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# New laws to protect social services users takes effect

From today, new legislation to ensure vulnerable Victorians are better protected will take effect.

The new Social Services Regulation Act will strengthen the community sector by streamlining and simplifying the regulation of social services and reducing red tape, protecting social services users from avoidable harm.

Under the new system, a single set of Social Service Standards and a single registration process for hundreds of community organisations has been established, as well the appointment of the independent regulator, Jonathan Kaplan.

The new regulator replaces the Human Services Regulator and provides decision making separation between the responsibilities of the Department of Families, Fairness and Housing and decisions made by the regulator.

The regulator can identify shortcomings in service delivery and work with providers to meet standards, issue fines to providers and initiate criminal proceedings for aggravated breaches of the standards where there has been wilful and serious non-compliance.

But Mr Kaplan reassured providers that he would take a “graduated approach” to regulating the new standards.

“This means our initial focus will be on informing and educating organisations about their obligations under the new standards,” he said.

“We understand that for some organisations, it may take time and effort to get things right. But over time, we will expect organisations to have comprehensively implemented the new standards.”

Since taking on the role as the state’s inaugural regulator in February, Mr Kaplan has prioritised stakeholder engagement, visiting organisations around Victoria to learn more about their vital role in protecting social services users from avoidable harm.

“It’s been fantastic going out to service providers, hearing about their understanding of the new scheme and how we can work together to achieve the best outcomes for vulnerable Victorians,” Mr Kaplan said.

He said his new role as the Social Services Regulator is an opportunity to build on the great work that many organisations are already doing while ensuring there is consistency across the sector.

“The scheme is about giving people confidence that when they turn up to a service, they’re going to receive the best service possible, and a service where the standards are reliable and consistent, whether it’s a government service, a for-profit or not-for-profit organisation.”

Under the new Act, the Worker and Carer Exclusion Scheme has also commenced.

Designed to address risks posed by individual workers and carers, the scheme replaces the Victorian Carer Register.

It also increases protections for children and young people in out of home care by expanding the range of conduct that can result in a worker or carer being excluded from working.

Before engaging with a worker or carer for the first time, service providers will be required to check with the Regulator if the person is on the excluded worker and carer database.

Services covered under the new Social Services Regulation Act include family violence, sexual assault, homelessness, Supported Residential Services, and disability services not within the National Disability Insurance Scheme. It will also oversee government-funded children, youth and family services.

In April, the Social Services Regulator launched its new website making it easier for providers to register and access information and guidance material about the new legislation.

To learn more about the new Social Services Regulator, download the guidance materials or subscribe to our newsletter, visit [www.ssr.vic.gov.au](http://www.ssr.vic.gov.au)