



**Council
to Homeless
Persons**

Welcome Pack

**Homelessness Advocacy
Service (HAS)**

chp.org.au



Welcome to the Homelessness Advocacy Service

If you have a problem with a homelessness assistance or social housing service – such as the transitional housing management (THM) program, a support service, or a rooming house – Council to Homeless Persons Homelessness Advocacy Service (HAS) can help.

What is HAS?

HAS is the key advocacy service for consumers who are without a home or at risk of experiencing homelessness.

The goal of HAS is to achieve mutually beneficial resolutions for consumers and service providers.

Some examples of problems you might want help with include:

- your rights not being respected
- breach of privacy and confidentiality
- not understanding information you have been given
- not knowing the best way to resolve an issue
- not receiving the service you believe you have a right to
- discrimination
- not being treated with dignity and respect
- being excluded from a service
- feeling unsafe in accommodation.

Contact HAS

The HAS Advocate at CHP is:

Angela Kyriakopoulos
1800 066 256 / 8415 6213
angela@chp.org.au

2 Stanley Street
Collingwood VIC 3066

How do we help?

CHP believes consumers should be aware of their rights and empowered to meaningfully participate in the homelessness system.

Each request for support is different, however the focus is always on trying to resolve the problem.

HAS will be guided by you about how to respond; because each person has different needs and is looking for a different outcome, the support varies from case to case.

HAS will advocate on your behalf, provide you with accurate information and advise you about your rights.

As a guide to what you can expect from HAS, responses might include:

- clarifying what is happening and trying to sort out any confusion or misunderstanding
- contacting the relevant service, discussing the problem and how best to resolve it
- support to negotiate complaint processes
- supporting consumers at a meeting with a service
- referral to a range of services such as material aid, support and external complaint bodies
- writing support letters
- mediation
- problem-solving.

Do you need a translator?

If you require a translation service, please let us know or contact VITS on 9280 1907.

Your privacy

The level of information that you share with our HAS advocate is optional, however some basic information including your name, age, address, and contact details are required to be collected on commencing service. Your privacy and consent is important to us. Any information gathered will be stored securely and kept strictly confidential unless you choose to sign our Consent form at the end of this letter that will allow our advocate to share (agreed upon) information with another agency to advocate on your behalf. You have the right to withdraw your consent at any time.

For more information, please visit chp.org.au/has-faqs.

Your rights

CHP provides a culturally safe workplace and consumer experience for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. We are committed to ensuring our services reflect this. Everyone is welcome at CHP and staff and consumers regardless of age, cultural background, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, or religious affiliation are encouraged to engage. CHP believes in the right for all people to be treated with respect and dignity at all times, and that all people who use our services should at all times feel safe and included at CHP.

HAS recognises your right to live with dignity and bases its support activities on this rights-based approach. Its work is underpinned by the principles, rights and responsibilities outlined in the HAS Consumer Charter of Rights and Responsibilities. This document can be accessed at chp.org.au/about-us/our-values.

Additional supports

At HAS, you are always welcome to bring a support person with you. If you require any additional assistance, please let your HAS advocate know who can assist:

- organising an interpreter
- providing information in a way that works for you
- providing a service that makes you feel comfortable and responds to your identity: whether this be your culture, ethnicity, spirituality, gender, and sexuality.

HAS feedback survey

Your feedback is greatly appreciated and important to us. We would appreciate your time in completing our HAS Feedback Survey at www.surveymonkey.com/r/CHP-HAS.

What to do if you are unhappy with our service

If you are unhappy with your service, we encourage you to speak to your HAS Advocate directly. If you are not comfortable doing so, or you feel your complaint has not been satisfactorily resolved, we encourage you to speak to the HAS Advocate's manager. They can be reached on 8415 6200.

For more information about how to make a complaint at CHP, please refer to the Complaints Process sheet in this Welcome Pack, or visit chp.org.au/about-us/our-values/how-to-make-a-complaint.

Useful resources

Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission Advice Line
1300 292 153 / www.humanrightscommission.vic.gov.au

Victorian Ombudsman
9613 6222 / 1800 806 314 / www.ombudsman.vic.gov.au

Dispute Settlement Centre of Victoria
9603 8370 / 1800 658 528 / www.disputes.vic.gov.au

Tenants Union of Victoria Advice Line
9416 2577 / www.tuv.org.au

Disability – Office of the Public Advocate
9603 9500 / 1300 309 33

Justice Connect – Homeless Law
8636 4400 / www.justiceconnect.org.au

Getting involved

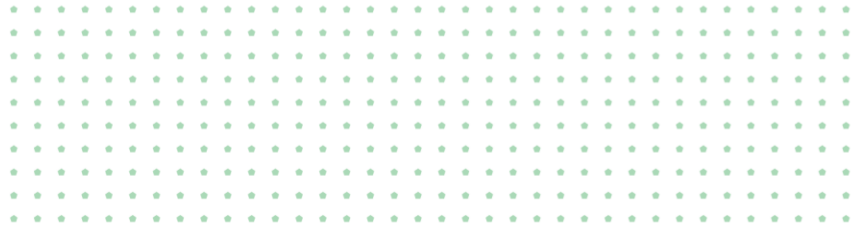
Your experiences are important to us. As part of CHP's work in state and sector-wide advocacy, opportunities exist for your voice and experience of homelessness to be heard.

Opportunities for participating at CHP include contributing to Parity magazine (Australia's only national homelessness publication) and/or joining the Peer Education Support Program (CHP's volunteer program for people who have not had a home).

Please let your HAS Advocate know if you are interested in becoming involved.

More information

For more information about Council to Homeless Persons or HAS, visit chp.org.au or call 8415 6200.



HAS Consent Form

I, _____

Of, _____

Contact Number (s) _____

Give authority and permission authorise for _____ from the Homelessness Advocacy Service (HAS) to:

- act on my behalf and obtain copies of all applications, files, documents or other materials relating to my grievance
- make appropriate referrals when requested by the consumer
- advocate and assist on my behalf at agency(s), and government departments.

Verbal consent to the above has been provided by consumer

I give HAS consent to contact the following agencies:

- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____

In giving consent to HAS I acknowledge that there may be some circumstances where HAS is legally required to disclose information to agencies or authorities if it is perceived that a child may be at risk of harm and/or I am suspected to be a perpetrator(s) of family violence.

In the event that I or others are experiencing family violence HAS will request permission to share this information with relevant services and/or the authorities.

Signed _____

Date _____

Permission for this consent is valid until _____

Verbal consent to the above has been provided by consumer

The consumer has the right to withdraw their consent at any time.

HAS Consumer Charter of Rights and Responsibilities

When you are seeking support from the Homelessness Advocacy Service (HAS), a program of the Council to Homeless Persons, you have certain rights and responsibilities. The HAS Consumer Charter of Rights and Responsibilities sets out your rights and responsibilities as a commitment from the Council to Homeless Persons and so they are clear to you.

The Homelessness Advocacy Service expects that you will meet your responsibilities and treat staff and other service users with respect and dignity.

You can expect the Homelessness Advocacy Service to:

- uphold your rights, as listed in this Charter and Victoria's Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities
- provide you with services based on both this Charter, as well as on the Human Services Standards
- be accountable to you, the community and the government for how the program provides services.

You have the responsibility to:

- supply the correct and necessary information about yourself and your situation
- respect the rights of others to feel safe
- respect the cultural backgrounds and privacy of others.

Your rights and responsibilities

If you are seeking or receiving assistance from HAS, you have the right to:

- understand your rights and responsibilities and be able to exercise them
- respect for your culture, ethnicity, gender and sexuality
- to be treated with respect and dignity
- be free from discrimination
- feel safe
- privacy and confidentiality
- know why any information you are asked for needs to be collected
- not provide information you do not want to provide
- make choices that will affect your future and have those choices respected
- expect that if we say we will do something for you we will do it
- participate in the decision-making process
- make a complaint or appeal a decision you do not agree with and get a response that makes sense
- be well informed at all stages of receiving a service and have that information provided in a way that makes sense to you
- an accessible, person-centred service that listens to you and responds to your needs
- services delivered in a fair, equitable and transparent manner.

If you don't agree with, or are not satisfied with the explanation, you can make a complaint or appeal at chp.org.au/about-us/our-values/how-to-make-a-complaint.

What to do if you don't think your rights have been met

If you feel comfortable doing so, as a first step raise the issue directly with HAS. If you don't think your rights have been met or you disagree with a decision, talk to the HAS Advocate or the Director of Services. Speak about any concerns you have and ask for an explanation about why a particular decision has been made. Council to Homeless Persons welcomes your feedback as an opportunity to review our service.

You could also contact the following organisations for help

- **The Victorian Ombudsman:** 1800 806 314 / www.ombudsman.vic.gov.au
- **Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission:** 1300 292 153 / www.humanrights.vic.gov.au
- **VITS Language Loop** (for assistance with interpreting and translations): 9280 1955 / www.languageloop.com.au
- **Consumer Affairs Helpline:** 1300 558 181

What to do if you are unhappy with our service?

In the first instance, if you are comfortable doing so, raise the complaint with the person in the organisation with whom you have been working with. For PESP members, that will generally be the PESP Team Leader and for HAS consumers, it is likely to be a HAS Advocate. If the issue is then resolved to your satisfaction, the process can finish (as is the case at any subsequent stage).

If you are not comfortable raising your complaint with the person with whom you have been working, or you don't think this is the appropriate person with whom to be discussing the complaint with (e.g., the complaint is about the conduct of the PESP Team Leader or HAS Advocate) or the complaint is unable to be resolved, then the complaint can be raised with the Director of Services. You can contact our office on 8415 6200.

If you are not comfortable talking to the Director of Services, or the complaint is unable to be resolved, or you don't think this is the appropriate person with whom to be discussing the complaint with, then the complaint can be raised with the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of CHP. If the complaint is about the CEO, the complaint can be made to the Chair of the CHP Board.

If the complaint is unable to be resolved through this process, the person making the complaint will be provided with information of external bodies that may be able to assist the progress of the complaint.

At all times, the complaint process is to remain confidential to the parties involved in order to ensure fairness.

If you are not clear about the process of making a complaint, or you would like to clarify something, you can speak to the HAS Advocate, PESP Team Leader, or Director of Services at any time.

Frequently Asked Questions about privacy and HAS

Privacy and the Homelessness Advocacy Service

The homelessness Advocacy Service (HAS) is a program of the Council to Homeless Persons (CHP). CHP is bound by the thirteen Australian Privacy Principles (APPs) from Schedule 1 of the Privacy Amendment (Enhancing Privacy Protection) Act 2012.

CHP takes privacy seriously and is committed to observing CHP's privacy policies and information handling practices. Please refer to the CHP Privacy Policy (this document can be accessed at chp.org.au/about-us/our-values) for full details of how we collect, use, store, and disclose an individual's personal information.

What is personal information?

Personal information is information or an opinion about you as an individual.

Personal information collected, used, stored and disclosed by HAS might include your name, address, nationality, demographic information (e.g., date of birth, country of birth, language), what area you live in and relevant contact details (e.g., phone number, email address).

The HAS Advocate will also take confidential case notes that record things such as: what service you are requesting, what outcomes you are seeking, what actions we agree to undertake, any contact with other services on your behalf, issues you might be experiencing (eg health) and what we do with and for you

What is sensitive information?

Sensitive information is information relating to a person's gender, racial or ethnic origin, political opinions, religion, trade union or other professional or trade association membership, sexual preferences, criminal record and health information about an individual.

A client might disclose sensitive information to the HAS Advocate that is relevant to the assistance they are receiving. For example they might contact HAS because they have been discriminated against because of a health issue or criminal record and would need to discuss these issues with the HAS Advocate to get support with them.

The HAS Advocate only needs – and will only collect – sensitive information that is directly relevant to your case and will record it in your confidential case notes, unless you ask them not to do so.

How is my personal and sensitive information collected?

Personal and sensitive information collected for HAS is collected by a HAS Advocate. Information is usually collected over the phone when you call however can also be collected during office visits or via email or written correspondence. Sometimes, as part of the assistance we provide, we might collect some personal

information about you from other agencies and people associated with you, for example when discussing your situation with a worker or agency you are being supported by.

How is my personal information stored?

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Why does HAS need my personal and sensitive information?

The collection, use and discloses of personal and sensitive information is a necessary and key element of the service HAS provides. In simple terms, the HAS Advocate needs information about you so they can help you.

However it is important to note that we only collect information that is directly related to the service we are funded to provide.

The collection of personal information (eg case notes) by HAS is a requirement of the Department of Human Services, who fund us and is a necessary element of meeting service quality standards we have to meet.

The collection of personal and sensitive information also supports our internal quality improvement processes (making our service better) and de-identified data assists us to improve the homelessness system more broadly (for example by analysing what people complain about).

Will you disclose my personal and sensitive information to anyone else?

Yes, but only if it is directly related to the service we are providing to you (eg support to make a complaint). The HAS Advocate only discusses things with another agency or worker if you have asked them to do so (eg to advocate on their behalf).

The HAS Advocate only discloses personal and sensitive information that someone contacting the service for assistance would reasonably expect to be disclosed. For example a person who contacted HAS because they needed advocacy support related to health issues might reasonably expect us to collect information about their health and disclose that information to an appropriate external service (eg housing service).

The HAS Advocate will advise you if they are going to disclose any personal or sensitive information (eg discussing case with an external agency, resolving a complaint) and get consent to do so unless it is not practicable (eg we cannot contact you). Similarly before making a referral on your behalf we will get your consent unless. If we can't get in contact with you we would only make the referral if we thought you would expect us to.

Who does HAS disclose my personal information to?

The HAS Advocate will only disclose your personal information in the context of the service being provided. The HAS Advocate might discuss your situation with an agency you are working with, an organisation you want support to resolve an issue with or an agency a referral is being made to on your behalf. The HAS Advocate might also have confidential discussions with their Manager about your situation to get advice.

In rare circumstances the HAS Advocate may have to disclose personal information because they have serious concerns about the health or safety about someone or we are directed by a court or tribunal to do so.

Does HAS disclose my personal information overseas?

No.

Do I have to allow HAS to collect my personal information?

No. People contacting HAS for assistance are under no obligation to disclose any information they don't want to disclose. If you don't want us to record any or all of the personal or sensitive information you disclose, please tell the HAS Advocate. However, not recording personal information may make it harder for the HAS Advocate to effectively assist you.

Can I remain anonymous or use an alias?

Yes. You have the right to remain anonymous or to use an alias should you want to.

Can CHP use my personal information for marketing purposes?

No.

Can I access the personal information HAS holds about me?

Yes. CHP allows individuals access to the information it holds about them within a reasonable time after they have made a written or verbal request for access. To ensure all correspondence is documented, if it is possible requests for access to information should be in writing.

In rare instances, CHP may refuse to give an individual access to requested information, for example because it may put another person at risk. Unless CHP is unable to do so (eg we cannot contact you) it will provide the individual with the reason they have been refused access.

CHP may decide it can only provide limited information, for example if by providing complete information another person's privacy may be breached. Unless CHP is unable to do so, it will provide the individual with the reason the request has been limited.

How can I access the personal information HAS holds about me?

If you want to access your personal information please talk to a HAS Advocate. The HAS Advocate will discuss what information you would like access to, when you would like to access it and how you would like the information presented (eg hard copy, email etc). Every effort will be made to meet reasonable requests and to be sensitive to individual circumstances.

Is there a fee for access to my personal information?

No.

What if I think HAS misused my personal information or breaches my privacy?

If you have concerns about the way in which we have handled your personal information or you think there been a breach of your privacy you can make a complaint.

If you want to make a complaint, the CHP Complaints procedure should be followed Policy (this document can be accessed at chp.org.au/about-us/our-values). In simple terms, the complaint can be made verbally or in writing and can be directed to whoever you feel is the most appropriate CHP staff member. CHP takes any complaints very seriously and will endeavour to resolve them, as far as is possible, to the complainant's satisfaction.

If a person needs any advice or assistance with issue relating to Privacy, such as determining what constitutes a breach of the APPs, they can contact the Office of the Australian Information Commissioner on 1300 363 992.

How can I change or correct my personal information?

It is important personal information we hold about people is accurate, complete and up-to-date. If you think the personal information we hold about you is incorrect, please advise the HAS Advocate and they will correct it.

Do you need homelessness or social housing service support?

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Our approach

HAS recognises your right to live with dignity and bases its support activities on this rights-based approach. Its work is underpinned by the principles, rights and responsibilities outlined in the HAS Consumer Charter of Rights and Responsibilities. HAS is aware of the impact of colonisation on Aboriginal individuals and communities. CHP is committed to respecting and supporting the rights of children, and CHP Board members, employees and volunteers have a responsibility to act on child safety concerns and allegations that may arise in the course of their roles at CHP. Read our child safe policy for more information.

CHP welcomes feedback and complaints that will assist in service improvement. Read our complaints policy or call the office and speak with the HAS Advocate or their manager.

All policies mentioned in this section can be access at chp.org.au/about-us/our-values.

Useful resources

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Tenants Union of Victoria Advice Line
9416 2577 / www.tuv.org.au

Disability – Office of the Public Advocate
9603 9500 / 1300 309 33

Justice Connect – Homeless Law
8636 4400 / www.justiceconnect.org.au

LGBTIQ+ Victorian Pride Centre
7035 3592 / www.pridecentre.org.au

More information

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