

## ***Protecting Your Personal Health Information***

Whittlesea City Council ('Council') is committed to the responsible collection and handling of personal health information, consistent with the Health Privacy Principles in the Health Records Act 2001. Council's Information Privacy Policy is publicly available on request and can be viewed on Council's website.

This statement communicates how Council manages personal health information. It is recommended that you keep this information for future reference.

### **What happens to information about you?**

Council is one of a number of health care services that work together to meet the health needs of residents in this area. This brochure provides some general advice on how your health information will be handled when you use one of Council's health services.

When you use a Council health service a health record is created. It includes your name, address, and contact details and information about your health. Every time you attend or have contact with Council, new information is added to your record. This allows the health services professionals involved with your care to access your information easily and quickly when needed.

Your health information is stored securely. Council will keep your health record for a minimum of seven years after your last visit. The record will then be held or disposed of securely, as required by law.

### **Why is this information necessary?**

Council needs to collect and keep this information to provide you with suitable health care. Your health record can help Council to quickly identify which courses of action are likely to be safe and effective for you. It will also lessen the need to collect the same information over and over.

Some information may also be used for research and planning, to help Council provide better health outcomes for the whole community. In this case, any identifying information, such as your name and contact details, will be removed before the information is used.

### **What rights do you have to access your health information?**

You can ask to see any information held on your health record. This may include viewing the information, obtaining a summary or in some cases a fuller copy of your record, or having information explained to you if you wish. Some limits may apply where particular circumstances prevent Council from releasing information. If any limits apply to your record, this will be explained to you.

You also have the right to correct any information in your record that you believe is incorrect, incomplete, out of date or misleading. You cannot ask that information held on your health record be removed, though you may ask that a correcting

statement be added to it. For information on how you may request access and/or correction, please speak to Council staff.

### **How will your information remain confidential?**

Council has strict policies about who can see and use your personal health information. All staff members who have access to your personal health information must treat your information confidentially. Your privacy is also protected by law.

Generally, Council only shares personal or health information about you with people who are directly involved in your ongoing care, for the purpose of a particular care service. If Council needs to share your information for any other purposes it will ask for your agreement before doing so (unless otherwise required by law).

### **What if you are unable to give consent?**

In some cases, persons may not be able to give consent because they are legally unable to make a decision about release of their information (for example, young people (children), people with a severe illness or major injury, or those with a mental illness or other impairment). In such cases, a decision will be sought from the person's authorised representative. People who can act as authorised representatives in these circumstances are specified by law. Council's Information Privacy Officer can give you more detail about this.

### **Who may have access to information about you?**

Council may recommend that other health care providers outside this service become involved in your care. In that case, you will be asked to give consent for Council to disclose any necessary information from your health record to the other health care services, to help them assess your needs and provide you with relevant care.

Sharing information in this way helps Council to provide you with effective services and lessens the need for you to repeat your personal or health information to each new provider. Please note that you do have the right to refuse consent if you wish. If you have any concerns or questions about sharing of information, please speak to Council staff.

### **When can information be disclosed to other people without your consent?**

There are very few situations when your information may be shared without your consent. For example, in an emergency situation, Council may release medical information about you to aid emergency treatment.

Also, in certain circumstances, this service may be required by law to release personal information about you. Examples include:

- Reporting of notifiable diseases to the Department of Human Services.
- Providing health records to a court when required in relation to legal proceedings.
- Providing health records to a law enforcement agency (eg. police) in response to a search warrant.

If any of these circumstances apply, Council will advise you as close as possible to the time when the information is released.

**Who do you contact?**

If at any time, you have a question about the way your personal information is being managed, or you have a complaint in relation to privacy or confidentiality of your information, please contact Council on ☎ (03) 9217 2170 between 8:30am and 5.00pm, Monday to Friday.

Alternatively, you can write to Council's Information Privacy Officer, at Locked Bag 1, Bundoora MDC 3083 or contact Council by e-mail at [privacy@whittlesea.vic.gov.au](mailto:privacy@whittlesea.vic.gov.au).

If you are not satisfied with the way in which Council handles your information or deals with your concerns, you may make a formal complaint to the Health Services Commissioner on ☎ (03) 8601 5225.

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