

**DOUGLAS COUNTY  
DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL SERVICES  
NOTICE OF PRIVACY PRACTICES**

Effective Date: April 14, 2003

THIS NOTICE DESCRIBES HOW MEDICAL INFORMATION ABOUT YOU MAY BE USED AND DISCLOSED AND HOW YOU CAN GET ACCESS TO THIS INFORMATION. PLEASE REVIEW IT CAREFULLY.

The Social Services Department provides many types of services, such as health and social services. Social Services staff must collect information about you to provide these services. Social Services knows that information we collect about you and your health is private. Social Services is required to protect this information by Federal and State law.

We call this information "protected health information (PHI)."

The Notice of Privacy Practices will tell you how Social Services may use or disclose information about you. Not all situations will be described. Social Services is required to give you a notice of our privacy practices for the information we collect and keep about you. Social Services is required to follow the terms of the notice currently in effect.

**Social Services May Use and Disclose Information Without Your Authorization**

- **For Treatment.** Social Services may use or disclose information with health care providers who are involved in your health care. For example, information may be shared to create and carry out a plan for your treatment.
- **For Payment.** Social Services may use or disclose information to get payment or to pay for the health care services you receive. For example, Social Services may provide PHI to bill your health plan for health care provided to you.
- **For Health Care Operations.** Social Services may use or disclose information in order to manage its programs and activities. For example, Social Services may use PHI to review the quality of services you receive.
- **Appointments and Other Health Information.** Social Services may send you reminders for medical care or checkups. Social Services may send you information about health services that may be of interest to you.
- **For Public Health Activities.** Social Services is the public health agency that keeps and updates vital records, such as births and deaths, and tracks some diseases.
- **For Health Oversight Activities.** Social Services may use or disclose information to inspect or investigate health care providers.

- **As Required by Law and For Law Enforcement.** Social Services will use and disclose information when required or permitted by federal or state law or by a court order.
- **For Abuse Reports and Investigations.** Social Services is required by law to receive and investigate reports of abuse.
- **For Government Programs.** Social Services may use and disclose information for public benefits under other government programs. For example, Social Services may disclose information for the determination of Supplemental Security Income (SSI) benefits.
- **To Avoid Harm.** Social Services may disclose PHI to law enforcement in order to avoid a serious threat to the health and safety of a person or the public.
- **For Research.** Social Services uses information for studies and to develop reports. These reports do not identify specific people.
- **Disclosures to Family, Friends, and Others.** Social Services may disclose information to your family or other persons who are involved in your medical care. You have the right to object to the sharing of this information.
- **Other Uses and Disclosures Require Your Written Authorization**  
For other situations, Social Services will ask for your written authorization before using or disclosing information. You may cancel this authorization at any time in writing. Social Services cannot take back any uses or disclosures already made with your authorization.
- **Other Laws Protect PHI.** Many Social Services programs have other laws for the use and disclosure of information about you. For example, you must give your written authorization for Social Services to use and disclose your mental health and chemical dependency treatment records.

### **Your PHI Privacy Rights**

When information is maintained by Social Services as a public health agency, the public health records are governed by other State and Federal laws and is not subject to the rights described below.

- **Right to See and Get Copies of Your Records.** In most cases, you have the right to look at or get copies of your records. You must make the request in writing. You may be charged a fee for the cost of copying your records.
- **Right to Request a Correction or Update of Your Records.** You may ask Social Services to change or add missing information to your records if you think there is a mistake. You must make the request in writing, and provide a reason for your request.

- **Right to Get a List of Disclosures.** You have the right to ask Social Services for a list of disclosures made after April 14, 2003. You must make the request in writing. This list will not include the times that information was disclosed for treatment, payment, or health care operations. The list will not include information provided directly to you or your family, or information that was sent with your authorization.

- **Right to Request Limits on Uses or Disclosures of PHI.** You have the right to ask that Social Services limit how your information is used or disclosed. You must make the request in writing and tell Social Services what information you want to limit and to whom you want the limits to apply. Social Services is not required to agree to the restriction. You can request that the restrictions be terminated in writing or verbally.

- **Right to Revoke Permission.** If you are asked to sign an authorization to use or disclose information, you can cancel that authorization at any time. You must make the request in writing. This will not affect information that has already been shared.

- **Right to Choose How We Communicate with you.** You have the right to ask that Social Services share information with you in a certain way or in a certain place. For example, you may ask Social Services to send information to your work address instead of your home address. You must make this request in writing. You do not have to explain the basis for your request.

- **Right to File a Complaint.** You have the right to file a complaint if you do not agree with how Social Services has used or disclosed information about you.

- **Right to Get a Paper Copy of this Notice.** You have the right to ask for a paper copy of this notice at any time.

### **How to contact Social Services to Review, Correct, or Limit Your Protected Health Information (PHI)**

You may contact your local Social Services office or the Social Services Privacy Official at the address listed at the end of this notice to:

- Ask to look at or copy your records
- Ask to correct or change your records
- Ask to limit how information about you
- Ask for a list of the times Social Services disclosed is used or disclosed information about you
- Ask to cancel your authorization

Social Services may deny your request to look at, copy or change your records. If Social Services denies your request, Social Services will send you a letter that tells you why your request is being denied and how you can ask for a review of the denial. You will also receive information about how to file a complaint with Social Services or with the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Office for Civil Rights.

### **How to File a Complaint or Report a Problem**

You may contact any of the people listed below if you want to file a complaint or to report a problem with how Social Services has used or disclosed information about you. Your benefits will not be affected by any complaints you make. Social Services cannot retaliate against you for filing a complaint, cooperating in an investigation, or refusing to agree to something that you believe to be unlawful.

## **Department of Social Services, Douglas County**

### **For More Information**

If you have any questions about this notice or need more information, please contact the Social Services Privacy Official or General Privacy Officer.

### **Mike Woods, Director of Social Services**

320-762-2302

Fax: 320-762-3833

809 Elm St., Suite 1186

Alexandria, MN 56308

### **Heather Haman, General Privacy Officer**

305 8<sup>th</sup> Street

Alexandria, MN 56308

Phone: 320-762-3858

[heather.haman@co.mail.douglas.mn.us](mailto:heather.haman@co.mail.douglas.mn.us)

### **For More Information**

In the future, Social Services may change its Notice of Privacy Practices. Any changes will apply to information Social Services already has, as well as any information Social Services receives in the future. A copy of the new notice will be posted at each Social Services site and facility and provided as required by law. You may ask for a copy of the current notice anytime you visit a Social Services facility.