

## 42. Drug and Alcohol Policy and Procedure

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### Purpose

Australian Quality Care recognises that every person with disability has a right to expect and receive quality and safe supports in accordance with the *NDIS Act* and the *United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disability*. We also recognise a client's dignity and their right to make decisions that may carry varying levels of risk.

The Company also has an obligation under the *Work Health and Safety Act* to ensure employees are provided with a safe work environment.

This policy sets out how we apply our obligations in ensuring clients' and workers' rights in our proportionate approach to drug and alcohol use, which includes zero tolerance for criminal activity.

### Scope

This policy applies to every employee at all levels of the business at Australian Quality Care.

### Policy

It is the policy of Australian Quality Care to provide a safe environment for clients to receive, and workers to deliver, the highest quality supports.

The Company's policy includes ensuring that workers are, at all times, not under the influence of drugs or alcohol that could impair their ability to do their work at the highest possible safety standard.

This policy intends to outline AQCare's safeguards around worker screening, training and supervision, and the Company's actions in the event that this policy is breached in any way.

### Procedure

#### Workers

The use of alcohol and other drugs can impact on workplaces in several ways, affecting relationships, safety and productivity.

Workers have a responsibility to ensure that they are always fit for work, and this includes not being impaired under the influence of alcohol or drugs.

The use or possession of illicit and non-prescription drugs by AQCare workers on shift will not be tolerated. In all but a very few cases that must be approved by management, possession and consumption of alcohol while on shift is also not permitted.

In addition to potential company disciplinary action, there may be real penalties under the law for a worker being under the influence of alcohol or drugs, or supplying drugs to their co-workers or clients, particularly where the activity has led, or may have led, to client or fellow worker being injured or becoming ill.

It is also important to consider contributing factors in why a person may use drugs or consume an excessive amount of alcohol. Factors could include home and personal matters, stress or fatigue at work, and pain self-management. Australian Quality Care offers the services of an Employee Assistance Program (EAP). The EAP provides phone and on-line counselling support and wellbeing resources, which can be accessed by all employees and their immediate family. In certain circumstances, AQCare may connect the worker to other [drug and alcohol related services](#), as appropriate.

## **Prescribed Medications**

There is always a level of risk when using any drug including prescription or over-the-counter medications. For instance, benzodiazepines (e.g. Valium®) and strong painkillers (e.g. codeine) can impact a worker's ability. This is particularly the case for drugs that a person hasn't taken before. As drug reactions vary from person to person, it's important to understand the possible side effects and monitor whether a worker is fit for work.

It is vital to follow a doctor's advice when taking prescription drugs and discuss any side effects, and how this might impact on a worker's ability to do their job competently and safely.

## **Illicit Drugs**

It can take several days to come down from drugs like ecstasy, ice and amphetamines. This means that drug usage during time off can still impact an employee's ability to do their work.

## **Alcohol**

If a person has had a big night, they may still be drunk the next day; this can make it dangerous for them to be at work.

Sobering up takes time. Hangover cures such as cold showers, doing exercise, strong coffee, or vomiting will not speed up the process. While these 'cures' may make a person feel better, they won't change their blood alcohol concentration (BAC).

AQCare expects workers to be responsible in making decisions about how their activities off-shift will affect the commitment they have made to their employer and their clients.

## **Code of Ethics and Conduct**

All employees, existing and new, are required to read, understand, and agree to follow AQCare's Code of Ethics and Conduct. This agreement sets out the standard of conduct expected of all employees including working with clients and as a team. The standards include their

responsibility to always act within the law and to perform their duties unaffected by alcohol or the use of drugs other than those prescribed for them by a medical practitioner.

## Disciplinary Action

If appropriate, disciplinary action may be taken against a worker if it is proven that they have breached a part of the Drug and Alcohol Policy. Disciplinary action will be proportionate to the breach and will be in line with the procedure outlined in AQCare's Human Resource Management Policy and Procedure. Each breach will be considered on an individual, case-by-case basis.

It may also be appropriate for management to report more serious instances, such as criminal activity, to police.

All disciplinary action will be kept strictly confidential.

## Clients

While it is against "House Rules" for a resident to possess or use illicit and non-prescribed drugs while residing in our accommodation, if a Support Worker witness or suspects that this is the case, they must follow the order of this procedure:

1. Ensure the **SAFETY** of all clients **FIRST**. If a client is suffering adverse reactions (medical or behavioural) to suspected drug or alcohol use, **call 000**.
2. If other clients are at risk of injury, calmly remove them from the source of harm (e.g., a drug or alcohol impaired person is behaving aggressively or violently).
3. Once all clients are as safe as possible, immediately contact your on-shift supervisor or manager.
4. If it is safe to do so, continue to provide support to the person suffering adverse effects until emergency responders arrive. Remember, the affected person may be disoriented and afraid and should not be reprimanded.
5. When emergency responders arrive, provide them with all information requested including the facts about what you observed. **DO NOT** disclose information about the incident to other clients, staff or visitors at any time.
6. Report to your supervisor or manager and complete an incident report as soon as possible after the event.

It is vitally important that a Support Worker who has witnessed or suspects drug use or alcohol consumption by a client **DOES NOT** approach or confront them about what they have seen or suspect, unless they need to respond to adverse reactions and/or remove others from a source of harm (e.g., a drug or alcohol impaired person is behaving aggressively or violently).

In this instance, the witnessing or suspecting worker should let their supervisor or manager know about their concern. They should maintain strict confidentiality and not discuss any part of the matter with any other colleagues or clients.

It is important to remember a person with disability has a right to make decisions and take risks. It is not a Support Worker's role to reprimand clients who choose to take such risks. If a Support Worker witnesses or suspects a client is using non-prescription or illicit drugs, or they are concerned about their alcohol consumption, the Support Worker should talk to their supervisor or manager. Supervisors or Managers may then address the concerns with the client or give advice about using a supported decision-making approach with the client about the risks involved in the activity. AQCare may connect the client to other [drug and alcohol related services](#), as appropriate.

## Signs of drug or alcohol impairment

It is important to be very sure that a person is under the influence of drugs — and not unwell — before any action is taken. It is difficult to know if someone, whether it is a worker or a client, is impaired by the use of drugs or if someone is using them.

Some signs of drug use or alcohol consumption can include:

- Excessive sleepiness, sluggishness, lethargy or falling asleep at inappropriate times.
- Lack of focus, concentration or motivation.
- Talkativeness or hyperactivity.
- Restlessness, agitation or irritability.
- Nervousness, anxiety or paranoia.
- Secretiveness.
- Misjudgement of time, being late to work or appointments, or missing work or appointments entirely.
- Mood swings or aggressive behaviour.
- Twitching, facial tics, jerky movements or rapid eye movements.
- Talk of financial pressures or stresses.

## What to do if you suspect a colleague is taking drugs

Before you go talking to your colleague, your manager or human resources about your suspicions, you need to be reasonably certain that there is indeed the potential of drug abuse.

Some common illnesses have the same symptoms as drug abuse, and you need to be sure that your colleague isn't just stressed out, or suffering from insomnia, or just plain sick from something else.

Unless you're a trained professional, we don't recommend confronting your colleague with your suspicions. Drug abusers in general tend to get very defensive about their drug habit. They are likely to become enraged at the thought of you telling them about your suspicions.

It is recommended that, if you have genuine concerns that a work mate is under the influence of drugs or alcohol, you take notes. All your observations about your colleague should be put in writing, including:

- dates and times of incidents
- witnesses to such incidents
- the work tasks affected by your colleague's activities

**Be sure to keep your notes private, as you do not want to implicate someone who may be innocent.**

After making your notes, if you are reasonably certain that there is indeed the potential of drug abuse and it is posing a genuine risk to the health and safety of the person, clients or work mates, you can talk privately to your manager or human resources. Share with them your concerns about your co-worker and show them your documentation. Above all, maintain strict confidentiality.

## Reporting

It may be appropriate for management to report more serious instances, such as criminal activity, to police.

## Staff training

Australian Quality Care will train staff where required so that all front-line workers can capably identify and respond to witnessed or suspected drug use or alcohol consumption. This training includes a mandatory requirement to complete *HLTAID003 Provide First Aid* and *HLTAID001 Provide CPR*, as well as how to respond to an emergency situation. The workers completion of this training will be documented on the employee's personnel file.

All employees, at the start of their employment, will be required to read, understand, and sign a Code of Ethics and Conduct Agreement, which outlines their obligations to conduct safe and competent work, and to read and acknowledge this Drug and Alcohol Policy and Procedure. These will be documented on the employee's personnel file.

## Related documents

- Employee Handbook
- Incident Report
- AQCare Code of Ethics and Conduct Agreement
- AQCare's Human Resources Management Policy and Procedure

## References

- [National Disability Insurance Scheme Act 2013](#)
- [National Disability Insurance Scheme Code of Conduct](#)
- [NDIS Worker Orientation Module](#)
- [NDIS Practice Standards and Quality Indicators 2020 – Version 3](#)

- [Privacy Act 1988](#)
- [Disability Services Act 2006 \(QLD\)](#)
- [United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities](#)
- [Drugsafe](#)
- [Alcohol and Drug Foundation](#)