

Safeguarding Children & Young People

# Strategic Action Plan

2022-2025

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## Acknowledgement to Country

The AFL acknowledges the Traditional Owners of the land on which we work and play our game. We pay our respects to Elders past, present and emerging. We acknowledge we play our great game on this land and respect the cultures of all First Peoples, their contribution to our nation and contribution to the game of Australian Rules Football.

# 01

# Foreward

Australian Football is a game for everyone, it breaks down social barriers, it brings people, young and old together and provides a space to create new friendships and most importantly, for people to have fun. As a leading national sporting organisation we are committed to providing a safe and welcoming environment for all children and young people who participate in football through promoting their social, emotional and physical safety and wellbeing. All children and young people who participate in footy have the right to be safe, feel safe and play safe.

Key to embedding a culture of child safety across the business has been the drive from leadership to ensure that all children and young people who participate in Australian Football, regardless of their gender, race, religion, disability, family or social background, have equal rights to a safe and welcoming environment. We achieve this through not only ensuring we have the right policies and practices in place but by supporting and educating our staff to understand and embed key safeguarding practices in the delivery of football programs and services.

The purpose of this safeguarding strategic action plan is to provide direction for all program areas over the next three years to continue to improve and create positive and safe environments and experiences for all young participants. This safeguarding strategic action plan is governed by five objectives each of which is underpinned by a set of key actions and collective outcomes.



This is a live document and modifications may be made in response to internal and external environmental changes such as legislative or compliance changes, audit, critical incident data review and/or feedback from across the business.

The plan will be reviewed on an annual basis to ensure its currency with approved changes incorporated as required. We look forward to implementing the key actions as outlined in this plan across the business as we continue to provide a safe and enjoyable experience for all children and young people who participate in our programs and services.

**Andrew Dillon**  
Chief Executive Officer – Elect

## 02

# Background

The AFL is the governing body for Australian Football, which conducts Australian Football competitions throughout Australia.

Relevantly, the AFL has control of the following State/Territory entities:

- AFL (NSW/ACT) Commission Limited
  - AFL Northern Territory Limited
  - AFL Queensland Limited
  - Football Tasmania Limited; and
  - Australian Football League (Victoria) Limited
- (collectively, the State Entities).

The vast majority of activities that involve an interaction with children and young people in our sport, namely participation in junior and/or youth football clubs and school football competitions, sit outside of the scope of the AFL's direct control. However, the AFL willingly plays a leadership role in respect of Leagues and 'out of scope' activities in other jurisdictions by recognising its position to influence behaviours and to help build a safe, inclusive and welcoming environment for children and young people to participate in Australian Football.

The AFL facilitates the following programs, services and activities for children and young people including:

- Auskick
- Talent pathways (16 – 18 year olds)
- Indigenous, Multicultural and Diversity programs
- State based camps and carnivals
- School football clinics

- Michael Long Learning and Leadership Centre (Darwin)
- Cape York House (Cairns)

The AFL actively promotes a safe physical and online environment for children and young people throughout AFL Talent Pathways and Affiliated State and Community Leagues nationally.

For the purpose of clarity, AFL People who play a role in safeguarding children and young people who participate in our programs, services and use our facilities include:

- All employees (including casuals); and
- All directly engaged volunteers and contractors/consultants who are engaged to provide services to the AFL or an AFL State entity that involve an interaction with children or young people.



# 03

## AFL's commitment to safeguarding children & young people

All children and young people, regardless of their gender, race, religious beliefs, age, disability, sexual orientation, or family or social background, have the right to feel safe and be free from any harm or abuse.

The AFL is committed to promoting and protecting the safety and wellbeing of all children and young people in our care who access AFL activities, programs, services or facilities, by fostering a culturally safe environment where children and young people feel safe and welcome.

### As part of the AFL's commitment to safeguarding children and young people, the AFL commits to the following:

- The AFL has zero tolerance for child abuse.
- The AFL will seek to provide an environment in which all children and young people feel supported and respected.
- The AFL recognises the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people, children and young people from culturally and/or linguistically diverse backgrounds, children and young people with a disability and children and young people who identify as LGBTI+, transgender and/or non-binary and will implement culturally appropriate practices and procedures to address those needs.
- The AFL supports the active participation of children and young people and welcomes the opinions of children, young people and their families to inform the development and update of policies and procedures in relation to matters affecting the safety and wellbeing of children and young people.
- The AFL will engage with children and young people and their parents/carers about safeguarding practices and help empower them to speak up when they see or hear something that makes them feel unsafe. This will be achieved through the provision of relevant information through appropriate resources which are readily available and accessible to children, young people and their parents/carers.
- In the event a concern or allegation is raised in relation to child abuse or any other inappropriate behaviour towards a child or young person that has occurred while a child or young person is under the AFL's care, the AFL will ensure it is treated seriously, in a culturally sensitive manner and fully investigated in accordance with this Policy, the Supporting Documents, any other related policies or procedures and relevant legislation.
- The AFL will actively promote the safety of children and young people throughout the Australian Football community, whilst recognising the need for state and local football leagues and clubs that are not under the AFL's direct control to take responsibility for providing a safe physical and online environment for children and young people in their care.

**As a national sporting code, the AFL wants everyone who participates in Australian Football to be safe, feel safe and play safe.**

# 04

## Our safeguarding journey so far



### 2017

- Introduction of Victorian Child Safe Standards which all organisations who provide programs, services and facilities to children and young people must abide by.



### 2018

- AFL Child Safeguarding policies and procedures implemented and applied across all States and Territories as best practice.



### 2021

- Review of AFL Safeguarding framework.
- Creation of Safeguarding resource suite for AFL People, children, young people and their families and game day personnel.



### 2022

- Audit of AFL safeguarding framework and introduction of updated policies and procedures in line with new Child Safety and Wellbeing legislation.
- Delivery of online safeguarding webinar series for families, community and AFL entities.
- Roll out of national safeguarding social media campaign.
- Support and leadership provided to wider industry on safeguarding young people in Australian Football.
- Development of stadium safeguarding policy framework.
- Roll out of Safeguarding Strategic Action plan (2022-2025).



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# Our purpose

## Vision

**To promote and protect the safety and wellbeing of children and young people in the AFL's care who access activities, programs, services or facilities for which the AFL is responsible for.**

## Values

- ✓ **Safe practices** – we are committed to creating a safe and welcoming culture where the rights and voices of children and young people are heard, listened to and incorporated into our policies and procedures and reflected in the delivery of AFL led programs and services and through AFL owned facilities (eg Marvel Stadium).
- ✓ **Safe people** – we support and train AFL people to know and understand how to safeguard children and young people and call out poor behaviour so everyone can be safe, feel safe, play safe.
- ✓ **Safe places** – we create and maintain safe environments through a risk-based approach both in physical and online spaces.



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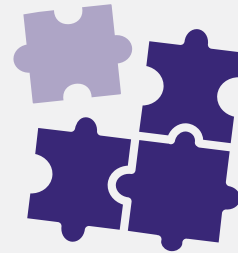
# Objectives

All objectives are interconnected and complementary to the overall purpose of safeguarding children and young people.

**Governance**



**Education**



**Safe environments**



**Risk management**



**Awareness & engagement**





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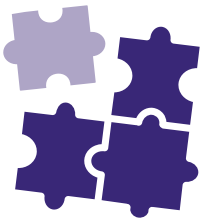
# Objectives



## Governance

**Robust safeguarding policies and practices embedded into everyday thinking and delivery of football programs.**

We will establish a robust governance framework with dedicated safeguarding policies and procedures at the AFL and Marvel stadium that prioritise the safety and wellbeing of all participants, staff, guests and patrons. Leadership across the business will champion the objectives of embedding a culture of child safety into the everyday delivery of programs and services.



## Education

**All staff have the relevant knowledge and skills to deliver safe and enjoyable programs and services to children and young people.**

We will provide AFL and MSL staff with the necessary skills and information through education and training opportunities on child safe practices so they feel confident in their interactions with children and young people and understand how to respond to and raise concerns in a sensitive and timely manner.



## Awareness & engagement

**Children, young people and their families are aware of safeguarding practices and have the opportunity to contribute to safe environments in Australian Football.**

We want children, young people and their families to fully understand what we do to keep them safe and have a say in their safety and wellbeing while participating in football programs and using Marvel Stadium and other facilities. The voice of the child will always be considered and child and young person focused resources support them to understand their rights and responsibilities and know how to speak up if something doesn't feel right.

The AFL recognises the role it plays across the broader football industry and is committed to supporting elite and community football to understand their obligations in relation to safeguarding children and young people through leadership and providing relevant resources.

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# Objectives



## Risk management

**A strong risk-based culture is embedded across all programs and services delivered to children and young people.**

We will embed a strong risk-based culture across the business supporting staff to identify and mitigate risks related to engagement with children and young people. We will utilise data and insights to drive safer practices, people and places creating a stronger risk management approach into operational and strategic practice.



## Safe environments

**Our stadiums and AFL managed facilities are fun and safe environments for staff, patrons and guests on event and non-event days and during residential stays.**

We will make sure event and non-event days at AFL controlled or owned stadiums are made safe and fun for children of all ages, abilities and backgrounds. This includes young people who work as casuals at Marvel Stadium, Auskick participants and children and young people who attend as patrons and guests of our stadiums.

We will support all staff to understand how to create safe and inclusive environments for children and young people who attend residential camps at our Michael Long Learning Centre and provide leadership in safeguarding to Cape York House. We will also support our international affiliates understand the AFL's expectations of safeguarding children who participate in programs associated with the AFL brand.

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# Outcomes

**1** All children and young people who participate in football programs and services and/or use AFL facilities (eg Marvel) are safe from harm and abuse and any inappropriate conduct is detected, managed and sanctioned in a timely manner.

**2** All staff feel confident to manage safeguarding issues and do the 'right thing' through the provision of training and support on safeguarding policies, procedures and practices.

**3** Data is used in a targeted manner to identify compliance themes and proactively address issues for children, young people and staff in a timely manner.

**4** Risk management becomes part of everyday thinking about how we keep children and young people safe.

**5** A strong commitment from leadership on creating and maintaining safe environments embeds a culture of child safety into everyday practice.



