



VICTIM SUPPORT
ACT Human Rights Commission

Victim Services Scheme Service Provider Guidelines 2023-2024

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1. SCOPE

This document outlines the operational guidelines for Approved Service Providers working with clients referred by the Victims Services Scheme (VSS), which is administered by Victim Support ACT (VSACT).

2. PURPOSE

The operating guidelines aim to promote quality and consistency in the delivery of services to clients of the VSS. The Operating Guidelines apply to all Approved Service Providers.

3. DEFINITIONS

Approved Service Provider means a person approved as a Service Provider under section 40 *Victims of Crime Regulation 2000*.

Client means a victim of crime who receives a service under the VSS.

Clinical Supervisor means a registered psychologist, registered occupational therapist, qualified social worker, clinical psychologist or other therapist, where applicable, who is accredited by the appropriate Australian professional body or registration body who engages in ongoing supervision of the Approved Service Provider.

Commissioner means the Victims of Crime Commissioner who is the head of agency for VSACT

Confidential Information means any information whether existing before, on or after commencement of the appointment, that:

- a) is any documentation, information or material supplied by the Commissioner or VSACT to the Approved Service Provider by whatever means; or
- b) is by its nature confidential; or
- c) a party knows or ought to know is confidential.

Counselling Services means counselling delivered under the VSS.

Victim as defined in the *Victims of Crime Act 1994* section 6 (1) includes:

- *Primary victim* meaning a person who suffers harm as a result of the commissioning of an offence.
- *Related victim* meaning:
 - a family member of the primary victim, who suffers harm because of the harm to the primary victim.
 - a person who is financially or psychologically dependent on the primary victim and who suffers harm because of the harm to the primary victim.
- *Homicide witness* meaning a witness to a homicide.

The Victims of Crime Regulation 2000 states that an eligible victim is any person that fits within the above categories and excludes victims of crime:

- who suffer harm as a result of committing an offence or

- who suffer harm caused by or arising out of the use of a motor vehicle.

Professional Association refers to the relevant association the Approved Service Provider must retain membership of for the duration of their appointment which may include but is not limited to The Psychology Board of Australia, the Australian Association of Social Workers, the Occupational Therapy Board of Australia, the Nursing and Midwifery Board the Australian Counselling Association or the Psychotherapy and Counselling Federation of Australia.

4. VICTIM SERVICES SCHEME

The Victim Services Scheme (VSS) provides services to individuals who have experienced crime in the ACT with the aim of assisting them to recover from the effects of crime and access their rights as victims. This may include counselling, psychological services, and justice advocacy.

Service Providers are contracted to provide services to VSS clients in the form of contact hours.

The VSS is governed by the *Victims of Crime Act 1994*, and the *Victims of Crime Regulation 2000*.

The criteria for accessing services through the VSS are set out in section 6 *Victims of Crime Act 1994* and regulation 24 of the *Victims of Crime Regulation 2000*.

VSS case coordinators work with clients to determine eligibility for counselling and other therapeutic services.

5. OPERATING GUIDELINES

5.1 PROFESSIONAL AND LEGAL REQUIREMENTS

Service provider qualification requirements

Applicants should nominate the service they will be providing, and supply evidence of the following:

Psychology

- Unconditional registration as a psychologist with the Australian Health Practitioner Regulation Agency (AHPRA); and
- Minimum of three years' experience as a registered provider of clinical mental health services; and
- Expertise in a range of therapeutic interventions and a demonstrated understanding of working with complex trauma.

Social Work

- Membership of the Australian Association of Social Workers and hold accreditation as a Mental Health Social Worker with the Australian Association of Social Workers (AASW); and
- Minimum of three years' experience as a registered provider of clinical mental health services; and
- Expertise in a range of therapeutic interventions and a demonstrated understanding of working with complex trauma.

Counselling

- Registration with the Psychotherapy and Counselling Federation of Australia (PACFA) as a clinical member; or
- Registered with the Australian Counselling Association (ACA) as a Level 3 or 4 member; and
- Minimum of three years' experience as a registered provider of clinical mental health services; and
- Expertise in a range of therapeutic interventions and a demonstrated understanding of working with complex trauma.

Occupational Therapy

- Unconditional AHPRA registration to practice with the Occupational Therapy Board of Australia and hold the Occupational Therapy Better Access to Mental Health endorsement with Occupational Therapy Australia; and
- Minimum of three years' experience as a registered provider of clinical mental health services; and
- Expertise in a range of therapeutic interventions and a demonstrated understanding of working with complex trauma.

Massage Therapy

- Accredited membership of the Australian Traditional Medicine Society (ATMS), with a minimum of three (3) years massage therapy experience; or
- Membership of Association of Massage Therapists (AMT) at Senior Level One or above with a minimum of three (3) years massage therapy experience; and
- Expertise in a range of therapeutic interventions and a demonstrated understanding of working with complex trauma.

Mental Health Nurses

VS ACT may also consider applications on a case-by-case basis from suitably qualified mental health nurses. VS ACT will consider the following when reviewing applications:

- Unconditional AHPRA registration as a Registered Nurse Division 1 to practice with the Nursing and Midwifery Board of Australia; and
- Hold a recognised specialist mental health nursing qualification along with a minimum of three years' experience providing clinical mental health services; and/or
- Credentialed as a specialist mental health nurse with the Australian College of Mental Health Nurses; and
- Expertise in a range of therapeutic interventions and a demonstrated understanding of working with complex trauma.

Professional Association's code of conduct, standards and ethics

You must:

- at your own cost maintain registration or accredited membership to professional associations, where available;

- comply with all codes of conduct, professional standards and ethics of your professional association;
- consult codes of conduct, professional standards and ethics of your professional association to inform practices relating to ethical conduct, matters of clinical and professional competence, and guidance on working with vulnerable people; and
- notify VSACT immediately should you be the subject of a complaint or have registration with your professional association suspended or cancelled.

Professional competence, continued professional development, clinical supervision and peer-to-peer consultation

You must maintain records about professional development.

Upon request you must provide VSACT information to demonstrate continuing professional development training as required to maintain professional registration or membership to professional association; and participate in VSACT information sessions as required.

In addition to service provision, you must:

- undertake a minimum of 10 hours of trauma-specific and/or applicable professional training per year;
- undertake the minimum requirement of professional competence and continuing professional development training required to maintain your registration and/or accreditation as a professional; and
- for social workers and counsellors - engage the services of a qualified Clinical Supervisor and access a minimum of one hour of one-on-one clinical supervision every four to six weeks and maintain records of clinical supervision; or
- for psychologists – engage in peer-to-peer consultation at least 10 times per year and maintain records of this supervision.

Notice of specialisation

You must advise the Commissioner if your professional specialties expand or change.

Criminal status

You must notify VSACT immediately if you have been charged with a criminal offence in the ACT or in another Australian or International jurisdiction.

Australian Business Number (ABN)

You must have an ABN registration at the time of providing any services.

Insurance requirements

You must have:

- Professional Indemnity insurance of \$10,000,000 (in respect of each claim) and \$10,000,000 (in the annual aggregate).
- Public Liability insurance of \$10,000,000 (in respect of each claim).

- Workers Compensation insurance (if required) to the extent required by a law of the Commonwealth or Territory.

Statutory obligations

You must comply with all applicable legislation, regulations and all relevant Australian standards (or equivalent standards in your state or territory) applicable to the delivery of approved services.

This may include but is not limited to:

- *Victims of Crime Regulation 2000*
- *Health Records (Privacy and Access) Act 1997*
- *Health Professionals Act 2004*
- *ACT Human Rights Act 2004*
- *Children and Young People Act 2008; and*
- *Standards of Practice for ACT Allied Health Professionals ACT Health 2016*

5.2 ALLOCATION OF THERAPEUTIC HOURS

The Victims of Crime Regulation 2000 outlines the availability of three levels of service under the VSS. Service levels determine the number of contact hours a victim of crime is eligible to access per crime, through the VSS. The eligibility for each of the levels is described below.

Level 1

All eligible victims (see above) are entitled to receive level 1 service under the VSS. Level 1 consists of no more than **2 contact hours**.

Level 2

An eligible victim is entitled to receive level 2 service if they have completed level 1 service for the crime concerned and the victim:

- is a *primary victim* of a violent crime; or
- is a *related victim* of a violent crime; or
- is a *related victim* to a primary victim who has died; or
- is a witness to a homicide.

Level 2 service consists of not more than 6 contact hours. In practice, if a client is eligible for level 2 service and they are seeking counselling, they will be referred for level 1 and 2 (**8 hours**) at the outset.

Level 3

An eligible victim entitled to receive level 2 service is entitled to receive level 3 service if –

- the victim has completed level 2 service for the crime; and
- a VSS case coordinator has decided that the victim would receive therapeutic benefit from receiving level 3 service.

Level 3 service consists of not more than **12 contact hours** in addition to the level 1 and level 2 contact hours.

The maximum hours a victim is entitled to receive is 20 hours other than in exceptional circumstances, as approved by the Commissioner.

5.3 PROVISION OF THERAPEUTIC HOURS AND REPORT REQUIREMENTS

Accepting allocations

You must respond to clients' appointment requests within two working days. In addition, prior to commencing service delivery to a client, you must ensure that:

- VSACT has provided you with approval to see the client, including checking that the client has sufficient hours of service approved;
- confirm that you have no actual or potential conflict of interest in relation to the client; and
- advise VSACT if you do not have the appropriate skills and experience to work with the referred client.

Delivery of therapeutic hours

All service provision should observe the principles of:

- accessibility;
- confidentiality and privacy;
- safety;
- professionalism; and
- professional boundaries.

Service provision should not occur in a public place or a client's home unless otherwise approved by VSACT.

You must seek written approval from the Commissioner and the client to allow any other person to observe, or be present at, a session with a client.

Should the focus of the service you are providing shift significantly from the initial presenting issues, you must consult with VSACT to determine an appropriate plan of action. Approval for services that are beyond the terms of the Support Plan may be provided by VSACT in exceptional circumstances.

Counselling format

Approved counselling can be delivered face-to-face, online or over the phone.

Before delivering phone or online counselling, you must ensure:

- expectations and risks associated with delivering counselling over the telephone or video conference have been identified and discussed with the client, this includes ensuring they are in a safe, private and appropriate environment for counselling;
- a risk management plan is in place to manage risks around not being able to read behavioural or visual cues whilst providing this mode of counselling;
- provisions of a dedicated work phone and/or video conference ID for all counselling delivered by these modes - personal devices must not be used;

- reliable and fast internet connections are required to minimise disruption; and you should be in a location and place that is private and conducive to phone counselling. This includes a place where there is minimal distraction, low noise, and access to a means of documenting the counselling session.

Initial appointment

You must offer clients their initial appointment within 21 working days of the client's request unless another timeframe is agreed with VSACT.

Approval for additional hours

Where a client is approved for level 2 service and you believe they would benefit from additional sessions, you may make a request to VSACT for level 3 service to be granted, so that the client can access up to 12 further contact hours. Requests for level 3 service must be accompanied by a progress report indicating:

- the progress made in attaining clinical goals;
- the interventions used;
- any revisions to the support plan; and
- the plan for case finalisation.

VSACT will not authorise extra hours retrospectively.

A request for additional services under 'exceptional circumstances' may be made where clients have completed level 3 service and require further service to reach their therapeutic goals. Requests are made using the 'Request for Exceptional Circumstances Approval Form' which can be obtained from VSACT. These requests should be accompanied by a revised support plan and state:

- what has prevented the achievement of the support plan goals;
- why it is impractical or impossible for the client to access another service;
- the interventions used to date;
- what is envisioned to be achieved in the additional hours; and
- what arrangements have been made with the client for future support on conclusion of these hours.

VSACT expects that in the majority of cases, a client's goals will be finalised either in the level 2 or level 3 allocated hours.

Support Plan

A support plan is sent with the allocation package and should be finalised in collaboration with the client at your first appointment.

You must provide the finalised support plan marked to the attention of the Case Coordinator (to VictimSupportIntake@act.gov.au) when you submit your first invoice (invoices should be to VictimSupport@act.gov.au). The support plan is included with the allocation package and should include:

- the client's rehabilitation goals; and

- the number of contact hours and particular services to be provided to achieve those goals.

Progress Report

To request level 3 service or if, at any point, the client will be transitioning to a different Service Provider, you must provide a progress report to VSACT marked to the attention of the Case Coordinator (to VictimSupportIntake@act.gov.au). A progress report template is included in the allocation package and should include:

- the number of contact hours you have provided;
- the progress made to date with the client;
- the therapeutic approaches used;
- your recommendation for further hours;
- any revisions to the support plan; and
- plans for case finalisation.

Closure Report

Following case closure, you must provide a closure report to VSACT. The closure report template is included in the allocation package and should include:

- the number of contact hours you have provided;
- the extent to which the goals of the support plan were achieved; and
- case finalisation including any referrals for ongoing support.

Change of practice details or availability

You must advise VSACT if your practice or contact details have changed. Further, please advise VSACT immediately if you are unable to provide counselling to a referred client. It is also important that you advise VSACT immediately if your availability to provide counselling services changes, for example where you:

- are at capacity and cannot take new allocations;
- have relocated;
- are taking leave; and/or
- are unable to provide new clients who require urgent counselling with appointments within five working days of their request.

VSACT is happy to amend our provider database to reflect a period of unavailability.

Disclosure of confidential information

This is only permitted with the informed consent of the relevant client or as required by law.

Shared counselling appointments

You must seek prior approval from the Commissioner before delivering family or shared counselling sessions. Please send these requests to victimsupportintake@act.gov.au.

The Commissioner will only consider family or shared counselling sessions where each client participant is an eligible victim.

Subcontracting

You must not subcontract any part of the approved services to another person, including another Approved Service Provider, trainee, supervisee, colleague, provisional psychologist, student or volunteer. You must not subcontract the writing of reports to another person, including another Approved Service Provider, trainee, supervisee, colleague, provisional psychologist, student or volunteer.

Client referrals to Victim Support

On occasion a provider may refer a client to VSACT for a service. We welcome these referrals. Please be aware that VSACT must determine the client's eligibility for counselling and identify the most appropriate provider for the client.

Transparency and Information

At the earliest opportunity, you must provide the client with clear, accurate information about:

- how many sessions have been approved; and
- your missed appointment policy for clients receiving Approved Services.

You must also inform the client about the limitations of client confidentiality, including the Approved Service Provider's obligations to:

- respond to lawful subpoenas;
- report child protection concerns if a mandated reporter; and
- report any imminent threats of suicide or harm to self or others.

You must advise the client in a timely manner of any planned absences, holidays or any other break that may interrupt therapeutic work.

Missed appointments

A missed appointment is defined as a client's failure to attend an appointment, or a cancellation within 24 hours of the scheduled appointment time.

In the event of a missed appointment, you should attempt to contact the client within one week to initiate or continue sessions.

If a client has missed two appointments, you must notify VSACT promptly to discuss future appointments.

You must not charge a client for a missed appointment under any circumstances.

Frequency of sessions

Frequency of sessions should be discussed in relation to the support needs of the client. It is usual practice that clients attend sessions on a fortnightly or monthly basis with the Service Provider.

If a Service Provider determines that sessions are required more frequently than once a fortnight, the Service Provider must discuss this with the Case Coordinator prior to finalising arrangements with the client.

Duration of counselling sessions

You have discretion in how you wish to use the approved hours of service. For example, if 4 hours are approved you may have 8 sessions of 30 minutes each or 4 sessions of one hour each.

You must seek approval from VSACT before undertaking individual service provision sessions exceeding one hour and/or if you wish to undertake sessions more frequently than once a fortnight.

Interpreter services

Where translating and interpreting services are required, VSACT will meet the costs, provided the use of such services have been approved by VSACT. Please contact VSACT to arrange the services of an interpreter at least 7 business days before the session. The request should specify the date, time and address of the counselling session, as well as the language and preferred gender of the interpreter.

Please advise VSACT immediately if you have any concerns about the services provided by the interpreter.

Approved services providers who are also government employees

If you are a public servant, you must:

- abide by all relevant government department guidelines and requirements in relation to undertaking secondary employment or private employment whilst in paid public sector employment in a government department; and
- not use your place of paid public sector employment to conduct a private practice as an Approved Service Provider including not using your workplace telephone contact number.

Commissioner discretion

All allocations to an Approved Service Provider are at the discretion of the Commissioner.

There is no guarantee that the Commissioner will approve the allocation of a victim to an Approved Service Provider.

The Commissioner may cease allocations of clients to an Approved Service Provider or transfer an allocated client from an Approved Service Provider.

The Commissioner may at any time, upon written notice vary or revoke any condition of approval, or impose any new or additional conditions in relation to the approval of services to be provided by the Approved Service Provider.

The Approved Service Provider agrees that immediately following receipt of such written notice, they will not be entitled to make any claim for the payment of any fee, expense or other form of payment arising in connection with the provision of services, or lack thereof.

VSACT reserves the right to refuse payment, partially or in full, for services, which are delivered outside of the operating guidelines, unless otherwise approved in writing prior to the delivery of the service.

5.4 LEGAL CONTEXT

You can deliver Approved Services to clients who are undergoing court processes or other legal processes as a victim or witness of crime.

However, in some circumstances therapeutic approaches, specifically, Eye Movement Desensitisation and Reprocessing (EMDR) and Hypnosis can impact on court evidence and outcomes. Approval is required by VSACT prior to commencing either of these treatments with a referred client.

Subpoenas

You must maintain accurate notes during counselling and other service provision sessions and consider that files and reports may be subject to a subpoena in relation to a court matter.

Please be aware the *Evidence (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1991* creates certain obligations and protections for counselling communications (also referred to as protected confidences) in sexual offence or family violence proceedings. Namely, counselling communications **must not** be disclosed for the purposes of a sexual offence or family violence proceeding without the leave of the Court that is dealing with those proceedings.

- A provider cannot be required, in a family violence or sexual assault proceeding, whether by subpoena or any other procedure, to produce a document containing a counselling communication without the Court's leave.
- This is irrespective of whether the counselling communication contains information relating to the alleged offences subject of those proceedings.
- You remain under this obligation whether or not the client consents to the protected confidence being disclosed for the purposes of a sexual offence or family violence proceeding.

If you receive a subpoena for a client allocated by VSACT, please contact your relevant professional association for information and advice. You may also wish to seek independent legal advice if you are uncertain about your legal obligations.

Mandatory reporting

You must fulfil obligations for mandatory reporting under the *Children and Young Persons Act 2008* or equivalent legislation in the relevant state or territory and comply with mandatory reporting requirements of your Professional Association.

Children

You must:

- assess the family context of a client when the client is a child or young person;
- ensure accused parents or caregivers do not attend the child's counselling session;
- obtain relevant information about any court orders that may be in place about the responsibility of the parent(s) and/or guardian(s) of a child client. This may include conditions of any court order that might be relevant to the service provision and parental consent; and

- seek independent legal advice if uncertain about legal obligations. Your professional registration body may be able to assist with advice or please contact VSACT for assistance.

5.5 SERVICE PROVISION RELATIONSHIP

Declaration of existing relationship and conflict of interest

You must notify VSACT immediately and await approval to proceed with an allocation if:

- a current or former relationship exists between you and the referred client; or
- a conflict of interest may arise if you deliver a service to the referred client.

Where, in the Commissioner's view, the conflict of interest cannot be managed, the Commissioner may change the Approved Service Provider for that client.

Maintaining professional boundaries

You must maintain professional boundaries and comply with all codes of conduct, professional standards and ethics of your professional association.

Do not engage in any financial, intimate, personal or inappropriate relationship with referred clients during or after service provision.

External Research

Do not recruit clients to participate in, or be the subject of, any research activity or case study unless prior written approval from the Commissioner has been provided.

Safety concerns for the Approved Service Provider

You must immediately report any behaviour from clients that leads you to have concerns for your safety. VSACT will liaise with you to discuss arrangements which could be put in place to ensure your safety or if service provision should cease.

Change of Approved Service Provider

You must not re-allocate clients to another service provider to deliver the therapeutic hours, unless prior approval has been granted by VSACT.

To seek approval, you must do so in writing and include:

- the reason for the request;
- the number of approved service hours remaining; and
- how many appointments the client has missed (if relevant).

You will be informed in writing of the outcome of any request for a change of Approved Service Provider.

VSACT may also initiate a change of Approved Service Provider in the event of a complaint.

5.6 SUPPORT, REFERRALS AND CONTINUITY OF CARE

Assistance with Financial Assistance Scheme Applications

Clients may contact VSACT for assistance in completing an application to the ACT Victims of Crime Financial Assistance Scheme.

Other supports

When a client needs court support, you should refer the client to VSACT for assistance.

Crisis referrals

You must refer clients in crisis to an appropriate service such as Access Mental Health or equivalent crisis services in other States or Territory and inform VSACT immediately if a client has been referred to crisis care.

5.7 RECORDS MANAGEMENT

Approved service provision hours

You must maintain:

- accurate and up-to-date records regarding delivery of service provision; and
- evidence of the client's attendance at appointments by completing the Attendance Record Template provided by VSACT.

VSACT may seek to review attendance records at any time.

Service provision sessions

You may commence service provision after receiving the VSACT letter confirming the relevant level of service and number of approved hours.

Client contact

You must maintain accurate and up-to-date records of all communications with the referred client, including:

- telephone calls;
- emails;
- text messages; and
- invoices.

Storage of records

You must take proactive steps to ensure records, both hard copy and on your computer system, are stored securely. Every effort must be taken to protect the client's personal information from misuse, interference or loss and from unauthorised access, modification or disclosure. Storage of client records must occur in accordance with relevant privacy legislation in your State or Territory.

5.9 PAYMENT

VSACT will only pay for hours approved in writing, as detailed in the allocation letter or subsequent approvals.

VSACT will pay for no more than two sessions where a client does not attend a scheduled appointment without providing advance notice. A missed appointment will not be paid by VSACT where you have been able to conduct a session with an alternative client.

You must not charge a client for more than our agreed rate.

In accordance with the *Victims of Crime Regulation 2000*, VSACT cannot pay for:

- any hours exceeding those approved in writing;
- appointments made in anticipation of an allocation and without written approval;
- preparation of medico-legal reports. If clients request a report for medico-legal purposes this must be negotiated with the person(s) requiring that report;
- time spent in court as an expert-witness;
- preparation of progress reports;
- preparation of closure reports;
- filing;
- arranging appointments with clients; or
- other administrative tasks.

Invoices

Invoices can only be submitted for clients registered and referred by VSACT in relation to approved contact hours. Invoices are to be provided on a regular basis with a maximum of five service sessions on one invoice. Please note, all invoices need to be submitted within a three-month period of service delivery.

Invoices should be forwarded to:

*ATTN: Corporate Team
Victim Support ACT
ACT Human Rights Commission
GPO Box 158
Canberra City ACT 2601
Email: VictimSupport@act.gov.au*

Invoices will be processed within 28 days as per the ACT Government Credit Policy.

Invoices must not have client names or other personal details recorded on them

The Party ID (PT) number should be clearly documented on the invoice.

5.10 MEDIA ENQUIRIES

You must obtain written approval from the Commissioner prior to any media engagement regarding your role as an Approved Service Provider.

5.11 COMPLAINTS

If a client has made a complaint about you to VSACT, you will be given the opportunity to consider and respond to the content of that complaint, other than in exceptional circumstances where to do so would, for example, impact the client's safety and well-being. If upon the Commissioner's consideration of the matter the complaint requires further action, the following options are available to the Commissioner under the regulation:

Victims of Crime Regulation 2000

Section 42 Suspension of approval

The commissioner may suspend the approval of a service provider if—

- (a) the commissioner is no longer satisfied on reasonable grounds of the matters mentioned in section 41; or
- (b) the service provider is a suspect in an investigation of an indictable offence; or
- (c) the service provider has been the subject of a complaint to the human rights commission and the complaint has not been decided or has been upheld.

Section 43 Cancellation of approval

The commissioner must cancel the approval of an approved service provider if:

- (a) on at least 3 occasions, a ground existed on which the commissioner would have been entitled to suspend the approval of the provider; or
- (b) if the ground for suspension of the approval of the provider is a state of affairs that has existed for 3 months or longer; or
- (c) the approved service provider has been convicted or found guilty of an indictable offence; or
- (d) for an approved service provider who provides a health practitioners service—the provider has ceased to be registered as a health practitioner.