

PROFESSIONAL PRACTICE RESOURCE

# Policy & Compliance Checklist

*A working audit of the policies, records and obligations behind an ethical private practice.*

This checklist gathers the policies, records and compliance obligations commonly expected of a private counselling or therapy practice in Australia. It is organised into five practical categories: client-facing policies, records and data, professional and legal standing, workplace health and safety, and financial and administrative matters.

Work through each section at your own pace and tick off what you already have in place. Treat this as a living document rather than a one-off exercise, requirements and best practice shift over time, so it is worth revisiting each year or after any significant change to your practice.

A reference section at the end lists the legislation, codes of ethics and regulatory bodies most relevant to counsellors and therapists in Australia, including a state-by-state table for work health and safety and health complaints contacts.

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General guidance only, not a substitute for legal or professional advice.

# 1. Client-Facing Policies and Agreements

*The documents your clients see, sign or rely on.*

- ☐ Informed consent form, including any use of AI in your practice (for example, transcription, note-taking or admin assistants)
- ☐ Privacy and confidentiality policy (client-facing)
- ☐ Fee schedule and payment terms
- ☐ Cancellation and non-attendance policy
- ☐ Refund policy
- ☐ Terms and conditions of service
- ☐ Complaints and grievance procedure
- ☐ Telehealth or online session policy
- ☐ Social media and online contact policy
- ☐ Gifts, dual relationships and boundaries policy
- ☐ Ending therapy or closing a file policy
- ☐ After-hours and crisis contact information

Notes, or items to action:

# 2. Records and Data

*How client information is kept, stored and protected.*

- ☐ Record-keeping and retention policy
- ☐ Privacy policy compliant with the Australian Privacy Principles
- ☐ Privacy policy addresses any use of AI tools (for example, transcription, note-taking or admin assistants)
- ☐ Data breach response plan
- ☐ Secure storage for physical files
- ☐ Secure storage for digital files (encryption, backups, access control)

- ☐ Client access to their own records procedure

Notes, or items to action:

### 3. Professional and Legal Standing

*Your own registration, insurance and ongoing obligations.*

- ☐ Current registration or membership with a recognised professional body
- ☐ Adherence to your professional body's Code of Ethics
- ☐ Professional indemnity insurance
- ☐ Public liability insurance
- ☐ Formal supervision agreement or plan
- ☐ Continuing professional development record
- ☐ Mandatory reporting protocol for your state or territory
- ☐ Voluntary reporting practice, for situations where you are not a mandated reporter
- ☐ Working with Children Check (if applicable)
- ☐ Business name and ABN registration

Notes, or items to action:

### 4. Workplace Health and Safety

*Yes, this applies to sole practitioners too.*

Under Australian WHS law you are a “person conducting a business or undertaking” (PCBU) even as a sole trader, with a duty of care to yourself, clients and anyone else affected by your work.

- ☐ Risk assessment of your practice space
- ☐ Emergency and evacuation procedure

- ☐ Incident and hazard reporting register
- ☐ Manual handling and ergonomic workspace setup
- ☐ First aid kit and provisions
- ☐ Working-alone or personal safety procedure
- ☐ Psychosocial hazards and practitioner wellbeing policy

Notes, or items to action:

## 5. Financial and Administrative

*The business side that keeps the rest running.*

- ☐ Business insurance reviewed (public liability, professional indemnity, cyber)
- ☐ Tax and GST obligations understood and up to date
- ☐ Website terms of use and privacy policy
- ☐ Email marketing consent processes (Spam Act compliant)
- ☐ Succession or contingency plan for client files, should you be unable to practise
- ☐ Master list of all policy and template documents, noting where each is stored and when it was last reviewed

Notes, or items to action:

## 6. Legislation, Ethics and Compliance

*A starting reference, not an exhaustive legal summary.*

The list below points to the bodies and legislation most relevant to counsellors and therapists in Australia. It is general information only. If you are ever uncertain about a specific obligation, check directly with the relevant regulator or seek independent advice.

Professional Codes of Ethics

- Australian Counselling Association (ACA), Code of Ethics and Practice  
[theaca.net.au](http://theaca.net.au)

- Psychotherapy and Counselling Federation of Australia (PACFA), Code of Ethics  
[pacfa.org.au](http://pacfa.org.au)
- Australian Health Practitioner Regulation Agency (AHPRA)  
[ahpra.gov.au](http://ahpra.gov.au)  
If you hold registration with a National Board, such as psychology, that Board's own code of conduct also applies to you.

### Privacy and Health Records

- Privacy Act 1988 (Cth) and the Australian Privacy Principles  
[oaic.gov.au](http://oaic.gov.au)  
Counsellors and therapists are treated as health service providers under this Act, regardless of business size.
- State-based health records legislation  
[check your state or territory government website](#)  
Several states have their own additional health records law, for example Victoria's Health Records Act and NSW's Health Records and Information Privacy Act, so check what applies where you practise.

### Consumer and Business Law

- Australian Consumer Law  
[accc.gov.au](http://accc.gov.au)  
Governs your terms of service, consumer guarantees, and what your cancellation and refund policy can and cannot say.
- Spam Act 2003 (Cth)  
[acma.gov.au](http://acma.gov.au)  
Sets consent, identification and unsubscribe requirements for email marketing and newsletters.

### Unregistered Health Practitioner Regulation

- National Code of Conduct for Health Care Workers  
[administered by your state or territory health complaints body](#)  
Applies to practitioners not registered with AHPRA. See the state-by-state table over the page for your local body.

### Work Health and Safety

- Model Work Health and Safety laws  
[safeworkaustralia.gov.au](http://safeworkaustralia.gov.au)  
Sets national policy. WHS law is actually regulated and enforced by your own state or territory, see the table over the page. Victoria operates its own Occupational Health and Safety Act rather than the national model law.

### Mandatory Reporting (Child Safety)

- Reporting obligations for suspected child abuse or neglect  
[aifs.gov.au](http://aifs.gov.au)  
These vary significantly by state, territory and employment setting. "Counsellor" is not automatically a mandated reporter category everywhere, so check your own state's child protection legislation. If you are not a mandated reporter where you practise, you can usually still make a voluntary report, it is worth having your own clear practice for when and how you would do this.

### Business Registration

- ASIC, business name registration  
[asic.gov.au](http://asic.gov.au)

- Australian Business Register, ABN registration  
[abr.gov.au](http://abr.gov.au)
- Australian Taxation Office, tax and GST obligations  
[ato.gov.au](http://ato.gov.au)

State and Territory Contacts

Work health and safety and health complaints are both regulated at state and territory level.

| State / Territory | WHS Regulator              | Health Complaints Body                                        |
|-------------------|----------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------|
| NSW               | SafeWork NSW               | Health Care Complaints Commission (HCCC)                      |
| VIC               | WorkSafe Victoria          | Health Complaints Commissioner                                |
| QLD               | WorkSafe Queensland        | Office of the Health Ombudsman (OHO)                          |
| WA                | WorkSafe Western Australia | Health and Disability Services Complaints Office (HaDSCO)     |
| SA                | SafeWork SA                | Health and Community Services Complaints Commissioner (HCSCC) |
| TAS               | WorkSafe Tasmania          | Health Complaints Commissioner                                |
| ACT               | WorkSafe ACT               | ACT Human Rights Commission, Health Services Commissioner     |
| NT                | NT WorkSafe                | Health and Community Services Complaints Commission (HCSCC)   |

Professional Resource Disclaimer

This resource is intended to support professional practice management and does not constitute legal, financial or clinical advice. It does not replace independent legal advice, professional supervision or consultation relevant to your specific circumstances. Legislation, regulatory bodies and professional standards change over time and vary by state and territory, always confirm current requirements with the relevant body.

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