



Sexual Health and Safety Policy

Document number: SCS-PP-4020 Version 4.0

Approval

Policy owner	Executive Manager, Specialist Community Services		
Business Unit	Specialist Community Services		
Approved by	Executive Manager, Specialist Community Services		
Date approved	01/12/2025	Review date	01/12/2027

1 Purpose

- 1.1 SVDPWA Specialist Community Services (SCS) is committed to fostering a culture where service users' sexual health and safety are valued and supported equally alongside their mental and physical wellbeing, with full respect for their rights.
- 1.2 SCS recognises that sexual health is a vital part of personal wellbeing, self-esteem, and social connection. Without proper awareness and information, service users may be at greater risk of poor sexual health and abuse.
- 1.3 SCS seeks to create a safe and respectful environment where open communication on sexual health and safety is promoted and encouraged.

2 Scope

- 2.1 This policy applies to all staff who work in the following SVDPWA Specialist Community Services:
 - Mental Health Service
 - Housing Plus
 - Homelessness Services
- 2.2 This policy should be read alongside the St Vincent de Paul Society WA's suite of Safeguarding Children and Vulnerable People policies and procedures, as listed in the References section.

3 Policy principles

Leadership and Accountability

- 3.1 SCS promotes the sexual health and safety of service users in a service related environment, recognising that this sits naturally alongside physical and mental health and wellbeing.
- 3.2 Sexual health and safety are prioritised in service planning and delivery, as well as a key consideration in reviewing risk and identifying quality improvement opportunities.
- 3.3 All staff and volunteers must follow the SCS-PP-4010 Professional Boundaries Policy and the SVDPWA-PP-1031 Code of Conduct for Children and Vulnerable People. This helps to ensure service user safety and reduces risks related to their vulnerability.
- 3.4 SCS staff will ensure that all steps are taken to ensure privacy and personal boundaries are maintained for each service user.

Responding to Concerns

- 3.5 Staff must report all concerns of actual or suspected abuse of service users and/or staff misconduct immediately to their line manager, Service Manager or, if out of hours, to On Call.
- 3.6 All disclosures are taken seriously, investigated and responded to promptly and from a trauma informed perspective, following steps outlined in the SVDPWA-PR-1112 Safeguarding Concerns Handling Procedure and, the SVDPWA-PR-1113 Investigating Safeguarding Concerns Procedure.

-
- 3.7 All concerns must be documented and, where appropriate, reported to the relevant authorities.
- For Mental Health Services, concerns must be reported to the Mental Health Commission, the Office of the Chief Psychiatrist, and LARU.
 - For Homelessness Services, where relevant the Department of Communities is notified.
 - Reports to external bodies (e.g. Police) must follow the organisation's safeguarding procedures.

Physical Environment

- 3.8 SCS is committed to facilitating an environment where service users can openly discuss and come forward with questions, concerns or issues related to their sexual health and safety as relevant to service delivery.
- 3.9 SCS welcomes and respects all sexualities, cultures and gender diverse people without judgement.
- 3.10 All service users of SCS services are entitled to feel safe physically, emotionally, culturally and, sexually, be treated with respect and, have any concerns heard and taken seriously.
- 3.11 SCS recognises that creating safe physical environments is crucial for promoting sexual health and safety. This includes ensuring service users in residential settings have access to gender specific bathrooms, lockable bedrooms and in some settings CCTV.

Partnering with Service Users

- 3.12 Service users are given access to clear information regarding their rights and responsibilities in relation to sexual health and safety as well as the standards expected by the organisation in relation to this.
- 3.13 SCS will ensure that resources on sexual health and safety are freely available to service users as relevant to each service.
- 3.14 SCS promotes the responsibility of service users to behave in ways that contribute to sexual safety as appropriate in the service environment.
- 3.15 Service users will be provided with information on the appropriate avenues to raise concerns and issues. This may include access to an independent advocacy service as relevant to service delivery.
- 3.16 Where required, service users are linked to external support services specific to their particular needs, to ensure that all aspects of their sexual health and safety needs are being met. Where possible staff will ensure that support is provided by the person/service of the service user's choice.
- 3.17 Disclosures and concerns from service users that indicate their sexual safety may be compromised, are taken seriously. Staff will act to ensure immediate safety while addressing the issue in accordance with Duty of Care, confidentiality requirements and Dignity of Risk.
- 3.18 SCS recognises that trauma can have a complex and long-lasting impact on service users, which can impact their mental, physical and sexual wellbeing, as well as their sense of safety.

Staff Development and Support

- 3.19 SCS ensures staff are trained and skilled to promote sexual health and safety, respond appropriately to concerns, and apply trauma-informed principles in all aspects of their work. This includes assigning culturally appropriate staff where possible and providing training on identifying and addressing issues or allegations of abuse relevant to service delivery.
- 3.20 Staff have access to regular group supervision delivered by an externally contracted professional. In addition to this they receive monthly line management where they can receive debriefing, coaching and discuss any concerns that they have.
- 3.21 As part of the division's commitment under the National Catholic Safeguarding Standards, all staff are required to complete the organisations Safeguarding Foundations training that includes working with vulnerable adults. This is renewed every three years.

4 Roles and responsibilities

- 4.1 The Executive Manager, Specialist Community Services is responsible for maintaining the currency of this policy.
- 4.2 Society representatives are required to adhere to this policy. Failure to comply may be considered a breach of our policies and may result in disciplinary action.

5 Review

- 5.1 This policy will be reviewed at least every two years, after consultation. Some circumstances may trigger an early review; this includes but is not limited to legislative changes, organisational changes, incident outcomes and other matters deemed appropriate by the Executive Manager.

6 Further assistance

- 6.1 Society personnel should speak with their Manager regarding any questions about the implementation of this policy.

7 References

References made in this policy are:

- 7.1 SCS-PP-4010 Professional Boundaries Policy
- 7.2 SVDPWA-PP-1031 Code of Conduct for Children and Vulnerable People
- 7.3 SVDPWA-PR-1112 Safeguarding Concerns Handling Procedure
- 7.4 SVDPWA-PR-1113 Investigating Safeguarding Concerns Procedure

8 Related documents and legislation

Related documents and legislation at the time of approval include:

- 8.1 SCS-PP-4014 Responding to Behaviours of Concern Policy
- 8.2 SCS-PP-4016 Disability, Access and Inclusion Policy

- 8.3 SCS-PP-4023 Gender and Sexuality Policy
- 8.4 SCS-PP-4018 Privacy and Confidentiality – Service User Policy
- 8.5 SCS-PP-4004 Managing Service User Feedback Policy
- 8.6 SVDPWA-PP-1030 Safeguarding Children and Vulnerable People Policy
- 8.7 SVDPWA-PR-1032 Safeguarding Children and Vulnerable People Procedure
- 8.8 Standard 1: Governance, Licensing and Accreditation Regulatory Unit, *Department of Health, Government of Western Australia.*
- 8.9 Specialist Homelessness Service Standards 2016, *Department of Communities, Government of Western Australia.*
- 8.10 Youth Work Code of Ethics. *The Association for Youth Work Western Australia*
- 8.11 Mental Health Act Charter of Mental Health Care Principles 2014 – *Mental Health Commission, Government of Western Australia.*
- 8.12 National Standards for the Mental Health Services 2010 – *Department of Health, Australian.*
- 8.13 Chief Psychiatrist Guidelines for the Sexual Safety of Consumers of Mental Health in Western Australia, December 2020

9 Approval and amendment history

Version	Approval authority	Date	Amendment summary
1.0	EM, SCS	30/04/2019	Initial version
2.0	EM, SCS	28/07/2021	Scheduled review
2.1	EM, SCS	30/11/2021	Conversion to new template
3.0	EM, SCS	27/11/2023	Scheduled review
4.0	EM, SCS	01/12/2025	Scheduled review

10 Definitions

Term	Definition
Culturally appropriate	Reference of culture in this policy relates to the wider definition of culture as outlined in the PersonBrain™ Model and Therapeutic Crisis Intervention including (but limited to): age, gender, sexuality, ethnicity etc
Dignity of Risk	Dignity of Risk acknowledges that life experiences come with risk, and self-determination and the right to take reasonable risks are essential for dignity and self-esteem.
Duty of Care	a moral or legal obligation to ensure the safety or well-being of others.
Safeguarding	the protection of children and adults who could be easily hurt emotionally and physically (Cambridge Dictionary)

Term	Definition
Sexual Health	Sexual health is a state of physical, mental and social well-being in relation to sexual identity. It requires a positive and respectful approach to sexuality and sexual relationships, as well as the possibility of having pleasurable and safe sexual experiences, free of coercion, discrimination and violence. https://www.who.int/topics/sexual_health/en/
Sexual safety	Includes both feeling and being psychologically and physically safety from unwanted sexual behaviour (Chief Psychiatrist's Guidelines for the Sexual Safety of Consumers of Mental Health Services in WA)