

# Child Safety and Wellbeing Policy

## 1. Purpose

This Child Safety and Wellbeing Policy demonstrates VMCH's strong commitment to child safety and wellbeing and sets out how our organisation keeps children safe from harm, including from child abuse, and our expectations about child safe practices for staff, volunteers, contractors and the broader VMCH community.

It has been developed in accordance with the Victorian Government's Child Safe Standards as well as the National Catholic Safeguarding Standards.

## 2. Commitment to child safety

All children who come to VMCH have a right to feel and be safe. The welfare of the children in our care will always be our first priority. VMCH will not tolerate any form of child abuse or harm.

VMCH is fully committed to child safety and wellbeing:

- We want children that access our services to be safe, happy and empowered. We support and respect all children, as well as our staff and volunteers.
- All allegations and safety concerns in relation to children will be treated very seriously and consistently with our clear policies and procedures.
- We have legal and moral obligations to contact authorities when we are worried about a child's safety, which we follow rigorously.
- We are committed to preventing child abuse and identifying risks early and removing and reducing these risks.
- We have excellent human resources and recruitment practices for all staff and volunteers.
- We are committed to regularly training and educating our staff and volunteers on child abuse risks.
- We are committed to the cultural safety of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, the cultural safety of children from a culturally and/or linguistically diverse background, and to providing a safe environment for all children living with a disability.
- We have specific policies, procedures and training in place that support our leadership team, staff and volunteers to achieve these commitments.

If we believe a child is at immediate risk of abuse or harm we will phone 000.

## 3. Scope

This policy applies to all Board members, employees, contractors, and volunteers and anyone else who conducts activities for or with VMCH which involve contact with children. This policy applies to all activities within VMCH which involve, result in or relate to contact with children, excluding St Paul's College which has its own Child Safety and Wellbeing Policy.

## 4. Responsibilities

**The Board** of VMCH and the **CEO** have the role of making sure:

- VMCH prioritises children's safety and wellbeing and that action is taken when a concern about children's safety is raised
- that appropriate and effective internal control systems are in place including appropriate policies and procedures and a Child Safe Code of Conduct
- The CEO is also responsible for overseeing investigations of reports of child abuse and reporting to the Board where appropriate

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Approved Date 27/10/22  
Review Date 27/10/25



**All staff/volunteers/contractors** share the responsibility for child safety, and must:

- champion and model a child safe culture at VMCH
- be familiar with and alert for any indications of the types of child abuse and harm that might occur
- understand and comply with VMCH's child safety policies and procedures
- report any child safety concern or complaint to their manager (or, if their manager is involved in the concern, to that person's manager or to a Child Safe Champion)

**All managers** overseeing child related services must ensure that they:

- take a proactive approach to embedding a child safe culture at VMCH
- assess the risk of child abuse within their area and take action to manage the risks in accordance with this policy and any risk assessments
- identify appropriate child safety training for staff and volunteers and ensure it is completed
- create a positive culture of reporting child safety concerns so people feel comfortable to raise concerns
- provide appropriate supervision of staff
- facilitate internal and external reporting, including mandatory reporting of any actual or suspected child abuse or harm in accordance with this policy and the Child Safe – Reporting Procedure
- action any recommendations from audits or reports on child safety and wellbeing

**Child Safe Champion** must ensure that:

- child safety is at the core of our child related services and drive any necessary change
- they undertake specific training on receiving reports of child abuse and conducting investigations
- where appropriate, receive reports of a child safety concern or complaint, escalate the matter to the appropriate manager for reporting and conduct investigations in accordance with the complaints policy
- initiate a review at least every 2 years of how effectively VMCH is delivering child safety and wellbeing

#### **The Governance Team**

- assist managers to undertake risk assessments of physical and online environments for children's activities
- assist with the review and amendment of child safety and wellbeing policies and procedures and changes to any associated policies

#### **The Quality and Clinical Excellence Team**

- the MOA quality framework includes audits to review and monitor staff practices and activities involving children to ensure compliance with the Child Safe Standards and findings are reported to the Executive and Board through monthly reporting.
- collate data from incident reports and complaints including those involving any child abuse or harm to children through monthly reports, thereby notifying the General Manager Quality and Innovation about those incidents and complaints who will report them to the Quality Compliance and Risk Committee.

#### **People and Culture Team**

- Ensuring our recruitment and screening practices comply with the Child Safe Standards

## **5. Definitions**

<b>Term</b>	<b>Definition</b>
<b>Child</b>	a person below the age of 18 years

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Term	Definition
<b>Child abuse</b>	all forms of physical violence against a child, causing serious emotional or psychological harm to a child, a sexual offence committed against a child, serious neglect of a child, an offence committed against a child under section 49M(1) of <i>the Crimes Act 1958</i> (Vic), such as grooming
<b>Harm</b>	is damage to the health, safety or wellbeing of a child, including as a result of child abuse by adults or the conduct of other children. It includes physical, emotional, sexual and psychological harm. Harm can arise from a single act or event and can also arise as a result of a series of acts or events over a period of time
<b>Cultural safety</b>	the recognition, protection and continued advancement of the inherent rights, cultures and traditions of a particular culture
<b>Mandatory reporting</b>	Reporting any reasonable belief that a child's safety is at risk to the relevant authorities (such as the police and/or the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS)) and fulfil their obligations as mandatory reporters – see the Child Safe – Reporting Procedure for information.
<b>Concerns and Complaints</b>	<p>A concern refers to any potential issue that could impact negatively on the safety and wellbeing of children.</p> <p>A complaint is an expression of dissatisfaction to VMCH related to one or more of the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• our services or dealings with individuals</li> <li>• allegations of abuse or misconduct by a staff member, a volunteer or another individual associated with VMCH</li> <li>• disclosures of abuse or harm made by a child</li> <li>• the conduct of a child at VMCH</li> <li>• the inadequate handling of a prior concern</li> <li>• general concerns about the safety of a group of children or activity</li> </ul>

## 6. Documenting policies and procedures

VMCH has a Child Safe Code of Conduct which specifies the standards of conduct required when working with children. Staff, volunteers and the Board must comply with the Code of Conduct at all times. Breaches of the Code of Conduct may result in disciplinary action including termination of a person's involvement with VMCH.

All third-party contractors are also expected to abide by the Child Safe Code of Conduct, and where they are engaging with or otherwise have access to children will have to sign the Child Safe Code of Conduct agreeing to comply with the code, prior to delivering any services.

## 7. Cultural safety for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children

VMCH is committed to creating environments where Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture is celebrated and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, families and community members are welcomed and included. Strategies to embed cultural safety for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children

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include:

- an Acknowledgement of Country at all significant events and meetings.
- displaying plaques and signs to Acknowledge Country and Traditional Owners.
- consulting with families and members of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community to identify opportunities to promote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture and practices in VMCH programs.
- providing opportunities for children to share their cultural identity and express their culture, including during VMCH community activities.
- supporting children who wish to explore their culture, including consulting with their family and relevant Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations.
- fostering organisation wide knowledge of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander history, culture, perspective, and values, providing training for staff and volunteers on the strengths of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture and its importance to the wellbeing and safety of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children.
- celebrating NAIDOC Week and acknowledging significant events including National Sorry Day and National Reconciliation Week.
- seeking feedback from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, families and communities on their experience at VMCH, particularly how safe they feel expressing their identity including their culture.

## 8. Children's empowerment and participation

At VMCH we actively seek to include children's views and ideas in our organisational planning and the delivery of services, especially about matters that directly affect them.

We want children to develop friendships through VMCH and encourage children to be supportive of each other. We do not tolerate bullying or abusive behaviour between children and take action if this occurs.

VMCH values the voices of children and will act on safety concerns raised by children or their families. We regularly communicate with children about what they can do if they feel unsafe.

We seek to understand what makes children feel safe in our organisation and support children's participation in the following ways:

- regular discussions with children, including child-led conversations on what makes them feel safe and unsafe and how to raise any concerns they have
- consultation with children about any proposed significant changes to the physical environment, programs or staffing and child safe policies and procedures. Children's views are collected by staff, provided to management and considered in the decision-making process
- information provided to children and families about VMCH's operations, staffing and programs are made suitable for different age groups and diversity of the children
- staff are provided with information or training to be able to engage with children and assist them to participate in decision making.

## 9. Involving families and communities

VMCH recognises the important role of families and involves parents and carers when making significant decisions about their child. Parents, families and communities are welcome to provide feedback at any time through our complaints and compliments process, feedback boxes, surveys, family forums and have your say (through the VMCH website) and are encouraged to raise any concerns they have with us.

VMCH provides information to families and community about our child safe policies and practices which seeks to inform children and young people about their rights including safety and participation through:

- seeking their feedback and input on creating this policy and the Child Safe Code of Conduct.
- publishing this policy and the Child Safe Code of Conduct on our website.
- including information about our child safety approach, complaints policy, and our operations and

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management structure in the handbook families are provided with.

- including information on child safety and wellbeing, and reminders about our policies and procedures, in our newsletter.
- offering meetings within service areas to give families the opportunity to hear first-hand about the Child Safety Standards and to ask questions.
- Where appropriate, children are offered access to sexual abuse programs that are presented in a relevant way.

## 10. Valuing equity and diversity

As a child safe organisation, we celebrate the rich diversity of all children, families, and community and promote respectful environments that are free from discrimination. We value diversity and equity for all children, to achieve this, we:

- provide training for all staff and volunteers on understanding diversity and how to support inclusion and cultural safety.
- welcome and support participation of all children, including children with disability, children from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, LGBTQI children and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and their families.
- offer students and families through our enrolment/referral/intake forms the opportunity to provide information about themselves, including any specific needs to participate fully in our programs.
- have zero tolerance of racism and other forms of discrimination including discrimination based on disability, race, ethnicity, religion, sex, intersex status, gender identity or sexual orientation and take action when discrimination or exclusion is identified.
- deliver programming that reflects the diversity of our clients, their interests and cultures.
- strive to reflect the diversity of our community through representation in our staff.
- acknowledge and celebrate important cultural dates in our services.
- have a physical and online environment that actively celebrates diversity.
- commit to ensuring our facilities and online activities promote inclusion of children of all abilities.
- We provide children with access to information, support and complaints processes in ways that are accessible and easy to understand, for example we have easy English version of documents including our Complaints Procedure and our Have Your Say Forms come in different languages.

## 11. Ensuring that staff are suitable and supported

VMCH undertakes a comprehensive recruitment and screening process for all workers and volunteers involved in child related services that aims to:

- promote and protect the safety of all children under the care of the organisation;
- identify the safest and most suitable people who share VMCH's values and commitment to protect children; and
- prevent a person from working at VMCH if they pose a risk to children.

VMCH only recruits staff and volunteers for child related services who are appropriate to engage with children. We require all staff, volunteers and Board Members to hold a Working with Children Check and NDIS Worker Screening Checks (or police checks) as well as undertaking referee checks for all staff. We require staff to have appropriate qualifications for their roles and check to make sure these qualifications are valid. We have an online system that notifies staff and management when one of these required checks is about to expire to ensure it is renewed in time.

## 12. Child-focused complaint systems

All reports of child abuse and child safety concerns will be treated seriously, whether they are made by an adult or a child and whether they are about the conduct of an adult or a child. All complaints and child safety concerns will be responded to promptly and thoroughly.

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VMCH has a Managing and Reporting Child Safety Incidents and Concerns Policy that includes information for staff and volunteers about how a complaint or child safety concern will be responded to. An easy-to-understand Child Safety Reporting Flowchart is also provided for children, families and the community to know about the complaint process and the supports available to those making a complaint and those involved in the complaint process.

If a complaint includes an allegation or incident of child abuse or harm, then staff and volunteers at VMCH must report it in accordance with the Managing and Reporting Child Safety Incidents and Concerns Policy. VMCH staff and volunteers are required to prioritise children's safety in any response and to report all potentially criminal conduct to Victoria Police as well as undertake any mandatory reporting.

Under VMCH's complaint handling and disciplinary policies, staff and volunteers involved in a child safety concern or complaint may be subject to actions to support child safety including:

- being prevented from providing services or having their duties altered so they do not engage with children at VMCH during an investigation
- termination of employment following an investigation
- allegations of unlawful conduct being reported to the police

The decisions we make when assessing incidents and undertaking investigations and disciplinary action will always be thorough, as transparent as possible, and based on evidence.

Complaints can be emailed to [child.safety@vmch.com.au](mailto:child.safety@vmch.com.au) or you can speak with a Child Safety Officer.

*If there is concern for the immediate safety of a child, immediately call 000.*

### **13. Staff knowledge, skills and awareness**

VMCH is committed to ensuring all staff and volunteers working with children (in addition to parents/carers and children), feel confident and comfortable in discussing any child safety concerns, including child abuse. Staff and volunteers are trained to identify, assess, and minimise risks of child abuse and to detect potential signs of child abuse.

All leaders, staff and volunteers who are involved in child related services and all Board members, are required to complete annual child safety training and records of kept of all those who have completed the training.

The annual training aims to ensure that staff and volunteers are attuned to the signs of harm and that they are able to facilitate child friendly ways for children to express their views.

VMCH assists its leaders, staff and volunteers to incorporate child safety considerations into decisions and to promote a safe environment where children are empowered to speak up about issues that affect them.

Issues or concerns about behaviour with children must be raised immediately, reported through appropriate channels as set out in the Child Safe – Reporting Procedure (including DHHS and Victoria Police where required) depending on the severity and urgency of the matter. Issues or concerns will be addressed in line with our Child Safe Code of Conduct, complaint handling policy and disciplinary policy.

New employees and volunteers are supervised carefully to ensure their behaviour towards children is safe and appropriate, that they understand VMCH's commitment to child safety, its Child Safety and Wellbeing Policy and the Child Safe Code of Conduct.

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VMCH has a trained Child Safety Officer with responsibility for responding to child safety related complaints or concerns, VMCH also has Child Safety Champions who are responsible for working with staff to respond to child safety incidents and promoting child safety and wellbeing across VMCH. The Child Safety Officer and Child Safety Champions are introduced to children so they know and understand who the appointed people are, and how and when they may contact them. Photos and names of the Child Safety Officer and Champions are displayed on our noticeboard and in our newsletters. If a person does not feel comfortable making a report to a Child Safety Officer or Champion, they may report their concern to a manager.

#### 14. Safe physical and online environments

We recognise the importance of identifying and managing risks of child harm and abuse posed by physical environments (for example, any doors that can lock), and online environments (for example, no staff or volunteer is to have contact with a child on social media).

We conduct regular risk assessments and have a risk management plan to address the risk of child abuse and harm at VMCH. The risk management plan will be developed in consultation with our staff, volunteers, parent representatives and children. We will ensure that any risk controls put in place balance the need to manage harm with the benefits of participating at VMCH. The Quality, Risk and Compliance committee is responsible for approving the risk management plan and ultimately the Board.

Any contractors or other providers of services who have access to children participating in VMCH programs must abide by the Child Safe Code of Conduct.

#### 15. Review of child safe policies and procedures

VMCH will review all child safe practices and policies at least every two years. The review process will be led by the Child Safety Champions, assisted by the Governance Team and the managers of VMCH's child related services.

VMCH will also review relevant practices and policies in response to a child safety incident. Findings from reviews will be reported to the people involved in our organisation and also inform our approach to continuous improvement of our child safety practices. Reviews are overseen by a member of the Executive Leadership team and children, families and staff will have the opportunity to contribute.

Complaints, feedback and incidents are analysed to identify opportunities for improvement.

If you have any queries about this policy or to report a breach, please contact a manager or a Child Safety Champion or Child Safety Officer.

#### 16. Record keeping

VMCH is committed to making and keeping full and accurate records about all child-related complaints or safety concerns. All child safety complaints, concerns, incidents and near misses will be recorded in the incident reporting system. All records are securely stored.

Records which may assist with the investigation of a complaint or safety concern will be identified and kept as part of the record of an investigation. Records will be kept even if an investigation does not substantiate a complaint. We will record and keep the outcome of any investigations, and the resolution of any complaints. This includes findings made, reasons for decisions and actions taken.

#### 17. Privacy and Information sharing

VMCH may share relevant information to promote the safety and wellbeing of children, where it is appropriate and in their best interests.

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VMCH will keep information about complaints confidential, except where it is necessary to share information to respond properly to a complaint or to prioritise child safety. We may also need to share information about incidents or complaints with external authorities to comply with the law or to prioritise safety. More information is available in our complaint handling policy.

## 18. Related Internal Documents

The following policies and procedures work together to support child safety and wellbeing across our operations:

Child Safe – Code of Conduct and VMCH Code of Conduct  
Managing and Reporting Child Safety Incidents and Concerns Policy  
Performance Management and Disciplinary Procedure  
Safeguarding Individuals Policy  
Complaint handling policy  
Recruitment and screening policy

## 19. Key Legislation, Acts, Standards

[Child Wellbeing and Safety Act 2005 \(Vic\)](#) (including [Child Safe Standards](#))  
[Children, Youth and Families Act 2005](#)  
[The Crimes Act \(Vic\) 1958](#) (including Failure to Protect and Failure to Disclose offences)  
[The Worker Screening Act \(Vic\) 2020](#)  
[National Catholic Safeguarding Standards](#)  
[The National Disability Insurance Scheme Act 2013](#)  
Victorian ECI Standards 2016  
NDIS National Quality and Safeguarding Framework  
Victorian Disability Safeguards Code of Conduct  
[The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child](#)  
[Victorian Reportable Conduct Scheme](#)  
*Wrongs Act 1958 (Vic) (including Part XIII – Organisational liability for child abuse)*

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