EMPOWER LINK

SAFE ENVIRONMENT POLICY AND PROCEDURE

PURPOSE

All participants' safety is a priority for EMPOWERLINK to ensure the provision of high-quality supports and services.

The purpose of this policy is to set out all the standard practices, procedures and risk control measures to ensure a safe support delivery environment for participants.

SCOPE

This policy applies to:
- All EMPOWERLINK staff, including permanent or casual employees, contractors, consultants, and people otherwise engaged by EMPOWERLINK (e.g., volunteers).
- All participants receiving NDIS services and support, including their families and support network.

DEFINITIONS

Term	Definition
Hazard	Any potential source of harm, damage, or adverse effects that could compromise safety and well-being.
Health and Safety	The measures and practices implemented to protect the physical, mental, and emotional well-being of individuals within the organisation.
Infectious diseases	Means any communicable diseases caused by organisms such as bacteria, viruses, fungi and parasites.
Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)	PPE is anything a staff member or a participant uses or wears to keep them healthy and safe.
Risk Assessment	The process of identifying, evaluating, and prioritizing potential hazards and associated risks to determine appropriate mitigation strategies.

POLICY

EMPOWERLINK is committed to ensuring each participant accesses supports in a safe environment that is appropriate to their needs.

To achieve this commitment, EMPOWERLINK will ensure the following:
- Each participant can easily identify workers who provide supports to them.
- Work is undertaken with each participant, and others, in settings where supports are provided (including their home) to ensure a safe support delivery environment for them.

- Where relevant, work is undertaken with other providers (including health care and allied health providers and providers of other services) to identify and manage risks to participants and to correctly interpret their needs and preferences.
- For each participant requiring support with communication, clear arrangements are in place to assist workers who support them to understand their communication needs and the manner in which they express emerging health concerns.
- To avoid delays in treatments for participants:
  - protocols are in place for each participant about how to respond to medical emergencies for them; and
  - each worker providing support to them is trained to respond to such emergencies (including how to distinguish between urgent and non-urgent health situations).
- Systems for escalation are established for each participant in urgent health situations.
- Infection prevention and control standard precautions are implemented throughout all settings in which supports are provided to participants.
- Routine environmental cleaning is conducted in settings in which supports are provided to participants (other than in their homes), particularly on frequently touched surfaces.
- Each worker is trained and has refresher training in infection prevention and control standard precautions, including hand hygiene practices, respiratory hygiene and cough etiquette.
- Each worker who provides supports directly to participants is trained, and has refresher training, in the use of PPE.
- PPE is available to each worker and each participant who requires it.

PROCEDURE

The following procedures are implemented to ensure that EMPOWERLINK meets its policy objective of ensuring a safe environment for all participants while in service provision.

SAFETY PROCEDURES

Staff must undertake all reasonable steps to safeguard participants, themselves and other staff members from any risk to their health and safety during service provision.

The Director or their delegate is responsible for communicating all standard safety procedures to all staff members and ensuring they comply with the safety procedures.

EMPOWERLINK has implemented the following safety procedures to ensure a safe environment for each participant:

Identification of workers

A badge/tag and/or uniform will be provided to each staff member to assist participants in easily identifying them. Staff must wear the badge/tag or uniform at all times during service provision.

At the commencement of the service delivery, staff must introduce themselves to the participant and their family/support network. If participants cannot identify the worker after the first introduction has happened, staff will keep introducing themselves in every service delivery opportunity.

The Senior Management Team must ensure that participants can identify their front-line staff.

If any staff member loses their badged or tag, they must report it to their supervisor or line manager immediately.

Risk Assessments

A risk assessment is undertaken by staff before delivering the supports and services to participants in their homes or any other setting.

To ensure a safe environment for participants, staff must:
- Determine if the participants' home or setting is safe during the initial assessment and support planning interviews/meetings.
- Undertake a risk assessment by completing the *Home Risk Assessment Form* at an appropriate frequency (daily, weekly, fortnightly or monthly), depending on the severity of the identified risks, to inspect the service environment and take necessary actions.
- Collaborate and work with each participant, their family/support network and other people in settings where supports are provided to identify and manage risks effectively.
- Work with other providers (including health care and allied health providers and providers of other services) to collaboratively identify and manage risks to participants and to correctly interpret their needs and preferences.
- Remove or avoid any identified hazard in the setting where possible.
- Identify any environmental risks for the participants and staff outside their homes.

INFECTION PREVENTION AND CONTROL

Infection prevention and control uses a risk management approach to minimise or prevent the transmission of infectious diseases.

EMPOWERLINK is committed to minimising the risk of the spread of infectious diseases in its work environments.

To prevent the spread of infectious diseases, staff must implement standard precautions throughout all settings in which supports are provided to participants. Standard precautions include but are not limited to the following:

- Routine environmental cleaning is conducted in settings in which supports are provided to participants (other than in their homes), particularly on frequently touched surfaces.
- Hand hygiene before and after all participant contact and service provision.
- The use of personal protective equipment (PPE), which may include gloves, impermeable gowns, plastic aprons, masks, face shields and eye protection
- The safe use and disposal of sharps, where applicable.
- The use of an aseptic "non-touch" technique for all invasive procedures, including the appropriate use of skin disinfectants.
- Appropriate chemical use and storage.
- Reprocessing of reusable instruments and equipment.
- Waste management.
- Respiratory hygiene and cough etiquette
- Appropriate handling of linen.

All staff are inducted in these standard precautions when they start their employment or engagement with EMPOWERLINK, and induction records are maintained in the *Staff Induction Checklist*. A refresher training in infection prevention and control standard precautions, including hand hygiene practices, respiratory hygiene, cough etiquette and the use of PPE, is undertaken annually as per the *Staff Training Plan*.

Any staff member with any infectious disease, including the flu and COVID-19, must not attend any settings in which supports are provided to participants and is required to report it to their supervisor or line manager immediately.

The Director or their delegate is responsible for:
- Training staff in infection prevention and control standards precautions.
- Ensuring standard precautions are being followed by all staff.
- Ensuring PPE is available for each worker, and each participant, who requires it.
- Keeping up to date with Federal and State or Territory health authorities' and work health and safety guidelines, SOPs and industry best practices and communicating them to front-line staff.
- Providing educational materials about infection prevention and control to staff.

To ensure infection prevention and control, staff must:
- Ensure participants are familiarised with EMPOWERLINK infection prevention and control standard precautions.
- Encourage participants to disclose any infectious disease or health issue or raise any concern about their health following EMPOWERLINK's *Feedback and Complaints Management Policy and Procedure*.
- Report incidents related to infection control or infectious diseases in accordance with EMPOWERLINK's *Incident Management Policy and Procedure*.

For each participant requiring support with communication, the following arrangements are in place to assist staff who support them to understand their communication needs and the manner in which they express emerging health concerns:

- Participant communication needs will be recorded in their support plan.
- Staff are trained on how to monitor the participant's health or safety and the different ways they can express their health concerns.
- The participants' emergency contacts and emergency management plans and protocols are recorded in their support plans, which include escalation processes.
- Staff are trained in how to respond to such emergencies (including how to distinguish between urgent and non-urgent health situations).
- Systems for escalation are established for each participant in urgent health situations and recorded in their support plan.

RELATED DOCUMENTS

- Home Risk Assessment Form
- Individual Risk Assessment Form
- Human Resource Register
- Staff Induction Checklist
- Staff Training Plan
- Participant Assessment and Support Plan
- Emergency and Disaster Management Plan
- COVID-19 Management Plan
- Participant Handbook
- Staff Handbook
- Risk Register

REFERENCES

- National Disability Insurance Scheme Act 2013 (Cth)
- NDIS Practice Standards and Quality Indicators – November 2021
- Work Health and Safety Act 2011 (Cth)
- Work Health and Safety Act 2011 (QLD)

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