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| Standard 3: Safe service environment |
| Social Services Standards |
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# Social Services Standard 3

**Safe service environment – Social services are provided in a safe, secure and fit-for-purpose environment.**

The *Social Services Regulation Act 2021* and the *Social Services Regulations 2023* 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 3 – providing a safe service environment

Providing a safe service environment is essential for ensuring the safe delivery of social services.

Standard 3 requires social service providers’ premises to meet a minimum standard to maintain a safe space:

* free from physical hazards
* in a condition that supports the health and wellbeing of service users.

Under this Standard, social service providers must:

* secure service users’ personal and private property
* manage the risk of harm
* give staff and service users clear directions in an emergency.

## What this Standard will ask you to demonstrate

The **outcomes** that Standard 3 aims to achieve are:

* social services are provided in an environment that supports service user safety, health and wellbeing
* emergency planning and management protect service users from risks of harm.

If you do not own the premises, you may need a lease agreement that ensures the requirements of Standard 3 are met.

# How to meet Standard 3

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).

The requirements often guide providers to build on existing frameworks. Many social service providers will already have arrangements in place to ensure that their premises, facilities and equipment are regularly maintained in line with relevant standards and laws.

For Standard 3, the service requirements focus on:

* safe, secure and fit-for-purpose premises, facilities and equipment
* personal and private property
* emergency management planning.

For ease, the service requirements for Standard 3 are detailed in **Appendix 1: Service requirements for Standard 3**. Appendix 1 also includes more information on:

* suggested actions
* useful documents
* indicators of success.

## Getting ready

Before checking your readiness to meet Standard 3, you may find it useful to gather these documents:

* **risk assessment frameworks** that identify hazards and risks of harm to service users
* **audits** of the physical service environment
* policies and procedures on **safety and security**
* policies for **regular maintenance** of premises, facilities and equipment
* **emergency preparedness** or management plans

Here are some starting points to assess your readiness to meet Standard 3 service requirements:

### Ensure safe, secure and fit-for-purpose premises, facilities and equipment[[2]](#footnote-2):

* Risk assessment plans and processes that identify hazards and reduce risks to service users.
* Procedures for staff to get feedback from service users about the suitability of premises and facilities.
* Records on reasonable adjustments made when providing equipment to meet service user needs.
* A maintenance schedule and occupational health and safety checklists.

### Secure personal and private property[[3]](#footnote-3):

* Processes ensuring service users’ personal and private property is stored securely, with suitable access given to service users.
* Providing information for service users on how their personal property will be stored and kept secure.
* Records of service users’ personal belongings, where appropriate.

### Emergency management planning[[4]](#footnote-4):

* Systems and processes to prepare for an emergency event, including risk mitigation strategies to reduce the risks of harm to service users.
* Providing information for service users on what to do in an emergency.
* Staff training on how to respond during an emergency and putting in place strategies for greater emergency preparedness, such as regular fire drills and evacuation exercises.

## 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.

Standard 3 is broadly in line with the Human Services Standards, particularly with requiring services to be provided in a safe environment for all people, free from abuse, neglect, violence or preventable injury.

The key change is the service requirements outline more explicit steps that providers must take for a safe service environment connected to the physical premises.

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 3

Regularly review your policies and procedures to track your performance against Standard 3.

Positive indicators may include:

* showing that service users have a safe place to secure their personal belongings and private property
* feedback that service users feel safe and secure in the service environment
* a training schedule that shows staff are prepared for a range of emergencies relevant to the social service they provide
* records showing that service users were given information on what to do in an emergency and how to evacuate the premises.
* map of premises or facilities with emergency exits and external safe meeting points clearly marked.

# Appendix 1: Service requirements for Standard 3

Safe, secure and fit-for-purpose premises, facilities and equipment

### Service requirement (clause 23)

1. A registered social service provider who delivers social services at premises that the registered social services provider owns or occupies must:
	1. identify and reduce hazards and risks of harm to service users relating to the premises, facilities, equipment, furniture and fittings used to deliver social services
	2. ensure that the premises, facilities, equipment, furniture and fittings used to deliver social services are suitable for the provision of the service, including having regard to the accessibility needs of service users
	3. ensure that the premises, facilities, equipment, furniture and fittings used to deliver social services are maintained in a safe and serviceable condition, and
	4. in the case of a registered social service provider who occupies but does not own the premises, enter into any arrangements or agreements necessary to comply with the requirements of paragraphs (a), (b) and (c).
2. A registered social service provider who delivers social services at a place other than premises owned or occupied by the service provider must implement and maintain practices to manage risks to ensure the safe delivery of social services at that place.

### Actions, useful documents and success indicators

Table 2: Safe, secure and fit-for-purpose premises, facilities and equipment

| Actions | Documents and other evidence | Indicators of success |
| --- | --- | --- |
| * Leaders put in place systems and processes to identify and reduce hazards and risks of harms to service users around the premises, facilities, equipment, furniture and fittings used to deliver social services
* Leaders and staff seek feedback from service users on the suitability of the premises, facilities, equipment, furniture, and fittings used for service delivery
* Social service providers offer reasonable adjustments when providing equipment to meet service users’ needs
* Leaders and staff take steps to make sure that the premises, facilities, equipment, furniture, and fittings are suitable, regularly maintained and meet relevant standards and laws
* Staff take immediate action to report and fix any property damage that threatens service user or staff safety and wellbeing
* If a social service provider does not own the premises, contract or other arrangements are made to guarantee that Standard 3’s service requirements are still met
 | * Risk assessment and management plans that identify hazards and risks of harm to service users and how these will be managed
* Environmental scan or audit of physical service environment, where applicable
* Policies and processes on safety and security
* Policies and processes for seeking service user feedback on the suitability of premises, facilities, equipment, furniture and fittings for service delivery
* Policies and processes on how service users can seek adjustments to the service environment to meet their accessibility needs
* Policies and processes for regular maintenance of premises, facilities, equipment, furniture and fittings
* Maintenance schedule and records, including occupational health and safety checklists
* Lease agreement or similar that make sure Standard 3 requirements are still met when the provider does not own the premises
 | * Service users feel safe and secure in the service environment
* The premises, facilities and equipment are suitable and meet service users’ accessibility needs
* Premises, facilities, equipment, furniture and fittings are suitable, well maintained and meet all relevant standards and laws
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Personal and private property

### Service requirement (clause 24)

A registered social service provider must implement and maintain practices to secure service users’ personal and private property:

1. at the registered social service provider’s premises, if the social services are delivered at premises owned or occupied by the registered social service provider, and
2. if the social services are delivered at a place other than premises owned or occupied by the registered social service provider, while the social services are delivered at that place.

### Actions, useful documents and success indicators

Table 3: Personal and private property

| Actions | Documents and other evidence | Indicators of success |
| --- | --- | --- |
| * Leaders make sure there are enough storage facilities available for service users to secure their personal and private property
* Staff provide service users with access to their personal or private belongings as required
* Staff maintain records of service users’ valuables stored by the social service provider
* If a provider does not own the premises, arrangements are made (such as a contract) to make sure service users’ personal and private property is secured while social services are delivered there
 | * Policies and processes on secure storage of and access to service users’ personal and private property
* Information for service users on how their personal and private property will be stored and kept secure
* Inventory or records of service users’ personal belongings, where relevant
 | * Service users’ right to privacy is recognised and respected
* Service users have a safe place to secure their personal belongings and private property
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Emergency management planning

### Service requirement (clause 26)

1. A registered social service provider must implement and maintain practices:
	1. to manage the risk of harm in an emergency, and
	2. to provide clear directions to service workers and service users on what to do in an emergency.

### Actions, useful documents and success indicators

Table 4: Emergency management planning

| Actions | Documents and other evidence | Indicators of success |
| --- | --- | --- |
| * Leaders put in place systems and processes to prepare for an emergency, including managing risks of harm to service users
* Staff provide service users with information about what to do in an emergency
* Staff receive information, education or training on how to respond during an emergency
* The social service provider puts in place risk mitigation strategies for greater emergency preparedness, such as regular fire drills and evacuation exercises
 | * Risk assessment and management plans that identify risks of harm to service users and how these will be managed
* Emergency preparedness or management plan including (but not limited to) fire safety, evacuation and infection control plan
* Information for service users on what to do in an emergency and how to evacuate the premises
* Map of premises or facilities with emergency exits and external safe meeting points clearly marked
* Records of staff information, education and training on how to respond in an emergency
* Schedule of fire drills or evacuation exercises, with evidence of completion
* Checklist for communicating with emergency services
 | * Staff are prepared for a range of emergencies relevant to the social service they provide
* Service users know what to expect in an emergency and are aware of evacuation procedures
* Risk of harm to service users is minimised due to effective emergency management planning
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| To receive this document in another format, email the Social Services Regulator enquiries@ssr.vic.gov.auAuthorised 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 complying with the Standards. If so, they may be asked to demonstrate how their approach complies with the service requirements and achieves the outcomes of the Standards.This information sheet provides a brief overview of the safe service environment standard. It helps social service providers meet the service requirements of this 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’.[[5]](#footnote-5) ‘Staff’ has the same meaning as ‘service worker’[[6]](#footnote-6) 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/ISSN 978-1-76130-495-8 (online/PDF/Word)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 23)** in Appendix 1. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. See **Service requirement (clause 24)** in Appendix 1. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. See **Service requirement (clause 26)** in Appendix 1. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. ‘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-5)
6. ‘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-6)