

Australian Evangelical Alliance Inc. (Missions Interlink)

PROTECTION OF VULNERABLE INDIVIDUALS POLICY			
Policy number	Pol. 019	Version	1
Drafted by	Nataliya Osipova	Approved by Board on	1 October 2021
Reviewed by	Policy Committee	Last reviewed	
Responsible person	Nataliya Osipova	Scheduled review date	1 October 2023

INTRODUCTION

Australian Evangelical Alliance Inc.'s (AEA) recognises that all people, regardless of their age, gender, race, religious beliefs, disability, sexual orientation or family or social background have a right to feel safe, to be safe and to be protected from abuse, neglect or exploitation.

AEA ministries recognise and committed to promoting and protecting the welfare and human rights of people that come into contact with AEA, particularly vulnerable persons who may be at risk.

APPLICATION

The policy applies to all activities authorised by or under the control of AEA and includes all Board members, staff, volunteers, contractors and third parties engaged by AEA.

1. Policy

1. The purpose of this Policy is to ensure that safe environments are created by AEA Inc which promote and enhance the safety and welfare of all people who come in contact with AEA ministries, including by:
 - (a) setting out the roles and responsibilities of people working in and with AEA ministries;
 - (b) setting out how AEA manages safeguarding risks;
 - (c) facilitating the safe management of incidents; and
 - (d) promoting a positive and effective internal culture toward safeguarding.

2. Regulatory context

1. All Australian jurisdictions have legal requirements around the prevention, protection and reporting of abuse, neglect or exploitation of vulnerable individuals.
2. The responsible persons for AEA are required to carry out their duties with due care and diligence, which includes taking care to protect vulnerable individuals. AEA is also required by the ACNC External Conduct Standards to protect vulnerable individuals delivering or benefiting from overseas programs – including programs on which AEA collaborates with third parties.

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3. Definitions

“Abuse, neglect or exploitation” means all forms of physical and mental abuse, exploitation, coercion or ill-treatment, including:

- sexual harassment, bullying or abuse;
- sexual criminal offences and serious sexual criminal offences;
- threats of, or actual violence, verbal abuse, emotional or social abuse;
- cultural or identity abuse such as racial, sexual or gender-based discrimination or hate crime; and
- abuse of power.

“at risk” means at risk of abuse, neglect or exploitation.

“external authority” includes the police and any relevant authority.

“Reasonable grounds to suspect” means a belief, based on some information, that a person has experienced, is experiencing or may experience abuse, neglect or exploitation. Proof is not required, a suspicion based on information is sufficient.

Questions that may help a person to determine whether they have reasonable grounds to suspect include:

- Could you explain to another person why you suspect something? This helps to make sure that your suspicion is based on information.
- Would an objective other person, with the same information as you, come to the same conclusion? This helps to ensure the suspicion is as objective as possible.

“Safeguard” means protect the welfare and human rights of people that interact with, or are affected by AEA, particularly those who are vulnerable or at risk.

“Vulnerable” means any person who is unable to take care or promote themselves (or their interest) against harm, abuse or exploitation by reason of age, illness, trauma, disability or any other reason. Vulnerability can be temporary or permanent.

4. Responsibilities

1. All people engaged in or with AEA must help to safeguard people by:

- (a) maintaining a safe environment for persons in the course of their work;
- (b) ensuring that, if they have reasonable grounds to suspect a person is at risk, they report the suspicions internally and (if required or appropriate) to an external authority; and
- (c) immediately contacting the police if they believe a person is at immediate risk.

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2. The Board is responsible for the protection of people that interact with, or are affected by AEA. It must ensure that:

- (a) AEA has appropriate and effective policies and processes in place to protect people and that these policies and procedures are implemented;
- (b) AEA complies with all relevant laws (both Australian and, where relevant, overseas laws) relating to safeguarding, including, in respect of children; and
- (c) AEA takes a survivor–centric approach to safeguarding.

3. The National Director of AEA must:

- (a) take reasonable steps to protect people, including developing and implementing processes and policies;
- (b) manage safeguarding and legal compliance;
- (c) ensure that reports are made to external authorities when required or appropriate;
- (d) manage reports of abuse, neglect or exploitation;
- (e) ensure that all Board members, staff, volunteers, partners, contractors and third parties are aware of relevant laws, policies and procedures;
- (f) ensure that all Board members, staff, volunteers, partners, contractors and third parties are aware of their obligations to report suspected incidents of abuse, neglect or exploitation;
- (g) provide support for all Board members, staff, volunteers, partners, contractors and third parties in undertaking their responsibilities;
- (h) comply with the requirements under State and Territory Reportable Conduct Schemes.

4. All State and Ministry Leaders should:

- (a) promote a positive culture towards safeguarding;
- (b) implement this Policy in their area of responsibility;
- (c) ensure that there are appropriate controls in place to prevent, detect and respond to incidents;
- (d) facilitate the reporting process when someone has reasonable grounds to suspect; and
- (e) ensure potential incidents are handled with accountability and transparency and with a survivor-centric approach.

5. All Board members, staff and volunteers of AEA must:

- (a) familiarise themselves with the relevant laws, policies and procedures for safeguarding;

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- (b) report any incident to the National Director and (if required or appropriate) to an external authority when it is reasonable to suspect that a person's safety or welfare is at risk;
 - (c) report any suspicion that a person's safety or welfare may be at risk internally or to an external party; and
 - (d) provide an environment that is supportive of everyone's emotional and physical safety.
6. All partners, contractors and third parties of AEA must:
- (a) implement the provisions of this Policy and AEA's procedures in their dealings with AEA; and
 - (b) report any suspicion that an incident may have taken place, is taking place, or could take place to the National Director and (if required or appropriate) to an external authority.

5. Identifying vulnerable individuals

1. Vulnerable individuals are people who are unable to take care of themselves or protect themselves against harm or exploitation and includes:
 - (a) Children (under 18 years of age); and
 - (b) Adults who are unable to take care of or protect themselves by reason of:
 - (i) Age;
 - (ii) Illness;
 - (iii) Trauma; and/or
 - (iv) Disability.
2. AEA will take steps to identify vulnerable persons who may be delivering or benefiting from AEA's ministry.
3. Vulnerable individuals may be:
 - (a) beneficiaries;
 - (b) staff;
 - (c) volunteers; or
 - (d) third parties, their beneficiaries, staff or volunteers.

6. Managing safeguarding risk

1. AEA will manage risks of safeguarding according to the following concepts:
 - (a) Holistic – AEA will regularly assess the risks to people in its operations and develop proportionate controls to mitigate those risks.

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- (b) Survivor-centric – AEA will put survivors at the heart of its approach to safeguarding.
 - (c) Lawful – AEA will ensure that it understands and complies with the law in everything it does, in all jurisdictions in which it works.
2. AEA will manage the risk of safeguarding by:
- (a) having up-to-date and documented risk assessments;
 - (b) maintaining a register of AEA’s legal obligations for safeguarding and workplace health and safety in all the jurisdictions in which it operates;
 - (c) having an action plan that sets out how it will manage safeguarding;
 - (d) having an incident response plan;
 - (e) doing all reasonable due diligence checks of Board members, staff, volunteers, partners, contractors, and third parties, including interviews, qualification checks and (for people that come or will come into regular or ongoing contact with children in connection with AEA’s programs have a valid Working with Children Check or other States’ equivalent (if available);
 - (f) implementing policies, procedures and systems that introduce controls to reduce the likelihood and consequence of incidents;
 - (g) conducting awareness-raising for stakeholders on risks, expectations, individual responsibilities, this Policy and reporting procedures;
 - (h) maintaining two reporting processes: a confidential reporting process and an overt reporting process;
 - (i) monitoring and reviewing the effectiveness and proportionality of its safeguarding approach;
 - (j) take steps to increase awareness within AEA of the importance of a safe place for vulnerable persons;
 - (k) maintain responsive procedures for fulfilling mandatory reporting obligations; and
 - (l) maintain responsive procedures for dealing with complaints and issues as they arise.

7. Managing incidents

- 1. Harassment, abuse, neglect and exploitation are all serious misconduct and AEA reserves the right to:
 - (a) take appropriate disciplinary action against those it believes are responsible, which may include dismissal;
 - (b) take legal action; and
 - (c) report the matter(s) to an external authority.

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2. Reporting suspected incidents

- (a) All Board members, staff, volunteers, partners, contractors and third parties must, as soon as practicable, report any suspicion that an incident has taken place, may be taking place, or could take place.
- (b) A person may report a suspected incident internally or to an external authority.
- (c) If a person believes that another person is at risk of immediate harm or the victim of a criminal offence, they must report directly to the police immediately.

3. Internal reporting

- (a) A person may report internally to any member of the Board, a State Ministry Leader or the National Director.
- (b) A person may make an internal report of a suspected incident confidentially, including with anonymity to the National Director.

4. Reporting to an external authority

- (a) any person may report directory to an external authority.
- (b) AEA must:
 - (i) report any suspected criminal offence to the police;
 - (ii) comply with all donor of funding authority requirements regarding the reporting of incidents; and
 - (iii) report any incident that constitutes significant non-compliance with the Governance Standards or External Conduct Standards to the Australian Charities and Not-for-profits Commission.

8. Privacy and data protection

- 1. All personal information considered or recorded must respect the privacy of the individuals involved unless there is a risk to someone's safety. AEA will protect personal information obtained in connection with this Policy in accordance with its Privacy Policy.

9. Compliance with this policy

- 1. The Board must comply with this policy and review compliance as part of its standard self-evaluation.
- 2. If the National Director or Board have reason to believe that this policy has not been complied with, they must investigate.

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