

PRIVACY AND CONFIDENTIALITY POLICY

1. Purpose and Scope

Relationships Australia Tasmania (RA Tas) is committed to protecting the privacy and confidentiality of clients, staff, Board members, students, volunteers and stakeholders in the way information is collected, stored and used. RA Tas ensures personal information is managed in accordance with the Australian Privacy Principles (APPs) as contained within the Privacy Act 1988 (Cth) and the Personal Information Protection Act 2004 (Tas).

This policy provides guidance on RA Tas' legal obligations and ethical expectations in relation to privacy and confidentiality and complies with the APPs when collecting, using, disclosing, storing and destroying an individual's personal information.

2. Definitions

Privacy provisions of the Privacy Act 1988 govern the collection, protection and disclosure of personal information provided to RA Tas by clients, staff, Board members, volunteers, students and stakeholders.

Confidentiality applies to the relationship of confidence. Confidentiality ensures that information is accessible only to those authorised to have access, and is protected throughout its lifecycle. Confidential information may be marked as such or deemed confidential by its nature, e.g. it is information that is not available in the public domain.

Consent means voluntary agreement to some act, practice or purpose. Consent has two elements: knowledge of the matter agreed to and voluntary agreement.

Individual means any person such as a client, staff member, Board member, volunteer, student, contractor or a member of the public.

Organisational information includes publicly available, and some confidential, information about organisations. Organisational information is not covered in the Privacy Act (1988) but some organisational information may be deemed confidential.

The public domain in relation to confidentiality is "common knowledge," i.e. information that can be accessed by the general public.

3. Limitations

This policy is limited by:

- The overriding duty of care to report serious matters as outlined in *RA Tas Mandatory Reporting of Serious Matters Policy*
- Courts which have the authority to subpoena files in relation to criminal or other matters
- Discussion with other parties as requested, as part of the service, such as supervision or as part of the service such as contracted training
- Information contained within contracts set out by funding bodies

4. Policy

- Management will ensure that processes are in place to ensure that client, staff and organisation information remains confidential and secure
- Management will, as part of the induction process, ensure that staff are trained appropriately
- Clients and staff have the right to request access to their records
- Staff will follow the protocols relating to the disclosure and distribution of personal information and accessing of personal records
- Staff who infringe this policy will proceed to disciplinary procedures
- Personal information is maintained accurately and is up to date
- Staff will ensure that confidentiality is observed in work practice at all times

5. Management of personal information in accordance with Australian Privacy Principles

5.1 What is personal information?

'Personal information' is information or an opinion about an identified individual who is reasonably identifiable.

Personal information may include 'sensitive information' about an individual such as a person's race or ethnic origin, political opinions, religious beliefs or associations, philosophical beliefs, memberships, sexual orientation or health, genetic or biometric information.

Sensitive information may include 'Health information', which includes information about a person's health, disability or use of health services.

5.2 What personal information do RA Tas collect?

RA Tas will only collect 'personal information' (such as name, contact details and date of birth) that is reasonably necessary to provide relevant services to an individual.

'Sensitive information' will only be collected if an individual consents to the collection of the information or where permitted by the Privacy Act.

5.3 How does RA Tas collect personal information?

RA Tas may collect personal information when:

- A form has been completed either verbally or in writing
- Through contact via phone or email
- During the course of relevant services provided
- In other instances, where consent has been provided

RA Tas will collect information direct from an individual and not from third parties unless the individual has given consent to the collection of the information from someone other than themselves or the organisation is required or authorised to do so by law. Should RA Tas receive unsolicited or unauthorised information from a third party, the organisation will destroy the information or ensure that it is de-identified, except where required by law to retain the information.

Where collection of personal information from a third party is authorised or required by Australian Law or a court order, RA Tas will inform the individual of the information held, the reason for its collection, the main consequences (if any) for the individual if the information is not collected and the identity of anyone to whom the information is disclosed.

5.4 How does RA Tas use or disclose personal information?

Personal information provided by a client is used for the purpose for which it was collected and to assist RA Tas in providing the service relevant to a client's circumstances.

In keeping with the organisation's ongoing commitment to quality practice, the organisation may also use personal information in practice discussions between a practitioner and their supervisor where it is seen to benefit the client.

A client's written consent will be sought to provide non-identifying information to the Commonwealth and/or State Government agencies that fund RA Tas programs for management and statistical purposes. A client's written consent will be sought before information is disclosed to another person or service to whom the client is being referred to for further support.

RA Tas will not generally disclose personal information about an individual to an overseas recipient. Exceptions may apply where disclosure is required or authorised by Australian law or court order or international agreement to which Australia is a party. If the organisation is required by law to provide information or if the individual consents to disclosure overseas, RA Tas will not be held responsible for ensuring the recipient complies with Australian Privacy laws, however, will take reasonable steps to ensure that the overseas recipients of an individual's personal information do not breach the privacy obligations relating to the individual's personal information.

Government identifiers such as a number, letter or symbol used to identify an individual will not be disclosed in relation to an individual's activity unless authorised by law.

RA Tas will take reasonable steps to ensure that personal information collected from an individual is accurate, up-to-date and complete. The organisation will check the individual's personal information at each occasion of re-contact for service and will update the information on the computer database.

RA Tas also participates in service development through analysis of anonymous service data and outcomes in collaboration with relevant partner organisations, for research purposes only. In these projects RA Tas will protect privacy by using anonymous personal information (identifying details are removed). Where this is not possible RA Tas will seek informed consent before using identifiable information.

5.5 Can an individual be anonymous or use a pseudonym?

Individuals will have the option of not identifying themselves or of using a pseudonym when accessing RA Tas services. Exceptions apply where it would be impracticable for RA Tas to provide appropriate service to the individual or where identification is required by law.

5.6 What about Direct marketing?

RA Tas will not use or disclose personal information for the purpose of direct marketing.

5.7 How does RA Tas store personal information?

Personal information is stored electronically, on paper, or both. RA Tas will keep personal information on a secure and protected client data management computer system as well as in paper documents stored in secure and locked storage areas. Access to personal information will be by authorised staff only.

Client records are maintained and managed in accordance with *RA Tas Client Files Policy and Procedures*. All staff who handle files are responsible for ensuring that the files are properly stored and that no file containing confidential information is left where there is unrestricted access.

5.8 How can an individual access personal information from RA Tas?

Individuals may request access to their personal information at any time. Should a client require access to their personal information, the client should talk with their practitioner. The client may be required to complete a *Request for Release of Information Form* that is available from their practitioner or by phoning 1300 364 277.

Subject to any requirements in the APPs, RA Tas will facilitate access in the manner requested by the individual if it is reasonable and practicable to do so. Individuals will not be given access to information about other people, even if they were party to the sessions the individual attended. Where access to information is denied the individual will be given written reasons for this decision.

5.9 What if an individual's personal information is not correct?

RA Tas will endeavour to ensure your information is accurate. If an individual's personal information changes or an individual believes RA Tas' records are not up-to-date or accurate, RA Tas will endeavour to correct personal information once it is identified as inaccurate by the organisation or by the individual. RA Tas will ensure that any other organisation to whom the individual's personal information was previously forwarded receives notification of any change, unless it is impracticable or unlawful to do so. Should RA Tas refuse to correct personal information as requested by the individual, written reasons for refusal will be provided to an individual.

5.10 When do we destroy personal information?

RA Tas securely destroys or de-identifies personal information when it is no longer required. Paper files for most programs are to be archived in a secure external storage facility when there has been no activity on a service file for 12 weeks. Paper files for adults are destroyed after a minimum of seven (7) years in accordance with legal requirements for retention of records. Children's files will be securely archived and kept until a child turns 25 years of age (i.e 18 years of age plus 7 years).

5.11 Limitations of Confidentiality

Confidentiality is strictly maintained. However, RA Tas has a duty of care to protect their clients and those close to them. RA Tas are therefore mandated by law to report risk of harm to self or others as well as instances of current child abuse or neglect or risk of child abuse or neglect.

5.12 How does an individual complain?

If an individual has a complaint about how RA Tas handles personal information, they should contact the organisation on 1300 364 277 or admin@reltas.com.au. All complaints will be dealt with fairly and as quickly as possible. If an individual is not satisfied with RA Tas' response, an individual can make a complaint about interferences with their privacy to the Office of the Australian Information Commissioner.

Email: enquiries@oaic.gov.au

Post: GPO Box 5218, Sydney NSW, 2001

Phone: 1300 363 992 Fax: 02 9284 9666 Web: <http://www.oaic.gov.au>

Or alternatively a complaint can be made to the Tasmanian Ombudsman under the Person Information Protection Act. Email: ombudsman@ombudsman.tas.gov.au

DSS National Client Complaints Team

Phone: 1800 634 035 Email: complaints@dss.gov.au

Post: DSS Feedback, GPO Box 9820, Canberra, ACT, 2601

Alternatively, you can submit a feedback form online <https://www.dss.gov.au/contact/feedback-compliments-complaints-and-enquiries/feedback-form>