



Social Services Block Grant Client Confidentiality

Policy 14.11

Effective: December 1, 2024

Introduction

Agencies that contract with the Tennessee Department of Human Services must maintain client confidentiality.

Scope

The reason for this policy is to document requirements surrounding client confidentiality.

Policy

Maintaining Client Confidentiality

1. All Tennessee Department of Human Services (TDHS) employees and Social Services Block Grant (SSBG) providers must maintain strict standards of confidentiality regarding client identity and case information.
2. All material, regardless of form, medium, or method of communication is considered confidential in accordance with state regulations and professional ethical standards.
3. Client records must be stored in a secure location regardless of medium. Physical records must not be removed from agency grounds and electronic records must be protected at all times.

Government Access to Client Information

When necessary, state and federal employees must be allowed to access client case information. At initiation of services, provider agency staff must inform all clients that their case records are subject to review by state and federal employees. Clients are to be reassured that both state and federal employees are obligated to maintain client confidentiality. SSBG is unable to provide services to clients who choose not to allow appropriate government review of their case information.

Release of Client Information to Third Parties

1. A client may request their SSBG agency share confidential information with a third (3rd) party. Examples include but are not limited to medical personnel and family members assisting with care.
2. Prior to the release of any confidential client information to any third party, a signed release of information form must be saved in the client's file.
 - a. Each agency is to use its own Release of Information (ROI) form.
 - b. SSBG has no requirement that the form be updated annually, but each agency should follow its own internal policy regarding ROIs.
 - c. Unless contradicted by agency policy, each ROI remains effective until revoked by the client.
3. All clients must be informed that they can revoke a Release of Information (ROI) at any time. Agencies must provide the client with a mechanism for documenting the revocation between assessments.

Supporting Documents

None

Definitions/Acronyms

| Term | Definition |
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| ROI | Release of Information |
| SSBG | Social Services Block Grant |
| TDHS | Tennessee Department of Human Services |

Supersedes

Social Services Block Grant Client Confidentiality, eff date 12/15/2023

Approval History

| Approved By | Approver Title | Approved Date | Effective Date |
|--------------------|----------------|---------------|----------------|
| Clarence H. Carter | Commissioner | 11/19/2024 | 12/01/2024 |
| Clarence H. Carter | Commissioner | 12/03/2023 | 12/15/2023 |
| Clarence H. Carter | Commissioner | 03/10/2021 | 03/15/2021 |

Revision History

| Date | Version | Location of Change | Description/Reason for Change |
|------------|------------|--------------------|--|
| 11/19/2024 | 12/01/2024 | Policy Section | This policy revision removed references to a form that does not include references to ROIs and clarified the policy around ROI expiration. |
| 12/03/2023 | 12/15/2023 | Policy Section | Updated title of section for transparency added requirement of reviewing access to the client's information as circumstances evolve. |
| 03/10/2021 | 03/15/2021 | N/A | New Policy |

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| Approved By | <i>Clarence H. Carter</i> | Approval Date | 11/19/2024 |
| Authority | 45 CFR 96.70 et seq. [Social Services Block Grants] 42 CFR §§1397. Tenn. Code Ann. § 71-6-118 | Effective Date | 12/01/2024 |
| Application | SSBG employees and provider staff. | | |