



Introduction to the  
**Community Visitor Scheme**

Disability Services (Community Visitor Scheme) Regulations 2013



Government  
of South Australia



# DCVS

## Introduction to the Community Visitor Scheme

### Community Visitor Scheme

#### Introduction

The Community Visitor Scheme is an independent statutory body, reporting to the Minister for Disability on matters related to the schemes functions under the *Disability Services (Community Visitor Scheme) Regulations 2013*.

The purpose of the Community Visitor Scheme is to further protect the rights of people with a disability who live in a disability accommodation facility or a Supported Residential Facility (SRF).

The independence of the Community Visitor Scheme is integral to the program, enabling residents, carers and family members to speak with individuals who are not associated with the provision of support.

The purpose of this document is to provide Community Visitors, service providers and other interested stakeholders with a broad overview of the Community Visitor Scheme.

#### Governance

The CVS and visits and inspections of facilities is a legislative requirement and overall responsibility and accountability for the scheme is held by the Minister for Disabilities. Whilst administrative support for the scheme is currently provided by the Department of Health and Ageing, the Principal Community Visitor and Community Visitors are independent statutory appointments by the Governor of South Australia.

The Principal Community Visitor reports directly to the Minister on issues related to the scheme's legislative functions. An Advisory Committee provides strategic advice and support to the Principal Community Visitor, monitors and evaluates the CVS, and contributes to strategic networks and relationships.

#### Objectives

The core objectives of the Community Visitor Scheme are to:

- Advocate for the rights of residents within disability accommodation facilities or SRF's;
- Improve resident experiences;
- Identify possible gaps in service provision for residents;
- Increase accountability and transparency within disability service provision;
- Assist with the resolution of complaints filed by residents;
- Provide a vital link between frontline service delivery and policy directorates;
- Ensure the consistent delivery of best-practice disability accommodation services and SRF's; and
- Improve overall health and well-being outcomes for residents.

## Staffing Functions

The Community Visitor Scheme comprises the following key workforce positions:

### Principal Community Visitor

The Principal Community Visitor is appointed by the Governor of South Australia, and reports directly to the Minister for Disability on matters relating to the disability scheme's responsibilities under the *Disability Services (Community Visitor Scheme) Regulations 2013*.

The Principal Community Visitor:

- oversees, advises and assists Community Visitors in their role;
- conducts visits to and inspections of disability accommodation facilities and Supported Residential Facilities, as required;
- reports to the Minister(s) regarding the performance of Community Visitor functions;
- reports on matters of concern regarding the care and treatment of residents;
- assists with the resolution of issues relating to the care, safety and wellbeing of residents;
- advocates for residents to promote the proper resolution of issues relating to their care, treatment or control, including issues raised by a guardian, medical agent, relative, carer, or friend of a resident or any person providing support; and
- any other functions assigned to the Principal Community Visitor under the *Disability Services (Community Visitor Scheme) Regulations 2013*.

### Community Visitors

Community Visitors are volunteers appointed by the Governor in a statutory, independent role to conduct inspections, resident advocacy and reporting functions.

Community Visitors have the right to visit and inspect:

- Government funded disability accommodation services
- Supported Residential Facilities

They can advocate for residents to promote the proper resolution of issues and can refer matters of concern relating to the delivery of services, through the Principal Community Visitor to the Minister, or any other appropriate body/person.

They can Inspect and report on:

- The appropriateness and standard of the premises for the accommodation of residents;
- The adequacy of information provided to residents and their guardian or family members regarding the treatment, care, and rights of each resident in the setting;
- The adequacy of information provided to residents and their guardian or family members regarding complaints processes, and the effectiveness of complaints processes;
- The attitude of staff towards residents and their guardians/families; and
- The quality of communication between staff members, residents and their guardian or family members.

## Valuing Volunteers

The Community Visitor Scheme volunteer program values the personal contribution of volunteers and operates on the following volunteer engagement strategies:

- Acknowledgement of the individual needs of volunteers to encourage sustainable appointment;
- Provision of gratifying work and working conditions;
- Recognition of the expertise that volunteers bring to their role;
- Facilitation of a reciprocal, mutually rewarding relationship between the organisation and the volunteer;
- Valuing diversity in gender, age, ethnicity, education and skill sets of volunteers;
- Creating an accessible, welcoming and inclusive working environment;
- Providing high-quality, comprehensive and relevant training for volunteers;
- Involving volunteers in decision-making;
- Implementing comprehensive evaluation strategies to ensure continuous improvement;
- Maximising the overall contribution of volunteers;
- Ensuring effective volunteer support infrastructure and resources; and
- Striving for excellence in volunteer management.

## Statement of Commitment for People of Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Backgrounds

The Community Visitor Scheme recognises cultural and linguistic diversity, and the migration experiences of South Australians with a disability, carers and families. At every point of contact, Community Visitors will endeavor to act in an appropriate manner, respectful of the cultural, linguistic, religious and spiritual needs or other specific needs of people of culturally and linguistically diverse background.

## Statement of Commitment for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Care

The Community Visitor Scheme is committed to improving health and well-being outcomes for all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in South Australia so that differences in health status with the rest of the South Australian population are eliminated.

## Accessibility of Community Visitors

A key focus for the Community Visitor Scheme is accessibility for residents and family members, and the promotion of resident and family involvement in decision-making regarding the provision of their treatment and care.

Promotion of the Community Visitor Scheme is undertaken regularly through a variety of mediums including hardcopy and electronic community-based resources. Residents, carers or family members can request a Community Visitor to undertake a specific visit and this can be by telephone or email directly with the Community Visitor Scheme office, or through disability service provider staff. If staff receive a request to see a Community Visitor from a resident, they are required to contact the CVS office within two working days. The independence of Community Visitors is important as it provides an opportunity to speak with individuals not associated with the provision of care about issues related to the care, treatment and management.

## Recruitment of Community Visitors

Community Visitors are recruited through a formalised volunteer recruitment program, with vacancies advertised across a variety of media and community information resources to attract a wide cross-section of candidates. Persons wishing to apply for the position of Community Visitor must be at least 18 years of age, and applicants are required to demonstrate their suitability for the role in relation to a variety of essential skills, abilities and characteristics.

Suitable applicants will be required to undertake a police check, comprehensive training and observation visits prior to being appointed to the role of Community Visitor.

## Conflict of Interest

Applicants cannot be appointed to the position of Community Visitor if they hold a position within a service to be visited under the Community Visitor Scheme, have a direct interest in a contract with a disability accommodation service or SRF, or if they have financial or personal interest which conflicts or may conflict with the proper discharge of his or her duties.

## Appointment of Community Visitors

A person can be appointed to the position of Community Visitor on conditions determined by the Governor.

## Security Clearance

The appointment of a Community Visitor requires consent to a criminal history check and, once passed, a Community Visitor is required to submit a signed copy of the Community Visitor Scheme Volunteer Code of Conduct, upon which an identification and security pass will be issued.

## Length of Appointment

A person can be appointed to the position of Community Visitor for a maximum of 3 years, after which time they will be eligible for reappointment. A Community Visitor is able to hold the position for a maximum of 2 consecutive terms.

## Suspension or Termination of Appointment

The Minister may suspend a person from the position of Community Visitor on the grounds of incompetence or misbehaviour.

## Vacancies

The position of Community Visitor is considered vacant if the person appointed to the position:

- resigns by written notice given to the Minister;
- completes a term of appointment and is not reappointed;
- becomes bankrupt;
- is convicted of an indictable offence or is imprisoned for an offence;
- becomes a member of Parliament of South Australia or any other State of the Commonwealth, or becomes a member of a Legislative Assembly of a Territory of the Commonwealth;
- Becomes, in the opinion of the Minister, mentally or physically incapable of performing the functions of the position satisfactorily;
- or in the unfortunate event that the person dies.

## **Training Program**

The Community Visitor Scheme is committed to providing high quality, relevant and comprehensive training to empower Community Visitors with the knowledge and skills to undertake their duties with confidence.

Taking into account the diversity of experience, skills and knowledge that volunteers bring to their role, as well as lessons learnt from community visitor programs operating interstate, the Community Visitor Scheme Volunteer Training Program will include, but not be limited to the following training modules:

1. Community Visitor Scheme introduction
2. Community Visitor Scheme program
3. Community Visitor Scheme visits and inspections
4. Practical matters for Community Visitors
5. Lived experiences
6. Disability
7. Mental Health
8. Dual Disability
9. Communication Strategies
10. Cultural Competencies
11. Values testing

The Community Visitor Scheme Volunteer Training Program will be facilitated in partnership with a range of disability workforce training providers.

## **Supervision**

The Community Visitor Scheme requires that a newly recruited Community Visitor to undertake observation visits as part of the orientation process prior to being appointed. This will provide the trainee Community Visitor with an opportunity to see the practical application of key areas covered in the training program.

A formal feedback process with the Principal Community Visitor will follow to determine whether the Community Visitor in training is ready to commence in the role.

Formal, ongoing support and mentorship will be provided to Community Visitors as an opportunity to offer feedback, discuss any matters of concern and provide opportunities for debriefing, troubleshooting and early risk management.

## **Feedback Opportunities**

Regular feedback opportunities for Community Visitors will be arranged by the Principal Community Visitor and provide the opportunity for Community Visitors to give and receive feedback, have their personal strengths highlighted and to be guided in the implementation of any identified service improvement strategies.

## **Peer Support**

Regular communication opportunities will be provided for Community Visitors to share their experiences and welcome new visitors to the team. These will also provide opportunities for troubleshooting, snapshots of current information and legislation relevant to the sector, information on training and professional development opportunities. Administrative staff will assume responsibility for facilitating communication, and all Community Visitors will be encouraged to contribute, providing an additional opportunity outside of training days for Community Visitors to network with each other and access peer support.

## **Continuous Improvement of Services**

Community Visitors play an important role in ensuring that standards of care disability services across South Australia meet key performance indicators for quality disability service provision.

Standardised reporting templates utilised by Community Visitors collect a range of information on systems, processes and operations in disability accommodation facilities and SRF's. Information drawn from a range of sources including documents held at the facility, observations and, most importantly, discussions with residents, carers, family members and facility staff.

## **Data Management**

The Community Visitor Scheme recognises the importance of comprehensive data collection and data management as a tool for measuring the quality of service delivery within the disability sector. The office ensures the inclusion of comprehensive data management practices within all evaluation and strategic planning processes, as well as the provision of training for volunteers in appropriate data collection and storage.

## **Staffing Requirements**

All scheduled visit and inspections are conducted by 2 or more Community Visitors.

If a resident, carer, family member or staff member requests a visit by a Community Visitor, a single Community Visitor may conduct the visit. Should the visit by a single Community Visitor result in the need for the disability accommodation or SRF to be inspected, 2 or more Community Visitors must carry out the inspection.

## **Frequency of Visits**

Disability accommodation services and SRF's must be inspected every 3-6 months

A resident or any other person who is providing support to a resident may request to see a Community Visitor at any time.

## **Notification**

A visit and inspection may be made by Community Visitors with or without prior notice.

## **Hours of Visits**

Community Visitors may carry out a visit and inspection at any time of the day or night, and a visit may be of such length as Community Visitors deem appropriate.



## Identification

Once appointed to the Community Visitor Scheme, all Community Visitors will be issued with an identification and security pass that is required to be worn during hours of duty and displayed upon arrival at the accommodation facility or SRF.

## Arrival and Departure

Community Visitors are required to give verbal notification to staff upon arrival at and departure of a facility.

## Safety during Visits

As part of the orientation and training process, Community Visitors are required to undertake comprehensive training in the safety and risk assessment protocols required to be adhered to during any visit and inspection. Refresher information will be provided and circulated to all volunteers, with the opportunity for Community Visitors to contribute any experiences that may be of benefit to the rest of the team.

## Responsibilities of Staff

Disability accommodation and SRF staff are required to provide Community Visitors with a briefing on any possible disruption to conducting the visit, or anything that they should be made aware of with regards to visiting persons living within the facility.

Reasonable assistance and cooperation is required to be provided by staff to ensure that Community Visitors are able to carry out their required duties.

## Powers of Inspection

Community Visitors have the power to inspect the premises or any equipment used for or relevant to residents, where practicable.

## Documentation Inspection

Community Visitors have the power to examine all documents or records relating to a resident. However, as a principal and wherever possible, Visitors make every effort to obtaining consent from the individual or their guardian.

## Power to Interview

Community Visitors may visit and interview any person who is living in the disability accommodation facility, subject to consent by the person receiving care.

Additionally, Community Visitors may visit and interview all facility staff involved in the provision of care, as well as management.

## Resident Consent

Community Visitors are instructed to wherever possible, to obtain consent from residents to inspect documents or records pertaining to them and residents can request not to be seen by a Community Visitor.

## Requests to Meet with Community Visitors

A resident or a guardian, medical agent, relative, carer, or friend of a resident or any person providing support may make a request to see a Community Visitor.

## Working with Interpreters

Community Visitors are required to undertake training on working with interpreters as part of cultural competency training. When undertaking an interview with a resident, family member or carer who is unable to communicate adequately in English but could communicate adequately with the assistance of an interpreter, the Community Visitor is required to arrange for a competent interpreter to assist during the interview process.

## Privacy Management

Community Visitors are required to ensure that all information collected, recorded or disposed of while undertaking a visit and inspection of a facility adheres to State Government confidentiality and information sharing provisions.

## Referral of Issues for Advocacy

Community Visitors provide an advocacy role in referring matters of concern and promoting the proper resolution of issues and can:

- provide information and assistance to support and empower residents, carers and family members to make a complaint or express their concerns about any aspect of treatment and care being provided within a disability accommodation service or SRF;
- assess complaints lodged by residents or family members to determine whether the complaint is being managed effectively;
- with resident consent, discuss any complaints that residents or family members may have with the accommodation staff, to facilitate efficient and effective resolution;
- provide referral options if the complaint is complex and requires involving external parties in order to seek resolution;
- investigate the adequacy of information provided to residents and family members with regards to their legal rights.

## Reporting Requirements for Community Visitors

Following a visit and inspection, where possible, the Community Visitors will provide the senior staff at the facility with informal verbal feedback about any issues or matters of concern raised during the visit. Community Visitors are required to provide a detailed, written report on the visit to the Principal Community Visitor.

Disability accommodation facilities and SRF's are expected to make every effort to address any issues raised in the Community Visitor's Report promptly. If an issue cannot be resolved at the facility level, the Principal Community Visitor may refer the matter to senior management of the service and/or an appropriate person or body for escalation and resolution.

## Reporting Requirements for the Principal Community Visitor

On or before the 30 September each year, the Principal Community Visitor is required to forward a report to the Minister on the work of Community Visitors during the previous financial year. Within 6 sitting days of receiving the report, the Minister must have copies of the report laid before both Houses of Parliament.

The Principal Community Visitor may, at any time, prepare a special report to the Minister on any matter regarding the performance of Community Visitor functions. Within 2 weeks of receiving a special report from the Principal Community Visitor, the Minister is required to have copies of the report laid before both Houses of Parliament. If Parliament is not sitting, the Minister is required to

deliver copies of the report to the President and the Speaker. The President and the Speaker must then immediately organise for the report to be published, and lay the report before their respective Houses as soon as possible.

## Reporting an Offence

In the case where a Community Visitor has reason to believe an offence has or is being committed, the Community Visitor is required to:

- Report the offence to the Principal Community Visitor immediately;
- Take reasonable steps to preserve any evidence relating to the offence;
- Await further direction from the Principal Community Visitor; and
- If the Principal Community Visitor has reason to believe that an offence has or is being committed at a treatment centre, the Principal Community Visitor must inform the Department immediately.

## Follow-up

Where issues have been raised within a Community Visitor report, the Principal Community Visitor is required to follow-up with the senior management of the disability accommodation facility or SRF within 2 weeks.

The Principal Community Visitor is required to report to the appropriate person or body in the case where the senior manager of the disability accommodation facility or SRF has not taken adequate or reasonable action to implement recommendations made by the Community Visitor in their report.

## Adverse Events

The Executive Director, Disability Services will inform the Principal Community Visitor of any adverse events, suicide and deliberate self-harm occurring within a disability accommodation service, and the Principal Community Visitor will follow up with disability accommodation facility or SRF staff to ensure that appropriate support services are offered to family members and carers.

## Liability

Community Visitors appointed on a volunteer basis with the Community Visitor Scheme will receive full insurance protection and exclusion from liability while undertaking duties in accordance with their role and responsibilities as a Community Visitor.

## Occupational Health Safety and Welfare

An understanding of occupational health, safety and welfare principles as they apply to the disability services and mental health sectors is a pre-requisite for appointment to the position of Community Visitor. All Community Visitors successfully appointed are required to undertake occupational health, safety and welfare training as part of their orientation into the Community Visitor Scheme Volunteer Training Program.

If a Community Visitor sustains an injury while on duty, the Community Visitor is required to fill out a workplace incident report and submit this report to the Principal Community Visitor as soon as practicable.

## Reimbursement of Expenses

The Community Visitor will be reimbursed for all approved expenses within a timely manner following submission of all relevant receipts together with a signed expenses claim form. A list of expenses able to be claimed will be clearly outlined in the reimbursement procedure.

## Exit Interview

Community Visitors exiting the Community Visitor Scheme will be invited to attend an exit interview as an opportunity to provide feedback on their experience with the program in order to assist with service improvement strategies.

## Evaluation

A comprehensive participatory action evaluation model underpins all strategic directions of the Community Visitor Scheme, encompassing consultations with volunteers disability accommodation facility or SRF staff and service partners as well as quantitative data collection to ensure relevance and continuous service improvement.

## Code of Conduct

The following Community Visitor Scheme Code of Conduct outlines the standard of conduct required of Community Visitors, and is required to be signed by all volunteers upon appointment to the Community Visitor Scheme.

Community Visitors will:

- Use their role to improve the experience of residents, their guardian, relative, carer or friend, or any other person who is providing support in receiving responsive and appropriate services;
- Treat all residents, their guardian, relative, carer or friend, or any other person who is providing support with dignity and respect;
- Respect the choices of residents, their guardian, relative, carer or friend, or any other person who is providing support;
- Ensure that the needs of residents, their guardian, relative, carer or friend, or any other person who is providing support are acted upon promptly in accordance with their role and responsibilities;
- Respond promptly to any issues of concern raised by residents, their guardian, relative, carer or friend, or any other person who is providing support;
- Facilitate respectful working relationships with all service partners, including, service proprietors, other volunteers and program/service staff;
- Generate mandatory, standardised reports following each visit and inspection of disability accommodation service or Supported Residential Facility in accordance with training;
- Be guided by and adhere to all the principles and processes outlined within the Community Visitor Scheme policies and procedures;
- Ensure adherence with all communications protocols, including those pertaining to privacy and confidentiality;
- Complete all orientation and ongoing training required to be undertaken to carry out the duties of Community Visitor;
- Ensure that personal interest does not influence the way the duties of Community Visitor are carried out and disclose any conflict of interest; and
- Contribute to a volunteering environment that is welcoming, supportive, respectful and safe.

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Signed \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

For more information

**Principal Community Visitor [cvs@health.sa.gov.au](mailto:cvs@health.sa.gov.au)**

**Telephone: 8226 0315 or 1800 606 302 [www.sahealth.sa.gov.au](http://www.sahealth.sa.gov.au) or [www.sa.gov.au/cvs](http://www.sa.gov.au/cvs)**

If you require this information in an alternative language or format please contact the Community Visitor Scheme on the details provided above and they will make every effort to assist you.





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