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| Standard 5: Accountable organisational governance |
| Social Services Standards |
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# Social Services Standard 5

**Accountable organisational governance – Effective governance and organisational systems support safe delivery of social services.**

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 5 – accountable organisational governance

Service users should be confident that a social services provider is well run and accountable for safe social services.

Governance is at the heart of how providers ensure ongoing safe service delivery. Effective governance arrangements will help providers maintain and improve safety standards over time.

Under Standard 5, providers must set up and maintain policies, procedures and review mechanisms that foster accountable governance practices.

Standard 5 ensures:

* governance arrangements set clear **directions for leadership**
* **systems** are in place that identify, track and **reduce risk, and improve service delivery**
* providers have a transparent incident management system
* staff can **confidentially raise concerns** around safe service delivery without punishment.

## What this Standard will ask you to demonstrate

The **outcomes** Standard 5 aims to achieve are:

* governance arrangements are **transparent and accountable**
* governance and leadership arrangements **support service users’ safety**, agency and dignity
* registered social services providers have governance and leadership arrangements in place to:
* identify, track and **reduce risk**
* **improve** safe service delivery and service quality.

# How to meet Standard 5

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.

For Standard 5, the service requirements focus on:

* accountable governance and leadership
* governance systems and practices in line with safe service delivery
* an environment where staff feel safe to report concerns about service delivery without being punished
* transparent incident reporting and management.

For ease, the service requirements for Standard 5 are detailed in **Appendix 1: Service requirements for Standard 5**. Appendix 1 also includes more information on:

* suggested actions
* useful documents
* indicators of success.

## Getting ready

Before checking your readiness to meet Standard 5, you may find it useful review policies and processes on how you maintain governance arrangements and to gather these documents:

* risk management frameworks
* policies and procedures on incident management
* policies and procedures for staff to make a complaint or raise concerns about service delivery
* leadership strategy to embed safe service delivery across the organisation and organisational culture
* systems and processes on ensuring safe service delivery by contractors.

Here are some starting points to assess your readiness to meet Standard 5 service requirements:

### Ensure accountable governance and leadership[[2]](#footnote-2)

* Business plan that outlines compliance frameworks and processes to make sure contracts, laws and regulations are met.
* Clearly defined leadership roles and delegations, with board members and leaders regularly reviewing and updating governance frameworks.
* Embedding service user safety in governance frameworks, leadership and organisational culture.
* Risk management frameworks, quality and safety frameworks.

### Maintain a safe and inclusive practice culture[[3]](#footnote-3)

* Training and education to build staff awareness and confidence in how to provide feedback, make a complaint or raise concerns about service delivery.
* Human resources policies on how to confidentially share feedback, make a complaint or raise concerns.
* Policies on inappropriate workplace behaviour, including how to report it.
* Privacy policy, including how to confidentially raise concerns and how confidential information is handled.
* Complaints and concerns are responded to promptly and action is taken to protect service users.

### Report incidents and adverse events[[4]](#footnote-4)

* Staff use an incident management system that meets legal requirements and are up to date on incident management requirements.
* Procedures on how staff should act when incidents and adverse events occur, including reporting to the Social Services Regulator.
* Monitoring system that identifies opportunities to improve safe service delivery and mitigate risks.
* Policies and procedures that show how to record incidents and adverse events.

### Checks on outsourced services[[5]](#footnote-5)

* Due diligence documentation when contracting other providers to deliver services.
* Service agreements with contractors include a requirement to ensure safe social service delivery.
* Policies and procedures to track, review and address contractor performance for safe service delivery.

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

Some social services providers may have governance settings in line with the Human Services Standards.

Standard 5 is broadly in line with the old governance standard of **effective governance and management at all times** (see **Table 1**).

Standard 5 has:

* more specific and clear requirements
* a stronger focus on lining up governance and organisational systems for **safe delivery of social services**.

When reviewing existing governance arrangements, some providers may wish to focus on ensuring the clear connection of safe service delivery to all relevant policies and processes.

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 compliance with Standard 5

Regularly review your policies and procedures to track your performance against Standard 5.

Positive indicators may include:

* examples of leaders and staff championing service user safety policies
* data from staff surveys that staff feel safe and supported to raise concerns about service delivery
* data from staff surveys that staff feel that leaders have addressed their feedback
* records showing a continuous improvement approach to incident reporting
* records showing reviews of near misses
* records of staff training on incident management, including reporting to the Social Services Regulator
* policies and examples of contract language and management showing how contractors are held accountable for delivering safe social services
* succession planning milestones.

# Appendix 1: Service requirements for Standard 5

Accountable governance and leadership

### Service requirement (clause 34)

A registered social service provider must implement and maintain governance arrangements to provide for leadership accountability for, and continuous improvement of, service user safety.

### Actions, useful documents and success indicators

Table 2: Accountable governance and leadership

| Actions | Documents and other evidence | Indicators of success |
| --- | --- | --- |
| * Leaders put in place systems and processes that make sure contracts, laws and regulations are met
* Leaders make sure suitable monitoring systems are in place
* Leaders and staff champion policies and processes around service user safety
* Board members and leaders regularly review and update the provider’s governance framework
* Board members, leaders and staff actively embed service user safety in organisational leadership, governance and culture
* Leaders and staff foster a culture of continuous learning and practice improvement
 | * Organisational structure or similar that has clearly defined leadership roles and delegations
* Policies and processes on governance arrangements and structures, including human resource practices where relevant
* Strategic plan, business plan or similar that may include:
	+ purpose, vision and values statement
	+ risk identification and management strategy
	+ legal and regulatory compliance framework
	+ records of service user and stakeholder consultation in strategic or other organisational planning
	+ quality and safety framework
* Succession planning
* Evidence of senior leadership commitment to service user safety in:
	+ policies
	+ processes
	+ position descriptions
* Evidence of analysing feedback and complaints to inform continuous improvement
 | * Key stakeholders are aware of the provider’s strategic direction, values and governance framework
* Leaders and staff effectively put in place organisational governance systems and processes
* Service user safety and a culture of continuous improvement are embedded in day-to-day practice of leaders and staff
 |

Safe and inclusive practice culture

### Service requirement (clause 35)

A registered social service provider must implement and maintain practices that support service workers to raise concerns confidentially, without reprisal, to assist in safe social service delivery.

### Actions, useful documents and success indicators

Table 3: Safe and inclusive practice culture

| Actions | Documents and other evidence | Indicators of success |
| --- | --- | --- |
| * Leaders promote and uphold the rights of staff to provide feedback and raise concerns about service delivery
* Staff know how to share feedback, make a complaint or raise concerns about service delivery
* Complaints and concerns are responded to within appropriate legal and regulatory frameworks
* Social service provider responds to complaints promptly, thoroughly and fairly
* Social service provider takes immediate action to protect service users
 | * Policies and processes that allow staff to confidentially share feedback, make a complaint or raise concerns about service delivery
* Information for staff on how to raise concerns about service delivery
* Code of conduct that clearly describes appropriate and inappropriate behaviour
* Privacy policy or similar that outlines how confidential information will be handled
 | * Staff feel safe, supported, and empowered to raise concerns about service delivery
* Leaders are responsive to the feedback, complaints and concerns raised by staff
 |

Incident and adverse event reporting

### Service requirement (clause 36)

A registered social service provider must implement and maintain an incident management system that transparently records, reports on and responds to incidents and adverse events relating to safe social service delivery, to improve safe social service delivery.

### Actions, useful documents and success indicators

Table 4: Incident and adverse event reporting

| Actions | Documents and other evidence | Indicators of success |
| --- | --- | --- |
| * Leaders and staff use an incident management system that meets legal, regulatory and contract requirements
* Staff record all incidents and events (including near misses) in the incident management system
* Leaders and staff act in a timely and transparent way when incidents and adverse events occur, including reporting to the Social Services Regulator
* Leaders and staff regularly review incidents and events (including near misses) to identify how to improve service delivery and manage risks
* Staff receive incident management information, education or training, including reporting to the Social Services Regulator
 | * Incident management system, including policies, processes, and records of:
	+ all incidents and adverse events
	+ implementation
	+ reviews
* Records of staff information, education and training on incident management
 | * Staff can effectively follow incident reporting and management policies and processes
* Safe service delivery is embedded in day-to-day practice
 |

Outsourced services

### Service requirement (clause 37)

If a registered social service provider engages contractors or other persons (other than employees) to deliver social services in whole or partially:

1. the registered social service provider remains accountable for safe social service delivery; and
2. the registered social service provider must have governance and contractual arrangements in place that hold those contractors and other persons to account to the registered social service provider for safe social service delivery.

### Actions, useful documents and success indicators

Table 5: Outsourced services

| Actions | Documents and other evidence | Indicators of success |
| --- | --- | --- |
| * Leaders and staff use proper due diligence when contracting or partnering with other people to provide services
* Staff screen contractors and other people appropriately
* Leaders put in place systems and processes to track, review and address contractor (or other people's) performance to ensure safe service delivery
* Staff give service users information on how to share feedback or complaints about a contractor or other person
* Staff receive information, education or training on engaging contractors or other people
 | * Service agreement or similar that includes a requirement for contractors or others to ensure safe social service delivery
* Policies and processes on engaging contractors or others, including:
	+ due diligence
	+ screening
	+ clearly defined roles and responsibilities
	+ monitoring and managing performance
	+ accountability for safe social service delivery
* Code of conduct that clearly describes appropriate and inappropriate behaviour
* Information for service users on how to share feedback, make a complaint or raise concerns about service safety
* Records of staff information, education and training on engaging contractors or others
 | * Contractors and other people prioritise safe service delivery
* Contractors and other people meet all contractual arrangements to keep service users safe
* Service users know how to share feedback, make a complaint or raise concerns about a contractor or the service they provide
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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 accountable organisational governance standard. It supports social service providers to 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’.[[6]](#footnote-6) ‘Staff’ has the same meaning as ‘service worker’[[7]](#footnote-7) 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 978-1-76130-493-4 (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 34)** in Appendix 1. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. See **Service requirement (clause 35)** in Appendix 1. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. See **Service requirement (clause 36)** in Appendix 1. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. See **Service requirement (clause 37)** in Appendix 1. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. ‘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-6)
7. ‘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-7)