

Family Violence Policy



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1. Purpose

This document outlines how WHL staff will identify and respond to family violence impacting service users and aligns WHL to the Multi-Agency Risk Assessment and Management (MARAM) Framework.

WHL aim to implement a consistent and effective response to family violence that is culturally safe, trauma-informed and is underpinned by a feminist philosophical framework.

2. Scope

This policy applies to all clients, renters, rooming house residents and rental applicants of WHL.

3. Statement of commitment

WHL commits to:

- Aligning with the MARAM Framework and Family Violence Information Sharing Scheme
- Upholding the rights of women and gender diverse people experiencing family violence
- Providing an informed, timely and supportive response to clients and renters experiencing family violence
- Providing a culturally safe service that enables equitable access
- Self-determination, respect and dignity for all clients and renters
- Collaboration and partnership with key stakeholders to assist and support clients and renters experiencing family violence
- Transparency and accountability

4. What is family violence

The *Family Violence Protection Act 2008* defines family violence as behaviour by a person towards a family member or person that is:

- Physically or sexually abusive
- Emotionally or psychologically abusive
- Threatening
- Coercive

In any other way controls or dominates the family member, causing them to fear for their safety or wellbeing, or that of another person.

Examples of family violence includes but is not limited to:

- Assault or causing injury

- Sexual assault or engaging in another form of sexually coercive or unwanted behaviour
- Property damage
- Verbal abuse, threatening behaviours, humiliation, blackmail and emotional manipulation
- Preventing victim-survivors from participating in their religion, cultural practices or language or preference
- Isolating a victim-survivor from their family, friends and support networks
- Denying reasonable financial autonomy or financial support
- Stalking, harassment, intimidation or coercion in order to cause fear or ongoing harassment, including through the use of electronic communication or social media
- Unlawfully depriving a family member of their liberty
- Killing or injuring an animal

Family violence can occur in relationships between spouses, domestic or other current former intimate partner relationships. It can occur in relationships such as parent/carer-child, relations of older people, siblings and other relatives, including between adult, extended family members and in-laws, kinship networks and in family-like or carer relationships.

5. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples

WHL recognises that family violence against Aboriginal people and communities is situated within the context of historic and ongoing impacts of colonisation, genocide, systemic violence, racism, family separation and intergenerational trauma.

The prevalence of family violence perpetrated by non-Aboriginal people against Aboriginal people is a key issue that requires a culturally safe and informed response.

WHL will implement a culturally safe lens and seek consultation from appropriate services when managing family violence incidents involving Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander renters or clients.

6. Policy

6.1 Guiding principles

WHL will:

- Apply client-centred approach to identification, responding, reporting and referral processes
- Maintain a skilled and well-trained workforce who will respond quickly and appropriately to family violence
- Always seek to create and maintain safe tenancies;
- Pursue a goal of early identification and intervention in cases of family violence;
- Manage tenancies ethically and fairly.

6.2 Identification, responding, reporting and referral

WHL will:

- Accept reports of or concerns about instances of family violence in different ways, including in person, in writing, over the phone and online;
- Take all reports of family violence that it receives seriously;
- Provide clients with safe options to meet staff confidentially at an agreed choice of venue;

Once aware of risk to a person from family violence or other criminal activity, WHL will:

- Ensure that all appropriate reports to law enforcement, other government agencies and supports are made in a timely manner
- Work with family violence support services and other services wherever possible, to ensure co-ordinated services to prioritise the victim's (including children's) safety and self-determination;
- Offer information on support services to clients, encourage clients to engage with support services and make agreed referrals on their behalf;
- Assist or refer clients to apply the relevant provisions of Residential Tenancies Act 1997 and/or tenancy agreement

6.3 Information Sharing

WHL is prescribed as an Information Sharing Entity (ISE). Any personal, health or sensitive information that is relevant to assessing and/or managing family violence risk can be shared with other ISEs, provided:

- the information is not excluded under the Act;
- sharing the information does not contravene another law; and
- applicable consent requirements have been met.

The information may relate to a victim survivor (adult or child), an alleged perpetrator or perpetrator, or third party.

Information can be shared verbally or in writing.

Where WHL receives a request, it must share that information, provided that the information meets the requirements of the FVISS.

Should staff have genuine concern for a renter or client's welfare because of information sharing restrictions or requests, this will be raised with the Line Manager and Operations Manager for consultation.

6.4 Building staff capability and capacity

WHL will:

- Ensure all staff who are in contact with clients, renters and applicants receive training on identifying and responding appropriately to domestic and family violence
- Train staff in the use of the Family Violence Multi-Agency Risk Assessment and Management Framework (MARAM) to provide a common approach to identification of issues and risk assessment.
- Contribute to internal resources and training documents to provide guidance to staff on how to respond to tenancy matters when family violence is present.

6.5 Creating safe tenancies

WHL will:

- Ensure that all entering clients who are impacted by family violence are supported to protect them from further violence
- Ensure that information about family violence and support services is available and accessible for renters
- Participate, in conjunction with support services, in risk assessments for new renters where there is or may be a risk of family violence to the renter;

- Conduct follow up meetings to check if there are any safety issues and to reinforce details of relevant support organisations.

6.6 Managing tenancies securely and fairly

WHL will:

- Assist clients to change locks and install additional security measures where practicable
- Assist clients to make applications to the VCAT to take a perpetrator's name off a tenancy agreement where a family violence safety notice or intervention order excludes a perpetrator from a property owned or managed by WHL
- Allow renters to end a tenancy agreement without giving the required notice where a victim needs to relocate immediately as a result of family violence
- In conjunction with support services, explore options for clients to relocate to other suitable properties owned or managed by WHL where the relocation is necessary for the safety of the renter.

WHL will ask that requests made under this part of this policy be accompanied by reasonable supporting evidence from the renter or their support provider.

7. Responsibilities

7.1 Board

The Board of WHL has responsibility for ensuring compliance with legal and regulatory requirements and is responsible for ensuring that appropriate and effective policies and systems are in place. This policy is implemented in accordance with that responsibility.

7.2 Chief Executive Officer

The CEO will:

- ensure that all managers and staff are aware of this policy
- lead a culture where all managers and staff understand the importance of and support an organisation-wide response to family violence; and
- provide support for staff to undertake their responsibilities under this policy.

7.3 Managers

All managers and supervisors will:

- inform staff about their responsibilities under this policy
- arrange comprehensive training for relevant employees about family violence
- facilitate the reporting of suspected family violence where appropriate; and
- be familiar with the types of family violence that might occur to clients in their area of responsibility.

7.4 Staff

All relevant staff share in the responsibility for the identification of family violence, and must:

- comply with this policy
- report any suspicion of family violence to their line manager; and
- adopt an approach that is supportive of a clients' practical and emotional needs and safety.

8. Reviewing

This will be reviewed every two years or earlier where changes in the legislative or regulatory environment require it.

9. Related Documents

- WHL Ending Tenancies Policies
- WHL Privacy and Confidentiality policy
- WHL Child Safety Policy
- WHL Allocations Policy
- WHL Staff Development Policy
- Responding to Family Violence in Tenancy Management (WHL)
- Family Violence Toolkit (CHIA Vic)
- Family Violence Multi-Agency Risk Assessment and Management Framework

10. Relevant Legislation

- The Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006 (Vic)
- Residential Tenancies Act 1997 (Vic)
- Family Violence Protection Act 2008 (Vic)
- Privacy Act 1988 (Cth)