



Participant Handbook

Welcome to the Mental Health Foundation ACT (MHF)

Thank you for joining us and allowing us to support you on your recovery journey towards a life you choose.

We will work with you and your carers/guardians to ensure that you receive the best support and services we can provide.

Acknowledgement of Country

In the spirit of reconciliation, MHF acknowledges the Traditional Custodians of country throughout Australia and their connections to land, sea, and community. We pay our respect to their elders, past and present and extend that respect to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples today. Sovereignty has never been ceded. It always was and always will be, Aboriginal land.

Acknowledgement of Lived Experience

MHF recognises those with the lived experience of mental illness. The voice of people with lived experience is essential in ensuring that MHF can support our participants on their recovery journey.

MHF is not a crisis service. In case of emergency, you are required to contact: 000; your clinical manager; the Access Mental Health Team (1800 629 354); or Lifeline (13 11 14).

Not sure who to contact?

If you have non-urgent questions at any time while receiving support from Mental Health Foundation ACT, you can email info@mhf.org.au and someone will respond to you within 24 hours between Monday to Friday.

Require further information?

Each of the documents mentioned in this Handbook have hyperlinks to a pdf copy that you can download. If you would like further information about anything else mentioned in this Handbook, please email info@mhf.org.au.

Have feedback or a complaint?

We welcome feedback both positive and constructive at any time. We also encourage you to lodge any complaint you may have about our services and how we support you. Visit our [website](#) to lodge your feedback or complaint.

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Section 1 - Introduction to MHF

(a) Who are we?

MHF was established in 1984 by Brian l'Anson and friends as a not for profit, community-based service. MHF supports people in Canberra and the surrounding regions who experience mental illness or mental health challenges.

Our vision is:

That Canberrans and surrounding community live with hope, choice, control and good mental health.

Focusing on creating hope, providing choice in service, and collaboration with users to codesign and co-produce services to meet your needs.

MHF aims to:

- Support people and their carers towards good mental health and wellbeing
- Improve lives through community acceptance and social inclusion
- Design and delivery a choice of tailored, safe, and effective support services
- Build a sustainable, strong, responsive, and valued MHF.

We are a registered National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) provider (No.4050001762), and we are accredited against the National Standards for Mental Health Services (expiry February 2027).

(b) Who are our staff?

The Chief Executive Officer of the MHF is Chris Ward.

Shahrin Ariff is our Program Manager and Peter Lennon is our Business Development Manager.

In addition, Angie Tadd is the Finance Manager and looks after NDIS Plan Management.

MHF has about 35 support staff who make up a diverse workforce. Our staff have a combination of life experience, work experience and formal training and love what they do.

Section 2 - Accessing MHF services

MHF is committed to ensuring that everyone who approaches it for service is assisted either with access to its services or with an alternative strategy that addresses their needs. MHF staff will ensure that there is equity of access to all potential services. Eligibility criteria is inclusive of the widest possible group of people who may need access.¹

Intake processes include a formal assessment focused on engaging with the participant, and identify and assess the individual's situation, issues, and needs, as well as negotiate with you appropriate and effective service delivery.

Individuals must provide consent for service intake processes to commence, during the process they will be treated with respect, and all information is voluntary and confidential.

Section 3 - How do I pay for services?

MHF services are fee for service, either using a participant's NDIS Plan; payment using personal funding; or in some cases discrete ACT and Commonwealth Government funding.

(a) National Disability Insurance Scheme

Most MHF participants fund their MHF support services through their NDIS Plan.

To do this, MHF will require your NDIS Number and in most cases a copy of your current NDIS Plan.

(b) Use of personal funds

If you would like to use your own personal funds to pay for your support, this can be negotiated. Depending on the circumstances MHF may request payment or partial payment up front to ensure that you have adequate personal funding for the provided services.

(c) Other government funding

MHF sometimes receives funding from either the Commonwealth or Australian Capital Territory Governments, to be used to fund specific projects. If you meet the criteria for the funded program, you will be able to access it free of charge. The manager for the specific program will discuss this with you further.

¹ For more detailed information about access to MHF services, download a copy of MHF's [Service Access Policy](#).

Section 4 - How do I start receiving MHF services?

Once you have met with an MHF staff member and discussed how we can support you, there will be some paperwork that you need to complete to start receiving our services.

An MHF staff member will go through these documents with you and can clarify any issues or concerns you may have. If you are unable to sign relevant documents yourself, your authorised carer or guardian can do so on your behalf.

(a) Individual Service Agreement

An Individual Service Agreement (ISA) sets out the contractual rights between MHF and yourself and includes your rights and responsibilities in relation to accessing MHF services and your requirements around notice for cancellation of an appointment.

(b) Schedule 1

The Schedule 1 sets out the specific line items in your NDIS Plan that MHF will be providing you with, and the cost per activity.

(c) Consent to Release Information

All MHF staff will treat your personal information in a confidential manner. With your consent, if you access other organisations or service providers, we will share information with them in the interest of your care and treatment. This information will be recorded on the *Consent To Release Information* Form.

We have an obligation to keep you and others safe from serious harm. If we believe you are at risk of self-harm or of harming others we must and will take action to keep you safe. This may mean that we share information about you with people even if they do not appear on this form or if you have requested we do share information with them.

During your time receiving our services please make sure you keep the information on this consent form up to date. If you would like changes made simply ask your relevant MHF support worker.

For more information about privacy and confidentiality see section 'Section 10 - How do you manage my private information?' below.

(d) Participant Goals

An important part of our support for you during your recovery journey with MHF is knowing what you want to achieve. These goals may be short term, over a 3-month period, or over a longer term of more than a year.

We will discuss your goals with you when you first start receiving our services. In most cases these goals will be set out in your NDIS plan, if you have one.

We undertake to work with you on achieving your goals and will check in with you regularly on how you are going and whether you would like to review them.

(e) Participant Intake Risk Assessment

Prior to receiving supports from MHF, staff will work with you to complete a risk assessment. This will focus on how we can support you if things do not go to plan, for example you become unwell or there is an emergency and we need to support you to evacuate your home.

If MHF staff are providing supports to you in your own home, we may undertake a Home Risk Assessment to support you to manage any workplace health and safety risks that could arise while staff are working with you at home.

(f) Occupancy Agreement and House Rules

If you are entering an Accommodation Services Program, you will need to sign either an Occupancy Agreement and/or agree to house rules.

The Occupancy Agreement sets out the terms under which you occupy a room in an MHF managed property and includes information around payment of a bond, payment of rent and how the agreement can be terminated.

The house rules cover things such as responsibility for cooking, cleaning, and other chores; any curfew at the property; whether alcohol is allowed onsite and what arrangements are in place for friends and family to visit.

Section 5 - What are my rights and responsibilities?

MHF works within ACT Health's *ACT Charter of Rights for people who experience Mental Health Issues (2011)*; the *NDIS Quality and Safety Commission Participant Rights* framework, which in turn incorporates the *United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities*.

MHF participants can expect to be respected and included as part of their recovery journey. MHF prioritises participant empowerment in its provision of recovery and support services.

You can access a copy of MHF's *Participant Rights and Responsibilities Policy*, [here](#).

(a) Participant Rights

Participants have the right to:

Respect	Be treated with respect. Have your individual human dignity valued. Be free from unlawful discrimination. Have your individual needs respected in terms of age, culture, language, disability, gender, and sexuality.
Safety	Be safe when receiving treatment and care. Receive high quality treatment and care. Be treated in the least restrictive environment possible for your needs. Receive appropriate and comprehensive information regarding your treatment. Obtain second opinions.
Communication	Be heard. Be understood. Have a safe environment and rapport that supports information exchange between you and workers. Be informed about costs, treatments, options, and costs. Ask questions. Receive clear and understandable answers. Communicate your views and preferences about your treatment and support options.
Access	Timely access. Care that promotes independence and recovery. Choose if, and when, family, friends, and other supports are integrated into your care and support.
Participation	Live, work and participate in your community. Participate in decisions and choices about your care, throughout all stages of your care and recovery. Receive information in accessible forms and languages. Access independent advocacy and legal advice regarding your treatment, care, and social needs.
Privacy	Protection of personal privacy. Privacy and confidentiality of your personal information. Access to your own health records in accordance with the law.
Comment (Be heard)	Comment on your care and have your concerns addressed. To provide formal feedback via the MHF Feedback and Complaints mechanism. Feedback and complaints forms can be downloaded from the MHF website or provided on request from MHF staff.

(b) Participant Responsibilities

Participants using MHF services also have responsibilities, which are:

Respect	Always treat other participants and staff with respect. Refrain from using offensive language or conduct in consideration of others.
Appropriate Conduct	Be in a safe state to interact with others. Refrain from behaving in ways that could make others feel uncomfortable or unsafe. Not be under the influence of drugs or alcohol when engaging in support. Respect property of MHF and others.
Transparency/ Honesty	Accept responsibility for your actions. Ensure any information you provide is accurate to the best of your ability and knowledge, and any changes are notified to MHF in a timely way

Communication	Communicate clearly and honestly with staff. Ask for clarification if you are unsure about anything.
Participation	Participate to the best of your ability in reasonable treatment and rehabilitation options.

MHF supports the rights of participants and carers to have a direct and active role in all aspects of their life and wellbeing and will work with the participant to determine what approach and level of engagement would be most appropriate and likely to achieve the best outcomes. This engagement may include supported decision making; co-design through collaboration; and providing relevant information about MHF services and other available supports.²

Section 6 - How do you ensure my safety while using MHF services?

Participants are entitled to feel safe in any environment where MHF delivers its services and be assured that risk and hazards associated with the services they receive have been identified and that processes have been developed to minimise or eliminate those risks.

To mitigate and anticipate future risk factors, MHF engages in hazard identification; risk management processes; work health and safety processes; incident review systems; review of all feedback and complaints received; and service evaluation and continuous improvement processes.

When engaged in service provision all staff and participants, under the *Workplace Health and Safety Policy Act 2011 (ACT)*, are responsible for: taking reasonable care of their own health and safety; taking reasonable care of the health and safety of others; and to comply with any reasonable request that is made in the interest of maintaining safety. In addition, there are staff specific procedures and guidelines that staff are required to follow as part of ensuring participant safety.

It is important for participants to be honest with staff when commencing with MHF and to maintain communication around issues that may impact on their safety, e.g., where self-harm has been an issue it is important that this is accurately communicated to MHF staff so that it can be appropriately addressed and integrated into the participant's recovery plan.³

In the event of incidents or accidents MHF adheres to mandatory recording and reporting, to ensure that incidents are investigated, and appropriate corrective or preventative measures can be taken to protect against future recurrence and eliminate (or minimise) risk. Privacy will be protected, and information will only be shared with appropriate agencies when essential in the interest of the wellbeing of the participant.

² For more detailed information about how MHF engages with participants, see MHF's [Participant and Carer Participation Policy](#).

³ For more detailed information about how MHF seeks to provide a safe environment for participants, see MHF's [Participant Safety Policy](#) and/or [Participant Safety Procedures](#).

(a) Abuse, neglect, and aggression

MHF works with participants in a variety of ways to assist in preventing abusive situations and recognising that safety and security are an essential part of the recovery process. Abuse or mistreatment of any person is unacceptable and MHF takes its obligations in relation to reporting and managing abuse and neglect allegations very seriously.

MHF staff are trained to recognise signs of abuse and neglect as well as how to respond to them, who to contact and what the reporting processes are.⁴

MHF policy is that aggressive, threatening, and violent behaviour will not be tolerated. MHF aims to reduce the risk factors to minimise the likelihood of escalation and has procedures in place to respond to aggressive behaviour. The types of behaviours that are considered unacceptable include the above abuse and neglect, but also sexual harassment, physical assault, and stalking.⁵

Where a participant in Accommodation Services engages in aggressive, threatening, violent or other inappropriate behaviour they may be asked to vacate the property in addition to police being called.

Section 7 - How do I provide feedback or suggestions?

MHF values feedback and suggestions from participants, their carers and other stakeholders and recognises the important part that feedback can play in MHF's continuous improvement processes.

MHF participants and other stakeholders may be asked to provide specific feedback on their experiences, but they can also provide feedback at any time.

Feedback can be provided several ways, including via the MHF website (www.mhf.org.au) and MHF staff can support participants to provide feedback if required.

The MHF website has information about providing feedback, including a form that can be used if preferred.⁶

Complaints received by MHF are discussed separately in *Section 8 - What do I do if I have a complaint?* below.

⁴ For more detailed information about how MHF manages and seeks to prevent abuse and neglect, see MHF's [Abuse and Neglect Policy](#).

⁵ For further information download a copy of MHF's [Managing Aggression in the Workplace policy](#).

⁶ For more detailed information about providing feedback to MHF, see MHF's [Participant and Carer Feedback Policy](#) and the [Feedback and Complaints Management Procedures for External Parties](#).

Section 8 - What do I do if I have a complaint?

MHF takes complaints about its services very seriously and encourages participants and other stakeholders that are unhappy with MHF services to bring their concerns to the attention of MHF.

The CEO of MHF is responsible for overseeing the investigation or resolution of any complaint received. Where it is not appropriate for the CEO to investigate the complaint due to an actual or perceived conflict of interest, another MHF manager will investigate instead.

If the complainant is unhappy with how their complaint has been addressed, they have the right to seek external support and review if appropriate. The MHF [Feedback and Complaints Management Procedures](#) set out the full complaints management process.

Section 9 - How do you look after my support person?

MHF recognises additionally that everyone has a right to support with decision-making, and to choose who provides that support. Carers, advocates, and others play an important role in the lives of participants and where consent is given by the participant, MHF staff will work closely with their support person to achieve the goals and best outcomes for the participant.

(a) Carers' rights

Carers should have the right: in charge of their degree of involvement; to be supported; to have their own health and well-being prioritised; to be provided with relevant information and appropriate care options; to develop their skills and knowledge base; to provide feedback; and be respected and acknowledged in their role.⁷

(b) Advocates

MHF encourages the seeking of independent support, for example, from independent advocacy services as needed.

Participants have the right to engage with advocates to assist them in receiving the best possible supports and achieving the best possible outcomes. Advocates can be present when participants are engaging services or activities delivered by MHF.⁸

⁷ For more detailed information about how MHF looks after carers, download a copy of MHF's [Carer Policy](#).

⁸ For more detailed information about how MHF works with advocates, download a copy of MHF's [Participant Advocate Policy](#).

Section 10 - How do you manage my private information?

MHF recognises the importance of confidentiality and protecting a participant's private information. MHF's privacy arrangements are underpinned by the Commonwealth Government's Australian Privacy Principles.

All information collected will be stored electronically in Supportability, MHF's client management system and only relevant staff will be given access to participant information. Each staff member has their own logon and access to participant records by staff can be monitored on an ad hoc basis if required.

Information about participants is necessary for appropriate and effective service delivery, and such information will only be gained with the participant's consent. It is important that accurate information is provided to MHF staff so they can provide you with the best support and care while you are using MHF services.⁹

Section 11 - How do you look after my health and wellbeing?

MHF promotes hygienic practices and conditions recognising that MHF's duty of care extends to hygiene and cleanliness procedures, with a focus on effective handwashing, hygienic cleaning techniques, and knowledgeable, appropriate, and rigorous hygienic practices¹⁰.

(a) COVID-19 Procedures

All MHF staff have received infection control training, and personal protective equipment (PPE) will be used, as necessary. All MHF sites are equipped with adequate PPE equipment, with hand sanitiser and temperature screening to ensure the safety of staff and participants. Staff and participants are required to regularly disinfect shared areas.

Isolation protocols will be enacted if either staff or participants have been potentially exposed, in accordance with government contact tracing procedures. If COVID-19 is caught when a participant is residing in STAR or SIL the participant may stay in self-isolation or may be transferred to appropriate alternative accommodation. Accommodations will be made (e.g., video-conference meetings, washing services, meal delivery, etc.) while self-isolation is completed.

MHF is continually updating and revising its COVID-19 response policy in line with government policies and guidelines. MHF participants and carers will be continually updated on COVID-19 protocols.

⁹ For more detailed information about how MHF manages participant records, read MHF's [Management of Participant Records Policy](#).

¹⁰ For more information about MHF's infection control and hygiene practices, read MHF's [Hygiene, Cleaning and Infection Control Procedures](#).

(b) Medication management

MHF is committed to ensuring that all participants are supported in management their medication in a manner that promotes choice, safety, and maximum quality of life. For participants in Accommodation services, after negotiation with the participant and/or their carer, medications will be stored securely in the MHF on-site staff office or kept by the participants themselves.

All medication kept on-site must be in a webster pack clearly labelled with the correct dosage information and the participant's name. MHF staff are only responsible for self-administering medication such as that found in a webster pack.

MHF Staff will support participants to self-administer their medication and will keep accurate and up to date records of medication dosages.¹¹

(c) Restrictive Practices and Behaviour Support

MHF will only engage in a restrictive practice approved by the Australian Capital Territory Senior Practitioner as part of a participant's Positive Behaviour Support Plan. All use of Restrictive Practices will be monitored, recorded, and reported as required under ACT and Commonwealth regulations.

(d) Managing Money and Assets

Participants of MHF services will be supported to manage their own money and financial assets wherever possible. Responsibility for assisting a participant with handling non-cash assets will only be assumed by staff when the participant or their authorised representative has requested and consented to receiving this assistance from MHF.

While it is important for participants to have ready access to their own cash to purchase personal items and for day-to-day expenses, MHF staff will not hold case on behalf of a participant. Therefore, if a participant requires access to and use of cash, they should manage that themselves with the indirect support of staff.

If a participant or their legal guardian specifically requests that staff handle a participant's cash on their behalf, this will only be allowed in exceptional circumstances and can only be approved by the CEO.

Where assistance in managing financial assets is required, this **must** be recorded in the participant's *'Individual Service Agreement Schedule 1'*.

¹¹ For more information about how MHF manages participant's medication, download a copy of MHF's [Medication Policy and Procedures](#).

Section 12 - How do I exit from MHF services?

MHF believes that participants should have a timely and smooth transition away from support.

There are several different processes by which a participant can conclude their engagement with MHF, including through exhaustion of NDIS funding. Exiting MHF services is done collaboratively with the participant.

That said, where the participant has engaged in illegal, aggressive, or other such behaviour MHF has the right to cease providing services to the participant immediately. For more information about this see the *Individual Service Agreement* signed by all NDIS participants when they begin receiving support services from MHF.¹²

¹² For more information about how MHF manages participant's exit from services, download a copy of MHF's [Service Exit Policy](#) and/or [Service Exit and Re-Entry Procedures](#).

Participant Handbook - Actions for staff:

Prior to **first** meeting with the new participant, print off the following documents:

- ☐ **Consent for the Release of Information Form** (to be read and signed by the participant)
- ☐ **Individual Service Agreement Template** (to be completed and then read and signed by the participant)
- ☐ **Individual Service Agreement Schedule 1 Templates** (to be completed and then read and signed by the participant)
- ☐ **Participant Rights and Responsibilities Policy** (to be given to the participant to read and understand)
- ☐ **Privacy and Confidentiality Policy** (to be given to the participant to read and understand)
- ☐ **Participant Intake Risk Assessment Plan** (to be completed in draft form and discussed with the participant and then signed by the participant and an MHF staff member)