



Child Safety Policy

Document Control

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Relevant standards, legislation and other documents:

- United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child.
- Child Wellbeing and Safety Act 2005 (Vic)
- Children, Youth and Families Act 2005 (Vic) (including reporting to Child Protection)
- Crimes Act 1958 (Vic) (including Failure to Protect and Failure to Disclose offences)
- Wrongs Act 1958 (Vic) (including Part XIII – Organisational liability for child abuse)
- Victorian Child Safe Standards

Definitions: (define key terms)	
CHANH	Central Highlands Association of Neighbourhood Houses
DFFH	Department of Families, Fairness and Housing
Members	Neighbourhood Houses (represented by managers and committees of management) funded by DFFH within the Central Highlands area
Board	Board of Governance, elected individuals responsible for the governance of the organisation
Staff	Any person employed by CHANH or volunteering at CHANH
Executive Team	CHANH President, Treasurer and Secretary

This Child Safety and Wellbeing Policy demonstrates CHANHs strong commitment to child safety and wellbeing, and how our organisation keeps children safe from harm, including child abuse.

Our Commitment to Child Safety

CHANH is a child safe organisation. We have a strong commitment to upholding the rights of children and have a zero tolerance of child abuse. We are committed to creating and maintaining a safe and empowering environment, where protecting children and preventing and responding to child abuse is embedded in our culture. We are committed to providing assistance and support to member organisations to assist them in achieving child safe organisations, compliant with the Victorian Child Safety Standards.

Purpose

This Policy outlines how CHANH prioritises the safety and wellbeing of children and what steps we will take to do this.

Scope

This policy applies to all staff, volunteers, Committee of Governance members, children and other individuals involved in our organisation.

Definitions

To make this policy easy to understand, here are some important words and what they mean:

- **Child or young person:** Anyone under 18 years old.
- **Child abuse** means:
 - a sexual offence committed against a child
 - an offence committed against a child under section 49M(1) of the Crimes Act 1958 (Vic), such as grooming
 - physical violence against a child
 - causing serious emotional or psychological harm to a child
 - serious neglect of a child.
- **Harm** is damage to the health, safety or wellbeing of a child or young person, 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 be cumulative, that is, arising as a result of a series of acts or events over a period of time.
- **Reasonable belief:** If you see or hear something that makes you think someone might be unsafe, you don't need proof—you just need a good reason to be concerned. Ask yourself:

- Can I explain why I'm worried?
- Would someone else feel the same way if they knew what I know?
- **Survivor-centric approach:** This means we listen to and support the person who has been harmed. We respect their rights, choices, and needs.
- **Concerns and complaints:** A concern refers to any potential issue that could impact negatively on the safety and wellbeing of children.

A complaint is an expression of dissatisfaction to CHANH related to one or more of the following:

- our services or dealings with individuals
- allegations of abuse or misconduct by a staff member, a volunteer or another individual associated with CHANH
- disclosures of abuse or harm made by a child or young person
- the conduct of a child or young person at CHANH
- the inadequate handling of a prior concern
- can take the form of general concerns about the safety of a group of children or activity.

Who Is Responsible for Keeping People Safe?

At CHANH, everyone has a role to play in keeping children and vulnerable people safe. Some people have extra responsibilities based on their role.

The CHANH Board

The Board is responsible for leading a strong culture of safety. They must:

- Make sure CHANH protects everyone who interacts with us.
- Follow all child safety laws and standards.
- Support a culture where safety is taken seriously.
- Make sure there are clear ways to report and respond to concerns.
- Support staff and volunteers to do their part.
- Conduct regular review of how effectively CHANH is delivering child safety and wellbeing through policies and programs.

The Network Manager

The Network Manager helps put the policy into action. They must:

- Review and improve child safety practices every year.

- Make sure CHANH follows the law and has appropriate systems in place.
- Make sure everyone knows how to report concerns.
- Respond to reports of abuse or harm.
- Support staff and volunteers with training and guidance.

All Staff and Volunteers

Everyone who works or volunteers with CHANH must:

- Know and follow the child safety rules and Code of Conduct.
- Report any concerns or suspicions about children's safety.
- Help create a safe and welcoming environment for everyone.

Partners and Contractors

People or organisations working with CHANH must:

- Follow this policy and our safety procedures.
- Report any concerns about someone being at risk.

How CHANH Keeps Children Safe

CHANH staff and volunteers (including committee members) work within these principles:

1. Provide a culturally safe environment which respects and values the diverse and unique identities of all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.
2. Respect children's diversity and individual differences and cater for their individual abilities
3. Work with our members to create safe environments, which promote children's protection, empowerment and participation
4. Model and engaging in respectful and impartial language.
5. Know how to respond to concerns or disclosure of child abuse.

We take safety seriously and work hard to prevent harm before it happens. Here's how we do that:

1. We Look for Risks and Act Early

- We regularly check for anything that might put children at risk.
- We write down these risks and take steps to reduce them.

2. We Have Clear Rules and Procedures

- We follow this policy and our **Child Safe Code of Conduct**.
- We check the background of staff, volunteers, and contractors before they start working with us.
- We display relevant information to Child Safety.

3. We keep child safety at centre of recruitment and screening processes

- We only recruit people who are appropriate to engage with children for any role in our organisation (including Board positions)
- We require a Working with Children's Check, National Police Check and referee checks for all staff, board members and volunteers.

4. We support training and development for our staff and members

- CHANH staff train in child safety practices and how to spot and report concerns.
- CHANH supports access to information, resources and initiatives to assist with child safety for our members.

5. We Make Reporting Easy

- If someone sees or hears something that worries them, they must report it.
- Reports can be made to:
 - A CHANH Board member
 - The CHANH Network Manager
 - Where appropriate – the Neighbourhood House where the incident occurs
- People can also report anonymously in writing if they prefer.
- If someone is in immediate danger, call **000**.

6. We Respond Quickly and Fairly

- If a complaint includes an allegation or incident of child abuse or harm, then staff and volunteers at CHANH must report it in accordance with the complaint/concerns procedure.
- NH staff and volunteers are required to prioritise children's safety in any response and to report all potentially criminal conduct to Victoria Police. Under the complaint handling and disciplinary policies, staff and volunteers may be subject to actions to support child safety including:
 - being stood down during an investigation or terminated following an investigation
 - having their duties altered so they do not engage with children at NH
 - not being allowed unsupervised contact with children at NH
 - removing their access to the NH IT system and facilities.
 - Complaints can be emailed to organisation email address or you can speak with the EO or Committee member
- If there is concern for the immediate safety of a child, immediately call **000**.

7. Record Keeping

- CHANH is committed to making and keeping full and accurate records about all child-related complaints or safety concerns.

- All child safety complaints, concerns and incidents will be recorded in the incident reporting system.
- 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.
- Records will be stored securely and kept by CHANH for at least 45 years.

8. Privacy and Confidentiality

- CHANH may share relevant information to promote the safety and wellbeing of children, where it is appropriate and in their best interests.
- CHANH 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.
- CHANH may also need to share information about incidents or complaints with external authorities to comply with the law or to prioritise safety.

9. Risk Management

- We recognise the importance of identifying and managing risks of child harm and abuse in the physical and online environments.
- We conduct regular risk assessments and have a risk management plan to address the risk of child abuse and harm at CHANH. The risk management plan is developed in consultation with our staff and volunteers.
- We will ensure that any risk controls put in place balance the need to manage harm with the benefits of participating in programs and activities. The Board is responsible for approving the risk management plan.
- Any contractors or other providers of services using our venue will be provided with a copy of this Policy to ensure child safety.

6. We Keep Improving

- We review our safety practices to make sure they're working.
- We listen to feedback from children, families, staff, and the community.

How We Put This Policy into Action

To make sure our commitment to safety is more than just words, we follow these steps:

- All staff and Board members must read and sign the **Child Safe Code of Conduct** when they start.
- We display child safety information in our workspaces and on our website.

- We include child safety in staff inductions, training, and performance reviews.
- We teach staff and Board members about the **Child Safe Standards** and how to create safe spaces.
- Leaders at CHANH must set a good example by always acting with honesty and integrity.
- We help everyone understand what might be a sign that someone is being harmed or at risk, such as:
 - A child says they or someone else has been hurt.
 - A person shows signs of being scared or withdrawn.
 - Someone else raises a concern but doesn't want to report it.
 - You see something that doesn't feel right.

If we believe someone may be at risk, we will:

- Act in the best interest of the child.
- Make sure they are safe.
- Report the concern to the CHANH Board.

Other Policies That Support This One

This policy works alongside other important CHANH policies, including:

- Child Safe Code of Conduct
- Vulnerable Persons Policy
- Privacy and Cyber Security Policy
- Risk Management Policy
- Risk Management Plan
- Staff recruitment, selection and screening Policy
- Safe Workplace Policy
- Policy Development and Review Policy
- Continuous Improvement Policy

What Happens If This Policy Is Broken?

If someone doesn't follow this policy, CHANH may take serious action. This could include:

- Extra training or supervision
- Disciplinary action
- Ending their employment or volunteer role

Responsibilities

Executive Team:

- To implement and monitor policy

Members:

- To be informed of the Executive Requirement and reimbursements
- To participate in policy reviews as required

Staff:

- Implementation of policy, as outlined in position descriptions
- Participation in policy review as required

Breach of Policy

A breach of this policy may result in disciplinary action up to and including termination of employment.