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| Standard 6: Safe workforce |
| Social Services Standards |
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# 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.**

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 6 – safe workforce

Safe social services delivery relies on a safe, effective and capable workforce.

Standard 6 recognises the importance of **strong recruitment practices** that attract staff with the right skills, qualifications and knowledge. These practices can also prevent unsuitable people entering the sector.

Under Standard 6, social services providers must also **properly support staff** through ongoing:

* training
* supervision
* performance management
* workforce planning.

## What this Standard will ask you to demonstrate

The **outcomes** that Standard 6 aims to achieve are:

* staff have the knowledge and capability to deliver safe social services
* staff are adequately supported to deliver safe social services
* staff are supervised and managed to deliver safe social services.

# How to meet Standard 6

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

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

The service requirements for Standard 6 work across all stages of the employee lifecycle, including:

* pre-employment screening and recruiting for the necessary skillsets
* ongoing training for staff on safe service delivery
* monitoring the safety of service delivery
* ensuring that workforce planning supports resource and skill needs.

The requirements often guide providers to build on existing frameworks and a **records management system** can help you keep an up-to-date evidence base of practices for a safe workforce. The system may document:

* suitable workforce recruitment approaches
* staff training
* performance management
* workforce planning

For ease, the service requirements for Standard 6 are detailed in **Appendix 1: Service requirements for Standard 6**. Appendix 1 also includes more information on:

* suggested actions
* useful documents
* indicators of success.

## Getting ready

Before checking your readiness to meet Standard 6, you may find it useful to gather these documents:

* recruitment policies and procedures
* pre-employment screening processes
* position descriptions that outline skills and capabilities needed for a safe work environment
* risk management approaches that include mitigating workforce planning risks
* policies and processes on staff supervision, performance monitoring and disciplinary procedures.

Here are some starting points to assess your readiness to meet Standard 6 service requirements:

### Workforce recruitment[[2]](#footnote-2)

* Staff training on strong recruitment processes, including interviewing and screening.
* Recruitment documents that highlight service user safety, including:
  + position descriptions
  + selection criteria
  + interview questions
  + reference checks.

### Workforce training[[3]](#footnote-3)

* Induction and onboarding for new staff.
* Staff training on trauma-informed practice, which supports service user health and wellbeing.
* Training plan and schedule that recognises the ongoing training needs of your workforce.

### Worker performance and conduct[[4]](#footnote-4)

* Code of conduct for all staff that clearly describes appropriate and inappropriate behaviour.
* Processes that ensure staff receive appropriate oversight and ongoing supervision.
* Staff roles, expectations and responsibilities are clearly defined by leaders.
* Procedures that show staff are held accountable for their performance and conduct.
* Evidence that code of conduct breaches are taken seriously and responded to appropriately.

### Workforce planning[[5]](#footnote-5)

* Policies on contingency arrangements for unexpected staff shortages.
* Risk management approaches that include mitigating workforce planning risks.
* A workforce strategy outlining the:
  + specific needs of service users
  + necessary qualifications, skills and experience staff need to provide services to service users.

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

Some social services providers may already have policies and procedures in line with the Human Services Standards.

Ensuring a safe workforce was not a separate standard under the Human Services Standards. Standard 6 is broadly in line with the old governance and management standard (see **Table 1**).

Standard 6 includes more details on the steps providers must take create a safe service environment.

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 6

Regularly review your policies and procedures to track your performance against Standard 6.

Positive indicators may include:

* records that show staff were appropriately screened before being employed
* training schedule that shows all staff have had regular, relevant training and development
* staff feedback that they feel confident to provide support to service users
* feedback from service users that they received continuity in delivery of services
* evidence that concerns with staff performance and conduct were addressed promptly and appropriately
* documentation on succession planning.

# Appendix 1: Service requirements for Standard 6

Workforce recruitment

### Service requirement (clause 40)

A registered social service provider must implement and maintain recruitment practices that give priority to service user safety and wellbeing.

### Actions, useful documents and success indicators

Table 2: Workforce recruitment

| Actions | Documents and other evidence | Indicators of success |
| --- | --- | --- |
| * Leaders put in place systems and processes to make sure all applicants are screened properly before being employed * Staff receive information, education or training on strong recruitment practices, including interviewing and safety screening | * Policies and processes on recruitment that prioritise relevant skills and capabilities needed for a safe work environment * Recruitment documents that highlight the importance of service user safety and wellbeing, including:   + position descriptions   + selection criteria   + interview questions   + reference checks * Pre‑employment screening policies and processes, including police checks and professional registrations * Records of staff information, education and training on strong recruitment practices, including interviewing and safety screening | * Staff have the right skills, qualifications and experience for their roles and to provide safe social services * Staff are properly screened before being employed * Recruitment practices prioritise service user safety and wellbeing |

Workforce training

### Service requirement (clause 41)

A registered social service provider must ensure service workers access ongoing training and are supported to deliver safe social services.

### Actions, useful documents and success indicators

Table 3: Workforce training

| Actions | Documents and other evidence | Indicators of success |
| --- | --- | --- |

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| * Leaders and staff demonstrate commitment to ongoing training and professional development * Leaders put in place systems and processes to identify, meet and track workforce training needs * Staff receive relevant induction training and onboarding when they start work * Staff receive ongoing training and professional development relevant to their role * Staff are trained to use trauma‑informed practice that supports service user health and wellbeing where appropriate * Training needs are regularly reviewed to support safe service delivery | * Policies and processes on induction and onboarding for new staff * Policies and processes on ongoing staff training and professional development * Training and educational materials that help staff provide safe services * Training plans or similar for staff * Schedule of upcoming training opportunities * Records of training completed by staff * Records that show staff have read and understood organisational policies and processes | * All staff receive regular, ongoing training and professional development relevant to their role * Staff feel supported and empowered to request more training if needed * Staff feel confident in their role to provide support to service users |

Worker performance and conduct

### Service requirement (clause 42)

A registered social service provider must implement and maintain practices to monitor and manage service worker performance and conduct to deliver safe social services.

### Actions, useful documents and success indicators

Table 4: Worker performance and conduct

| Actions | Documents and other evidence | Indicators of success |
| --- | --- | --- |
| * Leaders put in place systems and processes to make sure staff perform their roles effectively and deliver safe services * Leaders ensure that staff roles, expectations and responsibilities are clearly defined * Staff receive appropriate oversight and ongoing supervision * Staff are held accountable for their performance and conduct * Breaches of codes of conduct are taken seriously | * Position descriptions that clearly define staff roles, expectations and responsibilities * Policies and processes on staff supervision and performance monitoring, including performance management plans if needed * Code of conduct that clearly describes appropriate and inappropriate behaviour * Policies and processes on disciplinary action and code of conduct breaches | * Staff are supported to perform their role effectively * Staff get regular supervision where their performance is reviewed * Concerns about staff performance and conduct are addressed promptly and appropriately |

Workforce planning

### Service requirement (clause 43)

A registered social service provider must implement and maintain practices for planning and managing a workforce that is adequately supported to deliver safe social services.

### Actions, useful documents and success indicators

Table 5: Workforce planning

| Actions | Documents and other evidence | Indicators of success |
| --- | --- | --- |
| * Leaders identify skills, qualifications, experience and knowledge the workforce needs to provide safe services * Leaders regularly assess, track and review workforce suitability and performance through effective human resource practices * Leaders put in place strategies to identify and manage any risks that might lead to not having enough suitable staff | * Workforce strategy or similar that documents the specific needs of service users * Workforce strategy or similar that lists qualifications, skills and experience staff need to provide services * Policies and processes on reviewing workforce suitability and performance * A risk management system, including workforce planning risks * Policies and processes on possible arrangements for unexpected staff shortages * Position description templates * Succession plan * Staff rosters | * Social services provider has a well-planned and managed workforce that is properly resourced * Service users experience a degree of continuity in service delivery * Succession planning is in place |

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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](mailto: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 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 workforce 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’.[[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 978-1-76130-492-7 (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 40)** in Appendix 1. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. See **Service requirement (clause 41)** in Appendix 1. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. See **Service requirement (clause 42)** in Appendix 1. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. See **Service requirement (clause 43)** 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)