



CLIENT-802 Child Safe Procedure

Client Services

Applies to	Last reviewed and version no.	Next review date
All VACCA Board Members, and all VACCA staff (which includes employees, fixed term employees, students, volunteers and agency staff), and suppliers (i.e. tradespeople or consultancies).	May 2021 v1.2	May 2022

1.0 Purpose

Ensuring child safety is part of the VACCA Best Interests of the Child Principle of Practice. VACCAs *CLIENT-800 Best Interests of the Child Policy* and *CLIENT-801 Child Safe Policy* further defines the commitment VACCA makes to child safety.

Many of the children VACCA work with have experienced significant levels of trauma as a result of abuse.

Cultural safety for Aboriginal children is essential to building resilience and healing. The three key practice elements of Cultural Therapeutic Ways are culture, self-determination and a trauma informed approach which supports child safety for Aboriginal children.

The purpose of this procedure is to support VACCA Board Members and staff to understand their responsibilities to ensure children are safe and comply with all relevant legislation.

All Board Members and staff will be familiar with and follow the procedure.

2.0 Definitions

Refer to *CLIENT-804 Definitions* for detailed definitions.

Term	Definition
children	All children and young people under the age of 18 years.
child abuse	Constitutes any act against a child involving:

Term	Definition
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • physical violence • sexual abuse or grooming • emotional or psychological abuse • neglect or, • the omission or neglect of culture.
child safety	<p>Being safe means not being abused or hurt, living in a home that is safe and not dangerous and feeling safe. For an Aboriginal child being safe also means having caregivers that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • understand, respect and value the child's Aboriginal culture • help the child to feel good about their Aboriginal culture • help the child stay connected to their culture in all parts of the child's life.

3.0 Procedure

Ensuring child safety means children do not experience harm or loss and are not abused.

3.1 Supplier Contracts and Policy

All suppliers to VACCA are required to agree to *CORP 308-Supplier Policy* which includes child safe policies.

3.2 Child Safe Recruitment

Our child safe recruitment process includes relevant selection criteria, interview questions and reference checks specific to positions working with children who are Aboriginal, CALD, LGBTIQ+ and/or who have a disability.

All the key steps below must be completed and approved before an applicant is offered employment, including any additional requirements defined in the *HR-605 Recruitment and Selection Policy* and the *HR-610 Safety Screening Policy and Procedure*:

- a) Advertising includes statements that VACCA is a child safe organisation
- b) For those roles working with children, selection criteria in position descriptions includes experience working with children
- c) Interviews are face-to-face and must include behavioural-based questions to demonstrate appropriate behaviours when working with children and questions about motives for wanting to work with children
- d) Working with children check which is up to date
- e) Police record check which includes international police record checks where necessary
- f) Reference checks are conducted by telephone with recent line managers. Referees are asked if there have been any concerns about the applicant working with children
- g) Carer registration, where required
- h) Disqualified carer check, where required.

3.3 VACCA Code of Conduct

The *HR-600 Code of Conduct* describes the required safe and appropriate behaviours and relationships with children by everyone. Safe and positive conduct is also described in VACCA Program Manuals.

Behaviour which is inappropriate towards and around children may be made up of a single act or repeated behaviour and is a breach of the *Code of Conduct*. A breach of the *Code of Conduct* can place a child in a potential or actual harmful situation. Breaches must be reported immediately and may result in termination of employment or termination of contract for services to VACCA.

In addition, if a child safety breach of the Code of Conduct occurs during the probation period of employment, continuing employment is not offered.

Refer to the *Code of Conduct and HR-602 Performance Management and Serious Misconduct Policy* for more information.

3.4 Training, Awareness and Supervision

Up to date and ongoing training, awareness and supervision are provided to the Board and all staff on child safe practices and care as part of the leadership strategy to embed a culture of child safety.

The Board and staff are:

- a) Provided with a copy of the *CLIENT-801 Child Safe Policy*, this Procedure and the *Code of Conduct* when they commence work
- b) Required to attend child safe training and/or awareness and/or induction to ensure:
 - the nature of abuse and the immediate and long-term impacts on children, families and community are understood
 - how to identify children who are at risk of abuse
 - how to share information based on VACCA information sharing policies and procedures, having regard to child safety and wellbeing
 - how to take action on behalf of children to respond to and report child abuse or suspected abuse
 - VACCA's approach to healing using the Yinga model of care is implemented.
- c) Expected to encourage children to have their voices heard and to participate in decisions that affect them.
- d) Supported to access internal professional support for complex cases.
- e) Supported to participate in regular discussion on child safety at team meetings, and to receive ongoing supervision sessions as appropriate.

3.5 Responding to Child Abuse

- a) Failure to protect by VACCA Board or staff:

People of authority at VACCA commit a legal offence if they know of a substantial risk of child abuse and have the power or responsibility to reduce or remove the risk, but fail to do so.

Taking the necessary steps to protect a child in response to abuse, must occur before the reporting steps are carried out referred to in paragraph 3.6.

b) Responding to disclosure of child abuse by a child:

If a child directly discloses abuse, VACCA staff:

- i) must immediately ensure the child is safe and removed from harm
- ii) complete a safety plan
- iii) then ensure appropriate VACCA staff and supports are in place for the child making the disclosure.
- iv) will also consult with DHHS Child Protection staff where required.

Appropriate ways to respond to disclosure by a child are described in VACCA Program Manuals.

3.6 Reporting Child Abuse

a) Failure to Report Child Abuse:

Reporting of child abuse is required by law. Failure to report child abuse is an offence and this law applies to all VACCA staff and the Board.

It is the personal responsibility of the person who is aware of abuse, or who suspects abuse to make the DHHS report.

b) Fact and Safety Checking:

We all have a responsibility to report child abuse or suspected child abuse, where there is reasonable belief that an incident took place. This might be because a child has told someone directly that they or someone they know is being abused, or someone else has raised a suspicion but is unwilling to report it.

Observing suspicious and unsafe behaviour in others, including other VACCA staff or behaviour of a child that is consistent with abuse, are reasons to report.

- i) A fact and safety check must be conducted immediately.
- ii) Staff must immediately advise their line manager when they become aware of an incident and then report the incident to DHHS.

Consulting with a line manager or caseworker is not a DHHS report, and it does not release the VACCA Board or staff member of the obligation to report to DHHS.

- iii) Reporting must occur within the timelines described in the *CLIENT-805 Critical Incident Procedure*.

Other than the initial fact and safety check, it is not the role of VACCA staff to investigate the concerns or to interview the child.

To make a DHHS report, you do not need to prove that abuse has occurred.

- iv) Any child abuse incident which includes physical or sexual abuse, must be reported to police.

3.7 Feedback and Complaints

All feedback and complaints about children's safety are taken seriously and received by the Continuous Quality Improvement Unit.

Feedback and complaints are investigated without judgement, and in a timely and confidential manner.

Refer to *QUAL-901 Feedback, Complaints and Appeals Policy* for detailed procedures.

4.0 Monitoring and Review

Monitoring of this procedure will be conducted regularly by the Continuous Quality Improvement Unit, through case reviews and investigations outcomes. The procedure will be reviewed for updates every 12 months or when a change to legislation occurs.

5.0 Key legislation and Related Documents

Board Members and staff are required to comply with all relevant legislation, standards and policies including, but not limited to the following:

Accreditation Standards	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Child Safe Standards, DHHS • Human Services Standards 2015, DHHS • Rainbow Tick Standards, 2nd Edition, GLHV @ARCSHS La Trobe University, 2016
Legislation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Child Safety and Wellbeing Act 2005 (VIC)</i> • <i>Children, Youth & Families Act 2005 (VIC)</i> • <i>Family Violence Protection Act 2008 (VIC)</i>
Related VACCA documents	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CLIENT 800-Best Interests of the Child Policy • CLIENT 801-Child Safe Policy • CORP 308-Supplier Policy • HR-600 Code of Conduct • CLIENT 305-Critical Incident Procedure • HR-605 Recruitment and Selection Policy • HR-610 Safety Screening Policy and Procedure

6.0 Review and Approval

Frequency	Policy Owner	Date of Approval
Every 12 months	Director Client Services & Practice Development	RMAC 20/04/2021 Board 21/05/2021