

## Section 4: Direct service delivery to specific groups

Standard 4.1	Supporting parents and accompanying children
Standard 4.2	Supporting young people
Standard 4.3	Supporting women, children and other people experiencing family/ domestic violence
Standard 4.4	Providing culturally competent services
Standard 4.5	Providing advocacy services <b>New Standard</b>

### Overview of issues in this section

This section builds on practice described in the standards contained in Sections 2 and 3. This section focuses on:

- supporting the capacity of parents and families to engage with the service system
- supporting children to have their growth, developmental and health needs met
- helping people to develop and maintain positive family attachments and cultural connections
- maximising people's social, learning and employment opportunities
- enabling women and children to be safe and protected from violence
- providing people with culturally appropriate options and opportunities
- providing specialist advocacy services for people, including tenants of public, private and social housing.

**Standard 4.1** focuses on the needs of children up to 18 years of age who accompany a parent or carer.

***All services that provide frequent or infrequent support to children and young people accompanying their parents or guardians will need to adhere to this standard.***

**Standard 4.2** focuses on the needs of young people between the ages of 15 and 25 years who access services independently. The appropriate response to unaccompanied children under 15 years of age (and in some instances, to vulnerable young people aged 15 and 16 years) is covered in Standard 2.2 (signpost 2.2.2 initial assessment for immediate assistance and an appropriate service).

***All services that provide frequent or infrequent support to unaccompanied young people will need to adhere to this standard.***

**Standard 4.3** focuses on the varied service responses for assessment and support of people experiencing family violence. Standard 4.3 acknowledges some organisations are funded to provide specialist accommodation and/or support for women and children experiencing family violence, while other organisations may provide support to a range of people without a direct focus on family violence. Standard 4.3 contains practice descriptions that have been referenced from the Code of Practice for Specialist Family Violence Services for Women and Children 2006.

***All services that provide frequent or infrequent support to women, children and other people experiencing family violence will need to adhere to this standard.***

**Standard 4.4** focuses on the delivery of culturally competent services to people with diverse interests, customs, beliefs, culture and ethnic backgrounds.

***All services will need to adhere to this standard.***

**Standard 4.5** focuses on the delivery of specialist advocacy services for a range of people. The principles of advocacy relate to the support of another person to receive or access information or services. Whilst many organisations may provide a component of advocacy as part of a broader support or case management role, Standard 4.5 relates specifically to organisations that receive funding to deliver a specialist advocacy response.

***Standard 4.5 is applicable to:***

- homelessness advocacy services
- the advocacy service component for organisations funded to provide the Social Housing Advocacy and Support Program.

Documents that further support these standards include:

Working with Children Act 2005  
Residential Tenancies Act 1997  
Children, Youth and Families Act 2005  
Duty of Care (Department of Human Services 2000)  
Women's Safety Strategy (Office of Women's Affairs 2002)  
Language Services Policy (Department of Human Services 2006)  
Working with a Multicultural Community (Department of Human Services 1999)  
Victorian Indigenous Homelessness Study (Aboriginal Housing Board of Victoria, 2001)  
The Victorian Indigenous Family Violence Strategy (Department of Human Services 2001)  
The Protocol for Case Management of Unsupported Young People (Commonwealth and States)  
NTV Standards for Men's Behavioural Change Group Work – A Manual for Quality Practice (NTV 2006)  
Homelessness Assistance Program Guidelines and Conditions for Funding (Department of Human Services 2006)  
Social Housing Advocacy and Support Program Guidelines (Department of Human Services 2006)  
Code of Practice for Specialist Family Violence Services for Women and Children (Domestic Violence Victoria 2006)

## Standard 4.1: Supporting parents and accompanying children

**Parents or carers are assisted in supporting children and young people in their care so that each child's needs are identified and met and their rights are respected.**

Children are among the most vulnerable and disempowered of those experiencing homelessness or family violence. Children need specific care and attention to ensure their social, emotional and physical needs are identified and addressed. Parents, families and carers must be supported to create and sustain a safe and nurturing home environment, which supports childhood development and stability.

All organisations that provide frequent or infrequent support to children and young people accompanying their parents or guardians will need to adhere to this standard.

*The following features and examples are not meant to be exhaustive or prescriptive, but rather give some guidance to services in how to achieve this standard.*

### Documentation that can support good practice

#### Signposts of good practice

##### 4.1.1

**The organisation's written documents demonstrate a clear commitment to the rights of children accompanying parents or carers.**

#### Further explanation and examples

##### **Clear commitment to the rights of children**

The United Nations International Charter of the Rights of the Child is useful for organisations to consider when developing a statement of commitment to children. The organisation may embed the rights of children in a number of organisational documents, such as the constitution, mission statements, policies on childcare, case management and child-safe environments.

#### 4.1.2

**The organisation has documented policies that comply with statutory requirements and guide contemporary practice for staff that work with children.**

#### **Quality of care and safety of children**

For example, policies, procedures and guidelines will meet the legislative requirements of the Children, Youth and Families Act 2005 and the Working with Children Act 2005. Organisational guidelines may also cover:

- the importance of a welcoming and accessible service environment
- a range of family focussed means to engage with children, youth and their families
- the use of resources which are culturally and developmentally appropriate for the age group
- assessment and planning processes, including monitoring and responding to health needs (medical, dental, nutritional, hygiene, mental health)
- cultural support plans
- staff and volunteer recruitment strategies, job descriptions, skills, competencies and values
- processes for addressing conflict of interest between parents and children
- parenting support, including assisting parents to engage in continuous development of their understanding of normal childhood development and parenting skills that address children's emotional and physical care needs
- management of privacy, safety and security, including staffing, physical environments, equipment, vehicles, excursions
- access to childcare, preschool, and education opportunities
- developing relationships and networking with relevant service providers
- staff training and development opportunities
- mechanisms for receiving feedback from children.

#### 4.1.3

**The organisation has documented systems to support staff in carrying out their statutory responsibilities for the care and protection of children.**

#### **Child protection systems**

Policies, procedures and practices are in place that reflects the legislative intent of the Children, Youth and Families Act 2005 and the Working with Children Act 2005.

Documented systems should guide staff in identifying and acting in the case of suspected child neglect or abuse, in identifying and addressing self-harm and potentially suicidal behaviour in children and young people, and addressing violent behaviour towards others.

Documents should include a clear definition of care and protection issues, procedures to report issues to other authorities, attendance at case conferences, report writing, guidelines for working with parents under these circumstances and processes for staff supervision and debriefing.

#### **4.1.4**

**The organisation has documented systems for case management that includes identifying and meeting the needs of children and youth within the context of the family.**

#### **System for assessment and planning to meet needs**

Policy and procedure documents will reflect a focus on the individual needs of the children and the parents' role in supporting their children. In assessing and addressing needs it is important that:

- assessment of children and youth's strengths, risks and needs is undertaken in the context of their family. This includes an assessment of children and youth's well being including developmental, learning and health needs
- staff demonstrate an understanding of risk assessment, including procedures for reports and referrals to relevant authorities/agencies
- staff discuss children's needs with parents as part of an overall case planning approach
- staff gain each child's perspective in assessment, planning and ongoing service delivery
- staff give priority to the safety and well being of each child, while working towards maintaining the family unit (as appropriate)
- staff demonstrate an understanding of a range of approaches to support parents and families to access secondary and specialist services
- progress is reviewed against goals and strategies identified in case plans to ensure plans are still relevant
- staff assess the parents' own needs in privacy away from children
- staff document assessment, planning, case review and service delivery outcomes for children in individual case plans
- children's individual assessments and support plans are considered within the context of family case management.

#### **4.1.5**

**The organisation has a comprehensive resource guide to assist referrals for children, youth and families.**

#### **Resources to assist children**

Staff demonstrate a good working relationship and knowledge of other services and resources available for children in the community. This may include working with or referring children and families to organisations who provide health programs, education, child care, trauma or counselling services, play or recreation groups, child protection and legal services.

**Signposts of good practice**

**4.1.6**

**The organisation supports children to participate in developing their own case planning process in collaboration with their parents.**

**Further explanation and examples**

**Parents' and children's participation in case planning**

Processes should be developed to ensure the organisation engages positively and effectively with children, youth and their families to create an environment that supports development and stability. Inclusive practice includes creating opportunities for children, youth and families to participate in assessment, planning and decision making from a strength-based approach. Ideally, the organisation will jointly plan with parents the best process for identifying children's needs. Processes may include offering children the opportunity to engage directly with staff in order to participate in activities based around decision planning. The organisation should seek permission from parents if interviews with the child take place separately. Policies and procedures should guide staff practice where there are protective concerns for children.

In the planning process, the organisation should consider the child's need to develop and maintain relationships with families or other important people in their lives. How this is best done will depend on the child's age and developmental level, cultural issues, the parents' needs and the level of risk to the child. Within the assessment and planning process, the organisation should recognise that a child's/youth's needs may not necessarily have been assessed or addressed recently.

The child and their parents are all likely to have goals and tasks within the case plan. These need to be expressed in language appropriate to all parties, negotiated and reviewed to ensure there is commitment to follow-through on what is documented in the plan.

**4.1.7**

**Assessment and planning for children and young people considers their educational, health, cultural, social and emotional needs.**

**Assessing children's needs**

The organisation promotes the healthy development of children and youth by promoting their connectedness to parents, family, health & early childhood services, school, peer groups, community and culture.

The organisation's guiding documentation for assessing and planning for children and youth should reference the Statewide children's intake, assessment and support plan framework. This framework has been developed to support the identification of individual children's needs and includes a simple checklist.

#### **4.1.8**

**The organisation acknowledges the skills of parents and families and assists them to increase their confidence and capacity to meet the safety, stability and developmental needs of their child or youth.**

#### **Supporting parents and enhancing their skills**

Strengths-based planning approaches assist to identify the strengths and capacity of parents and families in supporting their children. The experience of homelessness or family violence may leave many parents feeling undermined in their capacity to look after or focus on their children's needs. Focusing on their strengths is likely to be a first step in being able to address future goals.

Organisations should assist parents and families to understand the impact that homelessness or family violence has on the social and emotional wellbeing of children. Parents may need information and/or counselling in order to explore and understand their own experiences and the experiences of their children. Where programs are offered to aid trauma and emotional recovery for children and young people, it is important that parents are involved and provided with skills to assist their children.

A range of approaches can help to support parents in their parenting role, including providing space for each child to spend time doing something fun with a parent (while other children are being safely cared for), or through referral to parenting support groups.

#### **4.1.9**

**The organisation gains parents' written consent for children to participate in activities or excursions when the parents are not present.**

#### **Parental consent**

The organisation complies with policies and procedures associated with duty of care, including the arrangement and monitoring of individual and group activities conducted on site or off site. Parents should be fully advised of details relating to activities prior to signing consent forms. Compliance with policies may include documenting:

- the children's health, medication history and dietary requirements
- consent forms for attending specific activities or excursions
- consent forms for photographs or video footage to be taken
- consent forms for emergency medical treatment
- staffing resources
- travel arrangements
- costs and personal requirements.

#### **4.1.10**

**With the parents' knowledge, the organisation consults children and youth about decisions that will affect them.**

#### **4.1.11**

**The organisation provides a safe, culturally appropriate and nurturing environment for children and youth.**

#### **Consulting with children and young people**

Guidelines should suggest a range of family focussed means to engage with children and youth, in age, cultural and developmentally appropriate ways to ascertain their preferences, feelings and needs. This may include discussions with children and youth regarding basic service rights or responsibilities, or decisions about their family, home, learning or recreation environments. Depending on the complexity of the issue, staff should seek views from children and young people with parents or, at a minimum, with parents' knowledge.

#### **Providing a safe, culturally appropriate and nurturing environment.**

A welcoming office or housing environment should be safe, meet community standards, expectations and legal requirements, as well as being appropriate to children and youth's cultural, age and developmental stage requirements. The organisation should demonstrate building environments that:

- meet legislative requirements (building codes, OHS etc)
- feature child safe design equipment and facilities, i.e. stair barriers, locks, gates, furniture, bedding, toys, outdoor spaces
- are equipped with indoor and outdoor play and recreation facilities appropriate to age and developmental requirements
- have private spaces available, including storage space
- create a warm and welcoming environment through appropriate furnishings and layout.

The organisation should also have the capacity to supply or access essential resources for families. This could include:

- food
- bottles, formula, nappies etc
- clothing and footwear
- personal hygiene items
- bedding
- health requirements.

#### **4.1.12**

**The organisation develops relationships with key agencies in order to refer and advocate for the needs of children and youth.**

#### **Collaborating with other agencies**

To be effective, organisations should build strong relationships with other like providers and community services in order to:

- promote awareness and a broader understanding of the effect of homelessness and family violence on children and young people
- advocate for the needs of parents, families, children and youth
- provide information to parents and families about other services
- provide active referrals to other services
- share or access resources
- create opportunities for joint case management of services where appropriate.

This may include working with or referring children and families to organisations that provide specialist children's services, health programs, education, child care, trauma or counselling services, play or recreation groups, child protection and legal services. In addition, organisations should support parents to advocate for their children, both at a service or program level and more broadly where other service systems are not meeting their needs (for example, where schools or child care services have not provided enrolment).

#### **4.1.13**

**The organisation ensures that staff are trained in child focussed, family centred practice.**

#### **Skills and knowledge in child-focussed practice**

A child focussed, family centred practice approach brings together the specialist resources provided by a professional with the knowledge; skills, concerns, decisions and plans of the family.

The organisation should ensure relevant staff demonstrate appropriate competencies, skills, knowledge, attributes and experience to complete the tasks and roles they will need to perform. In particular, staff should demonstrate:

- an understanding of the likely effects of homelessness or family violence on the development and behaviour of children and young people
- a commitment to addressing the needs of children or young people who have experienced homelessness or family violence
- an understanding of infant, child and adolescent milestones and developmental stages
- statutory responsibilities regarding the care and protection of children and young people under Victorian legislation
- child-focussed approaches to working with children and young people, for example, using play or art activities
- positive approaches that support parents and families to set boundaries and deal with conflict
- appropriate knowledge, liaison and consultation skills to work with specialist services.

Staff directly responsible for assessment and case planning with children and young people will require a more intensive level of training and may have specific qualifications in early childhood development or youth work.

#### **4.1.14**

**Staff demonstrate application of appropriate competencies to support the case management of children who are experiencing grief, loss, trauma or low self-esteem.**

#### **Emotionally supporting children**

Accompanying children are likely to be suffering from grief, loss, trauma and low self-esteem; however they may not have the language skills or maturity to articulate these needs. Staff should demonstrate competencies and skills in working with parents, carers or families and other specialised services to address these needs. At a minimum, this will mean acknowledging the impact of children's (and infants) experiences and developing approaches that can assist children and young people to deal with their feelings appropriately.

Specialized services may provide group programs to assist children share experiences and deal more directly or appropriately with their grief and loss. Building links with other agencies, i.e. youth services, childcare and relationship services, is also important. The Statewide Children's Resource Coordinator in each region can provide secondary consultation or assist organisations to develop appropriate policies and locate or design useful tools and resources.

#### **4.1.15**

**The organisation has a budget for responding to children's needs.**

#### **Budgeting resources for children's needs**

The organisation should demonstrate the capacity to directly allocate funding from program budgets to meet the specific needs of children and young people. In instances where this is not appropriate or possible, the organisation should demonstrate knowledge of local and Statewide resources, including application processes, eligibility and funding criteria. Staff should provide parents and families with information and further assistance as required to access funds.

**Signposts of good practice**

**4.1.16**

**The organisation monitors its work with children and young people to ensure it provides a quality service consistent with the organisation's policy framework.**

**Further explanation and examples**

**Reviewing performance**

This could include:

- reviewing policies, procedures and guidelines to ensure reflection of contemporary practice and compliance with funding or legislative requirements
- seeking feedback from children and their families about their experiences within the service
- monitoring the service culture to ensure consumer rights and responsibilities are promoted
- monitoring grievances and resolution processes
- reviewing data in order to identify gaps in service delivery or the development of trends
- conducting audits of case management processes and case reviews to measure the timeliness and effectiveness of interventions
- reviewing immunisation and health records to ensure health services and files are up to date
- monitoring support provided to children and young people to ensure gender equity and appropriateness for all ages involved
- monitoring staff supervision and training
- monitoring staff performance appraisals to ensure appropriateness of job descriptions, competencies, training and personal development opportunities
- monitoring referrals to specialist services, including access to kindergarten, childcare or schools.

## Standard 4.2: Supporting young people

**Young people are provided with support that is sensitive and responsive to their individual needs.**

Implementing prevention and early intervention strategies may assist young people to develop healthy, sustainable life styles.

All organisations that provide frequent or infrequent support to unaccompanied young people will need to adhere to this standard.

*The following features and examples are not meant to be exhaustive or prescriptive, but rather give some guidance to services in how to achieve this standard.*

### Documentation that can support good practice

#### Signposts of good practice

##### 4.2.1

**The organisation's written documents demonstrate a clear commitment to the rights of young people and indicate priority is given to:**

- **the level of independent living skills and how these can be improved to assist the transition to independence if necessary**
- **the importance of linking the young person to education, training or employment opportunities**
- **the importance of linking young people back to their families or community, where appropriate.**

#### Further explanation and examples

##### **Clear commitment to the rights of young people**

The United Nations' International Charter of the Rights of the Child, the Victorian Homelessness Strategy, and the Youth Homelessness Action Plan are useful for organisations to consider when developing a statement of commitment to young people. The organisation may not have a separate statement on the rights of young people, but rather have the rights embedded in a number of organisational documents, such as the constitution, mission statements, case management policies and principles and policies on age-appropriate environments.

#### 4.2.2

**The organisation has documented policies, that comply with statutory requirements and guide contemporary practice for staff that work with young people.**

#### Quality of care for young people

For example, policies, procedures and guidelines will meet the legislative requirements of the Children, Youth and Families Act 2005 and the Working with Children Act 2005.

Organisational guidelines may also cover:

- the importance of a safe, welcoming and accessible service environment
- assessment, risk management and planning processes,
- cultural support plans
- a range of family focussed means to engage with youth and their families where appropriate
- the provision of, or linking to programs that enhance a young person's independent living skills, health, income, housing and recreation opportunities
- the provision of, or linking to education, training or employment opportunities
- the use of resources that are culturally and developmentally appropriate for the age group
- processes for addressing conflict or setting boundaries
- management of privacy, safety and security, including staffing, physical environments, equipment, transport and excursions
- the provision of, or linking to crisis accommodation or housing
- staff and volunteer recruitment strategies, job descriptions, skills, competencies and values.

#### 4.2.3

**The organisation has documented policies to guide its work with young people who are parents.**

Young people who are parents require age-appropriate and sensitive support and their children require support as outlined in Standard 4.1.

#### 4.2.4

**The organisation has a comprehensive resource guide to assist referrals for young people.**

#### Resources to assist young people

Staff demonstrate a good working relationship and knowledge of other services and resources available for young people in the community. This may include working with or referring young people to organisations that provide housing, family mediation, health programs, education or career support, trauma or counselling services, recreation groups, child protection and legal services etc.

**Signposts of good practice**

**4.2.5**

**Assessment and planning for young people considers their educational, health, cultural, social and emotional needs.**

**4.2.6**

**The organisation provides a young person-friendly environment.**

**Further explanation and examples**

**Assessing young people's needs**

The organisation promotes the healthy development of young people by promoting their connectedness to parents, family, health services, school, peer groups, community and culture. Assessment and support processes should emphasize:

- the progressive development of independent living skills
- the identification of important relationships and family reunification (where appropriate)
- education, training and employment opportunities
- the importance of social and community inclusion.

**Office environments**

A welcoming environment should be safe, meet community standards, expectations and legal requirements, as well as being appropriate to young people's age and culture. Organisations should demonstrate building environments that:

- meet legislative requirements (building codes, OHS etc)
- feature safe design equipment and facilities such as safety locks and gates, stair barriers, furniture, bedding, recreation and play equipment etc.
- are equipped with appropriate recreation facilities
- have private spaces available, including storage space
- create a warm and welcoming environment through appropriate furnishings and layout.

Organisations should also have the capacity to supply or access essential resources for young people. This may include:

- food
- clothing and footwear
- education or training requirements
- personal hygiene items
- bedding
- health requirements.

#### **4.2.7**

**The organisation develops relationships with relevant organisations in order to refer and advocate for the needs of young people.**

#### **Collaborating with other agencies**

The organisation needs to build strong relationships with other funded organisations in order to:

- promote awareness and a broader understanding of the effect of homelessness and family violence on the lives of young people
- advocate for the needs of young people
- provide information to young people about other services
- provide active referrals to other services
- share or access resources
- create opportunities for joint case management of services where appropriate.

This may include working with or referring young people to organisations who provide housing, health services, education, trauma or counselling services, family mediation, recreation, income support, child protection and legal services. In addition, organisations should assist or advocate for young people where other service systems are not meeting their needs.

#### **4.2.8**

**Staff demonstrate the application of appropriate competencies to support the case management of young people who are experiencing grief, loss, trauma or low self-esteem.**

#### **Emotionally supporting young people**

Young people seeking assistance from funded organisations may be suffering from grief, loss, trauma or low self-esteem. However, they may not have the language skills or maturity to articulate these needs. Staff should demonstrate competencies and skills in working with young people and other specialized services to address presenting issues. At a minimum, this will mean recognising challenging behaviours as a response to these issues and having approaches that can assist young people to deal with their feelings appropriately.

Specialized services may provide group programs or individual counseling services to assist young people deal with personal issues. Building links with other agencies, i.e. youth services, trauma or sexual assault counseling services, mental health services etc. are also important.

#### **4.2.9**

**The organisation has a budget for responding to young people's needs.**

#### **Budgeting resources for young people's needs**

Organisations should demonstrate the capacity to directly allocate funding from program budgets to meet the specific needs of young people. In instances where this is not appropriate or possible, the organisation should demonstrate knowledge of local and Statewide resources, including application processes, eligibility and funding criteria. Staff should provide young people with information and further assistance as required to access funds.

**Signposts of good practice**

**4.2.10**

**The organisation monitors its work with young people (including young parents) to ensure it provides a quality service consistent with the organisation's policy framework.**

**Further explanation and examples**

**Reviewing performance**

This could include:

- reviewing policies, procedures and guidelines to ensure reflection of contemporary practice and legislative requirements
- seeking feedback from young people about their experiences within the service
- monitoring the service culture to ensure consumer rights and responsibilities are promoted
- monitoring grievances and resolution processes
- reviewing data in order to identify gaps in service delivery or the development of trends
- conducting audits of case management processes and case reviews to measure the timeliness and effectiveness of interventions
- reviewing health records to ensure health services and files are up to date
- monitoring and reviewing support provided to young people to ensure gender equity and appropriateness for all ages involved
- monitoring staff supervision and training
- monitoring and reviewing staff performance appraisals to ensure appropriateness of job descriptions, competencies, training and personal development opportunities.
- monitoring referrals to specialist services, including access to income support, family mediation, life skills, employment, education and training opportunities
- seeking feedback from referring and other relevant organisations.

## Standard 4.3: Supporting women, children and other people experiencing family or domestic violence.

**Women, children and other people experiencing family/domestic violence are provided with services that are sensitive and responsive to the diversity of their needs.**

Family violence is a fundamental violation of human rights and is unacceptable in any form. The safety of women and children, and other people who experience family violence is of paramount consideration in any response.

All organisations that provide frequent or infrequent support to women, children and other people experiencing family violence will need to adhere to this standard.

*The following features and examples are not meant to be exhaustive or prescriptive, but rather give some guidance to services in how to achieve this standard.*

### Documentation that can support good practice

#### Signposts of good practice

##### 4.3.1

**The organisation's written documents provide a clear framework for the model of service delivery the organisation uses to support women, children and other people experiencing family/domestic violence.**

#### Further explanation and examples

##### **Written framework for guiding practice**

Family violence can occur within any intimate relationship, including same sex relationships. It affects transgender people, the elderly and people with disabilities. It can be perpetrated by any member of a family against another, however is more likely to be perpetrated by men (predominately by a women's current or ex partner) against women and children.

The Code of Practice for Specialist Family Violence Services for Women and Children 2006 (the Code) outlines the principles and values, including an understanding of the nature and dynamics of family violence and the application of a gendered approach to work in this area, to provide the foundation for best practice and service provision. The primary aim of the Code is to enhance the safety of women and children in Victoria and is designed to:

- provide a model for best practice for services in Victoria that provide a specialist response to women and children experiencing family violence
- provide a foundation for ongoing reflection about how practice is undertaken and outline an optimum approach to practice
- ensure consistent, transparent and accountable practice across services providing specialist family violence support to women and children experiencing family violence
- provide guidelines for effective integration and collaboration with other community service providers and agencies engaged in providing responses to women and their children experiencing family violence

#### 4.3.1 (cont)

The Code should be read in conjunction with the Standards and should be viewed as complementary, but not an alternative to the Standards. Organisations, through documentation and process, should clearly demonstrate a practice framework that reflects the intent of the Code.

The organisation should demonstrate that services are provided within a framework that acknowledges and responds appropriately to women and children with a range of abilities and from cultural and linguistically diverse backgrounds, including indigenous women and children.

#### 4.3.2

**The organisation has a documented system for ensuring consumers can access appropriate services, including after hours and during periods of potentially high demand, such as public and school holidays.**

##### **System for ensuring access to services**

From July 2006, changes due to the Family Violence Service System Reform process will take effect, including changes to regional and sub regional after hour's responses available across Victoria.

Women with or without children who are at imminent risk and who need, and want relocation to safe accommodation outside their region should be actively referred to Women's Domestic Violence Crisis Service (WDVCS). Funded organisations should demonstrate this information is available to people requiring assistance by:

- recording a telephone message with contact telephone numbers for after hour assistance
- displaying and disseminating appropriate written information to people accessing the organisation and to other stakeholders i.e. community agencies, police, child protection authorities.

Funded organisations that provided family violence crisis accommodation responses should demonstrate that residents know how to contact staff for assistance at any time.

All funded organisations should demonstrate that people experiencing family violence have timely access to family violence risk assessment, referral or case management services during business hours. At a minimum, the organisation should demonstrate staff are able to use family violence screening processes, and with consent, make timely and appropriate referrals to specialist family violence providers.

Information provided by funded organisations should be culturally and linguistically appropriate.

### 4.3.3

**The organisation has documented security procedures and access protocols appropriate to the service model and level of security required.**

#### **Documented security procedures**

Funded organisations should demonstrate that policies and procedures provide guidance about a range of safety issues, including women's safety while receiving support and/or accommodation by the service. Funded organisations should demonstrate that people are assessed for safety and security on initial contact and subsequent contact with the service. The Common Risk Assessment Framework for Family Violence Services in Victoria (under development 2006) provides the framework for family violence risk assessment.

The level of security required will vary according to the service response provided by the funded organisation (generalist, specialist family violence services, crisis accommodation, transitional housing, and outreach services). Regardless of the type of service response, organisations should focus on the individual safety needs of women and children, whilst balancing the organisations responsibility for the safety of staff and other people.

The organisations policies, procedures and case management guidelines should demonstrate the effective management of risk, both to women and children, and staff by detailing:

- how risk assessments and referrals are managed
- how individual safety plans are negotiated and reviewed
- how physical environments are managed (locks, lighting, access, staffing, fencing, security doors, communication)
- how legislative requirements are met i.e. Occupational Health and Safety Legislation with regard to workplace environments, including transport, home or court visits etc.

### Signposts of good practice

#### 4.3.4

**The organisation has identified key 'first response' agencies in the area and established clear referral and access pathways.**

#### 4.3.5

**The organisation ensures that staff have an understanding of the nature of family violence and are appropriately trained in family/domestic violence issues.**

#### 4.3.5 (cont.)

### Further explanation and examples

#### **Pathways for access and referral**

Organisations should demonstrate a commitment to integrated service responses by developing strategies to work collaboratively with housing, specialist family violence, homelessness support and other key partners within their local area. The development of policies and procedures should reflect:

- development of partnerships with culturally specific organisations such as Indigenous Family Violence Regional Action Groups and Regional Workers and Indigenous Healing and Time Out services,
- negotiation of local and regional referral pathways with Statewide services, housing providers, police, courts, child protection, sexual assault and victims of crime services
- development of protocols and memorandums of understanding to define collective relationships
- consideration of other strategic planning and actions associated with membership on regional integrated family violence committees.

#### **Appropriate staff training**

Funded specialist family violence organisations should demonstrate that recruitment strategies place an emphasis on the employment of staff with appropriate competencies, skills, experience and understanding of the nature and dynamics of family violence. Organisational policies and procedures should demonstrate:

- adherence to the legislative requirements of Working with Children Act 2005 and the Children and Young Persons Act 2005
- staff recruitment and induction processes
- the negotiation and management of individual staff training and professional development plans
- staff supervision and appraisal processes
- staff networking opportunities.

Training should include:

- theoretical frameworks underpinning family violence and the effects on victims of violence
- how to undertake risk assessment with women and children
- safety planning strategies and how to assist women, children and others to continue to plan for their safety
- legislative requirements and options for intervention
- early childhood and childhood developmental stages including family focussed counselling and therapy responses.

Other funded organisations should demonstrate direct service delivery staff (and reception staff), have a good

working knowledge of the nature and dynamics of family violence, and the skills required to undertake initial screening assessments and referral processes.

#### **4.3.6**

**The organisation ensures that the safety and ongoing protection of people accessing services is given primary consideration.**

#### **Focusing on safety**

The organisation demonstrates that policies and procedures meet the requirements of relevant Commonwealth and Victorian Legislation. This may include:

- occupational health and safety requirements
- privacy and confidentiality
- child protection requirements
- human resource management.

The organisation also demonstrates that policies and procedures have regard for contemporary family violence practice frameworks as documented in:

- Victoria Police Code of Practice for the Investigation of Family Violence 2005
- Domestic Violence Victoria, Code of Practice for Specialist Family Violence Services for Women and Children 2006
- Common Risk Assessment Framework for Family Violence Services in Victoria (under development 2006).

All aspects of the organisation's risk management practices should have regard to the criteria set by the Department of Human Services. Organisational risk management strategies should have a documented rationale and be regularly reviewed. A risk management plan (or service safety plan) should:

- define proactive measures for preventing the occurrence of risk to all persons frequenting the service
- outline clear procedures regarding response to a critical or potential critical incident
- enable professional and prompt response to identified risks.

The organisation should demonstrate case management processes focus on individual risk and promote inclusiveness and optimum accessibility for people seeking services. The strategy of individual case-by-case risk assessment and safety planning should be supported within a broader organisational risk management framework or service safety plan.

#### 4.3.7

**Staff explore the full range of options for people to live free from violence.**

#### **Exploring options to exclude violence**

At the point of initial assessment and throughout the support period, staff should actively support women to identify the assistance they and their children need from the service. Determining the nature and degree of risk informs the response of the worker and the options explored in safety planning with the woman. Options for support may include:

- intervening early with the involvement of the police and courts to enable women, children and other victims to remain in their home
- enabling women to temporarily access crisis accommodation
- assisting women to locate appropriate long term housing
- referring women, or other members of the family to appropriate services i.e. housing, counselling or health, including mental health services
- working with the whole family to address the underlying issues once the violence has stopped.

#### 4.3.8

**Women with children are supported to keep their children with them.**

#### **Supporting parents and children together**

All funded organisations should demonstrate that support and accommodation services are delivered without prejudice, to all women, including women with accompanying dependent children of both genders. The organisation should demonstrate services offered, including accommodation or congregate care services, comply with the Equal Opportunity Act 1995.

#### 4.3.9

**Funded specialist family violence organisations provide secondary consultation to other organisations.**

#### **Role of specific violence services in secondary consultation**

It is essential the community have an awareness of the support available to women and children who experience family violence. Organisations have a responsibility to ensure the provision and dissemination of accurate information about their services. Where a women or child/young person are engaged with support provided by one or more services, their experience can be greatly improved with a collaborative approach to service provision.

#### 4.3.10

**Organisations encourage known users of violence to take responsibility for their violent behaviours within the case management process.**

#### **Encouraging people to take responsibility for violent behaviours**

Responsibility for violence rests with the perpetrator of the violence. Perpetrators should be held accountable for their use of violence and challenged to take responsibility for their actions. Organisations need to give clear messages to consumers and the broader community that violence is not an acceptable behaviour under any circumstances and that in many instances it is a crime.

#### 4.3.11

**The organisation takes an active role in preventing and eliminating family/ domestic violence.**

#### **Networking on family/domestic violence**

Organisations should demonstrate collaborative, integrated working relationships with appropriate stakeholders, including local agencies, police, local and Statewide networks and peak organisations. Funded specialist family violence services should also actively participate in regional integrated family violence committees. Organisations may demonstrate participation in a range of advocacy or community education activities that aim to promote community awareness of the effects of violence on the health and well being of women and children.

### Measuring outcomes to support good practice

#### Signposts of good practice

#### 4.3.12

**The organisation monitors its effectiveness in responding to the diverse needs of women and their dependents experiencing family/ domestic violence.**

#### Further explanation and examples

#### **Monitoring effectiveness**

Monitoring could include:

- reviewing policies, procedures and guidelines to ensure reflection of contemporary practice and legislative requirements
- seeking feedback from people about their experiences (and outcomes) within the service
- monitoring the service culture to ensure consumer rights and responsibilities are promoted
- monitoring the cultural appropriateness of service responses to individuals and the broader community
- monitoring and reviewing grievances and resolution processes
- reviewing data in order to identify gaps in service delivery or the development of trends
- conducting audits of assessment and case management processes, including individual safety plans to measure the timeliness and effectiveness of interventions
- monitoring staff supervision and training
- monitoring and reviewing staff performance appraisals to ensure appropriateness of job descriptions, competencies, training and personal development
- monitoring referrals received from police, Women's Domestic Violence Crisis Service, child protection authorities and other services
- reviewing referrals made
- monitoring and reviewing the frequency of critical incidents and subsequent outcomes
- seeking feedback from referring and other relevant organisations.

#### **Cross references:**

- Supporting parents and accompanying children (Standard 4.1)
- Supporting young people (Standard 4.2)
- Providing culturally competent services (Standard 4.4)

## Standard 4.4: Providing culturally competent services

**Each person receives a service that is sensitive to and respectful of their culture and language, including the importance of preserving significant networks and relationships.**

Individual interests, customs, beliefs and cultural and ethnic backgrounds are valued and fostered.

*The following features and examples are not meant to be exhaustive or prescriptive, but rather give some guidance to services in how to achieve this standard.*

### Documentation that can support good practice

#### Signposts of good practice

##### 4.4.1

**The organisation's policies and processes reflect a commitment to providing culturally competent services.**

#### Further explanation and examples

##### **Commitment to culturally competent service provision**

Cultural competence means the organisation understands the interests, customs, beliefs and culture and ethnic backgrounds of all people who seek a service. The organisation should demonstrate that policies and procedures provide:

- the availability of areas for the observance of a variety of cultural, spiritual or religious ceremonies (wherever possible)
- entry assessment that determines cultural, spiritual and linguistic issues and consultation with each person (or his or her representative)
- that ethnic or cultural groups are encouraged to participate in planning and conducting specific events or activities
- that peoples preferred language is identified and respected and arrangements are made for competent interpreters whenever informed consent is required, and at other appropriate times
- for the observation of religious, cultural and personally significant anniversaries and events of choice
- for the identification of individual likes, dislikes, choices, goals, health, dress and personal needs
- that people are enabled to maintain their dietary customs according to religion and culture
- takes into account appropriate ways of working within family and extended family structures and relationships
- respects the right of people not to disclose their cultural background or religious beliefs.

#### 4.4.2

The organisation has clear information about its services available in appropriate community languages or presented in a culturally appropriate way.

#### Culturally appropriate information

People who are not able to communicate through written or spoken English must be provided with access to appropriate language services or resources when:

- information needs to be communicated; and/or
- they are required to make decisions about their life.

Linguistically appropriate information could be provided as brochures, fact sheets, posters, audiotapes, videos, and resource cards or through the use of symbols or pictures.

### Processes that can support good practice

#### Signposts of good practice

##### 4.4.3

The organisation has strategies to ensure it provides services that are culturally competent to people accessing services.

#### Further explanation and examples

##### Strategies for culturally competent service provision

The organisation should demonstrate an up to date understanding of the culture diversity within the community it serves. Funded organisations may enhance their understanding of community needs and diversity by developing and maintaining relationships with indigenous and multicultural organisations.

The provision of culturally competent services is formulated through an understanding of cultural identity. The organisation should demonstrate assessment processes that determine:

- the individuals ethnic or cultural reference groups
- the degree of involvement with both the culture of origin and host culture for immigrant and ethnic minorities
- the individuals language abilities, use and preference.

Checklists for cultural assessment should include a guide for interpreting, communication, attitudes and beliefs. Cultural assessments should be framed through the use of specific questions that aim to discover important beliefs people may have about their housing, relationship or health needs. These beliefs may affect any/all aspects of housing or support. They may also explain behaviours and attitudes of the individual or family for which reasons are not immediately obvious. Assessments should seek to identify the cultural factors related to people's psychosocial environment and levels of functioning. This means understanding:

- stresses in the local social environment
- the role of religion and kin networks in providing emotional, instrumental and informational support for individuals and families.

Cultural diversity is not an excuse for violence or criminal behaviour.

#### **4.4.4**

**Staff demonstrate knowledge of the social and cultural groups represented in the local community and understand the social and historical factors relevant to their current circumstances.**

#### **Knowledge of cultural issues and context**

Consumers from similar cultural groups and nationality may have different needs and expectations dependent upon their life experiences, and/or adherence to traditions. It is important not to assume the needs of the person presenting based on previous contact with that cultural group. Organisations should demonstrate that staff have the competencies, skills and experience required to deliver culturally responsive services for their local community.

Organisational practice should demonstrate that:

- staff are encouraged to attend ongoing developmental cross culture training, in particular to gain skills to support newly arrived migrants and refugees and people who have suffered torture, trauma and loss
- staff have access to resources for ethnic communities
- flexible staff rostering to ensure gender appropriate services can be provided
- where appropriate, recruitment of staff from diverse cultural backgrounds is encouraged
- staff have the opportunity to participate in community or educational activities with local indigenous or cultural groups.

#### **4.4.5**

**Organisations use interpreters as appropriate during each element of case management.**

#### **Using interpreters**

Organisations should demonstrate adherence to the Department of Human Services Language Services Policy 2006.

#### **4.4.6**

**Staff link people to culturally appropriate services.**

#### **Linking with other cultural organisations**

Organisations should demonstrate staff provide people with referral or access to support and resources from local and Statewide multicultural associations or organisations. For example, linkages should be developed between the organisation and local indigenous services, community legal services, Centrelink, cultural community groups and resource centres. At a Statewide level links could be developed with appropriate services i.e. Department of Immigration, Victorian Foundation for Survivors of Torture and the Transcultural Psychiatry Unit.

**Signposts of good practice**

**4.4.7**

**The organisation monitors and reviews service delivery practice to ensure people receive culturally appropriate services.**

**4.4.8**

**The organisation monitors and reviews service provision to ensure responsiveness to a multicultural society.**

**Further explanation and examples**

**Reviewing cultural competence**

Monitoring may include:

- audit of intake and case management records to ensure each person has received a culturally appropriate assessment and has a support plan in place
- audit of tenancy or crisis accommodation placements to ensure each person (where appropriate) has received a culturally appropriate housing placement
- audit of referrals made to multicultural/indigenous or other specialist services
- audit of referrals received from multicultural/indigenous services
- analysis and use of funding data
- analysis of stakeholder feedback from local multicultural organisations
- analysis of consumer satisfaction surveys and grievance procedures/outcomes
- analysis of use of interpreter services or other resources
- analysis of organisational improvement logs (staff and consumer suggestions or feedback)
- review of organisational policies and procedures to reflect contemporary practice and changing community need
- review of recruitment processes to ensure employment of suitably qualified people
- review of physical environments to ensure cultural appropriateness
- review of staff supervision, personal development and performance appraisal systems.

**Analysing data**

The organisation has a responsibility to advocate for all people in the community who require housing information, housing/homelessness support or family violence services. In order to do this effectively, the organisation should demonstrate the use of up to date data and research to:

- identify and respond to service gaps or barriers
- advocate for the provision of new or improved services
- advocate for changes to Local Government or State Government policies where appropriate.

## **Standard 4.5: Providing Advocacy Services – New Standard**

**Each person receives the most appropriate advocacy service response, including assistance to sustain housing tenancies or support opportunities.**

People's individual circumstances can be enhanced when organisations advocate on their behalf for their access to services or resources.

**This standard is only relevant for organisations that deliver specialist advocacy services.**

*The following features and examples are not meant to be exhaustive or prescriptive, but rather give some guidance to services in how to achieve this standard.*

### **Documentation that can support good practice**

#### **Signposts of good practice**

##### **4.5.1**

**The organisation's policies and processes reflect a commitment to providing responsive tenancy or consumer advocacy services.**

#### **Further explanation and examples**

##### **Providing responsive advocacy services**

The organisations policies, procedures and plans should demonstrate a commitment to providing a rights based, individual consumer focussed advocacy service for people with a wide range of housing and homelessness needs. In this section, policies and procedures should reflect a commitment to advocating for the individual, as apposed to the broader service system advocacy role referred to in Section 5.

The principles of advocacy relate to the support of another person to receive or access information or services. Whilst many organisations may provide a component of advocacy as part of a broader support or case management role, Standard 4.5 relates specifically to organisations that receive funding to deliver a specialist advocacy response.

#### 4.5.2

The organisation has documented systems that guide contemporary practice for staff in the delivery of advocacy and referral services for individuals or families.

#### Ensuring the needs of people are met

Within appropriate funding guidelines, the service should demonstrate application of the principles of advocacy, as related to supporting another person to receive or access appropriate information or services. Funded organisations should ensure written guidelines support the delivery of a range of services that *may* include:

- ensuring that public housing applicants or consumers (as appropriate) who have more complex issues are assisted to have their housing needs addressed
- improving the opportunities for public housing tenants or consumers (as appropriate) to be involved in decisions about their housing and communities
- advocating for social housing tenants or consumers who require assistance with complaints, appeals, rent arrears, VCAT, neighbourhood disputes etc
- providing assistance to tenants or consumers to overcome literacy or language difficulties that prevent them from understanding housing or support processes\*
- advocating for consumers who have a grievance against a funded homelessness provider
- providing people with information with regard to tenancy legislation or VCAT processes.

Documented systems may include:

- guidelines for managing advocacy interventions, including direct representations to VCAT hearings and Office of Housing appeal processes
- a staff code of ethics (covering issues relating to respectful treatment, non-discriminatory behaviour, boundary setting, conflict of interest)
- duty of care obligations
- consumer or tenant personal information management systems, including file or contact notes
- referral processes
- data collection, use and management guidelines
- staff professional development plans
- staff work or activity plans
- planning frameworks for tenant or consumer participation.

\*Organisations should demonstrate compliance with DHS Language Services Policy in instances where people have language difficulties and require an interpreter service.

## Processes that can support good practice

### Signposts of good practice

#### 4.5.3

**Staff demonstrate appropriate knowledge and competencies with regard to the application of relevant legislation, policies and guidelines to support practice.**

### Further explanation and examples

#### **Skills and knowledge in advocacy based practice**

The organisation should demonstrate staff have the skills, competencies, knowledge and development required to provide a range of advocacy services that may include:

- Residential Tenancies Act 1997 information and advice
- VCAT representation at hearings
- interpretation of Office of Housing or other organisational policies and procedures
- referrals to secondary providers
- the promotion of tenant or consumer participation through community development activities
- advocating for the rights or needs of the individual to the appropriate organisation or body promoting or facilitating consumer participation in program or policy development (as appropriate).

## Monitoring outcomes to support good practice

### Signposts of good practice

#### 4.5.4

**The organisation monitors and evaluates its work with individuals and families to ensure provision of quality services consistent with the organisations funding and policy framework.**

### Further explanation and examples

#### **Reviewing performance**

This could include:

- reviewing policies, procedures and guidelines to ensure reflection of contemporary practice and compliance with funding and legislative requirements
- seeking feedback from consumers about their experiences within the service
- monitoring the effectiveness of protocols or memorandums of understanding with other services or government departments
- monitoring the service culture to ensure consumer rights, responsibilities and participation are promoted
- monitoring grievances and resolution processes
- reviewing data to identify gaps in service delivery or the development of trends
- monitoring regular staff supervision and training
- reviewing staff performance to ensure appropriateness of job descriptions, competencies, training and personal development opportunities
- monitoring the outcomes of referrals to secondary or specialist providers
- reviewing data to identify service gaps or trends
- reviewing outcomes from Office of Housing appeal processes or VCAT hearings.

#### **Cross references:**

- Rights-based approach (Standard 1.1)
- Consumer participation (Standard 1.2)
- Initial assessment (Standard 2.2)
- Effective referrals (Standard 2.3)