

# Quality and Compliance audits

## Information for residential care providers

### Overview

Victoria's most at-risk children will be better protected through the introduction of unannounced on-site audits of Department of Health & Human Services funded residential care facilities from April 2015.

The Victorian Government has announced \$1.5 million to fund the audits, which will ensure the highest standards of care in government-funded residential care facilities. This initiative will strengthen oversight of the Victorian residential care system to ensure a safer environment for children and young people in care.

Audits will include discussions with children and young people, in-person observations, interviews with staff and an examination of formal records to ensure compliance with the Department of Health & Human Services Standards, and relevant legislation.

The Department of Health & Human Services will work with funded residential care providers to ensure successful implementation of the initiative. The audits will complement the existing accreditation process, which requires major formal reviews every three years and one mid-term review in the cycle.

### Frequently asked questions

#### Why are you introducing the audits?

The Department of Health & Human Services is committed to the continuous improvement to improve the safety and wellbeing of vulnerable children and young people in out-of-home care.

The audits will strengthen oversight of the Victorian residential care system to ensure a safer environment for children and young people by monitoring compliance with existing legislative requirements, performance standards and contractual obligations. The use of such audits is a key strategy used by Victorian Government regulators and reflects contemporary research.

The lack of random audits was a regulatory weakness that was identified by the Protecting Victoria's Vulnerable Children Inquiry, the Auditor-General and the Ombudsman. The active checks were one of the recommendations made by the report of the Protecting Victoria's Vulnerable Children Inquiry.

## How will organisations be identified for an audit?

Organisations will be identified as high risk through a risk tiering process – those identified as high risk in relation to client safety and wellbeing will then be audited.

The risk tiering process is an assessment of risk that is based upon:

- evidence of a failure to meet standards
- evidence of a risk to client safety
- evidence of a failure to meet targets
- and evidence of organisational failure to meet its obligations in a timely manner.

The assessment of risk will be evidence-based utilising existing data sources within the Department of Health & Human Services. The risk tiering process is currently being developed by the Department of Health & Human Services, in consultation with the sector.

In addition to those organisations selected for audit through the risk tiering process, a number of randomly selected organisations will receive a targeted or themed audit.

## What is the audit process?

### Prior to the audit

In most cases organisations will not be receiving advance notice that an audit will be taking place. The exception is in cases where an audit is taking place to see that recommended changes have been implemented.

### During the audit

The time taken to complete the audit may vary for each organisation but is likely to be at least 1-2 days. It will be attended by a minimum of two auditors. The auditors will look at relevant documentation, in addition to observing practice and staff-to-client interactions.

The process on the day of the audit will include:

- Discussions with staff about policy and practice within the residential unit.
- Talking to children and young people about their experiences in the facility (where possible).
- The auditor may view and take copies of records and other relevant documents to evidence their findings.

Examples of the areas evidence may be requested from are in the Department of Health & Human Services Standards Evidence Guide. Any documentation copied or taken will be managed in line with confidentiality procedures outlined in 'Your Privacy Matters' Department of Human Services Policy June 2011.

The audit will include a visit to the organisation's head office to view recruitment records and policy documents.

### Please note:

- any evidence of immediate risk to the safety and wellbeing of clients, including client disclosures of risk, will be acted on immediately and a referral made to the relevant Department of Health & Human Services area office.
- there is no requirement for clients to participate in the audit, any discussions children and young people have with the auditor will be voluntary.
- as a delegate of the Secretary the audit team may inspect any records or documents relating to the care of children and young people in out-of-home care.

### Following the audit

A written report will be provided to the chief executive officer of the organisation as soon as possible after the audit. The auditors may have to return to the site if some evidence is not available on the day.

If recommendations for improvement are made in the report, there may be a follow-up audit. Organisations will be provided with a timeframe for addressing any issues outlined in the report. The timeframe will vary, depending on the scale and urgency of the issue.

The written report, including recommendations for improvement, will be provided to the Standards and Regulation Unit, Performance, Regulation and Reporting Branch, for their follow up and regulatory action and remediation as necessary.

## Are disability residential care units in scope of the audits?

The initial focus of the audits are residential care facilities for children and young people in out-of-home care. The Quality and Compliance audits will likely be extended to disability services later in the year.

## Who will undertake the audits?

A team of auditors within the Performance, Regulation and Reporting Branch of the Department of Health & Human Services will undertake the audits. This team will be responsible for undertaking the audits; providing an audit report; including recommendations; and completing follow-up audits as required.

All audit staff will be Police checked and are required to hold a Working with Children Check Card.

The Standards and Regulation Unit within Performance, Regulation and Reporting Branch will be responsible for risk monitoring and identifying organisations to be audited.

## What happens if an audited residential care unit does not meet the standards?

A written report will be provided to the chief executive officer of the organisation as soon as possible following the audit and will include any recommendations for improvement. The course of action following an audit will depend on the issue identified. For example:

- **Evidence of immediate risk to the safety and wellbeing of clients**, including client disclosures of risk, will be acted on immediately and a referral made to the relevant Department of Health & Human Services (department) area office.
- **Evidence of regulatory non-compliance** will be required to be remedied via an action plan and within an agreed timescale.

If recommendations for improvement are made in the report, there may be a follow-up audit.

Failure to implement the improvements detailed in the agreed action plan may result in regulatory action by the department.

## How will this help children in residential care?

Children and young people in residential out-of-home care are particularly vulnerable due to their age and histories of trauma and neglect. The audits will focus on the wellbeing and safety of children in residential care, providing greater oversight to ensure a high quality of care is being offered in our residential care facilities.

Input from children and young people is an important aspect of the audits and will provide an opportunity for children and young people to have a voice and provide feedback about the quality of the care and support they receive. Input from residential care staff will also be facilitated in addition to in-person observations and examination of formal records which will ensure a fair and robust assessment.

## Are you changing the Standards?

No, anything audited will already be a requirement under:

- the Department of Health & Human Services Standards
- the terms and conditions of the agency's contract with the department
- relevant legislation, such as the *Children, Youth and Families Act 2005*.

## **Will the audits be evaluated?**

The Department of Health & Human Services will undertake analysis of the audit findings periodically and may introduce thematic audits to target specific areas of improvement. An initial evaluation of the initiative is planned for April 2016.

## **What measures will be in place to minimise the impact on children and young people?**

There is no mandatory requirement for clients to participate in the audits, any discussions children and young people have with the auditor will be voluntary.

Auditors will receive relevant training to ensure they respect the fact that they are in clients' homes and will endeavour to be unobtrusive. Auditors will work with residential care staff to avoid undue distress or disturbance to children and young people during the audit.