



**Council
to Homeless
Persons**

Organisational policy

Child safe policy

chp.org.au



3.21 Child safe policy

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Policy statement

CHP is committed to the safety of all children.

CHP has a zero tolerance of child abuse.

CHP aims to create a child safe and child friendly environment where children feel safe and welcome. All children who come to the CHP office or we engage with in other settings, for example at CHP events, have a right to feel and be safe.

Application

Scope

This policy applies to all CHP employees, volunteers, students on placement and board members.

Definition

In the homelessness sector a distinction is often made between children and young people, as the sector is funded to work with young people and funding guidelines define a young person as aged between 15 and 25. However for the purposes of this policy children are defined as anyone under 18 years of age.

Failure to disclose offence

A new offence came into effect on 27 October 2014 for adults who fail to disclose child sexual abuse to police. The new offence applies to all adults, not just professionals who work with children. Any adult who holds a reasonable belief that a sexual offence has been committed by an adult against a child in Victoria must report that belief to police, unless they have a reasonable excuse for not

reporting. More information about this offence can be found [here](#).

Failure to protect offence

A 'failure to protect' offence applies:

- in organisations that exercise care, supervision or authority over children under the age of 16 **and** **where**,
- a person in a position of authority in the organisation knows of the risk of abuse **and**,
- has the power or responsibility to reduce or remove the risk, **but**
- negligently failed to do so.

More information about this offence can be found [here](#).

CHP engagement with children

CHP has limited direct engagement with children. However, due to Covid 19 implications, much of our work is now online and children are sometimes present when we are conducting meetings or online events.

The Homelessness Advocacy Service (HAS) predominately works with adults, though some clients have children or may be under 18 years of age. HAS is mainly a phone based service delivery model, with occasional outreach visits. On occasion, a client will bring their children into the office when coming in for a meeting.

The Peer Education and Support Program (PESP) team leader works with the PESP members not their children and the program is not a support service. That said, the PESP team leader remains alert to any concerns about PESP member's children and provides support (e.g. advice, referral information) when required. PESP members may bring their children to the office or to CHP events on occasion. Engagement with children may also occur during PESP activities, for example school tours, school visits and consumer surveys.

The Policy and Communications program might engage with children as part of policy and advocacy work, for example consumers they organize to do media with might have children or they might seek feedback from children to inform the development of a policy position.

More generally, direct engagement with children might occur at CHP events (e.g., children of people attending the event, or speakers presenting) or when the children of employees, volunteers or board members come to the office.

Raising the awareness of the impact of homelessness on children

CHP recognise that being without a home has a major impact on children. Being without a home can negatively impact on children in many ways including:

- disrupted attachments to caregivers and a distorted sense of self
- inhibiting a child's cognitive, social, physical, emotional and psychological development
- a sense of not being connected to their peers and the broader community
- difficulty engaging with and maintaining education (including early education services such as childcare and kindergarten).

CHP believes we have a responsibility to raise awareness about the impact of homelessness on children. We do this in a number of ways, including:

- regular children specific editions of Parity
- media stories addressing the impact of homelessness on children
- advocacy
- policy development
- membership on the Youth Refuge Coordinators Network
- Victorian representative for the National Youth Coalition of Housing
- engaging with the Statewide Children's Resource Program
- capacity building events and forums focused on children.

Children's rights to safety and participation

CHP recognise the right of children to participate and encourage children to express their views. CHP listens to their suggestions, especially on matters that directly affect them.

CHP actively encourages all children who use our services to 'have a say' about things that are important to them. CHP listens to and acts on any concerns children, or their parents, raise with us.

CHP is currently exploring how we can provide more structured opportunities for children to participate in CHP, for example in the development of policy positions and seeking feedback about our organisation.

Working with children in HAS

CHP is committed to respecting and supporting the rights of children, including the right to complain. A child might want support from HAS, for instance to make a complaint against a homelessness service provider. If safe and appropriate to do so HAS will work with the child's parent or guardian to determine the best way to assist a child that has contacted HAS for support. Where possible the HAS advocate should also discuss strategies with the CHP Manager prior to the interview.

When working with children it is important that child sensitive practices are employed. [The Victorian Statewide Children's Resource Program](#) are valuable contacts for information and support.

Valuing diversity

CHP values diversity and does not tolerate any discriminatory practices. To achieve this, we:

- promote the cultural safety, participation and empowerment of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and their families
- promote the cultural safety, participation and empowerment of children from culturally and/or linguistically diverse backgrounds and their families
- welcome children with a disability and their families and act to promote their participation
- seek to recruit appropriate staff from culturally and/or linguistically diverse backgrounds
- welcome same-sex attracted, intersex and gender diverse children and families
- have a physical environment that actively celebrates diverse cultures and recognises cultural difference.

Recruiting employees and volunteers

CHP applies the best practice standards in the recruitment and screening of employees and volunteers. CHP interviews and conducts referee checks on all employees and volunteers and requires police checks and Working with Children Checks.

Supporting employees and volunteers

CHP seeks to attract and retain the best employees and volunteers. Supervision aims to ensure that staff and volunteers carry out their work to a high standard providing support, guidance, and direction.

A [Code of Conduct](#) provides guidance to our employees, board members and volunteers. All employees, board members and volunteers are required to abide by the Code of Conduct.

CHP seeks to build the capacity of staff and volunteers to understand the Child Safe Standards and incorporate them into their work at CHP. All staff and volunteers are required to complete Child Safe Standards training, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Cultural Competency training, and LGBTIQ+ training.

Reporting a child safety concern, or allegation of child abuse

People, including children are encouraged to report a child safety concern or allegation to a staff member of CHP. That staff member will then report this to their line manager or CEO as soon as possible. A notification to Child Protection may be required. Child Protection will assess risk and safety of the child. The organisation is then required to notify the Commission for Child and Young People (the Commission) about allegations of certain types of conduct involving a child by their workers and volunteers. This is required under the Reportable Conduct Scheme. More information can be found here:

<https://ccyp.vic.gov.au/assets/resources/RCSInfoSheetUpdates/13Workers-and-Volunteers-200918.pdf>

As outlined earlier in this policy, any adult who holds a reasonable belief that a sexual offence has been committed by an adult against a child under 16 in Victoria must report that belief to police by calling 000, unless they have a reasonable excuse for not reporting. More information about this offence can be found [here](#).

CHP Board members, employees, volunteers, and students have a responsibility to act on child safety concerns and allegations that arise in the course of their role at CHP:

1. Ensure the child is safe if an allegation of child abuse is made.
2. An employee or volunteer must advise a manager or the CEO as soon as possible. CHP Board members must advise the CEO or Chairperson of the Board.
3. Volunteers, staff, and Board members will deal with concerns, and allegations sensitively and confidentially.
4. The manager and CEO will determine what the next steps will be (or the Chairperson in relation to Board members).

Risk management

CHP recognises the importance of a risk management approach to minimising the potential for child abuse or harm to occur and use this to inform our policy, procedures and activity planning.

Monitoring and Review

CHP regularly reviews the Child Safe and related policies and monitors its performance against the Child Safe Standards.

Responsibility

- CEO
- Management team
- CHP employees, board members, students and volunteers

Related policies and documents

- CHP purpose, vision and mission
- Privacy
- Complaints
- Injury and incident reporting
- Code of Conduct
- Whistleblowers
- Discipline
- Quality and continuous improvement
- Client critical incident reporting