



St Vincent de Paul Society
NSW
good works



VINCENTIAN VISITATION & ASSISTANCE GUIDELINES

UPHOLDING THE DIGNITY OF THOSE WE ASSIST

PART 1 | 2025 EDITION

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Acknowledgement of Country

We acknowledge the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, the Traditional Custodians of this land, with deep respect. May the Elders, past and present, be blessed and honoured. May we join together and build a future based on compassion, justice, hope, faith, and reconciliation.



Document number: PO2021-001

Policy owner: ED, Membership, Volunteers, and Early Intervention. **Approved by:** State Council, St Vincent de Paul Society NSW

Date approved: July 2025 **Review date:** July 2028



Introduction: About these Guidelines

Welcome to the Vincentian Visitation Guidelines. The purpose of these Guidelines is to help new members, volunteers and employees understand the Society's approach to assisting people and to support existing members, volunteers and employees to develop their practice.

A core activity of members of St Vincent de Paul is visitation: the act of caring, listening and giving support to those who need it in communities across NSW. This happens in many ways: in the home, at Society sites and offices, outdoors on our Vinnies Vans runs, and in the community.

These Guidelines bring together the most important information for members of the Society to help them undertake this work.

It supports best practice in responding to people's needs and ensuring members, volunteers and employees have the support, training and structures at their fingertips.

The first part of the Guidelines outlines frameworks and support on conducting visitations and interacting with the people we assist (PWA). It complements regular discussions during Conference meetings about visits and other good works that members and volunteers engage in.

The second part of the Guidelines brings together key checklists, policies, procedures and other resources for members all in one place, with links as needed to these documents. This second part of the Guidelines is best accessed online on the MAVS website under **Conference Resources**. The second part has the most up-to-date versions of policies and other documents that support Conference work.

All Society personnel involved with our Conference Assistance and early intervention programs should familiarise themselves with the Guidelines. It is recommended that Central Council, Regional Council and Conference Presidents lead discussions within their remits to reflect on the contents, and any local support needed to ensure the implementation of these Guidelines.

Past Versions of the Guidelines

The Vincentian Visitation Guidelines were originally developed by experienced Vincentians from Conferences in metropolitan, regional and rural communities spread throughout the 10 Central Councils in NSW, in collaboration with staff from the NSW State Support Office.

We acknowledge and thank the Victorian State Council for allowing us to adapt their Guidelines as a template for drafting the New South Wales version (2015 and 2021 versions). The 2025-26 update has also been guided by consultations with the 10 NSW Central Councils and approved by the State Council.

Our Mission

The St Vincent de Paul Society is a lay Catholic organisation that aspires to live the gospel message by serving Christ in the poor with love, respect, justice, hope and joy and by working to shape a more just and compassionate society.

Our Vision

The St Vincent de Paul Society aspires to be recognised as a caring Catholic charity offering 'a hand up' to people in need. We do this by respecting their dignity, sharing our hope and encouraging them to take control of their own destiny.



Message from Peter Houweling

State Council President

Fellow Vincentians,

I commend to you the Vincentian Visitation Guidelines—a valuable and practical resource that supports our shared mission of serving others with compassion, dignity, and respect. These Guidelines reflect the lived wisdom and experience of our members across the Society and are designed to strengthen the way we walk alongside those in need.

Conference Assistance remains the Society's largest single program of support in NSW, reaching and positively impacting the lives of over 100,000 people each year. To all Members reading this document—thank you for the vital role you play in making that possible.

In a time of growing challenges—faced together and alongside the communities we serve—our work has never been more vital. These Guidelines provide practical direction, meaningful support, and spiritual grounding to help us continue our good works.



I encourage every Conference to read, reflect on, and apply this resource in the spirit of love and service.

A sincere thank you to the Member & Volunteer Programs Team for their valued contribution to this important and practical resource.

Kindest regards
Peter Houweling



Reflection from Leo Tucker on The Visitation

Spiritual Advisor to State Council, Executive Director Mission & Formation

A brief reading from the Gospel of Luke...

“At that time Mary got ready and hurried to a town in the hill country of Judea, where she entered Zechariah’s home and greeted Elizabeth.”

Within the Catholic faith tradition, the Church celebrates the feast of the Visitation. This feast celebrates the fact that after Mary’s Annunciation, when she was asked to carry the Christ child in her womb, she went to visit her cousin Elizabeth (who was also joyously pregnant) to share the news and assist Elizabeth in her last stages of pregnancy.

This visit was a moment of grace. The profound love of two people coming together to share the gift of life. Mary, who was now carrying her child, had much to offer and share with Elizabeth.

I remember that at the time my wife Anne was pregnant with our daughter Maddie, one of her sisters was also pregnant with their first child. During that period Anne and Susan visited often, sharing stories of the joy of feeling kicks and movements, the pains of backaches but also sharing the fears of the actual childbirth and delivery and whether they would be good mothers. They walked in each other’s shoes in loving support, laughter and reassurances.

Much would have been the same with this visit of Mary and Elizabeth, although in this account there was a profound difference in the relationship. Elizabeth, through the eyes of faith, recognises the coming birth of Jesus (the Incarnation); Why should I be honoured with a visit from the mother of my Lord? This is so much more than simply an account of relatives visiting. It actually becomes a proclamation of faith.

The Society from its inception in 1833 has shared and offered spaces of visitation with those whom we serve and those who are in our care. Visitations, even in our earliest days, have

been at the bedside, in the homes of those in poverty, in hospitals, orphanages, prisons, care homes, in the Vincentian home, in the street and even in the Luxemburg Gardens! Visitation was – and still is - wherever a Vincentian could “be kind and love, for love is your first gift ... if you have nothing to give, give yourself” as Rosalie Rendu professed.

So, as an organisation which provides service through ‘visitation’, what does this mean today?

If we understand and reflect upon the visitation as not just an act of kindness but as a spiritual moment of true charity, then the Vincentian can visit in any place or time. The visitation is not about a specific place but how we visit and support the PWA or family asking for assistance.

The visitation between Mary and Elizabeth has much to offer our thoughts and reflections for our way of visitation. It is deeper than the need to visit homes, for it is more than a place: it is a way of caring, supporting, alleviating poverty and walking with others in difficult times. It is a way of understanding that we see and visit Christ in the poor. Through this, our visitations become a vehicle of love, hope and faith shared and expressed.

Today through our assistance we support people both at our services and local centres as well as in their homes. We take on this spirit of visitation through our person-centred approach: Welcoming, Engaging, Collecting & gathering appropriate information, Assessing, Responding and then periodically Evaluating the impact of our work (the WE CARE model). Through these Guidelines, I hope that you will continue your commitment to the Vincentian spirit of visitation, as we listen to and walk with the people we assist towards stability, security and community connection.

PART 1: OVERARCHING GUIDANCE



The Rule

The Rule is a foundational document of the Society and it beautifully describes what is expected of Vincentians in serving those in need.

We provide material aid to people who are marginalised, lonely or disadvantaged; we also offer much more through our compassionate service, respect, love, kindness and friendship as we recognise in them the face and spirit of Christ. The Rule offers members a way of living and serving within the Vincentian framework.

The Rule is available online at:

www.vinnies.org.au/about-us/the-rule.



Definition of Visitation

‘Visitation’ refers to any planned interaction with the people we assist (PWA). As explained above in the message from Leo Tucker, visitation can take place anywhere, for it is more than a place, it is a way of caring, supporting, alleviating poverty and walking with others in difficult times.

Visitation is any planned interaction with the PWA with an intention of assisting them. It can occur at their homes or any designated location, such as support centres, Conference hubs, or care centres. It may occur over the phone or online, using technology to ‘meet’. The purpose is usually to assess a person’s immediate needs, understand their circumstances, and provide appropriate support. Some Conferences also undertake social visitations, providing assistance through conversation and connection that combats loneliness and isolation.

All visitations are conducted in pairs to ensure safety and shared wisdom, and to enable post-visit discussion. This is required by the Rule, is Society policy and allows members to depend on each other for different perspectives and support.

Members will also engage in unplanned interactions such as drop-ins or crisis requests. Unplanned interactions follow the same principles as outlined in the Visitation Guidelines.



Our Early Intervention Program: A ‘Hand-Up’ to People in Need

Conference visitation is part of the Society’s overall approach to supporting people in need. As much as possible, this work is about supporting people experiencing financial hardship and helping to move them back toward stability. Each year, Vincentians around NSW assist around 100,000 people and their dependants with food, essentials and other material assistance as part of our Early Intervention Program for people experiencing financial crisis. The formal objectives of this program are to:

- Intervene early when people and families experience financial crisis; to assist and accompany them towards stability, security, and community connection; and
- Deliver impactful, connected and responsive assistance, tailored to individual needs, to prevent further escalation of need at the local level.

A key part of this approach is to ensure that we are both assisting people with their immediate needs, such as food and essentials, and linking them to other supports or services that might be needed to help them move towards stability. This could include referring people to services such as Housing, Inclusion, Domestic Violence or Drug & Alcohol Services within the Society, or to other local relevant supports.

Early Intervention programs, like ours, exist to give people a ‘hand up’ – preventing escalation towards homelessness or deeper crisis.

“The people from Vinnies have helped me stay alive. I can’t say that any more clearly. They’ve helped me to stay alive with some sustenance for basic things, some help when a few bills got totally on top of me.” – 67-Year-Old Man¹

“When I was sick and couldn’t walk after surgery, Vinnies helped with meals. They can’t be your hands and feet, but having their support makes a difference.” - 46-Year-Old Woman²



Foundations of Visitation

Understanding the concepts and principles below, and applying them to all interactions, will allow members and Society personnel to provide support that is compassionate, respectful, effective and meets the varying needs of PWAs with dignity and care.

Equal Treatment for Everyone

Treat all PWAs with the same level of respect, care, and attention, regardless of their background, identity, or circumstances. Ensure everyone is treated equally regardless of gender, race, age, religion, sexual orientation, marital status, or disability. This fosters an inclusive environment where everyone feels valued and respected.

The Society serves those in need regardless of creed, ethnic or social background, health, gender or political opinions. (The Rule: Part I, 1.4)

Catholic Social Teaching Principles³

St Vincent de Paul is a lay Catholic organisation. While we are not a formal part of the Catholic Church, we are guided by its social teaching and principles which are grounded in social justice and in universal human rights.

Catholic Social Teaching Principles offer a comprehensive, broad and accessible framework for addressing social issues. These principles are a summation of Catholic Social Teaching and provide a lens through which people can evaluate and act on social, economic, and political issues. They offer valuable and important guidance for members as they undertake the work of the Society.

Whilst not exhaustive, the seven Catholic Social Teaching Principles below cover a wide range of social issues as they relate to the work of the Society:

- 1. Dignity of the Human Person:** Every person has inherent worth and dignity and is created in the image and likeness of God. This dignity is inviolable and is not contingent on any external factors such as wealth, status, race, gender or disabilities. Recognising the dignity of every person compels us to ensure our mutual well-being and to advocate for human rights that are common to us all. This principle reinforces the importance of ensuring all are treated equally, with dignity and respect.
- 2. The Common Good:** This principle refers to the conditions that allow all people to reach their full potential and to thrive. It emphasises the social conditions that enable people to flourish. It demonstrates that we are more connected than we are separated. Concern for our neighbour is paramount in working towards benefits for the entire community.
- 3. Preferential option for the poor and vulnerable:** This principle calls for a special concern and priority for the needs of people experiencing poverty and vulnerability (people at risk). It is grounded in the belief that God chose to identify acutely through the experiences of the oppressed and excluded. It seeks to include all people without exclusion.
- 4. Participation and Community:** This principle recognises the right and responsibility of all people, without exclusion, to take an active role in the social, economic, and political processes that impact on them. Humanity is social, and the ways we live together affect the dignity of each person and the progress of society. We are therefore called upon to support people to take control of their destiny through our assistance and works.

¹ Person assisted by members of the Society between July 2023–June 2024, interviewed in 2024 as part of research by the McKell Institute on the effectiveness and impact of the work of members of St Vincent de Paul in NSW. Full report available at: [mckell_immediate-aid_final_spreads.pdf](#)

² Op. cit.

³ This section has drawn on *The Vincentian Way: A framework for formation on the mission, purpose, and identity of the Society of St Vincent de Paul*, January 2025, with thanks to the Australian National Council of St Vincent de Paul.

5. **Solidarity:** This principle recognises other people as our brothers and sisters and contributes to the common good. It is the commitment to stand with and for others, particularly those who are suffering or oppressed. It recognises that all human persons are interconnected and interdependent. It calls on us to accompany people living in poverty and experiencing vulnerability across national, racial, religious and ideological boundaries.
6. **Subsidiarity:** This principle holds that matters are handled at the level closest to people most affected by decisions and policies. Subsidiarity respects local autonomy and is informed by the competency and authority of decision-makers. It respects the ability and rights of individuals and local communities to be involved in decision making. Subsidiarity is informed by ‘participation’ and ‘solidarity’ to ensure that everyone has a place at the table to participate in decision making.
7. **Care for the Environment - Our Common Home:** calls us to care for the Earth and to use the resources entrusted to us responsibly. This principle highlights the connection between the environment and people experiencing poverty or vulnerability, recognising that environmental degradation often disproportionately affects the most vulnerable. It reflects the belief that we are entrusted to maintain the well-being of creation through sustainable acts of love.

The Society is committed to creating a safe, inclusive and supportive environment for all Vincentians and people we assist. In meeting State and National regulatory requirements, other foundational principles include:

Safeguarding Vulnerable Children, Young People, and Adults

“The Society helps the poor and disadvantaged speak for themselves. When they cannot, the Society must speak on behalf of those who are ignored.” (The Rule: Part 1, 7.5)

Relevant legislation: The Children and Young Persons (Care and Protection) Act 1998

The Society strives to work with the wider community to prevent all forms of abuse against children, young people and Adults at Risk and

to ensure that the inherent dignity, care and wellbeing of all vulnerable people are upheld. The Society has zero tolerance for behaviours and practices that harm children and Adults at Risk, including acts of violence, abuse, neglect, bullying, coercion and exploitation.

We have policies and procedures in place to detect and prevent abuse, neglect, and exploitation of children, young people, and Adults at Risk. As a lay Catholic organisation, we’re also implementing the National Catholic Safeguarding Standards, which are closely aligned to the NSW framework.

Members engage with children, young people and Adults at Risk in different ways. This includes Conference visits to homes, social visits, working directly with school-age children in our youth programs, working with people who have a disability, working in our residential services or in our retail stores.

Members play an important role in ensuring children, young people and Adults at Risk are safe from abuse and must develop practical skills in protecting children and responding to disclosures.

If a child, young person or adult has disclosed domestic or family violence (DFV) or sexual abuse, it is in the best interests of the person we assist to respond in a sensitive and appropriate manner. For instance, if the PWA is female, ensure that only female members attend the home visit.

Members have a responsibility to complete the compulsory Safeguarding module on the Society Members and Volunteers (MAVS) website. It is important that all members complete this module so the Society meets its Duty of Care obligations. The learning module can be found on your dashboard when you log into the MAVS website. Further information on Safeguarding can be found in Part 2 of these Guidelines, or on the [MAVS website](#).

Always remember that if you have any concerns about the welfare or wellbeing of a child, young person, or vulnerable adult, you have a responsibility to report these to a qualified professional who can assist. We have a Safeguarding Team to help you: for any questions or concerns, contact the team at safeguarding@vinnies.org.au or 1800 4 SUPPORT (1800 478 776).



Privacy and Confidentiality

“Members observe the utmost confidentiality in the provision of material and any other type of support.” (The Rule: Part I, 1.8)

Relevant legislation: The Privacy Act, 1988

Respecting privacy is essential to building trust and protecting the dignity of PWAs. As members of the St Vincent de Paul Society, we are often entrusted with personal information. We recognise that individuals have the right to control how their information is collected, used, and shared. When people place their trust in us, we are called to uphold that trust by handling their information with confidentiality, integrity, and with the same compassion and care that guides all our work.

To help meet privacy law requirements members can complete their privacy training on the [MAVS website](#) or in-person with the local staff team. In addition, a checklist is available in Part 2 of these Guidelines.

Understanding and Respecting Cultural and Social Diversity

“The Society promotes understanding, cooperation and mutual love among people of different cultures, religions, ethnic origins and social groups, and so contributes to the peace and unity of all peoples.” (The Rule: Part 1, 7.7)

Relevant legislation: The Anti-Discrimination Act 1977

In line with the value we place on common human dignity, it is important to seek to understand, and not to judge, people who come to the Society for support and assistance. This extends to ensuring that the language we use is always respectful, whether during a Visitation or any other activity such as a meeting.

To enhance this important foundation of Vincentian work, Conferences are encouraged to develop a deep understanding of the cultural, ethnic, and religious communities that make up the local communities that they serve. Joint activities or invitations to connect and develop greater understanding are a good way to do this, as well as engaging with other local groups that serve a similar purpose to the Society, such as local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Community Controlled Organisations. It is recommended that members complete the Djurali training and Diversity and Inclusion training on the [MAVS website](#) to gain a deeper awareness of First Nations peoples and other communities in your area.

The Conference Assistance Management System (CAMS)

In NSW, the Society uses an online system called the Conference Assistance Management System (CAMS) to keep information about PWAs safe and to ensure support is provided and recorded consistently across the State. Some Conferences have a dedicated person or people to enter data into CAMS.

CAMS is used to:

- Store information about PWAs safely and securely
- Record interactions and assistance provided to PWAs
- Record and update case notes
- Record referrals made internally and externally
- Record circumstances of PWAs so we understand some of the challenges they may be facing
- Run reports of the interactions and assistance given in real time.

Staff in your local Region can provide training on the CAMS system. If you have an issue or question about the system itself, you can email cams.support@vinnies.org.au

Responsible Assistance

“No work of charity is foreign to the Society. It includes any form of help that alleviates suffering or deprivation and promotes human dignity and personal integrity in all their dimensions.”
(The Rule: Part I, 1.3)

The Rule and Frederic Ozanam’s writings make it clear that he and his companions, and those who followed, were committed to giving much more than material goods to those in need. His words invite us to enter a dialogue and relationship with those we serve, and to give of our time and our presence in our encounter with PWAs.

A key method of doing this is to **listen carefully** to those we assist, and to develop an understanding of their needs and circumstances as fully as possible. This will help foster trust with the people and communities we assist and usually occurs over more than one visit or interaction.

Developing this understanding also allows members to consider the broader assistance that might help an individual or family to move from financial crisis back toward stability. This might be advocacy to help with bills or rental payment plans, support with Centrelink, or connection to other local professional services such as mental health, drug and alcohol support, homelessness services or financial counselling.

This is the true meaning of offering a ‘hand-up’ rather than a ‘hand-out’.



Step-by-Step Guidance to Visitation: The 'We Care' Framework

Members have been delivering excellent service for decades. The We Care Framework brings together and describes some of the shared knowledge and experience that members have grown over the years through their interactions with the people we assist.

The Catholic Social Teaching Principles combine with the We Care framework to guide our interactions with the people we assist, whether people are contacting Vinnies for the first time or participating in a planned visitation.

The following section guides members through a step-by-step process of supporting people during visitations. It involves five steps:

1. Welcome
2. Engage and Collect Information
3. Assess
4. Respond
5. Evaluate

Step 1: Welcome

When we first interact with PWAs, whether by phone, at a hub, support centre, or their home, we need to make them feel comfortable, welcome and not judged. Our aim is to provide assistance in a timely and respectful manner.

It is important to understand that the person we are assisting may be experiencing **trauma, grief, modern slavery, and/or a disability**. These factors can impact someone's behaviour, ability to absorb information, their decision-making or capacity to communicate. A smile and respectful listening contribute immensely to a successful interaction.

Reassure the PWA that we will help where we can and that patience and understanding are the best way to work with us (threatening, aggressive or violent behaviour is not acceptable). See Part 2 for more information on these ideas.

Ideally, our first interaction with a new PWA would occur on the phone or at a Vinnies Support Centre (VSC) or Conference site rather than in their home.

When interacting with a PWA, one of the first steps is to check CAMS to see if we have worked with this person before and what, if any, relevant information we hold.

Scheduling a Visitation or Interview

Once the PWA has made initial contact with the Society, setting appointments for a visitation or interview makes supporting the people we assist easier for several reasons:

If the members who will conduct the visitation do not have access to CAMS, you can send them the information they need (the proposed interview date and location, and any important notes) to the Conference mailbox or directly to a member's Society email address (@vinnies.org.au).

In some cases, members may have been requested to arrange a visitation with a PWA but are unable to make contact with them. For example, members may phone a PWA but not have their calls answered or returned. It is recommended that in this instance, members attempt to contact the person **four times**, using different methods, if possible, such as calling, texting or sending an email, before making a note that the person was unable to be contacted.

Preparing for a Visitation or Interview

Before interacting with a PWA, consider what information you have, or don't have, what materials you might need, what risks, challenges or opportunities might arise.

- As above, **check the CAMS system** to see if we have worked with this PWA before and if there is any relevant information about the PWA that you need to know.
- When rostering, consider **matching Vincentians** with the people being assisted wherever possible. For example: a woman who has experienced domestic or family violence may feel more comfortable with female members assisting them.
- When conducting home visits, members **must visit in pairs**, and it is recommended that one member is a woman.
- A member may over-identify with the PWA. In this case, it may be necessary to **swap with** another member. Consult with Conference Presidents on such decisions.
- Nominate a member of your Conference to **check in** with before and after the visitation – it is important to follow safety protocols to ensure support if an incident occurs on site.

- **Always read alerts and notes** in CAMS ahead of a scheduled visit.
- Collect relevant material such as the **Privacy Policy**, service flyers, **welcome packs** and the **PWA Charter of Rights and Responsibilities** (under development) to share with the PWA.
- See Section 2 for more information on working with cultural or other groups you haven't engaged with previously.

Remember that personal information about PWAs can only be sent from or to @vinnies email addresses. Referral forms are used to communicate between organisations about PWAs.

Risk Assessment

Since there are risks involved in visitations to homes and other sites, members conducting visits need to complete the **Visitation Risk Assessment Checklist tool** before visiting for the first time and regularly thereafter. This Checklist can be found on the MAVS website under Safety & Wellbeing.

- Ensure you are also familiar with the **Safe Home Visitation and Outreach Policy** and the procedures for members and volunteers.

Boundaries

Clear and respectful boundaries help protect both members and the people we assist. Clarity on where we can and cannot provide support helps to create safe, consistent, and fair relationships while minimising miscommunications, peer pressure and more serious incidents or allegations.

- Focussing on the purpose of support, not personal gain or dependency, helps to keep relationships fair
- Avoiding personal, financial or social arrangements outside our role as a member helps to manage PWA expectations and keeps both groups safe e.g. not accepting social media invites from PWAs
- Using Conference telephone and emails and following referral and escalation processes ensures the Conference can continue to assist the PWA beyond your shift

- Seeking guidance early if a situation feels unclear, uncomfortable, or complex shares the responsibility and helps the PWA to access the help they need

Please refer to the **Code of Conduct** for more information.

Tasks to include at the Welcome stage

- Introduce yourself with calm friendliness and ask about the PWA's wellbeing
- Reassure the PWA that you will help where you can
- Check CAMS to see if the PWA's profile already exists and review the information
- Enter basic profile details into CAMS and schedule a visit using the 'new interaction' feature on CAMS
- Communicate the details of the interview or visitation to the PWA and the documents they need to bring
- Respect Privacy and Confidentiality laws when dealing with people's information
- Consider who are the most appropriate members to be present
- Check in with a Conference member before and after the visit
- Apply the WE CARE framework to support people's dignity and choice and respect boundaries
- Check cultural protocols and book the TIS hotline if interpretation is needed
- Carry out a Risk Assessment before first visits and regularly thereafter.

Step 2: Engage and Collect Information

The next step is to engage directly with the person being assisted to open the discussion and get to know them, taking the time to understand what matters to them and any concerns they may have. These conversations can be positive and meaningful for everyone involved and can contribute to better outcomes for the people we assist.

Aim to be welcoming and approachable, while also remaining calm, respectful and professional. Trust is built through listening, honesty and consistency, so be clear about what you can and cannot do and avoid making promises or commitments that cannot be met.

Conference Practices on facilitating visitations

Conferences use various models of assistance when responding to PWAs. Some members operate from a Care and Support Centre or Hub. Others go to the home of the PWA or visit PWAs in a hospital or care facility and still others undertake visitations over the phone.

Visitations at Home

- **Visit in pairs** to ensure safety, shared wisdom and post-visit discussion.
- If you **feel unsafe**, neither enter the premises nor undertake visitation. Alternatives can include meeting at a Care and Support Centre, VSC or Hub, or in a public place or by phone.
- **Introduce yourself** – we encourage you to wear a Society badge and refer to the PWA's initial request for a visit in your introduction.
- **Select a seat within easy reach of the exit** and keep a comfortable distance throughout.
- **Respect privacy** throughout the visit.
- During the visit continuously **scan and assess the environment** for potential hazards and risks during visitations. Refer to Checklist 4 – Member Safety in Part 2 of this document.
- If a PWA behaves in a **threatening manner**, immediately terminate the visit and exit the premises. Make sure to **create an alert in CAMS**.
- **Avoid transporting PWAs** in your personal vehicle – use only vehicles belonging to the Society.

Visitations in a Care and Support Centre or Hub

- Create a comfortable environment – use rooms that contain comfortable seating and lighting and provide a quiet, private space, if possible.
- During the visitation, position yourself in an optimal place to promote an equal relationship with the person while being able to move away quickly if needed. For example, sit around a table near the door rather than behind a desk.
- Visit in pairs – similar to a home visit, always have two members present of an appropriate gender.
- Where possible, **offer tea**, coffee or water.

Collecting Information

After the initial welcome and engagement, members collect information to help better understand the needs of the PWA and to meet government reporting requirements.

When completing a person's profile in **CAMS**, some questions are mandatory and it's helpful to explain this to the PWA at the start of your conversation.

Before collecting information, always ensure the person being assisted has given their **informed consent**. There is wording to guide conversations about consent within CAMS and on interview sheets. People have the right to decline, though this may limit the help we can offer.

Examples of information collected for reporting purposes include age, gender identity, First Nations identity, disability status and languages spoken at home. Other information, like housing situation or issues with drugs or alcohol, helps the Society to understand the PWA's specific needs.

Under Vinnies' Privacy and Records Management obligations, personal information must be collected respectfully, recorded accurately, stored securely, and only used for appropriate purposes.



Core Principles for Effective, Safe & Respectful Recording of PWA Information:

1. Be factual, objective and clear;
2. Record only what is necessary and relevant (data minimisation);
3. Write promptly and ensure accuracy;
4. Reduce paper record-keeping.

Any **original information** provided by the PWA (e.g. Centrelink statements) is returned to the PWA. In most cases, it is suitable to sight a person's documents without taking a copy, but where a copy is taken it should be stored securely until it can be uploaded into CAMS and then the copy should be destroyed.

Responsibly recording information about the PWA is an essential part of supporting people with dignity, and respect while also meeting our legal obligations. High-quality records protect the people we assist by minimising harm, preventing misinterpretation, and ensuring sensitive information is stored, accessed, and shared appropriately.

Please note that all records in CAMS are legal documents that may be accessed by court order.

Refer to Checklist 2 for more information on each of the Principles for collecting information safely and effectively or refer to the [Privacy Management Policy \(internal\)](#) or [Records Management Policy](#).

Tasks to include at the Engage and Collect Information stage:

- Explain the Privacy Policy and PWA Charter of Rights and Responsibilities. Seek verbal or written consent. CAMS has a privacy collection statement in the Contact page which you can read to the person.
- Explain to the PWA that we strive to provide a safe environment for everyone and expect patience and understanding.
- Manage expectations by briefly outlining the range of support that can be considered.
- Explain why we collect personal information and how we identify the support that is right for them.
- Collect and record profile information, circumstances and case notes into CAMS.
- Apply the Core Principles for effective, safe & respectful recording of PWA Information

Step 3: Assess

Once you have collected key information about the PWA seeking assistance, their needs and circumstances, the next step is to assess the supports that we can offer.

Most often, this involves providing food or other essential items such as clothing. It can also include referrals to Vinnies Services or other community organisations, support with energy bills through the Energy Accounts Payment Assistance (EAPA) Scheme or a No Interest Loan (NILS), and/or support with medical costs, transport or other household items. See Part 2 for more information.

Furthermore:

Promote self-sufficiency

Vincentians endeavour to help the poor help themselves whenever possible, and to be aware that they can forge and change their own destinies and those of their local community.

(The Rule: Part I, 1.10)

In providing 'a hand up', the Conference helps to change someone's situation, sometimes for the long term. 'A hand up' may involve advocacy to facilitate access to much needed medical assistance or developing life skills by helping people to stay in education or encouraging someone to find employment. It is important at Conference meetings to discuss and agree upon various methods of assistance.

Key things to consider:

- **Conferences** can determine what limits to set on their assistance according to available resources and need to communicate any limits to the PWA compassionately, fairly and consistently.
- **Managing expectations:** set clear expectations about the support you can and cannot offer, including the types of assistance, the process involved, and any limitations. If required, indicate to the PWA that you may be able to refer them to another service or organisation. Managing expectations helps to prevent disappointment and frustration and fosters a collaborative approach to problem solving.
- Recognise that many people have **complex needs** that may be exacerbated by other factors such as accommodation, health,

employment or financial issues. PWAs with complex needs may require professional support and referral to a service that provides counselling, social work, drug and alcohol counselling or chronic health education.

- Encourage PWAs to engage in **supportive programs** or other services. This may involve referring them to programs or services that can build their skills or capacity. If members are unsure about what services and support may be appropriate, contact Vinnies Assist at 13 18 12 (Option 5) or the Safeguarding Team at safeguarding@vinnies.org.au / 1800 478 776.

Respect the choices of those we visit:

- **Help without judgement:** Maintain a clear distinction between *needs assessment* and any views you may hold about the choices or decisions of the PWA.
- **Avoid pre-conceptions:** Try to approach each case with an open mind.
- **Ensure all communication is respectful:** This includes when you cannot meet a PWA's expectations: if a Conference decides that a PWA is to receive reduced assistance, their requests for specific kinds of assistance cannot be met, or in some circumstances that assistance cannot be provided, communicate the decision in a respectful and compassionate manner. Prepare beforehand a list of local services who may be able to assist and share with the PWA.

Tasks to include at the Assess stage:

- In collaboration with the PWA, identify the best options for them based on the information provided.
- As far as possible, provide a range of options the PWA can choose from.
- Consider any complex needs and/or contributing factors to the person's situation.
- Seek opportunities to encourage self-reliance when people are ready to take the next step.
- Handle discussions with considerate, non-judgemental language to reduce frustrations.

Step 4: Respond

Responding to the needs of the people we assist

When we respond to the needs of PWAs, it is important that we take an early intervention approach. When we offer people a hand up rather than a hand-out, we help them to address their needs before they escalate to a crisis point, while also supporting them towards longer-term stability and self-sufficiency.

To achieve this, it may be necessary to refer people to other services. Because PWAs often present to us with complex needs, ensure that you:

- Agree on a plan of action. This may involve organising referrals or advocacy with other organisations;
- Provide the relevant assistance;
- Inform the PWA about any follow-up that will be taken;
- Schedule follow up appointments if required;
- Enter assistance and referrals into CAMS;
- Record information on the CAMS circumstances page and enter appropriate case notes.

People have the right to decline assistance from the Society.

If a PWA indicates that they want to decline our assistance, reassure them that you will respect their decision. If appropriate, try to explain the impact of their decision – for instance, this may limit the help we can offer – or provide additional information to help them make an *informed* decision. We cannot, however, force people to accept our assistance.

Referrals

A referral happens when we connect a PWA to another service for additional support. The service may be **internal** to the Society, such as a Conference or the Matthew Talbot Homeless service, or **external** to the Society, such as Westhaven Disability Services. Referrals may include requests for help with clothing, financial aid, housing support, legal aid, mental health or any other community services.

Making a referral

If you are planning to make a referral, the following tasks are helpful:

- Explain the benefit of **connecting** the PWA to another service.
- Ensure the PWA gives their **express consent** before you share their information as part of a referral. (Exceptions to this include reporting concerns to **the Safeguarding Team**, or when it may be necessary to report concerns about a person's well-being to the *police*.)
- Confirm that the service provider can provide that service and complete any relevant referral process or forms.
- Complete the steps to **record** a referral in CAMS.
- **Provide** information to the PWA on next steps – for instance, how and when the service will communicate with them - or how they can access the service if they prefer to access it themselves.

In some regions, such as Sydney Metropolitan Region, referrals are mostly made at Vinnies Support Centres (VSCs). VSC staff can assist members with additional referrals as required.

It is useful to develop a **local referral network** to help you respond to issues that lie beyond the expertise or resources of the Conference and maintain a file with information on external and internal providers that is regularly updated. Vinnies Assist is developing a State-wide tool to further assist Conferences with service and network information in your region.

Vinnies Assist (13 18 12) can also be contacted for information about internal and external referral networks, referral pathways, or to make referrals on your behalf. Client Support Officers, your local Society Regional Director, and your Central Council can also provide resources and advice.

If, during a conversation, you believe that making a referral is a good option for the PWA, there are several ways to do this. One way is to support the PWA with a **soft referral**. That is, provide the contact details of a service who may be able to assist with the expectation that the person will contact the service when they are ready. In this case, have business cards, flyers or the service's contact details handy and only use this approach with people who aren't ready to disclose or accept more formal help yet.

Advocacy

Advocacy is about **speaking up, influencing, or taking action** to help improve outcomes for the people we assist. On occasion, the PWA may not feel heard, able to access services, or able to speak for themselves. For members, advocacy can look like:

- **Listening carefully** to someone's experience and taking it seriously;
- **Raising concerns**, describing barriers, or escalating requests through the appropriate channels on their behalf;
- **Sharing accurate information** to help people and services understand available options, for instance, distributing Tenants' Rights information;
- **Facilitating fair and respectful treatment**, for instance, reminding providers of PWA rights to access services;
- **Helping improve systems or services** by feeding back what is not working for the PWA to service providers;
- **Tapping into Conference networks** to identify alternative pathways.

Advocacy is most effective when it is **respectful, informed and centred on the wishes of the person being supported**. Ideally, members collaborate directly with PWAs when advocating to model and foster the skills required to **self-advocate**. Organisations such as **Self Advocacy Sydney Inc.** provide free training in self-advocacy (for people with disabilities).

Community Advocacy or Lobbying

Conferences, under the leadership of the **Conference Presidents**, regularly build relationships with local leaders, community groups, networks and forums as well as with legislators and government bodies. Such activities aim to influence broader systems and policies on behalf of whole communities and increase the effectiveness of the Society's social justice priorities. Contact your Conference President or explore our **Society's Advocacy page** if you would like to know more.

Feedback and Complaints

Effective management of feedback and complaints can help ensure we maintain good relationships with PWAs and enables us to improve the ways in which we offer assistance. Feedback can include suggestions, concerns, observations, unverified information, or praise.

How feedback or complaints can be made:

- A Feedback and Complaints Form is available on the **Vinnies website** through a QR code;
- PWAs, Members and the Public can also email **complaints@vinnies.org.au** to express general feedback or complaints to the Society;
- Members can share feedback or complaints specific to member experience via:
mavs.support@vinnies.org.au (MAVS and Learning)
cams.support@vinnies.org.au (CAMS)
member.programs@vinnies.org.au (Member Programs)

It is important to ensure PWAs have access to information about how to provide feedback or make a complaint and are supported to lodge a complaint if they would like to do so. Per the **PWA Charter of Rights and Responsibilities** (under development), making a complaint does not impact a PWA's service. Speaking up is part of a fair and respectful service and people are not penalised for raising concerns.

Receiving complaints: when receiving a complaint, record it and refer it through appropriate channels:

- Local matters are referred to the relevant Council President;
- Complex or serious complaints are escalated to the Complaints Resolution Officer, who supports fair and timely resolution.

Complaints and actions taken are investigated and recorded in line with Society processes. Where appropriate, specific complaints can be summarised in PWA profiles in CAMS.

If a PWA or member raises a complaint with you:

- **Listen respectfully** and calmly, without interrupting;
- **Acknowledge** their concern without agreeing or disagreeing with the details;
- **Do not investigate**, judge, or promise outcomes outside your role;
- **Explain** the available options for providing feedback or lodging a complaint;
- **Support** the person to access the complaint process if they wish;
- **Refer** the matter on to the appropriate officers of the Society;
- **Respect Privacy & Confidentiality** and Recording Information principles (see Section 2).

Members and volunteers are not expected to resolve complaints by themselves. In practice, this means listening, supporting and ensuring concerns are passed on safely and appropriately.

Responding to Conflict

Different points of view can bring stronger decision making and deeper understanding between people. However, different points of view, system issues, misinformation, or unmet expectations can also create stress and anxiety. If conflict arises during a Visitation:

- **Acknowledge** the person's point of view and/or feelings. Rather than saying that you 'understand' it can be more helpful to acknowledge the person's experience, for instance, "I can hear how frustrating/difficult/tough this has been for you.";
- **Reassure** them that we will help where we can;
- **Summarise** the key issues;
- **Provide assistance** as appropriate – start with what we *can* do before moving onto what we *can't* do;
- **Make a referral** to an appropriate service where we cannot provide further assistance;
- **Remind** the PWA they can give feedback or make a complaint with no impact on their service.



It is okay to take time to listen and acknowledge without trying to find a solution to every issue. You can respectfully bring a conversation to a close once next steps are clear.

Be alert to early signs. If the PWA is using a raised voice, repeated or circular arguments, personal attacks or is physically agitated, it may be time to:

- take a break
- hand over
- remind the person of the PWA Charter of Rights and Responsibilities or
- end the visit

Be mindful of your own emotions and aim to maintain a calm, measured response. Lowering and quietening your own voice can help de-escalate tension.

After the visitation:

- Record the incident in CAMS and make a report in the IRMS
- Report the incident to relevant Conference officers
- Debrief with a trusted member to understand the situation, share insights and consider whether a different approach may help next time.

Always prioritise safety:

- Be aware of your surroundings and position yourself near an exit
- Follow incident response protocols and avoid being alone with PWAs
- Exit the visitation if behaviours escalate or you are uncomfortable
- Call 000 in an emergency or if behaviours escalate

Responding consistently, emphasising helpful behaviours (patience, understanding) and referring to Conference guidelines can help reduce frustration more generally.

For other types of conflict, please refer to Conference President and/or local staff.

Ending a visitation

End the interaction in the same way that you began, by being polite and unhurried. Check to see that your notes are complete before you see the next PWA. Consider any appropriate follow-up if a referral has been made.

- **Summarise** any agreements, actions or visitation details with the PWA;
- **Review** the interaction and **record** relevant details in the PWA's CAMS profile, including any case notes. Paper records can be used provided they remain on Society premises and are safely stored per **Privacy, Confidentiality and Recording Information principles**;
- **Handover** paper records to Conference or Staff officers to input information into CAMS;
- **Close** the interaction on CAMS unless there is further assistance pending or referrals to be followed up;
- **Shred** any paper copies once relevant information has been recorded in CAMS;

Case Notes

As you interview and interact with the people we assist (PWA), you will likely need to take some notes. There is a space for notes in CAMS and in the printed forms used by Members of the Society when they undertake Conference work. These are usually called Case Notes. Writing effective Case Notes is a standard practice across the community services sector. These records may be accessed by authorised staff, the PWA themselves and, in some circumstances, by court order. Clear, accurate notes help ensure safe, consistent, and respectful support.

Before recording any information, always ensure the person being assisted has given **informed consent** – usually at the Engage stage. Guidance on how to discuss consent is available in CAMS and on interview sheets. People have the **right to decline** to share information, particularly sensitive details, and this decision can be recorded in their Case Notes.

What to include in Case Notes: Case Notes focus on information that helps the Society understand a person's needs and provide appropriate support. Notes may include:

- **Factual observations** (what you saw or heard);
- **Direct quotes** where relevant;
- **Key issues** that impact their situation such as housing arrangements, DFV Safety Plans;
- Information related to **health, alcohol or other drug use**, *where relevant to assistance*;
- **PWA goals**, plans and progress such as employment outcomes, *where we assist that goal*;
- **Agreements made**, actions taken or referrals made.

Core principles for effective Case Notes

As for "Collecting Information", when recording people's personal details, we need to:

1. **Be factual, objective, and clear** - avoid opinions, assumptions, or unnecessary detail;
2. **Record only what is necessary and relevant** - data minimisation;
3. **Write promptly** and ensure information is accurate;
4. **Reduce paper record-keeping** by using approved systems where possible.

Under **Vinnies' Privacy and Records Management obligations**, personal information must be collected respectfully, stored securely, accessed and shared appropriately.

Refer to Checklist 2 for more information on each of the principles for collecting information safely and effectively or refer to the **Privacy Management Policy (internal)** or **Records Management Policy**.

Tasks to include at the Respond stage:

- Respect a person's right to decline assistance, limit information sharing, and make a complaint without impact on their service.
- Explain referral options, provide local referrals, confirm service availability and communicate next steps.
- Advocate for the PWA as required by speaking up, highlighting barriers and supporting access to services.
- Ensure PWAs know how to give feedback or make a complaint.
- Handover complaints and incidents to Conference or Staff officers.
- Handle complaints and conflict with calm acknowledgement, a summary of the issue and factual records. Assist or refer where possible and prioritise safety.
- End a visitation kindly by confirming agreements, actions and timeframes with the PWA.
- Record the interaction in CAMS – effective case notes and records are timely, factual and relevant. They do not reflect member opinions or perspectives.
- If paper records are used, shred them as soon as the information is transferred to CAMS.
- Foster PWA self-reliance through a 'hand-up' approach, collaboration and support for their choices.



Step 5: Evaluate

It's important to evaluate, reflect and improve as we interact with PWAs. The Society does this at local, regional and State level.

Conference Reflections

Each Conference meeting includes a reflective discussion on the support given to local PWAs and any lessons learned, new information or ideas about ways to improve.

Regional and State-wide Evaluation

At the Regional and State-wide level, the Society uses the data and information collected on our client system, CAMS, to help us determine key trends and the outcomes we are achieving. This data helps us to see how many people we are assisting as well as key demographic information. We also undertake a full Impact Evaluation of the support provided by Conferences every two years, which includes surveying PWAs.



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VINCENTIAN VISITATION & ASSISTANCE GUIDELINES

UPHOLDING THE DIGNITY OF THOSE WE ASSIST

PART 2 | 2025 EDITION

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Purpose: Part 2

Welcome to Part 2 of the Vincentian Visitation Guidelines.

Part 1 provided guidance around applications of our Mission, Vision and The Rule; best practice for visitations in the home or in a care and support centre; safeguarding and safety; respecting people's choices; giving a hand up and protecting people's privacy.

Part 2 brings together key checklists, policies, procedures and other resources for members all in one place, with links as needed to these documents.

This second part of the Guidelines is best accessed online on the [MAVS website](#) under Conference Resources.

The second part has the most up-to-date versions of policies and documents that support Conference work, Duty of Care and Risk Management.

Part 2 will be updated periodically.

“Vincentians endeavour to establish relationships based on trust and friendship. Conscious of their own frailty and weakness, their hearts beat with the heartbeat of the poor. They do not judge those they serve, rather they seek to understand them as they would a brother or sister.” (The Rule: Part I, 1.9)

Glossary

- CAMS: Conference Assistance Management System (database of client information)
- EAP: Employee Assistance Program
- EAPA: Energy Accounts Payment Assistance
- IPTAAS: NSW Isolated Parents Travel and Accommodation Assistance Scheme
- MAVS: Members and Volunteers Website
- MVEI: Membership, Volunteers and Early Intervention
- NILS: No Interest Loan Scheme
- PWA: Person/People We Assist (clients)
- SVDP: St. Vincent de Paul (also known as 'the Society' or 'Vinnies')
- TIS: Translating & Interpreting Service
- VSC: Vinnies Support Centre



Looking after ourselves and each other

Vincentians must look after each other if they hope to help others effectively. The Society structure supports its members. It is the collective responsibility of Councils and Conferences to create a nurturing environment for members and volunteers.

A key role of Councils is to provide members and volunteers with the information, tools, and resources that help them provide effective assistance to people experiencing disadvantage.

Individual members demonstrate their personal responsibility to the Society and to those they serve by becoming knowledgeable about the practices of their Conference and those of other organisations in the local area.

Supportive Practices

- Fostering a culture where the needs and well-being of a member's family are met is the first priority. As The Rule states:

The Vincentian vocation affects all aspects of members' daily lives, making them more sensitive and caring in their family, work, and leisure activities. Vincentians are available for work in the Conferences only after fulfilling their family and professional duties. (The Rule: Part I, 2.6)

- Supporting flexible ways in which younger members can maintain a connection with their Conference, while they manage competing responsibilities associated with work, study and raising a young family. For instance, Conferences can host some meetings outside office hours, allow members to attend meetings via video call and be sensitive in Conference communications to the competing demands all members must manage.
- Promoting Vincentian spirituality so that it enhances, refreshes and becomes a living part of a member's personal spiritual journey.
- Offering support to members who are experiencing personal difficulties.
- Inviting the **Conference Spiritual Advisor** to offer their insight and support in situations that may be difficult or challenging.

The spirit of poverty and encouragement:

Members of the Society are united in the same spirit of poverty and of sharing. They encourage one another to live a profound spiritual life and to share in the spirit of prayer. For this purpose, the role of a Spiritual Advisor is very important. (The Rule: Part I, 3.13)



Looking after ourselves and each other continued:

- Members are encouraged to share what they can reasonably do or feel comfortable doing. Members have not let the Conference down if they have personal limitations, for instance, if members decide to not take on activities that are more appropriately handled by a professional their decision will be supported.
- Referral is an important part of our Vincentian work. It enables the PWAs to access professional advice and support. Conferences should develop a list of referral agencies that can assist with emotional, practical, or financial issues.
- Allow sufficient time in meetings for members to debrief and discuss their visits. It is important to affirm and support members in their decisions, recognising that the assistance they give is based on their assessment of the situation. Discussing decisions, joys, concerns and doubts creates a supportive and growth-filled environment for all.
- Members can become emotionally drained because of a particular situation and may need to step back, both for their good and that of the PWA. If members feel disheartened or overwhelmed, help is available from their fellow Conference members.
- Particular situations affect individual members differently. Debriefing during a Conference meeting may not always be sufficient to ease a member's mind. In such cases, members can speak to their Conference President or a Mission, Spirituality and Pastoral Care Partner, or call the Employee Assistance Program (EAP) for a confidential discussion.
- Conferences are alert to the potential of personality clashes between their members and the people they assist and adjust their manner of assisting people as required.
- At times, a member may become over involved in a situation and risk losing their perspective. In this situation, the Conference President may wish to discuss alternative arrangements with a member.
- Always implement and monitor safe visiting practices.

Prayer Before Visitation

*Vincentians pray that the Holy Spirit may guide them during their visits and make them channels for the peace and joy of Christ.
(The Rule: Part I, 1.7)*

Here is an example of a prayer that assisting teams might share before a visit:

Prayer Before Visitation

*Lord, where two or three are gathered in your name you are in our midst.
Walk with us now as we journey with the people we assist today.
Be our support as we are your hands, feet and heart.
We ask this prayer in the name of Jesus.*





Share the Workload

Well designed workloads allow for the maximum benefit to the PWAs while also protecting the well-being of members. Ensuring that no team has more visits in a session than they can reasonably manage enables members to be fully present and to offer effective assistance.

A healthy growing Conference shares the workload and gives all members opportunities to participate and live the Vincentian life. Regional Councils have a particular role in helping Conferences adopt good practices.

Visitation must always be done in pairs and regular rotation of teams is recommended.

Conferences experiencing heavy workloads might consider:

- Recruiting new Members or Associate Members.
- Enquiring if there are any Youth or Young Adult Members seeking service opportunities.
- Seeking assistance from other Conferences that may have more members or fewer visits.

Similarly, if your Conference is not experiencing a heavy workload, consider supporting a Society service, Hub or VSC that is close enough to travel to if possible. Members can also assist by volunteering to provide over-the-phone support, such as through the No Interest Loans Program or conducting interviews for EAPA vouchers. Contact your local staff team to find out about these opportunities.

Involving New People in Our Service

Associate members or volunteers may be recruited to help share the load.

All new applicants are required to satisfactorily complete a:

- * Member Application Form,
 - * Working with Children Check (WWCC),
 - * National Criminal History Check ('Crime Check' or 'Police Check')
- and** provide the contact details of two referees. The Society covers the cost of National Criminal History Checks for volunteers.

Conferences may choose to recruit for specific roles. These can include Call Coordinator, Treasurer, Statistics Officer, or Secretary. This can free up other members of the Conference to conduct visitation. For example, a Conference Call Coordinator can organise calls and visits while a Statistics Officer can assist the Conference to record data on visits and assistance provided and generate reports.

Provide a Safe Environment for Work Health and Safety

Implementing and monitoring Society approved Work Health and Safety practices ensures that Conferences can continue to assist people in need.

All visitations must be carried out by active members as required by both the Rule and NSW State Council policy. Visiting people alone could compromise the Conference member, the PWA, and the Society. Visiting as a team enables support for one another and a partner to discuss the visit afterwards.



If you feel unsafe, neither enter the premises nor undertake visitation. In an emergency, call 000.



Provide a Safe Environment continued:

Alternative sites to meet PWAs include Care and Support Centres, VSCs or Hubs, in a public place or over the phone. If a PWA behaves in a threatening manner, immediately terminate the visit and exit the premises.

Visiting with at least one experienced member helps to ensure the work is approached with empathy, compassion, and respect, recognising that people accessing our services and programs are likely to have experienced trauma and loss.

Conferences will ensure that visiting members are well briefed on past incidents such as previous calls or work health and safety concerns. This information is available in CAMS by clicking on the 'Alerts' feature on the profile page.

It is every member's responsibility to create an alert when they come across a situation that warrants it, for example, if a PWA is at risk of domestic or family violence; people are behaving aggressively or the location is unsafe.

Avoid transporting PWAs in personal vehicles. Use the Society's pool vehicles if transport is required.

Members need to report all work health and safety hazards and incidents to the Conference President and complete and lodge an online or [WHS Incident Report Form](#) which can be accessed from the MAVS website. All members are encouraged to regularly review and be aware of relevant WH&S safety guidelines for visitation. [WHS Hazard Report Form](#) or [WHS Incident Report Form](#) which can also be accessed from the MAVS website.

It is important that members complete their safety induction compliance training, which can be found on the members' dashboard on MAVS website. Members are also advised to read the [Health and Safety Policy](#).

Members have the right to be safe and it is acceptable for a Conference to refuse to assist if their safety is compromised.

Employee assistance program (EAP)

The Employee Assistance Program (EAP) is a professional counselling service that is available to all members and volunteers. It offers confidential, short-term support for a variety of work-related and personal problems that may be affecting you at work or at home. The EAP gives you access to qualified professionals, including psychologists, social workers and management support counsellors. You can book an appointment [online](#) or by calling 1300 687 327.

Affirm and support each other in Conference meetings, remembering that assisting teams are free to make the decision they believe is the right one at the time. This autonomy to make decisions at a local level is consistent with the principle of subsidiarity which applies to the Society as a whole organisation.

To affirm each other, it is helpful to:

- Remember that some Members, Associate Members and Volunteers may not be Catholic and there may be a need to respect differences.
- Mentor new members in the Vincentian

- Celebrate or acknowledge National Volunteer Week, Member birthdays, anniversaries, and special events including the Feast days of our founder, Frederic Ozanam, and our patron, St Vincent de Paul.
- If possible, host member retreat days and prayer and reflection events on evenings, mornings or afternoons to nurture the relationship members have with God and with one another as an Association of the Christian Faithful.
- Attend together external retreat, prayer and reflection opportunities, such as *Taize* prayer evenings, E-Conferences, Zoom workshops and Reflection Days.



Nurture Each Other

The members meet as brothers and sisters with Christ in the midst of them, in Conferences that are genuine communities of faith and love, of prayer and action. Spiritual bonds and friendship between members are essential, as is the common mission to help the poor and marginalized. The entire Society is a true and unique worldwide community of Vincentian friends. (The Rule: Part I, 3.3)

approach. Find ways for more senior members to mentor and share their experience and knowledge, to act as guides and to encourage newer members.

- Encourage members to take advantage of Vincentian formation, learning and development opportunities and seek out training opportunities in the local community.
- Encourage members to attend Annual Masses, member gatherings, commissioning ceremonies, for new Presidents and new Members. Conferences may wish to honour long-serving members with service badges, and/or acknowledge years of service with certificates and anniversary celebrations.
- Appoint a member of the Conference to keep in touch with sick and inactive members and organise a Conference roster to visit them.
- Encourage social activities among the members, and consider including their spouse, partner, or family.
- Attend annual Society events, such as the annual Rosalie Rendu Forum, with other members or together as a Conference.



Enrichment Opportunities

We encourage members to continually develop and update their skills. This can be done through formal training via a course available through the MAVS website learning portal or via a face-to-face workshop. On the other hand, informal training occurs through discussions at Conference meetings and by partnering new members with more experienced members.

The NSW State Council is committed to providing the most appropriate support to members so they may respond in the best possible way to the PWAs. It is the responsibility of Central Council, Regional Council and Conference Presidents to ensure that both new and more experienced members complete learning and development activities.

The Membership, Volunteers and Early Intervention (MVEI) Learning Team is developing learning opportunities for members to broaden their knowledge and skills. New learning opportunities will be communicated via the MAVS website and staff in the regions. Members can also find further information about learning and development opportunities and resources on the MAVS website or contact mavs.support@vinnies.org.au for further information.

Staying in Touch

The Society issues publications and distributes correspondence through the MAVS website, by email and by mail. This assists members to stay in touch with what is happening in the wider Society. Conference Presidents support members to have access to these communications.

For example, *The Record* is a publication that informs members about what is happening in the wider Vincentian family at the national and international level. Some Conferences may wish to use articles from *The Record* for discussion during Conference meetings.

The Society publishes the *Vision Magazine* and distributes it to NSW Conferences, Centres, and Special Works twice a year. This publication shares with members a wide variety of news stories and events from across New South Wales.

The Vincentian is the Society's NSW official member newsletter. The *Vincentian* is published quarterly and provides members with important updates on what is happening in the membership space. It includes recent news stories and operational information from dedicated members and support staff across the State. It can be found on [MAVS](#) under Resources / Publications.

The [national website](#) for the St Vincent de Paul Society offers a range of information and resources. *The Record*, *Vision*, Spiritual Reflection guides and other publications are available under 'News and Stories' on the NSW homepage.

Checklists, Policies and Learning

The next section of the Guidelines provides a wide range of checklists and guidance notes, as well as links to key policies and learning modules for members within the Society. This section will be updated as needed and shared online via [MAVS / Resources / Conference Resources](#).



Checklist 1: GIVING ASSISTANCE

The information below is for **guidance only**. A foundational principle of the Society is that local Conferences and members are best places to make decisions about levels and frequency of assistance for their own communities within the broader framework of the Society's Mission and programs. Conferences are encouraged to develop local guidelines and checklists for assistance that take into account community circumstances and needs.

Conferences can determine what limits to set on their assistance and communicate it to the PWAs with compassion. Being transparent about how limits are determined ensures consistent and fair services between PWAs.

1. Frequency of assistance

To determine the frequency of assistance:

- Review the past interactions and number of times that the person has been assisted, ahead of time if possible.
- If a person has been assisted recently, ask questions, such as:
 - I can see that we assisted you within the past two weeks, can you tell me more about what is happening that means you need this assistance again?
 - Is there some other way we could assist you or an additional way we might assist?
 - Consider whether they have a specific need at present, such as a medical problem, that would require higher support for a period of time or whether they have ongoing needs
 - You may also wish to refer this person to your local staff team or VSC for a discussion about their ongoing needs
- A review of our data in CAMS shows that generally, people can require around 5 instances of assistance before they move back to a more stable position. If you are seeing a person or family frequently, this is a good time to consider additional referrals and other supports. Refer to Section 1: Referrals or reach out to your Conference President or local Society Staff Team for assistance if necessary.

2. Circumstances of the People We Assist

- Consider the family structure and size, as well as any caring duties
- Consider the circumstances or nature of crisis that the PWA is facing holistically, for example are there medical circumstances, mental health, employment, past-trauma, grief and loss, or other factors contributing to the situation?

Assistance Guidance: EXPENDITURE

Please note that the list below is *not exhaustive* and there are other assistance types and items in CAMS.

Remember also that when providing assistance of any type, it needs to have the appropriate approvals.

All expenditure must be approved by two members or by a member and an employee.

In addition, amounts greater than:

- \$1,000 are approved by the Conference Treasurer or President
- \$3,000 are approved by the Regional President
- \$10,000 are approved by the Central Council President and Regional Director
- \$30,000 are approved by the State Council President.



Checklist 1: GIVING ASSISTANCE continued

MATERIAL ASSISTANCE: FOOD

For food vouchers a *minimum of at least* \$50 for an individual living alone is recommended, and an additional *minimum of at least* \$50 per additional person living in the household.

Note that \$50 can support one person with food for only a few days, so if a person needs support through food for longer than this, the amount can be higher.

When issuing a **Store Card**, ensure it is recorded on the store card register, and in the person's client assistance record on CAMS.

Key items in food parcels are determined at the local level, based on community knowledge and need. Ensure any preferences or needs are taken into account (i.e. vegetarian, coeliac, halal) and ask questions to ensure cultural preferences are accounted for in key items.

Conferences consider budgetary constraints when ordering food for pantries and food parcels and use Food Bank and 'Woolworths At Work' systems for ordering. You can get help with setting this up at procurement@vinnies.org.au.

RENT, BOND, CRISIS ACCOMMODATION

The Society's [Rental Assistance Guidelines](#) on MAVS can be used to identify suitable rental assistance options for PWAs.

These Guidelines outline the questions to ask and help to provide referral and advocacy support to ensure that PWAs are receiving **sustainable solutions as the first priority**. Once these avenues are exhausted, rental assistance can be considered.

Importantly, also consider whether there is the real prospect of the client being forced into homelessness if the default continues. This needs to be balanced against the likelihood of long-term security of tenure by paying the current accommodation arrears and/or whether other supports such as advocacy and referrals need to be made.

The most common amount provided within this type of assistance is currently around \$1,000.

CLOTHING & HOUSEHOLD ITEMS

These items are generally accessed through **Vinnies Retail Shops** by issuing a Vinnies Gift Card. Conferences can find out how to access, order and use the Vinnies Gift Cards by contacting:
supplycentre@vinnies.org.au

Furniture and linen in Sydney metropolitan areas can be ordered through the Vinnies Shop Manager, Central Council Office or Vinnies Support Centre (VSC) for more information.

Conferences also purchase other pre-paid cards (Kmart cards, for example) for clothing and household items. Contact your local regional office to undertake this process.



Checklist 1: GIVING ASSISTANCE continued

WHITE GOODS & APPLIANCES

These are expensive items and in the first instance the capacity of the person being assisted to use a No Interest Loan (NILS) needs to be considered. Information about the Society's NILs is available on the [MAVS website](#).

If the circumstances of a person or family are such that white goods and appliances are needed, the Society has an account with The Good Guys, and this provides discounts on key items such as fridges and washing machines. To order these, contact your local Vinnies Shop Manager or the Procurement Team on procurement@vinnies.org.au.

Where an individual or family need multiple white goods, consider working with them to approach another local agency for additional white goods, such as Wesley Mission, GIVIT or the Salvation Army. Be sure to check if delivery is included in their service.

REMOVALISTS

This type of assistance can be needed from time to time but is generally rare. Where possible, co-contributions are requested of the person being assisted for this type of assistance. Conferences can consider assistance in the range of \$500, depending on need and distance, for this type of assistance.

PHONE ASSISTANCE

Two types of phone assistance are available to keep people connected to their service:

- **Telstra Bill Assistance Program** provides people facing financial hardship with two options: direct debit or non-direct debit. You will need to contact Telstra's Specialised Assistance Team via email at: specialassistance@online.telstra.com.au



UTILITY BILLS

Encourage your Conference to adopt or utilise the **Energy Assistance Accounts Payment (EAPA) scheme** or contact utility providers to access hardship and concessions schemes prior to using Society funds.

The Society is an EAPA provider and can provide over-the-phone support through **Vinnies Assist** on our 13 18 12 number.

To learn more about the scheme, check the [EAPA page](#) on the MAVS website or contact Member Programs at: member.programs@vinnies.org.au.

PHARMACY, MEDICAL, DENTAL and Optical assistance:

This type of assistance can be vital for some people. Conferences sometimes set up an account with a local provider. Members can ascertain what concessional dental and optical services are available for those we serve.

Checklist 1: GIVING ASSISTANCE continued

TRAVEL EXPENSES and FUEL COSTS

These can be subsidised to assist with attending medical appointments, school or emergencies and can be determined locally by Conferences.

For ongoing travel over 100kms related to medical appointments, Conferences can make use of the [NSW Government Isolated Patients travel and Accommodation Assistance Scheme \(IPTAAS\)](#). You can provide the online link or paper copies of the application to the client.

Similarly, [Can Assist](#) will provide petrol cards to cover travel for anyone with any type of cancer.

To support children to access school, enquiries are sent to Transport NSW for bus or train passes. Reimbursement options are available for complex cases.

To support First Nations families to attend funerals within NSW, the [Aboriginal Funeral Transport "Sorry Business"](#) initiative will provide assistance with transport.

*It is important to note that assistance such as **international and interstate airfares are not provided**, especially when children are involved as air travel can pose a risk of modern slavery.

Please check with your local Conference for local transport programs or pathways.

EDUCATION SUPPORT

This may consist of education allowances or back-to-school backpacks for school age children. Adults can be provided an allowance for further education or return-to-work programs.



FUNERALS

The Society sometimes supports funeral costs for people we have assisted or for family members of PWAs with a contribution of up to \$1000. We may also seek out other local agencies to help support these costs depending on need and circumstances. This type of expense is ideally organised before a funeral has taken place.

Note that PWAs may also be able to apply for a range of payments and support through Services Australia to support them through the loss of someone close to them. Information is available [here](#).



Checklist 1: GIVING ASSISTANCE continued

NON-MATERIAL ASSISTANCE

Sometimes the best assistance is just providing encouragement. Non-material support such as helping someone navigate services or connecting them with the right person can be the difference between a **hand out and hand up** and have a real impact on someone's life.

INFORMATION and ACCESS

On occasion, people need assistance to complete forms, contact agencies or the relevant NSW or Commonwealth Ombudsman. Supporting people to access the right information and services is an important part of visitation.

INDIVIDUAL ADVOCACY

Involves 'speaking up' for an individual PWA or family. This might include talking with energy providers or contacting credit card companies with, or on behalf of, someone we are assisting.

SYSTEMIC ADVOCACY

Involves 'speaking up' at a community, system, policy or government level to help address the root causes of poverty and disadvantage. It may involve meeting with decision makers to discuss the need for adequate income support or lobbying for more bulk billing by GPs.

REFERRALS

As noted in the We Care section of Part 1, making referrals to other Society Services, local providers or external services is a key part of Conference Assistance. When working with PWAs, consider what connections or services they might need and **record the referrals you make in CAMS** or on your interview interaction record.

From mid 2026, you will be able to access **training on Referrals** for Members on MAVS.

Conferences maintain an updated list of internal and external referral resources such as housing providers and mental health services. **Vinnies Assist is developing a State-wide resource** that will assist Conferences to locate appropriate support for the PWA. Vinnies Assist can also help Members with information on appropriate referral pathways for PWAs.



Vinnies Assist operates Monday to Friday from 8:30 am to 4:30 pm and can be contacted on **13 18 12**, option 5, or via email at: vinnies@vinnies.com.au.



Checklist 2: RECORDING PWA INFORMATION

CORE PRINCIPLES

Responsibly recording information about the PWA is an essential part of how the Society supports people with dignity and respect.

Clear, factual and intentional recording of information ensures continuity of support, accurate assessment of needs and the safe, lawful handling of personal information.

High-quality records also protect the people we assist by minimising harm, preventing misinterpretation and ensuring sensitive information is stored, accessed, and shared appropriately.

Under **Vinnies' Privacy and Records Management** obligations, personal information must be collected respectfully, recorded accurately, stored securely and only used for appropriate purposes.

Before recording any personal information, ensure you have **obtained informed consent** from the PWA. Sharing information must always be voluntary with the option to decline or withdraw at any time. Where consent is provided, please note this clearly in the case record.

More detailed guidelines are currently under development and safe practices will be shared in upcoming training. If you have any questions, please contact:
member.programs@vinnies.org.au.

Essential Links:

[Privacy Management Policy \(internal\)](#)
[Records Management Policy](#)

1. Be factual, objective and clear

Record only what was discussed, sighted or provided, without assumptions or commentary. When citing notes, avoid judgement, criticism, or moral assessments (e.g. tidiness, appearance), or commentary on lifestyle choices (e.g. substance use, pets). Use inclusive, plain and verifiable language to maintain accurate, reliable records while reflecting our Vincentian responsibility to help without judgment.

2. Record only what is necessary and relevant

Record only the information genuinely needed to provide assistance, ensure safety, or support referrals. Sensitive or third-party information such as medical or financial data, should only be included when it is essential to the support being provided and appropriate to record (a process called data minimisation).

3. Write promptly to ensure accuracy

Record key information as soon as possible after the interaction. Timely notes reduce errors, support safety and ensure documentation accurately reflects the situation without relying on memory. Update records promptly if new information arises or clarifies earlier notes.

4. Reduce paper record-keeping

Physical copies of information about PWA which are uploaded to CAMS should be securely destroyed (e.g. draft visitation notes). Any original information provided by the PWA such as Centrelink statements, should be returned to the PWA. In most cases it is sufficient to sight a person's documents without taking a copy. Where a copy is taken, it should be stored securely until it can be uploaded and then the copy should be destroyed.



Checklist 3: PRIVACY

Respecting people's personal information is part of caring for the people we assist and ourselves. This checklist outlines simple steps to ensure personal information is collected, used and stored safely and respectfully.

- If you are contacting PWAs using your mobile phone, do not give out your private number. Go to your phone's settings and put your phone onto 'private number'. If you have not done this before, your phone company, a staff member or a fellow Conference member can assist.
- Prior to collecting any information about a PWA, ensure we have their consent. This can be done by providing the person we assist with a copy of the Privacy Collection Notice and explaining its contents. A record of a PWA's consent needs to be maintained. Do not mislead or use pressure to gain personal information from PWAs.
- Ensure, as far as possible, that you maintain the accuracy and currency of personal and health information of PWAs.
- When taking notes, only capture information that is relevant to your assessment of a PWA's needs for assistance.
- Keep in mind that PWAs have a legal right to request access to the personal information we hold about them. Requests for access to personal information are directed to the Privacy Officer via privacy@vinnies.org.au.
- Explain to PWAs the situations in which you may have to disclose information they have shared with you without their consent, for example, for child protection purposes and to law enforcement agencies.
- Do not collect and save government IDs or issued documents (eg CRN statement, driver's license, Medicare card) when it is best practice to sight documents by two members. Record that this document was sighted.

- Only record information from a document where it has a purpose to assist the person and is necessary for the Society to provide the services or assistance requested.
- Do not include information in CAMS where it is *not relevant* to the assistance you are providing to the PWA, particularly if it references other people or opinions about other matters, e.g. "My aunty has been incarcerated".
- Upload documents to CAMS only where it is explicitly required.
- Do not leave PWA files displayed where they may be viewed by others, including on computer screens. Records are stored in a secure location, on Society premises. Once information about a PWA has been entered into CAMS completely and in full, any hard copy notes or forms from the interview/interaction can be securely destroyed or shredded.
- We must keep all personal information records securely for 7 years from the last date of interaction when they are without incident.
- Do not read PWAs' files that are not relevant to your role.
- Always seek a PWA's permission to refer them to another organisation or services.
- Do not discuss a PWAs' information with others, unless you have their consent to do so as per [SVDP NSW Privacy Policy](#)
- Always delete information you may have recorded from the PWA from your personal devices after you have interacted to ensure that you protect the PWA's data from harm.



Checklist 3: PRIVACY continued

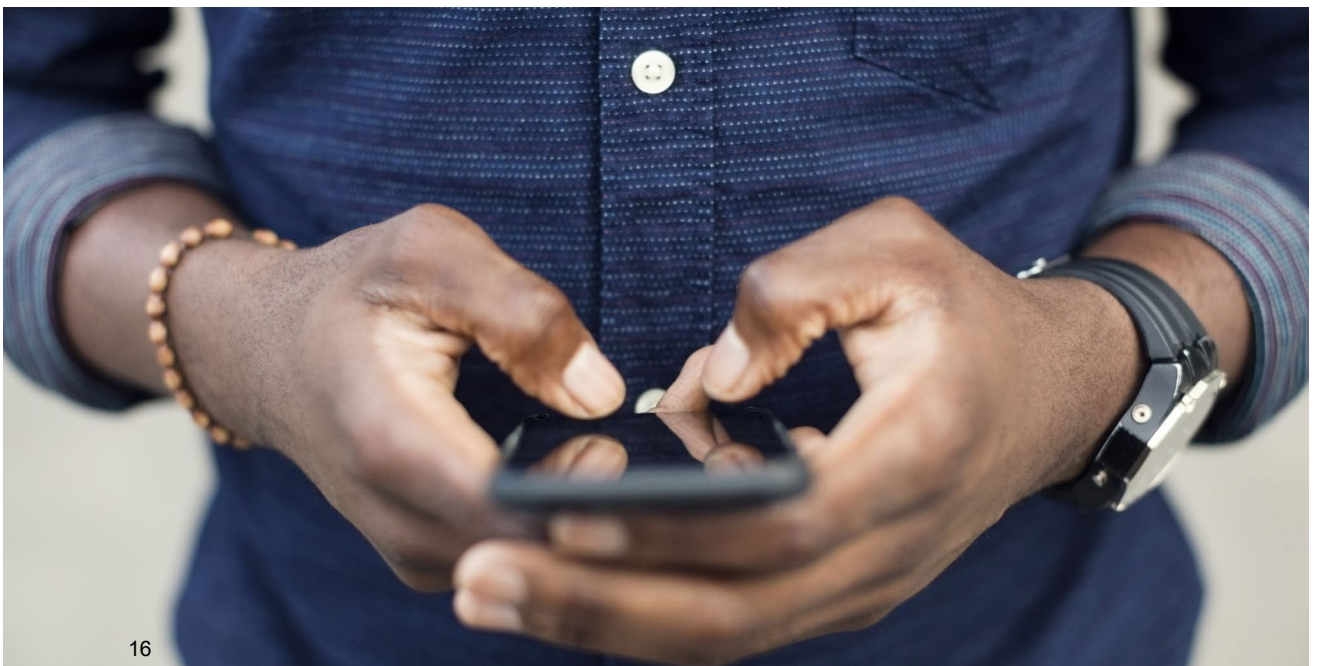
PLEASE NOTE:

The Society is responsible and accountable for all information collected that can identify a person.

Always consider how you collect, store and protect this information. Ask yourself: Could this information be seen by someone who should not have access to it?

The need to store information securely applies to all formats including phones, laptops, tablets, notebooks and post-its. Ensure any device used for PWA interactions is protected appropriately, including basic cyber security measures.

- Every time information is recorded or photographed, (including in SMS or emails in a device) it can include personally identifying information that is governed by the [Privacy Act](#).
- Every time any information is opened and downloaded onto a device, it is then stored on that device. This may include personal information that must be carefully protected and safeguarded. It does not need to be printed out for it to be at risk. It is recommended that download folders in all devices are cleared on a regular basis (for e.g. monthly).





Checklist 4: MEMBER SAFETY DURING VISITATION

Members need to understand how to keep themselves and others safe during visitations. Knowing how to identify risks, maintain safe positioning, respond to unsafe behaviour, and follow safety protocols helps protect wellbeing, prevent incidents, and ensure visits are carried out responsibly and confidently.

MINIMISING RISK WHEN CARRYING OUT HOME VISITATION

If you are carrying out a **home visitation**, you can minimise risk before, during, and after the visit by applying the Safe Home Visitation and Outreach Risk Assessment, summarised below:

BEFORE VISITATION

- If the person is an existing PWA with a profile on CAMS, check CAMS for any WH&S alerts on the person's profile page.
- If the person, or another member of the household, has a history of aggression, assess whether the visit is necessary, record the decision and the reasons.
- Assess whether the venue is safe. When it is unsafe to meet at the person's home, book an appointment to see them at a Care and Support Centre, VSC, or Hub. As a last resort, meet at a public venue.
- Prior to the home visit, nominate a member of your Conference as the check-in person, in consultation with your Conference President. This person is someone you can call or text each time you begin and finish a visit. After completing the home visit, let them know you have arrived home safely. The check-in procedure requires the check-in person to call members after one hour if they have not checked in.

DURING VISITATION

- Always conduct home visits in pairs: having at least one experienced member present helps to carry out safe home visitations.
- Confirm the PWA is at home before visiting and ensure they provide their consent before entering the premises.

- When you arrive, drive past the house to gain an awareness of available exits. Park your vehicle in a safe and secure location with no chance of being blocked in and avoid driveways. Avoid remaining in the car for prolonged periods before or after the visit.
- Wait for the door to be opened. Calls to 'come in' can indicate danger.
- Assess the property to identify possible hazards. Common hazards include broken paving, unknown persons living in or visiting the premises, unleashed dogs, clutter and construction or repair work.
- Always use gates and pathways, and respect people's property. Check that there is adequate lighting on stairwells and when entering a building or premises.
- Ensure members of your Conference know where you are going and when.
- Be aware of your surroundings and the location of the nearest exit. At all times, ensure there are no obstacles between you and the exit.
- When you enter the premises, make sure the door is not locked behind you. Assess the location of any dangerous items and ensure you make a record of any safety risks, either at the time or after the visit.
- Carry with you a mobile phone with a fully charged battery.
- Remain aware of the environment and your potential escape routes in case of emergency.
- Be aware of locks on any doors and know how they work (observation in most cases will be sufficient).
- Ensure you do not leave car keys or personal belongings in a place accessible to others.



Checklist 4: MEMBER SAFETY DURING VISITATION

AFTER VISITATION

- Record all interaction details including potential hazards or risks, such as aggressive behaviour, risks associated with the property or other safety risks on CAMS.
- Create an alert if necessary.
- Report any identified risk, hazard or incident on the Society's Integrated Risk Management System (IRMS).

IF YOU FEEL UNSAFE:

- Leave the premises immediately.
- If you have other concerns, such as an unsafe or unhygienic environment for people living in the home, report this immediately to your Conference President or your regional staff. In some circumstances this may warrant a safeguarding report being made, including when children reside at the property, and in other circumstances the Society may be able to assist with other appropriate supports for this household.

IF A PERSON RECEIVING ASSISTANCE BECOMES ABUSIVE:

- If you feel unsafe, politely end the interaction immediately by exiting the home or requesting that the person exit the Society premises.
- If possible, explain that assistance can only be provided when everyone involved is acting calmly and respectfully toward each other.
 - Keep your own tone calm to assist in de-escalation.
 - If the situation warrants and de-escalation is impossible, ring the Police (Dial 000) and explain the circumstances.
 - Conferences may consider refusing assistance for a period of time to individuals who have acted in an abusive manner, particularly if this has occurred on more than one occasion.



If you feel unsafe, please stop work. In an emergency, call 000.

AT ALL TIMES:

- If you feel unsafe, you have permission to stop work.
- If during a visitation you feel your safety is at risk or uncomfortable, politely inform the PWA you have to leave.
- If you observe someone working in an unsafe manner, raise the matter politely and respectfully with the person involved.

IF YOU ARE PHYSICALLY/ VERBALLY THREATENED:

- Call the Police if the situation warrants it.
- When you return to your car, ensure all windows are closed and all doors are locked.
- If it is unsafe to drive away, sound the horn long and loud and, if appropriate, ring the Police (Dial 000) on your mobile phone.
- If it is considered safe to drive away, proceed to the nearest Police Station.
- Do not leave the car until it appears safe to do so.
- Report the incident to your Conference President.

Additional Resources:

The Safety and Emergency Management Team have developed a [Safe Home Visitation and Outreach Risk Assessment Tool and Checklist](#). This is a handy pocket guide for members to use.

The [Home Visit and Service Outreach Policy and Procedure](#) is available on MAVS.



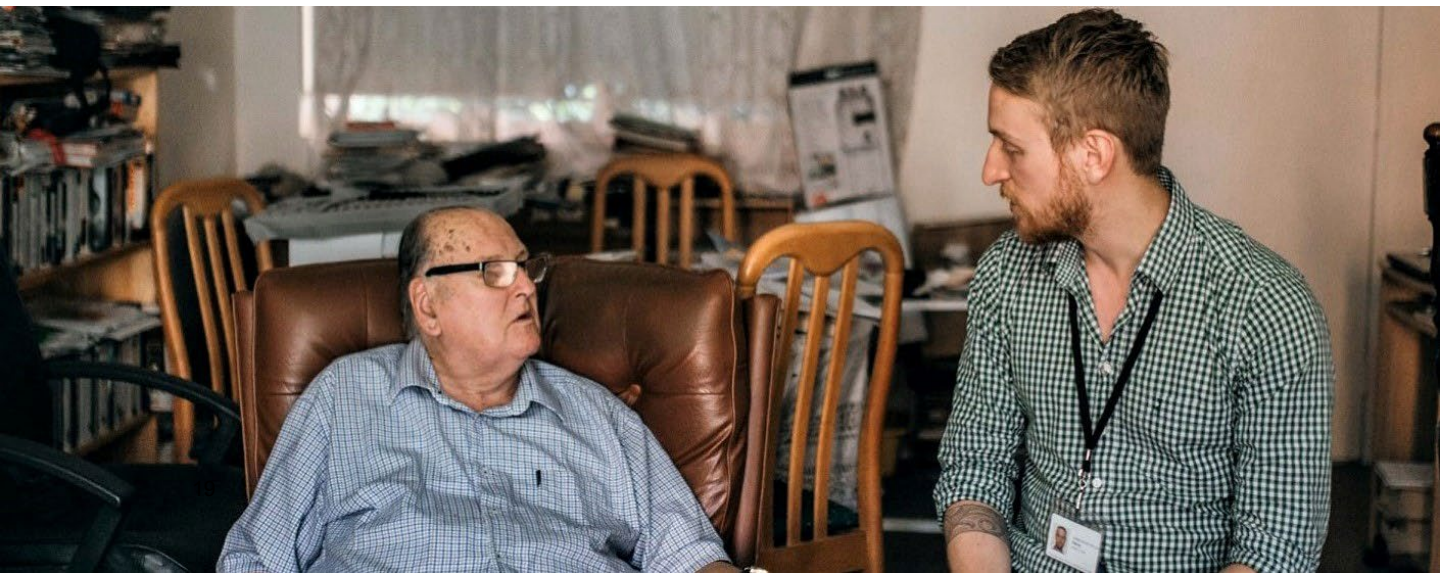
Checklist 5: COMMUNICATION SKILLS

Strong communication skills help members build trust, show respect, and support clear, compassionate interactions with the people they assist. Understanding how to listen, engage, and maintain healthy boundaries strengthens relationships and ensures assistance is delivered with dignity.

- Ensure that members who visit PWAs have access to all relevant information held by the Conference. You can view the PWA's details and past interactions in CAMS.
- Use an interview room to minimise disruptions during interviews.
- Supportive listening begins with body language. Turn your body towards the PWA. Have a relaxed posture and do not use distracting gestures. Make eye contact.
- If visiting in a home or another location, always call to confirm the visit beforehand. If you are using a private mobile phone, phone number blocking is recommended to maintain appropriate boundaries. Check with your phone carrier on how to do this. If there is a concern the PWA may need additional support, consider providing them with the number to the Vinnies Assist Helpline (13 18 12 option 5).
- Explain who you are. Always wear a St Vincent de Paul Society name badge displaying your first name only, and offer a simple introduction such as, "We are local volunteers from the St Vincent de Paul Society, a Catholic voluntary organisation."

USEFUL TIPS WHEN LISTENING:

- Occasionally repeat what the PWA says, including acknowledging their feelings
- Paraphrasing what the PWA says to check back and ensure that you have understood them
- Allow enough time for each visit
- Be aware of any cultural differences. For example, in some cultures direct eye contact may be considered impolite. You can learn more about different cultures and their practices using the free [Cultural Atlas](#).





Checklist 6: CROSS CULTURAL COMMUNICATION SKILLS

Members often meet people from a wide range of cultural and linguistic backgrounds. Being aware of cultural differences, language needs, and respectful approaches helps members communicate effectively, avoid misunderstandings, and create inclusive, culturally safe interactions.

- Avoid stereotypes and value judgements based on cultural difference.
- Be aware of cultural differences in verbal and non-verbal communication styles, for instance, direct eye contact is considered offensive in some cultures. You can read resources in the [Cultural Atlas](#) guide. It provides free online resources with detailed information about cultural practices and norms for many cultures in Australia.
- Do not assume English proficiency. Ask if the PWA would like an interpreter.
- Where possible, use an **accredited translator and interpreter**. You can access accredited Interpreting Services through 'TIS' at www.immi.gov.au/tis, or by calling 131 450. A pin number is required to use this service, contact Vinnies Assist, Vinnies Services or your local VSC to provide you with the correct pin number.
- Ensure that your non-verbal communication style matches what you are saying.
- Learn a few words in the language of the main culturally and linguistically diverse communities served. However, be careful not to mimic their accent or ways of speaking English.
- Be aware of words and terms that do not translate into other cultures, for example, 'feedback', 'advocate' or 'carer'.
- Build trust by meeting commitments and keeping promises.

Source: *Emergency Relief Handbook 2011*

IF YOU ARE UNABLE TO USE A TRANSLATOR/ INTERPRETER:

- Start with **yes/no questions** to ease into the conversation and establish safety
- Move into open-ended questions to elicit as much information as possible
- Summarise and repeat back information they give you to ensure you understand what they are saying;
- Speak clearly and a little slower than usual
- Give people additional time to respond, they may need to consider their response and then translate it to English
- Do not raise your voice; and
- Use plain language, avoid technical terms, abbreviations, slang, colloquialisms, and abstractions.





Checklist 7: WORKING WITH ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER PWAs

Across NSW, **one in four people** assisted by Conferences **identifies as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander**. It is important for Vincentians to have an understanding of, and connection to, First Nations cultures and groups in their local region.

- Conferences and members collaborate to build their basic knowledge about the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and language groups in their local area, including history, languages, leading family groups, and traditional custodians. A good place to start is with groups in your local communities. Information on these groups can be found in the [First Nations Resource Guide](#) on the MAVS website.
 - Undertake the 'Djurali – First Nations Cultural Awareness' training module, available in MAVS. This module provides general history and useful knowledge about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities across Australia.
 - Establish and maintain strong relationships with relevant Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander programs and services in your area. This can be done through joint events, meetings to share information and establish referral pathways, or cultural awareness training.
 - Engage with the Local Aboriginal Land Council for specific guidance on how to best engage and support the community. This may be through further cultural awareness training or establishing partnerships with local Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations.
 - In Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures, extended periods of silence during conversations are considered normal. Respect their use of silence. Do not mistake it for misunderstanding.
- Respect, acknowledge, actively listen and respond to the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and their community Elders.
 - As with all communities, take your time to navigate the diversity of voices in collaboration with community Elders. Utilise culturally appropriate approaches such as open questions, patience, and genuine follow through to build trust and sustainable relationships.
 - Where possible, display Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander visual and written materials such as maps of local language groups and communities, information about services and assistance the Society offers to First Nations communities, and Society approved Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP) support documents.
 - Be aware and respectful of extended family and kinship structures when working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and community elders. You can learn more about engaging with communities by reading the Community Engagement Plan.
 - Think about the language you use (verbal, non-verbal and written) when communicating with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. For example, for some Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, avoiding eye contact is customarily a sign of respect. Also, be aware that words might have different meanings in different communities.





Checklist 7: WORKING WITH ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER PWAs

continued

WHEN SPEAKING WITH ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER PEOPLE:
Be mindful of potential language barriers and health issues that impact communication.

- | | |
|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><input type="checkbox"/> Use clear, plain language<input type="checkbox"/> Avoid jargon<input type="checkbox"/> Speak clearly<input type="checkbox"/> Paraphrase what they say.
This allows you to check back and ensure that you have understood them. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><input type="checkbox"/> Do not mimic Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander speech patterns or attempt to speak Aboriginal English.<input type="checkbox"/> Do not continually ask a person to repeat themselves if it is difficult to understand them. |
|--|--|

Additional Resources:

You can find more information about appropriate language use and First Nations languages at [Reconciliation Australia](#) and its education arm, *Narragunnawali*.

The Society has a dedicated **First Nations Engagement Manager** who can provide assistance or answer questions. Approach your local office for the current Manager's contact details.





Checklist 8: CONSIDERATIONS WHEN WORKING WITH PWAs

Members frequently assist people experiencing trauma, disability, modern slavery, or other complex challenges. Understanding these factors helps members respond with sensitivity, uphold dignity, and provide support that is safe, appropriate and tailored to each person's needs.

TRAUMA-INFORMED SUPPORT

The Society is a trauma-informed organisation. We acknowledge trauma and grief in people's lives and its impacts at all levels, from people's behaviour to their ability to absorb information. Vincentians create a safe, supportive environment by being sensitive to the signs of trauma, practising active listening, and validating the experiences of the PWAs. We offer choices without bias or judgement, fostering self-reliance and respect in the recovery process.

To learn more, see [Trauma-Informed Practice Policy](#) in MAVS website.

AWARENESS OF MODERN SLAVERY

Modern slavery refers to situations where individuals are exploited through force, coercion, or deception and are unable to leave due to threats, violence, or abuse of power. This includes practices such as human trafficking, forced labour, debt bondage and child exploitation. Survivors of modern slavery often face severe restrictions on their freedom and are subject to inhumane working or living conditions. If you suspect a PWA is impacted by modern slavery, contact the Safeguarding team on **1800 4 SUPPORT** (1800 478 776) or a: safeguarding@vinnies.org.au

To learn more, you can sign up for the **Modern Slavery Course** developed by the Australian Catholic Anti-Slavery Network on the MAVS website / members dashboard, or contact your Local Staff Team to assist.

COMMUNICATION WITH PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES

People with disabilities may face different barriers that affect how they communicate, behave, access services or take part in conversations and decisions. Vincentians support people by being respectful, patient, open and by taking the time to understand how each person prefers to communicate. Where possible, speak directly to the person, avoid assumptions (ataxia can present as intoxication, for instance) and share information in clear and accessible ways. Always **seek consent** when approaching the person to assist them physically and avoid patting guide dogs or support animals. Where barriers arise, focus on practical adjustments, working alongside the person, utilising text-to-speech and other tools and linking them with the right supports, while always respecting their dignity, choices and independence.

To learn more, see the [Disability Inclusion resources](#) on the MAVS website, or contact your Local Staff Team for support.





RESOURCE TOOLKIT

CONFERENCE RESOURCES



Mission & Spirituality

Our Mission and Spirituality team, led by Leo Tucker, is available to provide pastoral support when you need it. You can also get in touch with the team when you need spiritual reflection guides, information on retreats and reflection days, or if you want to book a 'Facilitating Faith in Action' program. Contact Leo at leo.tucker@vinnies.org.au



Recruitment Tool

This tool has been designed to help you develop plans for recruitment of new members from your local community. It is designed as a workshop exercise to be done as a group and involves creating a map of your local community, so you can work out where you can start your outreach efforts. It can be found on the MAVS website by clicking [here](#).



Social Justice Resources

Our social justice team has resources you can use within your Conference including information on how to join the social justice network, upcoming events, Conference reflections and action kits. There's also a [link](#) for you to sign up to their newsletter. This information and resources can be found on the MAVS site [here](#).



Housing Tenants

Across NSW, members extend a hand of friendship to **SVDP Society housing tenants** and there are opportunities to expand this program. Members collaborate with Housing Staff at properties owned or managed by SVDP Society Housing. Tenants may be experiencing isolation, loneliness, or simply want to get more connected with their neighbours and the local area. In consultation with the tenants, ways to socially engage are explored and currently include activities such as morning teas and lunches, building a community garden, and/or special events for families. Greater Western Sydney, Maitland-Newcastle, Albury, Southern Sydney, the Central Coast, and Dubbo have opportunities for this engagement. Inverell and Port Macquarie Conferences are also involved. If you are interested in this program or would like to know more, check the [MAVS website](#).



RESOURCE TOOLKIT

CONFERENCE RESOURCES



Working with Young People

The Society has a designated Youth Engagement Officer (staff person) in each Central Council. You can reach out to this person for any updates on what our young members and volunteers are doing, as well as the current youth programs that are running in your Central Council. There are many ways our members can get involved with our younger members or youth-related work. To find out more, contact your Youth Engagement Officer for more information. You can find the contact details for all Youth Engagement staff [here](#).



Fundraising

Our head office has a fundraising team that can help with any local fundraising efforts your Conference wishes to engage in. There's also some information in the [MAVS website](#) on how to get assistance with fundraising. There is also a dedicated team to assist with grants. They can be contacted at Community.Grants@vinnies.org.au.



Retail Stores

If you have members who are also interested in volunteering in the retail stores, you can get in touch with the volunteer coordinator by emailing retailvolunteering@vinnies.org.au.



First Nations

For help connecting with First Nations communities or understanding First Nations issues, the Society has a dedicated First Nations Engagement Manager who can provide assistance or answer questions. Approach your local office for the current Manager's contact details and refer to Checklist 7 in these Guidelines.

PREPARING FOR A VISIT

SERVICE RESOURCES

Safeguarding Information

The Society prioritises Safeguarding of children, young people and Adults at Risk. We strive to work with the wider community to prevent all forms of abuse against children, young people and Adults at Risk and to ensure that the inherent dignity, care and wellbeing of all people are upheld. For details visit [MAVS website](#).

No Interest Loans Scheme (NILS)

The No Interest Loans Scheme (NILS) is for individuals and families on low incomes. It gives them access to safe, fair and affordable lending, so they can access the essential goods or services they need without putting themselves at risk of falling for payday lenders or other high-interest loan schemes. NILS is a great example of a service that offers a hand-up. You can find more about NILS [here](#) or contact them at nils@vinnies.org.au.

Information on Rental Assistance

With the rising cost-of-living pressures, rent assistance has increased dramatically as a form of support offered by Conferences to PWAs. This document compiles information about rental assistance schemes provided by the Federal and New South Wales State Governments. When PWAs require rental assistance, refer to the checklist and information using the link below to identify the most suitable option. <https://mavs.vinnies.org.au/media/miplvmbc/information-guide-rental-assistance-copy.pdf>

Translating and Interpreting Service (TIS)

TIS provides our members free use of the TIS service for all Conference / Emergency Service work. Requests can be made for male or female interpreters. Website: www.immi.gov.au/tis; Phone: 131 450.





PREPARING FOR A VISIT continued

Energy Accounts Payment Assistance (EAPA)

The EAPA scheme is administered by the NSW Government's Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water (DCCEEW) (formerly the Office of Energy & Climate Change). It provides short-term assistance to NSW households experiencing a sudden financial crisis or emergency that affects their ability to pay electricity or natural gas bills, through \$50 digital vouchers applied directly to existing utility accounts. Households are eligible for a maximum of two applications per energy type (electricity or natural gas) per financial year, with up to 8 x \$400 vouchers per application. Seven of the 10 Central Councils of the Society are currently providing EAPA assistance. For details, contact member.programs@vinnies.org.au.

Energy related fact sheets

Visit MAVS website for the following energy related [fact sheets](#):

- EAPA Delivery Guidelines
- Getting Help Paying Bills
- National Energy Bill Relief – Information for frontline staff
- NSW Energy Bill Relief – Small Business Fact Sheet
- NSW Energy Rebates and Bill Relief – Household Factsheet
- Gas rebate

Financial Counselling

Financial counselling is a free service offered by community organisations, community legal centres and some government agencies. If someone you are assisting is struggling with debt, refer them to a Financial Counsellor. Contact National Debt Helpline 1800 007 007.

AFTER A VISIT

Claiming Expenses

Members donate generously of their time and there is no need for anyone to be out-of-pocket for travel or other expenses.

The Volunteer Policy states that the Society will reimburse members and volunteers for pre-approved out-of-pocket expenses incurred directly as a result of undertaking designated unpaid work. The Expense Reimbursement Claim Form, mileage rates, and Credit Card Policy are available on the [MAVS website](#).

Please visit MAVS website to see [Treasurer's Toolkit](#) which provides the processes and resources to assist with Conference financial duties and responsibilities.



LEARNING RESOURCES

The MVEI Learning Team is a dedicated team of staff who can assist with member training and development, including help with using the MAVS learning portal. They can be contacted at mavs.support@vinnies.org.au. The following learning resources are currently available online with some sessions facilitated virtually; offline resources are under development:

Orientation: This is a monthly online session presented over Microsoft Teams for members and volunteers to attend as a group. It introduces the Society, its key people, the services we provide, as well as a history of the Society and our core values. Orientation sessions are advertised through Regional staff.

Compliance Modules:

Compliance training is essential to understanding the laws, regulations and internal policies that relate to the work members do. Being up to date with your compliance modules ensures you protect yourself, the PWAs, your Conference and the Society from risks such as data and confidentiality breaches, as well as safety-related incidents. Compliance training fosters consistent, respectful behaviour across the Society and ensures we are able to respond to potential safeguarding issues. Compliance units can be found on your MAVS learning dashboard when you log in.

Please note: Compliance training is additional to Compliance checks – Working With Children Check and National Criminal History Check – and currently consists of 4 modules:

1. Code of Conduct: The Society is guided by its key values and takes its [Code of Conduct](#) and related policies very seriously. The Code of Conduct translates Society values into minimum standards which all Society personnel are required to meet in their work.

2. Privacy and Confidentiality: The [Privacy and Confidentiality](#) module for staff, members and volunteers covers everything we need to know about handling people's personal details and sensitive information.

3. Safeguarding: In this module, we look at why children, young people and Adults at Risk need additional levels of protection. It covers the NSW Child Safe Standards, our legal obligations and explains members' role in reporting concerns about the safety and wellbeing of children and Adults at Risk. The policy is available [here](#).

4. Safety: The Society cares about your safety and is committed to building and maintaining a safety culture that is collaborative and alert to potential risks. This learning module will introduce you to our approach to safety and some of our important processes. The policy is available online on the MAVS website [here](#).



Optional Learning

The MVEI Learning Team also creates, and connects to, additional opportunities for training that support members to explore their areas of interest and/or add value to our work. For instance:

Djurali: At the Society, our vision for reconciliation is a society in which Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples are valued and celebrated. This means we will make every effort to ensure our community assistance through Conferences comes from a place of understanding. Djurali (Ju-ra-lee) means to learn and grow in the Dharug language. Our Djurali learning will help you contribute to our vision, providing you with knowledge and awareness that will assist you in your role. It is available on the MAVS website's learning portal on your dashboard under Optional Learning.

Modern Slavery: Members are in a unique position through the frontline services they provide of identifying someone experiencing modern slavery. Modern slavery affects about 41,000 people in Australia. The Society has a short online Modern Slavery course developed by the Australian Catholic Anti-Slavery Network, which is available to members through the MAVS website.

Disability Awareness: This course is designed to help improve the inclusion of people with a disability, both in the community and in our workplaces. You will develop a greater awareness of disability, how to use inclusive language and behaviours in your interactions and how you can remove practical and attitudinal barriers to participation.

Emergency Response: This course allows you to respond effectively to an emergency by helping you to identify what constitutes an emergency, understand the different roles and responsibilities involved and apply procedures appropriate to a given situation.

Other Learning Opportunities

The Society is in touch with organisations like Lifeline, Mental Health First Aid and Blue Knot that provide workshops on mental health issues, suicide prevention, domestic violence awareness, trauma awareness and the Accidental Counsellor program. From time to time, these organisations offer free or discounted workshops which will appear on the MAVS training calendar (under development). If you would like to request a training that is not listed or have feedback on the training available, please contact mavs.support@vinnies.org.au.





Leadership Resources:

Conference President's Induction and Resource Toolkit:

the Induction Workshop and Resource Toolkit were developed to support Conference Presidents to be prepared for their roles and align them with the Society's goals and aspirations.

This tool has been designed to mentor new Conference Presidents, sharing knowledge from people who have previously performed the role and can offer valuable insights into what it means to be a Conference President and the rewards and challenges that come with it.

Participants are invited to create their own activities based on their interests and skills of the people in their Conference and create an action plan to help them get started.

Contact mavs.support@vinnies.org.au if you would like to learn more.

Mission and Formation courses grounded in Spirituality

The Mission and Formation team also provides valuable learning and personal development opportunities for members including Facilitating Faith in Action and workshops on counselling. Contact the Mission team at mission@vinnies.org.au.

Treasurer's Toolkit

This toolkit consists of a Handbook, code, Chart of Accounts and other resources which provide Conference Treasurers with the processes and forms needed to manage Conference financial duties and responsibilities.

The toolkit can be accessed here: [Treasurer's Toolkit](#)





Message of Thanks

Thank you for all that you do and for your commitment to serving others as a Member of the St Vincent de Paul Society NSW.

Through your compassion, presence and action, you uphold the dignity of those we assist and bring the Vincentian spirit to life in communities across the state.

We hope these Guidelines support and strengthen your work. If you have any feedback, questions, suggestions, or need support, please speak with your local staff team or contact member.programs@vinnies.org.au.