

24.00 CHILD SAFETY AND WELLBEING POLICY

PURPOSE

This policy outlines the key mechanisms by which AccessHC upholds its commitment to the safety, participation and empowerment of all children who are engaged with AccessHC's services. Through this policy and accompanying procedures, it is expected that AccessHC staff, students, contractors and volunteers will understand and meet their moral, professional and legal responsibilities to safeguard children from all forms of abuse and neglect.

SCOPE

This policy applies to all AccessHC personnel including but not limited to the board, staff, students, contractors and volunteers.

RELEVANT LEGISLATION

- United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child:
- Child Wellbeing and Safety Act 2005 (amended 2016) (Vic)
- Working with Children Act 2005 (Vic)
- Working with Children Regulations 2006 (Vic)
- Child Safe Standards 2022 (Vic)
- Crimes Act 1958 (Vic)
- Crimes Act Amendment (Grooming) Act 2014 (Vic)
- Crimes Act Amendment (Protection of Children) Act 2014 (Vic)
- Family Law Act 1975 (Cth)
- Children Youth and Families Act 2005 (Vic)
- Family Violence Protection Act 2008 (Vic)
- Family Violence Protection Amendment (MARAM & Information Sharing) Act 2017 (Vic)
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DEFINITIONS

In line with the Victorian Government's *Child Safe Standards*, (2022) definitions of terms, and relevant legislation, definitions of terms applicable to this policy are as follows:

Child. A child is any person under the age of 18 years.

Young person. A young person is defined as being 12–18 years of age.

NOTE: the term 'child' is used throughout this policy to refer to both a child and young person.

Child abuse. Abuse constitutes any act committed against a child or young person, including, but not limited to:

- family violence
- grooming
- physical abuse
- sexual abuse
- emotional or psychological abuse
- neglect

Refer to Access HC Procedure - 24.03 Child Safety and Wellbeing Procedure – Reporting, Referring & Empowering for a full definition of the above plus guidelines on indicators of harm & abuse

Child safety. Means measures to protect children from abuse.

Cultural safety. Cultural safety is 'an environment that is safe for people of diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds and where there is no assault, challenge or denial of their identity, of who they are and what they need.

POLICY STATEMENTS

AccessHC is committed to the safety, protection and empowerment of all children who are engaged with our services and has zero tolerance of child abuse. We are dedicated to preventing child abuse by the early identification of risks and by removing and reducing these risks wherever possible.

Protecting children and young people from abuse and harm requires effort from the whole community. AccessHC assist parents, carers, families and communities to play their part in building and maintaining safe, inclusive and culturally respectful environments.

The cultural safety of children from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander backgrounds and children from culturally and/or linguistically diverse backgrounds are a core component of AccessHC's commitment to child safety and wellbeing, as is the safety and wellbeing of children with a disability.

Our commitment to child safety is publicly displayed at all sites and located on our website in appropriate child friendly language – Refer to Appendix One for the full version of our child safe commitments.

AccessHC has robust systems and processes in place to protect children from abuse. These include:

Child safety education and training

We provide all AccessHC personnel with regular and appropriate opportunities to develop their knowledge of, openness to and ability to address child safety matters. Training and briefings seek to ensure that everyone understands their professional, moral and legal responsibilities, including:

- Building their knowledge and understanding of child abuse and child safety risks
- Staying abreast of and meeting legislative requirements to protect the safety and wellbeing of children
- Maintaining familiarity and compliance with AccessHC's internal policies and procedures
- Continuously reviewing and improving systems and practices to protect children from abuse
- Taking prompt action when allegations of abuse are raised and ensuring that they are appropriately referred and investigated.

During the induction period, all new employees are required to complete mandatory training that addresses:

- Roles and responsibilities for keeping children safe from harm and abuse
- Information Sharing schemes and MARAM
- Policies and procedures that the organisation has to support personnel to respond to/report allegations, suspicions and/or incidents of child abuse.

Training updates are required yearly for personnel working directly with children and three yearly for all other personnel.

Other training requirements specific to roles and responsibilities include:

- Recognising signs of harm and abuse
- Responding to disclosures of abuse
- Cultural awareness and culturally safe practice

Child safety officers

AccessHC has in place two Child Safety Officers whose role it is to:

- Provide expert knowledge of child protection legislation, regulation and practice
- Oversee legislative changes and policy reviews as required regarding child safety and protection
- Conduct an annual risk assessment/develop a risk management plan as part of ongoing planning for quality improvement in child safety and protection.
- Implement professional development and training programs in child safety
- Provide advice and guidance to staff and associates who are managing complex or sensitive cases

AccessHC personnel are expected to draw on the expertise of the Child Safety Officers and to participate in briefings and education/training programs implemented by the Child Safety Officers.

Processes for responding to and reporting suspected child abuse

AccessHC takes allegations of abuse seriously, and has separate procedures for guiding staff on how to respond to and report allegations, suspicions and/or incidents of child abuse. The procedures include:

- 24.02 First Response – Responding to Disclosures of Child Abuse
- 24.03 Child Safety and Wellbeing – Reporting, Referring & Empowering
- 24.04 Child Safety: Employee Reportable Conduct
- 25.01 Child Information Sharing Scheme
- 25.02 Family Violence Information Sharing Scheme

Risk management practices and procedures

In addition to general occupational health and safety risks, AccessHC has risk management policies and procedures in place to identify, assess and outline steps to minimise child safety risks. This includes risks posed by physical environments (for example, medications being locked out of reach of children), online environments, organisational culture, client vulnerability, propensity of personnel and security measures for the onsite presence of contractors and/or visitors who are not directly involved with children (e.g. an electrician). A risk assessment is conducted annually and a risk management plan developed to manage identified risks.

Child safety code of conduct

AccessHC's Child Safety Code of Conduct specifies professional expectations and the standards of conduct required when working with children. All staff and personnel engaged in the provision of services and programs sign an agreement to abide by this Code of Conduct.

To ensure the Code is fully appreciated, understood and applied by all Access HC personnel and parents the following actions are taken:

- Access HC personnel read and sign the code of conduct when they are on boarded
- Communication of the code and how it applies to children/young persons and families is made in an appropriate way. This includes informing them of the behavior to expect from all Access HC personnel
- Re-reading and acknowledging the Code is included as part of annual training for existing AccessHC personnel
- Annual review and communication of the code occurs through the organisations communication channels including email, online communication systems, intranet, shared drive, team meetings as well as shared spaces including staff rooms and office areas
- The Code is included in employment advertisements and service contractors to ensure compliance

Behaviour that breaches the Code is expected to be reported to an AccessHC manager/supervisor and subsequently investigated. If the behaviour is deemed to be 'reportable conduct' as outlined in amendments to the *Child Wellbeing and Safety Act 2005*, the Commission for Children and Young People (CCYP) will be notified. In such instances, AccessHC will subsequently ensure that a thorough investigation of the reportable allegation is conducted in accordance with rules of procedural fairness and natural justice.

Any violation of the Code, whether or not it falls into the category of 'reportable conduct', shall result in disciplinary action, up to and including termination of employment.

Screening and recruitment practices

When recruiting and selecting employees and associates, AccessHC takes all reasonable steps to:

- Develop selection criteria and advertisements that clearly demonstrate our commitment to child safety and an awareness of our social and legislative responsibilities
- Confirm the applicant's Working with Children Check, National Police Check status, NDIS screening and/or professional registration (as relevant)
- Obtain proof of personal identity and any professional or other qualifications
- Verify the applicant's history of work involving children
- Obtain references that address the applicant's suitability for the job and for working with children (experience, skills & motivation).

New employees and other personnel engaged at AccessHC are inducted and supervised regularly by their direct reports. This ensures they understand AccessHC's commitment to child safety, their role in protecting children from abuse, and that their own behaviour towards children and young people is safe and appropriate.

Ongoing screening and supervision of staff, students, contractors and volunteers

AccessHC has processes for monitoring and assessing the continued suitability of staff and other personnel engaged to work with children, including regular reviews of the status of Working with Children Checks and staff professional registration requirements.

Empowering children, families and communities to stay safe

AccessHC personnel uphold the premise of the Victorian Child Safe Standards in that children, young people & families have unique insights into their lives, their needs and the world around them. They have a right to be heard and have their concerns and ideas taken seriously, particularly on matters that affect them, including how to keep safe. This aligns to our commitment to providing a trauma-informed service for our community.

AccessHC promotes the participation and empowerment of children, young people & families by:

- supporting them to understand their rights, including rights to safety, information & participation
- recognising the importance of friendships and support from peers to help children and young people feel safe and less isolated
- establishing an environment of trust and inclusion that enables them to ask questions and speak up if they are worried or feeling unsafe
- encouraging them to raise concerns, provide feedback and participate in decision-making that affects them
- valuing and respecting their opinions
- seeking their views about what makes them feel safe and unsafe
- providing opportunities for children and young people to participate in services and programs that are responsive to their contributions, thereby strengthening confidence and engagement

RESPONSIBILITIES

Board/CEO	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Ensure that AccessHC has an environment that is supportive of child safety and wellbeing - Ensure that there are robust systems and processes in place to protect children from abuse and appropriately manage cases of suspected abuse
Clinical Governance Committee	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Oversee the implementation and review of this policy and the accompanying procedures - Oversee child safety and reporting training for staff and managers - Ensure compliance with the Victorian Child Safe Standards
Child Safety Officers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Provide support and guidance for supervisors, managers and staff when unclear about policy and procedures regarding child safety - Oversee legislative changes and policy reviews as required regarding child safety and protection
Supervisors / Managers / Team Leaders	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Provide support and guidance for staff when abuse is suspected Consult with a Child Safety Officer on concerns or issues regarding instances of alleged child abuse - Support staff in their area of responsibility around child safety and reporting requirements

<p>All staff, students, contractors and volunteers working with children</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Be aware of and adhere to this policy and accompanying procedures Complete mandated child safety training- Advise all new clients of services for children and young persons that confidentiality will be limited by the Duty of Care undertaken by all AccessHC staff as per prescribed legislation. This will apply when a staff member reasonably believes that a child is in need of protection.
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RELATED INTERNAL POLICIES AND PROCEDURES

Policies

- 3.00 Risk Management
- 8.00 Human Resources
- 13.00 Workforce Development
- 16.00 Privacy
- 21.00 Access and Care
- 25.00 Information Sharing

Procedures

- 3.04 Incident Reporting
- 8.08 Working with Children Check
- 13.03 Staff Training and Development
- 16.01 Privacy
- 24.01 Child Safety Code of Conduct
- 24.02 First Response – Responding to Disclosures of Child Abuse
- 24.03 Child Safety and Wellbeing – Reporting, Referring & Empowering
- 24.04 Child Safety: Employee Reportable Conduct
- 25.01 Child Information Sharing Scheme (CISS)
- 25.02 Family Violence Information Sharing Scheme (FVISS)

SUPPORTING DOCUMENTS

State of Victoria 2022, *Child Safe Standards*

State of Victoria, Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) 2018, *Child Safe Standards Compliance Monitoring Framework*

Family Safety Victoria 2018, *Child Information Sharing Scheme Guidelines: Guidance for Information Sharing Entities*

Family Safety Victoria 2018, *Family Violence Information Sharing Guidelines: Guidance for Information Sharing Entities*

REVISION HISTORY

Version	Review date	Review body	Authorisation	Effective Date	Next Scheduled Review
2	Jan 2020	CG Committee	CEO	May 2020	May 2023

APPENDIX - Our Child Safe Commitments:

Children and young people's safety is our priority.

At Access Health and Community we:

- have ZERO tolerance for abuse towards children and young people
- take seriously any concerns about a child or young person's safety
- have strong systems in place to protect a child and young person from abuse
- are committed to children and young people's safety, participation and empowerment
- are dedicated to promoting the cultural safety of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people, and children and young people from other diverse backgrounds
- have a Code of Conduct for our workers and volunteers on how to behave when working with and around children and young people
- provide training and education to make sure everyone understands what to do
- hire people who are appropriate to work with and look after children and young people's safety
- will always take steps to minimise child and young people's safety risks and concerns
- have Child Safety officers to help our people review our practices and policies to keep children and young people safe from abuse and harm.