

Child Safety and Wellbeing Policy

People Branch

Parent policy

Code of Conduct

1. Introduction

The VEC is committed to improving the electoral participation of young Victorians. To achieve this, we actively engage with children and young people through outreach and education programs, as well as the Young People Advisory Group. These initiatives help us understand their perspectives and deliver services and information that meets their needs.

As part of enrolment programs and recruitment processes, the VEC may collect and hold sensitive information about young people. We recognise our responsibility to safeguard that information.

The *Child Wellbeing and Safety Act 2005 (Vic)* and the *Victorian Child Safe Standards* set out mandatory requirements for organisations, including the VEC, to ensure the safety and wellbeing of children.

This Policy establishes the governance framework through which the VEC meets these obligations. It reflects our commitment to creating a child-safe culture, preventing abuse, and responding effectively to concerns. The Policy is supported by our Child Safety Code of Conduct, which outlines the behaviours and practices that are expected - and prohibited - to protect children from harm.

2. Definitions

| Word/term | Definition |
|-------------------------------------|---|
| CCYPV | Commission for Children and Young People Victoria is an independent statutory body that promotes improvement in policies and practices affecting the safety and wellbeing of Victorian children and young people. |
| Child, young person or young people | A child or teenager under the age of 18 years old. |
| WWCC | The Working with Children Check is a screening process for assessing or re-assessing people who work with or care for children in Victoria. In Victoria the scheme is administered by Service Victoria's WWCC Unit. |

3. Scope

This policy applies to all VEC employees including appointed election staff, and contractors.

4. Policy statement

The VEC:

- is committed to child safety and wants children to be safe, happy and empowered
- has zero tolerance of child abuse and understands its legal and moral obligations to treat concerns seriously and report allegations, safety and wellbeing concerns to authorities
- is committed to the 11 Child Safe Standards as prescribed for organisations by the Commission for Children and Young People Victoria (CCYPV).

5. Roles and responsibilities

All staff

All staff are responsible for

- compliance with this Policy and the Child Safety Code of Conduct
- reporting concerns or incidents related to child safety
- maintaining a valid working with children check where required for their role and reporting to the Child Safety Officer immediately any issues that lead to the cancellation or potential cancellation of their working with children check.

People leaders

All staff are responsible for

- coaching and supporting staff to understand and manage child safety risks
- monitoring staff compliance with the policy and code and report breaches
- ensuring appropriate child safety screening is undertaken in all recruitment processes.

Child Safety Officer

The designated VEC Child Safety Officer is responsible for

- providing leadership, influence and expertise on child safety matters as they pertain to VEC
- developing frameworks, policies, procedures and supporting mechanisms to enable VEC to meet its child safety obligations
- receiving, managing, escalating and following up allegations or complaints
- actioning mandatory compliance and reporting obligations under relevant legislation.

People Group

The People Group is responsible for recruitment, selection and training activities for VPS roles:

- promoting the VEC as a child safe organisation in recruitment advertising

- supporting people leaders to identify VPS roles for which a WWCC and national police check are a mandatory requirement and maintaining a register of those roles
- arranging WWCC and police background checks for staff and candidates for employment in VPS roles for which these are mandatory requirements
- conducting ongoing checks on the validity of WWCCs for existing staff
- ensuring suppliers comply with pre-screening requirements for labour hire staff
- providing and monitoring completion of training on the Child Safety Code of Conduct.

Election Staffing Branch

The Election Staffing Branch is responsible for recruitment, selection and training activities for the appointed election workforce, including

- promoting the VEC as a child safe organisation in recruitment advertising
- identifying roles for which a WWCC and national police check are a mandatory requirement and maintaining a register of those roles
- arranging WWCC and police background checks for staff and candidates for employment in roles for which these are mandatory requirements
- conducting ongoing checks on the validity of WWCCs for existing staff
- ensuring suppliers are aware of pre-screening requirements for labour hire election staff
- ensuring election staff have received this policy, the Child Safety Code of Conduct and training where required.

6. Statement of commitment to child safety

The VEC has a Statement of Commitment to Child Safety (Statement of Commitment) regarding the wellbeing of children and young people, which is widely displayed, circulated and promoted.

Copies are available to:

- any school which engages with the VEC's Passport to Democracy Program or another VEC incursion
- any school that hosts an onsite voting centre
- parents who may need to bring their children along to electoral education/outreach sessions
- anyone who requests a copy.

The Statement of Commitment is also available to the public on the VEC website.

7. Child Safe Standards

The 11 Child Safe Standards (the Standards) set the minimum requirements for complying organisations to establish policies, procedures and practices that ensure the safety and wellbeing of

children. Mandated under the Child Wellbeing and Safety Act 2005 (Vic), the Standards are legally enforceable, and, for the VEC, compliance is regulated by the CCYPV.

Standard 1

Organisations establish a culturally safe environment in which the diverse and unique identities and experiences of Aboriginal children and young people are respected and valued.

Standard 2

Child safety and wellbeing is embedded in organisational leadership, governance and culture.

Standard 3

Children and young people are empowered about their rights, participate in decisions affecting them and are taken seriously.

Standard 4

Families and communities are informed and involved in promoting child safety and wellbeing.

Standard 5

Equity is upheld and diverse needs respected in policy and practice.

Standard 6

People working with children and young people are suitable and supported to reflect child safety and wellbeing values in practice.

Standard 7

Processes for complaints and concerns are child-focused.

Standard 8

Staff and volunteers are equipped with the knowledge, skills and awareness to keep children and young people safe through ongoing education and training.

Standard 9

Physical and online environments promote safety and wellbeing while minimising the opportunity for children and young people to be harmed.

Standard 10

Implementation of the Child Safe Standards is regularly reviewed and improved.

Standard 11

Policies and procedures document how the organisation is safe for children and young people.

8. Our approach to meeting the Standards

The VEC's approach to meeting the Standards is guided by the following key principles.

Empower children and young people

The VEC aims to support young people to understand the democracy they live in and inspire them to become active citizens within that democracy. To that end, the VEC aims to stimulate the curiosity of young people in relation to the community-based issues they care about. The VEC provides learning tools and approaches to enable young people to make positive change in their school or local community and consider how they, as active citizens, can take part in Victoria's democracy. A very

practical experience of taking part in democracy can be provided through employment or voting at an election.

Actively engage with the community

The VEC is committed to engaging meaningfully with all Victorians, with a particular focus on young people and communities that have historically been under-represented at the ballot box. We recognise the diverse needs of Young Victorians, including those with disabilities, and the importance of applying appropriate adjustments to ensure access and inclusion for every community member.

We are also acutely aware of the need for culturally safe and inclusive environments that validate cultural diversity and support learning, so that every elector understands they are equal at the ballot box.

Through established community engagement channels and programs, the VEC will seek feedback on our child safe policy and practices and, where relevant, incorporate child safe commitments and initiatives into community education and engagement plans, including:

- Young people education and engagement plan
- Aboriginal education and engagement plan
- Disability education and engagement plan
- Multicultural education and engagement plan
- Prison and without a home education and engagement plan

Implement appropriate governance and controls

The VEC has a tiered child safety framework informed by risk management plan. The framework is tailored to the VEC's operating model, which requires rapidly scaling the electoral workforce for an election event and reducing it just as quickly once that event has concluded.

The objectives of the framework are provided below.

- **Embed awareness:** Ensure all staff understand the VEC's commitment to being a child safe organisation and are familiar with supporting policy and procedures, regardless of their role or length of employment / appointment.
- **Strengthen safeguards:** for services and roles that involve direct or incidental contact with children the VEC will apply rigorous pre-employment screening and ongoing validation of working with children checks and national police checks; and will evidence completion of required training.
- **Clarify accountability:** Define responsibilities across roles and teams to ensure compliance with the Standards.
- **Ensure governance oversight:** Monitor compliance through regular reporting to the People Management Committee and the Executive Leadership Committee to maintain accountability and drive continuous improvement.

Consistency in recruitment and selection of staff

The VEC operates with two distinct workforces: Victorian Public Service (VPS) employees and election staff appointed under the *Electoral Act 2002* or through the *Local Government (Electoral Regulations) 2020* with recruitment managed by the People Group or Election Staffing Branch respectively. The VEC's Recruitment and Selection Policy and supporting procedures provide a clear and consistent framework for the recruitment and selection of the VEC's entire workforce.

All VEC staff involved in the recruitment and selection of staff must ensure recruitment and selection activities, including pre-employment screening, are conducted as set out in recruitment policy and procedure or otherwise as appropriate to the nature of the role.

Roles that are identified as having direct or incidental contact with children, or access to personal data of children, will be subject to additional selection criteria and screening requirements that demonstrate commitment to child safety, including a working with children check.

Support staff to meet child safety responsibilities

The VEC will ensure all staff are aware of their responsibilities in relation to child safety, and to support their engagement with children. The VEC will build awareness for all staff through induction training, handbooks and policies. Staff with direct or incidental engagement with children will be supported through more regular training, processes and procedures specific to their work, and supervision.

Implement practical physical and emotional safety and protection measures

The physical and emotional safety and security of children/young people involved with the VEC is prioritised in the following practical ways:

- adherence to Occupational Health & Safety legislation
- all school incursion bookings include an email statement that the supervising teacher must be present in the classroom at all times
- children accompanying their parents/guardians to education/outreach sessions are required to be under the supervision of their parents/guardians at all times
- VEC staff, contractors and appointees identify and mitigate risks in the online environments without compromising a child's right to privacy, access to information, social connections and learning opportunities.

9. Reporting concerns and complaints

The VEC will ensure families and children in our community are able to easily access information about how they can raise concerns, and how those concerns will be responded to and investigated.

Any VEC staff member or member of the community can make a report to the VEC's Child Safety Officer by phone, email or in writing.

Phone (03) 9067 0266 (direct line)

Email reportable.conduct@vec.vic.gov.au

In writing Chief People Officer
(as designated Child Safety Officer)
The Victorian Electoral Commission
Level 11, 530 Collins Street
Melbourne VIC 3000

If there is concern for the immediate safety of a child, immediately call 000.

10. Managing reports and complaints

The VEC takes all allegations of inappropriate behaviour toward children seriously and is committed to complying with all legal requirements regarding child safety. Where an alleged/suspected incident occurs, the Child Safety Officer will

- promptly report any alleged misconduct that may be criminal or reportable conduct to the appropriate external agencies or authorities
- manage allegations against VEC staff under the Management of Misconduct Policy
- prioritise the safety and wellbeing of children in our approach to investigating and responding to complaints.

Information related to concerns and complaints will be kept confidential, except where it is necessary to share information to respond properly to a complaint or to prioritise child safety. We may also need to share information about incidents or complaints with external authorities to comply with the law.

11. Policy updates or amendments

The VEC will review child safe practices and policies at least every three years, or earlier in response to concerns, incidents or changes in the Standards or relevant legislation. Reviews are overseen by the People and Culture Management Committee and approved by the Executive Leadership Committee and may be informed by consultation with community groups. Employees will be notified of any changes.

12. Policy breaches

Breaches of this policy may be misconduct and dealt with under the VEC's Management of Misconduct policy and supporting procedures.

13. Endorsement

| Approval | | |
|---|--|-----------------------------|
| Date approved: | Date of effect: December 2025 | Next review due: March 2027 |
| Approved by | Executive Management Group | |
| Owner | Designated Child Safety Officer | |
| Responsible group | People Group | |
| EDRMS reference and link | EDRM049-357527856-503 | |
| Supporting documents, procedures and forms | Statement of Commitment to Child Safety Code of Conduct Child Safety Code of Conduct Employment Screening Guidance and Procedure Management of Misconduct Policy Recruitment and Selection Policy | |
| References and legislation | Child Wellbeing and Safety Act 2005 (Vic) (including Child Safe Standards) | |
| Audience | All VEC employees, contractors, appointees, and volunteers | |

14. Change history

| Version | Date | Author | Changes | Approved by |
|---------|---------------|-----------------------------|---|-------------|
| V1 | 21 Jan 2020 | HR Branch | Initial Issue | EMG |
| V2 | 1 Jun 2022 | Angela Kelly Director HR | Updated to new standards requirements and VEC format | EMG |
| V3 | December 2025 | People Branch | Updated and expanded to better reflect CCYPV Standards, and VEC reporting | EMG |