

Equalities & Diversity Policy & Procedure

Our policy statement

HACO Healthcare, as an employer, is committed to eliminating discrimination and encouraging diversity amongst our workforce and the communities in which we serve. We aim to ensure that our workforce is truly representative of all sections of society and that each employee feels respected and able to give their best. Furthermore, we will work together to ensure that our customers, are provided with a responsive and culturally sensitive service, which addresses issues of discrimination and harassment. We recognise that some forms of disadvantage and discrimination are widely experienced by particular groups (because of race, ethnic origin, colour, national origin, disability, sexuality, religion, gender, marital status or age). We oppose all forms of unlawful and unfair discrimination and will seek to achieve equality by eliminating discrimination experienced on these grounds and promoting social cohesion.

We acknowledge that social cohesion is the bringing together, with the participation of all clients in an integrated way, of the economic, social, health and educational policies that will create a sustainable community. HACO will continue to develop and implement projects that actively contribute to the social cohesion of communities within which we operate. In addition, we support and promote diversity, by recognising that all people are different. We aim to recognise the needs of individuals and treat each person, in employment and through service provision, with dignity and respect.

Introduction

HACO recognises the important role we have, as an employer in eliminating all forms of discrimination and harassment under our sphere of control and in promoting tolerance, fairness and equality. In addition to our moral and legal obligations, we recognise there is significant strength to be gained from an effective Equalities and Diversity Policy:

It will help build a positive public image to Service Users, prospective Service Users, staffs, partners and stakeholders. Good performance on equality will help win new contracts. Taking account of diversity is crucial to developing new services to meet future need and to keep existing services relevant.

A governance structure and workforce that reflects the Service User base at all tiers will be better equipped to deal with the range of needs and aspirations of service users.

It will help improve staff recruitment and retention, with people not only wanting to join the organisation but employees remaining and creating significant loyalty.

HACO Healthcare is working towards becoming an Employer of Choice. Recruiting a diverse workforce will ensure a wider choice of applicants by making use of all available talent, bringing different outlooks and expertise. An inclusive approach will result in a more motivated work force which feels valued and willing to contribute to the success of the organisation. It should lead to reduced absence and turnover, with people able to attend work, free from prejudice, fear and harassment or other forms of discrimination. It will avoid, or reduce, costs associated with discriminatory action.

Our commitment to equalities and diversity is explicit in two of the corporate objectives contained within our Business Plan:

- To assist in promoting social inclusion in recognition of the diverse communities in which we work.
- To provide services that support vulnerable and disadvantaged Service Users in their homes

HACO Healthcare is committed to eliminating discrimination and encouraging diversity

Using this document

Our Equalities & Diversity Policy is in three parts:

1. **Policy Statement** - setting out our overall position in relation to equality and diversity matters.
2. **Policy Framework** - setting out our specific policy aims and our strategic objectives to achieve those aims. Our policy aims and strategic objectives are given both in terms of our areas of operation (e.g. employment or access to housing) and across the various categories of discrimination (e.g. race or disability).
3. **Implementation** – setting out overall responsibilities for implementation, communication and review of the Policy.

The Policy document will be supported by a number of Implementation Plans detailing the specific actions to be undertaken to achieve our policy and strategic aims.

We will work towards the development of individual Implementation Plans covering the following aspects of equalities:

- Age Champion Implementation Plan
- Disability Implementation Plan
- Black & Minority Ethnic Implementation Plan
- Family Friendly / Flexible Working Implementation Plan

Operation

Our Equalities & Diversity Policy covers all areas of our operation:

Governance

We believe that the accountability of our organisation is enhanced by the representation and involvement, on our governing bodies and sub-committees, of individuals from the diverse communities in which we serve.

To achieve our aims we will:

- Be fair and transparent in the recruitment to our governance structures.
- Keep the membership of governing bodies and sub committees under review and will implement ways to improve under-representation of people from all groups.
- Ensure that all in governance are well informed about equality and diversity issues.

Recruitment and staff development

We recognise that employing staff who reflect the range of experiences of the local community assists in the delivery of effective services.

To achieve our aims we will:

- Ensure that staff recruitment is conducted in accordance with equal opportunities principles.
- Regularly review the recruitment level of under-represented groups, particularly at senior levels, and take effective action to rectify any imbalance.
- Value and respect the identities and cultures of all our employees, and encourage all employees to reach their full potential.
- Develop and maintain opportunities for the career development of under represented groups. Where appropriate we will use lawful positive action to redress any imbalance within the workplace.
- Undertake to provide training in equality issues to all staff in relation to both the provision of services and the implementation of this Policy.

Harassment and bullying

HACO Healthcare condemns in strong terms harassment, bullying or intimidation of any kind and is committed to taking effective action to end such behaviour and provide proper redress.

To achieve our aims we will:

- Implement a Dignity at Work Policy which stresses the entitlement of every employee to work in an environment that promotes dignity and respect and outlines the organisation's response to inappropriate behaviour.
- Any incident of discrimination or harassment will be viewed as a serious disciplinary matter.
- Safeguard our staff from harassment by Service Users or members of the public.
- Work with local authorities and other local agencies to ensure support is provided for the victims of harassment.
- Work to ensure an effective degree of multi agency co-operation and information exchange in tackling harassment.
- Regularly review our policies covering harassment, bullying and intimidation. We will ensure these policies are implemented effectively by rigorous monitoring.

Policy Framework: Categories of Discrimination

Racial Discrimination

Racial discrimination is defined as treating a person, or group of people, less favourably based on their race, colour, nationality or ethnic origin.

This can take the form of, for example, withholding facilities, services or opportunities from someone who should be entitled to them and who is denied them on the basis of race. Such discrimination can involve exclusion, oppression, stereotyping and marginalisation.

HACO Healthcare works in some of the most ethnically diverse areas in the country. We recognise that employing staff, who reflect the racial and cultural diversity of our communities, at all levels of the organisation, will assist in the delivery of effective services. We will strive for racial equality.

To achieve our aims we will:

- We will sponsor a number of staff per year to take part in this scheme, so facilitating their individual career development.
- Take a proactive stance against discriminatory behaviour, combating racial prejudice, raising awareness and challenging unfair practices and racial stereotypes.
- Regularly review our policies covering racial harassment and other forms of discriminatory behaviour to ensure that these policies are effective and implemented fairly.
- Monitor satisfaction with our approach to combating harassment
- Strongly promote 'best value' in service provision and will encourage the involvement and consultation of the diverse communities within which we operate.
- Ensure that information about services and standards is widely publicised in plain English and provided in alternative formats and languages to accommodate speakers of other languages.
- Measure and analyse Service User satisfaction and explore areas where satisfaction is lower in certain groups than for Service Users as a whole.

Sex Discrimination (including Trans-Gender Status)

Sex discrimination is defined as treating a person or group of people, less favourably on account of their gender, marital status or gender reassignment.

HACO Healthcare is committed to ensuring women and men are fully and properly represented at all levels of the organisation and are rewarded equally for their contribution.

To achieve our aims we will:

- Encourage men and women men to take up training and development opportunities in areas and levels where they are under-represented.
- Challenge gender stereotypes and sexist language and behaviour.
- Ensure that female employees are not treated unfavourably on the grounds of pregnancy and / or child birth. This will also include unfavourable treatment on

the grounds of the effects of pregnancy or maternity leave, for example, any temporary lack of capacity during pregnancy.

- Recognise the importance of family-friendly policies (e.g. those relating to flexible working arrangements), in assisting to promote gender equality in employment, especially through supporting the needs of those with caring responsibilities. As a minimum, we will meet our statutory obligations in this respect. Within the constraints of effective service delivery, we undertake to give fair consideration to other requests for different working arrangements.
- Ensure that men and women are valued equally and that salaries, pensions and other financial rewards and benefits reflect parity and are free from any form of bias.
- We recognise that people who plan to undergo, are undergoing, or have undergone gender re-assignment can face discrimination and / or harassment. We will ensure that transgender / transsexual employees and residents are not discriminated against in relation to employment or service provision and will seek to ensure they are treated with dignity and respect.

Sexual Orientation Discrimination

Sexual orientation discrimination is defined as treating a person, or group of people, less favourably based on their sexual orientation or their perceived sexual orientation (i.e. on the grounds that they are gay, lesbian, heterosexual or bi-sexual).

We recognise the very real discrimination and harassment that people experience on the basis of their sexuality and are committed to the fair treatment of all employees and residents, irrespective of sexuality.

To achieve our aims we will:

- Encourage respect for different lifestyles and challenge negative stereotypical views.
- Be proactive in enforcing this message to employees and this is an important element of the 'Welcoming Diversity' Course, which will be mandatory for all staff.
- Ensure that our employment policies are not based on the assumption that everyone is heterosexual.
- Ensure that our harassment policies are implemented effectively, rigorously monitored and regularly reviewed.
- Work with other agencies to ensure that support is provided to victims and promote multi agency cooperation and information exchange in tackling harassment of this nature.

Age Discrimination

Ageism is unjustified discrimination against a person, or group of people, on the grounds of age. Ageism usually displays itself in one of two forms: discrimination against young people and discrimination against older people.

HACO Healthcare seeks to cultivate an environment which values all people regardless of their age.

To achieve our aims we will:

- Ensure that all employees are aware that the Equalities and Diversity Policy includes being positive about age. We will challenge misconceptions and stereotypes based on age, both in employment and in the delivery of services.
- Promote the benefits of a mixed-age workforce and will work towards becoming an Age Positive Employer. This means that we are committed to tackling age discrimination and taking practical steps to address any discriminatory practices in our day to day operations.
- Review our recruitment, selection, training schemes and promotion processes to ensure there are no hidden age barriers.
- Encourage employees of all ages to develop their potential and will promote a good spread of ages at all levels of the organisation.
- Ensure that we do not consider age as a factor when making decisions about redundancy.
- Endeavour to offer employees fair and flexible retirement options.

Disability Discrimination

Disability discrimination can be defined as treating a person, or group of people, less favourably than others because of a particular disability or for a reason related to a disability. Discrimination also occurs if an employer or service provider fails to comply with their legislative duty to make reasonable adjustments to accommodate the needs of a disabled person and the failure to do so cannot be justified.

HACO Healthcare is committed to achieving disability equality by eliminating unlawful discrimination and the disadvantage experienced by people with a disability, wherever reasonably possible. We will adopt the wide definition of disability contained in the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 (as amended) covering a wide range of impairments, illnesses and other conditions, both physical and mental.

To achieve our aims we will:

- Challenge stereotypes about people with disabilities and will seek to focus on what people can do rather than what they cannot.
- Work towards the commitments of achieving the 'Two Ticks' Disability Award and will regularly review our progress in this respect.
- Interview all applicants with a disability who meet the minimum requirement for a job vacancy and will consider them on the basis of ability.
- Ensure that there is a system in place to discuss at any time, but at least once a year, with disabled employees and board members what can be done to make sure they can develop and use their abilities.

- Make every effort when employees and board members become disabled to make sure that they stay in employment.
- Undertake to make appropriate adjustments in the workplace (e.g. to working arrangements and the work environment) to help people with disabilities to be, and remain, employed and to achieve their full career potential.
- Take action to ensure that all employees and board members develop the right level of disability awareness needed to deliver our commitments.
- Continue to provide a full range of housing services, addressing the wide variety of needs of disabled residents, including the provision of adaptations to support independent living, floating tenancy support and supported housing accommodation.
- Maximise access to our housing and services and will strive to provide services which are relevant to the needs of people with a disability. We will provide information in ways that are accessible to those with sensory impairment or other special communication needs (e.g. through use of sign language translators, home visits, alternative formats).
- Similarly, we will assist residents to communicate their needs (e.g. through use of text phones or induction loops).

Religion or Faith Discrimination

Religion or belief discrimination involves treating a person, or group of people, less favourably on account of their religion, religious belief or similar philosophical belief. Discrimination can also take place on the grounds of a mistaken perception of someone's religion, belief or faith.

HACO Healthcare recognises individuals' right to freedom of belief and protection from intolerance. We undertake to treat people fairly irrespective of their religion or belief and aim to promote good relations between people of different religions and beliefs. We also give a commitment to make every effort to provide a prayer room for employees whenever possible.

To achieve our aims we will:

- Develop employment practices in ways which recognise and respect religion and belief.
- Seek to improve the understanding of religion and belief among our staff.
- Deliver our services in ways which recognise and respect religion and belief. We will work with other agencies and community organisations to promote understanding and good relations between people of different faith communities.
- Tackle unlawful discrimination and harassment. We will ensure that our harassment policies are implemented effectively, rigorously monitored and regularly reviewed.
- Work with other agencies to ensure that support is provided to victims and promote multi agency cooperation and information exchange in tackling harassment of this nature.

HIV Discrimination

HIV discrimination is treating a person, or group of people, less favourably on the grounds that they have, or are thought to have, HIV or AIDS. This discrimination takes many forms and may result in gossip, rejection or violence when their HIV status becomes known, potential loss of income or job opportunities or potential problems with insurance and mortgages.

HACO Healthcare recognises that we need to work towards creating a more supportive environment for people with HIV or AIDS.

To achieve our aims we will:

- Challenge biased, fear-based and prejudiced attitudes to HIV, in particular by sharing facts about HIV.
- Seek to create an environment for both employees and residents whereby individuals may disclose their status without fear of rejection, discrimination and/or violence, if they choose to do so.

Responsibility for Implementation and Review

The Board: The Board of HACO has overall responsibility for the implementation of the Equalities and Diversity Policy. The Board has delegated this authority to the Equalities and Diversity Committee.

The Equalities and Diversity Committee: The Equalities and Diversity Committee has delegated responsibility from the Board for approving this Policy, for ensuring that adequate resources are provided to implement this Policy, for monitoring progress in implementation and for its regular review.

Director of Corporate Services: This role is responsible for ensuring that a framework of policies and procedures surrounding diversity and equalities issues are developed and implemented.

Equalities and Diversity Adviser:

This role is responsible for the practical implementation of the Equalities and Diversity Policy. This will be achieved through the provision of advice to staff members and managers in relation to the application of the Policy within the workplace. Additionally, the Equalities and Diversity Adviser will be responsible for co-ordinating the regular review and updating of this document.

Directors and Senior Managers: All directors and senior managers are responsible for championing equality and diversity, ensuring that all staff work within an equalities environment and that service provision is provided within this context.

All Managers: All managers are responsible for ensuring that they manage staff within the requirements of the Equalities and Diversity Policy. Managers are responsible for ensuring

that all staff are fully aware of the requirements of this Policy and that any breaches of this Policy are challenged and corrected.

All Staff: All staff are responsible for the implementation of the Policy across HACO. It is the responsibility of each individual to ensure that they are fully conversant with the requirements of the Policy. Individuals are encouraged to speak out against any behaviour which they believe is in breach of the Policy.

Training, Communication and Awareness

This area is a vital component which underpins the implementation of our Equalities & Diversity Policy. The Group is committed to ensuring that relevant training, guidance and information is provided to enable staff and board members to fulfil their responsibilities under this Policy and that open debate is encouraged. In addition, we will ensure that our position on equality issues is communicated to those people who may be subject to discrimination. We will make use of the following means:

Recruitment packs: A summary of this Policy will be included within the job application packs provided to prospective employees.

Staff induction folder: A summary of this Policy will be included within the staff induction folder issued to every employee.

Implementation

In-house training programmes: The importance HACO Healthcare attaches to equality and diversity is emphasised to all staff through the mandatory attendance requirement attached to the 'Welcoming Diversity' Course. In addition, tailored training will be made available for those staff who need additional skills and knowledge to fulfil their roles (e.g. cultural or disability awareness training for front-line staff and specific training for those recruiting staff).

Employee briefings: Managers will receive regular updates on equality and diversity issues, with the intention that this information is cascaded throughout the organisation through internal publications process. This is an important means of communicating the organisation's values and policies in this area.

Staff representatives: Members of the Staff Council are encouraged to raise any issues and concerns in relation to equality and diversity issues.

Staff/service user Handbooks: A summary of this Policy will be included within the handbooks issued to staff and service users at the commencement of their employment/care package

Website: HACO Healthcare external website www.hacohealthcare.org.uk will publicise a summary of this policy.

Impact Assessments

Impact Assessments are a systematic method of assessing whether a proposed policy will impact all groups equally. HACO Healthcare is working towards the implementation of impact assessments for new or amended policies, in order to:

- Ensure the identification of any actual or potential inequalities; and
- Consider alternative ways of achieving the aims of policy, to avoid or reduce any adverse impact.

HACO Healthcare will sponsor a number of members of staff per year to take part in scheme to facilitating their individual career development.

Dignity at Work: HACO Healthcare Dignity at Work policy document defines unacceptable conduct in the work place and sets out procedures for tackling incidents of inappropriate behaviour swiftly and decisively in a sensitive and confidential manner.

Complaints procedure: All complaints of discrimination or harassment will be taken seriously.

Employment: Any employee who believes that they have been the victim of discriminatory treatment, or who has witnessed discriminatory behaviour, should follow the procedure outlined in the Dignity at Work Policy.

Service delivery: Complaints about how we deliver our services are dealt with through our formal Complaints Procedure.