

# Cultural Safety Policy



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## 1. Purpose

This policy outlines how Women's Housing Ltd (WHL) embeds cultural safety into service delivery, including in communications, decisions and practices that impact Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander clients and renters.

## 2. Scope

This policy applies to all staff, students, volunteers and board members at WHL. While WHL values all forms of cultural diversity, this policy is focused specifically on cultural safety for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, in recognition of their unique status as First Nations peoples, their experiences of colonisations and their right to determination.

## 3. Definitions

### 3.1 Cultural safety

An environment that is spiritually, socially and emotionally safe for people, where there is no challenge or denial of their identity. It is an ongoing process that promotes understanding and respect, while acknowledging and addressing systemic barriers that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples face when accessing services.

### 3.2 Cultural competence

The ability to understand and communicate effectively and ethically in professional intercultural settings. It relates to the ability to recognise and appreciate cultural differences, and the skills involved in navigating diversity.

### 3.3 Self determination

The right of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to freely determine their political status and freely pursue their economic, social and cultural development. This includes decision making powers in matters affecting their lives and communities.

### 3.4 Cultural protocols

Established practices, customs or codes of behaviour that are specific to particular cultural groups. Observing these protocols shows respect and helps foster trust and safety.

### 3.5 Intersectionality

A framework that recognises that individuals may face overlapping and interdependent systems of discrimination or disadvantage based on race, gender, class, disability, sexual

orientation, age and other identities. This concept supports a nuanced understanding of renters' experiences.

## **4. Commitment to cultural safety**

WHL is committed to creating and sustaining a culturally safe environment for all renters, staff and stakeholders. We especially acknowledge the unique position of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as the First Peoples of this country and are committed to honouring their culture, self-determination and connection to Country.

This commitment includes:

- Recognising the impacts of colonisation, intergenerational trauma, racism and discrimination
- Embedding human rights, self-determination and trauma-informed principles into our work
- Ensuring that cultural safety is not optional but foundational to our service delivery

## **5. Culturally safe service delivery**

### **5.1 How WHL ensures culturally safe services**

- Providing clear information in accessible format and language
- Ensuring that complaints, feedback and service delivery processes are fair, non-discriminatory and culturally responsive
- Respecting cultural protocols, including around gender, communication, privacy and family dynamics
- Recognising and accommodating specific cultural needs in housing and tenancy management where possible (e.g. use of space, family structures, community gatherings, religious observance)

### **5.2 Specific examples of culturally safe practices**

- Never assuming a person is not Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander based on their appearance
- Providing interpreters where needed
- Asking clients or renters if they identify as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander, and if they would prefer this to be recorded or not recorded
- Respecting naming conventions and preferred titles
- Offering to refer clients or renters to Aboriginal led support services and respecting their preferences
- Acknowledging trauma around government services and understanding barriers to accessing other services
- Recognising that family structures may require flexibility in applying policies surrounding household members and temporary absences
- Seeking external consultations regarding complex tenancies where relevant
- Ensuring cultural safety is considered before commencing actions to end a tenancy
- Including culturally significant design features in properties
- Seeking consultation on complaints relating to cultural safety issues
- Understanding that intersectionality impacts Aboriginal women's experiences of family violence

- Aiming for a benchmark of 10% of tenancies allocated to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander renters

## **6. Staff development and education**

To support a culturally safe organisation, we will:

- Maintain a Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP) with tangible and measurable outcomes and report on this annually to Reconciliation Australia.
- Provide cultural safety training opportunities for staff, including induction training and ongoing training
- Embed cultural safety competencies into performance development frameworks and position descriptions
- Participate in and promote NAIDOC Week and National Reconciliation Week to provide learning and engagement opportunities for staff

## **7. Partnerships and community engagement**

WHL recognises that cultural safety is strengthened through meaningful relationships with the communities we service. WHL will:

- Build respectful, long-term partnerships with Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations (ACCOs)
- Work alongside ACCOs in both a formal and informal manner
- Engage in active consultation with culturally diverse renters and communities
- Support cultural events, initiatives and celebrations within our housing communities
- Share learnings and practices to contribute to sector-wide cultural safety improvements

## **8. Responsibilities**

### **8.1 The Board**

- Provide strategic leadership in fostering a culturally safe organisation
- Endorse and oversee the implementation of the Reconciliation Action Plan
- Ensure cultural safety is embedded in governance structures, decision making and risk management processes

### **8.2 CEO / Senior Management**

- Drive a culture of cultural safety and inclusion throughout the organisation
- Ensure the policy is operationalised through procedures, service delivery and staff development
- Allocate sufficient resources (staffing, training, etc.) to support cultural safety initiatives
- Develop and maintain respectful partnerships with Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations
- Report to the Board on progress, risks and outcomes relating to cultural safety

### **8.3 All staff**

- Understand and apply the principles of cultural safety in day-to-day work with renters, colleagues and stakeholders
- Participate in regular cultural safety learning opportunities

- Reflect on personal biases and attitudes and commit to continuous self-learning
- Use culturally appropriate communication and service practices
- Escalate concerns or barriers to cultural safety through appropriate channels

## **9. Relevant legislation or performance standards**

- Residential Tenancies Act 1997 (Vic)
- Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006 (Vic)
- Equal Opportunity Act 2010 (Vic)
- Racial Discrimination Act 1975 (Cth)
- Victorian Housing Registrar Performance Standards
- Community Housing Industry Association Aboriginal Cultural Safety Framework

## **10. Related documents**

- WHL Reconciliation Action Plan
- WHL Ending Tenancies Policy
- WHL Antisocial and Dangerous Behaviour Policy
- WHL Arrears Policy
- WHL Rent Setting and Review Policy
- WHL Family Violence Policy

## **11. Reviewing**

This policy will be reviewed every two years or when changes to legislation, regulatory frameworks or best practice guidelines occur.