

Incident reporting and the Serious Incident Response Scheme (SIRS) in home care

Working with older people living in their own homes means support workers may see, or become aware of, certain risks or incidents relating to their clients. This handout aims to help you understand why being observant and reporting incidents is so important, and to clarify your responsibilities when it comes to incident management and the Serious Incident Response Scheme (SIRS).

Why it matters to be observant

Being vigilant helps you recognise risks, prevent harm, and ensure that clients receive the right support and follow-up when an incident occurs. Reporting incidents is not about getting anyone in trouble, it's about protecting clients and making sure concerns are addressed quickly and properly.

Incidents can include anything from falls or injuries to changes in wellbeing, such as confusion, distress, or unusual behaviour. By noticing and reporting these incidents, you help maintain a high standard of care and support your clients' health and safety.

Incident Management: Organisational Processes and Responsibilities

Every home care provider has established procedures for reporting and managing incidents. As a support worker, your responsibility is to follow these processes whenever you witness or become aware of an incident involving an older client. These procedures ensure that all incidents, whether minor or serious, are properly recorded and investigated.

You do not need to decide how serious an incident is or whether it is SIRS reportable. Your organisation will review your report and determine the appropriate response. This takes the pressure off you and ensures all incidents are handled consistently and correctly.

Serious Incident Response Scheme (SIRS)

The Serious Incident Response Scheme (SIRS) is a Government initiative **designed to protect older people receiving aged care.**

SIRS sets out rules about how providers must respond to and report serious incidents involving clients.

It covers incidents that may involve abuse, neglect, or other harm while services are being delivered.

Key points to remember:

- SIRS applies to **all aged care, home care and CHSP providers** and their workers.
- Providers **must categorise incidents** as Category 1 (serious harm) or Category 2 (less serious, but still important).
- Support workers are **not responsible for deciding** whether an incident is SIRS reportable.
- You only need to report what you **observe** or **suspect**. The organisation handles categorisation and reporting to the Government.

Priority 2 reportable incidents (occurred during a service visit)	Priority 1 reportable incidents (occurred during a service visit)
- unreasonable use of force - psychological or emotional abuse - stealing or financial coercion - neglect - inappropriate use of restrictive practices	- missing participants - unlawful sexual contact or inappropriate sexual conduct - unexpected death

Reporting Incidents: Step-by-Step Guidance

Observe and Record: If you witness, discover, or suspect an incident, make a note of what happened, when, and who was involved. Use clear, factual language.

Report Promptly: Follow your organisation's reporting process. This might involve completing a form, calling your supervisor, or logging the incident in a digital system.

Stay Reassured: You are not expected to investigate, categorise, or resolve incidents yourself. Your role is simply to report.

Follow Up: If you are unsure whether something counts as an incident, report it anyway. It's better to be safe than sorry.

Clarifying responsibilities when an incident occurs

It's OK if you feel unsure about what to report, but remember, your job is to pass on information, not to make decisions about seriousness or next steps. The organisation's managers and designated staff will review your report and decide if it needs to be handled internally or reported as a SIRS incident. This approach ensures that all incidents are properly assessed and actioned.

Examples of common incidents that occur during a home care service:	Medication errors: You find the wrong medication has been given or missed.	Changes in behaviour: You notice a client is confused, distressed, or acting differently than usual.
Safety hazards: You spot broken equipment, unsafe conditions, or anything posing a risk to the client.	Falls or injuries: A client falls and hurts themselves during your shift.	Allegations or suspicions of abuse: The client tells you someone has harmed them, or you see signs of neglect.

All of these incidents or hazards need to be reported to your organisation, but not all of these are SIRS reportable incidents.

Even if an incident occurred outside your shift, or you weren't present, let your organisation know if you become aware of it. They will decide how to proceed

When is an incident NOT a SIRS reportable incident?

- The incident is NOT one of the 8 types of reportable incidents under the SIRS (see next page)
- The incident did NOT occur during a service i.e. it was unwitnessed because it occurred at a time when no services were being delivered
- The incident is client-to-client, or family member-to-client

This page provides details of the 8 reportable incident types under SIRS:

Unreasonable use of force:

- hitting
- pushing
- shoving
- rough handling

Unlawful sexual contact or inappropriate sexual conduct:

- sexual threats
- stalking
- sexual activities without consent

Neglect:

- withholding personal care
- untreated wounds
- insufficient assistance during meals

Psychological or emotional abuse:

- yelling
- name-calling
- ignoring
- making threatening gestures
- refusing access to care or services as a means of punishment

Unexpected death:

- The provider didn't take reasonable steps to prevent a death.
- A death results directly from something the provider did or didn't do.

Stealing or financial coercion by a staff member:

- coercing someone to change their will
- stealing valuables

Inappropriate use of restrictive practices:

- using a restrictive practice without prior consent
- using a restrictive practice in a non-emergency situation:
- issuing a drug to influence someone's behaviour as a form of restrictive practice

Unexplained absence from care:

- Someone is absent from the service without explanation, and there are reasonable grounds to report the absence to the police.



May 2026

Scan to watch a short and helpful explainer video for this topic!

