

## GUIDE TO SERVICE REQUESTS AND REFERRALS POLICY TEMPLATE

### ABOUT THIS POLICY AREA

This policy guides how the organisation encourages and manages requests for service from potential clients and referrals to and from other agencies.

A written service request and referrals policy is required as part of meeting Standard 1 (Accessibility of services).

#### **Standard 1 — service requests and referrals**

*The organisation develops, implements and reviews policies and procedures that deal with how it accepts service requests and referrals, and how referrals to other services are made, including when clients, for any reason, cannot obtain services from the organisation.*

#### **Policy checklist**

The following checklist will help you check that an existing policy covers this area adequately.

The policy should:

- describe how requests for services are recorded and handled
- describe the application of non-discriminatory eligibility criteria
- describe how ineligible or excluded clients are assisted to appeal the decision
- describe how ineligible or excluded clients are assisted to gain access to other more appropriate services
- describe how you ensure successful referral processes
- describe how you keep records of referrals and of the involvement of other agencies with your clients
- explain how you maintain and review relationships and referral arrangements with other agencies, and keep their contact details up to date
- contain clear procedures and actions
- indicate the timing of any actions
- show when it was approved
- show when it was last reviewed.

### COMPLETING YOUR REQUESTS FOR SERVICE AND REFERRALS POLICY

#### **Using the policy template**

The template provides some example statements. You can adapt these statements and include them in your policy or write your own statements to better suit the operations and services of your organisation.

To customise the policy template, click on the shaded instructions <<Insert text>> and insert the information that is specific to your organisation.

When you have completed the policy template, delete the shaded instruction such as: [Refer to the service requests and referral policy template guide for questions and/or examples to consider when customising this section.](#)

For further information on using the policy guides, refer to the information in *Using the policy templates and guides*.

## Guidelines for each section of your policy

### 1. Purpose

When identifying the purpose of this policy, consider how it might apply to your client group/s and other agencies you work with. Do you need to make specific statements to ensure you are inclusive of particular groups, such as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, Australian South Sea Islanders, people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds and people with a disability?

### 2. Scope

To determine the scope of the policy, consider the following questions:

- Does this policy apply to all your organisation's services, and to all clients and agencies?
- Which staff will be involved in responding to service requests and referrals?

### 3. Policy statement

If you are adopting this policy statement in the template, consider whether there are any additional commitments that your organisation wants to make.

In identifying the actions your organisation will take to implement this policy, you should include the following:

- how you receive, record and assess requests for services and referrals
- how you make successful and appropriate referrals
- the range of agencies with which you will maintain links to assist your target group
- how you will establish and maintain comprehensive and effective referral networks with these agencies.

### 4. Procedures

The procedures describe how your organisation achieves the aims and goals you have outlined in your purpose, scope and policy statement.

#### 4.1 Management of requests for a service

Explain how you receive requests for a service and how you record and assess these requests.

Requests for a service by a potential client may be:

- in person
- by phone
- on your application form
- by letter

- by email
- through a referral from another agency
- initiated by your service approaching them (outreach)
- an existing client seeking a different service.

The features of your entry/eligibility process that ensure it is inclusive and consistent may include:

- making sure each person has a clear understanding about the services available and the eligibility criteria (information available in community languages, explained verbally etc.)
- the use of advocates, support services and interpreters as required
- consistency and transparency in decision making
- acceptance of new clients referred by certain agencies
- written decisions
- the right to appeal.

The process followed to record a request and assess eligibility for a service may include:

- different processes for former, existing or new clients
- a standard application form
- standard forms and formats to record the request, the assessment and the decision
- manual or computerised client records
- an assessment process followed over a set timeframe
- a formal interview process or a decision made on initial information
- informing the client of the outcome in person, by phone or by letter
- putting the decision in writing, the reasons for the decision and the process for a client to appeal an adverse decision
- seeking management approval for exceptions made to the normal eligibility criteria in exceptional circumstances.

Statistical records of requests for service used to assess how well you reach your intended target group may include:

- age
- gender
- cultural/ethnic/language group
- service requested
- source of referral
- whether eligible for service or not
- other services clients are referred to.

#### *4.2 Making referrals*

Explain how and in what circumstances you make referrals to other agencies, including any specific processes you follow when referring an excluded or ineligible client.

Processes you follow to ensure you make an appropriate and successful referral may include:

- maintaining confidentiality and privacy at all times
- putting things in writing to the client or other agency when appropriate
- keeping records of contact with the client and the other agency

- maintaining an accurate and complete contact and referral database in your agency and/or using reputable external sources of information (e.g. Internet, information services, council etc.)
- clarifying with the client your understanding of the need they have expressed
- providing full and honest referral information to the other agency
- giving clients an accurate picture of the other agency and its service
- making a first contact with the agency on behalf of, or with, clients who are self-referring
- following up with the client about the appropriateness and suitability of the referral
- following up with the other agency about the appropriateness and suitability of the referral
- reviewing the success and appropriateness of ongoing relationships between your clients and other agencies
- having specific guidelines when referring excluded or ineligible clients, if appropriate.

#### *4.3 Establishing and maintaining effective referral networks*

Explain how you ensure that your referral networks are effective, and how you establish and maintain successful working relationships with other agencies your clients may use.

Effective referral networks will be:

- providing services relevant to your target client group
- supported by up-to-date information and good interagency relationships
- easy for your clients to access.

Successful working relationships with other agencies can be maintained in a variety of ways:

- open and honest communication
- accurate referrals
- following up on conversations with an email or letter to confirm verbal information
- written agency agreements clearly outlining the roles and responsibilities in the relationship
- regular review of the relationship and any agency agreement
- regular phone and face-to-face contact between workers at the individual worker level and through case conferences and interagency networks
- contact and cooperation at senior/managerial levels.

#### **5. Other related policies and documents**

List the other policies related to the service requests and access policy. This may include:

- access policy
- eligibility policy
- collaboration in service delivery policy.

Also list the forms and other organisational documents related to your service requests and referrals policy.

#### **6. Review processes**

Consider how often the policy should be reviewed and the process for doing this:

- **frequency of review:** Most policies benefit from an annual review. The experience of implementing the policy is used to decide which changes are necessary. Consider

reviewing your service requests and referrals policy as part of an annual review of your organisation's policies or, if your organisation is small, perhaps over a three-year period. Critical incidents may prompt you to review the policy ahead of schedule.

- **responsibility for the review:** In most organisations, the person accountable for service requests and referrals would be responsible for reviewing this policy. In small organisations, this may be the manager or service coordinator. In larger organisations, this may be a client service manager.
- **process for the review:** Decide which particular staff, volunteers, external people and organisations will provide input to the policy review and whether clients will be involved.
- **decision-making process:** Who will review draft changes to the policy, and who will approve changes? What will be the timeframe for the review process?
- **documentation and communication:** What records of the policy review process are needed? How will changes to the policy be communicated to staff implementing the policy? In a small organisation, this may be as simple as noting the changes at a staff meeting. In a larger organisation, an email memo may be needed.
- **key questions for the review:** Is the policy being implemented? Are procedures being followed? Is the policy clear? What has changed that may prompt a change to the policy? Have particular stakeholders had difficulty with any aspect of the policy? Can their concerns be resolved? How does the policy compare with that of similar organisations?