



Council on Aging & Human Services

Serving Eastern Washington & North Central Idaho

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CONFIDENTIALITY POLICY

The principle of confidentiality is basic to the maintenance of professional ethics and community respect. All staff of the Council on Aging & Human Services (CoA&HS) and volunteers have a set of ethical responsibilities by which they are bound to the client, CoA&HS, the community and themselves. CoA&HS clients act in good faith, expecting their circumstances and personal matters to remain confidential and the CoA&HS is obligated by law and ethics to reciprocate. Confidentiality of client information is maintained for the protection of the client.

The following procedures will be used by staff members and volunteers in regard to confidentiality. For the purposes of these procedures a "client" is defined as a person registered as a program participant. Registration is accomplished by completion of a Participant Information Form (PIF).

1. All paid and volunteer staff members will take responsibility for protecting the confidentiality of all clients. New staff members and volunteers will receive instruction in these confidentiality procedures.
2. All written and unwritten information concerning clients of the CoA&HS is considered to be confidential.
3. All written information regarding the clients of the CoA&HS will be maintained in files. Only those staff members or volunteers with a "need to know" will have access to these files. No staff member may remove client files from the office without authorization from the staff member's supervisor.
4. When it is necessary for a member of the staff to communicate information about a client to another person or agency, a Release of Information form will be signed by the client or their legal representative. The signed release will be kept in the client's permanent record. If the client is unable to give written consent then the staff member releasing the information will document the circumstances.
5. When client related materials, i.e. lists, logs and files, are used outside the office, staff members are responsible and must take appropriate steps to safeguard the materials. Steps might include locking unneeded materials in the car while visiting clients and keeping materials in a secure briefcase when the staff member is home or at meetings.
6. In emergency situations, when it is not possible to have a form signed, a verbal release may be given by the client or their legal representative. The staff member who receives the verbal release will make a note in the client's file and will obtain the written release as soon as possible.

7. A signed release will not be needed when:

"In general, personal information shall not be used or disclosed by any person or organization without the informed consent of the individual who is the subject of the information.

The major exception to this policy is that the information may be used for purposes directly connected with the administration of the program which has collected the information. Such purposes include, but are not necessarily limited to; determining eligibility, providing the services and participating in audits of the program. An example of using personal information in the course of providing a service would be a case manager or information and referral worker giving the name and other necessary information about an individual desiring a specific service to an agency than can provide that service." (DSHS memo IM-OOA-AAA-77-83)

8. When a CoA&HS staff member is working with a client and finds it necessary to obtain written information from another person or agency, it will be necessary to obtain a signed release from the client or representative. This release will indicate that the client or representative has given permission for release of information to the CoA&HS.

9. When a CoA&HS staff member either receives requested written information or releases written information about a client to another person or agency, a written or verbal follow-up will be given to the client. This follow-up will inform the client as to what information was released or obtained and what progress has been made in helping with his/her individual situation. A record of the follow-up will be kept in the client's file.

10. When a staff member receives unsolicited information about a client from family members, Gatekeepers, etc. the staff member may share the information with the client. Professional judgment will determine what to share.

11. The fact that a case has been made public through any of the news media does not alter the fact that this person still has confidentiality privileges with the CoA&HS. For example, if a client has been having difficulties with a given problem and is arrested, the CoA&HS confidentiality procedures will be maintained.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT:

The following acknowledgement will be signed by each CoA&HS staff member and the record kept in the staff member's personnel file.

I understand and agree to follow all the above procedures. I am aware that any breach of confidentiality is covered by the CoA&HS Personnel Policies.

Affirmed this _____ day of _____, 20____.

Signature: _____