

□

## Privacy

### **Rationale**

Privacy of personal information is an important principle to HMC. We are committed to collecting, using and disclosing personal information responsibly and only to the extent necessary for the services we provide. We also try to be open and transparent as to how we handle personal information. This document describes our privacy policies.

### **What is Personal Information?**

Personal information is information about an identifiable individual. Personal information includes information that relates to: an individual's *personal characteristics* (e.g., gender, age, income, home address or phone number, ethnic background, family status); *health* (e.g., health history, health conditions, health services received by them); or, *activities and views* (e.g., religion, politics, opinions expressed by an individual, an opinion or evaluation of an individual). Personal information is different from business information (e.g., an individual's business address and telephone number). This is not protected by privacy legislation.

### **Who We Are**

Our organization, HMC, includes at the time of writing 64 staff. We use a number of consultants and agencies that may, in the course of their duties, have limited access to personal information we hold. These include computer consultants, office security and maintenance, bookkeepers and accountants, temporary workers to cover holidays, credit card companies, website managers, cleaners and lawyers. We restrict their access to any personal information we hold as much as is reasonably possible. We also have their assurance that they follow appropriate privacy principles.

### **We Collect Personal Information: PRIMARY PURPOSES**

#### ***About Clients***

We collect, use and disclose personal information in order to serve our clients. For our clients, the primary purpose for collecting personal information is to provide appropriate services. None of the information is released without permission unless our files are subpoenaed. A second primary purpose is to obtain a baseline of information so that in providing on going services we can identify changes that occur over time.

#### ***About Members of the General Public***

For members of the general public, our primary purposes for collecting personal information are to provide notice of special events (e.g., a seminar or conference) or to make them aware of our services in general. For example, while we try to use work contact information where possible, we might collect home addresses, fax numbers and email addresses. We try to obtain consent before using any such personal information, but where this is not, for any reason, possible, we will upon request immediately remove any personal information from our distribution list.

On our website we only collect, with the exception of cookies, the personal information you provide and only use that information for the purpose you gave it to us (e.g., to respond to your email message, to register for a course, to subscribe to our newsletter). Cookies are only used to help you navigate our website and are not used to monitor you.

#### ***About Contract Staff, Volunteers and Students***

For people who are contracted to do work for us (e.g., temporary workers), our primary purpose for collecting personal information is to ensure we can contact them in the future (e.g., for new assignments) and for necessary work-related communication (e.g., sending out paycheques, year-end tax receipts). Examples of the type of personal information we collect for those purposes

include home addresses and telephone numbers. If contract staff, volunteers or students wish a letter of reference or an evaluation, we will collect information about their work related performance and provide a report as authorized by them.

### **We Collect Personal Information: RELATED AND SECONDARY PURPOSES**

Like most organizations, we also collect, use and disclose information for purposes related to or secondary to our primary purposes. The most common examples of our related and secondary purposes are as follows:

- To invoice clients for goods or services that was not paid for at the time, to process credit card payments or to collect unpaid accounts.
- To advise clients and others of special events or opportunities (e.g., a seminar, development of a new service, arrival of a new product) that we have available.
- Our Coordinators may review client and other files for the purpose of ensuring that we provide high quality services, including assessing the performance of our staff. In addition, external consultants (e.g., auditors, lawyers, practice consultants, voluntary accreditation programs) may on our behalf do audits and continuing quality improvement reviews of our services, including reviewing client files and interviewing our staff. Client information collected will reflect: the number of clients referred to the agency; the number of registered clients of the agency; and the age, gender and place of residence of the client.
- In addition, as professionals, we will report serious misconduct, incompetence or incapacity of other practitioners, whether they belong to other organizations or our own. Also, our organization believes that it should report information suggesting serious illegal behaviours to the authorities. Also, like all organizations, various government agencies (e.g., Canada Customs and Revenue Agency, Information and Privacy Commissioner, Human Rights Commission, Ministry of Citizenship and Immigration etc.) have the authority to review our files and interview our staff as a part of their mandates. In these circumstances, we may consult with professionals (e.g., lawyers, accountants) who will investigate the matter and report back to us.
- The cost of services provided by the organization to clients may be paid for by third parties (e.g., CIC, MIC). These third-party payers often have your consent or legislative authority to direct us to collect and disclose to them certain information in order to demonstrate client entitlement to this funding.
- Clients or other individuals we deal with may have questions about services after they have been received. We also provide ongoing services for many of our clients over a period of months or years for which our previous records are helpful. We retain our client information for a minimum of seven years.
- You can choose not to be part of some of these related or secondary purposes (e.g., by declining to receive notice of special events or opportunities, by paying for your services in advance). We do not, however, have much choice about some of these related or secondary purposes (e.g., external regulation).

### **Protecting Personal Information**

We understand the importance of protecting personal information. For that reason, we have taken the following steps:

- Paper information is either under supervision or secured in a locked or restricted area.
- Electronic hardware is either under supervision or secured in a locked or restricted area at all times. In addition, passwords are used on computers. All of our cell phones are digital as these signals are more difficult to intercept.
- Paper information is transmitted through sealed, addressed envelopes or boxes by

- reputable companies.
- Electronic information is transmitted either through a direct line or has identifiers removed or is encrypted.
  - Staff is trained to collect, use and disclose personal information only as necessary to fulfill their duties and in accordance with our privacy policy.
  - External consultants and agencies with access to personal information must enter into privacy agreements with us.
  - All breeches will be reported immediately

## **Retention and Destruction of Personal Information**

We need to retain personal information for some time to ensure that we can answer any questions you might have about the services provided and for our own accountability to external regulatory bodies. However, we do not want to keep personal information too long in order to protect your privacy.

We keep our client files for seven years. Our client and contact directories are much more difficult to systematically destroy, so we remove such information when we can if it does not appear that we will be contacting you again. However, if you ask, we will remove such contact information right away. We keep any personal information relating to our general correspondence (i.e., with people who are not clients) newsletters, seminars and marketing activities for about six months after the newsletter ceases publication or a seminar or marketing activity is over.

We destroy paper files containing personal information by shredding. We destroy electronic information by deleting it and, when the hardware is discarded, we ensure that the hard drive is physically destroyed.

## **You Can Look at Your Information**

With only a few exceptions, you have the right to see what personal information we hold about you. Often all you have to do is ask. We can help you identify what records we might have about you. We will also try to help you understand any information you do not understand (e.g., short forms, technical language, etc.). We will need to confirm your identity, if we do not know you, before providing you with this access. We reserve the right to charge a nominal fee for such requests.

If there is a problem we may ask you to put your request in writing. If we cannot give you access, we will tell you within 30 days if at all possible and tell you the reason, as best we can, as to why we cannot give you access.

If you believe there is a mistake in the information, you have the right to ask for it to be corrected. This applies to factual information and not to any professional opinions we may have formed. We may ask you to provide documentation that our files are wrong. Where we agree that we made a mistake, we will make the correction and notify anyone to whom we sent this information. If we do not agree that we have made a mistake, we will still agree to include in our file a brief statement from you on the point and we will forward that statement to anyone else who received the earlier information.

## **Do You Have a Question?**

Our Information Officer is Human Resources; He/She will attempt to answer any questions or concerns you might have. If you wish to make a formal complaint about our privacy practices,

you may make it in writing to our Information Officer. He will acknowledge receipt of your complaint; ensure that it is investigated promptly and that you are provided with a formal written decision with reasons. If you have a concern about the professionalism or competence of our services or the mental or physical capacity of any of our professional staff we would ask you to discuss those concerns with us. However, if we cannot satisfy your concerns, you are entitled to make a complaint to the Executive Director.

This policy is made under the Personal Information Protection and Electronic Documents Act. That is a complex Act and provides some additional exceptions to the privacy principles that are too detailed to set out here. There are some rare exceptions to the commitments set out above.

For more general inquiries, the Information and Privacy Commissioner of Canada oversees the administration of the privacy legislation in the private sector. The Commissioner also acts as a kind of ombudsman for privacy disputes. The Information and Privacy Commissioner can be reached at:

112 Kent Street  
Ottawa, Ontario K1A 1H3  
Phone (613) 995-8210 | 800-282-1376 | Fax (613) 947-6850 | TTY (613) 992-9190  
[www.privcom.gc.ca](http://www.privcom.gc.ca)