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| Standard 2: Service user agency and dignity |
| Social Services Standards |
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Social Services Standard 2

**Service user agency and dignity – Social services are person‐centred and respect and uphold service user rights and agency.**

The *Social Services Regulation Act 2021* (Vic) and the *Social Services Regulations 2023* (Vic) created 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 will replace 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:

* protecting the rights of service users
* supporting safe and effective social services delivery
* minimising 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
* Standard 2: Service user agency and dignity
* Standard 3: Safe service environments
* Standard 4: Feedback and complaints
* Standard 5: Accountable organisational governance
* Standard 6: Safe workforce.

# Standard 2 – service user agency and dignity

Standard 2 focuses on the dignity and agency of service users. It recognises the importance of staying connected to culture, family, friends and community.

Service users have diverse characteristics and lived experiences. The care, services and support a person needs is impacted by their unique social, cultural, health and wellbeing needs.

Standard 2 requires social service providers to acknowledge this diversity and to uphold service user rights around:

* advocacy
* accessible information
* participation
* informed consent.

## What this Standard will ask you to demonstrate

The **outcomes** Standard 2 aims to achieve are:

* the rights of service users are promoted and upheld
* service users can exercise their agency and take part in decisions about the social services they receive
* service users’ connection to culture, family, friends, and community is supported and respected.

# How to meet Standard 2

Service requirements outline actions for social services providers to demonstrate they are meeting a Standard.

To meet the Standard, you must meet **all** of the Standard’s service requirements[[1]](#footnote-1).

Many social services providers will already have frameworks in place to support service user agency and dignity, and Standard 2 builds on these inclusive foundations to focus on person-centred social services where:

* service users are given clear and accessible information
* practices are in place for service users to actively take part in making service-related decisions
* service users are supported to stay connected to their culture, family, friends and community.

For ease, the service requirements for Standard 2 are detailed in **Appendix 1: Service requirements for Standard 2**. Appendix 1 also includes more information on:

* suggested actions
* useful documents
* indicators of success.

## Getting ready

Before checking your readiness to meet Standard 2, gather documents, policies and processes that aim for service users to be:

* included in decisions
* listened to
* able to make choices
* accepted.

Here are some starting points to assess your readiness to meet Standard 2 service requirements:

### Upholding dignity and respect of service users[[2]](#footnote-2)

* Intake forms collect information about the diverse characteristics of a service user’s identity.
* Policies and procedures on responding to discrimination and how to manage complaints.
* Records of staff training and education in diversity, preventing discrimination and codes of conduct.
* House rules for accommodation services.

### Service user rights and responsibilities[[3]](#footnote-3)

* Systems and processes to protect service users’ privacy and keep their information confidential.
* Give service users accessible information about their rights and responsibilities.
* Promptly address breaches of service user rights.

### Advocacy and support[[4]](#footnote-4)

* Engage with local advocacy and support services.
* Help service users access advocacy and support services, including interpreter services.
* Staff training on service user right to advocacy and supports.

### Clear and accessible information[[5]](#footnote-5)

* Give service users clear and correct information on the social services provided.
* Provide information on how to share feedback, make a complaint or raise safety concerns.
* Provide accessible information in a way that meets service users’ diverse needs and backgrounds.
* Accommodation or service agreements clearly outline the fees and costs for services.

### Service user inclusion and participation[[6]](#footnote-6)

* Processes that help service users actively take part in decision making.
* Give service users opportunities to take part in planning, monitoring and service improvement.
* Act on service users’ choices and decisions when possible.

### Informed consent[[7]](#footnote-7)

* Procedures to make sure staff get informed consent from service users before providing services (if needed).
* Policies and processes for providing social services without consent (if it applies), including:
  + how it meets relevant laws
  + notification requirements
  + consulting with the service user.
* Staff training on the principles and practices of informed consent.
* Accessible versions of information collection statements and consent forms.

### Connection to culture, family, friends, and community[[8]](#footnote-8)

* Actively help service users stay connected to culture and chosen relationships with family, friends and community.
* Help service users access services in the community as needed.
* Policies and processes reflect the importance of family and community involvement.

## How the Standards relate to the old Human Services Standards

During their preparation, some social service providers may be reviewing policies and procedures that are in line with the Human Services Standards.

Some service requirements for Standard 2 are **broadly in line with** the Human Service Standards. The key change is there are more specific requirements for providers to put in place and maintain practices.

The more specifically defined requirements include:

* **Informed consent**: Although implied, the Human Services Standards did not have a specific requirement on informed consent.
* **Clear and accessible information**: Standard 2 includes more specific details on the kind of information social services providers must make available in accessible formats.
* **Dignity and respect**: Providers must acknowledge service users’ individual identity and diversity. This was not specifically referred to in the Human Services Standards.

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 | - |

## Track ongoing compliance with Standard 2

Regularly review your policies and procedures to track your performance against Standard 2.

Positive indicators may include:

* feedback from service users that they understand their support plans and how to make changes to their services
* service user support, case or service plans that show how the service user has taken part in making decisions about their services
* evidence that service users feel that complaints and feedback are taken seriously and addressed
* records of staff training on service user inclusion and participation in decision making
* cultural support forms
* feedback from service users that they feel connected to family, friends, and community
* evidence that advocacy and support services have access to service users and the premises.

# Appendix 1: Service requirements for Standard 2

Dignity and respect

### Service requirement (clause 13)

A registered social service provider must implement and maintain practices which ensure that:

1. each service user is treated with dignity and respect, acknowledging the service user’s individual diversity
2. social services are delivered free from discrimination.

### Actions, useful documents and success indicators

Table 2: Dignity and respect

| Actions | Documents and other evidence | Indicators of success |
| --- | --- | --- |
| * Leaders and staff treat all service users with dignity and respect * Leaders and staff recognise that identity is clearly linked to a person’s wellbeing * Leaders and staff help service users express their identity * Leaders identify, address and act to remove discrimination and barriers to access where possible * Staff receive information, education or training on diversity and discrimination | * Intake forms or similar documents collect information about the service user’s identity * Policies and processes to respond to discrimination * Code of conduct that clearly describes appropriate and inappropriate behaviour * House rules or similar for accommodation services * Accessible feedback, complaints or concerns handling policy and procedures * Records of staff information, education and training in diversity and discrimination | * Service users report they are treated with dignity and respect * Service users are supported to express their individual identity * Service users’ family, friends and community are treated with dignity and respect * Leaders and staff recognise and value diversity, including in culture, beliefs, sexuality and other aspects of identity |

Service user rights and responsibilities

### Service requirement (clause 14)

A registered social service provider must implement and maintain practices that:

1. support each service user to freely exercise the service user’s rights and responsibilities
2. are compatible with a service user’s right to personal privacy.

### Actions, useful documents and success indicators

Table 3: Service user rights and responsibilities

| Actions | Documents and other evidence | Indicators of success |
| --- | --- | --- |
| * Leaders put in place systems and processes to protect service users’ privacy and keep information confidential * Leaders and staff make sure service users get information about their rights and responsibilities in clear and accessible formats * Staff help service users freely exercise their rights and responsibilities * Breaches of service user rights are addressed promptly * Information about service user rights and responsibilities is available on the premises * Staff receive information, education or training on service user rights and privacy | * Accessible information for service users about their rights and responsibilities * Accessible and easy to understand feedback, complaints or concerns handling policy and procedures * Privacy and data security policies * Information for service users about privacy and information sharing * Information collection statements and consent forms * House rules or similar for accommodation services * Records of staff information, education and training on service user rights and privacy | * Staff respect and uphold service users’ personal privacy * Service users feel that complaints and feedback are confidential, taken seriously and addressed appropriately * Service users confidently exercise their rights and responsibilities * Staff promote service user rights and responsibilities |

Advocacy and support

### Service requirement (clause 15)

A registered social service provider must implement and maintain practices that support service users to freely access any relevant independent or state-funded advocacy services or other relevant support services.

### Actions, useful documents and success indicators

Table 4: Advocacy and support

| Actions | Documents and other evidence | Indicators of success |
| --- | --- | --- |
| * Engage with local advocacy and support services * Staff inform service users about their right to advocacy and support services * Staff provide practical help to service users and their support people to access advocacy services or other support services they need * Staff receive information, training or education on service users' right to advocacy and available supports | * Information for service users about advocacy and support services * Policies and processes to help service users access advocacy and support services, including interpreter services if needed * Dispute management policy and processes | * Service users engage advocacy services or other relevant support services as needed * Advocacy and support services have access to service users and premises * Advocacy and support are embedded in day-to-day practices |

Clear and accessible information

### Service requirement (clause 17)

A registered social service provider must provide clear, comprehensive, and accurate information about the following matters in a way that is accessible to and understandable by the service users:

1. the social services that are provided and, if applicable, any relevant service or activity that is not provided by the registered social service provider
2. the fees and costs for the social services provided
3. the rights and responsibilities of service users in relation to the provision of social services
4. the processes for lodging feedback, complaints, or concerns in relation to social service delivery or safety
5. the processes for dispute management in relation to social service delivery or safety.

### Actions, useful documents and success indicators

Table 5: Clear and accessible information

| Actions | Documents and other evidence | Indicators of success |
| --- | --- | --- |
| * Staff give service users clear and accurate information about:   + the social services provided   + fees and costs   + processes for lodging complaints, feedback or safety concerns   + dispute management * Service users receive information that meets their diverse needs and backgrounds * Leaders put in place systems and processes to check if information given to service users is easily understood * Leaders make sure documents and information are reviewed regularly for accessibility for all service users | * Accessible information for service users about:   + social services provided   + fees and costs   + service user rights and responsibilities   + processes for lodging feedback, complaints or safety concerns   + dispute management. * These documents should be in a range of formats to meet the needs of a variety of service users, such as:   + plain language   + Easy English   + translated information   + age-appropriate or child-friendly   + audio-visual   + accessible to service users from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds   + accessible service users with disability * Accessible accommodation or service agreements that clearly outline service fees and costs * Service user support, case or service plans that outline services provided and, if relevant, services the provider does not offer * Policies and processes for creating a support plan or planning service delivery for someone * Policies and processes for seeking service user feedback * Policies and processes for managing disputes about social service delivery or safety | * Service users have clear and accessible information about:   + social services provided   + fees and costs   + other important matters around safe service delivery * Service users show they understand:   + social services provided   + fees and costs   + other important matters around safe service delivery |

Service user inclusion and participation

### Service requirement (clause 18)

A registered social service provider must implement and maintain practices that support each service user and the service user’s support persons to actively participate in decisions about the social services provided to the service user.

### Actions, useful documents and success indicators

Table 6: Service user inclusion and participation

| Actions | Documents and other evidence | Indicators of success |
| --- | --- | --- |
| * Leaders put in place systems and processes to help service users take part in decision making * Leaders and staff give service users and their support people the opportunity to take part in planning, monitoring and improving their services * Staff tell service users about their right to take part in decisions that affect them * Staff help service users take part in activities that involve a level of risk, when appropriate * Staff record and act on service users’ choices and decisions where possible * Staff receive information, training or education that helps them with service user participation, inclusion and informed decision making | * Information for service users and their support people about how to take part in decisions about their social services * Policies and processes on service user inclusion and participation in decision making * Service user support, case or service plans that show how service users (or their support people) have taken part in making decisions about their services * Records of staff information, training and education on service user inclusion and participation in decision making | * Service users and their support people actively take part in making decisions about their services * Service users understand their support plans and how to make changes to their services |

Informed consent

### Service requirement (clause 19)

1. A registered social service provider must, before providing any social service to a service user obtain and document the informed consent of:
   1. the service user
   2. the service user’s authorised representative
   3. if the service user does not have decision-making capacity, a person authorised by law to make decisions for the service user in relation to the provision of the social service.
2. A registered social service provider is not required to obtain informed consent to the provision of a social service if the provider is authorised or required under another Act or law to provide the social service without consent and the registered social service provider:
   1. complies with the requirements of that Act or law, including any notification requirements
   2. unless notification is required under that Act, notifies the following persons as soon as practicable of the provision of the social service without informed consent and of the legal authority or requirement to do so
   3. the service user
   4. the services user’s authorised representative
   5. if the service user does not have decision-making capacity, a person authorised by law to make decisions for the service user in relation to the provision of social service.

### Actions, useful documents and success indicators

Table 7: Informed consent

| Actions | Documents and other evidence | Indicators of success |
| --- | --- | --- |
| * Staff get and record informed consent from service users and their authorised representatives before social services are provided, when needed * Staff give service users the information they need in a timely way to make informed and active choices about their services * Staff receive information, training or education on the principles and practices of informed consent | * Policies and processes for getting informed consent from service users before providing services * Policies and processes for providing social services without consent (if relevant) that includes:   + how it complies with relevant laws   + notification requirements   + consultation with the service user and their support people * Information collection statements and consent forms * Records of staff information, training and education on the principles and practices of informed consent * Service user support, case or service plans show that either:   + the service user or their authorised representative gave informed consent before service delivery   + the service is being provided without consent | * Service users are aware of the potential benefits, negative effects, alternatives and costs before giving informed consent to receive a social service * Service users’ support people know and are included in informed consent practices * Information on informed consent is readily available in accessible formats |

Connection to culture, family, friends and community

### Service requirement (clause 21)

A registered social service provider must implement and maintain practices that support service users to maintain connections to service users’ culture, family, friends and community.

### Actions, useful documents and success indicators

Table 8: Connection to culture, family, friends and community requirement guidance

| Actions | Documents and other evidence | Indicators of success |
| --- | --- | --- |
| * Leaders and staff actively help service users stay connected to culture and chosen relationships with family, friends and community * Staff identify and record service user needs and preferences on connection and use them to inform planned activities * Staff help service users access services in the community as needed | * Intake forms or similar that collect information about the service user’s culture, family, friends and community * Cultural support plans or similar * Service user support, case or service plans help them connect with culture, family, friends and community * Policies and processes that show the importance of family and community involvement and describe ways this can occur | * Staff help service users stay connected to their chosen family, friends and community * Service users feel safe to express their cultural and diversity needs * Service users feel connected to family, friends and community |

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| To receive this document in another format, email the [Social Services Regulator](mailto:enquiries@ssr.vic.gov.au) 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, April 2024.  This guidance is general in nature and the list of compliance indicators is not exhaustive. Some social service providers may adopt a different approach to meeting the Social Services Standards. If so, they may be asked to show how their approach complies with the service requirements and achieves the outcomes of the Standards.  This information sheet provides a brief overview of the service user agency and dignity standard. It helps social service providers meet the service requirements of the Standard by identifying actions, documents and other evidence.  In this document, ‘leaders’ means individuals who are responsible for decision making or people management in a social service provider, including but not limited to ‘key personnel’.[[9]](#footnote-9) ‘Staff’ has the same meaning as ‘service worker’[[10]](#footnote-10) and includes volunteers. ‘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 978-1-76130-496-5 (online/PDF/Word) or (print)  Available at [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 |

1. The service requirements are outlined in Schedule 1 of the *Social Services Regulations 2023*. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. See **Service requirement (clause 13)** in Appendix 1. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. See **Service requirement (clause 14)** in Appendix 1. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. See **Service requirement (clause 15)** in Appendix 1. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. See **Service requirement (clause 17)** in Appendix 1. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. See **Service requirement (clause 18)** in Appendix 1. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. See **Service requirement (clause 19)** in Appendix 1. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. See **Service requirement (clause 21)** in Appendix 1. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. ‘Key personnel’ is defined in the Social Services Regulations 2023 and includes a member of the group of people responsible for the executive decisions of the social service provider as well as other prescribed roles. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. ‘Service worker’ is defined in the Regulations as an individual employed or engaged by a social service provider to deliver a social service, including as a volunteer. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)