born in Germany. She moved to Australia with her husband when she was 28 years old. Mrs Kieselbach has moderate dementia, which is slowly worsening. Lin is the support worker who has visited Mrs Kieselbach twice a week for the past six months. Mrs Kieselbach has always enjoyed Lin's visits as they have common interests and have a lot to chat about. Over the last few weeks, Lin has noticed Mrs Kieselbach sometimes starts to talk to her in German instead of English. Lin has to remind her to speak English. She has also noticed that Mrs Kieselbach sometimes seems not to understand Lin, and Lin must repeat what she has said.



When Lin reports this to her supervisor, her supervisor suggests it is possible that as her dementia progresses, Mrs Kieselbach is losing her ability to speak English and she will gradually revert to German. To respond appropriately and with respect, Lin arranges to introduce a German-speaking worker to Mrs Kieselbach.

Practice task 3

1. Why is it important to respond appropriately to diverse people and behaviour in community services work?

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2. How can you work effectively with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people?

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3. Describe two ways you can communicate in a way that responds positively to individual and cultural differences.

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Click to complete Practice task 3

1D Discuss concerns or problems with supervisor

When providing a first point of contact for people with support needs, it is important that you discuss any concerns or problems with your supervisor promptly. Your organisation is likely to have specific procedures you must follow to report observations you have made. Whether you report your observations in writing or verbally depends on these procedures.

Remember that your role is to assist in developing a person's profile and identifying the kind of support they need. Only qualified staff such as psychologists and occupational therapists can make a full assessment of a person's situation or provide them with advice.



Make observations

A lot of useful information about a person's emotional, physical and psychological state can come from careful, accurate observations. This can help you, your colleagues, and your supervisor develop a thorough profile of the person with support needs and establish how best to support them. Consider the following.

Information from observation

As the first point of contact, you are often able to identify aspects of a person's emotional and physical needs. These may be things that are important to the person's wellbeing but which they are not able to articulate. Your observations of a person's behaviour can help you to determine whether to seek support from your supervisor or other staff in your own or other organisations. Also, your observations can be used to identify whether you, the person with support needs, or someone else is in an unsafe position.

Considerations for the observer

While it is important to look for all the verbal and nonverbal signs you can, avoid making assumptions, labelling the person's behaviours or making judgments based on your own values. Under the Privacy Act, a person has the right to access all personal information kept about them by your organisation, including any notes or observations about them. It is also very important that the observations you make are accurate. It is always best to make notes as soon as possible after you finish speaking with the person, while your observations are still fresh in your mind.

Report observations

An organisation is likely to have specific procedures you must follow when reporting observations that you make at the first point of contact. Whether you report your observations in writing or verbally depends on these procedures. If a person with support needs wants to use one of the services your organisation provides, you will usually complete a registration or intake form. In most cases the observations you make about the person when discussing the reason for their visit and the information you obtain while completing the form will help you work out which staff member they need to speak or meet with next.



Discuss concerns or problems

When discussing concerns or problems relating to a person you support, you must always use discretion. It is not appropriate to make notes about a person's behaviour in front of the person, nor speak about a person's needs in front of other service users or colleagues who do not require the information. In situations where the person with support needs is distressed or agitated, doing this may make things worse. Wait until you are away from the person to make any comments or observations.

The types of behaviours you might discuss with your supervisor are explored below.

Body language

Consider how the person appears. For example, do they appear angry or euphoric? What is their posture?

Given their circumstances, is their body language appropriate? (For example, someone in shock may not exhibit much emotion). Observe the person's verbal and nonverbal behaviour to identify differences between what they are saying and what they are doing (mixed messages).

Speech

- ▶ Does the person speak fast or slowly, loudly, shout, babble or ramble?
- ▶ Do they respond to questions with only yes/no or very brief responses?
- ▶ Are they slurring their words or repeating themselves?

Understanding and awareness

- ▶ Does the person seem able to concentrate, know where they are and who they are speaking with?
- ▶ Do they appear confused or disoriented?
- ▶ Do they speak to themselves or have conversations with someone who is not there? If so, note the tone of their speech and body language.

Thought process

- ▶ Is the person's conversation logical or do they change topics and are hard to follow?
- ▶ Does their behaviour make you question whether they are delusional or suicidal?
- ▶ Does it seem that the person feels persecuted? For example, do they feel that your agency is conspiring against them?

Potential abuse

- ▶ Do they have bruises, burns, cuts, broken bones or other wounds?
- ▶ Are they exhibiting aggressive or compliant behaviour?
- ▶ Do they constantly apologise?
- ▶ Is the person anxious?

Aggression and harm

To determine aggressive behaviour assess if the person is expressing hostility (verbally or physically) directed at themselves, you, others or property.

Signs of potential or actual self-harm include unexplained wounds, depression, and threatening suicide.

Avoid making assumptions

One of the key reasons to avoid making assumptions at the first point of contact is that the person may have a health issue that affects their behaviour. Many health concerns or conditions may only be revealed during an assessment of the person. A person may exhibit behaviour that is only part of the overall problem, so it is important to avoid assumptions. For example, a person who appears under the influence of alcohol may be experiencing an underlying personal issue that led them to use the alcohol in the first place. More examples follow.

Examples

- ▶ Some forms of epilepsy, which lead to seizures but do not involve full body convulsions (these can cause the sufferer to appear as though they are drug- or alcohol-affected).
- ▶ Parkinson's disease can cause people to shake and have tremors.
- ▶ Severe hearing loss can cause people to speak with a heavily slurred voice.

Example

Discuss concerns or problems with supervisor

Chen works in a first point of contact position in a local community service that provides support for homeless young people. Referrals can be made by the individual or by a service on behalf of the young person. Chen notices that a young girl is standing in the doorway. She looks nervous and ready to run away. Chen nods at her and mouths 'hello' with a smile, hoping to encourage her to feel comfortable about coming in. This strategy works and the girl approaches Chen.



The girl appears sullen, scared and anxious. She says in an angry and defiant voice that she is tired of the fights at home, hates her father and has run away, but is now sick of living on the streets. Chen notices that she sits with her legs crossed, her arms folded across her body and her whole body hunched up.

Chen wonders if perhaps the girl is being sexually abused and decides to report his observations and discuss his concerns with his supervisor. Chen's role is to determine whether people accessing the service are eligible for emergency housing. In this case, he feels that his observations warrant further support for the girl. When reporting his observations, he refers to his notes, where he recorded the following:

- ▶ Body language – closed (legs crossed, arms crossed across body, hunched up); thumb-chewing
- ▶ Demeanour – scared, sullen, anxious
- ▶ Nonverbal communication – angry/defiant appearance
- ▶ Verbal communication – swore, mentioned fights, says she hates her father.

Practice task 4

1. Why is it important to record observations about your first contact with a person accessing your service?

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2. Identify two concerns or problems about a person accessing your service that you might discuss with your supervisor.

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3. Why is it important to avoid making assumptions about a person with support needs? Provide one example.

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Click to complete Practice task 4

Summary

1. As the first point of contact, you have the responsibility of determining what kind of support the person needs. You may then be able to provide the support directly, refer them to someone within your own organisation, or to another organisation that is best placed to provide the support required.
2. It is important to be able to put people at ease while you are working with them. You need to be able to develop a positive relationship based on trust and respect. Having effective communication skills will help you to do this.
3. Your ability to recognise signs of distress can enable you to adjust your own behaviour, manage the situation and obtain support quickly.
4. Assertive communication is clear in its intent, involves standing up for your own rights and feelings, but respecting the rights and feelings of others at the same time.
5. Community services work is based on a set of core values. These include that every person has a right to be treated with respect and dignity, to equal opportunity and social justice, to be as self-determining and independent as possible, and that no person should be discriminated against on the grounds of race, ethnicity, colour, age, gender, sexual preference or disability.
6. When providing a first point of contact for people with support needs, it is important that you discuss any concerns or problems with your supervisor promptly.
7. Remember that your role is to assist in developing a person's profile and identifying the kind of support they need. Only qualified staff such as psychologists and occupational therapists can make a full assessment of a person's situation or provide them with advice.

Learning checkpoint 1

Greet and observe people

This learning checkpoint allows you to review your skills and knowledge in greeting and observing people who access the service.

Part A

1. Explain why it is important to greet people with support needs in a way that respects their individual values.

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2. Describe two ways a support worker should respond to a person who is being physically aggressive.

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3. Explain why it is important to respond appropriately to people with a cognitive impairment.

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4. What is assertive communication?

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5. List four conflict avoidance techniques.

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6. Describe two cultural practices a support worker may need to consider when providing information and service to people from different cultural backgrounds.

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7. Explain how a person's literacy levels affect the way a support worker provides information and service to the person.

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Part B

Read the case study, then answer the questions that follow.

Case study

Khoa is an Australian citizen of Vietnamese descent. Khoa and his family migrated to Australia in 1981 as part of a legal resettlement program. Khoa and his family integrated into a strong Vietnamese Australia community in Sydney's western suburbs where they have lived ever since. Khoa and his family speak Vietnamese in the home and amongst their Vietnamese family and friends. While Khoa's children speak fluent English due to their Australian education, Khoa and his wife have only a basic understanding of the language and heavily rely on their children to translate for them.

Khoa's wife, Ly, has recently been diagnosed with dementia. Khoa is unsure of how to care for Ly effectively and with Ly, visits the local community health centre for assistance. Nancy is the community health nurse rostered on that day and warmly greets Khoa and Ly as they arrive to the centre. In broken, but understandable English, Khoa explains Ly's diagnosis and tells Nancy that he requires some assistance caring for Ly in their family home. Nancy notices that Ly looks confused, frightened and disoriented. While Nancy discusses Ly's care needs with Khoa, Ly wanders around the reception area and doesn't participate in the conversation.

1. How should Nancy respond to Khoa's linguistic differences to ensure he understands the information provided to him?

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2. How should Nancy respond to Ly's individual needs to ensure she understands the information provided to her?

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3. Identify any concerns or problems that Nancy may need to discuss with her supervisor.

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Topic 2

In this topic you will learn how to:

2A Collect and document information

2B Discuss reasons for contact with the service

2C Explain and uphold rights and responsibilities of the person with support needs

Collect routine information

Some people with support needs will want general information that may be available in a brochure. Others may want an application form or timetable for activities provided by your service. People with support needs may require access to your service or a referral to someone else in your own or another organisation; for example, to a counsellor.

Your organisation's policies and procedures can help you determine whether all contacts need to be logged. Information collected from people should only relate to what is needed. It is important that people accessing your service understand why the information is being collected and what will be done with it. The people accessing your service should also be advised of their rights relating to confidentiality and accessing their own records.

2A Collect and document information

As a support worker, your role is to collect and document identifying information about the people accessing your service, in accordance with organisation and confidentiality requirements. Your role and the structure of your service determine what information you are required to collect.

There is federal and state government legislation that protects the rights of people in need of support and allows them to access their health and personal information. This includes information kept in a person's individual care plan and records, progress notes, personal details shared with you by service users or others, communication from outside stakeholders and medical information from a doctor. The way your organisation manages the personal information you collect must respect and comply with the privacy and confidentiality rights of service users.



When you commence working in any organisation you will receive induction/orientation training that includes information about your organisation's policies and procedures. If you are in doubt about what policy and procedure you should follow or if you are unsure about how to support a person, speak to your supervisor.

Organisational policies and procedures

No matter what kind of service you work for, the information you collect should be guided by your organisation's policies, procedures, protocols and guidelines.

These documents vary between organisations because they reflect the individual organisation's values and goals, as well as its legal and ethical framework. Policies and procedures may be formally documented, as in the case with large organisations, or can be informal practices used by a small organisation or individual operators.

Informal practices are those that are accepted practice within an organisation though they may not be documented anywhere. They are usually passed on via demonstration, discussion, verbal instruction or buddy systems.

Policies, procedures, protocols and guidelines are described here.

Policies

Policies explain how you are expected to act in regard to privacy and confidentiality, hazard reporting, work health and safety, rights and responsibilities, conditions of employment and hours of work, incident and accident reporting, access and equity, and handling complaints.

Policies help you make decisions about the way you undertake your duties, and ensure consistency in the way things are done by every worker.

Examples of organisation policies include those related to:

- ▶ work health and safety
- ▶ record keeping
- ▶ conduct and ethical behaviour.

Procedures

Procedures describe the steps you take when carrying out a task in order to make the policies work. They give you step-by-step instructions for each task, and guide you when you are unsure of what to do.

These might be displayed on notice boards, in an induction kit or in a file available to all workers.

Examples of common procedures include:

- ▶ assessment procedures
- ▶ evacuation procedures
- ▶ filing procedures.

Protocols

Protocols relate to the code of practice and ethical behaviour expected when carrying out your duties. They help you comply with ethical legislation.

An organisation may have protocols for:

- ▶ communicating with particular groups of people in need of support
- ▶ respecting cultural diversity
- ▶ responding to aggressive behaviours.

Guidelines

Guidelines are often attached to procedures and set the recommendations for best practice when completing a particular work task. They can assist you to follow current practices and continue to improve.

Best practice guidelines may relate to:

- ▶ the provision of care and support
- ▶ respecting others in the workplace
- ▶ ensuring information and services provided are culturally appropriate, equitable and holistic.

Record-keeping policies and procedures

Your organisation's policies and procedures must address how relevant documents are to be kept, and how team members can access, inspect, and copy them. There are many sources of record-keeping responsibilities. For example, there can be particular laws around health records, records relating to disputes, or records relating to children in care.

You could keep a register of documents that must be collected and stored to ensure you and your team members meet your legal record keeping obligations.



Community services organisations can be required to keep records for:

- ▶ Commonwealth and state laws
- ▶ funding agreements
- ▶ quality standards.

Personal information handling practices

The types of information your organisation collects and holds includes personal information and health information about users of your service, and personal information about workers and contractors.

Personal information handling practices will vary depending on your organisation but should address the following aspects.

Types of information

Depending on the context of your service, individuals may choose to deal with you anonymously (or by providing a pseudonym) in which case their details will not be subject to privacy laws. If a person does identify themselves, you will usually collect their name, age, gender, contact details, some medical history, their symptoms (if applicable), ethnic background, sexual practice, demographic information, language requirements, next of kin or emergency contact details, allergies, reasons for accessing the service, or sources of service referrals. You may also record information about health or community services to be provided to the person in the future.

Collection methods

Your organisation will usually collect information directly from a person when they use your services, or when they send you an email, fax, letter, or complete an online or paper form. You may sometimes collect personal information from a third party, such as a residential care facility who is managing a person's care, or from family members contacting your organisation on a person's behalf. If someone calls on behalf of a person in need of support, you must collect the caller's name and contact details.

Recording information

All consultations with your organisation must be recorded in a manual or electronic database. Any information collected as a result of a person contacting your organisation is considered personal information.

Maintaining records

Your organisation should have processes in place to ensure that records of personal information remain accurate, complete and up to date, including by verifying the information with the person each time they use your services, or from other sources. The records are retained for up to 25 years as is usual with health information.

Using personal information

Your organisation will collect, store, use and disclose personal information for the following reasons:

- ▶ the provision of information on, and supporting access to, relevant support and care services for individuals
- ▶ maintenance of a central service user record to improve service delivery
- ▶ management of the aged care system by the Commonwealth government
- ▶ assisting government departments to provide health services or address issues raised by service users
- ▶ matching service delivery data with health information for service improvement
- ▶ compilation and analysis of statistics relevant to public health and safety
- ▶ compliance with legal obligations.

Sharing personal information

Your organisation may share relevant information with other health services and/or government agencies in the event of a national or jurisdictional health disaster, in order that an appropriate health response can be provided.

Personal information may also be used to make follow up calls to service users for feedback on their satisfaction with service delivery.

Disclosing personal information

Personal information will generally not be disclosed to anyone except as described in your organisation's privacy statement, where the person consents to a particular disclosure, or where the identifying data is removed.

There may be other disclosures where the person would reasonably expect the disclosure to occur. When information is disclosed to third parties, your organisation should make all reasonable efforts to ensure you disclose only relevant information and that it is accurate, complete and current.

Protecting personal information

Your organisation will have systems and procedures in place to protect personal information from misuse and loss, and from unauthorised access, modification or disclosure.

Formal intake

You need to follow your organisation's policies and procedures relating to the formal intake process. A formal intake procedure is the way information is gathered in an interview to determine eligibility for support from your service (which may include direct support or referral to another service). Once you have determined that eligibility requirements are met, the person with support needs is then likely to be referred to a duty officer, counsellor or other qualified person who will manage further assessment of the person's needs, develop an individual plan and determine what interventions and support are required, including referrals.



In some services, the first point of contact person may be a qualified counsellor, triage worker or other health care professional. In this case, they may continue, after gathering basic information, to conduct a more thorough assessment of the person's support needs.

Collect complete and accurate information

The information you collect will determine if your organisation can provide a suitable service to a person with support needs; that is, whether the person meets the eligibility criteria. It also will determine how quickly a service or referral can be provided and the type of service or referral needed. It is important, therefore, that the information you collect is accurate, complete and not affected by assumptions. Consider the following.

Inform the person

Appropriate questioning skills are critical to getting the most complete and accurate information possible when filling out a person's intake form. Interviewing a person for personal information includes informing them of their rights to confidentiality of the information they give. It is also important to explain how the information will be used by your organisation.

Methods of questioning

The questions you need to ask may not help to establish good rapport with a person. Remember that people with support needs may be vulnerable or upset, or have had poor relations with community services. Depending on the circumstances, you may wish to collect information in the course of your conversation, rather than using questioning techniques at the outset.

Record information

You may be required to enter the information you collect directly into your organisation's database or onto a paper form. You may also be required to complete a referrals log. This is a log where referrals – either self-referrals or referrals from other services – are logged.

The importance of accuracy

Information you collect needs to be accurate and legible, so as not to put service users or others in your organisation at a disadvantage. For example, if you collect a telephone number and accidentally transpose figures, an assessment officer or case manager may not be able to contact the person. In the meantime, the person may not be receiving the support they require. The following outlines methods to ensure accurate personal information is recorded and maintained when entering information into a computer-based system.

Ensure accuracy of recorded information

- ▶ When transferring details from a handwritten document, make sure that the spelling of names, addresses and other details is correct.
- ▶ Check details with the person present while showing them what you are entering on the screen.
- ▶ When altering information from a previous entry for the person, ensure the original information is saved first.
- ▶ Personal records often have to be kept for specified periods under law.

Privacy, confidentiality and disclosure

When discussing a person's situation, always be aware of maintaining their privacy. You must protect confidential details. You always need the person's consent if you wish to talk about their situation. Often people are happy to give their consent because they know you want to help.

Maintaining confidentiality is part of respecting a person's privacy and individual rights. In practice, confidentiality means not discussing an individual's personal information unless they have given their consent for this to happen. There are exceptional circumstances that do enable you to disclose private information but this is generally only when you become aware that someone may be harmed.



You can read more about privacy, confidentiality and disclosure at the following sites:

- ▶ <http://aspirelr.link/aacqa-privacy-policy>
- ▶ <http://aspirelr.link/law-handbook-privacy-confidentiality>

Collection, use and storage of information

On 12 March 2014, the Australian Privacy Principles (APPs) replaced the National Privacy Principles and Information Privacy Principles and apply to organisations, and Australian Government (and Norfolk Island Government) agencies.

There are now 13 national privacy principles that apply to the collection, use and storage of personal information. Here is further information about how to handle personal information.

National Privacy Principles

- 1 Open and transparent management of personal information**
Ensures that organisations manage personal information in an open and transparent way.
- 2 Anonymity and pseudonymity**
Requires organisations to give individuals the option of not identifying themselves, or of using a pseudonym. Some exceptions apply.
- 3 Collection of solicited personal information**
Outlines when an organisation can collect personal information that is solicited. It applies higher standards to the collection of 'sensitive' information.
- 4 Dealing with unsolicited personal information**
Outlines how organisations must deal with unsolicited personal information.
- 5 Notification of the collection of personal information**
Outlines when and in what circumstances an organisation that collects personal information must notify an individual of certain matters.
- 6 Use or disclosure of personal information**
Outlines the circumstances in which an organisation may use or disclose personal information that it holds.
- 7 Direct marketing**
An organisation may only use or disclose personal information for direct marketing purposes if certain conditions are met.
- 8 Cross-border disclosure of personal information**
Outlines the steps an organisation must take to protect personal information before it is disclosed overseas.
- 9 Adoption, use or disclosure of government-related identifiers**
Outlines the limited circumstances when an organisation may adopt a government-related identifier of an individual as its own identifier, or use or disclose a government-related identifier of an individual.
- 10 Quality of personal information**
An organisation must take reasonable steps to ensure the personal information it collects is accurate, up to date and complete.

- 11 Security of personal information**
 An organisation must take reasonable steps to protect personal information it holds from misuse, interference and loss, and from unauthorised access, modification or disclosure. An entity has obligations to destroy or de-identify personal information in certain circumstances.
- 12 Access to personal information and 13 Correction of personal information**
 Outlines an organisation’s obligations when an individual requests to be given access to personal information held about them by the organisation.
- 13 Correction of personal information**
 Outlines an organisation’s obligations in relation to correcting the personal information it holds about individuals.

Safeguard confidential information

It is important to maintain the confidentiality of your service users and ensure systems are in place to protect their personal information. A person’s record is highly confidential and you may be required to sign a confidentiality agreement when you are employed, saying you will not divulge any information you have acquired during or after your involvement with service users unless legally required to do so.

Facilities or agencies holding personal information must take all reasonable steps to safeguard security. Make every effort to ensure that a person’s trust is not abused in any way.

Access to information should be restricted to the appropriate workers on a need-to-know basis. In some circumstances, service users may request that certain information is not to be shared with family, carers, friends or their advocate. It is essential that you adhere to their request.

To help protect the interests of the person accessing the service, follow the guidelines listed here.

- Protect personal information**
- ▶ Keep personal information safe to prevent unauthorised access, loss, modification, disclosure or other misuse.
 - ▶ Ensure only authorised personnel have access to personal information.
 - ▶ Do not pass on information read in reports or entrusted to people who are not entitled to it.
 - ▶ Be discreet when speaking on the telephone as private conversations can be easily overheard.
 - ▶ Never provide personal information about a person over the phone without prior permission.
 - ▶ Take care not to discuss service users with anyone else unless it is in the person’s best interests.
 - ▶ Take all reasonable steps when transmitting personal information by email or fax, including information using data encryption, to ensure its safety, integrity and confidentiality.

- ▶ Ensure information that is no longer required is returned to the place of origin or disposed of in the correct manner.
- ▶ Dispose of confidential information appropriately, by using a shredding machine or placing the information into a secured recycling bin for appropriate disposal.
- ▶ If you are using a person as an example in your studies, ensure you do not reveal their name or other identifying information.

Disclosure of information

There are some instances in which you are permitted to disclose information as part of your duties. For example, if the person in need of support is being referred for medical treatment, the hospital, specialist or doctor needs to know the person's medical history, allergies and other personal details.

You may be required to disclose private or confidential information when:

- ▶ the person would reasonably expect the disclosure to occur, for example, quality assurance processes
- ▶ you are authorised or compelled by law to disclose
- ▶ it will prevent or lessen a serious threat to someone's life, health or safety or a threat to public health and safety
- ▶ it is required for public health surveillance where symptoms are mapped geographically to see if patterns arise as an early warning system identifying epidemics
- ▶ it is necessary as part of the establishment or defence of a legal claim
- ▶ it is requested by an enforcement agency such as the police
- ▶ it is a necessary part of an investigation following a complaint, accident or incident
- ▶ there is a change of service provider in which case the personal information is transferred to a new organisation.

Mandatory reporting

You and your work colleagues should be able to recognise indicators of abuse, distress or other issues of concern regarding a person's treatment and safety. You should clearly document what you have seen or heard and verbally report the matter to senior management immediately.

If a work colleague reports a situation to you, make sure you collect as many details as possible. Depending on the circumstances, you may need to take immediate action to protect the person's safety or provide information and advice to the worker about the steps they need to follow to address the situation within legislative and organisation protocols.



Situations that should be reported

Inform workers that it is important to report to you or other senior staff any signs of abuse or neglect.

Examples of situations that should be reported include when:

- ▶ a person with support needs shows a change in behaviour or mood or other signs that may indicate abuse
- ▶ a person with support needs appears apprehensive about a particular person, or is receiving inappropriate treatment, e.g. intimidation
- ▶ a person with support needs discloses that they are being abused or harmed by another person
- ▶ a person such as a family member or friend reports that they have observed, or suspect, abuse
- ▶ a family member or carer is not addressing the financial, health or medical needs of a person with support needs.

Reporting protocols

Your organisation should have protocols in place for reporting actual or suspected abuse and neglect. It is important that all work colleagues are aware of and follow these guidelines.

Inform

- ▶ Inform work colleagues about the reporting requirements

Arrange training when necessary

- ▶ Ensure work colleagues understand the various types of abuse and are familiar with indicators of these.

Report

- ▶ Report suspected abuse to relevant people or authorities such as senior management, the Aged Care Complaints Investigation Scheme or other relevant authorities, such as the National Disability Abuse and Neglect Hotline, the relevant State Guardianship and Administration Board or Tribunal, the relevant state or territory Child Protection Agency or the Commonwealth or state Ombudsman.

Keep records

- ▶ Keep records of all incidents involving allegations or suspicions of reportable assaults.

Ensure confidentiality

- ▶ Ensure work colleagues are protected from repercussions from making reports about suspected abuse by keeping their identity confidential.

Statutory reporting requirements

As a support worker, you must be aware of the specific statutory reporting requirements relevant to your area of work.

Mandatory reporting for suspected abuse or neglect of a child

Each state and territory has their own child protection legislation that contains varying requirements for who is mandated to report child abuse and what type of abuse must be reported. For example, in the ACT, sexual and physical abuse must be reported, but not neglect or emotional abuse. In NSW, all forms of abuse, including exposure to family violence, must be reported.

Managers, including both paid employees and volunteers, who supervise those providing direct services to children are mandated to report. Reports are made to the relevant child protection authority in each state or territory.

For more information on who is legally required to report suspected child abuse or neglect in Australia refer to the Australian Institute of Family Studies Resource sheet, visit the following website:

- ▶ <http://aspirelr.link/mandatory-reporting-child-abuse>

Compulsory reporting for approved providers of residential aged care

Providers of residential aged care must identify, report, and respond to allegations of assault in residential aged care. Compulsory reporting requirements involve workers:

- ▶ reporting incidents involving alleged or suspected reportable assaults to the Police and to the Department of Social Services
- ▶ taking reasonable measures to ensure workers report any suspicions or allegations of reportable assaults to the approved provider, authorised person, the police, or the Department.

The compulsory reporting requirements are one part of an approved provider's responsibilities under the *Aged Care Act 1997* (Cth) to provide a safe and secure environment. For more information, refer to the Department of Social Services' Compulsory Reporting Guidelines for Approved Providers of Residential Aged Care.

Reporting requirements for disability service providers

Service providers that are funded under the National Disability Agreement are required under their funding arrangements to report key information about their service users on an ongoing basis.

In certain circumstances disability service organisations are required to report on individual plans.

Written information

Remember that any written documents, form, emails or service user records are permanent and legal documents. For this reason, you should be very particular in the way you record written information in your workplace. Care documentation is recognised as evidence in a court of law.

When writing confidential documents, write clearly and legibly in black or blue pen. Do not use liquid paper; if you need to correct errors, draw a line through the error and initial it. Always double-check the name of the service user or resident you are writing about.

Make sure completed documents are filed appropriately, such as in a locked filing cabinet or a password-protected file.

The types of documentation a manager may need to prepare or manage include:

- ▶ care plans
- ▶ care records
- ▶ handover sheets
- ▶ progress notes
- ▶ communication books
- ▶ incident or accident reports
- ▶ assessment tools
- ▶ admission and discharge reports
- ▶ time sheets
- ▶ personnel files.

Electronic and manual record keeping

While some organisations prefer manual record-keeping systems, most organisations use an electronic record-keeping system, making it easier to capture information, generate reports and meet legal and taxation reporting requirements.

When setting up a record-keeping system in your organisation, you must consider the advantages and limitations of electronic versus manual systems, described below, and decide what is most appropriate for the needs of your organisation.

Electronic record keeping

Most organisations use accounting software programs to simplify electronic record keeping and produce reports. Electronic record keeping allows you to:

- ▶ record financial transactions, including income, expenses and payments to workers
- ▶ use less storage space
- ▶ easily generate employee pay records or inventory reports
- ▶ keep up with the latest tax rates, laws and rulings
- ▶ allows multiple people to access, update and makes notes to records in real time
- ▶ backs up records and keeps them safe in case of fire or theft.

Manual record keeping

Some organisations may want to use a simple, paper-based record keeping system. The advantages of manual record keeping include that:

- ▶ it is less expensive to set up
- ▶ correcting entries is made easier as opposed to electronic systems that can leave complicated audit trails
- ▶ the risk of data corruption is much less
- ▶ the risk of data loss is much less, especially if records are stored in a fire-proof environment
- ▶ issues with duplicate copies of the same records are avoided
- ▶ the process is simple and does not require training in sophisticated software.

Record-keeping risks

There are legal and financial consequences should your organisation fail to comply with record keeping requirements of tax, business and privacy laws. More information is below.

Lost or damaged records

- ▶ Recovering essential organisational records if they have been lost, damaged, destroyed or stolen, will assist you to re-establish organisational operations and service delivery.

You can reconstruct them by researching your past transactions or requesting information from a range of sources, such as the ATO, your bank, service users, suppliers, or other service providers.

Privacy and security

- ▶ Australian privacy laws apply to the collection, use and storage of personal information. You must apply the national privacy principles to your record-keeping system.

New technologies make it easier to access, transmit and misuse personal information. Pay particular attention to securing online and electronic records. Develop a privacy policy and train your team members to implement it.

Example

Collect and document information

Ramesh is a support worker in an organisation that provides support to help people overcome addiction. Jodi comes into the service and Ramesh notices that she appears quite anxious. He welcomes her and asks how he can help her. Jodi explains that she is addicted to alcohol and wants help. Ramesh provides general information about the services. He observes that Jodi is fidgeting and appears unable to sit still, so he makes sure he provides general information at first without going into too much detail.



He explains the support that the organisation provides and gives Jodi time to ask questions and then asks if he can take her details and make an appointment for her to see a specialist so that they can undertake an assessment.

Jodie agrees and Ramesh collects her details including age, gender, family situation, services requested and reason for request of the service. He makes sure that Jodi understands why he is collecting information and how the information will be used. He also explains that she has the right to request access to her information at any time.

Practice task 5

1. Identify and describe three types of personal information collected from people accessing community services.

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2. Describe two ways that personal information is collected.

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3. Describe two ways that support workers can ensure personal information is accurate.

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Click to complete Practice task 5

2B Discuss reasons for contact with the service

Support workers in first point of contact roles are responsible for collecting sufficient information to help them determine what each person's needs are. Community services is a very broad field and people may approach your organisation for any number of reasons. Often people understand they need help, but may be unaware of the types of services available. Sometimes people know exactly what they want or need and sometimes they do not. Observation, listening and questioning skills are useful for better understanding people's needs. The importance of understanding what exactly a person requires is outlined below.

Understand needs

Your role is to understand a person's needs and to help them clarify their goals. This may seem straightforward; for example, a person wants to make an appointment to see someone in your service. Without clarifying the person's needs, you cannot know whether the person with whom they seek an appointment is the best person to provide support. In addition, the person may need to meet eligibility criteria to receive support from your organisation.

Clarify needs

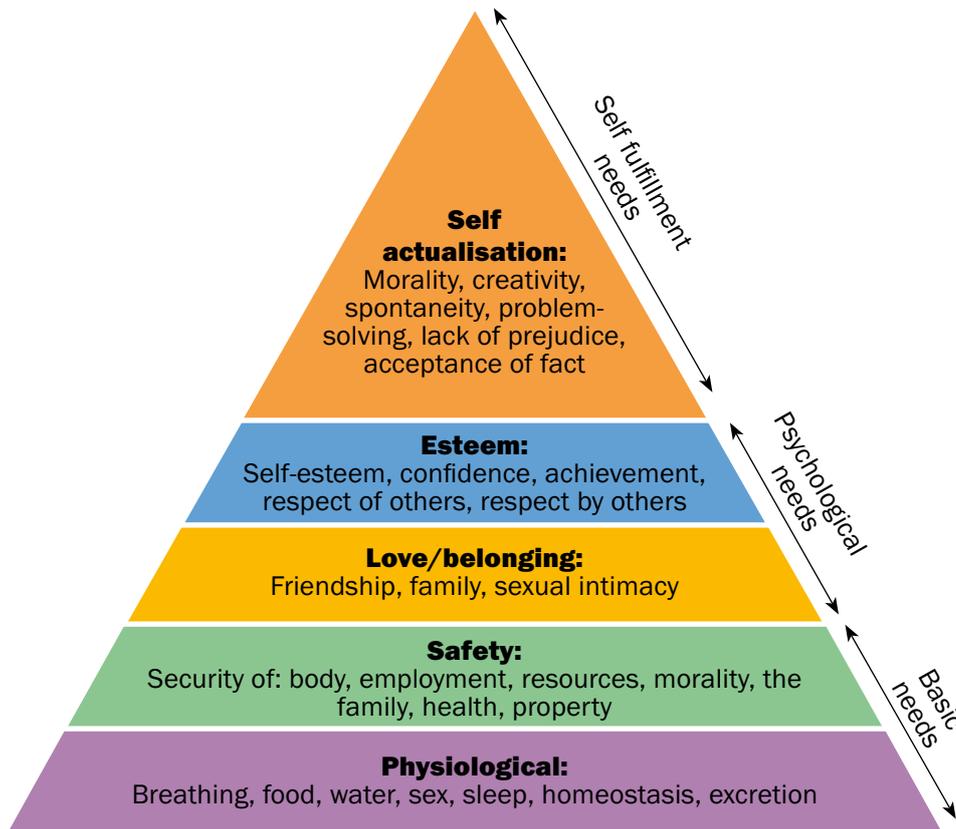
A person may present with an overt need; for example, they may ask for help to find employment. However, without taking the time to understand their needs better, you may not realise that they have depression or a drug addiction that needs to be addressed so that they can be successful in their job search. A person may have many different needs and it may sometimes be difficult to understand which need should be addressed first.

Maslow's hierarchy of needs

Abraham Maslow, an American psychologist, developed a hierarchy of needs that attempts to explain and prioritise the needs of people. Maslow's hierarchy is a useful tool that you can use to prioritise the person's needs.

People have many needs, including survival-related needs, such as food and safety, and the need to be the best person they can be. People often attempt to satisfy different needs at the same time. However, when a basic need is not being met, people may abandon more complex needs; for example, a person who is homeless may seek shelter before attempting to satisfy the need for respect. The following illustrates the hierarchy of needs.





Confirm the reason for contact

People may contact your service because they want support for themselves or someone they know. They may want information or an appointment to see someone in your organisation or some other organisation. Understanding the reason for a person's contact can be difficult, as they may not be able to articulate their need; for example, because of drug use or a mental disability. Similarly, a person may discuss one particular aspect of support they are seeking, without mentioning other support needs. Here are some tips for confirming reasons for contact.

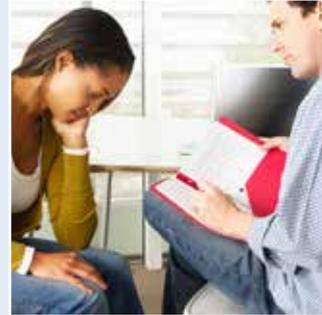
Tips for confirming reasons for contact

- ▶ Be aware of the person's communication style; for example, they may be cooperative or demanding.
- ▶ Ensure that communication is two-way, so that both you and the person are constantly confirming understanding.
- ▶ Ask questions to clarify the information provided, ensuring that you understand correctly and can determine additional needs.
- ▶ Ask the person what their expectations are as this can help to clarify the reason for their contact.
- ▶ Use open questions to probe the person for additional information if necessary.
- ▶ Follow your organisation's policies and procedures.

Example

Discuss reasons for contact with the service

Romina has come into a council shop front office. Tung, a community services worker for the local council, finds out as much as he can about Romina. She is 18 years old and ran away from home when she was 16. Although she does not tell him about her estranged family, she does tell him that she left school without finishing Year 12, had always loved school and wanted to go to university, but now cannot because she must work. Tung explains that there are multiple pathways into university – she could do a TAFE course and then progress to university. He suggests that maybe she could live with a relative while she was studying.



As he speaks, he notices that Romina becomes very quiet and he asks her if she's okay. Romina starts to cry and explains that she has left all her school documentation at home. She feels she cannot go back because her parents would never accept her, but she misses her family. Tung understands that not all aspects of a person's life can be dealt with at one time. He knows that even though Romina misses her family, her most pressing need, given that she feels she cannot go home, is to find safe shelter. He tells her that they should prioritise finding her accommodation before returning to the service later to discuss how she can work while studying. He also suggests that at some point they may be able to discuss counselling with her family to see if reconciliation is possible.

Practice task 6

1. Explain why it is important for support workers to discuss a person's reasons for contacting the service.

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2. Provide two tips for confirming a person's reasons for contacting your service.

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Click to complete Practice task 6

2C Explain and uphold rights and responsibilities of the person with support needs

All people with support needs have the right to privacy, to be treated with dignity and respect, and to be provided with the information and support they require to be able to make informed decisions. These rights are outlined within your organisation's policies and procedures, with which you must comply. There are also some rights specifically put in place by legislation. Workers also have rights and responsibilities.

Rights of service users

As a support worker, you are responsible for explaining and upholding the rights and responsibilities of the people accessing your services.

Support workers must confirm that service users understand their rights and responsibilities by asking questions, requesting the service user to sign any relevant policies, procedures, codes or service agreements, or by providing the person with written materials about the services provided.

The rights of service users are described below.

The right to dignity

Your service users have the right to be spoken to and treated with respect and concern for their feelings and entitlements. Maintaining a person's dignity means not talking down to them and having regard for their individual, cultural and religious rights.

People should be able to retain their personal, civic, legal and consumer rights and be assisted to achieve active control of their own lives within the community. Factors that contribute to a person's dignity include a sense of control, the capacity to communicate, recognising friends and family members, having adequate pain and symptom management, and being continent.

It is also important to avoid inappropriate prolongation of dying; this is addressed when care teams take a palliative approach, which enhances the person's dignity and their quality of life.

The right to privacy

You need to respect and value the service user's privacy. Privacy can be applied to a person's physical environment and possessions, their physical and bodily needs, and their personal relationships, information and needs. Privacy relates to many areas including the right not to be watched, listened to, or reported upon without consent and not to be the focus of uninvited public attention. Privacy is protected by legislation as well as common law.

Your service users also have a right to expect that their personal information will remain private and secure. They have the right to access their own health and personal information. This includes all care records and personal information shared with you by the person and others, as well as communications from other agencies and medical information from health professionals.

The right to confidentiality

Your service users entrust a great deal of information to community services workers. In return, you must make every effort to ensure this trust is not abused in any way. Help protect the interests of people in need of support by not passing on information to others who are not entitled to receive it, or discuss service users outside of the work setting.

Remember to file personal documents as soon as you have finished with them and destroy records appropriately.

The right to make an informed choice

You must provide relevant and sufficient information to people in need of support so they can make decisions and choices based on the correct information provided to them. People have the right to be involved in decision making that affects their care and wellbeing. They must be given enough information that allows them to make an informed choice. You should encourage service users or their representatives to take responsibility for their actions and choices, and choose a service or care plan that best meets their needs and preferences.

You will need to focus on the needs and preferences of the person and their carer, families or advocate. Take account of any lifestyle choices, as well as cultural, linguistic and religious preferences. Encourage the involvement of the person in the planning, development and management of assessment service to ensure they understand and are able to exercise their rights.

The right to access services

People in need of support should have access to the services they need and receive equal treatment for equal need in a non-discriminatory manner, regardless of their gender, social circumstances, ethnic and cultural backgrounds, or disability.

According to the *Home and Community Care Act 1985* (Cth), special services to improve access and equity must be provided to:

- ▶ Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people
- ▶ people from culturally and linguistically diverse communities
- ▶ people who live in rural and remote communities
- ▶ people who are financially disadvantaged
- ▶ war veterans.

The Commonwealth Department of Human Services provides comprehensive information for older people, people with disabilities and those who provide care and services to others. The Department provides free and confidential information on community aged care, disability and other support services available across Australia.

The right to have social needs met

You must recognise that people in need of support are human beings with social needs. For example, if you work in aged care, you and your team members should:

- ▶ support the rights of married couples to live a married life
- ▶ provide ease of access for families and other visitors with due regard for the wishes of service users
- ▶ recognise the needs of residents for social contact and provide opportunities for social interaction, including opportunities for developing new friendships within the residential care and the community.

The right to freedom of association

Freedom of association is a principle contained in human rights conventions. The objective is to ensure people are able to meet and interact freely, without the interference of the state, or of others. You and your team members must not threaten, organise or take any action that applies undue pressure on another person. It is illegal to discriminate, threaten or otherwise victimise another person. People have the right to associate with whomever they wish and should be provided with the opportunity to do so.

The right to freedom of expression

All service users and their carers, friends or family have the right to participate in decisions about the service they receive. For example, if a person in need of support would like to collaborate with you or one of your team members, in developing their care plan, they must be provided with the opportunity to express their ideas, opinions, queries and concerns. You should listen carefully to their needs and preferences to ensure their rights are upheld. Make sure you allow people to express themselves without judgment.

The right to make a complaint

All service users have the right to complain if they are dissatisfied with the way care is provided or have concerns regarding a certain aspect of the service, such as catering, financial matters, hygiene, security, activities, choice, comfort and/or safety.

A complaints procedure is a legislative requirement that all organisations must comply with. The procedure allows the person to exercise their rights and also provides your organisation with useful feedback about the appropriateness of the service you provide. Everyone in your organisation should be aware of the complaints procedure. Complaints should be dealt with fairly and promptly and without fear of repercussions.

The right to an agreed standard of care

People in need of support expect your organisation's service standards to:

- ▶ be reliable and dependable
- ▶ adhere to legislative requirements
- ▶ be inclusive of service user participation and collaboration
- ▶ be affordable and accessible
- ▶ be fair in regard to rights and responsibilities
- ▶ be individualised to each person and their particular needs.

Responsibilities of service users

People in need of support from the service you provide have legal and ethical responsibilities they must adhere to in order to access and continue using your service.

They also have a responsibility to uphold the rights of workers and visitors to your organisation. The following are examples of service user responsibilities.

Provide information

- ▶ A service user has a responsibility to provide correct and necessary information to the best of their ability. If you feel a person has not revealed adequate or complete information, explain to them in clear terms why you need the information and continue to ask questions until you are confident that you have the information required.

Keep appointments

- ▶ A service user has a responsibility to keep appointments made by them or by your service on their behalf, or to notify you of their inability to attend where relevant. Service users should be provided with information about who to contact if they cannot attend appointments and about any financial penalties or other consequences that may be imposed.

Follow safety procedures

- ▶ Service users have a responsibility to observe safety procedures in order to ensure their own safety and the safety of others including workers, other service users and visitors to the organisation. This includes following emergency evacuation procedures and observing no-smoking signs.

Responsibilities of support workers

In every organisation, whether it is public or private, small or large, everyone has rights and responsibilities.

One of the most important ways to show a person that you respect them and genuinely want to give them support is to meet the responsibilities owed to them. You can do this by working to the following principles.

Rights

Support workers have the right to:

- ▶ a safe workplace
- ▶ a workplace free from harassment and discrimination
- ▶ access to a grievance (complaint) process
- ▶ wages in accordance with the award rates
- ▶ clear direction of their duties
- ▶ receive advice and training
- ▶ not be unfairly dismissed.

Responsibilities

Support workers have a responsibility to:

- ▶ maintain the rights of service users and report any breaches if these rights are not being upheld
- ▶ follow organisational policies and procedures
- ▶ understand and work within the boundaries of the job description and level of authority
- ▶ not behave or act in any way that may negatively affect a service user, other workers, or visitors to the organisation
- ▶ comply with a duty of care
- ▶ be competent and work within level of training
- ▶ maintain confidentiality of business information and privacy of personal information
- ▶ follow safety procedures and practices and work in a safe manner at all times
- ▶ be willing to learn and train in new skills
- ▶ respect cultural and social diversity.

Example

Explain and uphold rights and responsibilities of the person with support needs

Allira works in an organisation that provides general information to people about health and related services. A service user, Jacob, has requested to see his records. Allira understands that Jacob has a right to see his records and refers to the organisation’s policies and procedures to determine what she needs to do to meet his request. She explains the policy to Jacob, ensures that he receives the document ‘Request to view records’ and asks if he would like to take it home to complete or whether he would like to complete it immediately and give it to her to action.



Once Jacob has returned the completed form, Allira explains the next steps and confirms that the records officer will contact him within two days. She tells Jacob that he is welcome to contact her at any time and gives him her business card.

Practice task 7

1. Explain a person’s right to access services.

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2. Describe two responsibilities of service users.

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3. Identify two responsibilities of support workers.

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Click to complete Practice task 7

Summary

1. As a support worker, your role is to collect and document identifying information about the people accessing your service, in accordance with organisational and confidentiality requirements.
2. The types of information your organisation collects and holds includes personal information and health information about users of your service, and personal information about employees and contractors.
3. Support workers in first point of contact roles are responsible for collecting sufficient information to help them determine what each person's needs are.
4. The people accessing your service should also be advised of their rights relating to confidentiality and accessing their own records.
5. Your service users have the right to be spoken to and treated with respect and concern for their feelings and entitlements.
6. One of the most important ways to show a service user that you respect them and genuinely want to give them support is to meet the responsibilities owed to them.

Learning checkpoint 2

Collect routine information

This learning checkpoint allows you to review your skills and knowledge in following organisational procedures to collect routine information about the person.

Part A

1. List two types of identifying information that a service may collect from a person with support needs.

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2. Identify two benefits of using an electronic record keeping system to store personal information.

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3. What processes should a service organisation have in place to maintain personal records in accordance with legal and ethical obligations?

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4. Explain why it is important to discuss the reasons why a person has made contact with a service.

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Part B

Read the case study, then answer the questions that follow.

Case study

Masika is employed in an organisation that provides support for people with physical and intellectual disabilities. She has recently worked to relocate Rosy into a safe house in another town. Rosy is a person with a mild intellectual disability who had left an abusive partner and was worried that he might find her and act violently. Rosy's partner, Dimitri, knows she has accessed services at Masika's organisation. When making the arrangements, Masika explained to Rosy how they would keep her information confidential and read the organisation's privacy and confidentiality policy out to her.

Later that day, after Rosy is driven to her new home, Dimitri comes into the reception area and asks if Rosy has been in. Masika calmly explains to him that it is the organisation's policy not to disclose information about anyone without their authorisation. She suggests that she take down his contact details so that they can get back to him if any information becomes available. Dimitri is not interested in providing his details and leaves the building. Masika discusses the situation with her supervisor, who suggests they contact the police as a precautionary measure to protect Rosy.

1. Why didn't Masika disclose Rosy's personal information to Dimitri?

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2. Provide two reasons for why Masika could be required to disclose Rosy's personal information to a third party.

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3. If Masika was required to disclose Rosy's personal information to a third party, what must she consider?

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4. Describe Rosy's right to privacy.

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5. Describe Masika's responsibility to keep Rosy's information confidential.

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Topic 3

In this topic you will learn how to:

- 3A Identify urgency and nature of need and refer accordingly**

- 3B Identify and respond to issues of personal safety within scope of role**

- 3C Recognise situations beyond scope of role and seek assistance**

Identify priority of need

The people that come to your organisation for support have varied needs. Some are urgent and require immediate attention, while others, though important, are not urgent and can be attended to as soon as possible. For you to be able to meet people's needs, you must understand the operations of both your own organisation and organisations that may also be in a position to support the people accessing your services.

Some people may have issues that can be potentially unsafe for them, you and others in your workplace. You need to fully understand the processes to follow when an unsafe situation arises. Most importantly, you need to be very clear about how to seek assistance when you need it.

3A Identify urgency and nature of need and refer accordingly

As a support worker, you are responsible for identifying the urgency and nature of a person's support needs, and referring them in accordance with organisational guidelines.

There are often insufficient resources available to meet the needs of all people at all times. This means that some people may have to wait before receiving a service within your own organisation or an external organisation. You need to determine whether a person needs immediate support or whether they can possibly wait a little longer. For example, if you have two people with support needs asking for accommodation support, but only one vacancy, you need to make a judgment.



Your organisation's policies and procedures provide the guidance you need to make this decision.

Confirm available services

A comprehensive knowledge of your own organisation's services and those offered by other relevant organisations are useful for understanding what options are available to help people with support needs. Some community services have in-house specialists such as counsellors, medical practitioners, psychologists, occupational therapists and others. Other community services provide advice only.

You must have a good knowledge of the operations of your organisation and others where you may refer people with support needs. It is also useful to get to know the names and roles of people you deal with on a regular basis, particularly in other organisations.

It is important to know information about your organisation including:

- ▶ hours of operation
- ▶ contact details – phone numbers, mailing and email addresses
- ▶ after hours emergency contact information
- ▶ services provided, including any associated fees and charges
- ▶ locations of referred organisations – this is important to help people access an appropriate service in the most convenient location.

Identify urgency of need

Support workers will sometimes be required to determine which person requires access to a service more urgently than others. This occurs when demand is greater than the amount of services available. Your organisation will have procedures that set out how priority needs should be determined. These criteria should be clear to people accessing your service, and to other referring services, so that priority determination is seen to be fair.

If people present with needs that do not fit neatly into criteria, ask your supervisor. Remember that you have a duty of care, which includes ensuring that people receive the support they need in a timely manner. The following outlines some criteria.

Immediate support is required

Example: A woman has presented with a child, and both exhibit signs of stress and obvious bruising. She indicates that a male family member has threatened them with violence.

High (needs must be addressed as soon as possible)

Example: A person is homeless or at risk of homelessness, is an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander, or has an intellectual disability or a serious mental illness.

Routine (non-urgent)

Example: A family has requested an assessment for support for their elderly parent, who has started to exhibit signs of dementia. In this case placing the person on a waiting list is unlikely to affect them negatively.

Low (the issue can wait)

Example: A school counsellor has asked a youth health service to speak to the school's Year 10 students about mental health and managing stress.

Identify nature of need

Community services workers may be working in one of many different services and the nature of the needs of people accessing their service will be varied.

It is important that support workers identify the nature of a person's need to ascertain the urgency of fulfilling that need, and make decisions about prioritising that person's needs and requirements for referral.

The nature of a person's needs may relate to:

- ▶ aged care
- ▶ home and community care
- ▶ disability services
- ▶ alcohol and other drugs
- ▶ family and domestic violence
- ▶ mental health
- ▶ housing
- ▶ employment services
- ▶ children's services
- ▶ child protection.

Identify urgency of referral

After the initial assessment, you should have a reasonably good understanding of the needs of the person accessing your service and you will need to make decisions relating to the need for referral.

The urgency of referral will be determined by several factors including the:

- ▶ level of risk involved
- ▶ wishes of the person with support needs
- ▶ immediate nature of the demands for service (response to crisis versus response to long-standing needs)
- ▶ ability of yourself and/or your organisation to meet all or some of the person's needs
- ▶ wishes of other relevant stakeholders; for example, family, friends or other members of the treating team.

Referrals within your organisation

People with support needs should be referred appropriately, in accordance with organisational protocols, policies and procedures.

It is important to understand exactly what services are provided by your organisation and who is responsible for providing them. You can then refer people correctly when the time comes.

Your organisation will have guidelines in place to manage the referral process, linked to the kinds of services offered. Always keep the person with support needs informed about who you are referring them to and why. This puts them in a better position to make their own decisions about the program being suggested for them. In most organisations referrals are made by appointment, unless the person's needs are urgent.

The best way to find out about your organisation is to:

- ▶ attend an induction and/or other training program
- ▶ ask your supervisor
- ▶ read organisational information provided to service users (brochures, websites, published articles)
- ▶ talk to work colleagues to find out who is responsible for providing services, and their roles and responsibilities
- ▶ read the organisation's strategic and/or operational plans
- ▶ attend and contribute to staff meetings.

Referrals to external organisations

Your organisation may not always have all resources required to meet the needs of people accessing your service and you may need to refer the person to a service that is better able to meet their needs.

When referring a person to another organisation, involve that person in making decisions about the suitability of the service. All organisations have procedures for referring people to other organisations, as well as for receiving referrals. When referring people internally or to another organisation, inform the person of how long they may have to wait before an appointment can be made and explain why.

Personal information is private and confidential, and the person’s consent should be sought for that information to be shared with others. It is important that you understand your own organisation’s policies and procedures for incoming referrals.

Inform individuals

Informing people about their referral involves:

- ▶ details about the organisation and why you are referring them there
- ▶ what the other organisation will expect from them (for example, if any fees and charges are associated with the referral)
- ▶ what information you provide to the other organisation.

Accept referrals

Methods for accepting referrals include:

- ▶ a telephone call, with you logging details of the referral directly into your organisation’s database or onto a paper form – in some cases the person with support needs will be present when this referral occurs
- ▶ an email or an online form
- ▶ the person attending with a letter or other written document from the referring organisation.

Example

Identify urgency and nature of need and refer accordingly



Todd is a volunteer in a community services organisation that provides information and support. David comes into the office and says that he is tired of binge drinking and taking drugs and is scared that he’s losing control of his life. He says that his girlfriend is threatening to leave him unless he ‘straightens himself out’. Todd asks David if he would consider a referral to a local youth alcohol and drug counselling service, but David says that he doesn’t want to go somewhere local in case he runs into people that might know him. Together they agree on a service that is 20

minutes away in another suburb. Todd explains that the service is free, but they will expect David to keep the appointments he makes.

David agrees and together they complete the referral form. Todd goes through each question on the form so that David understands what information is being provided to the alcohol and drug counselling service and can ask questions and express concerns. Todd then faxes the form through to the alcohol and drug counselling service and advises David that he should receive a call to make an appointment within the next 48 hours.



Practice task 8

1. Explain how referrals are made within an organisation.

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2. Explain how referrals are made to external organisations.

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Click to complete Practice task 8

3B Identify and respond to issues of personal safety within scope of role

Some people accessing your service may become violent, particularly when they feel helpless and powerless. Other people may be required by court order to attend your service against their will, and so may feel angry and resentful. Identifying and responding to issues of personal safety allows you to take steps that protect yourself and others, while attempting to minimise the potential for violence.



Identify issues of personal safety

Community services workers have a responsibility to promote and protect the rights of the people they support, and provide services that improve the person's quality of life, while ensuring compliance with work health and safety laws.

The main causes of workplace injuries in community services are:

- ▶ lifting, carrying, pushing, pulling
- ▶ slips, trips and falls
- ▶ workplace violence.

Consultation

Community services workers can make a significant contribution to identifying hazards, assessing risks and developing preventative measures for work health and safety issues that arise in the workplace. Workers must be consulted on health and safety matters that directly affect them.

Community services workers should:

- ▶ identify or assess workplace hazards or risks
- ▶ decide on measures to control risks
- ▶ decide on the adequacy of employee facilities
- ▶ determine the membership of any WHS committee
- ▶ propose changes that may affect health and safety.

Duty of care

Community services organisations and workers have a responsibility to provide a duty of care to ensure the safety and wellbeing of people in receipt of their services. Legislative and regulatory obligations underpin an organisation's policies, which determine the procedures to guide service delivery that promotes and enhances the safety and wellbeing of people. Here is more information about duty of care.

Duty of care

Duty of care is the obligation a person has to act in a way that would not cause harm.

A duty of care exists when someone's actions could reasonably be expected to affect another person. The law has established a duty of care to the person. This principle is based on the worker taking reasonable care to avoid acts or omissions that may cause foreseeable harm to any person. You must think ahead about possible risks or dangers to the person using your service, co-workers or others while making sure you follow the organisation's policies and procedures.

Negligence

Negligence occurs when duty of care has been breached and harm to either person or property ensues. It is the legal and ethical obligation of any community worker, supervisor or organisation to ensure that people using services are not exposed to unnecessary or unreasonable risk.

Dignity of risk

The rights of people to dignity and choice, upheld in legislation and service standards, also require that duty of care or safety is not used as a reason to limit a person's freedom or personal choice. A support worker's adherence to duty of care and safety must be coupled with the concept of dignity of risk, which means that a person has the right to make their own choices and to take risks.

Work health and safety

On 1 January 2012, the *Work Health and Safety Act 2011* (Cth) came into effect, replacing the *Occupational Health and Safety Act 1991* (Cth). This model legislation was developed by the Commonwealth government to harmonise work health and safety laws across Australia.

For the Act to be legally binding, it must be passed by the Parliament in each state and territory.

Community services workplaces are seen by state and territory governments as high risk workplaces because of the potential for aggressive and violent service user behaviour. Work health and safety (WHS) legislation includes both employer and employee responsibilities. Your workplace will have policies and procedures in place relating to WHS. Ensure you request a copy and become familiar with it.

The object of the harmonisation of work health and safety laws is to:

- ▶ protect the health and safety of workers
- ▶ improve safety outcomes in workplaces
- ▶ reduce compliance costs for business
- ▶ improve efficiency for regulatory agencies.

Unsafe behaviour

Unsafe behaviour is any behaviour that places you, the person accessing your service, or anyone else at risk of physical or emotional harm.

Unsafe behaviours may include:

- ▶ shouting, having intrusive conversations or playing loud music

- ▶ using threatening or abusive language or behaviours; for example, swearing, making offensive remarks, damaging property
- ▶ harassing or bullying workers or other service users
- ▶ making derogatory, discriminatory or demeaning remarks or gestures; for example, making racial or sexual comments
- ▶ using drugs, consuming alcohol or being drug- or alcohol-affected when on the organisation's premises
- ▶ behaving unlawfully, for example, stealing, drug dealing or being physically violent
- ▶ threatening the safety of workers or others.

Predict or assess the risk of violence

One of the best predictors of potential violence is whether a person has a history of violence; for example, a person may have an abusive family background or a history of being arrested for violence. If a person is referred to your service, this information may be included on the referral form that you receive.

Your observation skills can help you to recognise early warning signs, such as changes in a person's behaviour. It is important to observe a person's verbal and behavioural cues to gain information about their emotional and psychological state.



Risk assessment

Employers are required by WHS laws to conduct risk assessments to identify hazards in the workplace.

Your workplace will do risk assessments for dealing with aggressive or violent people, considering the risks and hazards associated with both service users and the workplace environment. The importance and examples of service user and workplace risk assessments are demonstrated below.

Service user risk

Many community services organisations conduct service user risk assessments as a part of their intake assessment. These can come under different names, such as an individual risk profile. If a service user risk assessment brings up the possibility of aggressive or violent behaviour, an individual plan can be drawn up for that person. This may be called a behaviour intervention and support plan, a behaviour support plan or similar. The plan will be kept with the person's case management file after they are registered and while they receive support.

Work environment

Another part of risk assessment is assessing the work environment. This includes considering the risks and hazards present in certain areas, such as:

- ▶ the reception area; for example, is the area clearly defined and is there anything there that could be used as a weapon?
- ▶ interview/counselling rooms; for example, do the rooms have lockable doors and is there clear access to emergency exits?

Minimise the potential for violence

Workers can take steps to minimise the potential for violence occurring in their workplace. These are listed below.

Methods to minimise potential for violence

- ▶ Attempt to defuse the situation by speaking quietly and calmly, using language that the person can understand.
- ▶ Answer all questions honestly and clearly.
- ▶ Ensure there are no objects nearby that could be used as weapons.
- ▶ Know your organisation's policies and procedures for dealing with violent people – this could include using a hidden security alarm.
- ▶ When meeting a person in a private meeting room, always making sure your exit path is clear.
- ▶ Keep a reasonable distance from the person and do not turn your back on them.
- ▶ If a person shows signs of imminent violence, isolate the person from others in the vicinity.
- ▶ Suggest that the person may wish to discuss their concerns in a private meeting room where there are no distractions.
- ▶ Address all threats immediately – service users must be advised that threatening behaviour is not acceptable at any time.
- ▶ Follow the guidelines set out in your organisation's policies and procedures.

Scope of practice

Scope of practice refers to the area of practice that people with specific qualifications or experience must adhere to. You and your work colleagues should not undertake roles that are the responsibility of other professional or occupational categories.

If a person requires support in areas outside your scope of practice, you should refer them to another service or health professional.

Community services workers are responsible for:

- ▶ providing support
- ▶ personal care
- ▶ case management
- ▶ assessment.

Scope of role

You need to understand your obligations within your scope of practice to meet the legal and ethical requirements of your role. You should clarify any misunderstanding or confusion in these areas.

If you do not understand your legal and ethical responsibilities within your scope of practice you may risk breaching your duty of care obligations, or not responding to situations in a responsible or reasonable manner.

The difference between legal and ethical obligations is described below.

Legal obligations

- ▶ Legal obligations include duty of care and adhering to the laws and regulations that govern your area of practice. You should be informed about your work health and safety obligations and responsibilities and how you can address these within your scope of practice.

Ethical obligations

- ▶ Ethical obligations include ensuring you understand and apply the ethical codes and practice standards that apply to community services work. It is important that you understand your ethical obligations relating to maintaining appropriate professional boundaries with service users.

Example

Identify and respond to issues of personal safety within scope of role

Ahmed is a person with support needs who comes in to a community support organisation to ask for help finding employment. Ahmed has trouble speaking English fluently. Miller, a worker at reception realises that Ahmed is very frustrated and notes from his body language that the language barrier is aggravating him. Ahmed is starting to breathe very heavily.

Miller recognises that he needs to take action to calm Ahmed to avoid a potentially unsafe situation. He speaks to Ahmed calmly and says that he can see that he must be very frustrated but he will do everything he can to help. He tells Ahmed that he is welcome to bring in a friend to help interpret for him. He offers Ahmed a glass of water and they sit quietly for a moment. When Ahmed seems calmer, they begin to talk again, and Miller gives Ahmed some translated brochures about their services.



Practice task 9

1. Describe the duty of care that community services workers owe to the people they support.

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2. Identify two unsafe behaviours that may be exhibited by a person accessing a service.

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3. Describe two methods community services workers could use to minimise the potential for violence occurring in their workplace.

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[Click to complete Practice task 9](#)

3C Recognise situations beyond scope of role and seek assistance

If you are working as part of a multidisciplinary team it is crucial that you understand exactly what you are expected to do and your level of authority. No function is isolated. You must always work and act within the scope of your role and responsibilities and seek advice or clarify anything you do not understand. Your scope of practice refers to what you are trained and authorised to do. For example, a community services worker does not diagnose conditions or provide physiotherapy treatment. These roles belong to other professions.



As a support worker, you should be able to recognise situations that are beyond the scope of your role and seek assistance where necessary.

Recognise situations beyond scope of role

To ensure you always work within the scope of your role you should be familiar with the range of functions and work roles that your particular occupational category is authorised to carry out. Your organisation will have its own requirements about how workers should adhere to their relevant scope of practice.

For example, although most community services workers receive some basic training in counselling, this does not mean they are expected to provide counselling as part of their work role. Most organisations that provide counselling as a major part of their service are more likely to employ qualified professional counsellors.

Consider whether a situation is beyond the scope of your role by asking these questions:

- ▶ Does this particular task or activity fall within my position specifications?
- ▶ Who else may have responsibility for this role?
- ▶ Do other workers in the same job role carry out this task?
- ▶ Do I have the training, skills, knowledge or competence to carry out this activity?
- ▶ Is it in the best interest of the person with support needs?
- ▶ What legal and ethical considerations apply to this situation?
- ▶ Do I need to seek advice to check I can carry out this task or activity?

Seek assistance

There are likely to be times when you cannot defuse a situation and you may become concerned for your own safety and/or the safety of others. You may recognise in a person's behaviour an imminent threat of violence towards you, themselves or others. It is important that you acknowledge the situation and take immediate action. Your organisation's policies and procedures should outline the requirements for when and how to seek urgent assistance.

Who you seek assistance from depends on the person accessing your service and the situation. Assistance may come from the following sources.

Other staff

Your supervisor, experienced staff or staff with specialisations may be able to assist you. For example, they may be trained in behaviour management or, in cases involving non-English speaking people, may be able to communicate with a person in their first language.

Consumer groups

These are groups, generally of volunteers, who form to provide help and support to people with particular needs. There are a range of consumer groups, including support groups for carers, people living with chronic pain, people who need financial management aid, and people who wish to access toy libraries or playgroups.

Clinical mental health services

Your organisation may have a list of organisations that provide services to people with mental health needs. Clinical and community support services for young people, adults, and older people can be accessed to provide high standards of practice and service.

Acquired brain injury services

Acquired brain injury could be the result of an accident, or alcohol or drug abuse. There are organisations providing specialist support to people who have acquired brain injuries that identify opportunities to provide mental, emotional and physical wellbeing, encourage independence, and social inclusion.

Specialists

The key specialists in community services organisations are psychologists and counsellors. These people can be critical for dealing with a potentially dangerous person, particularly where the specialist knows the person and is involved in their treatment. Many specialist medical practitioners offer different health services. Most community services organisations hold a list of these.

Other community-based support services

Other community-based support services may include aged care and support services, multicultural services, children's services, community bus, health and wellbeing programs, housing, transport, finance and employment support services.

Police

The standard procedure in the event of an emergency is to phone 000 and explain the situation to the operator, who can arrange for the appropriate response. It is good practice to have an established arrangement with the local police station or office. Some community services organisations have formal agreements in place with the police because they deal with difficult people frequently.

Ambulance

If a person accessing your service is in a critical situation, an ongoing communication with an ambulance in transit may be necessary. Many community services organisations have a qualified first aid officer or nurse on duty, who should be on hand to talk to the ambulance staff if required. Your organisation may have an arrangement with the local hospital for advice over the phone.

Example

Recognise situations beyond scope of role and seek assistance

Fahid is a support worker in a community services organisation that provides support to people with alcohol addiction. Fahid meets with a potential service user, Zara, to discuss how the organisation can assist her. While they are discussing Zara’s needs, she suddenly becomes very aggressive and starts shouting obscenities. Fahid would normally suggest that they continue the meeting in a more quiet area, but he does not know Zara and he feels that the situation is unsafe.



Fahid’s organisation provides panic buttons under each desk and the policy is that immediate action must be taken in any situation where a person becomes aggressive. It is outside the scope of Fahid’s role to respond to the situation without requesting assistance. Fahid presses his panic button, which alerts management and automatically calls the police, who arrive within minutes. By following his organisation’s procedures, Fahid reduces the risk of any harm to himself, Zara or others.

Practice task 10

1. Why is it important for support workers to understand the scope of their role and responsibilities?

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2. List two questions a support worker could consider to recognise situations beyond the scope of their role.

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3. Identify two specialists or other services a support worker could seek assistance from to deal with situations beyond the scope of their role.

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[Click to complete Practice task 10](#)

Summary

1. For you to be able to meet people's needs, you need to understand the operations of both your own organisation and organisations that may also be in a position to support the people accessing your services.
2. Some people may have to wait before receiving a service, whether it involves access to workers within your own organisation or an external organisation. You need to determine whether a person needs immediate support or whether they can possibly wait a little longer.
3. Identifying and responding to issues of personal safety allows you to take steps that protect yourself and others, while attempting to minimise the potential for violence.
4. Community services organisations and workers have a responsibility to provide a duty of care to ensure the safety and wellbeing of people in receipt of their services.
5. As a support worker, you should be able to recognise situations that are beyond the scope of your role and seek assistance where necessary.
6. You need to understand your obligations within your scope of practice to meet the legal and ethical requirements of your role.

Learning checkpoint 3

Identify priority of need

This learning checkpoint allows you to review your skills and knowledge in identifying and prioritising the person's needs.

Part A

1. Identify two factors that support workers should consider to identify the urgency of a person's need for referral.

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2. What is duty of care?

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3. When and how would a community services worker be required to seek the assistance of the police?

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Part B

Read the case study, then answer the questions that follow.

Case study

Sarah is a community services worker at a drug and alcohol detoxification centre. It is Sarah's responsibility to greet and assess people with support needs when they first arrive at the centre for detoxification. Sarah understands that the people she deals with have made the decision to spend some time in a detoxification unit to withdraw from their drug of choice, and as a result, can appear very frightened, agitated, or nervous. The detoxification centre where Sarah works is also staffed by doctors, nurses and other allied professionals.

Roman visits the centre, and on arrival, is assessed and interviewed by Sarah. Sarah asks Roman what types of drugs he is using and the frequency. She tells Roman that his answers must be honest to ensure she acts and plans his withdrawal based on an accurate assessment of Roman's health. After asking a couple of questions Roman starts becoming nervous. He stands up and shifts from one foot to the other, still listening to Sarah and answering her questions, but unable to concentrate or sit still. When Sarah asks Roman why he wants to participate in the detoxification program he slams his fist into the desk and tells her it is none of her business.

1. Why might Sarah consider Roman's behaviour to be unsafe?

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2. How could Sarah predict the risk of Roman's behaviour becoming violent?

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3. Identify two ways that Sarah could minimise the potential for Roman’s behaviour to become violent.

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4. Why is it important for Sarah to respond to Roman within the scope of her own role?

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Topic 4

In this topic you will learn how to:

- 4A Provide current, relevant and culturally appropriate service information**
- 4B Help people contact other agencies or services for further information**
- 4C Confirm information needs have been met**

Provide service information

It can be difficult to anticipate the information or support a person may need. Having a comprehensive knowledge of the services offered by your own organisation and other service providers helps you to be as prepared as possible. The information you provide to people with support needs must be accurate, up to date and relevant. Networking with workers from other service providers can help you stay informed about the services they offer. These contacts may also be useful support when you need alternative solutions or information about where to obtain assistance.

The level of support you can provide to people depends on you and on the person with support needs, including factors such as whether they have an intellectual and/or physical disability and their language skills.

4A Provide current, relevant and culturally appropriate service information

The people you support may seek knowledge about how to deal with situations and problems. They need to know how your organisation can assist them and the options available. Some people will attend your service voluntarily; for example, a person may come to you because they need information and support in relation to a family member who is an alcoholic. Other people may be referred to your organisation by court order because they have committed an offence.

You should aim to provide people accessing your service with current, relevant and culturally appropriate service information that will meet their individual needs, differences and requirements.



Role of the community services organisation

All community services organisations must implement procedures to ensure all services, information, and responses to people with support needs comply with duty of care and accepted standards of ethical behaviour.

Community services organisations provide services that specialise in caring for the needs of people who cannot be supported by their community alone. The service provider may specialise in a particular area of care, such as accommodation, or education, or provide services that include all aspects of a person's life.

The role of community services organisations is to:

- ▶ support and maintain the needs of people accessing its service
- ▶ support and maintain the needs of the organisation
- ▶ actively promote the needs of people the service supports through principles of normalisation, social integration, empowerment and self-determination
- ▶ actively support, through direct intervention, people who require accommodation, recreation, education or employment services
- ▶ provide employment within the sector
- ▶ promote the growth of other support services, such as transport, catering, specialised equipment
- ▶ raise awareness of the situation of the service user group to which the organisation supports
- ▶ be accountable to government policy and best practice standards in the provision of services
- ▶ provide information and resources about service areas that is accurate, relevant and up to date
- ▶ encourage the wider community to support and participate in the activities of the service.

Service entry, transition and exit

Community services organisations should aim to meet individual needs and promote a sense of dignity, purpose and security to all community members who access it. You must be consistent, transparent and non-discriminatory in your approach to all people entering, transitioning or exiting the service. Your organisation will have policies and procedures in place to guide you.

Entry is the process through which a person enters into a specific support or service arrangement with your organisation. Transition is the process through which a person moves from one service area to another, or is referred to another organisation that can more adequately address their needs. Exit is the point at which a person leaves or no longer requires your service.

Entry, transition and exit procedures should:

- ▶ promote the health, wellbeing, safety and security of all people receiving support and services
- ▶ be provided on the basis of relative need and availability of resources
- ▶ adopt a non-discriminatory access process that respects age, gender, race, religion, sexual preferences and disability consistent with human rights and other legislation
- ▶ acknowledge that all people have the right to accurate, clear and transparent information
- ▶ not limit information to one mode or type and ensure information can be changed to suit individual needs and preferences
- ▶ be provided in a flexible, responsive and person-centred way to meet each individual's support needs and goals
- ▶ assess all participants requesting support and services, and where resources are limited, manage waiting lists for services according to the person's level of need
- ▶ acknowledge that each person has the right to refuse a service and to leave at any time
- ▶ be fair, transparent, follow due process, and uphold the rights of service users
- ▶ protect the safety and integrity of support workers, service users, programs and services, and provide people with information on how to re-enter services if required.

Service entry, transition and exit procedures

Examples of service entry, transition and exit procedures are briefly described below.

Entry procedures

1. A person or their family member/advocate requests a service and is determined as eligible to receive support.
2. Requests can be made by telephone, email, on-site, or through a general enquiry function on the organisation's website.
3. From the initial contact, the person's eligibility will be determined and arrangements negotiated with the person and their support network.
4. Support workers will assess the information provided by the person and provide a recommendation regarding the suitability of the person's needs and request for support and services.

5. If the organisation has the appropriate resources and can effectively support the person to meet their goals and needs, the request for access will be approved.
6. The person will be notified in writing of their acceptance to receive support or services.
7. If the person is transitioning from another service provider, the organisation will seek the person's consent to discuss or obtain support requirements for the previous service provider.

Transition procedures

1. Once a person has accepted support and/or services from the organisation, a transition process will commence to minimise the impact of change that is occurring for the person and develop a support schedule that meets the person's needs, requirements and goals in a person-centred way.
2. The support workers will coordinate the transition of support and services by meeting with the person and their support networks to develop a transition pathway.
3. The organisation will implement person-centred processes and principles to ensure it develops an understanding of the person's strengths and preferences. This will inform the development of the support schedule, the person's individualised plan, risk profile, and support budget.
4. The transition pathway should clearly identify a timeframe for the induction, transition and any review schedules that have been agreed to by the person.
5. The transition places the person and their support network at the centre by designing a transition pathway that assists the person to be independent and have control over the planning, implementation and review of their support and services.

Exit procedures

1. The organisation should plan an exit process that is professional, planned and developed in consultation with the service user and their support network.
2. The person is given information about referral processes or introduced to other service providers or community agencies which can offer ongoing support and services after a person exits the organisation.
3. The organisation explores the reasons why a person has exited the service, including the consequences of their decision to exit and the possibility of re-entry occurring in the future should the person's circumstances change.
4. The exit plan is made available to the person and with their informed consent, identifies timeframes, actionable steps, and people responsible to implement the actions.
5. The service user reserves the right to re-access services within a period set by the organisation, after formally exiting the service, without having to follow the formal access process again.

Address service user needs

The needs of people accessing your service must be addressed by your organisation. The multi-faceted nature of community services means that an organisation may include many different features, and each person's need must be linked to an appropriate service within the organisation to best serve their needs.

The goal of an organisation will be set by the relationship between the services it is equipped to provide and the needs of the community it serves. Communities come in many different forms and will have different ways of approaching their goals and meeting their needs. Consider conducting a community needs assessment to identify the common goals and highest priority needs of the community you serve. Review the results and develop a plan to make improvements to your existing service, or develop new strategies that meet the identified needs of your community.

Conduct a community needs analysis by:

- ▶ interviewing influential people in the area of services you provide, including community group leaders, local personalities, or government officials
- ▶ asking existing service users, or members of the general community, to complete surveys that provide feedback on how people feel about issues that concern your organisation
- ▶ holding focus groups by gathering a selection of existing and/or potential service users, or other stakeholders, around a table to discuss the options, services and information provided by your organisation
- ▶ holding a community forum to provide community members with opportunities to raise questions, and discuss their issues and concerns, that relate to the service your organisation provides.

Types and features of services

Each organisation provides different services. You need to understand exactly what services your organisation provides so that you can give people accessing your service, accurate and complete details about what they can expect.

Some organisations provide one or two specialist services, while others provide many related services. Some organisations offer referral services, and others simply provide information about different types of service providers and where people can seek further help. Examples of different service user groups and the types of relevant service organisations available are identified in the following table.

Potential service user group	Type of community service for this target group	Services provided
Families and friends of alcoholics	Family support services	Support group meetings to help families and friends of alcoholics
General community, older people, young people, people with disability	Community garden	Organic fruit and vegetable community garden, social activities, sustainable living advice

Potential service user group	Type of community service for this target group	Services provided
People with disability	Disability support services, residential care services	Respite for carers, group home accommodation, clinical services, transport, activities
Unpaid family carers	Carer advisory service	Information, support and referral for carers, counselling (telephone and face to face), library, community support
People at risk of becoming homeless	Community housing and accommodation services	Support people, private and public housing, case-management, advocacy
Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People involved with the justice/court system	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander services, community justice groups	Preventative intervention and supportive resolution processes to reduce incarceration, minimise unlawful behaviour, curb misuse of drugs and alcohol, promote lifelong education
Older people	Home and community care, community support services	Home delivery of meals, in-home support services
Adults and children escaping domestic violence	Community support services, welfare services, emergency accommodation services	Emergency supported accommodation, support and referrals, counselling
Individuals and families affected by drug and alcohol abuse	Counselling services, drug and alcohol counselling	Counselling and support services, drug and alcohol counselling, anger management groups, community education and information sessions
Individuals and families affected by sexual harassment and/or abuse	Counselling services, community support groups	Counselling, advocacy, information, community education regarding sexual assault/abuse
Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People	Support services	Social and emotional wellbeing clinics, personal development, support groups, youth issues, life skills, career guidance, parenting skills

Potential service user group	Type of community service for this target group	Services provided
All community members	Health services	Health education and awareness programs, information and pamphlets, assessments for application of specific aids, child health clinics and home visits, parenting classes, referrals to other health service providers, advice/assistance on managing at home for older people and people with a disability

Research other services

When researching other agency’s services take note of basic information such as range of services, eligibility criteria, opening hours, referral options and the address and contact details. Where possible, obtain brochures and other written information that you can keep on file and distribute to clients.



Provide service information

Each person accessing your service requires information to be presented in a meaningful way. Most organisations have their own website where service users can access information. However, it is important not to assume that everyone knows how to use a computer and has access to the Internet. Many people, including those affected by issues such as low literacy levels, homelessness, or poverty, may not be able to access or use a computer.

Your organisation may provide information:

- ▶ verbally, either in person or by telephone
- ▶ in pamphlets, brochures, or other published materials which may be mailed, emailed or provided in person
- ▶ in letters or reports
- ▶ audio-visually, such as in a video or PowerPoint presentation
- ▶ in regular newsletters, which may be distributed by mail, email or sent as updates via SMS
- ▶ in other published materials, such as learning resources
- ▶ on posters, noticeboards, billboards, or other graphic presentations
- ▶ in advertising materials.

Keep information up to date

When an organisation develops a website, brochures, posters or other forms of information, you must ensure the information is up to date and relevant to the needs of people accessing your service. Information supplied by other service providers must also be kept current. Consider how this information is kept up to date so that you do not provide a person with information or published material that contains inaccurate or out of date information. The following demonstrates reasons for keeping information up to date and provides methods to achieve this.

Considerations

To ensure information is kept up to date, consider the following:

- ▶ Have existing programs changed or have new ones started?
- ▶ Are contact details, opening hours, the information on services offered and timetables for various activities all current?
- ▶ Are web links to other organisations still working and is the information you hold on their services and referral arrangements accurate?
- ▶ Have government guidelines for funded programs changed?
- ▶ Have new laws been introduced that affect your services?

Strategies

Community services organisations use different strategies to keep information up to date:

- ▶ Printed or web-based information can include a statement that asks readers to contact the office if the information is out of date.
- ▶ You may contact other organisations to check the currency of their information.
- ▶ Your organisation's website may include a notice about how often information is updated.
- ▶ If the information belongs to your organisation, speak to your supervisor to ascertain whether or not the information is current.

Relevance of information

Your organisation would have to keep a lot of information if it were to attempt to cover all of the community services that available to people. This is one reason why you need to limit the information you provide so that it is relevant to the people you support.

Using active listening and questioning skills enables you to provide people accessing your service with information that is relevant to their needs. For example, a person may ask for information on services to assist them in finding a job. They may need language and literacy training to improve their ability to find employment, so you also need to provide them with information on how to access this kind of support. Remember, information should always be provided in a way that ensures that the person can understand it.



Culturally and linguistically appropriate information

Support workers must ensure that services are provided with sensitivity to and an awareness of the cultural beliefs and practices of people from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds. This is inclusive of the awareness of needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, their families and communities.

Many of the people accessing your service will be CALD. Here are some tips when presenting information to CALD individuals.

Provide service information to CALD people

- ▶ Learn as much as you can about the cultures of people who are likely to seek information from your organisation.
- ▶ Do not assume that a person who has a language difficulty or does not speak English is intellectually impaired.
- ▶ Consider making a list of workers in your organisation who can speak languages other than English, so that you can ask for their assistance.
- ▶ Seek assistance from an interpreter service.
- ▶ Have brochures and information available in languages that reflect your organisation's service user group.
- ▶ Where possible, use diagrams and pictures in brochures and other sources of information.
- ▶ Consider factors such as religious or cultural differences.
- ▶ Consider that some CALD service users can have different understandings of community organisations due to previous negative experiences.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people

Cultural factors, such as etiquette and language, may impact your interactions with the people accessing your service. The following lists cultural factors that may affect interactions with Indigenous Australians.

When interacting with Indigenous Australians:

- ▶ always use language that can be easily understood
- ▶ acknowledge that Indigenous Australians may have a lack of trust of institutions and personal support may be required to build a relationship with them
- ▶ giving people your time and attention has more meaning for many Indigenous Australians than written or online information
- ▶ if regular visits from Indigenous Australians occur, make the reception area more welcoming by putting up an Aboriginal flag, artwork or posters.

Information for people with a disability

When providing information to people with a disability you need to make a distinction between, and specifically cater for, intellectual and physical impairments. Many people with physical disability do not have any difficulty communicating unless they have a vision or hearing impairment, or their disability severely affects their body language. In some cases specialist communication devices are needed. Examples are further described below.

Hearing and vision impairments

When providing information to people with a hearing impairment:

- ▶ face the person when speaking to them so that they can lip-read if necessary
- ▶ use your body language to augment your words
- ▶ observe the person's body language to help you determine if they can follow the conversation
- ▶ be prepared to write down instructions or information if necessary
- ▶ use short sentences and uncomplicated language and do not use jargon, acronyms or words that the person may not understand.

When providing information to people with a visual impairment:

- ▶ ensure information is made available in large print, in Braille or in an audio format
- ▶ ensure information on your organisation's website can be easily enlarged or verbally spoken.

Intellectual disability

When providing information to people with an intellectual disability it is important to establish whether they can understand and process the information you give them, and make decisions about the services they need. If you have any doubts seek the advice of a clinician, if available, or your supervisor.

Consider the following:

- ▶ Remove any distractions, such as televisions.
- ▶ Move to a quiet, private area.
- ▶ Use short sentences and uncomplicated language and do not use jargon, acronyms or words that the client may not understand.
- ▶ Speak slowly and clearly.
- ▶ Match your body language to what you are saying.
- ▶ Be observant of the person's body language to help you determine if they can follow the conversation.
- ▶ Break down instructions or information into small sections.

Reduce stigma

Stigmatising is labelling a particular group as less worthy of respect than others because of their cultural background, disability or mental illness. One of the most effective ways to help reduce stigma is to provide fact sheets to people such as parents, carers or other community services workers who visit your organisation. These challenge the misunderstandings that lead to groups being stigmatised by providing the facts.

Training for staff who work with stigmatised service user groups should involve having members of those groups participate in the program.



Example

Provide current, relevant and culturally appropriate service information

Aria is employed as a support worker in a not-for-profit organisation that provides English language courses for people either who are self-referred or who have been referred by employment support organisations. Anh enters the reception area and approaches Aria. Anh struggles to explain in English that he has to get a job and has to learn English. Aria notes that Anh is of Vietnamese background. When Anh answers her questions, he avoids making eye contact with her, but Aria knows that this is a sign of respect in Vietnamese culture rather than him being evasive.



Aria gives the latest course schedule to Anh and points to the relevant information as she discusses it. Instead of telling Anh he can start on the next Monday, she asks whether he can come to the first course and points to the date. Anh says he can't come on that date, but points to the date of the next course. Aria nods her head, says, 'Okay' and gives him a card that tells him all the information that he needs to remember. In this way Aria provides information to Anh that is accurate and up to date, and also communicates in a culturally appropriate and sensitive manner.

Practice task 11

1. Briefly describe the difference between service access, transition, and exit processes.

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2. Identify two requirements of information provided to people accessing your service.

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3. Describe two ways that you can provide service information to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people effectively.

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Click to complete Practice task 11

4B Help people contact other agencies or services for further information

Many services are available that could be useful to people accessing your service. Some are easily accessible and other services can be accessed by referral only. For a number of reasons, people with support needs may not be capable of making contact with other services by themselves and will require assistance.

To be able to support people accessing your service, you need to know as much as possible about other available services that link with the support provided by your organisation. Other services may be available within your organisation, or by another service provider. For example, to assist a person who has a young child, you may need to provide information on local child care options.

Methods to develop knowledge about other service organisations include:

- ▶ joining online forums and actively participating
- ▶ joining a professional network or business association and participating in networking activities
- ▶ participating in learning and development opportunities or training
- ▶ pursuing relationships with other people working in the same industry and community services sector
- ▶ subscribing to publications such as newsletters, magazines or journals that inform you about other community services organisations and the services they provide.

Maintain a list of contacts

Keep a list of networks and key contacts. Some organisations have a database where all network and contact information is maintained, so that everyone in the organisation has access to the same resources. Databases store information in electronic records that may be searched, retrieved and organised in a variety of ways.

Networking can lead to sharing services and collaboration between organisations, which helps build a coordinated approach to service user referrals. You may also like to keep a record in your email contacts system.

Using an electronic contact database:

- ▶ saves time – retrieving a single record can be done in just a few clicks
- ▶ preserves vital information – reduces the risk of losing important contact information
- ▶ allows you to merge database records with documents making producing paper reports almost instantaneous
- ▶ makes information more accessible by giving you lots of ways to look at your data
- ▶ allows you to link contacts with each other, or with other information.
- ▶ enables mass customisation – the ability to provide individualised responses to a group of contacts at once.

Assist people to contact other services

While some people can source their own information or make contact with organisations to which they are referred, many people cannot. This may be due to a physical or intellectual disability, or because the person does not have access to necessary communication tools. It is important to consider the level of assistance needed by people to access services. The following explores when and how to access services on behalf of a person with support needs.

Access services on a person's behalf

Where a person needs support to access other services, you may choose to access the other service on their behalf; for example, you may telephone the other service to make an appointment for the person (in this situation you should take care to maintain the person's confidentiality and only reveal information with their consent). You could also encourage the person to contact the other organisation while you are present.

Obtain informed consent

Always remember that you require the person's consent before passing information to another service provider. This includes case information and personal details. To assist a person in making the decision to transfer to another organisation, you may need to explain why they are being referred. Do so in respectful language and using empathy.

Links with other service providers

Many community services providers are linked with other organisations who provide similar, or complementary, supports and services. The intersections between different health settings and providers means organisations must work together to meet a person's individual needs and address their personal goals.

As a person's primary service provider, you should connect with existing networks at the local and regional level, and with other case managers and care coordinators at the individual level, to provide a person-centred, individualised support to service users. For example, linking Medicare Locals and community services organisations to undertake needs analysis and develop service delivery models identifies and meets the needs of disadvantaged and marginalised groups.

Link with other service providers by:

- ▶ developing new relationships that improve access and equity
- ▶ working in partnership with community based services that reached disadvantaged people and marginalised communities to develop alternate models of care in a range of settings
- ▶ improving linkages between community services organisations, primary care providers and acute health care services to improve discharge planning
- ▶ connecting with case managers and care coordinators through the primary health care system
- ▶ developing multi-disciplinary and cross-sectoral models of care to meet the needs of people with complex and multiple needs
- ▶ promoting the ongoing engagement between Government agencies and community services organisations in the implementation of health and community services reform.

Example

Help people contact other agencies or services for further information

Antonia works in an organisation that provides support for carers who look after older Italian people. Sandra makes contact with Antonia and explains that she is happy to look after her elderly mother, but occasionally she needs a break. Antonia suggests a number of day respite care organisations that provide care for older Italian people. Sandra says she is interested, but she doesn't speak English very well, so is concerned that she will not be able to find out the information she needs to make a decision. With Sandra's permission, Antonia contacts the organisations on her behalf. She organises meetings with two different organisations, and asks that they each provide an Italian interpreter.



Practice task 12

1. Identify two methods to develop knowledge about other community services organisations.

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2. Identify two benefits of using an electronic database to manage service provider contact information.

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3. Describe how support workers could assist people to contact other services.

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Click to complete Practice task 12

4C Confirm information needs have been met

After providing information to a person with support needs, you should ask the person if they have received all the information they need or whether they need further assistance. If it appears that the information has been ineffective in meeting the person's needs, then some form of evaluation is essential to determine the reasons for this failure and identify how the organisation can offer further, and more effective, assistance.

As a support worker, you should also identify whether there is a communication barrier stopping the person from fully understanding or receiving the information and identify how these barriers can be overcome efficiently.

Confirm whether a person's information needs have been met by:

- ▶ asking the person for feedback about the information they have received
- ▶ asking the person questions to confirm their understanding of the information
- ▶ checking with the person's family members/advocate or support network for their perspective on the effectiveness of the information
- ▶ consulting with the referral agency to establish the level and quality of assistance and information provided.

Example

Confirm information needs have been met

Sonia is the program manager at an organisation that provides support and services to young people. Sonia is responsible for developing and implementing programs and activities that deter young people from joining gangs. One of the programs run by Sonia's organisation is called the 'Faithful Friend' program. Its purpose is to help young people who face serious adversity – those who have little opportunity to develop positive and supportive relationships with adults. The program facilitates meaningful, monitored mentoring matches between adult volunteers and young people living with disadvantage. Sonia is asked by the local high school to give a presentation about the program at a whole school assembly. Sonia carefully prepares her presentation, ensuring that all the key information is covered, including how to access the service or find out more information.

Afterwards the school principal thanks Sonia and says he would like to know more about how the program will benefit his teaching staff. While the information Sonia provided discussed the advantages for young people and their families, it didn't address the positive flow on effect the program may have for the school culture. Sonia suggests that she make another presentation to the school's staff members only, specifically addressing how the program can help deal with difficult behaviours more effectively. The principal agrees and schedules the meeting to occur in a week's time.



Practice task 13

Prepare and conduct an interview with your supervisor, or an experienced community services worker. Identify how they have confirmed whether a service user has had their information needs met. Obtain details of how they provided further assistance to service users who required additional support.

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Click to complete Practice task 13

Summary

1. It can be difficult to anticipate the information or support a person may need. Having a comprehensive knowledge of the services offered by your own organisation and other service providers helps you to be as prepared as possible
2. Aim to provide each person accessing a service with current, relevant and culturally appropriate service information that will meet their individual needs, differences and requirements.
3. All community services organisations must implement procedures to ensure all services, information, and responses to people with support needs comply with duty of care and accepted standards of ethical behaviour.
4. An organisation should promote access, inclusion and choice for people accessing the service, and focus on their individual needs, goals and aspirations.
5. To be able to support people accessing your service, you need to know as much as possible about other services available that link with the support provided by your organisation.
6. If it appears that service information provided to a person has been ineffective in meeting the person's needs, then some form of evaluation is essential to determine the reasons for this failure and identify how the organisation can offer further, and more effective, assistance.

Learning checkpoint 4

Provide service information

This learning checkpoint allows you to review your skills and knowledge in providing service information to people who access the service.

Part A

1. Briefly describe the overall role of a community services organisation.

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2. Identify two ways to conduct a community needs analysis.

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3. Identify two services that could be provided to people with a disability.

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4. Identify two types of information a community services worker may provide to a person with support needs.

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5. Describe two positive characteristics of entry, transition and exit procedures.

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6. Describe two ways that a community services organisation could link its services with other providers.

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Part B

Read the case study, then answer the questions that follow.

Case study

Tabé is a support worker at a residential aged care facility where he is responsible for assisting older people to transition from living in their homes, to living in the aged care facility. The people who request support and services from the facility need help usually because of an illness, a disability, an emergency, or because of the needs of their family, friends or carers. The support workers assist residents with day-to-day tasks such as cleaning, cooking, and laundry; personal care, such as dressing, grooming and going to the toilet; and 24-hour nursing care, if and when required. Tabé has been asked to meet with three brothers who are bringing their elderly mother, Gladys, to the facility for an introductory tour. Gladys is Russian and her husband passed away thirty years ago. Since then she has lived alone. Her three sons are concerned for Gladys's welfare living alone, as all three of them live in regional areas over two hours away from her and cannot quickly get to her if she required assistance. Gladys is reluctant to move into an aged care facility but has agreed to do so to please her sons.

Tabé meets the family at the reception and straight away ushers them into the tea room to sit down and discuss Gladys's care needs. Once Tabé has established a basic understanding of Gladys's needs, interests, preferences, and abilities, he then tailors his tour and presentation to address her concerns.

1. How could Tabe ensure he provides Gladys with appropriate information about the aged care facility and its services?

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2. How could Tabe assist Gladys to contact other agencies or services to obtain further information?

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3. What could Tabe do to ensure Gladys's information needs have been met?

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