**Context**

The Victorian Disability Act 2006 and the Quality Framework Standards require Community Service Organisations to provide information about the services that people with a disability can expect from their organisation. Information should also describe the how their employees will work and engage with people with a disability and their families/carers. Community Service Organisations are also required to inform new and existing service users about the process to follow should they wish to make a complaint about the service. This must be communicated in a format that is accessible to the person using the service.

[**Quality Framework**](http://www.dhs.vic.gov.au/disability/improving_supports/quality_framework_for_disability_services_2007)

[**Disability Act 2006**](http://www.legislation.vic.gov.au)

**Client Service Charter**

The Client Service Charter outlines the steps that the organisation takes to ensure that it complies with the Disability Services Act 2006 and the Quality Framework Standards. The Client Service Charter guides employee conduct and provides clear expectations about their behaviours and organisational processes. A useful indication of whether a Service Charter is effective is the number of times it can be cited as a control for an identified risk.

The Client Service Charter may be part of an information package for new or prospective service users. Community Service Organisations may choose to publish a service handbook or separate brochures that describe the range of services available.

The Client Service Charter and information about the range of available services is designed primarily for people with a disability, their families/carers and employees; but may also be distributed to government, community stakeholders (for fundraising) and other service providers (for service referrals and potential alliances).

With the shift to personalise services and portable self-directed funding, community service organisations need to be responsive to people’s changing needs and interests. The relevance of the Client Services Charter and service information can be maintained by encouraging communication between people with a disability, families/carers and the organisation.

**Purpose**

The purpose of the Client Service Charter and Service Information is to provide information about the:

* Legal basis for the service (e.g. registration, legislative compliance requirements)
* Range of services available
* Reason that the disability service provider’s services should be considered
* Target group(s) for the services
* Way in which people will be treated if they decide to purchase a service
* Way in which the service provider will communicate with service users
* Features and limitations of the services available (including cost and purchasing details)
* Rights and responsibilities of the parties involved in the service transaction
* Organisation’s Mission, Vision, Values, Strategies, culture and service delivery ethos
* Courses of action available to an aggrieved service user.

**Considerations**

The Service Charter relates to the following elements of the Disability Risk Management and Controls Model:

Element: Innovation, Quality & Improvement

Sub element: Policies & Procedures

* + - * Service Delivery
      * Quality

The Client Service Charter reflects the organisation’s Strategic Plan. For example, the provision of services outlined in the Charter is consistent with the organisation’s Mission, Vision and Values. The way in which services are provided and relationships are managed, particularly in relation to the feedback and improvement process, will support the organisation to achieve its Goals (refer to the ‘Our Customers’ section of the Strategic Plan)[[1]](#footnote-1).

**Procedure**

When developing or reviewing a Client Service Charter, the following steps should be considered:

Step 1: Introduction

Step 2: Service Charter Purpose

Step 3: Mission

Step 4: Vision

Step 5: Core Values

Step 6: Service Provision

Step 7: Our Clients

Step 8: Service Standards

Step 9: Client Communication

Step 10: Service Delivery Process

Step 11: Comments & Complaints

These steps are a guide. Some organisations may elect to combine several steps into one, depending on the structure of their Strategic Plan.

**OUR ORGANISATION**

**Step 1. Introduction**

Include an introductory statement outlining your organisation’s approach to service provision. The excerpt below is provided as an example:

This Charter will tell you about [insert name of agency] and our commitment to providing excellent services to people with disability and their families/carers. We believe that the better we know each other, the better we can work together to achieve your goals.

Our organisation is accredited by the Victorian Department of Human Services, and we focus on safety and work to meet the highest standards to ensure your health and wellbeing and that of our workers.

Our services include [list], but are designed to meet your needs.

We will work best in partnership with you. Sharing what we know means that together we can make good decisions. Our communication is honest and open. Everything we record is agreed with you.

If there are limits to what we can do, we will disclose them.

Before you agree to use our service, you are entitled to make sure that we can deliver on our promises. If you or we feel that we cannot do this, we will refer you to an organisation that can better meet your needs.

We know that people who use our services generally have limited funds, so we do everything we can to reduce costs and maximise outcomes. We will provide you with regular, detailed information about how your money has been spent.

By its nature, our work requires you to provide highly sensitive information about yourself and your family. We assure you that we will respect your right to privacy, confidentiality and dignity at all times.

We welcome opportunities to improve, and encourage you to tell us if you are displeased or concerned about your service.

**Step 2. Client Service Charter Purpose**

Describe the main theme of your Client Service Charter, including what your organisation aims to achieve. Examples include:

This Charter shows our commitment to providing day placement and training activities…and outlines the necessary steps towards gaining quality outcomes.

This Charter outlines our customer service standards and ensures that the respite services we provide are planned, documented and carried out under controlled conditions.

**Step 3. Mission**

Briefly describe your organisation’s Mission, which includes the general objectives and principles of your organisation as per the Mission documented in the Strategic Plan (the Mission statement(s) can be taken directly from your organisation’s Strategic Plan). For example:

To form partnerships with government, the community, clients and other relevant stakeholders to empower people with disabilities to achieve their potential.

To overcome the personal, structural and attitudinal barriers that prevent people with a disability from participating in community life; and work to make our community more inclusive, accessible and welcoming.

To deliver quality and innovative disability, education and senior service options that empower and enrich individuals and communities.

**Step 4. Vision**

State your organisation’s Vision (from the Strategic Plan). The Vision defines the overriding principle that guides the organisation and outlines what the organisation would like to achieve or accomplish in the medium- to long-term. For example:

An inclusive community that welcomes and values people of different abilities, cultures, backgrounds and beliefs.

**Step 5. Core Values**

List and describe your organisation’s core Values. The core Values represent your organisation’s ideals and include points which describe the moral and ethical basis on which your organisation delivers services to people with a disability.

For Values to be meaningful they have to be shared, so it is important to include employees in the development of organisational Values. These Values drive employee behaviour and set a benchmark for their conduct with clients. The Values are aligned with the Code of Conduct and, where applicable, the Code of Conduct for Victorian Public Sector employees and state legislation. For example:

**We believe in being:**

**Inclusive** because everybody has something to offer & their gifts enrich us all

**Informed** because information, knowledge & a culture of life-long learning & improvement are the building blocks of excellent outcomes

**Tenacious** because the best results will only be achieved through persistence & hard work

**Transparent** because without openness and honesty, nothing is durable

**Sensitive** because everyone is owed dignity & respect, irrespective of their language, culture, religion or beliefs.

**Integrity in all we do:** conducting all dealings in an open and honest manner and in accordance with the code of conduct.

**Empowering ourselves & others**: ………………..

**Showing respect for others**: ……………

**Being accountable**: ……………….

**Step 6. Client Services**

Outline the services provided by your organisation and provide a brief description of each service. For example:

Adult services are provided by a range of skilled and experienced staff, including physiotherapists, speech pathologists, occupational therapists and psychologists. The team, together with other adult services staff, offers the following benefits:

* Work in partnerships with clients, families & carers
* Early childhood intervention
* Communication resource centre service

Describe the way in which the person receives a service and is supported to maximise the benefits associated with being involved with the organisation. Assure the client that all services will be carried out in accordance with relevant legislation and quality standards.

**Step 7. Our Clients**

List the people who use your services, for example:

Our clients include people with a disability, their families and carers

**Step 8. Service Standards**

Service Standards describe the benchmarks and measures by which your organisation provides services. These standards will include the quality of service being provided. It may be useful to reference the *DHS Quality Framework* (<http://www.dhs.vic.gov.au/disability/improving_supports/quality_framework_for_disability_services_2007>) when developing these standards.

For example:

We pride ourselves on providing professional and high quality services. Our services include: programs tailored to your needs and interests, therapy support to assist with your physical needs and communication, and staff who treat you with respect.

**Policies and procedures may also be part of a Service Standards section of the Service Charter.**

This section may include policies and procedures that relate to:

* Decision making, choice and advocacy
* Privacy, dignity and confidentiality
* Complaints and disputes
* Protection of human rights and freedom from abuse
* Service termination/exiting the service
* Fees and charges.

**Step 9. Client Communication**

In this section, key messages and the manner in which they will be communicated to clients is outlined.

Clients should be informed about choosing or purchasing a service in a format that is easily accessible and understood. For example, verbal communication, brochures, online access, etc. In some instances, several alternative formats may be required.

Clients also need to be informed about the following:

* What the service includes and expected outcomes
* Individualised service agreement – the nature of the contractual relationship between the person and the organisation
* Fee – service charges, billing and accounting to clients; terms and conditions, including a clear statement of the organisation’s fees and client account management policies and practices
* Payment – including methods of payment and actions taken for non-payment
* Legal requirements in relation to service provision
* Timelines
* Complaint/compliment/feedback processes
* Privacy and confidentiality statement
* Exit and service termination – including the method by which a person can exit the service.

Communication may also include information on the Victorian Disability Service Standards, the Disability Act 2006 and other relevant legislation, including a statement on the organisation’s compliance with relevant legislation.

**Communication process**

Outline the communication process you follow. This example may be used as a guide:

**Initial meeting:** The person with a disability, and if appropriate, their family/carer are encouraged to be involved in the initial interview and subsequent meetings. During the interview, an Application for Enrolment form is completed.

**Application:** We check the application form to ensure that the person with a disability is registered for service with the DHS, whether other service programs are being offered or used, and whether a case worker has been appointed.

If a case worker has not been appointed, the manager will determine responsibility for the coordination of services to the person concerned.

**Information provision:** The person seeking the service receives a client handbook and the following is explained:

* fees for service
* purpose of fees
* conditions of payment
* sexual harassment
* DHS standards

Documents are provided in an accessible format, appropriate to the person’s needs. The applicant or support person will be asked to sign an acknowledgment that each document has been explained and is understood.

**Development of Individual Program Plans:** Once the person with a disability has gained a service or place in the program, an Individual Program Plan is developed with them.

**Step 10. Service Delivery Process**

The Service Process Map provides a detailed outline of the service delivery process, outlining the steps for providing services from the point of contact through to the point at which the service is terminated. The Process Map is the basis for service planning and coordination with other parties.

The Service Process Map also links to strategic planning. For example, the effectiveness of service planning and coordination impacts on the achievement of goals in the ‘Our Clients’ and ‘Our Markets’ sections of the Strategic Plan (refer to the Strategic Plan resource). It also informs the Marketing Plan.

**Step 11. Comments and Complaints**

Community Service Organisations are responsible for informing people using their services about the process for making a comment or complaint about the services provided. This includes the steps to take, who to contact and the relevant contact details. This process must be accessible and assistance provided as necessary.

The Disability Services Commissioner requires Community Service Organisations to record all complaints, the resolution process and outcomes. Recording and analysing complaints will inform service improvements. An example of a complaint log is depicted here.

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Complaint Log** | | | | | |
| **Date** | **Service offered** | **Complaint** | **Resolution** | **Date implemented** | **Outcome** |
|  |  |  |  |  |  |
|  |  |  |  |  |  |
|  |  |  |  |  |  |
|  |  |  |  |  |  |

1. Please refer to the NDS *Strategic Planning* resource, developed as part of the *Disability Risk Management and Controls Model,* located at [www.nds.org.au](http://www.nds.org.au) [↑](#footnote-ref-1)