Working Alone Policy

1.   Purpose

Inala Community House (ICH) is committed to ensuring that all workers are safe at work, this includes while working alone. This policy seeks to ensure that appropriate systems are in place to ensure that workers who may be working alone are safeguarded from harm.

For the purposes of this policy, working alone means being the sole worker present at a location, regardless of whether clients or other stakeholders are present at the time.

2.   Scope

This policy applies to all employees, Board members, volunteers, students, trainees and contractors. For the purposes of this policy, these persons shall be referred to as workers.

3.   Policy

Workers may work alone for a variety of different reasons and in many different locations.

Based upon the nature of the work, workers may be alone:

- In the office
- At client visits
- At meetings (with external stakeholders)
- At events
- While working from home
- Any other venue where no other worker is present

3.1   Risks

Working alone may mean that there is limited or no assistance available to:

- Help with challenging tasks
- Alert the worker to hazards
- Give a second opinion about risks
- Notice if others are fatigued, unwell or making mistakes
- Assist with difficult or dangerous situations
- Call for emergency assistance

There are also psychosocial hazards which can arise from:

- Lack of support (e.g. not being able to easily ask questions, access resources or get help)
- Inappropriate behaviour such as violence or sexual harassment (e.g. from clients towards workers)
- Low role clarity (e.g. where workers can't easily discuss and clarify tasks)
- High job demands (e.g. where tasks cannot be shared in busy periods)

3.2   Risk Assessment

Working alone requires additional consideration of risks by evaluating factors such as:

- The nature of the work
- How long the person will work alone
- What communication tools are available
- The time of day, including whether it is during regular office hours
- The location, whether it is:
    - Onsite or offsite
    - Secure or open
    - Near to other offices (for assistance) or not
    - Remote or not (ability to call/access emergency services)
- The worker's skills and capabilities
- Any support the worker may need to do the work
- The risk to mental health
- What other stakeholders may be onsite
    - Other professional stakeholders (e.g. Departmental staff)
    - Clients

The ICH Personal Safety in the Community Policy outlines minimum requirements for working out in the community (offsite).

Appendix A provides a basic guide to assessing the level of risk relating to working alone.

3.4   Approval

As a general rule, working alone is not permitted unless it is authorised by Service policies or procedures or by the CEO. Where working alone forms a regular part of service delivery, it is expected that services have procedures which outline safety guidelines for people working alone with due consideration of the level of risk involved. These procedures should:

- Demonstrate a commitment to ensuring worker's physical and mental health through suitable support, supervision and training as appropriate to the level of risk
- Ensure that workers are aware of risks, controls and emergency procedures
- Ensure that workers always have a way to communicate in an emergency (e.g. duress, mobile or landline)
- Incorporate a regular check in process with workers (as appropriate to the level of risk)
- Ensure that the whereabouts of workers and an expected time of return/finish is monitored
- Ensure that everyone finishes work safely including an escalation process if the worker does not return or check in as expected

The Chief Executive Officer must authorise working alone where:

- No Service specific policies or procedures exist, or
- Risks are deemed to be high, or
- Where workers will be present or entering the:
    - Offices before 7am or after 6pm, or
    - Halls before 7am or after 8pm, or
    - Any work offsite prior to 7am or after 8pm, or
    - Any work on a public holiday

This authorisation requirement does not apply to on-call situations where phone-only support is offered.

3.5   Responsibilities

The CEO will:

- Ensure that ICH demonstrates a commitment to supporting and safeguarding workers who work alone through appropriate and effective systems
- Approve requests for working alone as needed
- Ensure that the Managers have effective systems to manage the risks associated with working alone

Managers will:

- Ensure that if working alone is a regular part of service delivery, that policies and/or procedures exist which comply with this policy
- Discuss with team members about risks of working alone and the required mitigation strategies
- Ensure that there are effective controls in place to manage risks associated with working alone

Workers will:

- Follow this policy and any other policies and procedures which relate to working alone
- Prior to working alone, ensure that it is permitted under and in accordance with service policies and procedures, or that approval is obtained from the CEO (through their supervisor)

4.   Breaches

Breaches of this policy may result in disciplinary action in accordance with the ICH Performance Counselling and Discipline Policy.

5.   Review

This policy shall be reviewed every 3 years or as appropriate after an incident.

This policy shall remain in effect unless otherwise determined by resolution of the Board.

6. Related Documents

Policies
ICH Workplace Health and Safety Policy
ICH Work from Home Policy
ICH Personal Safety in the Community Policy
ICH Workplace Violence Policy

Procedures
ICH Incident Management Procedure

Appendix A:

Risk Assessment Factors	Low	Medium	High
The nature of the work	• Low risk tasks (e.g. office based work)	• Medium risk tasks (e.g. offsite work, some minor shifting of furniture/ cleaning)	• High risk tasks (e.g. use of power tools, major house clean up, working at heights)
How long the person will work alone?	• Less than 1 hour	• Between 1-3 hours	• Over 3 hours
What communication tools are available	• Duress alarm • Mobile phone	• Mobile phone with limited areas of patchy signal	• Mobile phone in remote areas with poor signal
The time of day, including whether it is during regular office hours	• Daytime and regular office hours	• Daytime but outside of office hours	• Night and outside of office hours
The location, whether it is: • Onsite or offsite • Secure or open • Near to access to emergency services (remoteness)	• Onsite • Secure • Not remote	• Onsite/Offsite • Open • Not remote	• Offsite • Open • Remote
The worker's skills and capabilities	• Experienced workers with appropriate training	• Experienced workers	• New workers with minimal experience
Any support the worker may need to do the work	• Availability of on-call support • Nearby office locations	• Limited on call support • No nearby offices	• No support available
The risk to mental health	• Support, supervision and training available	• Limited support, supervision and training available	• No support, supervision or training available
What other stakeholders may be onsite • Other professional stakeholders (e.g. Departmental staff) • Clients	• Professional stakeholders • Low risk clients	• Limited public access • Medium risk Clients	• General public • High risk clients