

Written Policies and Procedures

Tip Sheet for Residential Addiction Treatment Services

Tip #1: Understand the legislative requirements

Requirements for written policies and procedures are detailed under the following:

1. [Mental Health Services Protection Act](#) (Act);
2. [Mental Health Services Protection Regulation](#) (Regulation); and
3. [Residential Addiction Treatment Services Standards](#) (Standards).

For example:

- Sections 2 and 3 of the Schedule of the Act includes requirements for written policies and procedures regarding consent to services and service contracts.
- Sections 4 of the Schedule of the Act includes requirements for other written policies and procedures including with respect to the recruitment of employees, incident prevention and incident response, and with respect to the treatment of clients with dignity and respect.
- Sections 6 and 7 of the Schedule of the Act require that copies of all required policies and procedures are available upon request and that all employees are properly trained under the required policies and procedures.
- Section 50 of the Regulation requires a complaints policy and procedure.
- The Standards contain more specific requirements pertaining to service types, annual reporting and to the various policies and procedures related to complaints and critical incidents.

Reach out to Compliance and Monitoring at amh.cam@gov.ab.ca or call 780-427-8740 (toll free at 310-0000) if you have questions.

Tip #2: Ensure written policies and procedures not only meet all requirements, but are customized to the particular circumstances, needs and challenges you may face as a service provider.

We encourage all service providers to review each requirement with respect to their particular situation or circumstance. This may include consideration for:

- The types of services being provided;
- The particular needs and challenges of the target clientele;
- The needs and concerns of the surrounding community in which the service is being provided; and
- The particular needs of staff in terms of training and support in respect to the above, among other considerations.

Policies and procedures should also address unexpected or unlikely events such as:

- A variety of potential medical emergencies;
- Various security or safety breaches, physical, virtual or otherwise;
- Misconduct, criminal or inappropriate behavior from staff or clients; and
- Natural disasters, accidental/non-accidental fires, vandalism, various building and maintenance issues, among other considerations.

Always highlight the intent of the various policies and procedures. Staff should always be clear on what they are trying to achieve through the policies and procedures as opposed to blind adherence to specific policies and procedures.

Tip #3: Ensure policies and procedures are written in plain language, are understood by staff, and can be applied.

Policies and procedures should be written in plain language so that they can be readily understood and applied by all staff.

- Use words that are easy to understand and avoid jargon or unnecessary legal or obscure language.
- Avoid descriptions that are vague. Rather provide specific examples on how certain policies or procedures are to be applied.
- If necessary, provide step-by-step instructions. For example:
 - You may want to consider providing specific instructions on client assessment and triage to ensure all necessary information about the client is obtained.
 - You may want to consider providing specific instructions around medication storage, handling and dispensation to ensure the safety of clients and proper tracking of all medication.
- Test for readability and comprehension with various staff and make changes as necessary based on the feedback.
- Include definitions, define acronyms and incorporate other reading aids as necessary to improve readability and comprehension.

Tip #4: Engage with clients and staff on a routine basis and as necessary to ensure all policies and procedures are relevant and adapt to the situation on the ground.

Spend time to periodically review the policies and procedures with staff, ensuring staff:

- Understand what is required of them;
- Keep each other accountable in the application of the policies and procedures; and
- Review the policies and procedures together if possible on an annual basis or as often as needed to ensure they are relevant and applicable and clearly understood by all staff.

Spend time with clients to see if the policies and procedures are meeting their needs.

- Be open to feedback and ensure good feedback is captured in the policies and procedures.
- Ensure staff are made aware of any new changes to the policies and procedures following incorporation of the feedback.

Tip #5: Keep a policy and procedures manual readily at hand and accessible to all staff and upon request.

A manual compiling all policies and procedures would be beneficial for staff. Consider whether it is best for staff to have access to a paper copy, digital copy or both. Ideally, the manual will have a table of contents, contain all current policies and procedures, as well as a revision history to track the latest versions of each policy and procedure and when they were last updated. This manual will also be handy to provide in the case of an inspection or audit.