



Philosophy, Principles and Objectives of Information
Privacy and Confidentiality
March 2004

Philosophy

Merri Outreach Support Service (MOSS) is committed to the idea of dignity, respect and worth of each individual. MOSS is committed to protecting the privacy of personal information. We define personal information as information, which directly or indirectly identifies a person. Service user files are kept for the purposes of continuity of service. Only information that is relevant to a person's support needs and their work with MOSS support workers will be recorded. We collect and handle a range of personal information for the purposes of planning, monitoring and evaluating our programs and functions; all of which enable us to continue providing a quality holistic service.

MOSS recognises that the nature of our services means that much of the information we handle is particularly sensitive. Generally, the information we collect will relate primarily to areas of health, community support and the protection of individual and public health and safety. We recognise the essential right of individuals to have their information handled in ways, which they would reasonably expect – protected on the one hand and made accessible to them on the other. It is the policy of MOSS to limit the exchange of confidential information concerning service users, staff and internal agency issues. Service users will be given a copy of the policy on privacy and confidentiality at the time of assessment.

Principles and Objectives

We have adopted the respective Privacy Principles contained in the Victorian privacy laws as minimum standards in relation to handling personal information. What this means is that we:

- collect only information which we need for a specified purpose;
- ensure that you know why we collect particular information and how we will handle it;
- provide you with access to your own information, and the right to seek its correction;
- store information securely, protecting it from unauthorised access; and
- retain it for a period authorised by the *Public Records Act 1973*;

- use and disclose information only for the specified or directly related purpose with your consent (unless otherwise authorised by law).

At times, MOSS is legally obliged to give out the information requested and is therefore unable to maintain confidentiality. Examples of this are:

1. When MOSS staff are subpoenaed to answer questions in court.
2. When requests accompanied by a warrant are made by police. In accordance with DHS policy, any requests for information made by the police are to be put in writing, clearly stating the legislation that authorises the request for information. Police are to be informed that our response is also to be put in writing and placed in the client's file for future reference.
3. When requests come from Centrelink which:
 - are formalised in writing and state exactly what information is required
 - quote the Social Security Act, section 1304 as authority
 - are relevant to Social Security payments.
4. When the Australian Tax Office is seeking information and the Taxation Act is quoted.
5. When a notification to Child Protection Services would be undertaken as an emergency response if fears were held for a child's safety or in case of suspected sexual abuse.

When information is given out under any of these circumstances, MOSS will immediately inform the service user about what information has been provided, who it was provided to, and why confidentiality was breached.