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ACCESS AND EQUITY POLICY

BACKGROUND

Access and equity are important principles of social justice. All clients have a right to consideration for and provision of service without discrimination.

POLICY

VIWA is committed to improving the welfare of those who are disadvantaged by fostering a culture that embraces diversity within our services and enhancing the quality of life for all people with disabilities through their effective participation and independence in the community.

In striving to achieve our commitments we will:

- ensure services are available to everyone who is entitled to use them and are developed and delivered on the basis fair treatment of everyone who is entitled to use them;
- identify and remove barriers that stop people knowing about or using of our services;
- respond to all people with awareness, flexibility, adaptability and empathy;
- ensure that all staff accept their responsibility to prevent discrimination and barriers to access and participation; and
- assess and provide clients with services on the basis of need regardless of their race, religion, cultural background, gender, sexual orientation, disability or ability to pay for services.

PROCEDURES

When establishing, reviewing or altering a physical access point or a communications device or medium at any site, staff will ensure that the design and functioning of the space conforms to the Access and Equity Policy.

Assessing premises layout

Whenever services move into new premises, how partitions, furniture, equipment etc. can be arranged to maximise accessibility and security will be developed in consultation with all relevant staff.

In the case of outreach locations, relevant staff should make any requests for changes to the premise's management.

Assessing client characteristics and community diversity

Services are to assess the characteristics of its clients and identify groups that the service is not reaching.

Services compare the characteristics of its clients against any demographic data on its catchment that it has collected through research or from other sources.

Where there is a concern about meeting the needs of clients within a service due to client characteristics, whether identified by the service or the client, provide a formal complaint and feedback brochure to the client.

Criteria for accepting clients

VIWA services may limit eligibility to specific groups. Service eligibility will be documented.

Accessibility and equity issues, particularly those faced with literacy problems and people with disabilities, are discussed during organisational induction.

Where access and equity issues arise, or a need for staff member and/or volunteer training is identified, the Executive Officer shall organise for appropriate sensitivity training (either in-house or external).

Physical locations

VIWA aims to ensure that:

- all existing service delivery sites are accessible for all people, or have alternative strategies in place for clients with mobility issues, physical disabilities or who need pram access
- all new services and sites will ensure disability access, including toilets
- an ease of access to all services with clearly identifiable signage, lighting and proximity to public transport and car parking within grounds or within walking distance
- strategies will be in place to ensure the personal safety of clients who may be at risk as a result of violence and abuse when they access the service and alternative strategies are in place if personal safety within the service cannot be met.

In addition, our site would consider or as determined by a risk assessment:

- Separate entry and exit points with locks
- Two separate waiting areas for clients
- Duress alarms.

Informing clients of the service locations

When informing clients of the location of a service, the staff member or volunteer should ask the client how they intend to access the service:

- If the client indicates that they will be travelling via public transport, the staff member should endeavour to give them information about public transport services.
- If the client indicates that they will be travelling by vehicle and require a car park, the staff member should direct the client to our service car park or the closest disability parking space (where the client is a disability parking permit holder).
- If the client indicates they will be dropped off, the staff member should direct the client to the closest drop off zone or disability parking space.

Accessibility for clients

Accessibility of services for clients with mobility issues, physical disabilities, mobility aids and equipment and pram access is considered during service design. Our planning would consider:

- appropriate car parking facilities
- appropriate entry and exit to building
- internal doors and space requirements
- toilet facilities
- parenting areas (for nappy changes/breastfeeding)
- secure space to leave mobility aids and equipment and prams
- at least one service delivery room for clients on the ground floor where services are delivered over more than one floor and there is no lift.

Specific accessibility needs of clients are established at the time of intake (as relevant), by enquiring if a client is able to access the service or have any specific requirements.

For situations when modifications to buildings to improve accessibility are not feasible or possible, alternative strategies will be identified and implemented as necessary.

Wheelchair access

VIWA's services are to be accessible to clients with disabilities and meet all relevant building standards.

All service locations are to be wheelchair accessible.

Communicating with hearing impaired clients

VIWA's services shall communicate with deaf clients by scheduling face-to-face interviews with the use of deaf interpreters, text messages.

The service will cover the cost of the interpreter, where the interpreter service charges a fee.

Interpreters for hearing impaired clients

1. Sign-language interpreters are booked through our preferred provider Deaf Society of South Australia's Deaf Can Do
2. Appointments are booked online or by phoning 8100 8200
3. For emergencies contact their after-hours emergency number on 0417 233 369.

Translating written material

VIWA may use an appropriate translating service to translate documents for clients (eg. letters), its pamphlets and publications into languages other than English.

Communications

Pamphlets and publications

Each service will produce at least one pamphlet that provides basic information about the location and services. Where funds allow it will endeavour to print the brochure in other languages.

Pamphlets and publications shall be written in plain English, and be suitable for translation.

Consideration shall be given to ensuring that, as far as practicable, people with specific disadvantages (eg. sight impairment, hearing impairment, poor literacy skills) are taken into account during the drafting of pamphlets and publications.

Talks and workshops

All talks and workshops should be held in accessible venues and in a location that is convenient for a majority of the participants.

Client complaints and feedback

Clients are encouraged to provide feedback and complaints

Disability guidelines

VIWA aims to assist those with a disability through:

- Ensuring all our services and products are accessible to people with a disability, and their associates by:
 - seeking to identify and meet the needs of staff and clients with a disability
 - taking a planned and managed approach to meet approved standards for physical access at sites and facilities where services are provided
 - ensuring that new and alternative methods of delivering services and products, including technological solutions (e.g. websites and intranets) meet accepted accessibility standards, where practicable
 - ensuring a strategic approach to staff development and training to ensure that all staff receive appropriate disability awareness and discrimination training to enable them to respond sensitively and appropriately.

- Treating people with a disability, and their associates, fairly and equitably by:
 - being consistent, fair and non-discriminatory in making decisions and providing services to the public, clients, staff or volunteers with a disability
 - minimising barriers for people with "aggregate disadvantage" (e.g. people with multiple disabilities, hidden cognitive disabilities, Indigenous Australians with a disability, or people with a disability who live in a remote location, people with a disability who do not use English as their preferred language) where practicable.
- Informing people with a disability, and their associates, about available services and seeking their views on how we may best meet their needs by:
 - providing information that is accessible to people with a disability and using targeted marketing strategies to reach clients and staff with a disability
 - consulting a representative cross-section of stakeholders with a disability when formulating policies, developing information and making decisions on how best to improve service delivery.
- Working with people with a disability, and their associates, and responding to their identified needs by:
 - delivering services and products in flexible ways which meet their needs
 - ensuring our staff members are aware, skilled and equipped to respond sensitively and fairly to clients and colleagues with a disability
 - recognising the diversity of views and needs of people with a disability.
- Achieving the best possible results for people with a disability, and their associates, by:
 - reviewing and evaluating service provision to identify service gaps for people with a disability
 - using feedback and complaints from people with a disability to continuously improve and solve problems
 - making best use of staff skills, knowledge and community contacts in relation to disability.
- Responding to people with a disability, and their associates, efficiently and effectively by:
 - identifying indicators of good responsiveness in relation to awareness, flexibility, adaptability and empathy
 - ensuring that staff members meet the high standards of service that is the entitlement of all people
 - making the best use of our resources.
- Being responsible and accountable for our actions and results to people with a disability, and their associates, by:
 - integrating disability considerations into strategic and business plans and corporate support systems (e.g. procurement, finance, complaints, asset management)
 - including results and improvements in working with people with a disability in Annual Reports.

Client characteristics and community diversity

Clients accessing services may be asked to specify cultural background, religion, and other information that may influence how services can be provided in a culturally sensitive manner. However, this is not to be used to discriminate between clients or exclude clients from services. This information is also a requirement of funding bodies and forms part of Minimum Data Set collections and Privacy and Information Sharing. This information used, when appropriate to ensure service delivery is culturally informed and appropriate for each individual, and to evaluate service against the needs of the community where in this case a client's personal information is not linked.

Clients may wish not to provide this information however they should be informed about how this may impact on the service provided to them.

REFERENCE

Advocacy Procedures
Carer Recognition Policy
Consumer Participation Policy
Consumer Complaint Policy & Procedure
Consumer Rights and Responsibility Policy
Equal Opportunity and Diversity Policy
Fee Review Policy and Procedures
Freedom of Information Policy
Workplace Bully Policy
Workplace Harassment Policy