



The Department of Veterans' Affairs
Commonwealth Child Safe Framework
Compliance Statement 18 September 2023

OUR COMMITMENT TO CHILD SAFETY

The Department of Veterans' Affairs (DVA), formerly the Repatriation Department, is a department of the Government of Australia, established in 1918, and renamed to the DVA in 1976. DVA is charged with the responsibility of delivering government programs for war veterans, members of the Australian Defence Force (ADF), members of the Australian Federal Police, and their dependants including children and young people.

Open Arms – Veterans and Families Counselling (Open Arms), formerly the Vietnam Veterans Counselling Service (VVCS), a Division of the DVA, has been supporting the Veteran community since 1982. Open Arms provide a range of mental health and community support services to current and ex-serving ADF personnel and their families, including children and young people.

DVA is committed to ensuring the safety of children and young people in all business areas and services we deliver. This is achieved through a range of activities including compliance with the Commonwealth Child Safe Framework.

OUR INTERACTION WITH CHILDREN AS PART OF OUR OPERATIONS

DVA has occasional face-to-face and online interactions with children and young people who might be accompanying parents and caregivers interacting with DVA. Additionally DVA offers the following programs directly to children and young:

Kookaburra Kids: Face to face and online contact through funded third parties.

Open Arms – Counselling Services: Face to face contact, telephone and online contact with children through in-centre staff, contractors and Outreach Program Counsellors (third parties). Our client intake service, care coordination, group programs, peer program and community engagement activities may involve direct, face to face contact, telephone, and/or online interaction with children and young people.

Veterans Chaplaincy Pilot Program: The program is a government commitment to provide chaplaincy support, post service for transitioning at risk Australian Defence Force Personnel and their families. This service may involve face to face contact, telephone, and/or online interaction with children and young people.

COMPLIANCE WITH THE FRAMEWORK AND MEASURES TO IMPROVE COMPLIANCE MOVING FORWARD

DVA remains compliant with the four requirements of the Commonwealth Child Safe Framework through the following activities:



1. Annual risk assessment in relation to activities of the entity, to identify the level of responsibility for, and contact with, children, evaluate risks to child safety, and put in place appropriate strategies to manage identified risks.

DVA's 2023 annual child safety risk assessment determined a medium residual risk rating. The key risks to children identified in the annual risk assessment include the potential for accidental physical and psychological harm, physical or psychological abuse, grooming, sexual abuse, and the misuse of digital content. The consequences of these risks are major (i.e. significant harm to a child) however it is unlikely that they would occur.

Residual Risk Rating	Medium
Residual Consequence Rating	Major

Actions and measures to mitigate risk include, but are not limited to:

DVA Broadly:

- Security clearance (where required) and reference checks as part of the on-boarding process.
- Induction processes to ensure familiarity with policies, procedures and training modules.
- Funded third parties for child care under the DVA's Rehabilitation Program, Kookaburra Kids and Grants have clauses within contract and policy advising clients that they are responsible for ensuring providers have appropriate checks as required.
- The Australian Public Service (APS) Code of Conduct provides a framework of ethics and values for all permanent and contracted APS staff that govern behaviour and responsibilities.
- Professional registration and codes of conduct including the Australian Health Practitioner Regulation Agency, Psychology Board of Australia, Australian Psychological Society, and Australian Association of Social Workers.
- Legislated requirements for providers, including child care providers, to be approved/accredited.
- Parental consent prior to taking images during programs such as Kookaburra Kids to be obtained.
- Any images and videos obtained during programs such as Kookaburra Kids are not to be used for promotional purposes.

Open Arms Specifically:

- Security clearance (where required) and reference checks as part of the on-boarding process.
- Working with Vulnerable People (WWVP), Working With Children Checks (WWCC) or equivalent for relevant DVA staff and contractors, and all Open Arms staff and contractors, as per state and territory based legislative requirements, with National registers to track and audit compliance.
- Induction processes to ensure familiarity with policies, procedures and training modules.
- The Australian Public Service (APS) Code of Conduct provides a framework of ethics and values for all permanent and contracted APS staff that govern behaviour and responsibilities.



- Professional registration and codes of conduct including the Australian Health Practitioner Regulation Agency, Psychology Board of Australia, Australian Psychological Society, and Australian Association of Social Workers.
- A refreshed policy suite including those that stipulate appropriate child safety practices:
 - Reporting Child Abuse & Neglect Procedure
 - Services to Minors Procedure
 - Working with Children Registration Instructions
 - Clinical Risk Management Policy
 - Working with Minors Instruction.
 - Open Arms Quality and Safety Review Procedure
 - Response to Disclosure of a Crime Instruction
 - Privacy and Confidentiality Procedure
 - Intake Assessment Guide
- All Open Arms in-centre clinical staff are provided with monthly external supervision, which is an opportunity to raise complex matters pertaining to child safety, informed consent when working with minors, and mandatory reporting considerations.
- Child Safety Training including:
 - Updates on the Family Violence Multi-Agency Risk Assessment and Management Framework (MARAM) that has been rolled out by the Victorian Government in 2021 for our Victorian clinicians.
 - Training in the Quality and Safety Framework of recovery-orientated suicide and violence prevention for all in-centre clinical and administrative teams (as relevant to their role).
 - Training in the new Open Arms Risk Assessment (OARA), risk management, and safety planning for all in-centre clinicians.
- Complaints and disclosure procedures including an improved client feedback management system.
- Expansion of the Open Arms Client Safety Unit has facilitated Open Arms' capacity to manage and respond to child safety matters through the establishment of:
 - A clinical auditing framework.
 - A clinical incident review process.
- Awareness and compliance with legislation and contemporary clinical practices to prevent harm.
- Open Arms ensures informed consent is obtained with minors and parents where appropriate.
- When Open Arms conducts intake assessments with minors, one or both parents are included in the Intake assessment, or another adult guardian if safety concerns prevent inclusion of a parent. It should be noted in exceptional circumstances A 'senior' minor (not strictly defined by age but typically 14-17) may under circumstances defined in policy, be assessed for intake independently of their parents.
- All clinical contact with minors in the Open Arms national call centre is reviewed by an Assistant Director. This helps to identify child safety matters and ensure appropriate service provision and risk escalation.
- Children and youth are accompanied by parents or caregivers where clinically appropriate.
- Children do not engage in services, such as group programs, where age-inappropriate content may be encountered.



Identified child protection concerns are reported to the statutory child protection authorities in each state/territory in accordance with the requirements in each jurisdiction. Reports made by Open Arms are tracked and monitored by Assistant Directors and communicated on a regular basis to senior and executive leadership.

- The completion of Certificate IV in Mental Health Peer Work has formed part of the onboarding process for new Open Arms Peer workers which includes information on mandatory reporting responsibilities and processes.
- 2. Relevant Training and compliance to ensure all staff are aware of, and compliant with, the Framework and relevant legislation, and that all required staff and contractors hold working with children checks (WWCC)/Working with vulnerable people checks (WWVP) and mandatory reporting requirements.**
 - 3. Adoption and implementation of the National Principles for Child Safe Organisations.**
 - 4. Publication of DVA's annual statement of compliance with the Framework including an overview of DVA's child safety risk assessment.**

CHILD SAFETY INITIATIVES UNDERTAKEN IN THE REPORTING YEAR

Initiatives undertaken in the reporting year and not previously described in the statement include the following:

- Educational resources have been offered including undertaking Family and Domestic Violence Support at Work training, as well as access to external training offered through DV-alert.
- Routine review of the Kookaburra Kids Risk Management Plan conducted and reported to the DVA of people who work or volunteer with children in relation to the project activity.
- Clause G8A stipulates that grant recipients are required to comply with State, Territory and Commonwealth Law relating to employment or engagement. Additionally, grant recipients may be required to submit an annual statement showing compliance with clauses in G8A. These clauses form part of the Commonwealth Grant Suite.
- Client Coordinated Support Branch has included content regarding responding to child safety and family and domestic violence in its Case Management Practice Guide.
- Provide relevant information on Child Safe training resources for DVA staff (ongoing and non-ongoing) and contractors who have direct interaction with children.
- Consistent with the scope of the CCSF, the DVA CSF applies to all DVA staff and DVA funded third party providers.
- Mandatory training for DVA staff who have direct engagement with children is an important tool in ensuring a safe environment for children.