
Title: Safeguarding Children and Vulnerable People Policy



Division: All

Approved by: Group Chief Executive Officer

Purpose

Mercy Health holds a strong commitment to child safety and to the safety of vulnerable people, based on the following organisational principles:

- Listening to the voice of children and vulnerable people
- Zero tolerance of abuse
- Development and ongoing review of policies and procedures to protect children and vulnerable people from abuse
- A commitment to take all allegations of abuse against children and vulnerable people seriously and to respond to them consistently and in line with Mercy Health's policies and procedures.
- A recognition of the need to continually promote cultural safety and provide a safe environment for children and adults of Aboriginal and culturally and/or linguistically diverse backgrounds, and children and adults with a disability.

Mercy Health is committed to creating and maintaining environments that are safe, supportive, caring and nurturing for all people and especially for children and vulnerable people.

Caring for vulnerable people is central to the Vision of Mercy Health. We acknowledge that all people in need of care services experience vulnerability due to disability, age, illness or mental illness and may be unable to take care of themselves or advocate on their own behalf.

We recognise that some populations, groups and communities are at a higher risk for poor health or abuse as a result of the barriers they experience to social, economic, political and environmental resources, as well as limitations due to illness or disability (National Collaborating Centre for Determinants of Health 2020). Many of these systemic structures and systems intersect on multiple levels to: oppress, create barriers and overlapping forms of discrimination, stigma, and power imbalances based on characteristics such as Aboriginality, gender, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, ethnicity, colour and nationality" (Family Services Victoria). Barriers may be static or dynamic, may be experienced in combination and may change across the lifespan.

This Policy provides an overview of the approach that Mercy Health takes to support the provision of care at Mercy Health for children and vulnerable people.

Who Must Comply

All Mercy Health employees, volunteers and contractors

Policy

Mercy Health is committed to enhancing the wellbeing and recognising the rights of the children and vulnerable people we serve, by protecting their safety, independence and dignity and treating them with compassion.

In addition to our legal and ethical obligations in the provision of care The Mercy Way articulates our commitment to recognise and uphold the human rights of each person that we support. It is our foundational philosophy and underpins the operation of all Mercy Health services. It stands firmly on the learnings and teachings from our Catholic heritage and is expressed through our values and the behaviours we aspire to demonstrate in our quest to bring God's mercy to those in need.

Title: Safeguarding Children and Vulnerable People Policy



Division: All

Approved by: Group Chief Executive Officer

We recognise the equal and innate worth of each person, before God and with each other, which means that we:

- Recognise each person we support as a citizen peer with unique values, wishes and contributions.
- Commit to respecting the diverse experiences and expressions including the unique claims for justice of each person we support.
- Recognise that vulnerability is part of our shared human experience – not separate from it.
- Believe that each person has the right to be supported to experience freedom, belonging and self-determination in a personally meaningful way.
- Act in solidarity with those most at risk of exclusion or marginalization based on what they themselves have experienced or are experiencing as just or unjust in their own lives.
- Believe that human rights are more than abstract ideals; that they are experienced and expressed in the context of our relationships.
- Recognise our obligation to continually challenge discrimination and oppression and to transform unjust cultures, systems and practices that structure our relationships with the people we support.

As part of our commitment to safeguarding children and vulnerable people:

- Mercy Health will embed a culture of safety and response in leadership, governance and practice.
- We will prioritise the safety and best interests of the children and vulnerable adults with whom we work.
- We plan, organise and review activities to proactively consider and eliminate potential risks.
- Mercy Health staff have a duty to identify and report any allegations or suspicions that a child or vulnerable person is being abused or neglected.
- Mercy Health will provide a consistent, sensitive and timely response to people who have experienced abuse or neglect or where abuse or neglect is suspected.
- Mercy Health will co-operate with agencies in safeguarding children and vulnerable people including the Police and government agencies.
- Mercy Health will provide support to employees in managing vulnerability in their work including access to training and the Employee Assistance Program.
- Mercy Health will have specific procedures in place to guide staff on responsibilities to protect the rights and for supporting groups with increased vulnerability including but not limited to: children, older people, Aboriginal and Torres Strait islander peoples, diverse cultural background and those experiencing family violence.
- Procedures will include as a minimum requirement:
 - Expectations of staff in relation to the vulnerable group.
 - Guidance on protecting the rights of the vulnerable people including requirement to work in a way that doesn't expose vulnerable people to situations whereby their rights and vulnerability may be exploited deliberately or accidentally.
 - Expectation for vulnerable people to be an active participant in decision making about their care where able.

Title: Safeguarding Children and Vulnerable People Policy



Mercy Health
Care first

Division: All

Approved by: Group Chief Executive Officer

- Employees/volunteers to take appropriate measures to maintain their own safety and that of residents/patients/clients and other employees/volunteers.
 - Contact with Police where there is evidence of a criminal offence.
 - Process for support of vulnerable person making disclosure or involved in incident.
 - Escalation process for employees/volunteers.
 - Process for informing family, guardian or other people as appropriate dependent on the situation and specific vulnerability of those involved.
 - Incident report completion.
 - Process for provision of support, debriefing for vulnerable person, family, guardian.
 - Reference to and compliance with any specific legislation, mandated requirements or industry recommendations dependent on the vulnerable group.
- Safeguarding of children and vulnerable people at Mercy Health will be overseen by the Equity and Inclusion Committee via the Safeguarding Coordinator.

Definitions

Term	Definition
Abuse	Abuse, as described by the WHO, is 'a single, or repeated act, or lack of appropriate action, occurring within any relationship where there is an expectation of trust which causes harm or distress to an older person'. It can take various forms, such as physical abuse, psychological or emotional abuse, financial abuse, sexual abuse, and neglect.
Child	Any person under the age of 18 years.
Neglect	According to WHO: Neglect includes both isolated incidents, as well as a pattern of failure over time on the part of parent or other family member to provide for the development and wellbeing of the child – where the parent is in a position to do so – in one or more of the following areas: health, education, emotional development, nutrition, shelter and safe living conditions.
Vulnerable Person	<p>Any person, who is, or may be in need of care services. This may be because of a mental or other disability, age or illness. The person may be unable to take care of him or herself or unable to protect him or herself against significant harm or serious exploitation.</p> <p>We recognise that some populations, groups and communities are at a higher risk for poor health or abuse as a result of the barriers they experience to social, economic, political and environmental resources, as well as limitations due to illness or disability. Many of these systemic structures and systems intersect on multiple levels to: oppress, create barriers and overlapping forms of discrimination, stigma, and power imbalances based on characteristics such as Aboriginality, gender, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, ethnicity, colour, nationality etc.</p> <p>This broad definition of vulnerable person, underpinned by human rights principles, encompasses 'adults at risk' a term being used in some contexts to promote a focus on risk factors rather than on an individual.</p>

Key Legislation, Acts, Standards & References

	Applicable Groups	Jurisdiction
Integrity in the Service of the Church: A Resource Document of Principles and Standards for Lay Workers in the Catholic Church in Australia. National Committee for Professional Standards, A Committee of the Australian Catholic Bishops & the Leaders of Religious Institutes in Australia. 2011.	All	All

Title: Safeguarding Children and Vulnerable People Policy



Division: All

Approved by: Group Chief Executive Officer

Aged Care Act 1997 (Cth)	Aged Care	All
Compulsory reporting for approved providers of residential aged care services	Residential Aged Care	All
National Disability Insurance Scheme Act 2013 (Cth)	Disability	All
Crimes Act 1900 (ACT)	All	ACT
Working with Vulnerable People (Background Checking) Act 2011 (ACT)	All	ACT
Children's Guardian Act 2019 (NSW)	Children	NSW
Child Protection (Working with Children) Act 2012 (NSW)	Children	NSW
Crimes Act 1900 (NSW)	All	NSW
Disability Inclusion Act 2014 (NSW)	Disability	NSW
Disability Services Act 2006 (Qld)	Disability	QLD
Criminal Code Act 1899 (Qld)	All	QLD
Working with Children (Risk Management and Screening) Act 2000 (Qld)	Children	QLD
Child Wellbeing and Safety Act 2005 (Vic)	Children	VIC
Children, Youth and Families Act 2005 (Vic)	Children	VIC
Child Safe Standards	Children	VIC
Crimes Act 1958 (Vic)	All	VIC
Disability Act 2006 (Vic)	Disability	VIC
Family Violence Protection Act 2008	All	VIC
Mental Health Act 2014 (Vic)	Mental Health	VIC
Criminal Code Act Compilation Act 1913 (WA)	All	WA
Disability Services Act 1993 (WA)	Disability	WA
Working with Children (Criminal Record Checking) Act 2004 (WA)_	Children	WA

Link with Organisational Values

Compassion:

- In articulating an open and inclusive approach to practice, this policy creates a context of **compassion** as fostering a spirit of generosity, kindness and support in being present to the needs of others.

Keywords

Assault, violence, The Mercy Way, abuse, neglect, National Catholic Safeguarding Standards

Links to Related Documents

- Code of Conduct Policy
- Code of Conduct With Children Policy
- [Equity & Inclusion Policy](#)
- Emergency Procedures
- National Catholic Safeguarding Standards (NCSS)
- [Vulnerable Children and Child Protection Policy](#)
- [Vulnerable Children and Child Protection Procedure](#)
- [Protection of Children Policy](#)
- [Protection of Children Procedure](#)

Title: Safeguarding Children and Vulnerable People Policy



Division: All

Approved by: Group Chief Executive Officer

- [Screening Policy \(including Police Record Check and Working with Children and Vulnerable People Checks\)](#)
- [Working with Children and Vulnerable People Checks Procedure](#)

Version History / Author / Contributors

V.	Date Created	Sections Changed	Created/Amended by
1	11/2014	New	EO to CEO
2	13/05/2020	Provided clarity on definition of vulnerability and groups experiencing increasing vulnerability Components on Mercy Way added Added additional links Removed Safeguarding Vulnerable adults procedure as retired Added additional legislation	EO to GCEO
3	12/11/20	Policy scope broadened to encompass children and concepts in the NCSS	EO to GCEO