New Client Home Visit Risk Assessment

Worker safety, participant privacy and dignity on the first visit

The first visit to a new client's home is the point at which an independent support worker has the least direct knowledge of the environment, the people who may be present and whether the planned support can be delivered safely. A proportionate pre-visit risk check reduces avoidable risk without turning the participant's home, history or disability into something to be investigated.

> **The starting point**
>
> A participant's home remains their private home. During paid support it is also a workplace. Good practice requires both realities to be respected: the worker must manage foreseeable work health and safety risks, and the participant retains their rights to privacy, dignity, choice and control.

1. What should happen before the first visit?

Safe Work Australia's guidance for health care and social assistance says a pre-visit risk assessment should be conducted for work in people's homes. For an independent worker, this does not need to be an elaborate compliance exercise. It needs to identify the hazards that are reasonably foreseeable for the actual visit and establish what controls are required before attending. [1][2]

Start with the work, not the participant's diagnosis

The relevant question is not whether the participant has a particular diagnosis, behaviour support history or personal circumstance. The relevant question is whether there is information that materially changes how the first visit should be planned or delivered.

Before the visit, clarify information such as:

- the correct address, access arrangements, parking and any known difficulty entering or leaving the property
- the support that is actually being requested and whether it involves personal care, transfers, manual handling, cooking, transport, community access or other higher-risk tasks
- whether anyone else is expected to be present during the visit
- whether animals will be present and whether any animal needs to be separated from the work area
- whether smoking or vaping occurs inside the home or near the area where support will be delivered
- any known environmental hazards that are directly relevant to the visit, including unsafe access, damaged flooring, poor lighting or significant trip hazards
- whether there are known recent incidents of violence, aggression, threats or other circumstances that could reasonably affect worker safety
- whether there are known weapons, sharps, drug paraphernalia or other specific hazards relevant to the work environment
- whether the worker will have reliable phone contact and access to assistance if something goes wrong.

> **Keep the information request proportionate**
>
> A first-visit risk check is not a request for the participant's complete history. If information does not change the safety arrangements or the way the support will be provided, there should be a clear reason before collecting it.

2. Participant rights still apply to safety planning

The NDIS Code of Conduct applies to registered and unregistered NDIS providers and workers. It requires workers to respect the privacy of people with disability, respect self-determination and decision-making, and provide supports safely and competently. [3]

The NDIS Practice Standards apply to registered providers and are a useful benchmark for good practice for anyone providing NDIS funded supports. Their privacy and dignity standard expects participants to understand and agree to what personal information is being collected and why, including audio or visual recording. [4]

What this means on a first home visit

- Explain why a safety-related question is being asked when the reason is not obvious.
- Ask only for information that is relevant to the planned support or the safety of the visit.
- Do not inspect rooms, cupboards, belongings, medications, or documents.
- Do not photograph or record the home as part of a routine risk check. If a photograph is genuinely required for the support, obtain appropriate permission and manage it as personal information.
- Treat information you happen to see or hear during the visit as private. Being in someone's home can expose you to information that was never intentionally provided to you.
- Document observable facts and agreed controls rather than judgemental descriptions of the participant, their visitors or their home.

3. Lone-working arrangements for a new client visit

A first visit may also be remote or isolated work, even in a metropolitan area, if the worker cannot readily obtain assistance. Safe Work Australia identifies effective communication, access to emergency assistance and systems that account for a worker's whereabouts as relevant controls. [1][5]

Use a defined check-in system

For example:

Stage	Arrangement
Before the visit	A nominated safety contact or system holds the appointment details needed for the safety process.
On arrival	The worker checks in, or the system records that the visit has commenced.
Expected finish	A clear finish or check-out time is recorded.
If the worker does not check out	The safety contact attempts to reach the worker and follows a predetermined escalation process.
Immediate danger	The worker leaves if able and contacts emergency services where required.

Apple Find My, Life360 and live location sharing

Live location sharing can be a legitimate worker-safety control, but it can also disclose a participant's residential address and a pattern of support. Avoid treating persistent personal location sharing as the default solution.

Better practice is to:

- use one nominated safety contact or a purpose-built lone-worker system rather than sharing work movements with a broad family or friendship group
- limit the information and duration of access to what is needed for the safety purpose
- include the arrangement in your written lone-worker/privacy procedure
- tell participants, in general terms, if their appointment location may be visible to a nominated safety contact or safety system for WHS purposes

- avoid messages that combine a participant's name, address, diagnosis and other sensitive information when the safety contact does not need all of it.

> **Example**
> "I am commencing a home visit at 2:00 pm and should check out by 3:30 pm. If I have not checked out by 3:45 pm, call me and follow the escalation procedure." This is a safety process. It does not require a running commentary about the participant or what occurs during the visit.

4. When you arrive: reassess the environment

A pre-visit assessment cannot predict everything. The first few minutes of the visit are an opportunity to confirm that the environment and circumstances match what was expected. Safe Work Australia recommends updating the assessment where an unknown or changing environment creates new risks. [2]

Relevant changes might include:

- an unexpected person whose behaviour materially changes the safety of the visit
- an unsecured animal where there is a credible risk of injury
- active violence, threats, intimidation or escalating behaviour
- serious intoxication where it affects the safety of the planned support
- blocked access or exits
- a manual-handling task or piece of equipment that was not identified beforehand
- smoke, biological hazards, sharps or other environmental conditions that materially alter the risk
- loss of phone coverage or another failure in the agreed lone-worker system.

Not every difference is a hazard

A home does not have to look like a workplace. Clutter, unusual décor, different housekeeping standards, political or religious material, a participant's communication style, or lifestyle choices that the worker personally dislikes are not automatically WHS risks. The assessment should identify the pathway to harm, not substitute personal judgement for risk.

5. If the first visit is not safe to proceed

A participant can make choices about their own home and lifestyle. A worker is not required to continue work where a serious or unmanaged work health and safety risk remains. The response should be proportionate to the hazard rather than punitive toward the participant.

Depending on the issue, reasonable controls may include:

- asking for an animal to be secured while support is delivered
- moving the support to another area of the home
- changing or postponing a task until suitable equipment is available
- arranging for two workers rather than one
- using a different meeting location or remote contact where appropriate
- leaving or declining to enter when an immediate risk cannot be controlled.

If the worker leaves or postpones a visit, consider what needs to happen next so that an ongoing support is not simply abandoned. The safety issue, the control required and any alternative arrangement should be communicated clearly and documented.

6. After the first visit

The first visit provides information that was unavailable during the pre-visit check. Update the risk record while the circumstances are still clear, but keep the record focused on information that affects future service delivery.

Record:

- hazards, incidents or near misses
- controls that worked or need to change
- agreed arrangements for animals, smoking, access, equipment, other people or check-ins where relevant

- whether the next visit can proceed under ordinary arrangements or needs additional controls
- only what is necessary to manage the work and support safely.

First-visit practice: do / don't

DO	DON'T
Complete a proportionate pre-visit risk check.	Treat the participant's diagnosis as the risk needing assessment.
Ask questions that change how the visit is planned or delivered.	Collect personal information not relevant for a basic risk assessment.
Use a defined check-in/check-out process for lone work.	Broadcast client addresses or support details to friends or family.
Assess if the environment is different from what was expected.	Inspect the home or belongings without a support-related reason.
Document observable hazards and agreed controls.	Use judgemental labels such as "dodgy", "filthy" or "unstable".
Leave or modify the visit where a serious risk cannot be controlled.	Stay in an unsafe situation because leaving feels impolite.

Legal and practice framework

This resource uses Safe Work Australia's national model WHS guidance and current NDIS Commission guidance. A self-employed person may hold duties as both a PCBU and a worker under the model WHS laws. WHS legislation is regulated by each state and territory. The model WHS laws operate in all Australian jurisdictions except Victoria, which has its own occupational health and safety legislation. [6][7]

Privacy obligations depend on the circumstances of the business and the information handled. The Australian Privacy Principles can apply to small disability service providers where they provide a health service and hold health information. State or territory privacy obligations may also apply. [8]

> **Use of this resource**
>
> This is a practice resource, not legal advice. Independent workers should check the WHS, privacy, record-keeping and NDIS obligations that apply to their own business, registration status and jurisdiction.

Sources and further reading

[1] Safe Work Australia – Work environment hazards: working in private homes
[2] Safe Work Australia – Understand and assess the risks
[3] NDIS Quality and Safeguards Commission – NDIS Code of Conduct
[4] NDIS Quality and Safeguards Commission – Core module: Rights and responsibilities
[5] Safe Work Australia – Remote and isolated work
[6] Safe Work Australia – Duties under WHS laws
[7] Safe Work Australia – Model WHS laws
[8] Office of the Australian Information Commissioner – What is a health service provider?

Pre-Visit Risk Check

NEW CLIENT | FIRST HOME VISIT

Complete before the first in-home visit using information reasonably available at intake or referral. Record only information that is relevant to the planned support or worker safety. Update after the first visit if circumstances differ.

Client / participant:	**Date of first visit:**
Address:	**Planned start / finish:**
Support to be provided:	**Referral / information source:**
Worker:	**Nominated safety contact / system:**

A. Visit and environment

☐ Address and access arrangements confirmed.

☐ Parking / entry / exit issues considered, including lighting if the visit is after dark.

☐ Mobile reception or another reliable communication method is available.

☐ Known hazards affecting access or movement have been identified.

☐ Smoking or vaping arrangements are known where exposure could affect the worker.

☐ Animals are known and any required arrangements for securing them have been agreed.

B. Planned support

☐ The tasks expected during the visit are clear.

☐ Manual handling, transfers or physical assistance have been identified where relevant.

☐ Required equipment is available and the worker is competent to use it.

☐ Known infection, sharps, bodily-fluid or other biological hazards relevant to the planned work have been considered.

☐ The visit does not require a task that falls outside the worker's competence, role or agreed service.

C. People and foreseeable safety risks

☐ It is known who is expected to be present during the visit.

☐ Any recent threats, violence, aggression or other behaviour relevant to worker safety has been considered.

☐ Any known weapons, drug paraphernalia or other specific hazards relevant to the work environment have been considered.

☐ There is a plan for any risk that requires two workers, a different location, altered timing or another control.

D. Lone-worker arrangements

☐ A check-in / check-out process is in place.

☐ Expected finish time and escalation time are recorded.

☐ The nominated safety contact knows what to do if the worker does not check out.

☐ Emergency contact / 000 arrangements are clear.

☐ Any live-location sharing is limited to the person or system that needs it for the safety purpose.

☐ Appointment information shared for worker safety is limited to what the safety contact actually needs.

Pre-visit decision

☐	Proceed under ordinary first-visit arrangements.
☐	Proceed with additional controls recorded below.
☐	Two-worker / alternate location / other modified arrangement required.

☐	More information is required before attending.
☐	Do not attend until identified risk is controlled.

Controls / arrangements required before the visit

Participant privacy and dignity check

☐ Information collected for this risk check is limited to what is relevant to the visit.

☐ The reason for any sensitive safety question can be explained to the participant.

☐ No unnecessary photographs, recordings or inspection of private areas are planned.

☐ Any worker-safety location sharing is restricted to the minimum necessary access.

☐ The visit plan respects the participant's home, privacy, preferences and ordinary control over their environment, except where a specific WHS control is reasonably required.

Completed by:	**Date:**
Review after first visit:	**Next review / if circumstances change:**

Review this check after the first visit, after any incident or near miss, and whenever the support, environment or known circumstances materially change.