

VAC Client Confidentiality Procedure

Application	All VAC staff, contractors, volunteers (including Board members), and students-on-placement (this includes SAMESH)
Exceptions	None
Legal and regulatory framework	Health Records Act 2001 (Victoria) Privacy and Data Protection Act 2014 (Victoria) Privacy Act 1988 (Australia) Freedom of Information Act 1982 (Victoria)
Contractual requirements	DHHS (Health) Centrelink Confirmation eServices (CCeS)
Standards	QIC standards 1.6 Knowledge management; 1.8 Legal compliance; 2.4 Client rights HSS standards 1.1 Empowerment
Related policy	VAC Privacy and Confidentiality Policy
Related templates, forms and documents	VAC Client Confidentiality Agreement for Staff and Volunteers Service and program client consent forms and templates (refer to section 6 below) VAC Privacy Statement
Other Associated policies and procedures	VAC Complaints, suggestions and compliments procedure VAC Client Access to Client Care Records Procedure Staff Code of Conduct Volunteer Code of Conduct

1. Purpose and Scope

VAC is committed to protecting the privacy and confidentiality of clients' personal, health and sensitive information (henceforth referred to as *client information* in this procedure).

The purpose of this procedure is to ensure that:

- Client information is kept confidential to clients, to the VAC staff, contractors, students and volunteers assisting them, those managing client records and their supervisors, and to others at VAC who need to know for other approved purposes as outlined in section 3.1 below
- The limitations to client confidentiality are understood, including the circumstances under which:
 - Client access to all or part of the information VAC holds on them may be refused
 - Client information may be disclosed without consent

All VAC staff, contractors, students and volunteers are to comply with this procedure.

2. Definitions

Confidentiality applies to information given to a person or organisation under an obligation not to disclose that information to others unless there is a statutory requirement or duty of care obligation to do so.

Health information refers to any information relating to a person's physical, mental or psychological health or disability.

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Informed consent is consent given on the basis of having:

- The capacity to give informed consent
- Been given adequate information to enable an informed decision
- Been given a reasonable opportunity to make the decision
- Given consent freely without undue pressure or coercion by any other person
- Not withdrawn consent or indicated any intention to withdraw consent

(DHHS, Informed Consent. *health.vic*)

Personal information refers to any information that may identify a person. Personal information includes a person's name or address, and can include photos, credit history information, bank details, where a person works and any other information that could reasonably identify them.

Sensitive information may refer to information including to a person's race, ethnicity, political opinions, membership of political associations and trade unions, religious or philosophical beliefs, sexual preferences, health and genetic information or criminal records.

Supervisors at VAC are Team Leaders, Managers and Directors. Each of these roles involves direct supervision of staff, volunteers or students-on-placement.

3. Procedure

3.1 Consent to collect, use and share client information

Informed consent, in writing or verbal, must be obtained from clients using VAC services at intake or as soon as possible after, in order to:

- Collect and use their information, and to
- Share their information with other services and agencies. Then, only essential and relevant details are to be shared.

VAC services are to provide the following information to clients about the way VAC handles their information:

- Purpose of collecting their client information
- How it will be used
- To whom information may be transferred and under what circumstances
- Limits to privacy and confidentiality of client information
- How clients can access or amend their information
- How clients can make a complaint if they feel their privacy or confidentiality has been breached

Where verbal consent has been obtained, this must be recorded in the designated location in the Client Health Record (refer to [section 6](#) below).

Client consent to VAC services collecting and sharing their information is time-limited. Consent shall be re-obtained periodically where information is to be shared, and a record kept of the client's updated consent status.

Clients' informed consent in writing is to be obtained for the collection and use of their audio (including transcripts) or visual images (including photographs, video, digital or artistic images). This consent must be collected prior to generating the material for promotional, media, advocacy or service-related purposes.

Clients have a right to withdraw their consent to the collection or use of all or part of their information, no matter the format, at anytime. If a client requests to withdraw their consent, the supervisor or relevant staff member from the service/program concerned is to:

- Discuss the reasons for withdrawal and any implications for service/program provision with the client
- Record the client's decision in the client's contact notes and other relevant places (eg. database)
- Remove the client's information from use

3.2 Collection and use

Client information may only be collected and used for the purposes for which it has been collected. These purposes may include:

- Providing a service to the client and referral
- Handling a complaint
- Incident management and reporting
- Service/program planning
- Advocacy
- Service/program evaluation
- Auditing
- Research

Only de-identified and non-identifiable client information or feedback may be used in VAC research, evaluation or review reports and discussions.

Copies of confidential client information may only be made if necessary:

- For an above purpose, and the risks have been considered and mitigated, or
- To meet legal or contractual requirements (as detailed in sections [3.3](#) and [3.4](#)).

Wherever it is lawful and practicable, individuals will have the option of not identifying themselves, or using an alias.

As required by the [Australian Privacy Principles](#) (2014) contained in the Privacy Act 1988, VAC will not adopt a government assigned individual identifier number e.g. Medicare number as if it were its own identifier/client code.

3.3 Access and Correction

Clients have a right to access and correct their personal information held by VAC. Refer to the *VAC Client Access to Client Care Records Procedure* for further details.

3.4 Disclosure without consent

Client personal, health or sensitive information may only be disclosed without the client's consent in the following circumstances:

- It is required or authorised by law (e.g. subpoenaed by the Court, requested under FoI) or to meet contractual requirements, for instance, DHHS¹ or Centrelink Confirmation eService (CCeS)² contractual requirements.
- It will prevent or lessen a serious and imminent threat to somebody's life or health.

3.5 Secure storage, archiving and destruction

Client information will be protected against loss, unauthorised access, use, modification or disclosure and against other misuse.

All client records will be kept securely in password-protected electronic folders and/or locked filing cabinets, to be accessed only by VAC staff and volunteers with authority to do so.

The records of inactive clients are to be securely archived for the period required under the [Health Records Act 2001](#) after which time they may be safely destroyed³.

3.6 Security measures

The following physical, technical and administrative security measures are to be enacted across VAC.

Physical measures

- Locking filing cabinets and unattended storage areas
- Physically securing the areas in which the personal information is stored
- Not storing personal information in public areas
- Positioning computer terminals and fax machines so that personal information cannot be seen or accessed by unauthorised people or members of the public
- Not transferring client records off VAC sites unless necessary (refer to 3.7.1 below)

Technical measures

- Using passwords to restrict computer access, and requiring regular changes to passwords
- Establishing different access levels so that not all staff can view all information
- Ensuring information is transferred securely (for example, not transmitting health information via non-secure email)
- Using electronic audit trails

¹ Refer to relevant sections in the current service agreement between the Department of Health & Human Services and Victorian AIDS Council for more information about the DHHS disclosure requirements. The relevant sections in the DHHS/VAC agreement dated 25/02/2016 are sections 6 Recordkeeping – Freedom of Information, 17 Privacy and 18 Confidential Information.

² Some VAC services access the Centrelink Confirmation eService (CCeS) to confirm client income information. Maintaining access to CCeS requires that VAC complies with the *CCeS Policy* and *CCeS Terms* including around client confidentiality and obtaining clients' informed consent prior to accessing their information. Under the CCeS Terms, VAC is obliged to make relevant client records available for CCeS auditing.

³ The Health Records Act 2001 requires organisations to retain and securely store the records of adult clients for at least 7 years and the records of child clients (under the age of 18) until the child reaches 25 years of age.

- Installing virus protections and firewalls
- VAC control over mobile devices (refer to the *VAC/GMHC Mobile Devices Policy*, for further details)

Administrative measures

- Routinely informing staff, volunteers, contractors, students and Board members about the importance of client confidentiality and our privacy and confidentiality policies and procedures during induction
- Providing easy access to privacy and confidentiality policies and procedures on the staff intranet
- Requiring staff, volunteers, contractors, students to read and sign the *VAC Client Confidentiality Agreement for Staff and Volunteers* when they start
- Requiring staff to read and sign the *Staff Code of Conduct*

3.6.1 Transporting client records off-site

Client information in paper or electronic form must not be transported out of the office unless authorised and it is necessary to do so (for example, transporting between VAC sites, to or from client home visits or other off-site service delivery points).

When necessary, the documents should be transported securely in a non-transparent container or password protected electronic device.

Documents must not be left in cars overnight. They must be taken inside and securely locked in a cabinet.

3.7 Breach of privacy or confidentiality

All clients accessing VAC services will be provided with information about how to make a complaint should they feel there has been a breach of their privacy or confidentiality. Such complaints will be dealt with according to the *VAC Complaints, Suggestions and Compliments Procedure*.

The *VAC Complaints, Suggestions and Compliments Procedure* is also to be followed if a complaint about a breach of client confidentiality is received from another agency or individual advocating on a client's behalf.

Where a VAC member of staff, volunteer, contractor or student has observed a breach of client confidentiality by a colleague, the matter should be raised with:

- The person in breach themselves
- The direct supervisor of the person in breach, or
- The direct supervisor of the person observing the breach.

If this is not possible or appropriate, follow the delegations indicated in the *VAC Grievance Guidelines* (Human Resources).

If a staff member, contractor, student or volunteer is found to have breached a client's confidentiality, action will be taken.

4. Communication

Information and training about the *Client Confidentiality Procedure* will be provided in a range of formats to all VAC staff, contractors, students and volunteers.

5. Review

The Client Confidentiality Procedure will be reviewed on a three-yearly basis, or more frequently if required.

6. Associated forms, templates and other documents

VAC Client Confidentiality Agreement for Staff and Volunteers

VAC Staff Code of Conduct

DWF Consent to Access Centrelink Confirmation eServices (CCeS)

DWF Authority to Act (Individual)

DWF Client Consent to Release their Personal Information

DWF Privacy Authority

Community Support maintaining your privacy

Community Support Client Code of Conduct and Consent Agreement (to release personal information)

CASP Counselling Consent Form for Release of Information

CASP Counselling/AOD program manual

Equinox Registration

HIV Services Program Privacy Policy

HIV Services Program Consent Form for Release of Information

PRONTO! Consent to Communicate Client Information between PRONTO! and Other Services

PRONTO! PrEP Clinic Registration Form

7. References and acknowledgements

Department of Health and Human Services (Vic), *Informed Consent*, health.vic (visited 25/5/2016)

Department of Human Services (Aus) *CCeS Policy* March 2016

Department of Human Services (Aus) *CCeS Terms* March 2016

Department of Human Services (Aus) *Centrelink Confirmation eServices Procedural Guide for Businesses* March 2016

Department of Human Services (Vic), 'Information Privacy', *Business Practice Manual*, Chapter 2, September 2014

NADA Privacy and Confidentiality Policy template

Service Agreement 01/01/2016 to 30/06/2018 between the State of Victoria as represented by the Department of Health and Human Services (ABN 74410330756) and Victorian AIDS Council Inc (ABN 52907644835) Agreement no. 31668 Agreement version # 1 Date: 25/02/2016

VAC/GMHC Mobile Devices Policy

VAC Client Confidentiality Framework

