



Central Highlands Association of Neighbourhood Houses

Safeguarding Vulnerable People Policy

Document Control

Policy Title:	Safeguarding Vulnerable People		
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Relevant standards, legislation and other documents:

- Occupational Health and Safety (OHS) obligations—including psychological health and the management of psychosocial hazards.
- Equal opportunity and anti-discrimination, privacy and confidentiality, child safety standards, whistleblower protections, and workplace relations requirements.
- Governance and fiduciary duties of Committee/Board members and the duty of care to staff and volunteers.

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

Central Highlands Association of Neighbourhood Houses

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CHANH exists to strengthen neighbourhood houses, their people, and their communities. We are committed to safeguarding vulnerable people—including Neighbourhood House staff, Committee/Board members, volunteers, and community participants—by:

- Meeting people where they are: responding respectfully to individual circumstances and capacities.
- Upholding rights and dignity: embedding a rights-based approach grounded in safety, inclusion, and self-determination.
- Prioritising prevention: designing our planning, supports, and initiatives to reduce harm before it occurs, including psychological health harms at work.
- Listening and responding: ensuring impacted people are meaningfully involved in the design, delivery, and evaluation of CHANH initiatives.

While CHANH is not a crisis service, we guide, support, and refer to appropriate services and uphold our OHS obligations, including psychological health duties, when we are an employer and when we influence practice across the network.

Scope

This policy applies to all CHANH **Committee/Board members, employees, contractors, students, and volunteers**, and to all **interactions with network members and their communities** conducted under CHANH auspices (advice, training, events, site visits, projects, online forums, communications, and advocacy).

Definitions

- **Vulnerable people (context-based):** Individuals who, due to personal, situational, organisational, or systemic factors, may be at heightened risk of harm or reduced capacity to protect their own wellbeing. In CHANH's context, this includes NH staff and Committee/Board members experiencing workplace stress, conflict, moral injury, or burnout, as well as volunteers and community members facing financial, social, cultural, health, disability-related or other barriers.
- **Safeguarding:** Proactive and responsive actions that prevent, identify, reduce, and respond to risks of harm (including psychological harm), and enable safe, respectful participation.
- **Rights-based approach:** Practice that recognises and actively protects human rights, including dignity, participation, equality, privacy, cultural safety, and procedural fairness.

- **Psychological health (OHS):** A state where work-related psychosocial hazards (e.g., job demands, low role clarity, conflict, bullying, exposure to distressing content, poor support) are identified and controlled as reasonably practicable.

CHANH Safeguarding Approach

CHANH's safeguarding practice is rooted in a rights-based, person-centred, and prevention-focused approach. We recognise that vulnerability is often situational, and for our network the most common experiences of vulnerability arise for Neighbourhood House staff and Committee/Board members navigating workplace stress, conflict, burnout, or governance complexity. CHANH is committed to meeting people where they are, responding with dignity and cultural sensitivity, and ensuring all supports—advice, capacity building, conflict guidance, referrals, and co-design processes—enhance psychological safety, uphold legal protections, and reduce harm. We do this by embedding proactive safeguarding into our planning, our interactions, and our organisational culture, ensuring that impacted people are listened to, respected, and directly involved in shaping decisions that affect them.

Key Approaches

- **Rights-based practice:** Upholding dignity, autonomy, procedural fairness, equality, privacy, and cultural safety in all interactions.
- **Meeting people where they are:** Tailoring support to each individual's context, capacity, communication style, and current pressures.
- **Prevention first:** Identifying and addressing risks early, integrating psychosocial hazard management, and building safe processes into planning and facilitation.
- **Person-centred responses:** Providing proportionate, respectful support—coaching, information-sharing, conflict guidance, governance advice, or warm referrals—based on individual needs and desired outcomes.
- **Psychological safety:** Prioritising safe communication, trauma-aware approaches, and practices that minimise distress, moral injury, or re-traumatisation.
- **Cultural safety and inclusion:** Ensuring all people—particularly Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, culturally and linguistically diverse communities, LGBTIQ+ communities, and people with disability—feel respected, safe, and heard.

- **Do no harm:** Designing and delivering interactions, training, consultations, and projects in ways that minimise the risk of emotional, psychological, or professional harm.
- **Participatory design:** Involving impacted people in CHANH planning and initiatives from the outset, ensuring decisions reflect lived experience and frontline insight.
- **Transparency and boundaries:** Clearly communicating CHANH's role, remit, and limitations while acknowledging governance and employer responsibilities of Neighbourhood Houses.
- **Confidentiality with duty of care:** Protecting privacy while acting where there is serious risk of harm or legal obligation.
- **Continuous learning:** Reviewing safeguarding practices, using feedback loops, and adjusting approaches to improve safety, quality, and relevance for the network.

CHANH Safeguarding Practice

Safeguarding in CHANH is a flexible, person-centred practice that recognises vulnerability is often situational and may fluctuate over time. Responding to people is not linear— response may need to move back and forward between steps to match the individual's needs, emerging risks, or changes in circumstances. This practice also recognises the dual responsibility to support vulnerable people with dignity and care, while protecting CHANH staff from psychosocial hazards, including situations where distressed or overwhelmed members may become hostile, demanding, or unsafe. Confidentiality is upheld wherever possible, with information shared only when necessary for safety, legal compliance, or appropriate follow-up.

CHANH's Safeguarding Practice follows these core steps:

1. Notice and Invite a Conversation

Privately acknowledge concerns or early signs of distress, burnout, conflict, or unsafe dynamics, and offer a supportive, confidential conversation.

- Use respectful, non-judgmental language.
- Ensure the timing, location, and format prioritise safety for both the individual and CHANH staff.

2. Listen, Explore, and Clarify Needs

Engage in a calm, rights-based, culturally safe conversation to understand the situation and the person's desired outcomes.

- Clarify CHANH's role, boundaries, and limitations.
- Explore whether workplace stress, governance issues, conflict, or personal factors are contributing.
- Identify any emerging risks to the individual, others, or CHANH staff.

3. Assess Risk and Safety for Everyone Involved

Make a proportionate, trauma-aware assessment of immediate risk.

- Consider psychological health hazards, including distress, role conflict, bullying/harassment, or moral injury.
- Assess whether the situation is becoming unsafe or hostile for CHANH staff and whether adjustments, pauses, or safety controls are required.
- If risk is serious or imminent, follow CHANH's critical incident pathway.

4. Stabilise and Plan Short-Term Supports

Work collaboratively to identify what will help in the short term.

- Provide information, coaching, or advice grounded in rights, responsibilities, and legal protections.
- Identify workload, governance, or conflict resolution steps.
- Develop safety strategies or supports appropriate to the person's context.
- For CHANH staff safety: implement boundaries, written communication, or facilitated meetings as needed.

5. Refer, Coordinate, or Escalate Where Appropriate

Provide warm referrals or structured escalation pathways, with consent wherever possible.

- Options may include governance advisors, mediation services, OHS/IR guidance, mental health supports, EAP, GP, or specialist agencies.
- Where required to prevent serious risk, make necessary disclosures in accordance with legislation and CHANH policy.
- When behaviour becomes unsafe, aggressive, or persistently disrespectful, escalate internally to ensure CHANH staff psychological safety is protected.

6. Document Minimal Necessary Information

Keep proportionate, factual, and secure notes.

- Document only what is necessary for continuity, safety, and legal compliance.
- Store records securely with restricted access.
- Record any decisions relating to confidentiality, information sharing, or safety controls.

7. Follow Up, Review, and Adjust

Revisit the situation after an agreed period.

- Check the effectiveness of supports and risk controls.
- Adjust approaches as needs change or new information emerges.
- If further risk or escalation arises, revisit earlier steps or open a new safeguarding cycle.
- Reflect internally on CHANH staff wellbeing following challenging interactions.

Roles and Responsibilities

Board

- Set the safeguarding tone and expectations; approve and oversee this policy.
- Ensure adequate resourcing for prevention, training, and participatory design.
- Monitor trends and risks (including psychological health) via de-identified reporting.

Network Manager

- Embed safeguarding across planning, projects, training, and communications.
- Ensure psychosocial risk management is operationalised (identify hazards, assess risks, implement controls, review effectiveness).
- Establish and maintain referral pathways (e.g., EAP, mediation, legal/IR advice, WHS advisory, mental health, family violence, community legal services).

All Staff, Contractors, and Volunteers

- Follow this policy, complete training, and raise concerns early.
- Maintain confidentiality and respect for all persons involved.

Relevant Policies

This policy works alongside other important CHANH policies, including:

- Child Safety and Wellbeing
- Child Safe Code of Conduct
- Critical Incident Policy
- Data Retention Policy
- Privacy and Cyber Security Policy
- Risk Management Policy

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- Staff recruitment, selection and screening 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: Safeguarding Quick Guide

1. Wellbeing & Risk Triage

a. Is there immediate risk of serious harm?

- Yes → Follow **Critical Incident** steps; contact emergency services if necessary; notify President.
- No → Proceed to supportive conversation and plan.

b. Supportive Conversation (10–20 mins)

- Thank them for raising concerns; acknowledge rights and responsibilities.
- Explore what's happening, impact, what's needed now.
- Clarify roles (what CHANH can/can't do).
- Agree next steps (e.g., conflict coaching, governance advice, workload triage, EAP/GP, mediation options, referral).

c. Minimal Notes

- Facts, agreed actions, follow-up date, any referrals made with consent.

2. Conversation Prompts (Rights-Based, Trauma-Aware)

- “Thanks for trusting me with this. What would be most helpful for you right now?”
- “Can we check the immediate pressures and what's within your control this week?”
- “Let's review the options relating to your obligations and protections as an employee/volunteer.”
- “Would you like me to make a introduction to...?”
- “What would ‘safe enough’ look like for the next two weeks?”

3. Psychosocial Hazard & Controls Snapshot

Hazard	Examples	Practical Controls
Role ambiguity	Conflicting directions from Committee	Role clarity doc; decision rights map; governance coaching
Excessive demands	Under-resourced programs; constant crisis mode	Prioritisation framework; phased timelines; escalation path
Conflict/poor civility	Email aggression; meeting hostility	Civility ground rules; chair training; mediation panel

Low support	Isolated roles; no debriefs	Scheduled supervision; peer circles; EAP
Exposure to distress	Intake stories; crisis presentations	Rotation; debrief; vicarious trauma training
Change stress	Funding uncertainty; restructures	Change plan; predictable comms; psychological safety check-ins