

Risk Management within a wellness approach

Assumptions

- Service providers (and their staff) have an ethical, moral, professional and legal responsibility to exercise due and reasonable care in providing services to the clients within their care.
- Organisation's duty of care requires that staff provide a reasonable standard of care in the delivery of services in order to avoid any harm coming to their clients.
- All service providers are required to maintain a risk management strategy as a component of their ongoing quality improvement systems. This should provide a framework that guides the organisation's approach to choice, risk and decision making.
- The delivery of health and community services will always involve an element of risk – there are risks associated with action and inaction.
- Ageing, disability or illness should not remove a person's independence, autonomy or limit their right to make choices and take risks.
- Clients who have the capacity to make informed decisions, have the right to make choices about their health and their healthcare.
- A wellness approach encourages service providers to empower clients and carers with the ability to make choices and share decisions about the way services are delivered.
- Service providers and staff need to work together so that client and carer's choices are acknowledged and respected, outcomes and benefits are clearly discussed and documented.
- Effective client centred care involves working in partnership with clients, carers / families and other agencies. Risks are therefore shared between a number of key stakeholders and judgement about an acceptable level of risk should be a joint decision. The individual risk owner should be the client.
- All staff need the skills, knowledge and confidence to deliver care in a safe and supported way, ensuring that the client's goals remain a priority.
- Effective risk management requires a consistent approach across the organisation (and with partner organisations). This requires that Boards of Management, executive and management teams work together to create the appropriate authorising environment and that staff and volunteers are supported to assess and manage risks effectively.



Principles of the approach

It is often better to risk an adverse outcome than to deny the inherent worth, dignity and autonomy of an individual by removing the right to choose and being independent.

While it is acknowledged that service delivery inherently involves risk, the services delivered by the community care sector are important. They enable many people to remain in their homes, promote health and wellbeing, facilitate independence and quality of life. Therefore, service providers should adopt a client centred approach to risk management and consider a range of impacts that their action / inaction may have on a client's health and safety.

It is broadly accepted that staff have a responsibility to utilise their skills, expertise and experience to assist clients to make informed decisions and wherever possible, support clients to safely execute their choices in order to achieve their goals. In turn, agencies have a responsibility to support staff with the provision of supportive risk management systems, simple tools, information and decision supports that enables them to practice in a person centred way.

This requires that, rather than trying to avoid all risks, the following points should be considered:

- Organisations should integrate the management of risk as part of their organisational objectives, program design, delivery and individual goal setting and planning
- Our duty of care is to the whole person in context - duty of care therefore needs to balance against the dignity of risk taking and acceptable risk tolerance and appetite.
- Organisations need to take into account the interests and expectations of various stakeholders (clients, carers, staff, other agencies etc.) when designing and delivering care.
- The choices that clients make and the risks they have taken throughout their life, reflect their individual values, their priorities/objectives/outcomes and are part of their identity as autonomous adults. These need to be integrated into the way services approach their care.
- The risks associated with care need to be weighed up against the risks of not providing the service (and/or providing care in a different way).
- Organisations need to consider their risk tolerance (what level of risk they are willing to hold) and define what constitutes an acceptable / reasonable level of risk
- Staff have a responsibility to ensure that clients are informed and empowered to make choices and share risks appropriately.
- Staff need to be empowered to utilise their professional judgement and expertise in order to make appropriate and informed decisions with their clients.

When working in partnership with other agencies:

- ensure that the accountability for risk is clearly understood
- develop standard processes to share risk information (proactively and reactively) and collaboratively manage risks with consideration of the stakeholders who are best placed to implement the necessary controls and proposed risk treatments. While this supports the timely and effective management of presenting risks, it also enables staff to learn from each other and continue to reduce the likelihood and/or consequences of ongoing risks.
- ensure alignment of each agency's risk management approach and when appropriate, create a risk management framework for the partnership (that articulates joint choice, empowerment, reporting and risk management processes).

Where are we now

Service providers (and individual staff) already utilise a plethora of strategies to ensure that services are delivered in a safe manner. These are essentially risk mitigation strategies. Included in the table below, are a range of examples

| Examples of existing risk mitigation strategies | |
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| At an organisational / team level: | With individual clients: |
| Employing appropriately skilled and qualified staff who operate within clear professional guidelines (e.g. position descriptions) | Sharing information with staff (within and beyond your agency) to ensure services are delivered safely and effectively |
| Providing relevant orientation, resources and ongoing training opportunities to staff to ensure they understand organisational policies, systems and approaches to care (including risk management) | Documenting activities appropriately, including discussions regarding safety and the provision of information etc. to support clients making informed decisions |
| Maintaining appropriate policies and procedures that articulate operating principles, processes and protocols | Adopting a client centred approach to care planning, that enables clients to discuss what is important to them, their priorities and choices about the way care is delivered (i.e. goal directed care planning) |
| Maintaining a practical and user-friendly risk reporting systems, including clear flags and processes for risk escalation | Clearly articulating and monitoring objectives for individual clients, staff and the broader organisation |
| Credentiailling | Openly seeking feedback from clients, carers and families (about their individual care and the service/system) |
| | Providing clients with accurate and up-to-date information about the scope of their services and making links with other relevant agencies |

To support this work, agencies can also integrate transparent risk management strategies into service provision by utilising tools such as the SAFE tool (see below)

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| S | Stop (and think rationally) | <p>1. What are we trying to achieve? _ <i>Always start with the individual client's care or support plan.</i></p> <p>2. Who needs to be consulted in making this decision? _ <i>Stakeholders include the client and their family/ carers, and service provider's staff/ volunteers.</i></p> |
| A | Assess the risks | <p>3. List all foreseeable risks, both positive (opportunity) and negative (threats), impacting what we are trying to achieve? _ <i>Use following risk description formula - The opportunity/ threat of (what, where, when) driven/ caused by (how) resulting in (impact/ consequences)</i></p> <p>4. List controls/ actions currently in place to manage these foreseeable risks? _ <i>Controls include policies, procedures, work practices, etc</i></p> <p>5. What are the actual causes and sources of these foreseeable risks, their positive and negative consequences, and the likelihood that those consequences can occur? _ <i>These foreseeable risks should be significant.</i></p> |
| F | Follow best practice | <p>6. What will be the outcomes for the client, staff involved, work colleagues, service provider/ carer and other stakeholders?</p> <p>7. Can the outcomes be justified in terms of the interests of the service provider or its clients and withstand public scrutiny? _ <i>Document all decisions and reasons for decisions.</i></p> <p>8. Are the outcomes reasonable, practical and cost effective? _ <i>Consider costs (burden of taking precautions) and benefits associated with treating the risk.</i> _ <i>The duty imposed by Occupational Health and Safety Act, 2004 – “reasonably practicable”.</i> _ <i>Consider availability and suitability of ways to eliminate or reduce the hazard or risk.</i></p> |
| E | Evaluate the service you provide | <p>9. Is the solution working? _ <i>Revise treatment plan accordingly.</i></p> |