

<b>Sunbeam House Services Policy Document</b>	<b>Title: Postural Supports Policy</b>
	<b>Effective Date: 01 October 2014</b>



## Document Control

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## **1.0 POLICY:**

The purpose of this guideline is to ensure the safe use of postural supports for therapeutic purposes.

## **2.0 SCOPE:**

- Refers to all clients in Sunbeam House Services (SHS) who use a postural support device for therapeutic purposes.
- Refers to all SHS staff and to the wider circle of support of clients who use postural support devices.

### **GLOSSARY OF TERMS**

**Pelvic Strap** A strap prescribed for the purpose of maintaining the pelvis in optimal alignment. This is usually set at a particular angle to hold the pelvis in position. It may have two or four points of attachment.

**Postural Harness** A device that is applied to the trunk to assist in supporting a person to remain in an optimal sitting position.

**Airways** The pipe that runs from the mouth and nose down the front aspect of the neck/throat to the lungs. It transports air to the lungs and is also known as the windpipe.

**Ventilation** The act of getting air in to and out of the lungs

**Postural Supports** Any device that is prescribed to enhance or promote improvement in posture. These can include, but are not limited to, trunk supports, chest harness, pelvic supports, head supports, ankle huggers, and foot supports.

Postural supports devices provide postural support for people whilst they are sitting in wheelchairs or other seats.

When used correctly a postural support device can help a person to sit comfortably and safely for long periods. They can also assist people to use their arms and hands to the best of their abilities However, if not used correctly postural support devices can become a safety risk.

All staff that support service users who use a postural support device should read and understand this document.

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Postural support devices should only be used in accordance with the prescribed guidelines\* and manufacturers instructions.

**\*If a postural support is used outside of the prescribed guidelines it is considered to be a restraint and the restrictive practice policy should be implemented immediately**

### **Postural Support Device Safety Risks**

The incorrect use of a postural support device can result in injury or death.

There is a risk of injury if:

- The person is not positioned correctly in the postural support device.
- The prescription guidelines are not followed correctly.
- The postural support device is too tight or too loose.
- The postural support device is damaged, worn or frayed.

The use of a chest harness possesses a risk of a person not being able to breathe if:

- The lower straps of the harness become loose and the harness rides up near the person's neck blocking the windpipe.
- The person slides down in their chair so that the harness is around their neck and blocks the windpipe.
- The shoulder straps of the harness cut across the person's neck blocking the windpipe. This can happen if the side supports on the chair that support the person's trunk is not in place.
- The harness is done up so tightly the person cannot take a breath.

Prolonged and/or regular use of mechanical restraint can lead to:

- Muscular atrophy and shortening of tendons
- Demineralisation of bones
- Arrested motor development
- Disuse of limbs.

In order to reduce risk, the postural support device should be used correctly, as prescribed and well maintained

### **Maintaining Postural Supports**

A postural support will only work effectively if it is well maintained. Every time you apply a postural support device check that

- Straps are not frayed or worn. If so they will need to be reported and replaced.

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- Straps are not caught in wheels.
- Screws/nuts/washers that attach the postural support device to the chair must be secure and replaced if missing.
- Buckles are not damaged. If damaged, these will need to be reported and replaced.
- Hook and loop Velcro fastening holds securely. If it does not, remove any lint in the fastening or replace.
- There are no changes in the postural support device fit, due to weight gain or loss or due to seasonal changes. Postural support device straps should be adjusted to ensure that they are not too loose or too tight.
- Clean the postural support regularly with warm soapy water and dry away from direct sunlight.

If you notice any of the above problems and are unsure how to solve them contact the prescriber of the postural support device.

### **Correct use of a Postural Support**

To correct use of a postural support device is individual to the person and therefore only prescribed guidelines should be followed.

### **Correct use of a Harness**

The following general guidelines for the use of a harness should be followed unless otherwise prescribed:

1. The chest harness must be worn with a firmly fastened lap belt or pelvic strap at all times.
2. The position of the harness must be checked after reclining or sitting the person up.
3. Alterations to a harness should only be made by an experienced prescriber

A chest harness will only work effectively if it is well maintained. Every time you apply the harness check that:

- Straps are not frayed or worn. If so, they will need to be replaced.
- Straps are not caught in wheels.
- Screws/nuts/washers that attach the harness to the chair must be secure and replaced if missing.
- Buckles are not damaged. If damaged, these will need to be replaced.
- Hook and loop Velcro fastening holds securely. If it does not, remove any lint in the fastening or replace.
- There are no changes in the harness fit, due to weight gain or loss or due to seasonal changes. Harness straps should be adjusted to ensure that they are not too loose or too tight.
- Clean the harness regularly with warm soapy water and dry away from direct sunlight.

If you notice any of the above problems and are unsure how to solve them contact the prescriber of the harness.

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### **Guidelines for Prescribers**

The prescription of postural supports should be team based and one member of the team should have skills, education, and experience in the field of postural support prescription.

A proper clinical assessment of seating and positioning needs is essential to ensure that the most appropriate body support system is recommended. This includes identifying other therapeutic interventions that could positively impact on the individual's postural position. When recommending seating interventions the decision making process should include consideration for the least restrictive postural support device that still meet the individual's needs.

Each service user who uses a postural support device should have a clearly outlined prescription for the use of the postural support device. The prescription should include the conditions for use, the duration of use, any special requirements and a monitoring/review mechanism.

Ensure manufacturer's guidelines are followed.

The prescriber of a postural support device as part of a seating system should ensure that carers receive adequate instruction about how to safely apply, remove, and maintain the postural support/harness.

### **The following guidelines are recommended:**

The risks associated with harness/postural support device use should be discussed with the person with a disability and at least one primary carer.

- The person with a disability and the primary carer should be encouraged to share this information in both written and verbal formats with other carers.
- The person with a disability and/or the primary carer should be provided with a copy of the **"Safe Use of a Chest Harness"** brochure.
- If the person lives in supported accommodation or attends other services, they and/or their carers should be encouraged to provide a copy of the brochure to the services.

It is essential to ensure that documentation relating to postural support prescription is adequate. The clinical reasoning, discussions, and collaborations that led to the prescription and the instruction that accompanies the prescription of seating supports must be recorded in the appropriate place. In particular, it is necessary to document the following:

- A collaborative decision making process
- Adequate instruction of carers

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- Time frames and the process for review

If a person with a disability or those that support them choose to make a decision other than that recommended by the prescriber this must be reflected in the documentation.

### **3.0 ROLES & RESPONSIBILITIES:**

The Physiotherapy department at Sunbeam House Services will monitor the use of all Postural Supports for Clients. Staff are responsible to ensure that Postural Supports are used correctly.

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