



Critical Incident Policy

Document Control

Policy Title:	Critical Incident		
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Relevant standards, legislation and other documents:

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

Purpose

The purpose of this Critical Incident Policy is to ensure that CHANH responds rapidly, safely, and consistently when confronted with situations that present serious or imminent risk of harm to

individuals, CHANH staff, Neighbourhood House personnel, community participants, or organisational operations.

This policy prioritises a rights based, person centred, and psychological safety approach, recognising that CHANH's dual responsibility is to:

- Support vulnerable people- often Neighbourhood House staff and Committee/Board members - experiencing distress, conflict, or harm; and
- Safeguard CHANH staff, who may encounter escalating, hostile, or unsafe behaviour while providing support.

This policy provides a clear framework for identification, escalation, response, documentation, and review of critical incidents.

Scope

This applies to:

- All CHANH staff, contractors, volunteers, and Committee/Board members.
- All interactions with Neighbourhood House staff, Committee/Board members, volunteers, or community participants undertaken as part of CHANH's role (including advisory, training, onsite visits, meetings, calls, emails, online sessions, and events).

Definition of a Critical Incident

A critical incident is any event—sudden or developing—that presents serious, imminent, or escalating risk to:

- Life or physical safety
- Psychological safety
- Legal or regulatory compliance
- The operational stability of a Neighbourhood House
- The safety of CHANH staff

Critical incidents require immediate action, rapid decision-making, and clear documentation.

Examples of Critical Incidents

Critical Incident

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CHANH recognises the following as potential critical incidents. These examples guide, rather than limit, decision-making.

1. Imminent or Serious Risk to Life or Physical Safety

- Expressions of suicidal intent, self-harm plans, or inability to maintain personal safety
- Disclosures of family violence, stalking, or threats of harm
- Violent incidents, possession of weapons, or threats occurring within a Neighbourhood House
- Credible threats of harm directed at staff, committee members, volunteers, or community participants

2. Acute Psychological Distress or Crisis

- Inconsolable distress, panic, or signs of mental health crisis
- Severe burnout or moral injury leading to unsafe decision-making or collapse
- Distress that impairs the person's ability to engage safely or rationally

3. Workplace or Governance Behaviours Creating Serious Risk

- Severe bullying or harassment allegations
- Escalating governance conflict involving intimidation, verbal abuse, or unsafe behaviour
- Dysfunction preventing duty-of-care responsibilities from being met

4. Hostility or Threats Directed Towards CHANH Staff

- Aggressive, intimidating, or abusive behaviour toward CHANH staff
- Harassment through emails, calls, or online interactions
- Unsafe expectations or refusal to accept boundaries or safe communication requirements

5. Legal or Regulatory Breaches

- Mandatory reporting obligations (child safety, criminal acts, fraud, serious misconduct)
- Incidents requiring notification to WorkSafe or equivalent regulatory bodies
- Privacy breaches involving sensitive personal information

6. Operational or Governance Failure

- Committee unable to meet governance duties due to conflict or dysfunction
- Sudden resignations leaving a service unable to operate safely
- Financial instability posing risk to staff or community

7. Environmental or Facility-Related Safety Incidents

- Fire, flood, gas leak, structural hazard, or contamination
- Violent break-ins or property damage

Guiding Principles in Responding to Critical Incidents

All critical incident responses will be:

- Person-centred and respectful, meeting people where they are
- Trauma-aware and psychologically safe
- Rights-based, upholding dignity, procedural fairness, and privacy
- Proportionate, prioritising immediate safety first
- Transparent, with clear communication of CHANH's role and boundaries
- Balanced, safeguarding both the individual and CHANH staff
- Collaborative, involving the right external agencies when needed
- Documented, following minimum necessary information requirements

Confidentiality and Information Sharing

As per CHANH Privacy and Cyber Security Policy, CHANH protects privacy wherever possible. Information will only be shared:

- With informed consent, or
- When required to prevent serious risk, or
- When mandated by law

All information sharing must be:

- Proportionate
- Minimal necessary
- Documented with rationale

Staff safety and boundaries

CHANH staff have the right to a psychologically safe workplace.

Therefore, if a critical incident includes hostile, abusive, or unsafe behaviour, staff may:

- End meetings immediately
- Insist on written communication only
- Decline to attend an onsite visit
- Provide referral or escalation to appropriate advisor
- Step back from the situation until safe controls are in place

Roles and Responsibilities

CHANH Staff

- Respond to potential critical incidents quickly

Critical Incident

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- Prioritise safety and escalate promptly
- Follow this or own policy and document actions taken
- Maintain confidentiality (within legal limits)
- Use staff safety controls when needed
- Determine external notifications
- Access debriefing and support mechanisms as needed

Committee/Board (CHANH)

- Provide oversight and authorise policy updates
- Support resourcing for psychological safety and safeguarding
- Receive de-identified reports on critical incidents

Relevant Policies

This policy works alongside other important CHANH policies, including:

- Safeguarding Vulnerable People Policy
- Child Safety and Wellbeing Policy
- Child Safe Code of Conduct
- Data Retention Policy
- Privacy and Cyber Security Policy
- Risk Management Policy
- Safe Workplace Policy
- Policy Development and Review Policy
- Continuous Improvement Policy

Breach of Policy

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

Addendum: Critical Incident Response

Critical incident response is not linear. Staff may move backwards and forwards between steps depending on how the situation evolves.

Step 1: Identify and Recognise

Staff should treat a situation as a potential critical incident when:

- There are immediate or escalating safety risks
- The behaviour is unsafe, hostile, or abusive
- The person appears mentally unwell or unable to regulate
- Legal obligations are potentially triggered

Step 2: Immediate Safety Actions

- Prioritise safety for all parties
- If required: call emergency services (000), crisis lines, or local supports
- Remove CHANH staff from unsafe situations (ending meeting, switching to email, stopping engagement)

Step 3: Stabilise the Situation

- Provide calm, grounding communication
- Note key details (time, behaviour, statements)
- Identify immediate needs and any protective factors
- Establish or reinforce boundaries (especially for CHANH staff safety)

Step 4: Determine Required Escalation

This may include:

- Emergency services
- Governance support (e.g., Contacting Committee Chair)
- WorkSafe advisory
- Specialist mental health or family violence referral
- Legal or compliance reporting
- Mediated communication only
- Suspension of further engagement until safe

Step 5: Documentation (Minimum Necessary)

Using Support Notes form, record:

- Facts, observations, and direct quotes
- Risk indicators and actions taken
- Referrals, notifications, or supports provided
- Safety controls for CHANH staff
- Follow-up requirements

Step 7: Follow-Up and Aftercare

- Schedule a check-in with the impacted person
- Implement safety plans or governance interventions
- Ensure CHANH staff involved receive debriefing and psychological support
- Review whether immediate controls remain necessary

Step 8: Review and Learn

Within 7–14 days post-incident:

- Network Manager conducts a short review
- Identify system or communication improvements
- Update safeguarding procedures if needed
- Provide de-identified insights to the Committee