Howard Center Client Handbook

Third Edition

Quick Reference

<logo>

Howard Center Main Number

802-488-6000

Howard Center’s Intake Line

Anyone can call Howard Center. We will provide support, answer questions, and connect you to resources and services at Howard Center or in the community.

Frequent reasons for calling:

Looking for therapy

Feeling worried about a child

Needing support for your family

Getting help for an addiction

<logo>

First Call for Chittenden County

802-488-7777

Howard Center’s Crisis Line

Available 24/7/365

Frequent reasons for calling:

• Overwhelming emotions

• Thoughts of suicide

• Hearing disturbing voices

• Immediate concern for a loved one’s well-being

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WOULD YOU LIKE TO REGISTER TO VOTE?

If you are not registered to vote and would like help, please speak to your provider or front desk staff for a registration form. To be eligible to vote in Vermont, you must:

1. be a citizen of the United States;

2. be a resident of Vermont and a resident of the town in which you apply to be added to the checklist; (OR be a military or overseas voter qualified under the federal Uniformed and Overseas Citizens Absentee Voting Act whose last place of residence in the United States immediately prior to moving overseas was in a Vermont town or city);

3. take, or have previously taken, the Voter’s Oath; And be 18 years of age or older or will be 18 on or before the day of election.

About Howard Center  
Welcome  
Welcome, and thank you for choosing Howard Center. This handbook is designed to familiarize you with Howard Center and to explain your rights and responsibilities. It is available in a number of different languages, large print, and in electronic format. If you would like a different format or if you need help understanding any information in this handbook, please ask a staff member or call 802-488-6000. We hope that you find our services helpful in supporting you and/or your family members. If you have questions, please don’t hesitate to ask. We strive to provide compassionate care and treatment for children, adults, and families in our community to ensure Help is here. Thank you.  
<Signature>  
Catherine Simonson, Chief Client Services Officer

Our Mission  
We help people and communities thrive by providing supports and services to address mental health, substance use, and developmental needs.

How We Help  
Howard Center has a long and rich history as a trusted provider in our community. With a legacy spanning more than 150 years, Howard Center has been providing progressive, compassionate, high quality care, support, and treatment for those members of our community in need. Founded in 1865 as an agency serving the children of the destitute, it now offers mental health, substance use, and developmental services across the lifespan. Our staff of 1,600 provides help and support in over 60 locations in four counties. More than 16,000 clients and community members turned to us last year for help to lead healthier and more fulfilling lives.

Our Vision  
Howard Center is a national leader in the delivery of integrated and seamless community-based supports for individuals, families, and communities in need. Help is here.

Core Values  
Clients are at the heart of our decision making.  
We are committed to individual and collective well-being and success.  
We are responsible stewards of the resources entrusted to us.|  
We are steadfast in our practice and pursuit of excellence.

Howard Center is committed to the health and safety of our clients, staff and community. Please ask your provider or the front desk about current safety precautions in place.

Hours of Operation  
The standard business hours for Howard Center are 8:30am to 5:00pm Monday – Friday, with specific sites and programs having expanded hours. Times of services may vary, and are flexible according to client needs. Some services, including residential support and crisis services, are provided 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days a year.

Howard Center Main Number

802-488-6000

Howard Center’s Intake Line

First Call for Chittenden County

802-488-7777

Howard Center’s Crisis Line

24/7/365

Services

How to Get Help

Anyone can call Howard Center’s main number 802-488-6000 to get help. When you call, you will be asked the reason for your call, and you may receive information about community resources and eligibility requirements for various programs. If needed and desired, you will be scheduled for an intake assessment. Howard Center’s 24/7/365 mobile crisis program, First Call for Chittenden County, is available for phone support, face-to-face intervention, and crisis assessment. If you are outside Chittenden County and need crisis support, we will connect you to resources in your area, as each county in Vermont has its own crisis service. After an intake or crisis assessment, you may be referred to one or more Howard Center programs or other community resources, as needed. Occasionally, referrals are made directly to a Howard Center program without an initial assessment, such as referrals by schools. If there is a waitlist for needed services, you will receive support while you are waiting. Once the Howard Center service begins, you will be assigned a primary provider who will work with you to determine your needs and preferences. Together you will create an individualized service plan or treatment plan. Your provider can make additional referrals within Howard Center or to other community groups if other services or supports are needed for you or a family member. Live language interpretation is available for phone calls and face-to-face services. If services are needed outside of Howard Center, you can also dial 2-1-1 on your phone. Vermont 2-1-1 is a statewide resource offering information and referrals for an array of services, including employment, education, child care, government programs, support groups, legal aid, transportation, community food shelves, and other resources. The service is available 24/7/365 and is a local call from anywhere in Vermont. Live language interpretation is offered.

Organizational Structure

Howard Center offers a variety of services:

Access & Intake Services  
Crisis Programs  
Outpatient Services  
Long Term Supports and Services  
Home and Community Programs  
School Programs  
Medication Assisted Treatment Programs

Consumer Input  
Your involvement in the planning and evaluation of the services you receive is an important part of the agency’s philosophy. There are a number of ways that we will encourage your participation. All clients and family members, if appropriate and permitted by the client, participate in the development of their service plan(s). Before services begin, you will meet with a provider for an assessment and together you will make decisions about which services are right for you. A primary provider will be assigned to you. Depending on the program(s) you are enrolled in, this person may be called a counselor, social worker, therapist, case manager, support worker, doctor, nurse, or something similar. This provider will coordinate your care with you. You and your provider will develop a plan of care to meet your individual needs. You will decide what your goals are, what steps you need to take to achieve these goals, and how you will know you are ready to transition into other services or to leave the agency. Your provider will help you with referrals to other services if that is necessary. On occasion, clients may choose to develop special plans in advance should their condition worsen or they develop another serious problem which makes it difficult for them to make decisions. These are called advance directives. Howard Center has a number of groups, called Standing Committees, for clients and/or their families to provide feedback about services and input on our current work and the future direction of Howard Center. These Standing Committees are: Family Advisory Council, Consumer Advocacy Network, Developmental Services Standing Committee, and the Substance Use Services Advisory Committee. Speak to your provider or contact the Howard Center main number, 802-488-6000, for more information. Additionally, more than 50% of Howard Center’s Board of Trustees are clients or their family members. One of the ways we evaluate our services is to ask how satisfied clients are and if the services they received have helped them. We use questionnaires while clients are receiving services and contact clients after completing services. Your participation in this process is voluntary and greatly appreciated.

Payment for Services  
Howard Center services are paid for through a variety of funding sources. Many kinds of insurance, including Medicaid, are accepted. If you have insurance, please bring your card to your first visit. Be aware that some insurance companies require a co-pay. If you are uninsured, we will use a sliding scale to set individual fees based on your financial situation. Please note that if you choose not to use your insurance, the sliding fee scale cannot be used. Your fee will be explained to you before you begin to receive services. Howard Center is committed to working with clients, families, health insurers, local and state agencies, private entities, and other sources to secure funding to support needed services. Financial limitations will not limit access to services. If you have billing questions, call 802-488-6920.

Creating a Safe Environment  
Each Howard Center site is equipped with fire extinguishers and first aid kits. There are emergency exit instructions posted near every door. Each site has a specific evacuation plan. If you would like a copy of a site’s emergency plan, please ask your provider. Fire drills and lockdown safety protocols (also posted near every door) are regularly practiced. Generally, there is at least one staff member at every site who is trained in CPR and first aid. Staff are also trained in Universal Precautions. Should a situation arise in which an individual requires medical attention or Universal Precautions should be implemented, clients can ask a staff member to intervene. A number of sites have automated external defibrillators. Our relationship with those we serve is based on mutual respect and consideration. Although some of the rules and expectations we outline may be imposed by state or federal regulations, our main goal is to create a positive experience for our clients. Mutually respectful behavior is expected from clients and staff. No weapons are allowed on agency property. The possession and/or use of any and all illegal drugs on agency property is strictly prohibited. In accordance with Vermont State law, the use of all tobacco products on agency grounds, both indoors and outdoors, is strictly prohibited except in some of our residential programs. “Tobacco products” includes all tobacco products, e-cigarettes, and any non-FDA approved nicotine product or device. (The use of FDA approved nicotine replacement products for the purpose of cessation is allowed.) If you would like additional information regarding tobacco usage statistics, cessation assistance, or to speak to a cessation specialist, please go to www.802quits.org or call 1-800-784-8669. For additional substance use treatment resources, contact your provider or our main number at 802-488-6000. Service animals, emotional support/companion animals, and service animals in training are welcomed on agency property and in most agency activities, as many staff and clients partner with service animals. It is important to note that while service animals and service animals in training are permitted in places of public accommodation, emotional support/companion animals do not have the same option for legal access. Visit www.ada.gov for rules and regulations regarding service and emotional support/companion animals. According to the Americans with Disability Act (ADA), a service animal is defined as “a dog that has been individually trained to do work or perform tasks for an individual with a disability.” Service animals in training are permissible under Vermont accessibility statute. Service animals come in all breeds and sizes and do not need to be visibly identifiable. They should be under their handler’s control and leashed at all times unless tethering the animal interferes with the handler being helped with a disability related activity. From time to time, you may see a therapy dog team on our premises who has been invited to visit folks in one of our programs. Since you may not know which type of dog you may be seeing at Howard Center, it is best to talk with the handler before engaging with an animal. Please understand that many of these animals are with their person for disability related reasons, so it is important not to distract the animal by making sounds, offering food, or trying to pet.

Client Rights and Legal Information

Confidentiality of Information  
Federal and state laws protect your confidential information. Respecting confidentiality is important to us. We will use and disclose your health information for treatment, payment, and healthcare operations, as outlined in our Notice of Privacy Practices. This includes using and disclosing health information about you so that the treatment and services you receive at the agency may be approved by, billed to, and paid for by a third party such as an insurance company. Alcohol and drug abuse information is protected by 42 CFR Part 2 and may not be released or disclosed without your specific written permission unless otherwise provided for in the regulations. You are advised that under certain legal circumstances, such as the following, information about you or your family may be released without your permission:

• We are mandated by Vermont law to report actual or suspected cases of abuse and neglect involving children and vulnerable adults.

• We are required to take appropriate action if you are in imminent danger to yourself or others, or in the event of a medical emergency.

• We reserve the right to disclose credible threats of violence or harm made against identifiable victims, including persons or property.

• On occasion, we may be required to comply with a court-ordered subpoena to testify or provide records.

• We will disclose medical information about you when required to do so by federal, state, or local law.

Rights of Clients and Families  
Howard Center’s goal is to provide services and treatment in the least restrictive environment available in a manner that is responsive and appropriate to your unique characteristics, needs, desires, and abilities.

• You have the right to be treated with dignity and respect at all times when receiving services. You have the right to adequate and humane treatment and care.

• You have the right to services and support without regard to race, religion, gender, ethnic background, age, sexual orientation, disability, or HIV status.

• You have the right to be informed about all agency policies that affect the course of your treatment or service experience. Please ask your provider for more information regarding agency policies.

• You have the right to communicate in your primary language and primary mode of communication.

• You have the right to be informed of your service provider’s credentials and qualifications. Licensed and rostered psychotherapists will provide their credentials and qualifications to you by no later than their third contact with you. The credentials and qualifications of all other direct service staff members will be provided to you upon your request.

• You have the right to receive information about eligibility criteria and funding priorities, available services, programs and practitioners, practice guidelines, management practices, and grievance and appeal procedures.

• You have the right to be an active participant in the development of an individualized treatment or support plan that may include other agencies and to review such plans and records.

• You have the right to informed consent and to participate in ALL decisions which will establish your treatment/service goals, including your preferences regarding the choice of provider. During intake or at any time during the course of services, you may tell your provider your preferences regarding service delivery, release of information, concurrent services, composition of the service delivery team, and involvement in research projects, if applicable.

• You have the right to receive timely, pertinent information to facilitate your decision making.

• You have the right to privacy. Your confidentiality is protected by state and federal law except in specific situations allowed or required by law.

• You have the right, to the extent permitted by law, to refuse medication or specific treatment procedures.

• You have the right to access, and receive a copy of, the health records we originate and/or maintain on you, with some exceptions. You have additional rights regarding your health information that are outlined in the Notice of Privacy Practices.

• You have the right to all legal protection and due process for status as an outpatient and inpatient, both voluntary and involuntary, as defined under Vermont law.

• You have the right to access or be given a referral to legal entities for appropriate representation.

• You have the right to access or be given a referral to self-help and advocacy support services.

• You have the right to have any alleged infringement of your rights investigated and resolved.

• A child or adolescent with a severe emotional disturbance as defined by ACT 264 who needs the services of more than one agency is entitled to the development of a Coordinated Services Plan through their treatment team’s planning process. If you as the parent or guardian are dissatisfied with the coordination of services, you may appeal under ACT 264 through the Agency of Human Services.

• In addition to these rights, participants of some programs may have additional rights or rights stated in a different way. Clients are informed of their rights annually or as often as is required by the State or other governing or regulatory body.

These rights do not require any health, mental health, or service professional to administer treatment contrary to such professional’s judgment if the treatment exceeds the skill level of the professional or the service is deemed to be harmful to the individual’s wellbeing or is beyond the financial resources of the organization.

None of the above rights shall prevent a program from reducing or eliminating services to a person for whom the provision of appropriate treatment or services is impossible as a result of a person’s refusal to consent to or cooperate with reasonably offered and provided care and support services.

Responsibilities of Clients and Families  
Services are effective only when there is a partnership between the client and provider. All parties need to make a full commitment to achieving the treatment or service goals. We ask all clients to commit to the following:

• Regular participation in treatment or services

• Regular attendance at scheduled visits or appointments

• Payment at the time of service when a direct fee has been agreed upon

• Resolution of differences in a reasonable way

• No physical or verbal threats, or aggressive behavior

• No weapons are allowed on agency premises

• No smoking or use of tobacco products is allowed on agency premises

• No illicit drugs or alcohol are allowed on agency premises

If the above expectations are not followed, the agency reserves the right to discontinue or place restrictions on services. Any rights or privileges that have been restricted or suspended may be reinstated at the agency’s discretion, based on individual circumstances and the reason for restriction or suspension.

Code of Ethics Summary  
Howard Center has developed a detailed Code of Ethics to which it expects its employees to conform. A summary of the ethical expectations are outlined below.

• Howard Center employees will respect and promote the rights of clients to self-determination and will assist clients to identify and clarify their own goals.

• Howard Center employees will not knowingly engage in behavior that is harassing or demeaning to persons with whom they interact in their work, based on a person’s age, gender, race, ethnicity, national origin, religion, sexual orientation, disability, language, or socioeconomic status.

• Howard Center staff will not use derogatory language in any written or verbal communications.

• Howard Center employees will not engage in physical contact with clients that is not professionally justifiable and that causes harm, including psychological harm.

• Howard Center employees will obtain appropriate informed consent to therapy or related procedures, except in instances in which capacity to consent is in question.

• Howard Center staff will explain services provided and any results of such services in a language that is understandable to the recipient of those services.

• Howard Center employees will take steps to set appropriate boundaries when it is not feasible or reasonable to avoid social or other nonprofessional contact with clients, students, supervisees, or research participants. Whenever feasible, Howard Center employees will refrain from treating clients where a pre-existing relationship could cause harm or a prior sexual relationship existed.

• Howard Center employees will make reasonable efforts to plan for care in the event that psychological services are interrupted by factors such as illness, death, or scheduling availability.

• Howard Center employees will not abandon patients or clients. Howard Center employees will appropriately terminate a professional relationship when it becomes reasonably clear that the patient or client no longer needs services or is not benefitting from the services.

• Howard Center employees will not engage in, condone, or facilitate unfair discrimination based on age, gender, race, ethnicity, national origin, religion, sexual orientation, disability, language, or socioeconomic status.

• Howard Center employees will discuss limitations on confidentiality, including limitations that are applicable in group, marital, and family therapy, or in organizational consulting.

• Howard Center employees have a primary obligation to take precautions to respect the confidentiality rights of those with whom they work or consult, recognizing that confidentiality may be established by law, institutional rules, or professional relationships.

• Howard Center staff is required to report abuse of children and vulnerable adults and threats of harm to self or others.

• As early as possible, Howard Center employees and the patient, client, or other appropriate recipient of services will reach an agreement specifying the compensation and billing arrangements. Howard Center employees will not barter or accept goods or services in return for services provided. Howard Center employees will not misrepresent the agency’s fees. Howard Center will not engage in fee splitting.

• Howard Center employees will perform evaluations, diagnostic services, or interventions only within the context of a defined professional relationship.

• Howard Center staff do not accept any gifts or gratuity, including expenses paid on behalf of an employee, with a value of more than $25.00. A complete version of the Howard Center Code of Ethics, including the above summary as well as other topics, can be found on our website at www.howardcenter.org.

Consumer Complaint, Grievance, and Appeal Policy and Procedures  
As a client of Howard Center, you have the right to file grievances about the services you receive. We strongly encourage you to request a full copy of our Grievance and Appeal Policy and Procedures, as it contains detailed information that is designed to help you through these processes. Speak to your provider or front desk staff to request more information. For your convenience, we have summarized the policy on the next several pages.

Definitions  
Adverse Benefit Determination: refers to any of the following:

• Denial or limited authorization of a requested service, including determinations based on the type or level of service, requirements of medical necessity, appropriateness, setting, or effectiveness of a covered service

• Reduction, suspension, or termination of a previously authorized service

• Denial, in whole or in part, of payment for a service

• Failure to provide services in a timely manner, as defined by the Agency of Human Services

• Failure to act within established timeframes regarding standard resolution of grievances and appeals

• Denial of a beneficiary’s request to obtain services outside the network

• Denial of a beneficiary’s request to dispute a financial liability, including cost sharing, copayments, premiums, deductibles, coinsurance, and other beneficiary liabilities

Appeal (applies to individuals with Medicare or Medicaid): a formal oral or written request from a consumer to the agency to review its decision on an adverse benefit determination. An expedited appeal is an appeal in an emergent situation which could seriously jeopardize the consumer’s life; health; or ability to attain, maintain, or regain maximum function.

Authorized Representative: an individual, either appointed by a client or authorized under state law, to act on behalf of the client obtaining a determination or dealing with any level of the grievance or appeal process. Unless otherwise stated, the authorized representative has all of the rights and responsibilities of the client they represent.

Fair Hearing: This is a quasi-judicial process where the consumer and the designated agency each present their side of the situation to a professional hearing officer. Fair hearings are only open as options after the consumer has exhausted Howard Center’s internal process with regard to an adverse benefit determination.

Grievances: an oral or written expression of consumer dissatisfaction about any matter other than an adverse benefit determination.

Grievance Review: An internal review of the grievance decision-making process by an unbiased third party within Howard Center.

Policy  
A grievance or appeal will be appropriately reviewed and given due consideration in a timely manner. Clients, and/or guardians, if applicable, will be informed of the agency’s grievance and appeal policy and procedures upon intake and annually thereafter, or at a different frequency if specific contracts dictate. The policy and procedures will also be posted in service locations and on the agency’s website. Additionally, all staff will be trained on the consumer grievance and appeal policy and procedures upon hire and annually thereafter. Any individuals initiating or pursuing a grievance or appeal will be free from any form of retaliation. Any questions about this policy or the associated procedures should be directed to Howard Center’s Director of Information Management and Compliance. There are four additional agency representatives to ensure compliance with this policy. The Director of Information Management and Compliance will serve as the grievances and appeals coordinator for Howard Center overall and is responsible for ensuring timely processing and resolution of all grievances and appeals. All discussions surrounding the decision process of a grievance or appeal will be kept confidential from the general public or third parties, unless requested otherwise by the client.

If you believe your privacy rights have been violated, you may file a complaint with the agency or with the secretary of the Department of Health and Human Services. To file a complaint with the agency, contact the Compliance Hotline by phone at the number noted below. Please note that privacy complaints are handled as required under federal law and are not addressed through the agency’s grievance process.

Clients of the Park Street Program and the Transitional Housing Program have additional grievance rights documented in the agency policy on the Prison Rape Elimination Act (PREA). This is available on the website [www.howardcenter.org](http://www.howardcenter.org).

Timelines and department-specific requirements may vary depending on the program in which the grievance or appeal occurs. The appointed grievance and appeal representative will be responsible for reviewing and complying with different departmental requirements, when not outlined in this policy.

At any time, a staff person or client can contact the Compliance Hotline by calling 802-488-7195 to leave a confidential voicemail. These can be anonymous. All calls will be acknowledged and investigated.

Copies of the full agency policy and procedure are available to any client upon request.

Office of Professional Regulation—Conduct and Complaint Process  
The Vermont Secretary of State Office of Professional Regulation provides Vermont licenses, certifications, and registrations for over 37,000 practitioners and businesses.

Each profession or occupation is governed by laws defining professional conduct. If this applies to your provider at Howard Center, he or she will provide you with a copy of their Disclosure Form and relevant statutes. You can find copies of the specific statutes at the Vermont Secretary of State Office of Professional Regulation site at <https://www.sec.state.vt.us/>professional-regulation.

Clients who wish to file a complaint may do so on the Office of Professional Regulation website by visiting https://www.sec.state.vt.us/professional-regulation/file-a-complaint.aspx. For further information you may reach the Office of Professional Regulation by writing or calling:

Office of Professional Regulation

89 Main Street, 3rd Floor

Montpelier, VT 05620

802-828-1505

Upon receipt of a complaint, an administrative review determines if the issues raised are covered by the applicable professional conduct statute. If so, a committee is assigned to investigate, collect information, and recommend action or closure to the appropriate governing body.

All complaint investigations are confidential. Should the investigation conclude with a decision for disciplinary action against a professional’s license and ability to practice, the name of the license holder would then be made public.

Disciplinary action through the Office of Professional Regulation ranges from reprimand to revocation of license, but does not involve financial compensation, with some exceptions. Financial remuneration can be pursued through private attorneys, small claims courts, or with the Consumer Protection Division of the Office of the Attorney General.

CLIENT ADVISEMENT FORM  
Copy for reference only.

<Howard Center logo>

Client Advisement

* Your decision to use our services is voluntary.
* Howard Center services are a cooperative effort between client and provider.
* While we trust that our services will be of benefit to you, there are no guarantees about the results of treatment, evaluation, or support.
* Some programs may use therapies or techniques in the course of treatment such as meditation, yoga, or guided imagery. Your provider will discuss this with you in more detail if you are to receive any of these services.

Client’s Confirmation of Disclosure

I have been oriented to Howard Center including:

1. Mission and Values

2. Hours of Operation, including Crisis Services

3. How to Access Services and Organizational Structure

4. Consumer Input

5. Payment of Services

6. Creating a Safe Environment

7. Confidentiality of Information

8. Rights of Clients and Families

9. Responsibilities of Clients and Families

10. Code of Ethics Summary

11. Consumer Complaint, Grievance, and Appeal Policy and Procedures

12. Office of Professional Regulation – Conduct and Complaint Process

13. My service provider’s credentials and qualifications

14. The site’s emergency exit route and location of fire extinguisher

15. Notice of Privacy Practices

Back cover

<Howard Center Logo>

HELP IS HERE.

Racism is a Public Health Emergency

Howard Center joined the City of Burlington and over 30 community organizations to declare racism as a public health emergency. Howard Center commits to the following action steps as an anti-racist organization:

1. Create a data dashboard system to identify health disparities and inform practice change within our agency’s clinical practice and recruitment plan.
2. Advance recruitment strategies to racially diversify the Board of Trustees and senior leadership at Howard Center.
3. Enhance training and support to address racist actions by those we serve (clients, students, patients).
4. Demonstrate support for Black Lives Matter through an agency action initiative.
5. Offer educational sessions on racism related to mental health, substance use, and developmental disabilities as part of our free and open to the public Community Education Series.

“We are committed to a world without racism. With roots in social justice, Howard Center staff work each day to serve our community and strengthen diversity, equity, and inclusion in our organizational culture and system of care. We look forward to joining together with our community partners to strategically and fully eradicate systemic racism throughout our community.”

* Catherine Simonson, LICSW, Chief Client Services Officer

HELP IS HERE.

<image>

We respect women, men, and non-binary people. We value Black lives. We stand with our LGBTQIA+ community members. We celebrate children. We stand with immigrants, refugees, with indigenous peoples, and people of all faiths. We support individuals and families challenged by mental health, substance use, and developmental disabilities.

We stand with our community.

HATE HAS NO BUSINESS HERE.

All are Welcome Here.

<logo>