

Guidelines
for
Koori Hospital Liaison Officer Program

Department of Human Services
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GUIDELINES FOR KOORI HOSPITAL LIAISON OFFICER PROGRAM

Introduction

The Koori Hospital Liaison Officer Program was established in 1982 as one of the major recommendations of the *Working Party into Aboriginal Health, 1981* (the Working Party).

The Working Party recommended that Koori Hospital Liaison Officers (KHLOs) be employed in hospitals to ensure Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have equitable access to mainstream health care services, and to increase the cultural awareness and sensitivity of the services to the health needs of Koori people.

Since its inception, the KHLO Program has been monitored and coordinated centrally within the Department of Human Services (the Department), and since 1996 has operated under the *Koori Hospital Liaison Officer Program Guidelines, April 1996*.

Following a departmental decision to transfer the KHLO Program to Regions by June 2002, amendments were necessary to the guidelines to reflect changes in the areas of responsibilities of the key stakeholders. The views of KHLOs, employing hospitals, the Koori Human Services Unit and the Regional Offices of the Department have been taken into account in the development of the guidelines.

The success of the KHLO Program depends upon clear guidelines that give direction to assist hospitals in providing a culturally appropriate health care service to Koori patients and their families.

Goals of Koori Hospital Liaison Officer Program

- To assist in improving access and availability of appropriate health care services and preventive health services to Koori people.
- To ensure the provision of resources, information and programs to Koori patients so that informed decisions concerning treatment, prevention and rehabilitation can be made by the individual and their family.
- To improve the ability of health care providers to meet the particular needs of Koori patients and their families.
- To increase the sensitivity of health care providers to Koori health issues.

Objectives of Koori Hospital Liaison Officer Program

- To create awareness among Koori communities of the various health related services that are available.
- To ensure services received by individual Koori patients presenting for treatment are appropriate to their needs.

- To raise awareness within the Koori community of the importance of continuity of health care.
- To ensure individual Koori patients are aware of alternative options available to them in both treatment and health related matters.
- To facilitate cross-cultural education for health care providers on the needs of Koori patients and their families.
- To promote an approach to holistic health care which recognises environmental, social, economic and spiritual influences.
- To improve the quality and accessibility of Koori health statistics in Victoria.
- To encourage members of the Koori community to identify as Koori when presenting for treatment at health care agencies, so as to improve the quality of Koori health statistics in Victoria resulting in more informed decisions about health care needs of Koori people.

Organisational Relationship

- The KHLO is professionally and administratively responsible to the employing hospital, and as a hospital staff member will follow hospital-wide policies and procedures.
- All KHLO positions will be based at the employing hospital and the geographical boundaries of the KHLO's work area will be determined by the hospital in consultation with the local Aboriginal community.
- The Hospital Supervisor is the direct line manager of the KHLO, and will provide direction and support to enable the KHLO to carry out the day-to-day activities required of the position.
- Regional Offices of the Department will have responsibility for the KHLO Program within the Regions in rural areas.
- Metropolitan Health and Aged Care Division (MH&AC) of the Department will have responsibility for the KHLO Program relating to hospitals located in the metropolitan area, and may wish to work collaboratively with the relevant Metropolitan Regional Office.
- The Koori Human Services Unit will have a statewide monitoring role for the KHLO Program, and provide a support role to Regional Offices and MH&AC Division on Koori issues.

Communication Protocols

The KHLO Program will benefit from comprehensive guidelines which clearly set out areas of responsibilities to foster professional working relationships between all stake holders and help minimise problems which could hinder the delivery of an effective service to the Koori community.

Koori Hospital Liaison Officer

The KHLO as an employee of the hospital will adhere to the lines of accountability within the hospital, and report directly to the Hospital Supervisor of the KHLO Program.

- The KHLO will direct all queries to and seek advice and direction on all work related issues from the Hospital Supervisor of the KHLO Program.

- If the KHLO feels there are grounds for complaint, whether they are work related or on ethical issues, attempts must be made to resolve the matter in conjunction with the Hospital Supervisor, in the first instance.
- If the matter cannot be resolved, the KHLO should follow the hospital's grievance procedures.
- The KHLO will adhere to the privacy principles and confidentiality requirements of the hospital.

Hospital Supervisor

The Chief Executive Officer of the hospital, and the Hospital Supervisor as the KHLO's direct line manager, will have overall responsibility for the KHLO Program within the hospital.

- The Hospital Supervisor will provide direction and support to the KHLO with day-to-day work related activities.
- The Hospital Supervisor will seek advice and support on the KHLO Program from either the relevant Regional Office of the Department, or MH&AC Division for metropolitan hospitals, when necessary.
- The Hospital Supervisor will be the liaison contact between the Regional Office and the KHLO, or the MH&AC Division, as appropriate.
- The Hospital Supervisor should seek advice from the KHLO on programs and issues that directly involve the local Koori community.

Regional Office

Rural Regional Offices will co-ordinate and monitor the KHLO Program within the Region.

- The Regional Office will provide advice and support to the Hospital Supervisor, as requested.
- The Regional Office will seek advice and support from the Koori Human Services Unit, as needed.
- The Regional Office will communicate on all matters relating to the KHLO Program directly with the Hospital CEO or Hospital Supervisor, in the first instance. This includes seeking the hospital's support if requesting the KHLO to attend meetings, be part of a committee, or working group, etc.

Metropolitan Health and Aged Care Division

MH&AC Division will co-ordinate and monitor the KHLO Program within the metropolitan area, and work collaboratively with the relevant metropolitan Regional Office.

- MH&AC Division will provide advice and support to the Hospital Supervisor, as requested.
- MH&AC Division will seek advice and support from the Koori Human Services Unit, as needed.

- MH&AC Division will communicate on all matters relating to the KHLO Program directly with the Hospital Supervisor, in the first instance. This includes seeking the Hospital Supervisor's support if requesting the KHLO to attend meetings, be part of a committee, or working group, etc.

Koori Human Services Unit

The Koori Human Services Unit will have overall statewide monitoring responsibility for the KHLO Program.

- The Koori Human Services Unit will provide support and advice to Regional Offices, when requested.
- The Koori Human Services Unit will provide support and advice to the Metropolitan Health and Aged Care Division, when requested.
- The Koori Human Services Unit will liaise with and provide information on statewide issues related to the KHLO Program to Hospital Supervisors, when requested.
- Where issues are regional specific, the Koori Human Services Unit will direct Hospital Supervisors to the Regional Contact Officer in the Regional Office, or in MH&AC Division, as appropriate, for support, information or advice on the KHLO Program.
- The Koori Human Services Unit will direct KHLOs to consult with their Hospital Supervisor on all issues in the first instance, and then follow the hospital's grievance procedures, if there are any matters that cannot be resolved.
- The Koori Human Services Unit will direct the Koori community co-operatives or members of the Koori community to the Regional Office, MH&AC Division or Hospital Supervisor with any queries or complaints about the KHLO Program.
- The Koori Human Services Unit will direct any queries relating to the data reports provided by KHLOs to the Medical Records Administrators or the KHLO, depending upon the policy of each hospital.
- The Koori Human Services Unit will direct all correspondence relating to the KHLO Program to Regional Offices, or to MH&AC Division in the case of metropolitan hospitals.

Roles and Responsibilities

While each hospital has the flexibility to develop the KHLO Program to best suit both the needs of the hospital and the local Koori community, the Program's original intent to ensure that Koori patients and their families have equitable access to hospital services is paramount, and must be included in the generic duties of the KHLO.

Responsibilities of Koori Hospital Liaison Officer

- Assist Koori patients and their families to have an understanding of hospital procedures.
- Ensure that Koori patients and their families are given an appropriate explanation of diagnostic tests and treatment options.

- Participate in discharge planning for patients and ensure appropriate support services are in place for after-hospital care, eg district nursing services, welfare services, Home and Community Care programs.
- Encourage frequent health checks for individuals and families so as to maintain the highest possible quality of health.
- Encourage and assist Koori people and their families to access and utilise other health services existing within the broader community, as well as Koori community controlled organisations.
- Facilitate cultural orientation and in-service training programs for hospital staff, and be a resource person for cross-cultural education on Koori issues.
- Assist in improving the general quality and accessibility of Koori health statistics through the provision of monthly data reports to Koori Human Services Unit.
- Develop a broad understanding of available health care services within the hospital and recommend changes to enable these services to be more accessible to the Koori community.

It is desirable for the KHLO to

- assist in maintaining an effective working relationship between the employing hospital, other health care agencies, relevant government agencies, the local Koori community, Koori organisations, and where applicable Aboriginal Medical Services.
- assist in the development of health promotion and prevention programs with the hospital and in consultation with the local Koori community.
- participate in regional meetings of KHLOs and where appropriate involve Hospital Supervisors and the Regional contact officer.

Responsibilities of Hospitals

- Develop and monitor policies for the KHLO functions in consultation with the local Aboriginal community
- Nominate a culturally sensitive senior staff member who will co-ordinate the hospital's Koori health initiatives, be a supervisor to the KHLO, and where possible, ensure that the KHLO is a member of a team within the hospital.
- Ensure that the KHLO position is physically located in a designated hospital with the geographical boundaries of the KHLO's work area set by the hospital in consultation with the local Aboriginal community.
- Provide appropriate administrative support and resources for the KHLO.
- Provide access to an appropriate motor vehicle for the use of the KHLO, as seen necessary and in line with hospital policy that has been developed in line with the characteristics and views of the local Aboriginal community.
- Ensure that staff comply with statistical and data collection procedures in relation to Koori patients, including daily printouts of inpatient, accident and emergency and outpatient admissions.
- Provide professional development training and support to KHLO to assist in achieving the objectives of the KHLO Program.
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Responsibilities of Hospital Supervisor

As line manager of the KHLO, provide direction and support to the KHLO to enable the duties and responsibilities to be carried out efficiently.

- In consultation with the KHLO, recommend changes required to make the hospital's services and programs more accessible to the Koori community.
- In conjunction with the KHLO, encourage and support the development of local health promotion and prevention program for the Koori community.
- Encourage and support ongoing cultural awareness training and education on Koori health issues for hospital staff.
- Promote the role of the KHLO within other areas of the hospital.
- Encourage and support the KHLO to seek out and participate in staff development and appropriate education and training programs.
- Encourage and support the KHLO to liaise with and seek the involvement of the local Aboriginal community in the development of health service programs

The Hospital Supervisor for the KHLO Program needs to be a senior staff member and possess

- an interest in and commitment to Koori health issues.
- authority to make decisions and access staff at all levels of the hospital.
- a willingness to recognise and respect the diversity of Koori culture.
- a commitment to achieving equitable access to health services for Koori people.
- a supportive and active approach to the KHLO Program.
- a willingness to learn and share experiences with Koori people.
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Responsibilities of Regional Offices

- Coordinate the KHLO Program in rural Regions.
- Nominate a culturally sensitive regional contact officer to deal with operational matters for the KHLO Program as necessary, and a culturally sensitive senior officer to oversee the process.
- In conjunction with the Koori Human Services Unit and hospitals assist in the further development and strengthening of the KHLO Program, including the need for additional KHLO positions within the Region, where relevant.
- Negotiate with hospitals and provide details of program expenditure and service provisions as outlined in the Conditions of Funding.
- Provide advice to hospitals on recruitment and staffing issues for KHLO Program.
- When requested, and in conjunction with hospital supervisors and KHLOs, participate in the Koori Hospital Advisory Committee meetings, and Koori Hospital Liaison Officer Statewide Meetings.

Responsibilities of Metropolitan Health and Aged Care Division

- Coordinate the KHLO Program within the metropolitan area.
- Nominate a culturally sensitive staff member to be responsible for the KHLO Program.
- In conjunction with the Koori Human Services Unit and hospitals assist in the further development and strengthening of the KHLO Program, including the need for additional KHLO positions within the metropolitan area, where relevant.
- Negotiate with hospitals and provide details of program expenditure and service provisions as outlined in the Conditions of Funding.
- Provide advice to hospitals on recruitment and staffing issues for KHLO Program.
- When requested, and in conjunction with hospital supervisors and KHLOs, participate in the Koori Hospital Advisory Committee meetings and Koori Hospital Liaison Officer Statewide Meetings.

Responsibilities of Koori Human Services Unit

- The Koori Human Services Unit will have overall statewide responsibility for the KHLO Program, including the monitoring of the KHLO Guidelines.
- In conjunction with the Regional Offices, MH&AC Division and hospitals, assist in the further development and strengthening of the KHLO Program, including the need for additional KHLO positions.
- Provide advice and support to Regional Offices and MH&AC Division, as requested.
- Co-ordinate the collection of monthly reports providing data from hospitals on Koori admissions and cross checking of Victorian admissions on inpatients' reports.
- Collate and analyse data on Koori hospital admissions.
- Regularly publish available information on health in the Koori community.
- Convene combined bi-annual meetings of KHLOs, Hospital Supervisors and Regional contact officers, and the KHLO Program contact officer from MH&AC Division.

Cultural Considerations

- In recognition of the cultural obligations to the Koori community, the KHLO may need to attend funerals. The KHLO can, when a death occurs be expected to commit an inordinate amount of time assisting, supporting and liaising with and on behalf of the grieving family.

This is an expectation from both the family and the Koori community as a whole and cannot be summarily dismissed. Cultural sensitivity should be observed. Hospitals should negotiate a time limit with the KHLO based on a clear policy that has been developed in consultation with the local Aboriginal community.

- KHLOs elected to local, state and national Aboriginal bodies and forums must negotiate with their employer on terms and conditions to allow them to attend meetings or other activities that will take time away from their workplace.

Transport of Koori Clients

KHLOs may be expected to provide transport for Koori people to and from health care agencies. Transport issues should be subject to policies that reflect local circumstances and needs of Aboriginal patients and community members.

Recruitment to KHLO Position

Hospitals must recruit to a vacant KHLO position within a reasonable and realistic timeframe, and take the necessary steps to ensure that an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander person fills the position.

Hospitals are encouraged to liaise with the local Aboriginal community, Regional Offices for rural areas, or MH&AC Division, for metropolitan hospitals, during this process.

The selection panel will consist of

- Hospital Supervisor and/or a representative from the Hospital's Human Resource area,
- a KHLO, Koori public servant or an appointed member of the local Aboriginal community,
- and
- if requested, a regional office representative for rural hospitals, or a representative of MH&AC Division for metropolitan hospitals.

The key selection criteria for the KHLO position will include:

- A sound knowledge and understanding of Koori culture, society and kinship networks, as well as the ability to communicate with, and be accepted by, the local Koori community.
- Well developed interpersonal skills, written and verbal, and the ability to develop and maintain communications with Koori communities, other hospital staff, other mainstream agencies, and government departments.
- Assist in the development of strategies and guidelines for programs that could improve access to mainstream services by the Koori community.
- Demonstrated ability to record and maintain statistics.
- An understanding of Koori health issues at a local and state level.
- The ability to work as a member of a team with a range of community and professional groups.
- Current driver's licence

Other desirable skills and experience:

- Knowledge and understanding of hospital protocols and procedures.
- Knowledge of Koori health policy at a state and national level.

Recommendations relating to the decision of the selection panel are to be forwarded to the Hospital Board and the relevant Regional Office, or for metropolitan hospitals, the MH&AC Division of the Department for ratification.