



YMCA AUSTRALIA REPORT

IMPLEMENTATION OF THE RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE ROYAL COMMISSION INTO INSTITUTIONAL RESPONSES TO CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE

Introduction:

The YMCA strives for an inclusive society where everyone has the opportunity to reach his or her potential. We believe in the power of inspired young people, and as such, we want to provide a tangible expression of their rights and their voices. The safety and protection of children and young people is paramount.

YMCA Australia and all of its Licensed Member Associations, Board Directors, staff and volunteers have a legal, moral and Mission-driven responsibility to:

- protect children and young people from all forms of abuse, bullying and exploitation;
- create and maintain a child safe culture that is understood, endorsed and put into action by all the individuals who work for, volunteer, govern or access a YMCA program, service or managed facility; and
- acknowledge that protecting children is everyone's business.

We recognise that child safe organisations and child safe communities do not just happen. They require conscious actions to protect children from harm and extended guardianship to all children and young people. We acknowledge that safety extends further than YMCA sites, programs and services and strive to develop communities that are safe for all children and young people. We understand our role in contributing to a child safe community.

We respect and support the diverse needs of all children, young people and their families including those who are Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander, are from culturally and or/linguistically diverse backgrounds, have a disability or identify as LGBTQIA.

This Report

This report has been compiled to present a consolidated view of the implementation of the Royal Commission's recommendations by all members of the National Council of the YMCAs of Australia.

While the YMCA of NSW responded to the Royal Commission through the examination of Case Study 2, the federated structure of the YMCA in Australia also required that YMCA Australia provide a response to the Royal Commission through Case Study 47 and now also to the National Office of Child Safety.

This report is provided to the National Office of Child Safety on behalf and inclusive of all members of the National Council of the YMCAs of Australia.



Section 1: Identifying the institution

Organisational Name: The National Council of the Young Men’s Christian Associations of Australia.

Location: Level 1, 88 Market Street
South Melbourne
VIC 3205

Website: www.ymca.org.au

Organisational Category: Sport, recreation, arts, cultural community and hobby groups.

Organisational Structure: The YMCA Movement in Australia is a federated structure currently comprising 16 independent and autonomous Associations (known as Member Associations or Members) that collectively form the National Council of the YMCAs of Australia. Each Association is subject to being granted a Charter of Membership by the National Board and is required to have entered into a Licensing Agreement (supported by Licensing Standards) with the National Council. YMCA Australia is a company limited by guarantee and is also governed by a volunteer Board of Directors. YMCA Australia's Board is elected by the Members and is supported by the staff of YMCA Australia.

While each YMCA Member Association is an independent and autonomous organisation, all YMCAs are collectively united in our focus on safeguarding children and young people.

All YMCAs in Australia are bound by the YMCA Safeguarding Children and Young People Policy (Refer Section 4 – Attachments). Leading into 2018, YMCAs were required to ensure all local policies and procedures were compliant with this Movement policy. As of 2019, this standardised policy is in place at all YMCAs, and used exclusively and without modification. Implementation requirements (standards) are built into the YMCA Licensing Standards (approved at November 2018 AGM).

Whilst local YMCAs still generate their own suite of policies and procedures to complement the Safeguarding Children and Young People Policy (ie. Human Resource, Reporting, Risk Management, Compliance policies and procedures), the licensing standards now provide a consistent approach between YMCA Member Associations, and enable an oversight and compliance framework from the National Office.

This oversight and compliance framework will be monitored in 2019 by a Centralised Child Safety Unit of five (5) full time roles, supporting the work being conducted at a local level.

Section 2: General reporting against recommendations relevant to all institutions

Theme 1: Making institutions child safe

Measure 1.1: New or revised Code of Conduct, policies and procedures for child safe institutions

Report Volume: Volume 6 and Volume 7

Recommendation(s) the measure is in response to: Recommendations 6.6 and 7.8

Description of measures implemented prior to December 2018:

Rec 6.6 Standard 1: Child safety is embedded in institutional leadership, governance and culture.

Our commitment to achieving this standard is embedded into our collectively agreed Safeguarding Children and Young People policy, which guides all YMCA people, Directors, CEOs, staff, volunteers and contractors on their integral role in the protection of children and young people and clearly outlines the expectations and responsibilities we all share.

Opening up dialogue across the YMCA is a commitment of the National Board with the National President, CEO and other key leadership roles in leading a web based conversation each year. These annual child safety conversations set the cultural and leadership expectations of all YMCAs.

Embedding child safety in our leadership, governance and culture is also actively supported through our participation in an external audit and accreditation program delivered by the Australian Childhood Foundation (ACF). Over the previous 2 to 10 years all YMCAs have participated in the ACF Safeguarding Children Program.

All YMCA employee, volunteer and director position descriptions include references to safeguarding responsibilities and adherence to the YMCA Code of Conduct. All staff and volunteers are required to acknowledge and sign they understand the YMCA Safeguarding Children and Young People Policy and the YMCA Code of Conduct.

A recent addition to ensure this standard is met is the establishment of a YMCA Centralised Child Safety Unit (CCSU) in 2018/2019 to ensure all aspects of child safety are supported consistently across all YMCAs. The CCSU is established via the collective efforts and collective funding of all the Member Associations.

Currently, the majority of risk management information and mitigation strategies are managed at the local level by YMCAs (note: reference to prospective work).

Rec 6.6 Standard 2: Children participate in decisions affecting them and are taken seriously.

The YMCA is committed to listening to the voice of children and young people and is working towards developing frameworks and safe spaces where intergenerational leadership can develop through authentic and reflective communication that ensures the voices of children and young people are heard – and taken into account on any matter that affects their care or wellbeing. Leaders around the YMCA are collectively working on how to develop strategies to enable the voice of children and young people to be more loudly heard and a central tenant of change.

The engagement of children in decisions affecting them and mechanisms to engage children and young people in policy development occurs primarily through YMCAs at a local level, and may be conducted in varying ways (note: reference to prospective work).

Rec 6.6 Standard 3: Families and communities are informed and involved.

The YMCA Safeguarding Children and Young People Policy includes a detailed commitment statement regarding the involvement and engagement of families and communities, including supporting and listening to families and the promotion of community strengthening and child-safe communities.

Currently, the engagement and involvement of families and communities occurs locally, through YMCAs and the services provided (note: reference to prospective work).

Rec 6.6 Standard 4: Equity is upheld and diverse needs are taken into account.

All YMCAs have a deep commitment to children and young people in the following ways:

- We commit to the safety and wellbeing of all children and young people who access any of our programs, services or facilities.
- We commit to providing children and young people with nurturing experiences via positive and safe relationships with our YMCA people.
- We commit to developing the skills and capacity of children and young people to identify ('Know'), assess ('See'), and manage ('Respond') to unsafe situations.
- We commit to listening to children and young people and empowering them by taking their view seriously and addressing any concerns that they raise with us.
- We commit to consulting with children and young people (and their families) who have additional needs or who are from diverse backgrounds.
- We commit to cultural safety for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people and respect and understand that our Indigenous culture will be promoted to and with others.
- We commit to cultural safety for children, young people and their families from cultural and/or linguistically diverse backgrounds and will provide child safety resources in alternate languages and images whenever possible
- We commit to respond appropriately to the needs of children and young people with a disability and provide a safe environment for them which includes educational resources, strategies and support to help improve the capacity of children, young people and their families to identify and respond to harm.
- We commit to supporting all forms of diversity, including children, young people and their families who identify as being LGBTQIA.
- We commit to support families and communities to promote children and young people's healthy development and wellbeing.
- We commit to take action to ensure that children and young people are protected from discrimination, exploitation, abuse or harm.

These commitments are upheld in our YMCA Safeguarding Children and Young People Policy, to which every YMCA is accountable.

YMCA Australia is currently implementing a project to translate our YMCA Safeguarding Children and Young People Policy and child-safety messaging into different community languages. This will be completed in late 2018/early 2019.

The current project to translate our YMCA Safeguarding Children and Young People Policy and the YMCA Code of Conduct into child-friendly language will involve consultation with a diverse range of children and young people, including those identifying as being from Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander background, children and young people living with disability, children and young people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds and children and young people identifying as LGBTQI+ or identifying as belonging to LGBTQI+ families (note: reference to prospective work).

Rec 6.6 Standard 5: People working with children are suitable and supported.

The YMCA Safeguarding Children and Young People Policy details the commitment, obligations and expectations of all YMCAs in implementing recruitment and selection processes.

For many years, YMCAs in Australia have implemented consistent recruitment, pre-employment screening practices and induction processes to support child-safety standards. These practices have also been supported and audited through the ACF Safeguarding Children Program in which all YMCAs have participated.

YMCA Licensing Standards also set clear expectations and requirements of all YMCAs in relation to recruitment, pre-employment screening and induction of new employees and volunteers. Inconsistencies are addressed through the YMCA Licensing Committee. The newly established CCSU will enable greater monitoring capacity of compliance with these standards and ensure leading practice continues to be developed.

Rec 6.6 Standard 6: Processes to respond to complaints of child sexual abuse are child focused.

As part of our commitment to being a child-safe organisation, the YMCA established a nationally consistent approach to redress which commenced in 2016. YMCA Redress was developed in alignment with the recommendations of the Royal Commission Report on Redress and Civil Litigation and as a tangible expression of our commitment to implementing the recommendations of the Royal Commission. Ten key principles underpinned YMCA Redress that included:

1. Our approach is survivor-focused.
2. Our approach is transparent, accountable and open to review.
3. Our approach will be timely and responsive.
4. Our approach will be nationally consistent.
5. Our approach is trauma-informed.
6. Our approach is accessible.
7. Our approach is not subject to time limitations.
8. Our approach applies a standard of proof of reasonable likelihood.
9. Our approach must be sustainable.
10. Our approach maintains survivors' rights to civil litigation.

YMCA Australia supports the introduction of a National Redress Scheme and formally joined the Scheme when it commenced on July 1 2018.

As participants in the National Redress Scheme we will continue to maintain a survivor-focused response to survivors in the delivery of a direct personal response that will offer survivors the ability to meet with a senior official of the organisation, an opportunity to tell their story and also to receive a written and/or verbal apology for the abuse suffered.

The YMCA considers all forms of child sexual abuse to be intolerable and inexcusable under any circumstances. We recognise the lifelong impact that child sexual abuse may have on the health and wellbeing of individuals, their families, and communities.

Our response to survivors of child sexual abuse at a YMCA in Australia is based on our long-held values of respect for the dignity and intrinsic worth of all people and of justice for all people.

YMCAs adopt a trauma-informed approach in our response to survivors of abuse and we are committed to a survivor-focused approach ensuring that the rights and choices of survivors are respected and supported.

Wherever children have experienced sexual abuse they must be given opportunities to access support and assistance to heal, recover, have their experiences acknowledged and be provided with opportunities to realise their full potential. We accept our responsibility to ensure that any person who has experienced sexual abuse as a child within the YMCA, or by a YMCA employee or volunteer is offered a response that is equitable and just.

Processes to respond to complaints are currently managed and conducted through YMCAs at a local level, however our YMCA Safeguarding Children and Young People Policy outlines our commitment to this including a commitment to listening to all children and young people when voicing their concerns in relation to child safety issues and ensuring children, young people and their families have the opportunity to access counselling and support following any incidents of child safety breaches.

In addition, our YMCAs all implement local reporting and allegation response procedures in accordance with the standards required through the ACF Safeguarding Children Program and their respective jurisdictional legislative requirements.

Rec 6.6 Standard 7: Staff are equipped with the knowledge, skills and awareness to keep children safe through continual education and training.

The YMCA Safeguarding Children and Young People Policy outlines our commitment to training and supporting our staff and employees through education, knowledge and awareness on issues of child safety. YMCA Australia annually convenes a National Child Safety Conversation which is open to any YMCA employee or volunteer to raise awareness about new research, leading practice and an opportunity to ask questions and seek feedback.

Locally, YMCAs conduct their own training and staff development in relation to child safety practice (note: reference to prospective work).

Rec 6.6 Standard 8: Physical and online environments minimise the opportunity for abuse to occur.

The YMCA Safeguarding Children and Young People Policy also specifies our commitment to this including our collective commitment to:

- using best practice standards in the recruitment, screening and employment (including (but not limited to) police and/or working with children check) of YMCA people;
- providing safe physical environments that when possible, are designed with children, young people, their families and YMCA people;
- regularly auditing our facilities and immediate surrounding environments to assess their safety;

- monitoring our online environments to ensure their safety; and
- promoting, supporting and building positive relationships between children and young people.

In relation to online environments, the majority of procedures are developed through YMCAs at a local level. Local YMCAs also hold a range of leasing arrangements with partners at a local level which can sometime present challenges in relation to physical environments in which YMCA operate (note: reference to prospective work).

Rec 6.6 Standard 9: Implementation of the Child Safe Standards is continuously reviewed and improved.

Child safety strategy development and shared learning of leading practice is a topic at each key YMCA meeting involving our CEOs, senior leaders, Directors and is also embedded in the National Board committee structure. YMCA Australia and the National Board hold particular responsibilities to work with all our YMCAs and external expertise as required to review and continuously review our YMCA Safeguarding Children and Young People Policy.

YMCA Australia supports the National Safeguarding Leadership Team which actively contributed to leading policy and practice at all YMCAs.

The YMCA Safeguarding Children and Young People Policy is renewed every three years at a minimum. More frequent updating of the policy occurs in the event of relevant legislative or regulatory changes. The policy was last reviewed and revised in 2017 informed by leading practice research and in consultation with the Institute of Child Protection Studies.

All YMCAs maintain supporting policies and procedures at a local level and these are annually reviewed in conjunction with an annual self-assessment as part of the ongoing ACF Safeguarding Children Program (note: reference to prospective work).

Rec 6.6 Standard 10: Policies and procedures document how the institution is child safe.

The YMCA Safeguarding Children and Young People Policy has been in place as a nationally adopted and endorsed policy since 2014 and has been mapped to the child safe standards during this journey.

Complementary policies and procedures are maintained and implemented locally through YMCA and these may include reference to jurisdictional differences in legislation and regulation.

In addition to the YMCA Licensing Standards, the ACF Safeguarding Children Program supports compliance with policy and procedure in alignment with child safe standards (note: reference to prospective work).

Prospective work that will be undertaken post-2018 to implement this measure

Rec 6.6 Standard 1: Child safety is embedded in institutional leadership, governance and culture.

While the majority of risk management information and mitigation strategies are currently managed at the local level by YMCAs, the newly established CCSU will provide increased capability, systems and oversight to support the collective of YMCAs.

Rec 6.6 Standard 2: Children participate in decisions affecting them and are taken seriously.

All YMCAs are collectively united in our belief in the power of inspired young people and this means we are committed to empowering children and young people to have a voice and be heard. This includes having a role in decisions that affect them regarding programs and services and also advocating for their issues and needs in public fora.

While this standard is currently supported to varying degrees at the local level through YMCAs, the production of a child-friendly version of the YMCA Safeguarding Children and Young People Policy and the YMCA Code of Conduct is underway. This will be utilised nationally in 2019. YMCA Australia has engaged the Institute of Child Protection Studies to undertake this work to ensure the implementation of leading practice informed by an evidence-based methodology.

YMCA Licensing Standards will be further strengthened in 2019 to incorporate a requirement that all YMCAs implement considered and consistent methods of receiving feedback from children and young people.

In addition, the CCSU will include a dedicated Engagement and Diversity role which will have a specific focus on listening to children and young people, including the implementation of a national safeguarding survey with children and young people to commence in 2019.

Rec 6.6 Standard 3: Families and communities are informed and involved.

All policies are accessible on the website and for the last two years the YMCAs of Australia have published a summary report on our commitment to child safety.

Through the establishment of the CCSU, the YMCA nationally will have greater capacity to conduct a national survey of families, implement national data collection and implement improved systems and access for ongoing engagement with families and communities. This will complement and enhance the engagement our YMCAs currently conduct at the local level.

Rec 6.6 Standard 4: Equity is upheld and diverse needs are taken into account.

The newly established CCSU Engagement and Diversity role will also have a focus on minority groups and those with specific vulnerabilities to ensure YMCA policy and practice is supporting their needs and listening to their voices.

A national system for information, support and complaints processes for children and their families will be introduced in 2019, to support and enhance existing local processes.

Rec 6.6 Standard 7: Staff are equipped with the knowledge, skills and awareness to keep children safe through continual education and training.

While YMCAs conduct localised training for staff and volunteers, this has generally occurred in a varied manner. In 2019, the YMCA Licensing Standards will be strengthened regarding the training and development requirements for all YMCAs.

In addition to this, the newly established CCSU will have a dedicated Learning and Development function that will implement measures such as: maintaining a library of evidence-based training

modules; implement e-safety training across all sites; monitor the training of Boards and CEOs; and ensure compliance to minimum training requirements as per the YMCA Licensing Standards.

Rec 6.6 Standard 8: Physical and online environments minimise the opportunity for abuse to occur.

The newly established CCSU will be developing leading practice guidance for YMCAs to support the development of physical environment that prioritise child-safety and the creation of child-friendly spaces. These guidelines will also support local YMCAs in their advocacy and influence with partners such as local governments, schools and other community partners.

Rec 6.6 Standard 9: Implementation of the Child Safe Standards is continuously reviewed and improved.

The YMCA Licensing Standards will be strengthened in 2019 to ensure consistency in policy content across all YMCAs and the newly established CCSU will harmonise policies and procedures over the next two years.

Rec 6.6 Standard 10: Policies and procedures document how the institution is child safe.

As noted above in relation to Standard 9, the YMCA Licencing Standards and the CCSU function will ensure compliance and harmonisation of policies and procedures that incorporate and implement child safe standards.

Measure 1.2: Improvements to institutional responding and reporting

Report Volume: *Volume 7*

Recommendation(s) the measure is in response to: *Recommendations 7.7 and 7.8*

Description of measures implemented prior to December 2018:

Rec 7.7: Consistent with Child Safe Standard 6: Processes to respond to complaints of child sexual abuse are child focused, institutions should have a clear, accessible and child-focused complaint handling policy and procedure that sets out how the institution should respond to complaints of child sexual abuse.

In alignment with the response under Standard 6 above, many YMCAs locally have child and young person friendly versions of the YMCA Safeguarding Children and Young People Policy and all YMCAs have responding to allegations, reporting and complaints procedures and these would also include investigations processes.

In addition to this, YMCAs also implement disciplinary procedures in the event of a breach of the Safeguarding Policy and/or a breach of the Code of Conduct (note: reference to prospective work).

Rec 7.8: Consistent with Child Safe Standard 1: Child safety is embedded in institutional leadership, governance and culture, institutions should have a clear code of conduct.

In 2017, the YMCA Safeguarding Children and Young People Policy included a 'Safe Behaviours' section as a high level articulation of a Code of Conduct. All YMCAs have a local Code of Conduct in addition to the Safeguarding Children and Young People Policy (note: reference to prospective work).

Prospective work that will be undertaken post-2018 to implement this measure

Rec 7.7: Consistent with Child Safe Standard 6: Processes to respond to complaints of child sexual abuse are child focused, institutions should have a clear, accessible and child-focused complaint handling policy and procedure that sets out how the institution should respond to complaints of child sexual abuse.

Please refer to response under Measure 1.1 Rec 6.6 Standard 6.

Rec 7.8: Consistent with Child Safe Standard 1: Child safety is embedded in institutional leadership, governance and culture, institutions should have a clear code of conduct.

A review of the Safe Behaviours policy will be conducted in 2019 in order to implement relevant changes required to rescind local versions and ensure national consistency.

Measure 1.3: Improvements to recordkeeping and information sharing

Report Volume: Volume 8

Recommendation(s) the measure is in response to: Recommendations 8.1 and 8.4

Description of measures implemented prior to December 2018:

Rec 8.1: To allow for delayed disclosure of abuse by victims and take account of limitation periods for civil actions for child sexual abuse, institutions that engage in child-related work should retain, for at least 45 years, records relating to child sexual abuse that has occurred or is alleged to have occurred.

Currently, record keeping processes and procedures are maintained through each member Association at a local level.

YMCA Australia also maintains secure record of current and historical allegations of child sexual abuse and additional safeguarding allegations reported by our member Associations.

Rec 8.4 (Principles 1 to 4)

Currently, record keeping processes and procedures are maintained through each member Association at a local level.

As per the response to Recommendation 8.1, YMCA Australia maintains secure records of current and historical allegations of child sexual abuse and additional safeguarding allegations reported by our member Associations. These are primarily reported through member YMCAs reporting requirement associated with the YMCA National Insurance Program. Information and records are also maintained

with regard to the delivery of YMCA Redress (prior to July 1 2018) and subsequently as a participant in the National Redress Scheme (as of 1 July 2018).

Incidents of safeguarding policy breaches such as grooming, code of conduct breaches and minor incidents are recorded through member Associations at the local level.

The YMCA National Insurance Program collects significant and major incident data that pertains to current and historical allegations or incidents of child sexual abuse and this is maintained through a secure platform.

Currently, the disposal or destruction of relevant records is conducted by member Associations in accordance with the legislative and regulatory frameworks and requirement in their relevant jurisdictions.

Individuals seeking historical records that pertain to their interaction with the YMCA is facilitated through YMCA Australia and the relevant local YMCA. Due to the nature of YMCA programs and services, however, many records relating to individuals may not have been kept.

Prospective work that will be undertaken post-2018 to implement this measure

Rec 8.1: To allow for delayed disclosure of abuse by victims and take account of limitation periods for civil actions for child sexual abuse, institutions that engage in child-related work should retain, for at least 45 years, records relating to child sexual abuse that has occurred or is alleged to have occurred.

YMCA Licensing Standards will be strengthened in 2019 to incorporate a requirement that YMCAs maintain relevant records for a period of 45 years.

Rec 8.4 (Principles 1 to 4)

YMCA Licensing Standards will address a national data collection of all incidents listed, on a quarterly basis at a minimum. This will enable accurate risk analysis and risk mitigation strategies to be implemented at a national level.

In addition, the National Child Safety Risk Manager (to be introduced in 2019) will work to align reporting accuracy and reporting templates with all local YMCAs, including a nationally consistent IT solution to support this process.

Theme 2: Children's Voices

Measure 2.1: Children participate in decisions that affect them

All relevant Volumes and Recommendations

Description of measures implemented prior to December 2018:

Please see responses provided under Measure 1.1

Prospective work that will be undertaken post-2018 to implement this measure

Please see responses provided under Measure 1.1

Section 3: Reporting against institution specific recommendations

Sport, recreation, arts, cultural community and hobby groups (*Volume 14, recommendation 14.1*)

Recommendation 14.1 states:

“All sport and recreation institutions, including arts, culture, community and hobby groups, that engage with or provide services to children should implement the Child Safe Standards identified by the Royal Commission.”

Please refer to responses in Section 2 of this report.

Section 4: Attachments

Att 1: [YMCA Safeguarding Children and Young People Policy](#)

Att 2: [YMCA Safeguarding Video](#)