

# Parish, agency and entity safeguarding responsibilities

The head of entity is responsible for ensuring compliance with the requirements of the Safeguarding Children and Young People Policy and relevant procedures and practices to promote the safety of children and young people consistent with the:

- Child Safe Standards (Victoria)
- National Catholic Safeguarding Standards
- National Principles for Child Safe Organisations <sup>1</sup>

Specifically, within a parish, the Parish Priest has a legal obligation under the Child Wellbeing and Safety Act 2005 (Vic) to ensure that safeguarding measures are in place to keep children and young people safe from abuse and harm.

## THE ROLE OF THE SAFEGUARDING COMMITTEE

Under the National Catholic Safeguarding Standards, the parish, agency or entity leadership is required to establish a Safeguarding Committee to which provides advice to, and works with, the leadership of the parish, agency or entity to ensure policies, processes and practices are in place to protect children and young people<sup>2</sup>.

The Safeguarding Committee is an advisory committee only. This means that committee members are not themselves subject to the legal obligations under the Child Wellbeing and Safety Act 2005 or the Child Safety Standards made under it by virtue of them being a member of the Committee – the legal obligation remains with the leadership of the parish, agency or entity e.g. the Archbishop, Parish Priest, or CEO<sup>3</sup>.

The Committee will meet four or more times per year and report progress to the relevant governance body within the parish, agency or entity (e.g. Parish Pastoral Council, Board, Committee of Management) on a quarterly basis.

The Committee's role is to assist the leadership so that the Safeguarding Children and Young People Policy is embedded across the parish, agency or entity and compliance requirements are met by:

- Promoting child safety within their community and fostering an understanding of the importance of child safety.

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<sup>1</sup> See **INFORMATION SHEET: Organisational frameworks for safeguarding children and young people**

<sup>2</sup> Where it is not possible to establish a stand-alone Safeguarding Committee due to low volunteer numbers, the Parish Pastoral Council may establish a Working Group or may accept safeguarding responsibilities as part of its existing remit.

<sup>3</sup> Please note – Any adult (aged 18 years and over) in Victoria is subject to obligations under Section 327 of the Crimes Act 9158 that require those who hold a reasonable belief that a sexual offence has been committed in Victoria by an adult against a child (aged under 16) disclose that information to Victoria Police.

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- Working collaboratively with the leadership to promote the safety of children and young people.
- Implementing, maintaining and/or reviewing child safety processes and procedures to support the wellbeing and safety of children and young people with input from relevant stakeholders e.g. priest, parish administration, parents, children young people, program leaders, pastoral associates.
- Engaging in and/or reviewing risk management processes to promote the safe participation of children and young people in programs, activities and events.
- Involving children and young people (and their families) in decision-making and planning to promote child safety.
- Ensuring that reporting processes for concerns and/or allegations are well communicated across the parish, and act as a first point of contact in relation to child safety concerns, reports or allegations and comply with reporting protocols for child abuse reports and allegations in a sensitive and supportive manner.
- Participating in and/or delivering child safety information and training.
- Monitor ongoing compliance with the CAM Safeguarding Children and Young People Framework which encompasses the requirements of the Victorian Child Safe Standards.

Documentation (e.g. meeting minutes, correspondence, risk assessments, communication) in relation to the Safeguarding Committee is to be kept by each parish, agency or entity, and stored securely. These records will form part of the evidence base for the parish, agency or entity's efforts to safeguard children and young people.

The leadership, working with its Safeguarding Committee, will summarise its compliance with the requirements of the Safeguarding Children and Young People Framework on an annual basis (self-assessment/audit process) and present it to the Professional Standards Unit (PSU) of the Catholic Archdiocese of Melbourne (CAM).

## **SAFEGUARDING COMMITTEE MEMBERSHIP**

The membership of the Committee must include parish, agency or entity leadership representatives and other relevant stakeholders including:

- program coordinators, who may be employees or volunteers involved in child and youth related work and ministry
- volunteers with child safety expertise (e.g. lawyer, human resources professional, teacher or school principal, early childhood education worker, police officer, social worker, youth worker) and/or commitment to safeguard children and young people
- parent representatives.

Members of the Committee are in effect 'Safeguarding Officers' for the parish, agency or entity. Safeguarding Officers are an important asset within a parish, agency or entity and can act as points

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of contact for advice, support and direction in relation to child safety matters. See **TEMPLATE: Safeguarding Committee Position Description**.

## **CAM PROFESSIONAL STANDARDS UNIT**

Across CAM, the PSU is responsible for:

- Assisting parishes, agencies and entities to implement the Safeguarding Children and Young People Policy.
- Providing support, advice and training to Archdiocesan parishes, agencies and entities to strengthen their efforts in relation to child safety.
- Assisting Archdiocesan parishes, agencies and entities to comply with the Safeguarding Children and Young People Policy and relevant standards.
- Managing concerns, allegations and reports of child abuse and breaches of the Safeguarding Children and Young People Policy in accordance with moral, legal and ethical obligations to safeguard children and young people and the Reportable Conduct Scheme.
- Guiding improvements in relation to our approach to child safety across the Archdiocese (e.g. Safeguarding Children and Young People Policy, Code of Conduct, compliance, risk management, training) to meet legislative requirements at the state and federal level, and best practice expectations proposed by Catholic Professional Standards Limited.
- Undertaking annual child safety audits

PSU will receive and coordinate the response to allegations and reports of child abuse in relation to clergy, employees and volunteers across CAM, consistent with our moral, legal and ethical responsibility to safeguard children and young people and our reporting obligations under the Reportable Conduct Scheme. **See INFORMATION SHEET: Reporting child safety-related misconduct and/or child abuse.**

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