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# Make Safe Guide: video transcript

**Angela Ensouf** : Hello, we acknowledge the traditional owners on the land on which we meet and pay our respects to their elders past, present and emerging. Welcome to this video about the *Make Safe Guide*. I'm Angela and I'm here with Wendy from *Hoarding Home Solutions* and we've been teaching frontline workers how to work effectively with hoarding clients for over a decade. We've been providing training to DFFH Victoria and are pleased to share the new *Make Safe Guidelines* document with you on their behalf.

We didn't write the document but share their goal of keeping people safely housed. So how can this be done? By empowering everyone who encounters hoarding and environmental neglect to have a a common understanding of the issue and the skills and knowledge to help keep people safe.

**Wendy Hanes**: Think of the Make Safe guide as a universal tool for all frontline workers in Victoria who encounter hoarding and environmental neglect in the course of their work. Whether you're a housing officer or a support coordinator, emergency service provider, local council officer, social worker, mental health professional or an independent service provider like ourselves, this guide this for you. It has been developed to provide practical information to strengthen the capacity for all organisations to respond well, to foster collaboration between organisations and to prioritise keeping people safely housed. The *Make Safe Guide* replaces “Hoarding and Squalor, a practical resource for service providers” that was developed by the Department of Health back in 2013, and we believe it's easier to read and implement than the 2013 version.

What this guide isn't, is a funded programme, entity, funding model or initiative. It doesn't sit with any particular one service or organisation. Also, it's important to understand that it's not a clinical look at hoarding or meant to replace expert advice or focus on treatment for people with hoarding or environmental neglect.

**Angela Ensouf** : Why do we need this sort of guide? Why do we care how people live? We care because hoarding and environmental neglect creates serious risks for the person at the centre of the issue, as well as their families and neighbours and pets.

Now, before we jump into the document, let's review what we understand about hoarding and environmental neglect. Hoarding is a diagnosable, treatable behavioural mental health disorder characterised by excessive acquiring and extreme distress around discarding of items that most of us would consider to be useless. As a result, it leads to key areas of the home not being able to be used for their intended purpose.

**Wendy Hanes**: Environmental neglect, formerly known as squalor, describes a heavily cluttered, unsanitary living environment, possibly as the result of hoarding behaviour, but possibly as the result of other things such as substance abuse, lack of skills, domestic violence, physical and mental health challenges, or ageing issues. The important thing to remember is that hoarding is a behaviour and environmental neglect describes the condition of the harm.

**Angela Ensouf** : So what can you expect to find in the *Make Safe Guide*? The first part of the guide sets the stage. It establishes a common understanding of the setting for the response. It's all about what hoarding is, who's who and what they do in response to hoarding. It acknowledges that no one organisation owns the patch or has total responsibility for creating a positive outcome. It highlights the range of providers already active in this challenging area and the value of working together in a coordinated response. The second part is the *Make Safe* service response. The response is set out in a 9-step chart followed by detailed information to support each step. And the third part is the appendix, and don't overlook it just because it's an appendix. It's a checklist that captures a wealth of information in one document and its very important resource for gathering and communicating key information in a structured way.

**Wendy Hanes**: So, what are the key messages in the *Make Safe Guide*? First of all, it's a person-centred approach and this is reflected in the language, and you will have noticed the words squalor was changed to environmental neglect and that's because squalor has a negative subtext. That is stigmatises people, it misdirects our focus to the stuff rather than the person and it can hinder our communication. It's also reflected in the referral charts; it’s reflected in the care team approach, and it's reflected in the attention that is given to consent and privacy.

The second key message is a focus on safety and harm reduction. It's embedded in the name of the document *Make Safe*, and we're talking about the safety of people, children, animals, neighbours, and this is opposed to a deep understanding of hoarding from a clinical perspective and the third thing is, that it focuses on collaboration. And this is reflected in the acknowledgement of the organisations and providers that have already built expertise in this area, and it's reflected in the service response model and care team approach in the document.

So what does it mean for you?

There is a focus on harm reduction. Harm reduction prioritises the safety of occupants. It is based on the clean needle philosophy. You may not be able to stop people hoarding, but you can make them safe. Attention to fire safety, unblocking exits and the elimination of trip hazards. Those sorts of things take precedence over changing behaviour. In practical terms, this means that our highest priority is keeping people safely housed by targeting specific risk factors and doing this over and instead of heavy-handed industrial claims.

**Angela Ensouf:** Let's take a look at the 9- steps that make up that make safe service response model. Here they are for you and we're going to go through one at a time.

Step 1, whether in your position, you receive referrals or make referrals, the service response starts here. Referrals are driven by what the person needs and their consent and of course will change over the lifetime of the relationship with the client. Now don't forget, when making referrals consent is crucial, not only because it's a legal requirement but because the engagement process could be traumatising for the person if actions are taken without their consent.

There is often a lot of fear and shame around hoarding, so gaining consent can be tricky. A consent pathway is laid out and guides you in the case of someone not giving their consent. And the first question is, does the person have capacity to consent? Many of us have a duty of care to act when there is a reasonable belief or of a serious threat to a person's life, health, safety or welfare, or a serious threat to public health, public safety or public welfare. The chart steps us through the various options in the most challenging cases.

**Wendy Hanes**: Step 2 is about gathering information about the person from relevant referrers and approaching the renter or the homeowner with sensitivity and the goal of creating an environment where the person feels comfortable and engaging in services. Remember, no one has the power to enter a person's home based solely on a complaint, without consent from the homeowner or renter themselves.

In cases of hoarding, it's common to experience avoidance behaviours as the person may feel threatened or embarrassed or angry or ashamed. The document lays out practical steps that may help you to gain an invitation into the home. The reality is that the process of engagement can be slow and require a lot of patience and tenacity.

**Angela Ensouf:**  Step 3, initial risk and needs identification, is a broad, shallow screening process to uncover underlying and presenting issues and risks. It's not a diagnostic process it’s a determination of a person's safety and the risks that are present, the person's willingness to accept help, and the person's priority for immediate referral and intervention. At this stage, it's appropriate to also consider the welfare and support ways of others, such as animals, family members or neighbours. You can use the Environmental Profile and Risk Assessment Checklist in the appendix of the Make Safe Guide to help you identify and collect the information you need at this stage.

**Wendy Hanes**: What if someone's immediate safety is at risk? We look at this in Step 4. You don't need to carry this burden alone. This step in the guide defines the levels of risk and provides information about people and organisations you can contact in high-risk situations, either with consent or as a duty of care referral. Start with your supervisor and familiarise yourself with how emergency services, child protection services, the Office of the Public Advocate, Orange Door, and organisations like that can assist. If fire risk appears to be high, you can make a hoarding notification to Fire Rescue Victoria without the person's consent. Fire Rescue Victoria needs the property address to create an alert in their system that helps firefighters to prepare if they need to go to that property.

**Angela Ensouf:** Step 5 is the assessment of risk for planning. When using a harm reduction approach, the specific risks and needs should inform the strategies that are used, and this includes the person's views and their willingness to accept support. At this stage, key actions are assessment of risk for planning, engagement and consultation with the person, communication between organisations with consent, reducing or removing environmental neglect, reducing, or removing fire risks and monitoring for maintenance and referrals for continuing support. This *Make Safe Guide* outlines three tools to use for objective assessment and communication, the Environmental Profile and Risk Assessment checklist in the appendix, the *Clutter Image rating scale*, and the *Home Environment Index.* These tools will help to define priorities and aid communication.

**Wendy Hanes**: So, you've identified and assessed the risks. Now it's time to consider what needs to be done to mitigate those risks and who you need on your team to do it. The *Make Safe Guide* is about collaboration. No one owns the patch. No one person or organisation needs to carry the full burden and responsibility of keeping someone safe. This is where the care team approach comes in. Service coordination and care team planning are covered in detail in the document and we encourage you to familiarise yourself with these. A good, well run care team will actually reduce your workload rather than increase it with unnecessary meetings. The care team should support the client by agreeing goals, prioritising actions, allocating responsibilities, and agreeing timelines. The care team should support its members by singing from the same hymn book and sharing the responsibility and burden of the intervention.

**Angela Ensouf:** Hoarding is not fixed overnight in Step 7, continuing social supports, it recognises the long-term view of continuous harm reduction and tenancy maintenance. This requires regular review and assessment of the person's circumstances. There will be a range of social, health, mental health and personal supports involved in the *Make Safe* service response. The guide sets out common referral pathways that can assist at this important date.

**Wendy Hanes**: Hoarding and environmental neglect can be run long running chronic issues and you can expect backsliding, and you'll need to maintain contact and often repeat key harm reduction steps over and over. One member of the care team may play an ongoing role in monitoring the safety in the harm and helping that person to recover before the backsliding becomes just completely overwhelming.

**Angela Ensouf:** And finally, step 9, periodic check-ins with the care team, discuss, update and communicate the person's future focused action plan with the persons care team. This reflects the key message of the person-centred approach and it's important to mention that good record keeping is a great service to all stakeholders involved, allowing everyone over time to have the benefit of understanding the history of the case and avoid missteps in the future. Collaboration is the key to success.

**Wendy Hanes**: OK, so let's recap. The *Make Safe Guide* is a process guide of best practice for anyone who encounters hoarding or environmental neglect. It replaces “*Hoarding and Squalor: a practical resource for service providers”*, developed by the Department of Health in 2013. It's a person-centred approach. It focuses on safety and harm reduction, and it focuses on collaboration.

Thank you for watching today and we encourage you to familiarise yourself with the contents of the *Make Safe Guide* and keep it handy to guide your efforts when dealing with cases of hoarding and environmental neglect. Thank you.