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# Introduction

The *Social Services Regulation Act 2021* (Vic) and the *Social Services Regulations 2023* (Vic) create a new regulatory framework for social services in Victoria. This framework puts the protection and safety of social services users at the centre of social services delivery.

The Social Services Regulator replaces the current Human Services Regulator.

The Social Services Regulator aims to strengthen protections for social services users to safeguard people from harm, abuse and neglect. Core objectives include to:

* protect the rights of service users
* support safe and effective social services delivery
* minimise the risk of avoidable harm in service delivery.

To help achieve these aims, there are six Social Services Standards that all registered social services providers must meet.

* **Standard 1: Safe service delivery** – Social services are safely delivered based on assessed needs
* **Standard 2: Service user agency and dignity** – Social services are person-centred and respect and uphold service user rights and agency
* **Standard 3: Safe service environments**– Social services are provided in a safe, secure and fit-for-purpose environment
* **Standard 4: Feedback and complaints**–Service users are supported to provide feedback, complaints or concerns about service safety
* **Standard 5: Accountable organisational governance**– Effective governance and organisational systems support safe delivery of social services
* **Standard 6: Safe workforce**– Social services are delivered by a workforce that has the knowledge, capability and support to deliver safe social services with care and skill.

Each Standard is equally important. Providers must meet **all six Standards**.

To meet a Standard, you must meet **all** its service requirements. Service requirements outline the actions you must take to meet a Standard.

# When the Social Services Standards apply

The Social Services Standards replace the Human Services Standards and Accommodation and Personal Support Standards **from 1 July 2024**.

If you had to meet the Human Services Standards or the Accommodation and Personal Support Standards, you will likely need to make some changes to meet the new Standards.

There is guidance to help you meet the new Standards – see **Useful resources and contacts**.

Supported residential services providers also have specific obligations to meet in the *Social Services (Supported Residential Services) Regulations 2024*.[[1]](#footnote-1) These include notification requirements and minimum staffing levels. Detailed guidance will be developed for these providers[[2]](#footnote-2).

All social service providers should continue to meet:

* service user needs
* community expectations
* any relevant obligations (for example, local laws).

# Comparison with other Standards

## Human Services Standards

Many social service providers will be familiar with the Human Services Standards.

You may be able to adapt existing systems and processes to meet the service requirements of the Social Services Standards. Service requirements outline practical actions to take to meet each Standard.

The Social Services Standards and its service requirements are **broadly in line** with the Human Services Standards (see **Table 1**). Both cover similar themes of:

* safety in service delivery
* service user wellbeing and agency
* organisational systems and processes (for example, governance and complaints) that affect service user safety.

Table 1: Social Services Standards and Human Services Standards

| Standard | Social Services Standards | Human Services Standards |
| --- | --- | --- |
| 1 | **Safe service delivery**: Social services are to be safely delivered based on assessed needs | **Empowerment**: People's rights are promoted and upheld |
| 2 | **Service user agency and dignity**: Social services are to be person-centred and respect and uphold service user rights and agency | **Access and engagement**: People's right to access transparent, equitable and integrated services is promoted and upheld |
| 3 | **Safe service environment**: Social Services are to be provided in a safe, secure and fit-for-purpose environment | **Wellbeing**: People's right to wellbeing and safety is promoted and upheld |
| 4 | **Feedback and complaints**: Service users are to be supported to provide feedback, complaints or concerns about service safety | **Participation**: People's right to choice, decision making and to actively participate as a valued member of their chosen effectively community is promoted and upheld |
| 5 | **Accountable organisational governance**: Effective governance and organisational systems are to support safe delivery of social services | **Governance and management**: Organisations must be effectively governed and managed at all times |
| 6 | **Safe workforce**: Social services are to be delivered by a workforce that has the knowledge, capability and support to deliver safe social services with care and skill | - |

The Human Services Standards and action areas are outcomes-based and expressed in terms of the impact on service users.

In comparison, the **service requirements** of the Social Services Standards are framed as **specific actions** thatsocial services providersmust complete.

The major differences from the Human Services Standards are outlined in **Table 2**.

Table 2: Key changes from the Human Services Standards

| Social Services Standards | Service requirement | Change |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Standard 1:** Safe service delivery | Service user safety | Includes identifying and reducing risks of harm in online environments. Harm is defined to include exploitation, improper treatment and discrimination. |
| **Standard 1:** Safe service delivery | Cultural safety and inclusion | More detailed requirements, including staff training. |
| **Standard 1:** Safe service delivery | Aboriginal cultural safety and inclusion | More detailed requirements in line with the Child Safe Standards. |
| **Standard 2:** Service user agency and dignity | Advocacy and support | Social service providers must help service users freely access any relevant independent or state‑funded advocacy or similar support service. |
| **Standard 2:** Service user agency and dignity | Clear and accessible information | Social service providers must provide certain information in an easy-to-understand format. |
| **Standard 2:** Service user agency and dignity | Informed consent | Clearly defines and requires informed consent before service delivery. |
| **Standard 3:** Safe service environment | All service requirements | Clearer requirements for the physical service environment, personal and private property, and emergency management planning. |
| **Standard 4:** Feedback and complaints | Systems and processes | Clearer requirements, including telling service users of their right to raise matters of social service safety with the Social Services Regulator and other entities. |
| **Standard 4:** Feedback and complaints | Dispute management | Social service providers must help service users access services to manage and resolve disputes between the service users and the social service provider about social services provided. |
| **Standard 5:** Accountable organisational governance | Safe and inclusive practice culture | Social service providers must help service workers raise concerns confidentially and without punishment to ensure safe social service delivery. |

More detailed information on the Human Services Standards is available in the *Human Services Standards evidence guide*. The guide can be accessed at [DFFH Service Providers’ Human Services Standards evidence guide (word) web page](https://providers.dffh.vic.gov.au/human-services-standards-evidence-guide-word) <https://providers.dffh.vic.gov.au/human-services-standards-evidence-guide-word>.

## Accommodation and Personal Support Standards

The Accommodation and Personal Support Standards were designed for supported residential services. They contain many sector-specific and premises-based requirements.

In contrast, the Social Services Standards apply to **a broad range** of social service providers, as the Standards apply to all social services in scope of the new scheme.

The new Standards are **less prescriptive.** This means providers have more flexibility to meet the Standards in ways that best suit their service delivery model.

Although there are many similarities, there are more clearly stated requirements in the Social Services Standards and its service requirements. The key differences are outlined in **Table 3**.

Table 3: Key differences from Accommodation and Personal Support Standards

| Social Services Standards | Service requirement | Difference |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Standard 1**: Safe service delivery | Service user safety | Includes identifying and reducing risks of harm to service users. Its scope is broader than the physical environment. |
| **Standard 1**: Safe service delivery | Cultural safety and inclusion | More clearly stated requirements, including staff training. |
| **Standard 1**: Safe service delivery | Aboriginal cultural safety and inclusion | More clearly stated requirements that all providers must understand. |
| **Standard 2**: Service user agency and dignity | Advocacy and support | Social service providers must help service users freely access any relevant independent or state‑funded advocacy or similar support service. |
| **Standard 2**: Service user agency and dignity | Informed consent | Clearly defines and requires informed consent before service delivery. |
| **Standard 4**: Feedback and complaints | All service requirements | There was not a standard similar to Standard 4.[[3]](#footnote-3) Most of the service requirements on feedback and complaints will be familiar to the sector as they were required under past regulations. |
| **Standard 4**: Feedback and complaints | Dispute management | Social service providers must help service users access services to manage and resolve disputes between service users and the social service provider about social services provided. |
| **Standard 5**: Accountable organisational governance | Safe and inclusive practice culture | With the exception of incident reporting, most aspects of Standard 5 are new. |
| **Standard 6**: Safe workforce | Workforce recruitmentWorkforce planningWorker performance and conduct | Elements like ‘workforce planning’ and ‘worker performance and conduct’ are new.Some things are similar, such as criminal record checks and training.[[4]](#footnote-4) |

## Child Safe Standards

Some social service providers must also meet the Child Safe Standards. The Child Safe Standards will continue to apply.

For more information about the Child Safe Standards, see the [Commission for Children and Young People’s Child Safe Standards section](https://ccyp.vic.gov.au/child-safe-standards) <https://ccyp.vic.gov.au/child-safe-standards>.

# Useful resources and contacts

## Resources

* Information sheets on each Standard – available on the [Social Services Regulator’s Social Services Standards webpage](https://www.vic.gov.au/social-services-regulator-social-services-standards) <https://www.vic.gov.au/social-services-regulator-social-services-standards>
* Overview of the Standards – available on the [Social Services Regulator’s Social Services Standards webpage](https://www.vic.gov.au/social-services-regulator-social-services-standards) <https://www.vic.gov.au/social-services-regulator-social-services-standards>
* [Victorian Government website’s About the Social Services Regulator page](https://www.vic.gov.au/about-social-services-regulator) <https://www.vic.gov.au/about-social-services-regulator>
* [DFFH Service Providers’ Human Services Standards evidence guide (word) web page](https://providers.dffh.vic.gov.au/human-services-standards-evidence-guide-word) <https://providers.dffh.vic.gov.au/human-services-standards-evidence-guide-word>

## Contact us

For further information about the Standards not covered by the linked resources above, you can contact the Social Services Regulator:

* email the Social Services Regulator <enquiries@ssr.vic.gov.au>.

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| To receive this document in another format, email Social Services Regulator <enquiries@ssr.vic.gov.au>.Authorised and published by the Victorian Government, 1 Treasury Place, Melbourne.© State of Victoria, Australia, Department of Families, Fairness and Housing, June 2024.Except where otherwise indicated, the images in this document show models and illustrative settings only, and do not necessarily depict actual services, facilities or recipients of services. This document may contain images of deceased Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.In this document, ‘Aboriginal’ refers to both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. ‘Indigenous’ or ‘Koori/Koorie’ is retained when part of the title of a report, program or quotation.**ISBN** 978-1-76130-543-6 **(pdf/online/MS word)**Available at [Social Services Regulator social services standards](https://www.vic.gov.au/social-services-regulator-social-services-standards) <https://www.vic.gov.au/social-services-regulator-social-services-standards> |

1. See the [Victorian Legislation website's Social Services (Supported Residential Services) Regulations 2024 page](https://www.legislation.vic.gov.au/as-made/statutory-rules/social-services-supported-residential-services-regulations-2024) <https://www.legislation.vic.gov.au/as-made/statutory-rules/social-services-supported-residential-services-regulations-2024> [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Guidance will include specific obligations for Supported Residential Accommodation providers, as outlined in Part 9 of the Act. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. The service requirements include obligations to give information on how to share feedback, complaints or concerns about service delivery or safety. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. The Regulations also refer to training and qualifications for staff performing certain functions. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)