



CREATING FUTURES

Trauma Informed Practice
Framework



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MESSAGE FROM

OUR CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER

Much more is known now about the impacts of trauma on the architecture of the brain and on behaviour. It is recognised that the effects of childhood abuse and neglect may linger into adulthood in ways that significantly affect long-term functioning.

Our commitment to strengthen how we understand and respond to trauma stems from a need to provide the best possible support to both clients and staff. Improving the way we respond to trauma gives us the best chance of working alongside people to change and heal from their experiences.

Our Trauma Informed Practice Framework is another important building block that sits alongside our Child Safe Commitment, Outcomes Star, White Ribbon Commitment and Service Standards, serving as a foundation for all we do.



Melissa Perry

Chief Executive Officer





COMMUNICARE VALUES

- **HOPE** : Create optimism and hope for the future;
- **OPPORTUNITY**: Create opportunities to learn, to share knowledge and experience, to grow and advance;
- **PERSEVERANCE**: Leading with courage, passion and determination to overcome challenges and reach and achieve goals;
- **EQUALITY**: Recognise, respect and value people's differences and to contribute to and realise their full potential.

COMMUNICARE'S STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

Strategic priorities highlight the best means of ensuring that our values are alive and enacted, and outcomes are measured to ensure continuous improvement, innovation and advocacy for clients. These priorities include:



OUR CULTURE

We will have a culture that is aligned to our values and aspirations, and attracts and retains the right people to govern, lead and provide quality services.



CLIENT EXPERIENCE

We will provide client-informed services which deliver a measurable, impactful, and quality experience for people.



WELL-RUN BUSINESS

We will provide effective, integrated systems and processes to ensure the business is well-run, adaptable, and sustainable.



STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIPS

We will seek, develop and nurture mutually beneficial strategic partnerships which assist us to deliver our purpose.



ADVOCACY

We will be an effective advocate with communities for social justice, equality, and inclusion.



SOCIAL IMPACT

We will demonstrably achieve positive social impact.

WHY A TRAUMA INFORMED FRAMEWORK FOR COMMUNICARE?

Communicare works with children, young people, adults, families and communities in many different services, with many different staff areas of expertise. Communicare understands that trauma has a major impact on many areas of wellbeing - health, mental health, poverty and housing for example. Trauma also has the potential to limit access to services. Communicare is committed to becoming informed about and raising awareness of these impacts and to embedding a trauma informed approach across the organisation.

Communicare's values align strongly with the introduction of trauma informed practice. Most importantly, Communicare wants to ensure that clients, staff, partnering agencies and services all embrace positive and equitable behaviours which offer hope and opportunity. We strive to lead with courage and determination to facilitate change and enable clients to be empowered to reach their full potential.



WHAT IS TRAUMA?

The term “trauma” refers to experiences that cause intense physical and psychological stress reactions. It can refer to “a single event, multiple events, or a set of circumstances that is experienced by an individual as physically and emotionally harmful or threatening and that has lasting adverse effects on the individual’s physical, social, emotional, or spiritual wellbeing.”

Although many individuals report a single specific traumatic event, others, especially those seeking mental health or substance abuse services, have been exposed to multiple or chronic traumatic events.

The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), part of the US Department of Health and Human Services, suggests there are three “Es” in conceptualising trauma reactions.

- **EVENTS** or circumstances which may include the actual or extreme threat of physical or psychological harm (i.e. natural disasters, violence, etc.) or severe, life-threatening neglect for a child that imperils healthy development, either one-off or chronic or long term.
- **EXPERIENCE** of the events by individuals will vary. How the individual labels, assigns meaning to and is disrupted physically and psychologically by an event will contribute to whether it is experienced as traumatic.
- **EFFECTS** may occur immediately after the event or may take some time to develop. They may last varying amounts of time and may include everything from the loss of trust in others to memory, attention and thinking problems, to the very neurobiological makeup of their brain and ongoing health and wellbeing problems.

¹Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. Trauma-Informed Care in Behavioural Health Services. Treatment Improvement Protocol (TIP) Series 57. HHS Publication No. (SMA) 13-4801. Rockville, MD: Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. 2014. pXIX

WHAT IS TRAUMA INFORMED PRACTICE (TIP)

The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration in the USA is the world leader in trauma informed practice. SAMHSA defines trauma informed practice as a strengths-based service delivery approach:

“that is grounded in understanding the impact of trauma, that emphasizes physical, psychological, and emotional safety for both providers and survivors, and that creates opportunities for survivors to rebuild a sense of control and empowerment.”

It also involves avoiding institutional processes and individual practices that are likely to retraumatise individuals who already have histories of trauma, and it upholds the importance of client participation in the development, delivery, and evaluation of services. Trauma informed practice assumes the possibility of recovery.

SAMHSA identifies four key elements of a trauma-informed approach:

1. Realising the prevalence of trauma;
2. Recognising how trauma affects all individuals involved with the program, organization, or system, including its own workforce;
3. Responding by putting this knowledge into practice; and
4. Resisting re-traumatisation.

An Australian Mental Health article notes that *“Trauma informed services do no harm i.e. they do not re-traumatise or blame victims for their efforts to manage their traumatic reactions, and they embrace a message of hope and optimism that recovery is possible. In trauma- informed services trauma survivors are seen as unique individuals who have experienced extremely abnormal situations and have managed as best they could.”*¹

Instituting a trauma informed approach requires organisations to make philosophical and cultural shifts in how they approach people seeking help throughout their services and systems. Trauma informed practice should be embedded in how the service is conducted and while some staff will have trauma specific skills, most simply need to embrace practice principles as set out later in this document.

¹Dr Cathy Kezelman, Trauma Informed Practice, June 2014 article in Perspectives, a newsletter of Mental Health Australia.



TRAUMA INFORMED PRACTICE SERVICE MODEL

PROGRAM PRINCIPLES

These are focused on clients of Communicare but apply equally to all staff, students, contractors and volunteers. They are the core principles Communicare staff will use when designing and implementing, assessing and reviewing all programs and client interactions. Communicare endorses the following six key principles:

1. SAFETY

Throughout the organisation, staff, and the people they serve feel physically and psychologically safe; the physical setting is safe and interpersonal interactions promote a sense of safety.

2. TRUSTWORTHINESS

Our operations and decisions are conducted with transparency with the aim of building and maintaining trust among staff, clients, and family members of people receiving our support. If staff agree to do something, it should be done in a timely manner or the client and family members should receive an explanation for the delay.

3. COLLABORATION AND MUTUALITY

We aim to have a true partnering and levelling of power differences between staff and clients, across our organisation. We recognise that healing occurs through relationships and in the meaningful sharing of power and decision-making.

4. EMPOWERMENT, VOICE AND CHOICE

Our focus is on the strengths of people, families and communities, and we enable them to be built on, validated and new skills developed as necessary. We aim to strengthen everyone's experience of choice and recognize that every person's experience is unique and requires an individualised approach.

TRAUMA INFORMED PRACTICE SERVICE MODEL

5. PEER SUPPORT AND MUTUAL SELF HELP

These are integral to what we do and are understood as a key vehicle for building trust, establishing safety, and empowerment. We recognise client and worker lived experience as a means of assisting each other to grow. We have a belief in resilience and in the ability of individuals, organizations, and communities to heal. Communicare acknowledges and promotes the possibility of recovery from trauma.

6. CULTURAL, HISTORICAL AND GENDER ANALYSIS

We recognise that cultural, historical, and gender issues have real impacts on the experiences and choices of people; we actively move past cultural stereotypes and biases (for example, those based on race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, age and socio-economic origin), and offer gender responsive services, leveraging the healing value of traditional cultural connections, and we recognise and address historical trauma

We acknowledge Australia's First Nation Peoples as the custodians of this land. We acknowledge the trauma experienced by many First Nations Peoples as a result of past Government Acts and Policies. We fully understand that this trauma continues to impact current and future generations.

Communicare endorses inclusiveness and shared purpose. We recognise that everyone has a role to play in a trauma-informed approach and that one does not have to be a therapist to be therapeutic.

We ensure that the change process is conscious, intentional and ongoing; we strive to become a learning community, meaning that we constantly respond to new knowledge and developments.



TRAUMA INFORMED PRACTICE AREAS

Trauma informed practice is a way of operating, rather than a means of imparting information. We will approach Trauma Informed Practice by;

1. Acknowledge the pervasive nature of trauma in clients;
2. Promote trauma recovery;
3. Ensure that direct service staff are trained and skilled in evidence-based trauma practices;
4. Provide training and mentoring to all staff and provide workforce development, employee assistance and supervision to staff who may have experienced trauma or may be impacted by the work they do;
5. Include the perspectives of lived experience of trauma and help seeking in all areas and at all levels of our organisation.

Critical components of trauma informed practice also include:

1. Treating each person, including staff members, as if they may have trauma in their background;
2. Providing clear messages to new clients about safety, trust and respect;
3. Offering clear information about boundaries of acceptable behavior and safety and putting these into practice;
4. Actively promoting resilience and promotive and protective factors including reliable mentors and social and community sources of support;
5. Ensuring administrative and employment procedures are as trauma informed as our work with individuals and the community.

By embedding trauma informed practices in all services with all people, our practices are supportive of all people seeking assistance.

We consider every stage of engagement with people through the trauma informed lens – how we reach out to clients, how clients approach our services, how Reception greets them and so on. Each touch point should be viewed as an opportunity to help people feel safe, have their wishes respected and receive support according to evidence-based best practices.

EMBEDDING TRAUMA INFORMED PRACTICE

Embedding our Trauma Informed Practice Framework requires that every tier of the organisation needs to play a part in integrating our commitment:

- Board and Executive;
- Managers;
- Service Staff;
- People, Culture and Development.

ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES - EMPLOYEES

All Communicare employees have an obligation to:

1. Learn about, understand and implement evidence based best practice skills for trauma informed practice as relevant to their role;
2. Follow all trauma informed policies and procedures;
3. Undertake standardised intake and assessment measures;
4. Keep clients and themselves safe, using safety plans, grounding skills and emotion regulation;
5. Engage in collaboration with clients, their families and communities;
6. Ensure re-traumatisation is minimised by positive use of trauma informed practice;
7. Make referrals to trauma specific services when necessary;
8. Learn how to self-regulate and undertake self-care;
9. Effectively access supervision, coaching and EAP as required to ensure best practice.



ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES - LEADERSHIP TEAM

Managers and Coordinators should provide leadership about trauma informed practice, embedding trauma informed practices into Leadership and Supervision.

They should:

1. Role model effective trauma informed practice with both clients and staff;
2. Provide education about trauma informed practice and measure staff outcomes;
3. Ensure trauma informed practice is an aspect of all intake, assessment and ongoing individual and group work;
4. Design and implement elements that measure trauma informed practice data collection and service review;
5. Ensure trauma informed practice is a core area of discussion in supervision.

CLOSING STATEMENT

Communicare firmly believes that trauma informed practice empowers and provides hope to our core constituents and Communicare is committed to implementing trauma informed practice in ways which best support clients, staff and the community as a whole.



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