



Australian Government
Australian Institute of
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Safeguarding children from child sexual abuse

Research report

Liz Wall, Rachel Moody, Louis Kling, Tanvi Pappu,
Dhatsayini Rattambige and Patrick Boshier



Sensitive content warning

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- **Bravehearts** information and support line: 1800 272 831 or website: bravehearts.org.au/

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The Australian Institute of Family Studies acknowledges the Traditional Owners of Country throughout Australia and recognises their continuing connection to lands and waters. We pay our respects to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures, and to Elders past and present.

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Abbreviations

Abbreviation	Term
ACECQA	Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority
ACIC	Australian Criminal Intelligence Commission
AFP	Australian Federal Police
AHRC	Australian Human Rights Commission
ACMS	Australian Child Maltreatment Survey
ACT	Australian Capital Territory
AIFS	Australian Institute of Family Studies
ALRC	Australian Law Reform Commission
CAC	Child Advocacy Centre
CCYP	Commission for Children and Young People
CDC	Centers for Disease Control
CFCA	Child Family Community Australia
CfS	Connect for Safety
CISS	Child Information Sharing Scheme
CSA	Child sexual abuse
CSAM	Child sexual abuse material
CSE	Child sexual exploitation
CSPRP	Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel
CYACs	Child and Youth Advocacy Centres
DBS	Disclosure and Barring Service
DFFH	Department of Families, Fairness and Housing
DSS	Department of Social Services
ECEC	Early childhood education and care
ECSA	Eradicating Child Sexual Abuse
FV	Family violence
FVISS	Family Violence Information Sharing Scheme
Garda	An Garda Síochána
GDPR	General Data Protection Regulation (UK)
HSB	Harmful sexual behaviours
ICO	Information Commissioner's Office
ICS	Integrated Care Systems
ISEs	Information sharing entities
LADO	Local Authority Designated Officer

LSPs	Local Safeguarding Partnerships
MAPPA	Multi-Agency Public Protection Arrangements
MARAM	Multi-Agency Risk Assessment and Management Framework
MASH	Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hubs
MDT	Multi-Disciplinary Team
MIST	Multiagency Investigation and Support Team
NGOs	Non-Governmental Organisations
NQF	National Quality Framework
NRF	National Reference System
NSPCC	National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children
NSW	New South Wales
NT	Northern Territory
OAG	Office of the Auditor-General
OCG	Office of the Children's Guardian
PSS	Personal Safety Survey
PTSD	Post-traumatic stress disorder
QFCC	Queensland Family and Child Commission
QLD	Queensland
QPS	Queensland Police Service
RCIRCSA	Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse
RWVP	Registration to Work with Vulnerable People
SA	South Australia
SDEs	Secure Data Environments
SPs	Safeguarding partners
SUBSBH	Speak Up. Be Strong. Be Heard.
TAS	Tasmania
Tasmanian Commission	Commission of Inquiry into the Tasmanian Government's Responses to Child Sexual Abuse
VIC	Victoria
WA	Western Australia
WHO	World Health Organization
WWCC	Working with Children Check

Glossary

Term	Definition
Child abuse material (sometimes referred to as child exploitation material)	<p>'Child abuse material' has a complex legal definition according to section 473.1 of the <i>Criminal Code Act 1995</i> (Cth). In simple terms, it is material that depicts or describes a person, or a representation (e.g. doll) of a person, who is, appears to be, or is implied to be, under 18 years of age, and who is, appears to be, or is implied to be, engaged in abusive activities. This can include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ being victimised by torture, cruelty or physical abuse ▪ engaging in sexual poses or sexual activity (whether or not in the presence of other persons) ▪ being in the presence of a person who is engaged in, or appears to be engaged in, a sexual pose or sexual activity. <p>Child abuse material can also be material that depicts or describes a sexual organ, the anal region, or the breasts of a person who is, or appears to be, or is implied to be, under 18 years of age, or a representation of any of those things.</p> <p>'Child sexual abuse material' (CSAM) is a subcategory of child abuse material that includes sexual characteristics.</p> <p>In Queensland, the legal definition of 'child exploitation material' under section 207A of the <i>Criminal Code Act 1899</i> is material that describes or depicts a person, or a representation (e.g. doll) of a person, who is, or appears to be, under 16 years of age, in a way that is likely to cause offence to a reasonable adult, and that involves the child being:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ in a sexual context (e.g. engaging in a sexual activity); or ▪ in an offensive or demeaning context; or ▪ being subjected to abuse, cruelty or torture.
Child maltreatment	<p>'Child maltreatment' refers to physical abuse, emotional abuse, sexual abuse, exposure to family violence, and neglect (National Office for Child Safety, 2021b, citing AIFS, 2018).</p>
Child safeguarding	<p>Child safeguarding is defined as the action taken to promote the welfare of children and protect them from harm, which includes protecting children from abuse and maltreatment, preventing harm to their health or development, and ensuring they grow up in safe and effective care. Child protection is part of safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children and is defined for the purpose of this guidance as activity that is undertaken to protect specific children who are suspected to be suffering, or likely to suffer, significant harm. This includes harm that occurs inside or outside the home, including online (Department for Education, UK, 2023a)</p>

Child sexual abuse	<p>‘Child sexual abuse’ (CSA) refers to ‘any act that exposes a child or young person to, or involves a child or young person in, sexual activities that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ they do not understand ▪ they do not or cannot consent to ▪ are not accepted by the community ▪ are unlawful’. <p>CSA may include the following behaviours:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ the sexual touching of genitals ▪ masturbation ▪ oral sex ▪ vaginal or anal penetration by a penis, finger or any other object ▪ sexual touching of breasts ▪ voyeurism – spying on or watching another person doing something private without their permission ▪ exhibitionism – exposing yourself in public ▪ exposing the child or young person to pornography ▪ grooming (National Office for Child Safety, 2021b).
Child sexual exploitation	<p>‘Child sexual exploitation’ (CSE) refers to the same behaviours that constitute CSA, but with an additional element of exchange present – including, for example, the exchange (or the promise of an exchange) of money, shelter, material goods, or immaterial things such as protection or a relationship (ECPAT International & WeProtect Global Alliance, 2022).</p> <p>A child may be coerced to engage in CSE through physical force or threats (Terminology and Semantics Interagency Working Group on Sexual Exploitation of Children [Interagency Working Group], 2016). A child may also be persuaded to engage in CSE as a result of complex factors, including situational factors (e.g. poverty, abuse, neglect, homelessness) and/or human ones (e.g. a power imbalance between the victim and survivor and the perpetrator) (Interagency Working Group, 2016). Either way, CSE is not consensual (Interagency Working Group, 2016).</p>
Child sexual offence	<p>A ‘child sexual offence’ is an act or omission that defies the criminal laws of a state, with the intent and primary purpose to engage in or facilitate activities or conduct of a sexual nature involving a child (Interagency Working Group, 2016).</p> <p>In Queensland, a ‘child sexual offence’ refers to ‘an offence of a sexual nature committed in relation to a child’ (<i>Criminal Code Act 1899</i> (Qld), s 207A).</p> <p>This can include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ indecent treatment of a child (e.g. fondling a child in a sexual manner or having a child touch the genitals of another person, or taking sexual photographs of a child) ▪ engaging in penile intercourse with a child under 16 ▪ rape ▪ incest ▪ grooming a child (or their parent or carer) ▪ making child exploitation material ▪ repeated sexual conduct with a child (Queensland Government, 2025a).

Coercion	‘Coercion’ refers to ‘the use of threats, intimidation, and/or force to make someone so fearful as to act against his/her/[their] will’ (Roper, 2011).
Consent	<p>The Commonwealth Consent Policy Framework: Promoting Healthy Sexual Relationships and Consent Among Young People provides an Australian community definition of consent that recognises consent must be free and voluntary, specific and informed, affirmative and communicated, ongoing and mutual, and reflective of the consenting parties’ capacity to reach, communicate or withhold consent (Department of Social Services [DSS], 2023, pp. 10–11).</p> <p>Each Australian jurisdiction has a slightly different statutory (legal) definition of consent, but they all recognise that consent involves a ‘free and/or voluntary’ agreement.¹ Further, they all recognise that children below the age of consent are legally incapable of consenting to sexual activity, regardless of their subjective attitudes towards the activity.²</p> <p>In Queensland, the legal definition of ‘consent’ is ‘free and voluntary agreement’ under the <i>Criminal Code Act 1899</i> (Qld), s 348. Consent can be withdrawn at any time, and it cannot be inferred through the mere fact that a person does not offer physical or verbal resistance. It also cannot be inferred just because the person has consented in the past, to the same or different acts, or with the same person or different people.</p>
Family violence	<p>‘Family violence’ (FV) refers to a form of interpersonal violence that occurs between intimate partners or family members and in domestic or family-like settings (DSS, 2022).</p> <p>This definition is intentionally broader than ‘domestic violence’ so it can capture violence that occurs in the broader familial context (e.g. elder abuse, violence perpetrated by children or young people against parents, guardians or siblings, and violence perpetrated by other family members such as parents-in-law) as well as violence within intimate partner contexts (e.g. intimate partner violence) (DSS, 2022, p. 37).</p> <p>However, family violence is sometimes captured in the broader umbrella of ‘family and domestic violence’ (FDV). In the Queensland context, FDV refers to behaviour that is physically, sexually, emotionally, psychologically or economically abusive, or threatening or coercive, or in any other way controls or dominates a person and causes that person to fear for their own or another person’s safety or wellbeing (Queensland Government, 2022, citing <i>Domestic and Family Violence Protection Act 2012</i> (Qld)).</p>

¹ *Crimes Act 1900* (ACT), ss 50B, 67(1)(b)–(o), 67(2)(b); *Crimes Act 1900* (NSW), s 61H(1); *Criminal Code 1983* (NT), s 192(1); *Criminal Code 1899* (Qld), s 348(1)–(2); *Criminal Law Consolidation Act 1935* (SA), ss 46(2), 46(3) and 47; *Criminal Code Act 1924* (Tas), ss 2A(1) and 2A(2)(b)–(i); *Crimes Act 1958* (Vic), ss 36(1), 36AA(1)(b)–(o); *Criminal Code Compilation Act 1913* (WA), s 319(2)(a).

² In the ACT, NSW, NT, Queensland, Victoria and WA, this means children under 16 years of age (*Crimes Act 1900* (ACT) s 55; *Crimes Act 1900* (NSW) s 66C; *Criminal Code Act 1983* (NT), s 127; *Criminal Code Act 1899* (Qld) s 215; *Crimes Act 1958* (Vic) s 49B; *Criminal Code Act Compilation Act 1913* (WA) s 321); in SA and Tasmania, it means children under 17 years of age (*Criminal Law Consolidation Act 1935* (SA) s 49; *Criminal Code Act 1924* (Tas) s 124).

Grooming	<p>'Grooming' refers to 'behaviours that manipulate and control a child, their family, kin and carers or other support networks, or organisations' (National Office for Child Safety, 2021b, p. 59). Such manipulative behaviours are intended to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ gain access to the child ▪ obtain the child's compliance, and possibly that of their family, kin and carers or other support networks, or organisations ▪ maintain the child's silence, and possibly the silence of their family, kin and carers or other support networks, or organisations ▪ avoid discovery of CSA (National Office for Child Safety, 2021b, citing Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse [RCIRCSA], 2017c). <p>Each Australian jurisdiction has a criminal offence related to 'grooming' and/or other forms of predatory conduct used to facilitate later sexual activity with a child.³</p> <p>In Queensland, the legal definition of 'grooming' under section 218B of the <i>Criminal Code Act 1899</i> is something that involves an adult engaging in conduct in relation to a child (or a person who is believed to be a child) under 16 years of age, or a person who has care of a child, with intent to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ facilitate the procurement of the child to engage in a sexual act; or ▪ expose, without legitimate reason, the child to any indecent matter.
Harmful sexual behaviours	<p>'Harmful sexual behaviours' (HSB) refer to a range of sexual behaviours that are used by children or young people under 18 years old (National Office for Child Safety, 2021b).</p> <p>HSB may be problematic to the development of the child or young person who uses them, and may cause significant harm to the victim and survivor who experiences them (National Office for Child Safety, 2021b).</p> <p>These behaviours may include sexual aggression, coercion and other predatory behaviours (National Office for Child Safety, 2021b, citing RCIRCSA, 2017b).</p>
Intimate partner violence	<p>'Intimate partner violence' (IPV) refers to any behaviour within an intimate relationship that causes physical, sexual or psychological harm (DSS, 2022, p. 37).</p> <p>IPV does not necessarily involve people living together in a domestic setting. For example, IPV can occur in the context of separated partners (DSS, 2022, p. 37). It can also occur in the context of dating relationships that do not involve cohabitation, particularly among adolescents and teens (World Health Organization [WHO], 2013, p. vii) – sometimes referred to as 'teen dating violence'.</p>
Offender	<p>An 'offender' is a person who is found guilty of having done something that is prohibited by criminal law (i.e. committing a crime) (National Office for Child Safety, 2021b, citing RCIRCSA, 2017f).</p>

³ See, e.g., *Criminal Code Act 1995* (Cth), s 474.25A; *Crimes Act 1900* (ACT), s 66; *Crimes Act 1900* (NSW), ss 66EB, 66EC; *Criminal Code Act 1983* (NT), s 208JG; *Criminal Code 1899* (Qld), ss 218A–218B; *Criminal Law Consolidation Act 1935* (SA), ss 63B, 139A; *Criminal Code Act 1924* (Tas), ss 125C–125D; *Crimes Act 1958* (Vic), s 49M; *Criminal Code Compilation Act 1913* (WA), s 204B)

Perpetrator	<p>In the context of this report, a 'perpetrator' is an adult who has sexually abused a child, including offenders who have been convicted for sexual abuse in court (National Office for Child Safety, 2021b, citing RCIRCSA, 2017f).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ <i>Note:</i> children or young people who have sexually abused other children are not referred to as 'perpetrators' but as children who have used HSB. We have used this terminology so as not to stigmatise or harm children who use HSB, while still acknowledging those behaviours have significant, harmful impacts on victims and survivors (National Office for Child Safety, 2021b).
Pornography	<p>'Pornography' refers to sexually explicit materials intended to arouse (McKee et al., 2020, p. 1,085).</p>
Victim and survivor	<p>In the context of this report, a 'victim and survivor' is a person who has experienced and/or is experiencing CSA.</p> <p>We use this dual language to recognise that some people prefer the term 'survivor' because it reflects their resilience and empowerment, while others prefer the term 'victim' because it more directly acknowledges the harm they endured through the abuse, and recognises that many people have lost their lives as a direct result of abuse, or do not feel they have 'survived' it and its impacts (National Office for Child Safety, 2021b). We acknowledge some people do not identify with either term (National Office for Child Safety, 2021b, citing RCIRCSA, 2017f).</p> <p>Victims and survivors may be children or adults, noting CSA can be current or historical (National Office for Child Safety, 2021b).</p>

Executive summary

Background

This report was commissioned by the Queensland Child Death Review Board as part of the Review into the System Response to Child Sexual Abuse (Queensland Family & Child Commission [QFCC], 2025c) (the QFCC Review). The review responds to a high profile, recent example of institutional child sexual abuse (CSA) in early childhood education and care (ECEC) contexts: the case of Ashley Paul Griffith. Griffith was arrested in 2022 and ultimately pleaded guilty to 307 offences of sexual offences against children.

The impacts of CSA are profound for victims and survivors, particularly when experienced in early childhood (defined as ages between 0 and 5 years old), represents a critical developmental phase characterised by significant brain plasticity and sensitivity to environmental influences (Gilmore et al., 2018). Globally, the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) reports that 1 in 5 women and around 1 in 7 men experienced sexual violence during childhood (UNICEF, 2024). In Australia, the ACMS found that over 1 in 3 women (37.3%), almost 1 in 5 men (18.8%) and over 1 in 2 gender diverse people (52%) aged 16 and over reported experiencing sexual abuse by any person during their childhood (Mathews et al., 2023).

Experiences of CSA as an adverse childhood experience can have significant negative impacts on a child's development and long-term wellbeing. Victims and survivors may experience disruptions in attachment patterns, socio-emotional development, and emotional regulation (Bick & Nelson, 2016; Jimenez et al., 2016). CSA can also have lasting impacts on overall mental and physical health throughout a person's life (Smith & Pollak, 2020).

'Institutional CSA' occurs when CSA takes place on the premises of an institution, during institutional activities, or is perpetrated by an official of the institution, such as an educator (Mathews, 2019). Young children's limited ability to communicate, and their significant dependency on adult caregivers mean that ECEC contexts are 'high risk' settings.

While children are vulnerable to adversities and associated negative impacts, they are capable of fostering positive development when provided with appropriate support. Secure attachments and supportive caregiving environments can promote recovery and resilience (Graham et al., 2021; see also Gee, 2021).

This understanding of both the potential for harm and the opportunities for positive intervention underscores the critical importance of effective strategies to safeguard against CSA in ECEC settings. By implementing robust safeguards and providing timely, appropriate support, we can work towards minimising the occurrence of CSA.

Project design

This report aims to provide insight into regulatory mechanisms for safeguarding children against CSA in ECEC contexts and to identify opportunities to incorporate best practice policy and procedures for the design and implementation of safeguarding schemes in Queensland.

It provides a synthesis of data obtained through a desktop review process, following a scoping review method. The approach involved sourcing, collating, and synthesising literature, legislative materials, and policy documents from Australia and select overseas jurisdictions from

the last 10 years. Material was limited to content that focuses on CSA and not other categories of abuse such as child maltreatment or child sexual exploitation (CSE).

The overseas jurisdictions included in the review are the United Kingdom, the Republic of Ireland, Wales, Canada, New Zealand, the United States and select European countries. These jurisdictions were selected based on their relevance to the Australian context and the availability of pertinent information.

The analysis in this report is guided by and contextualised within the specific circumstances of the *Griffith* case, a high-profile instance of CSA in an ECEC setting. This case is used as a lens to examine broader systematic issues rather than to draw definitive conclusions about the circumstances of the offending.

The scope of the report included a detailed analysis of frameworks, practices and mechanisms aimed at safeguarding children from CSA ('regulatory safeguards'), including information sharing mechanisms, and collaborative models, that exist in ECEC settings. As such, the analysis focused on specific schemes and elements within each jurisdiction that were most relevant to the objectives of the report. This targeted approach allowed for a focused examination of best practices and innovative strategies in child safeguarding within ECEC settings.

The scoping review method employed a systematic and iterative approach, comprising several key steps:

- **Literature identification:** Academic and grey literature were systematically identified through Covidence, supplemented by 'snowballing' and targeted searches for relevant policy and legislative documents.
- **Screening process:** A two-stage screening process was implemented, involving practical screening of titles and abstracts, followed by methodological screening of full texts to assess rigour and clarity.
- **Data extraction and analysis:** Data were extracted from selected records and organised into thematic findings. The analysis adopted an inductive approach, addressing research questions within the context of broader themes rather than discretely.
- **Reporting:** This report is structured to respond to the research questions by examining regulatory safeguards in ECEC settings at a societal, community/organisational, and individual/interpersonal levels. This approach follows the socio-ecological model and draws on evidence from Australian and international jurisdictions, focusing on the most relevant policies, legislative measures, and collaborative practices identified through the desktop review. The findings in this report are presented in a sequence that reflects the objectives of the project, with each section providing a comprehensive analysis of effective strategies for preventing and safeguarding children from CSA in ECEC contexts.

Key findings

At a conceptual level, a public health approach to prevention of CSA frames it as a preventable problem that can be addressed by enacting interventions at a population-wide level (Cant et al., 2022; Letourneau et al., 2014; Quadara et al., 2015; Trew et al., 2021). These must be comprehensive and multi-layered, integrating prevention efforts at societal, community/organisational, and individual/interpersonal levels of the socio-ecological model.

The socio-ecological model recognises that public health issues like CSA are fundamentally influenced by complex individual, interpersonal, community and societal factors (Letourneau et

al., 2020; McKillop et al., 2018a, 2018b). It therefore ensures policy makers can develop prevention efforts that are appropriately informed by, and tailored to, different contexts.

An effective public health approach to prevention of CSA in ECECs incorporates safeguarding measures in all ECEC settings. The evidence clearly demonstrates that the safety of children must be the highest priority, underpinned by a strong culture of child safety that goes beyond policies and procedures to shape everyday practice and organisational values. This commitment should be embedded at every level from jurisdictional strategies, reporting and safeguarding schemes, and reinforced through foundational training for staff on reporting, grooming awareness, trauma-informed care, and information sharing.

A brief overview of the review of individual elements in the Australian and International safeguarding contexts is provided below. A more detailed review of Australian and international jurisdictions is outlined in the body of the report.

Australia

Australia's approach to safeguarding children against CSA in ECEC settings is underpinned by a public health framework, embodied in the [*National Strategy to Prevent and Respond to Child Sexual Abuse 2021-2030*](#) (National Strategy). The *National Principles for Child Safe Organisations* form the cornerstone of this approach, implemented through the Commonwealth Child Safe Framework. These principles aim to build understanding and capacity across communities, families and organisations to safeguard children.

Key regulatory measures include Working with Children Checks (WWCC), information-sharing schemes and reportable conduct schemes. WWCCs screen individuals working with children, considering criminal history, child protection information and professional disciplinary records. Information-sharing schemes facilitate exchanges between prescribed agencies, while reportable conduct schemes mandate reporting of child abuse allegations.

While Australia's child safeguarding frameworks, such as its reportable conduct schemes and mandatory reporting obligations, are strong in certain areas, inconsistency between jurisdictions presents ongoing challenges. A strengthened approach would comprise a national scheme for the ECEC sector to ensure information and data are shared and communicated effectively. This is a current policy priority identified in this report.

Highlighting the practical benefits of place-based multi-agency collaboration, Western Australia's Child Family and Youth centres support children and families experiencing CSA. These centres bring a range of services together, including policing, physical and mental health. This enables an integrated response to the complex needs of victims of CSA and their families, while also providing a trauma-informed policing response where appropriate. The strength of these place-based approaches lies in their comprehensive nature, where professionals from different sectors can work in partnership, share information, and coordinate interventions to enhance the safety and wellbeing of children.

However, the effectiveness of collaborative models in Australia is limited by inconsistencies across jurisdictions and challenges in cross-jurisdictional information sharing. The current absence of a centralised information-sharing system has led to inadequate or incomplete information being exchanged in some cases. Additionally, there is a notable absence of rigorous evaluation of these regulatory safeguards, making it difficult to measure their overall impact and effectiveness.

International

International approaches to safeguarding children in ECEC settings provide valuable insights for strengthening regulatory safeguards in Australia. This report highlights several leading international models, each demonstrating best practice in key areas such as worker screening, information sharing, and multi-agency collaboration.

The United Kingdom's Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) allows for greater discretion in information disclosure for high-risk professions. The UK system is further strengthened by the integration of Local Authority Designated Officers (LADOs), who coordinate investigations and facilitate information sharing among agencies. At the community level, Local Safeguarding Partnerships bring together ECEC organisations with other agencies, creating a coordinated and consistent approach towards safeguarding children.

Ireland's Garda Vetting system addresses a critical gap by requiring overseas criminal record checks for applicants who have lived abroad. The Irish system, like the UK's DBS, also considers a wide range of information, including police investigations and allegations to comprehensively assess suitability for working with children.

The Child Advocacy Centre (CAC) model in North America and the Barnahus model in Europe similarly demonstrate the importance of multi-agency collaboration. These models integrate investigative and support services, providing a coordinated response that prioritises both safety and wellbeing. Their strength lies in bringing diverse agencies together and creating a framework in which individuals and organisations working with children and their families share the responsibility in safeguarding children.

The strength of these international models lies in their comprehensive vetting processes, multi-agency collaboration and addressing gaps in overseas criminal history checks. However, they also face challenges, including non-mandatory information sharing in some systems and resource-intensive implementation requirements.

The implications below are a starting point for further investigation of individual safeguarding schemes and regulatory mechanisms that could be considered in Queensland.

Implications

This report identifies a range of implications for consideration in the design of policies, safeguarding frameworks and protocols for protecting children from CSA. These implications also outline key factors for ensuring best practice collaboration and information sharing is implemented to strengthen child safeguarding in Queensland.

Effectively safeguarding children in ECEC settings forms part of a comprehensive, multi-layered public health approach that integrates prevention efforts at societal, community/organisational, and individual/interpersonal levels. Several critical implications for policy and practice emerge from the findings of this desktop review. These are outlined below to prompt further investigation and consideration, rather than act as definitive recommendations.

1. The literature consistently indicates that it is critical to develop a **culture** that prioritises the safety of children alongside the implementation of any policies, frameworks or regulatory safeguards. This commitment to cultural change should be clearly articulated using consistent language and embedded at all levels of the socio-ecological model including at the regulatory framework (societal) level and the organisational level of the sector and individual ECECs.

2. The evidence suggests that regulatory frameworks, mechanisms and bodies are most effective at safeguarding against CSA when operating as a **network**, rather than as isolated entities. It is important for such a network to share common goals, language, practices and learnings to ensure consistency when sharing information or when implementing reporting schemes, policies and protocols. One potential feature of this may be a **uniform information sharing database**, which could provide critical insights that help safeguard against CSA. Such a database should be supported by robust mechanisms such as formal agreements and multi-agency safeguarding partnerships.

3. The Australian reporting schemes reviewed here, including reportable conduct schemes and mandatory reporting obligations, compare well to international models, however the literature indicates that there are still areas for improvement. Australia's reporting schemes could be improved by **encouraging organisations** to build cultures that support the reporting of CSA and related concerns, developing clear reporting pathways and providing staff with regular training and clear guidelines to encourage them to report concerns.

4. The literature suggests that fostering local, place-based collaboration with a range of relevant entities, including local government, non-profit organisations, schools, law enforcement, and parents and families, is critical to creating a truly **child-centred approach to safeguarding**. Strong multi-agency partnerships must be underpinned by clear arrangements that enable all parties to work together to safeguard and promote the welfare of children.

5. Despite the important role that ECEC plays in supporting children, the sector faces several challenges. These include staff shortages and attracting suitably, qualified staff (Jobs and Skills Australia, 2024). A highly trained ECEC workforce, supported by strong human resource practices is integral to children's safety and wellbeing (Letourneau et al., 2020). Therefore, **supporting the ECEC sector** with training and strengthening human resource practices must be a core consideration when implementing child safeguarding measures. Robust human resource management, including thorough screening processes, staff training, monitoring processes, clear policies for addressing staff allegations, and inter-agency information sharing, is vital to **prevent perpetrators from moving between institutions**.

6. It is critical that any new child safeguarding schemes or mechanisms build review and evaluation into their design. This ensures opportunities for improvement can be identified and measures of effectiveness are considered at all levels of the system. Proactively fostering a culture of safety is essential. **Accountability and effectiveness** will be strengthened through regular reviews, evaluations, and independent scrutiny of safeguarding arrangements.

Conclusion

The examination of regulatory safeguards for CSA in ECEC contexts reveals a critical need for a more cohesive, evidence-based approach. Although existing frameworks demonstrate a commitment to the safety of children, the efficacy of these measures is compromised by systems inconsistencies, lack of networked integration and evaluation challenges.

A key challenge lies in the fragmented implementation, inconsistent intersection and the lack of rigorous assessment of various strategies and frameworks, especially across different jurisdictions. This report underscores the imperative for a paradigm shift from isolated jurisdictional efforts to a unified, national approach that prioritises cross-border information sharing and standardised evaluation metrics.

Moving forward, the focus should be on creating a culture that prioritises the safety of children that permeates all levels of the socio-ecological model - from ECEC settings and the overall

sector, to support from robust regulatory frameworks. This cultural shift, combined with improved mechanisms for identifying and responding to potential threats, has the capacity to substantially strengthen Australia's safeguarding capabilities.

Crucially, the findings highlight the potential for significant enhancement through the implementation of multi-agency collaboration, particularly at a local level, especially in the areas of comprehensive vetting and sharing of information. The adoption of these practices must be tailored to the Australian context, considering the unique challenges posed by the country's federated system.

The implications of this report extend beyond policy reform, calling for a fundamental reassessment of how child safeguarding is prioritised and operationalised within ECEC contexts. It challenges policy makers, practitioners and researchers to collaborate in developing innovative solutions that address the complexities of CSA safeguarding and prevention in an increasingly interconnected world.

In essence, this report seeks to contribute to change in strengthening safeguarding of children in ECEC settings. By addressing the identified gaps and leveraging international insights, there is an opportunity to learn from recent events and seek to establish a significantly higher standard in CSA safeguarding and prevention, ensuring the safety and wellbeing of young children.

Introduction

Background and Context

[Child sexual abuse](#) (CSA) is a pervasive and deeply troubling issue worldwide (UNICEF, 2024) and in Australia (Mathews et al., 2023). Alarming high CSA prevalence rates, together with recent high-profile cases of CSA in early childhood and care (ECEC) contexts (defined [below](#)) in Australia, have led to increased recognition of the need for greater initiatives to safeguard children from CSA in Australia.

One of the historical challenges with designing and implementing such safeguards is that CSA is a highly complex, emotive, politicised and public issue, which creates difficulties with creating coordinated and effective policy solutions. However, Australian governments are committed to overcoming these difficulties (Australian Government Response to the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse, 2018; Letourneau et al., 2014; Vosz et al. 2023).

On 4 December 2024, the Queensland Attorney-General and Minister for Justice and Minister for Integrity requested the Queensland Child Death Review Board to conduct a Review into the System Response to Child Sexual Abuse (Queensland Family & Child Commission [QFCC], 2025c), using the Ashley Paul Griffith matter as a case study (QFCC, 2025c) (the QFCC Review).

The QFCC commissioned AIFS to contribute to the QFCC Review by reporting on frameworks, practices and mechanisms aimed at safeguarding children from CSA ('regulatory safeguards') with a focus on early childhood settings and services. Therefore, this report focuses on regulatory safeguards designed to stop institutional CSA in ECEC contexts.

- 'Institutional CSA' occurs when CSA takes place on the premises of an institution, during institutional activities or is perpetrated by an official of the institution, such as an educator, religious figure, coach, or camp leader (Mathews, 2019).
- In the context of this report, 'ECEC contexts' refers to institutional settings that engage with children during their [early childhood](#) years. This includes 'long day care, occasional care, family day care, Multi-purpose Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children's Services, preschools and kindergartens, playgroups, creches, early intervention settings and similar services' (Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority [ACECQA], 2022, pp. 8, 45).

This report represents one of four literature components of the QFCC Review, elements of which will inform a report to be prepared by QFCC to inform the policy development process.

Offending by Ashley Paul Griffith

The QFCC Review and this report have been influenced by a prominent, recent example of institutional CSA in ECEC contexts: the case of Ashley Paul Griffith, an early childhood educator in regular contact with children. Griffith was arrested in 2022 and ultimately pleaded guilty to 307 sexual offences involving children (*R v Griffith* [2024] QDC 207 (*Griffith*) [6], [1]). This included contact offences involving 69 different female children, aged between 2 and 7 years old (*Griffith* [19]). Griffith was sentenced to life imprisonment (*Griffith*).

Before his arrest in 2022, multiple attempts were made to detect and prevent Griffith's offending, including two reports to police (*Griffith* [51], [53]). Neither report led to legal action; one was investigated but no charges were laid, and the other did not meet the necessary threshold for criminal investigation (*Griffith* [51], [53]).

Similar cases to Griffith's are thoroughly documented in the *Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse* (RCIRCS), as well as other inquiries such as the *Commission of Inquiry into the Tasmanian Government's Responses to Child Sexual Abuse* (Tasmanian Commission). Such cases offer critical opportunities to reflect, learn and ultimately act to better prevent, detect and respond to CSA.

What is early childhood?

The definition of 'early childhood' is not absolute and can vary depending on the context. For example, the World Health Organization [WHO] classifies it as including an age range of 0–8 years old (WHO, 2020). In the context of ECEC settings, the age range of 0–5 is commonly used to define early childhood, as this typically encompasses the years before formal schooling begins (ACECQA, 2022; Australian Government, Department of Education [AGDE], n.d.). This is the definition we use in this report.

Early childhood is a developmental phase that plays a vital role in the learning, development, emotional regulation and wellbeing of children (ACECQA, 2022; Compas et al., 2017; Daelmans et al., 2017; Montroy et al., 2016). It represents a critical developmental period characterised by significant brain plasticity and sensitivity to environmental influences (Gilmore et al., 2018).

Experiences of adversity during this period can have significant negative impacts, for example:

- disruptions in attachment patterns, socio-emotional development and emotional regulation (Bick & Nelson, 2016; Jimenez et al., 2016)
- lasting impacts on overall mental and physical health through life (Smith & Pollak, 2020).

However, intervening early to address adversity, particularly in the institutional context, shows promise in supporting normalisation in the activation of key circuitry related to cognitive control (Bick & Nelson, 2016). For example, secure attachments and supportive caregiving environments can promote recovery (Graham et al., 2021; see also Gee, 2021). Therefore, while children are vulnerable to adversities and associated negative impacts, they maintain significant capacity for positive development when provided with appropriate support (Smith & Pollak, 2020).

What is child sexual abuse?

This report uses the definition of, 'child sexual abuse' as defined by the Australian National Office for Child Safety:

any act that exposes a child or young person to, or involves a child or young person in, sexual activities that:

- they do not understand
- they do not or cannot consent to
- are not accepted by the community
- are unlawful

(National Office for Child Safety, 2021b).

There are, however, inconsistencies and complications with definitions of the term 'child sexual abuse' (Kilimnik, Pulverman & Meston, 2018; Mathews & Collin-Vézina, 2019; Stevenson et al., 2024). One complication is that terms like 'child sexual abuse' and 'child sexual exploitation' (CSE) are often used interchangeably and they describe behaviours that sometimes overlap. The main difference between the two is that CSA typically occurs without the exchange element which is a necessary characteristic of CSE (e.g. the exchange or promise of money, shelter,

goods or relationships). Rather, CSA is primarily driven by the perpetrator's desire for sexual gratification (i.e. pleasure or satisfaction derived from sexual stimulation: Werner, Borgmann & Laan, 2023) (ECPAT International Interagency Working Group, 2016). This report does not focus on CSE; it focuses on CSA.

The WHO conceptualises CSA in terms of developmental stage which can be useful for considering policy changes aimed at specific groups. This definition indicates: 'the involvement of a child or an adolescent in sexual activity into which he or she has been forced or tricked; which they may not understand is wrong; about which they may be afraid to tell someone' (WHO, 2022, p. 2).

How common is child sexual abuse?

Prevalence of CSA generally

Obtaining robust data on the prevalence of CSA presents significant challenges. The sensitive nature of CSA means that victims and survivors may be reluctant to disclose their experiences. A recent study found that disclosure of CSA in Australia has been infrequent, with only 54.8% of all those who experienced CSA ever telling anyone anything about it (Mathews et al., 2025).

There are a range of cultural, economic, societal, religious, familial and institutional factors, alongside recollection and detection challenges, that likely contribute to underreporting of CSA (Cagney et al., 2025; Mathews et al., 2025). Underreporting is particularly likely for men and for victims and survivors who experienced CSA perpetrated by a parent or adult family member, a caregiver in an institutional setting, or a known adolescent they were romantically involved with (Mathews et al., 2025).

There are also challenges with the methods and quality of studies that attempt to generate reliable data on prevalence, including the use of instruments which do not have demonstrated validity and reliability, and the use of questions that are too vague, narrow or otherwise inappropriately constructed to capture nuanced and accurate data (Mathews et al., 2020). Despite these limitations, several large-scale studies and administrative data collections provide the best available estimates of CSA prevalence.

UNICEF has drawn on demographic and health surveys, multiple indicator cluster surveys and other nationally representative surveys to identify the extent of CSA worldwide.

- UNICEF (2024) found that, globally, 1 in 5 women (650 million) and around 1 in 7 men (between 410 and 530 million) reported experiencing sexual violence during their childhood. This includes 1 in 8 women (more than 370 million) and around 1 in 11 men (between 240 and 310 million) who experienced contact offending, such as sexual assault.

In Australia, the Australian Child Maltreatment Survey (ACMS) and Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) Personal Safety Survey (PSS) are the two principal sources for national prevalence data.

- The ACMS found that over 1 in 3 women (37.3%), almost 1 in 5 men (18.8%) and over 1 in 2 gender diverse people (52%) aged 16 and over reported experiencing sexual abuse by any person during their childhood (Mathews et al., 2023). This includes almost 1 in 4 people (23.7%) who experienced contact offending (Mathews et al., 2023).
- The PSS found that 11% of women (about 1.1 million) and 3.6% of men (about 343,500) aged 18 and over reported experiencing sexual abuse by an adult before they were aged 15 (Australian Bureau of Statistics [ABS], 2023).

- Both the ACMS and PSS found that CSA rarely occurs as a single event. The ACMS found that 78% of victims and survivors experienced multiple episodes, 42% experienced abuse more than 6 times and 11% experienced abuse more than 50 times (Mathews et al., 2023).

Prevalence of CSA in early childhood

There is enough data to suggest that CSA is a significant and widely prevalent issue – including specifically in Australia. Indeed, a recent study by Cagney and colleagues (2025) found that the prevalence of sexual violence against children in Australia is higher than the global prevalence (27.8% compared to 18.9%, age-standardised).

However, critical gaps lie in data around the rates of CSA against children during early childhood specifically, and studies suggest that current statistics may underestimate CSA prevalence in early childhood (Pereda, 2023; RCIRCSA, 2017h). This absence of data is particularly concerning given young children's limited ability to report abuse.

How does child sexual abuse occur in early childhood education and care contexts?

CSA occurs across various institutional settings, including ECEC contexts, which are classified as 'high risk' settings (Kaufman et al., 2019; Wonnacott et al., 2013). The high risk stems from:

- the inherent nature of early childhood care, involving children being at a critical early developmental stage, including a limited ability to communicate (Mathews, 2019)
- children in early childhood having minimal capacity to communicate (especially verbally) their experiences or understand inappropriate behaviour (Briggs, 2017)
- young children's significant dependency on adult caregivers (Moore, 2017).
- adults developing close relationships with children that are subtle and sustained over time (RCIRCSA, 2017c)
- adults being drawn to institutions that service children because they provide access to children (Vosz et al., 2023), or adults becoming motivated to perpetrate CSA in the context of those institutions when presented with an opportunity to do so and/or risk of detection appears to be low (Kaufman et al 2019; RCIRCSA, 2017h; Tasmanian Commission, 2023e)
 - this was the case for Ashley Paul Griffith, who explained his attraction to children escalated to offending 'when the opportunity emerged', specifically through employment in institutional contexts (*Griffith [77]*).
- individuals in institutional roles being viewed as trustworthy (Centre of Expertise on Child Sexual Abuse & Centre for Abuse and Trauma Studies, Middlesex University, 2020)
- individuals' ability to avoid detection by using their position or influence to circumvent safeguarding measures (Erooga et al., 2019; Palmer, 2017; Quadara et al., 2015).
- the use of grooming as a critical tactic (RCIRCSA, 2017c), which can be difficult to identify because it is subtle, and its techniques are not always explicitly sexual or abusive (McAlinden, 2015).

'Grooming' does not have a consistent universal definition (Winters et al., 2022). However, in the context of the report, 'grooming' is defined according the RCIRCSA (2017f) definition as:

behaviours that manipulate and control a child, their family and other support networks, or institutions with the intent of gaining access to the child, obtaining the

child's compliance, maintaining the child's silence, and avoiding discovery of sexual abuse

(RCIRCSA, 2017i, p. 323).

This definition aligns with the definition Winters and colleagues (2022) recently proposed to bring consistency into the field. Winters and colleagues (2022) explain that the manipulation may involve selecting, gaining access to, isolating, developing trust with a child and/or their guardians, community and environment, and desensitising the child to sexualised behaviour and physical contact. Further, it involves behaviours that occur after the abuse, designed to facilitate future instances of abuse and/or prevent disclosures (Winters et al., 2022).

Recognising the signs of grooming and CSA in children during their early childhood requires careful observation, as they often lack the language to articulate their experiences. Potential indicators include sudden changes in behaviour such as increased fear or withdrawal, regression to earlier developmental stages (e.g. bedwetting), unexplained injuries, a sudden intense attachment to a particular adult and/or the display of sexualised behaviours or language inappropriate for their age (Bravehearts, n.d.-a; National Office for Child Safety, 2025).

What are the impacts of child sexual abuse?

Impacts of CSA generally

The impacts of CSA vary according to the type, duration, and frequency of abuse, as well as victims' and survivors' individual characteristics and their relationship to the perpetrator (Ventus et al., 2017). However, victims and survivors' personal accounts of their experiences of CSA, and the aftermath of those experiences, clearly demonstrate the potential for CSA to have numerous and complex impacts on people's lives (see, e.g. RCIRCSA, 2017d).

Quantitative research has also attempted to demonstrate potentially devastating complications associated⁴ with experiences of CSA, including mental health issues (e.g. post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), anxiety and depression), attachment issues, functional somatic syndromes, suicide attempt/s, sexually inappropriate behaviour, alcohol and other drug-related issues, smoking, relationship difficulties, impacts on gender identity, disruptions to education and employment and economic insecurity (Assini-Meytin et al., 2022; Bonvanie et al., 2015; Ensink et al., 2020; Lawrence et al., 2023; Scott et al., 2023; Fuller-Thomson et al., 2020; van Hoof et al., 2015). Abuse in institutional settings can also lead to distrust of institutions and authority, and, for those abused in religious settings, impacts on spirituality (Assini-Meytin et al., 2022).

It is important to acknowledge that victims and survivors of CSA do not necessarily or clearly experience complications; some are asymptomatic or show adaptive responses (Andersen, 2022; Domhardt et al., 2015; Sanjeevi et al., 2018). Further, victims and survivors can be resilient, and interventions and strategies can mitigate adverse experiences, for example, with:

- high levels of support, including the emotional support and warmth of a caregiver, support from peers and support at a community level
- positive cognitive coping strategies (distinct from e.g. self-blame and self-stigmatisation) – including disclosing and discussing the experience, reframing or reinterpreting the

⁴ It cannot be easily proven whether CSA alone causes adverse outcomes, given adults' health and psychopathology can be influenced by a range of other variables (including other forms of childhood adversity which often accompany CSA: see, e.g. Mathews et al., 2023; Higgins et al., 2025; Office for National Statistics, 2020) (Sanjeevi et al., 2018; see also Fisher, 2017).

experience, focusing on the future and asserting control (Domhardt et al., 2015; Sanjeevi et al., 2018; see also Tsang et al., 2020).

Impacts of CSA in early childhood

Early childhood represents a crucial period of development ([see above](#)). Experiencing traumatic events during early childhood can therefore be especially harmful (Andersen, 2022). Studies have found that experiencing CSA in early childhood is uniquely associated with heightened risk for abnormalities in the brain, including in regions that govern attention, visuospatial recognition, memory, self-reflection, emotional regulation and threat detection (Andersen, 2022; Teicher et al., 2016).

Studies have also indicated that the institutional context appears to exacerbate some of the adverse impacts associated with CSA, including across psychological, social, physical, educational and economic domains (Blakemore et al., 2017). Institutional CSA creates complex trauma manifestations that require sustained intervention and support (Herbert et al., 2020).

Project design

Aim

The present project represents a desktop review of regulatory schemes and other policy mechanisms to safeguard children from CSA in ECEC contexts - as well as the collaborative systems to support their implementation. The review covers Australia and 6 select international jurisdictions.

This project aims to inform the QFCC about current developments and opportunities to incorporate best practice policy and procedures required to safeguard children from CSA in ECEC contexts. This material (and other commissioned reviews) will be used by QFCC to develop a report that will further inform child safeguarding policy in Queensland.

This project also aims to help QFCC contextualise and inform their engagements with other stakeholders and government entities being consulted as part of the QFCC Review and/or subsequent work around CSA.

Scope

The scope of this project is based on the Request for Quote (RFQ) (issued 8 January 2025), AIFS' response (submitting 5 February 2025) and the associated Contract (signed 23/25 March 2025). AIFS and QFCC refined this scope through ongoing discussions about priority focus areas during progress meetings. The final agreed scope is reflected in the following table.

Table 1: In scope

	In scope
Content	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Content that focuses on CSA, <i>not</i> other categories of abuse like child maltreatment and CSE, nor other forms of sexual harm involving other children like harmful sexual behaviour (HSB) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – However, some materials consider child maltreatment broadly and/or collapse CSA and CSE, in which case we discuss them all ▪ Content that focuses on CSA in ECEC contexts ▪ Content specifically relevant to, or replicable in, the Queensland context ▪ Content from Australia and select⁵ international jurisdictions ▪ Content from the last 10 years (01/01/2015 – 01/03/2025). ▪ High-level, summary analysis of effective regulatory safeguards aimed at protecting children from CSA in ECEC contexts, as well as delivery and enforcement models for these safeguards (including collaborative models and holistic approaches to cross-government coordination) ▪ Consideration of unique factors like grooming and particular risk profiles (however, this content was only considered to the extent it arose in materials in the desktop review; it was not specifically searched for)
Key Activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Desktop review of relevant literature, policy documents and legislative frameworks directly relevant to the content scope stated above

⁵ See directly above.

Audience	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Primary audience: QFCC ▪ Secondary audience: Qld Attorney-General; Parliament; Expert stakeholders engaged in QFCC consultations ▪ Tertiary audience: stakeholders (including other government stakeholders); public (via QFCC website);
Format / Style	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Single report <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Word and PDF format – Meets web accessibility requirements ▪ Plain English (to ensure accessibility for non-specialist audiences)

Methods

This report synthesises data obtained through a desktop review process. This involved sourcing, collating and synthesising literature, legislative materials and policy materials from Australia and select overseas jurisdictions from the last 10 years that provide useful information about how to safeguard children from experiencing CSA in ECEC contexts.

This process followed a scoping review method (Mak & Thomas, 2022; Arksey and O'Malley, 2005), using a systematic and iterative approach to mapping and summarising the existing evidence on best practice for safeguarding children from CSA in ECEC contexts.

The scoping review method involves the following steps:

- identifying the research question(s)
- identifying relevant academic, legislative and policy materials ('sampling')
- selecting and screening
- charting and extracting the data
- collating, summarising and reporting the results.

Please note: The following research questions were drawn from the initial RFQ provided by the QFCC. As the project progressed, QFCC and AIFS agreed to some minor changes in focus within these questions, in order to best inform a further advice to government that QFCC will prepare.

Research questions from the RFQ

- What are the most effective policies, legislative measures and protocols for protecting children from sexual abuse, and how are they implemented and enforced in Australia and internationally?
- What are the best practices for collaboration among governments, non-profits, schools, families, and law enforcement in safeguarding children from sexual abuse?
- How do Australia's practices for protecting children from sexual abuse compare with leading international models, and what lessons can be adapted to improve outcomes in the Australian context?

Report structure

Refinement to the research questions above (in conjunction with QFCC) mean that this report is structured to best support a government process aimed at informing the design and implementation of child safeguarding regulatory schemes. This process will be conceptualised within a public health approach to prevention of CSA and the report is therefore structured to align with the way such regulatory mechanisms fit within the socio-ecological model.

As the agreed major focus of this report is the societal level regulatory mechanisms that can be implemented at government level, the headings reflect those that were indicated to be of most interest to QFCC, including national bodies and frameworks, organisational level guidance and strengthening regulatory mechanisms. The focus on Working with Children Checks, Information sharing and Reporting schemes reflect the importance of these schemes in the approach to strengthening child safeguarding.

In relation to international jurisdictions, the report findings demonstrate the elements and collaborative models that best provide useful examples of child safeguarding that could be relevant in the Queensland context rather than complete reviews of each jurisdiction. This approach acknowledges the time constraints applicable and aligns with the agreed approach of identifying information on a priority basis of usefulness for QFCC.

Sampling

347 materials are discussed in this desktop review. This sample was obtained via the following steps.

- 1,432 records were identified through a formal search in Covidence, drawing on records from APO (Analysis & Policy Observatory database), Australian Criminology Database (CINCH), Australian Family and Society Abstracts, AustLII (Australasian Legal Information Institute), New Zealand Family Violence Clearinghouse, National Criminal Justice Reference Service Abstracts Database (US NCJRS) and SocIndex.
- From the initial Covidence search, 24 duplicates were removed, leaving 1,408 records that were screened for practical relevance. 990 records were deemed irrelevant, leaving 418 records that were screened for methodological rigor. Finally, 314 records were deemed unsuitable and excluded, leaving 104 records in the final sample of academic and grey literature.
- In addition to the academic and grey literature systematically identified through Covidence, additional searches were conducted to identify supplementary materials ('snowballing') – adding 142 records into the sample of academic and grey literature.
- Further, 161 policy and legislative documents were identified with targeted searches within relevant jurisdictions with searching targeting key frameworks, guidelines and child safeguarding policies that support CSA prevention.

Selecting and screening

Records were screened in two stages: practical screening and methodological screening. The former involved reading the title and abstract of records to determine whether they were practically useful, and the latter involved reading the full texts of records that were deemed useful to determine whether their methods were rigorous and clearly explained.

Data extraction and reporting

Data were extracted from the records into thematic findings in this report. Along with these themes, this report presents the implications that arise from the findings of this desktop review.

The analysis of these records was informed by the research questions and the facts of the *Griffith* case (outlined above) with the aim to identify mechanisms that would strengthen child safeguarding in Queensland and Australia more broadly.

This report follows a structure that charts key components of socio-ecological public health approaches and situational approaches in preventing institutional CSA in ECEC contexts:

- [societal level regulatory prevention efforts](#)
- [community and organisational level regulatory prevention efforts](#)
- [individual and interpersonal level regulatory prevention efforts](#)
- [a collaborative approach to CSA prevention](#).

Data were extracted and reported thematically based on an inductive process. Research Questions 1 and 2 are addressed sequentially. Research Question 3 is answered concurrently, drawing out key findings by comparing Australian and international practices within each regulatory theme. Rather than examining the entire safeguarding system of each jurisdiction throughout the report, the focus is on those elements that best illustrate the most relevant or strongest examples of the specific model or practice being discussed. This process was agreed to between QFCC and AIFS in order to maximise efficiency and utility of final findings.

Key concepts and considerations

Key takeaways

- **The evidence base on preventing CSA clearly emphasises the importance of taking a public health approach.**
- **The socio-ecological model is the theoretical framework recommended for conceptualising the complex interplay of risk and protective factors at the individual, organisational, community and societal levels of influence.**
- **A situational crime prevention approach is most appropriate for preventing CSA offending by modifying an organisational environment to deter/disrupt the motivations and opportunities for potential offending in ECEC settings.**

A public health approach

The CSA literature consistently supports a public health approach to prevention of CSA (see e.g. Assini-Meytin, 2020; Austin & Salter, 2024; Quadra et al., 2015; McKibbin & Humphreys, 2020). A public health approach to prevention of CSA frames it as a preventable problem that can be addressed by enacting prevention interventions at a population-wide level (Cant et al., 2022; Letourneau et al., 2014, Quadara et al. 2015; Trew et al. 2021).

A public health approach to prevention usually requires the following four components, as outlined by the Center for Disease Control (CDC) in the United States of America (USA):

1. identify and define the public health problem
2. identify risk and protective factors

3. develop interventions based on the available evidence and evaluate them
4. implement interventions (CDC, 2024).

Prevention interventions can be primary, secondary or tertiary – although distinctions between them are not always clear (see, e.g. Vosz et al., 2023).

- **Primary** prevention efforts attempt to stop crimes before they occur (Quadara et al., 2015; Smallbone, 2017). This includes strategies pitched at a population level, to address underlying causes of crime and bolster factors that protect against it.
- **Secondary** prevention efforts attempt to detect risks or early manifestations of crime (Quadara et al., 2015) – guided by a socio-ecological understanding of risks (explained [below](#); see [Appendix B](#)). They target specific populations who may be at risk (Quadara et al., 2015).
- **Tertiary** prevention efforts attempt to address crimes after they have been committed (Quadara et al., 2015) – for example, therapeutic and criminal justice responses.

The [Lucy Faithfull Foundation](#) (a UK-based organisation that works to stop CSA before it occurs) provides useful examples of primary, secondary and tertiary prevention interventions, adapted and presented in [Appendix A](#).

The socio-ecological model

The socio-ecological model provides a theoretical framework for understanding the multifaceted and interactive characteristics of public health issues to inform a [public health approach](#) to those issues. This model was originally developed by Bronfenbrenner (1977) almost 50 years ago, but it remains one of the most eminent models in public health promotion and violence prevention, including CSA prevention (see, e.g. Quadara et al., 2015; Letourneau et al., 2020).

The socio-ecological model recognises that public health issues like CSA are fundamentally influenced by complex individual, interpersonal, community and societal factors (Letourneau et al., 2020; McKillop et al., 2018a, 2018b). It therefore ensures policy makers can develop prevention efforts that are appropriately informed by, and tailored to, different contexts (Artus & Niemi, 2016). This report considers prevention efforts in these different contexts:

- **Societal level prevention efforts** involve large, structural tools such as government policies or laws that influence human behaviour (e.g. criminal codes, enforcement frameworks and policies) and socio-cultural norms that influence human attitudes and dynamics (e.g. adults as caregivers and de facto decision makers for children) (Quadara et al., 2015)
- **Community and organisational level prevention efforts** involve the social and other influences at the level of organisations and communities such as ECECs, schools and workplaces or the community in which one lives (e.g. best practice and guidelines) (Quadara et al., 2015)
- **Individual and interpersonal level prevention efforts** address factors that arise depending on unique individuals and how they relate to one another (Quadara et al., 2015)

Ordinarily, the socio-ecological model differentiates prevention efforts targeted at individual and interpersonal levels, but for the present report we will discuss them briefly and concurrently, as they are less relevant for our purposes than the societal and organisation factors that can be exploited to facilitate CSA in ECEC contexts (which are the focus of the main regulatory prevention efforts we are investigating).

The socio-ecological model also presents a holistic view of public health risk factors, allowing policy makers to consider how these factors can arise and interplay depending on various developmental (individual), ecological (environmental) and situational factors (Ligiero et al. 2019). Examples of these risk factors are set out in [Appendix B](#). It should be noted that these risk factors can increase the risk of a person perpetrating CSA or of a person experiencing CSA.

For example:

At a **societal level**, socio-cultural norms or attitudes that support offending, such as attitudes that support male dominance and control.

At the **community/organisational level** (such as an ECEC) – lack of appropriate monitoring and supervision.

At the **individual level** – social deficits or sexual problems (for perpetration) or lack of protective family relationships (for victims and survivors experiencing CSA).

It is important to note that risk factors do not cause CSA, and *CSA is never the victim and survivor's fault* just because they experience circumstances or characteristics that may heighten their risk. However, perpetrators may exploit risk factors to maximise opportunities for offending. Additionally, some people or groups may be particularly vulnerable to public health risks if they face disadvantage or other issues that span across various developmental, ecological and/or situational factors in their lives (Vera-Gray, 2023; WHO, 2016). This is conveyed in Australia's *Safe & Supported First Action Plan 2023–2026*, designed to implement the *National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children 2021–2031*, where it states:

[W]hen the holistic needs of children, young people and families are not met, they can face a range of challenges that put them at risk of experiencing child abuse and neglect

(National Office for Child Safety, 2022, p. 58; see also Tolendi, 2025).

A situational approach

The literature also points to situational crime prevention as a complementary model for preventing CSA, alongside a public health approach. While the public health approach focuses on addressing *root causes* of crime and minimising *drivers* of crime, the situational approach focuses on modifying *environments* in which crime occurs to reduce *opportunities* for crime.

Situational crime prevention is based on criminological theory that construes the cause of crime as linked to perpetrators' motivations to offend as well as the criminal opportunities presented to them by their cultural, socio-economic and physical environments (Guerzoni, 2018). It seeks to reduce opportunities for perpetrators to commit crimes through modifying those environments and increasing the risks and difficulties associated with crime and reducing any rewards (Clarke, 2018). It primarily focuses on the *settings* in which crime occurs, rather than the *individuals* who may be involved (Clarke, 2018).

A situational approach to preventing CSA specifically involves identifying risks in settings where children congregate – including ECEC contexts – and employing risk management techniques to mitigate them (Morley & Higgins, 2018; Vosz et al., 2023).

Situational crime prevention draws on a range of criminological theories and risk management techniques, including routine activity theory, crime pattern theory and the rational choice perspective (Clarke, 2018).

- **Routine activity theory** argues that the routine activities of potential perpetrators bring them into contact with 'suitable' targets (i.e. potential victims and survivors), sometimes in the absence of capable 'guardians' (i.e. people that can protect and/or intervene to stop the crime: Eck, 2003) and that this contact can provide the opportunity for a perpetrator to then commit crimes (Cohen & Felson, 1979; Finkelhor & Asdigian, 1996). From a routine activity theory standpoint, situational crime prevention efforts should include policies that change the routine activities of potential perpetrators to decrease their opportunities to interact with potential victims and survivors (see e.g. Socia, 2015).
- **Crime pattern theory** argues crimes are shaped by perpetrators engaging in ordinary, everyday activities and structures (e.g. physical, socio-economic and cultural environments) and identifying criminal opportunities (Brantingham & Brantingham, 2013). From a crime pattern theory standpoint, situational crime prevention should involve adjusting and monitoring environments where children are, such as ensuring supervision (Mogavero & Hsu, 2018).
- A **rational choice perspective** argues that the threat of formal sanctions can deter people from committing crimes in the belief that an offender makes a 'rational choice' to offend as they will weigh up the 'benefits' of offending versus the consequences (Socia, 2015, citing Socia, 2012, citing Bachman et al., 1992). Adopting this perspective for prevention, would include implementing measures such as increased surveillance and greater punitive measures or consequences. The potential perpetrators will then factor in the likelihood of being caught and the potential impacts, deterring them from the offending by the costs being too great (Socia, 2015).

Societal level regulatory prevention efforts

Key takeaways

- Since the 2017 Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse, Australia's approach to preventing CSA has moved from a criminal justice response paradigm to a public health approach. This is framed by *The National Strategy to Prevent and Respond to Child Sexual Abuse 2021–30*.
- Australia's National Centre for Action on Child Sexual Abuse has a leading role in raising awareness and understanding of CSA and guides best practice in preventing and responding to CSA.
- The early childhood care and education sector in Australia is regulated by the National Quality Framework which includes a national law and national regulations outlining standards of care and operational requirements.
- Australia also has a national set of Child Safe Principles to guide organisations on safeguarding children.


National guidelines and structures

The National Strategy

Australia has recently been moving towards a [public health approach](#) to preventing CSA, rather than having a response focus only. Prior to the RCIRCSA, CSA was addressed primarily through a paradigm of criminal justice and service responses. This included a criminal justice response to offending and provision of services such as sexual assault and health services to those who had experienced CSA, rather than conceptualising CSA as a public health issue that could be prevented (Austin & Salter 2024; McKibbin & Humphries, 2020). The RCIRCSA encouraged this move – recommending a national strategy which applies a public health approach to CSA prevention (RCIRCSA, 2017f, p. 10).

Pursuant to the RCIRCSA's recommendation, the Australian Government developed the *National Strategy to Prevent and Respond to Child Sexual Abuse 2021–2030* (the National Strategy). Between 2021 and 2030, the National Strategy aims to achieve a vision in which all 'children and young people are protected and safe from sexual abuse' and all CSA '[v]ictims and survivors are supported and empowered' (National Office for Child Safety, 2021, p. 20).

The National Strategy embodies multi-tiered, complementary public health prevention efforts:



Quaternary prevention	Evaluates how effective tertiary interventions are to make sure they are delivering the right results
Tertiary intervention	Aims to respond to CSA and prevent it from happening again
Secondary prevention	Aims to address the early warning signs of CSA and change the end result for people who are at risk of experiencing or perpetrating CSA
Primary prevention	Responses are aimed at the whole community and address the underlying causes of CSA

The **National Office for Child Safety** is the entity responsible for the implementation of most federal measures designed to eliminate CSA since the RCIRCSA, including the National Strategy and the National Principles for Child Safe Organisations. Their role involves consultations with stakeholders, monitoring and evaluating the National Strategy, and researching and implementing further measures (National Office for Child Safety, n.d.).

To further guide the implementation of the National Strategy, the Australian Government released the *First Commonwealth Action Plan to Prevent and Respond to Child Sexual Abuse 2021–2024* (the First Action Plan). Five practical themes emerge from this:

- awareness raising
- education and building child safe cultures
- supporting and empowering victims and survivors
- enhancing national approaches to children with [harmful sexual behaviours](#) (outside the scope of this report)
- offender prevention and intervention.

The fifth of those themes focuses on prevention. Measures include perpetrator prevention programs, interventions before offending or re-offending occurs, enhancing law enforcement and intelligence to identify victims and survivors and perpetrators, ensuring relevant legislation and policy is current, working with international counterparts and with the digital industry to improve global responses to CSA (particularly online), establishing and maintaining awareness-raising programs, and strengthening the Australian Government's ability to prosecute CSA perpetrators (National Office for Child Safety, 2021).

The National Centre

The National Centre for Action on Child Sexual Abuse (National Centre) is an independent body that complements the Australian Government's approach to CSA. It was founded in late 2021, pursuant to one of the RCIRCSA's (2017a) recommendations to:

- provide ongoing national leadership to improve outcomes for victims and survivors and prevent future CSA
- support and promote strategic research and address knowledge gaps around CSA
- raise awareness and reduce stigma around CSA
- support help-seeking and guide best practice (National Centre, 2025).

The National Centre is a partnership between three respected organisations with strong histories of leadership in responding to CSA: the [Australian Childhood Foundation](#), [Blue Knot Foundation](#) and [The Healing Foundation](#) (National Centre, 2025).

The National Centre (2023) recently developed a 5-year organisational strategy titled *Here for Change*. It outlines 7 challenges and related responses associated with actioning the recommendations from the RCIRCSA. Most of these challenges relate to *responses* to CSA, but the following are relevant to consider when designing and implementing efforts to prevent CSA:

Challenge	National Centre response
1. CSA and its effects across the lifespan of victims and survivors are not well understood or identified in the community	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Foster a shared language to advance understanding about CSA. This will involve consulting widely to ensure the language is fit-for-purpose for stakeholders across the policy landscape ▪ Support efforts to measure the prevalence and impact of CSA, including by creating a framework for research that facilitates longer-term monitoring and measurement ▪ Measure community understanding and attitudes ▪ Help raise awareness
7. CSA will not be stopped unless there is a comprehensive framework for addressing the power dynamics and factors which enable it	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Bring together local and international evidence and knowledge to inform a comprehensive framework for understanding the factors which enable CSA to occur – drawing on the approach used in other theories of change, including, for example Our Watch's (2021) Change the story ▪ Mobilise efforts to reduce the prevalence of CSA, including by ensuring good communication among collaborators, with regular, effective and adaptive communications channels with stakeholders

National Principles for Child Safe Organisations

The *National Principles for Child Safe Organisations* (the National Principles) provide a national approach to embedding a child safe culture within organisations that interact with children (including ECECs) (Australian Human Rights Commission [AHRC], 2018). They focus on the safety of children broadly and do not specifically focus on CSA. However, they are drawn directly from Recommendation 6.5 of the RCIRCSA (2017g, p. 24) and are highly relevant to CSA prevention.

The National Principles are embodied in the Commonwealth Child Safe Framework (the Commonwealth Framework), which 'sets minimum standards for Commonwealth entities to create and maintain behaviours and practices that are safe for children' (National Office for Child Safety, 2020, p. 4).

Although the Commonwealth Framework is pitched at a national level, the National Principles were developed under the oversight and guidance of the Community Services Ministers across all Australian jurisdictions and were endorsed by members of the Standing Council of Australian Governments (COAG) in 2019 (Child Safe Organisations, Australian Human Rights Commission, 2018). Most states and territories have legislated the National Principles to apply in their jurisdiction (except the NT and WA), as detailed in [Appendix B](#).

The National Principles are:

1. Child safety and wellbeing is embedded in organisational leadership, governance and culture.
2. Children and young people are informed about their rights, participate in decisions affecting them and are taken seriously.
3. Families and communities are informed and involved in promoting child safety and wellbeing.
4. Equity is upheld and diverse needs respected in policy and practice.
5. People working with children and young people are suitable and supported to reflect child safety and wellbeing values in practice.
6. Processes to respond to complaints and concerns are child focused.
7. Staff and volunteers are equipped with the knowledge, skills and awareness to keep children and young people safe through ongoing education and training.
8. Physical and online environments promote safety and wellbeing while minimising the opportunity for children and young people to be harmed.
9. Implementation of the national child safe principles is regularly reviewed and improved.
10. Policies and procedures document how the organisation is safe for children and young people (AHRC, 2018, p. 6).

The AHRC provides guidance for organisations to understand and build capacity to implement the National Principles, including with a [self-assessment tool](#) and [e-learning modules](#).

National Quality Framework

The National Quality Framework (NQF) is a national initiative developed by the COAG in 2012. It is aimed at providing a nationally consistent regulatory system for improving and maintaining high quality education and developmental outcomes for Australian children in the ECEC sector. The scheme is administered by ACECQA and includes a national law spelling out the standards for care and early childhood across Australia. This is supported by regulations outlining the operational requirements for organisations in the sector.

The NQF regulates both private and public ECEC services. These services are subject to the same legal obligations under the NQF and relevant state/territory legislation, including inter-related child safeguarding mechanisms such as information sharing and mandatory reporting (ACECQA, 2023).

A recent independent review of the National Quality Framework Child Safety arrangements found the scheme was robust and operating as intended. However, a number of recommendations were made to strengthen these safeguards, including enshrining 'child safe culture' in Quality Area 7 and requiring all staff, regardless of roles or service types, to notify their Approved Provider of a change in status to their WWCC or teacher registration/accreditation obligations (ACECQA, 2023).

National Standards for Working with Children Checks

In 2019, the Commonwealth Government and state and territory Attorney-Generals endorsed the *National Standards for Working with Children Checks* (the National WWCC Standards). These were created in response to the 2015 Working with Children Checks Report published by the RCIRCSA which called for national consistency and for specific restrictions (RCIRCSA, 2015). Although these are societal level standards (i.e. implemented nationally for a broad

audience), they are discussed [below](#) in the context of more specific, organisational level prevention efforts.

Community and organisational level regulatory prevention efforts

Key takeaways

- Organisations in the ECEC sector should have consistent guidelines that prioritise a culture of safety and risk management based on situational prevention of CSA.
- The Moore Centre for the Prevention of CSA has produced a comprehensive guide to preventing and responding to CSA, outlining eight key practices.
- It is vital to prioritise creating a culture of safety in organisations, rather than just implementing protocols.
- Quality training and education about CSA and prevention is important for staff of organisations, as well as children and parents.
- Supervising and monitoring adult–child interactions is critical, but practical measures should complement fostering a culture that prioritises the safety of children.
- In Australia, each jurisdiction requires that people working in children-facing organisations have a current WWCC; however, these approaches differ.
- International screening schemes may address some of the challenges faced by WWCC models in Australia, including accessing a broad scope of information and detecting offending overseas.
- Information sharing schemes are imperative for the early identification and proactive prevention of CSA. Information-sharing provisions can vary significantly across Australian jurisdictions.
- Within Australia, this report suggests Victoria offers the most comprehensive framework for addressing barriers to information sharing and promoting the safety of children in Australia, which incorporates the Child Information Sharing Scheme (CISS).
- Elements of international information-sharing schemes may strengthen safeguarding and CSA prevention in Australia by promoting practices such as local collaboration to promote safeguarding
- Reportable conduct schemes support CSA prevention by establishing mandatory reporting duties for workers in occupations that interact with children. Such reporting obligations have been shown to improve CSA identification.
- The existing reportable conduct schemes in NSW, WA, ACT, Tasmania and Victoria and the Australia-wide mandatory reporting obligations in Australia are all considered strong in international comparisons. A review found that NSW offers the most comprehensive Australian reporting scheme for promoting the safety of children.
- In Australia, some jurisdictions are either in the process of implementing (QLD) or still have not enacted a formal reportable conduct scheme (SA, NT).

Guidelines for organisations that work with children

Some organisations provide discrete guidelines to shape understandings, attitudes and behaviours towards protecting children, based on the unique context and needs of the organisation. These guidelines often build on and overlap with the fundamental materials that exist to guide the safety of children at a societal and structural level (discussed [above](#)).

The following guideline is a particularly promising example to consider because it specifically and comprehensively addresses CSA in ECEC and other youth-facing contexts rather than child maltreatment more broadly.

The Moore Centre USA

The Moore Centre for the Prevention of CSA at the John Hopkins School of Public Health in the USA has drafted a comprehensive guide for *Preventing and Addressing Child Sexual Abuse in Youth Serving Organizations* (Letourneau et al., 2020). It was prepared following an extensive review of literature around best practice prevention, which identified the following 8 critical practices.

Element	Explanation and examples
1. Focus on child wellbeing and safety above all else	<p>This practice involves instilling an organisational culture dedicated to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> treating child wellbeing and safety as paramount developing caring and professional relationships with children, with appropriate boundaries addressing boundary violations – including before they occur (through regular training, clear policies and supervision) providing consistent and exemplary leadership, policies and practices using child-focused language <p>The importance of creating a culture of child wellbeing and safety is discussed further below.</p>
2. Make training a foundational focus of organisational practices	<p>This practice involves training leaders, staff, volunteers, as well as parents, children and young people themselves – to equip people with the necessary knowledge, attitudes and awareness to best prevent CSA.</p>
3. Increase the monitoring of adult–child interactions	<p>This practice involves maximising visibility, through:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> designing physical spaces that increase observability (e.g. using glass windows and half-walls) establishing regulations that increase transparency (e.g. having a greater number of staff working with children and increasing staff dialogue with children and parents, i.e. providing opportunities for disclosure) monitoring current and prospective staff.
4. Collaborate with children and parents	<p>This practice involves taking children and young people seriously and providing them with opportunities for substantive input regarding decisions that affect them (consistent with the United Nation's <i>Convention on the Rights of the</i></p>

	<i>Child</i>), including decisions around their experiences of CSA.
5. Identify safety concerns and develop solutions to specific organisational CSA safety risks	This practice not only involves implementing organisation-wide risk management efforts that match baseline safety elements (matching, for example, the National Principles discussed above), but more specific, current and place-based efforts based on the unique environment of each ECEC service at any given time. These efforts should be affordable, practical and sustainable over time.
6. Increase evaluation and accountability within the organization	This practice involves developing, documenting and adhering to a safety plan, as well as evaluating the degree of that adherence. Evaluation methods can include surveys and interviews with people that use the organisation (i.e. the children and young people and their parents and carers), individual staff reviews, and periodic, independent oversight by an external provider.
7. Address harmful sexual behaviours in children	This practice involves recognising that children may engage in harmful sexual behaviours including sexual aggression, coercion and other predatory behaviours (National Office for Child Safety, 2021, citing RCIRCSA, 2017b). Organisations must be able to respond to this appropriately through education, training and reporting. <i>Outside the scope of this report – not discussed.</i>
8. Strengthen human resource management	<p>This practice involves:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ recruiting and selecting highly qualified candidates who display attitudes that disavow <i>all</i> forms of abuse – including emotionally, physically and sexually abusive behaviours ▪ training and socialising the workforce to embrace and prioritise the desired culture that assures the safety and wellbeing of children ▪ supervising and meeting with staff regularly to provide monitoring and feedback ▪ staffing the organisation with specialists responsible for detecting and responding to CSA ▪ adopting 'high commitment human resource management' (HRM), involving rigorous recruitment and selection, employment security, filling leadership positions from within the organisation and engaging in merit-based promotion, sharing information with employees and allowing them to formulate organisational practices, teamwork and minimising status differentials (Letourneau et al., 2020, p. 48).

Creating a culture of child wellbeing and safety

As The Moore Centre identified, a critical component of CSA prevention is focusing on the safety of children above all else by instilling an organisational culture that does not tolerate risks or violations to the safety of children (Letourneau et al., 2020).

Indeed, the dynamics, environment and culture of safety of an organisation can impact a potential perpetrator's attitudes and behaviours towards CSA (Guerzoni 2018; Kaufman et al. 2019) as well as responses to inappropriate behaviours (see e.g. Tasmanian Commission, 2023a, 2023b, 2023c, 2023d). It is therefore critical that ECEC organisations invest in creating a culture of safety (ACECQA, 2023; Artus & Niemi, 2016; Tasmanian Commission, 2023e). Such a culture may be guided by the child safe standards established at the Commonwealth level (the National Principles) as well as those at state and territory levels (see [Appendix C](#)). A culture of safety may include, for example:

- Robust safeguarding measures, including mandatory two-adult supervision, transparent documentation practices, and regular independent reviews of safety protocols (RCIRCSA, 2017e; Safe Kids Thrive, 2021) (such monitoring practices are discussed further [below](#)).
- Training and education – empowering staff to recognise and report concerns about inappropriate behaviour to avoid creating an environment where abuse can go unchecked (Briggs, 2017; Finch et al., 2021; Mathews, 2017).
- Empowering staff with the capability and willingness to report concerns. Studies have shown that, while there may be *awareness* of concerns (in 79% of the 43 cases reviewed), responses often vary in effectiveness, defined as the degree to which concerns are formally reported and acted upon in a timely and appropriate manner (Brown et al., 2022).

The Commission of Inquiry into the Tasmanian Government's Responses to Child Sexual Abuse in Institutional Settings 2023 (2023e) heard evidence from Professor Donald Palmer of University of California (USA), drawing on his expertise in organisational misconduct (including CSA). In his evidence, Professor Palmer expanded on the protective characteristics of a child safe culture, suggesting that an organisation that fosters a child safe culture would:

- offer professional development for staff about CSA including improving staff knowledge of situational offending, perpetration and the dynamics of CSA
- build a culture of willingness and knowledge about how to raise complaints and concerns
- prioritise and clearly articulate that the safety of children is the priority for the organisation in all its practices and processes, including recruitment and staffing as well as daily activities
- address the power imbalances and traditional social roles whereby adults have authority over children, as this can enable the dynamics of CSA

(Tasmanian Commission, 2023e; see also Letourneau et al., 2020).

Importantly, the Tasmanian Commission (2023e) concluded that implementing behavioural practices alone is insufficient to prevent CSA, and that a protective culture is important. This is an important note, given that, in their study involving 3 surveys that measure perceptions of safety within 'youth-serving' organisations, Russell, Higgins & Stewart (2019) found that early implementation of child safe standards (see [Appendix C](#)) typically involves organisations focusing on their compliance rather than their culture, which means staff may be relying on following certain clear rules rather than developing an autonomous skillset and capability they can use to protect the safety of children themselves (in addition to following the rules).

Russell & Higgins (2020) have identified difficulties with measuring whether an organisational culture is objectively 'safe'. They recommend a survey that measures the following expertise and capability to assess the overall capability of an organisation to embody a child safe culture.

(a) awareness of organisational policies, practices and safeguarding culture;

(b) confidence to take action when a child or young person voices a concern about their safety and wellbeing;

(c) attitudes in relation to children and young people's knowledge and access to safety education; and

(d) knowledge about the risks and prevention of child sexual abuse

(Russell & Higgins, 2020).

The importance of cultural safety for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children

Building a culture of safety should include a commitment to cultural safety. Cultural connection can enhance the wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children by fostering a strong sense of identity, high self-esteem and secure attachments (Murrup-Stewart et al., 2021). This can be a protective factor against abuse, particularly in the face of intergenerational trauma, which is a legacy of colonisation and past social policies including child removal. (RCIRCSA, 2017a).

Despite many government reforms, CSA remains prevalent and under-reported in some remote Aboriginal communities (Mace et al., 2014). Some barriers that prevent children from speaking out and engaging with protective services may include a lack of cultural safety and distrust in welfare and justice systems (Mace et al., 2014; RCIRCSA, 2017j).

Further discussion on collaborative practices and improved information sharing mechanisms to enhance cultural safety and safeguarding for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children can be found [below](#), in the Information sharing section and [below](#), in the Collaborative approaches to CSA prevention section.

Training and education

Providing ECEC staff with comprehensive training on grooming awareness and trauma-informed practices is crucial for early detection and intervention of CSA (Bravehearts, n.d.-b). However, training and education does not need to be limited to staff and is in fact particularly effective when it involves children and parents (Trew et al., 2021). For example, Body Safety Australia has designed [programs](#) that aim to empower not only educators, but also children and their families and carers with the knowledge and skills to recognise, respond to, and prevent CSA (Body Safety Australia, n.d.).

These programs often focus on teaching children about bodily autonomy, safe and unsafe touch, and how to seek help from trusted adults (Body Safety Australia, n.d.). This is consistent with the intention of child and parental education broadly: seeking to improve children's understanding of self-protective behaviours and controlling their own bodily integrity (Russell et al., 2024; Trew et al., 2021; Vosz, 2023). It is also consistent with overall advice that parents and caregivers maintain open communication with their children, reinforcing messages about body safety, and responding supportively to any disclosures or observed changes in behaviour (Clark & Nadeem, 2023).

Russell and colleagues (2024) describe two main approaches to child and parental education as a model of CSA prevention: the first is focused on engaging parents as the leading component of the intervention; and the second focuses on children as the main recipients of the intervention with parents as supportive elements (Russell et al., 2024). The involvement of

parents is centred on the concept of 'protective parenting' that sees active and engaged parenting as a mechanism to support child-focused CSA prevention (Russell et al., 2024).

Educational programs for parents have been successful in increasing knowledge, awareness and readiness to engage in behavioural strategies that may protect against CSA (Guastaferro et al., 2022; Nickerson et al., 2018).

Similarly, educational programs for professionals have been successful in increasing the knowledge, attitudes and preventative behaviours of those professionals (Rheingold et al., 2015; Rudolph & Zimmer-Gembeck, 2018).

Trew and colleagues' (2021) rapid evidence check into effective teaching strategies for CSA prevention found that it is difficult to identify the best content areas, pedagogy (instructional techniques) and delivery modes for teaching programs targeted at children and young people. However, the authors note that in ECEC contexts, educational programs require specialised features and appropriate cautions (Trew et al., 2021). They note that effective programs for children aged 2–8 years should incorporate the following features:

- having four or more sessions
- active parental involvement (while acknowledging, and dealing sensitively, with the reality that not all parents are a source of safety for children: see e.g. Salter et al., 2021)
- input from children, parents and professionals from a range of cultural backgrounds, to ensure culturally appropriate and sensitive content (see also Russell, Higgins & Posso, 2020)
- holistic implementation wherein discussions around CSA form part of sexuality education
- rigorous evaluations (Trew et al., 2021; see also Artus & Niemi, 2016).

Further, the Tasmanian Commission (2023b) found that good educational CSA prevention programs must:

- commence as early as possible, initially being delivered by parents
- include discussion of body parts, ownership of bodies and touching of bodies
- involve group interactions for school-age children, including with teachers
- use diverse and engaging resources and materials
- be delivered over long time frames with shorter sessions.

Expert Professor Kerryanne Walsh indicates that children and young people should have ongoing sexual abuse prevention education throughout their entire education, including in child care and kindergarten (Tasmanian Commission, 2023b). This aligns with Trew and colleagues' (2021) finding that knowledge and skills are retained better when reinforced over time.

Challenges with an educative approach to preventing child sexual abuse

The literature offers some criticism of an educative approach to CSA prevention in circumstances where it relies too heavily on self-protective strategies, in that this can put the burden on children to protect themselves from something they have the right to be protected from. For example, the literature cautions against idealising child-focused educational programs because:

- such programs conceptually frame children as carrying a burden to prevent CSA (Vosz et al., 2023) but prevention efforts must include a focus on perpetrators (Assini-Meytin et al., 2020)

- power differentials between adults and children may make it difficult for children to apply the skills they learn in child-focused educational programs in practice (Trew et al., 2021)
 - This can be particularly challenging for children in ECEC contexts, especially for children who are pre-verbal (Trew et al., 2021).

Further, despite the promise of educational programs (see e.g. Trew et al., 2021), the literature notes a lack of effective evaluations that can demonstrate whether, or how, such programs lead to effective CSA prevention (Rudolph et al., 2023; Trew et al., 2021; Vosz et al., 2023).

Monitoring

The CSA literature often stresses the importance of carefully supervising and monitoring adult–child interactions (see e.g. ACECQA, 2023; Assini-Meytin et al., 2021; Letourneau et al., 2020) which is based on situational prevention of CSA and aiming to deter offending. This involves, for example:

- designing physical spaces that increase observability (e.g. using glass windows and half-walls)
- establishing regulations that increase transparency and opportunities for people to notice and report problematic interactions
- reducing opportunities for adults and children to interact in isolated environments or convene in spaces lacking monitoring or supervision
- minimising adults' isolated access to children in close contact, such as when needing assistance dressing or at sleep times (Kaufman et al., 2019; Guerzoni 2018).

Monitoring practices must be strong to deter and limit perpetrators from the opportunity to perpetrate CSA (Guerzoni, 2018).

Challenges with monitoring to prevent child sexual abuse

In the sentencing remarks of the Griffith case, it was noted that the offender was not detected offending at some of the centres that had CCTV cameras present. This could be interpreted as an implication that CCTV may be a useful mechanism for increasing monitoring of child/adult interactions (*R v Griffith* [2024] QDC 207 [67]). However, there are drawbacks to any implication that CCTV may be an answer for child safeguarding approaches. The recent review of the National Quality Framework indicates that CCTV use in ECEC contexts generates privacy considerations for children, employees and other adults attending the centre, noting that many providers are unlikely to be aware of all relevant regulatory requirements around privacy and surveillance (ACECQA, 2023).

The ACECQA (2023) review noted that CCTV cameras may create the perception of a safer space through indicating increased monitoring, but also acknowledged that cameras alone do not prevent offending. They require consistent monitoring and review of footage to detect offending and can provide opportunities for the footage to be accessed inappropriately (ACECQA, 2023).

ACECQA's findings about CCTV are consistent with extensive criminological research around CCTV, which indicates its benefits are of most value in circumstances involving property crime, specifically in car parks (Piza et al., 2019). In the review report, ACECQA recommended (at recommendation 2.6) that ECEC services who install cameras must also have appropriate policies in place (ACECQA, 2023).

Ultimately, these findings indicate the importance of having multi-layered prevention efforts that are appropriately scaffolded. A scaffolded prevention approach involves practical protective measures (organisational policies, protocols and systematic safeguards) while also promoting healthy organisational cultures (Gerda, 2023; Kaufman et al., 2019; Russell & Higgins, 2020; Vosz et al., 2023).

This means that, for example, physical protocols like visible spaces and CCTV cameras must be accompanied by cultures that prioritise the safety of children and by training and support that provides workers with the skills to act in defence of children's safety (e.g. by making formal reports).

This approach incorporates both proactive prevention cultures and strategies as well as reactive response mechanisms, acknowledging the dynamic nature of risk management in ECEC contexts (Vosz et al., 20223).

Working with children checks

Screening checks are a critical component of preventing CSA (Assini-Meytin et al., 2020; Tasmanian Commission, 2023e). Screening checks involve assessing a potential staff member's credentials and history. In Australia, one example is a Working with Children Check (WWCC). A WWCC is a worker screening process designed to prevent individuals with any history of child-related, sexual or other dangerous offences or behaviours from having access to children during their employment. It is compulsory in each Australian jurisdiction for people working in children-facing organisations (including in ECEC contexts) to have a current WWCC.

Historically, each Australian jurisdiction only had access to information about criminal convictions when they were screening information from interstate about prospective employees to work with children. However, in 2013, COAG signed an agreement to ensure all governments would take necessary legislative and administrative actions to expand the range of criminal history information they provide to each other for the purposes of screening prospective employees in child-related settings: the *Intergovernmental Agreement for the National Exchange of Criminal History Information for People Working with Children* (federation.gov.au, 2013).

This Agreement means that screening units can now access information about spent convictions, current charges not yet heard in court, historical charges, and further information from police surrounding the circumstances of convictions or charges (including, importantly, whether children were involved) (federation.gov.au, 2013).

Cross-jurisdictional information sharing has been further expanded through the National Reference System (NRS) developed by the Commonwealth Department of Human Services and the Australian Criminal Intelligence Commission (ACIC) in 2019. The NRS receives, maintains and makes available key decisions provided by jurisdictions about WWCCs to assist in the continuous monitoring of check holders and applicants. However, ACECQA recommends further work is needed in each jurisdiction to better integrate operational processes and legislative changes into the NRS (ACECQA, 2023).

This report notes that ACIC is funded to pilot a National Continuous Checking Capability in 2025, which will provide real-time, cross-jurisdictional access to criminal history notifications (ACIC, 2024). This represents a major advancement towards a nationally integrated WWCC model.

National Standards for WWCCs

The RCIRCSA and other recent inquiries have recommended more universal and consistent standards for WWCCs (RCIRCSA, 2015; Queensland Family and Child Commission [QFCC], 2017). In response to the RCIRCSA, the Commonwealth Government and State and Territory Attorney-Generals endorsed the *National Standards for Working with Children Checks* (the National WWCC Standards) in 2019.

The National WWCC Standards provide a universal and consistent framework for all jurisdictions to implement. They ensure:

- universal parameters and exemptions for which professions require a WWCC
- safeguards for applicants working in protected professions while waiting on a WWCC application
- criminal history information analysed by the WWCC, including convictions, findings of guilt and charges
 - International criminal history information is to be self-disclosed
 - Police services are to provide screening agencies with criminal history information and any other available information relating to the circumstances of an offence
- risk assessment protocols and criteria for assessing risk in relation to different offences, detailing where applications should be granted or not
- a definition for relevant criminal history and findings of misconduct
- processing standards
- compliance and monitoring standards for breaches of WWCC regulations (Australian Government Response to the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse, 2019; see also Australian Government Response to the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse, 2018; RCIRCSA, n.d.).

Despite the National WWCC Standards, state and territory approaches to WWCCs still differ significantly (Child Family Community Australia [CFCFA], 2021).

Promising examples of working with children checks in Australia

There are ongoing, separate reviews into blue card systems in Australia i.e. the systems that monitor and regulate industries that interact with children (e.g. childcare, education, sport, cultural activities and foster care) to create safe environments – including through WWCCs. Therefore, only a few relevant jurisdictions are considered in this report.

Tasmania and Victoria have been selected due to recent scrutiny of their WWCC systems, and Queensland has been selected given its critical relevance to the present report. A snapshot of those WWCC schemes is outlined in [Appendix D](#) and the strengths and weaknesses are outlined in the table below. More detailed information follows.

Table 2: Strengths and weaknesses of worker screening schemes across Australian jurisdictions

Jurisdiction	Strengths	Weaknesses/Limitations
QLD	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Can assess a broader range of police information including non-charges or convictions, up to police discretion 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Difficult review process, with commentary on consequences for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander

		and regional populations (QFCC, 2017; 2024a)
TAS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Employers must notify the regulatory body when an employee with an RWVP (Registration to Work with Vulnerable People) check leaves the business 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The RWVP is applicable to workers in all industries involving vulnerable people, meaning child-specific measures are more difficult to integrate
VIC	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Links to Victoria's reportable conduct scheme, meaning reportable conduct can be assessed Separate volunteer and employee checks provide additional points of scrutiny and are easier to track for both regulators and businesses 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Unable to consider a broader range of police information beyond charges or convictions Difficulties highlighted with cross-jurisdictional information sharing Limited scope for what reportable conduct allegations can be considered

Queensland

In Queensland, there is a blue card system that involves:

- individuals applying for a blue card if they work in one of the categories of [regulated employment](#), *including ECEC contexts*
- applications checked against a National Reference System to determine whether another state or territory has made any adverse WWCC decisions against the individual or industry (e.g. negative notices, suspensions, interim bars or cancellations of prior WWCCs)
- applications checked through blue card checks to identify relevant prior history that may have a bearing on an individual's suitability for working with children
- ongoing daily monitoring, to ensure card holders comply with blue card requirements (Queensland Government, 2025b).

In 2017, this system was reviewed and the report, *Keeping Queensland's Children More Than Safe: Review of the Blue Card System*, presented 81 recommendations, with 16 outstanding (QFCC, 2017; QFCC, 2024a). Of those outstanding recommendations, the following are relevant to the ECEC sector.

- Develop an education and community awareness strategy for parents, carers and the community around the blue card system.
- Require applicants to disclose international convictions.
- Review the resourcing requirements necessary to support organisations in building capacity to be child safe (QFCC, 2024a).

The review also indicated that further consideration should be given to how the WWCC system could capture international criminal history information (a challenge discussed further [below](#)), and pointed to the existence of a criminal history exchange system with New Zealand and their police forces (QFCC, 2024a; CFCA, 2021).

This report forms part of the wider System Responses to Child Sexual Abuse Review, which includes in its terms of reference a consideration of the blue card system alongside other child protection policies and measures. (QFCC, 2025b; 2025c). The Review's terms of reference also include consideration of how Griffith's offending between January 2003 and August 2022 may have been prevented or identified earlier and responded to more effectively had it occurred with the current systems that are in place to better safeguard children (QFCC, 2025c).

Media reporting suggests that, in the *Griffith* case, allegations made to police were not brought to the attention of blue card services, despite their ability to consider police information when

renewing blue cards. The media proposes that this may be due to the allegations possibly not reaching the threshold of severity for the Queensland Police Service (QPS) to do so (Nolan, 2023). This potentially illustrates that protocols, procedures and regulations themselves may not be enough to address CSA. It emphasises the importance of developing a [culture that prioritises the safety of children](#) and empowers people with the awareness, willingness and skills to prevent CSA by passing on relevant information through existing structural channels (including the blue card system).

Tasmania

In Tasmania, there is a [Registration to Work with Vulnerable People](#) (RWVP) system that involves:

- registration by anyone who works or volunteers with vulnerable people, including children, in the context of [‘regulated activities’](#), *including ECEC contexts*
- registration applications undergoing background checks and risk assessment, to assess historical experiences that may have a bearing on an individual or industry’s suitability for working with children
- continuous monitoring of registered individuals – aided by Tasmania Police, Child Safety Services and others who share information with the RWVP Scheme
- prohibition of anyone who is found to pose an unacceptable risk of harm when working or volunteering with vulnerable people, including children, in regulated activities (Department of Justice, Tasmania, 2025a).

The RWVP scheme was investigated within the Tasmanian Commission’s (2023e) Report which noted opportunities to strengthen the RWVP scheme and advised (under Recommendation 18.12) that:

- legislation or regulations should provide guidance to the Registrar of the RWVP scheme as to the factors to consider when conducting risk assessments under the RWVP scheme
- this statutory guidance should also clarify how the assessment of unacceptable risk should be undertaken – in recognition that it is a predictive exercise (involving tendency)
- once the Registrar of the RWVP scheme determines that a person poses an unacceptable risk, that person’s registration must be refused, suspended or cancelled.

Victoria

In Victoria, there is a [WWCC scheme](#) that involves:

- registration by [qualified persons](#), *including people working in ECEC contexts*
- applications being assessed against criminal records, relevant professional conduct (recorded through the Victorian Institute of Teaching, the Suitability Panel under the *Children, Youth and Families Act 2005* (Vic) and the Reportable Conduct Scheme), and other relevant legislative requirements (Victorian Government, 2025b).

The Victoria Ombudsman investigated the WWCC scheme in 2022 after a failure to reject a WWCC application from a youth worker who was under investigation for multiple sexual offences and child protection concerns interstate (Glass, 2022). The investigation report determined that there were organisational lapses in screening workers, as the youth worker had successfully lied about past work experience and qualifications obtained interstate (Glass, 2022). The investigation noted the need for a wider scope of information for WWCC registrations, including any police information or ongoing investigations about an individual notwithstanding a formal finding (Glass, 2022).

Promising international examples of working with children checks

A snapshot of some of the promising WWCC schemes that exist overseas are outlined in [Appendix D](#) and the strengths and weaknesses are outlined in the table below. These international WWCCs schemes were selected for their perceived efficacy. Additionally, these models have all undergone some form of post-implementation review. More detailed information follows.

Table 3: Strengths and weaknesses of worker screening schemes from overseas jurisdictions

Jurisdiction	Strengths	Weaknesses/Limitations
Republic of Ireland	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provides some international screening Can access information on non-conviction/charges Encourages the creation of sector-specific disqualifying offences or information 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Large administrative burden on the Garda (police) Different standards on disqualification between professional membership bodies
UK	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Empowers local police forces to provide any/all relevant information even where no findings exist Deeply ties into the UK local information sharing model (see below) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provides no international screening Although organisations are liable for hiring individuals with certain disclosures, the lack of decision-making by the Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) may result in high-risk individuals working in the ECEC sector
NZ	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Includes a mandatory safety checking system for organisations to follow Provides some international screening Can include any relevant police information according to police discretion Encourages detailed record-keeping on employees 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The disclosure system means final hiring decision making is with organisations, meaning high-risk individuals may still find work in the ECEC sector. These organisations however are required to bar individuals with certain offences In most circumstances, organisations are unable to share risk assessment information with each other Volunteers do not need to be screened

Republic of Ireland

In Ireland, there is a vetting process ('Garda Vetting') for all people doing [relevant work](#) with vulnerable people, including children. This vetting is operated by the National Vetting Bureau in An Garda Síochána (Garda), Ireland's National Police and Security Service. Vetting is managed through a profession-relevant vetting provider. For the ECEC profession, vetting is primarily managed by [Early Childhood Ireland](#) (An Roinn Leanaí, Míchumais agus Comhionannais, Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth, Ireland, 2025). However, not all ECEC workers are members of Early Childhood Ireland and may be subject to the regulations of other membership bodies.

Early Childhood Ireland automatically deems people who are subject to certain disclosures through Garda Vetting as unsuitable for employment in the sector. These disclosures include:

- dishonesty in the application and/or Garda Vetting Form
- charges or convictions of:

- a crime related to the ill treatment or neglect of children, minors or other vulnerable people
- drug and/or alcohol related charges, especially if children were involved
- ownership, possession, production or distribution of CSAM
- public disorder and/or assault
- damage to public property
- other offence that in the organisation’s opinion deems the applicant unfit to work with Early Childhood Ireland, such as crimes of deception, fraud or domestic violence
- being known to child protection services due to concerns around suitability for working with children
- a confirmed finding of child abuse or neglect (Early Childhood Ireland, 2023).

Alongside the above types of information, Garda Vetting may also consider a statement of any ‘specified information’, meaning information about an applicant concerning a finding or allegation they caused harm to another person received by the National Vetting Bureau from the Garda or a Scheduled Organisation. Specified information can include anything that may point to the applicant presenting a potential risk to children (An Garda Síochána, 2016).

We did not encounter any evaluations of the Garda Vetting scheme, but it is notable that it has processed a large volume of applications and that, from January to mid-March 2025, 3% of Garda Vetting checks disclosed convictions, with an additional 10% leading to further investigations (An Garda Síochána, 2025).

United Kingdom

The [Disclosure and Barring Service](#) (DBS) is the UK’s worker screening policy for almost all professions working with vulnerable people, including children. The DBS is a government agency that helps employers make safer recruitment decisions by processing and issuing criminal record checks for people working or volunteering in roles involving vulnerable people (DBS, 2024).

The DBS scheme consists of different types of checks, depending on the role an individual has applied for. These include:

- a basic DBS check, which shows unspent convictions and conditional cautions
- a standard DBS check, which shows the same as a basic check as well as spent convictions and adult cautions from the Police National Computer
- an enhanced DBS check, which shows the same as a standard check as well as any additional information held by any local police considered relevant to the role
- an enhanced DBS check with barred list, which shows the same information as an enhanced check and indicates whether an applicant is on a barred list (DBS, 2024).

There are two barred lists: (1) people barred from working with children, and (2) people barred from working with vulnerable adults (DBS, 2024). Individuals are typically placed on one or both list/s if they have committed a particularly serious crime that suggests they will forever present a risk to children or vulnerable adults – including, for example, sexual offences (DBS, 2024).

Aside from basic checks, DBS checks must be requested by organisations who are listed with the DBS on behalf of potential applicants (DBS, 2024). It is illegal to request an enhanced DBS check with barred list unless a person’s role requires this level of information (i.e. because it involves a [regulated activity](#) working closely with children or vulnerable adults) (DBS, 2024).

ECEC contexts *do* require this level of information, specifically from the barred list for working with children (Ofsted, 2024).

The UK Government commissioned an independent review of the DBS regime in 2023. It found that the system was delivering its mission of helping employers and organisations to make safer employment decisions (Bailey, 2023). However, it provided 9 key recommendations to maximise the system's efficiency and effectiveness. Recommendations relevant for ECEC contexts included:

- the definition of 'regulated activity' relating to children be amended to remove the exemption for supervised activity (so that even supervised staff are subject to high level checks)
- consideration be given to amending the definition of 'regulated activity' with the aim of making it more easily understood by those who must apply it
- the Home Office and DBS to continue assessing if any further steps can be taken to mitigate the risk of individuals circumventing the DBS identification validation process – for example, by mandating that a birth certificate be provided as one of the identity documents
- DBS to assess the possibility of updating the DBS Update Service – an online subscription-based service that allows individuals to keep their DBS certificates up to date and allows organisations to check certificates online with an individual's consent (UK Government, 2025) – to enable employers to receive notification of any change to the status of the certificate (Bailey, 2023).

Notably, DBS checks are unable to access any criminal records or activity that has occurred overseas (Care Quality Commission [CQC], 2019). Although it is not mandatory for organisations to request police checks from overseas jurisdictions, this is a recommended approach to ensure the employment check is rigorous (CQC, 2019).

New Zealand

New Zealand has a [police vetting service](#) to assist organisations responsible for the care, protection or education of children elderly or disabled [sic] people to make assessments about people's suitability for a position with the organisation.

ECEC organisations must subject employees to a 'police vet' as part of a safety checking process (Te Tāhuhu o te Mātauranga, Ministry of Education, 2024b). Other components of safety checking include:

- confirmation of the person's identity
- a risk assessment to assess the risk the person would pose to the safety of children if employed or engaged as a children's worker (s 31)
- a chronological record of an individual's work history over the last 5 years, including a description of positions held
- an interview relating to the person's attitudes towards working with children, with questions designed to identify any potential risks they may pose to children
- contact with at least one referee from the person relating to the potential risk they may pose to children
- proof of any relevant professional memberships or licenses required for their role (Te Tāhuhu o te Mātauranga, Ministry of Education, New Zealand, n.d.; *Children's Act 2014*, s 31).

Safety checks are designed to be a detailed risk assessment mechanism for child-facing roles, including within the ECEC sector, and are completed and recorded by the employer. Employers

must have a written procedure detailing both the process and the purpose of safety checks, in addition to policies around how they check components for both existing and new workers. It is an offence for an organisation to employ a person as a children's worker without completing the safety check prior to the individual starting work with the organisation (Te Tāhuhu o te Mātauranga, Ministry of Education, New Zealand, 2024b).

A police vet of a prospective worker⁶ is undertaken by New Zealand Police on behalf of an employer. The police do not provide a judgement on whether an individual should be employed or not by the employing agency, and they are unable to give advice beforehand on which specific information will be released for a vetting request (New Zealand Police, n.d.). The police provide:

- a conviction history report
- infringement/demerit reports
- active charges or warrants for arrest
- charges that did not result in any conviction
- any interaction with New Zealand Police considered relevant to the role being vetted, including investigations that did not result in prosecution
- information regarding family harm primarily where the individual's home environment may place vulnerable persons at risk
- information subject to name suppression where that information is necessary for the purpose of the vet (New Zealand Police, n.d.).

The New Zealand Police vetting scheme was reviewed by the Independent Police Conduct Authority & Office of the Privacy Commissioner in 2016. The Commissioner provided recommendations leading to the creation of publicly available substantiation thresholds guiding which information is disclosed to different agencies, as well as an internal decision-making framework for vetting staff to follow (Independent Police Conduct Authority & Office of the Privacy Commissioner, 2016).

Challenges with using worker screening to prevent CSA

Detecting interstate movement

A recent Victorian inquiry flagged the interstate movement and employment of individuals under investigation in one jurisdiction as an area of concern (Glass, 2022). In these circumstances, a perpetrator may be able to continue engaging in abusive behaviours without detection (Quadara et al., 2015). National collaboration on worker screening is therefore an important component of an effective child safeguarding system.

Further worker screening harmonisation and cross-jurisdictional information sharing is being implemented through Measure 3 of the *First National Action Plan of the National Strategy* (National Office of Child Safety, 2021).

Detecting offending that occurs outside of Australia

The National Standards require applicants to self-disclose any international criminal history information, including new information arising after their application is submitted (Australian Government Response to the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual

⁶ Volunteers do not need to be police vetted or be subject to a safety check under the Act (Te Tāhuhu o te Mātauranga, Ministry of Education, New Zealand, 2024a).

Abuse, 2019). However, current WWCC models in Australia do not capture any international criminal history.

A model with access to a broader scope of international criminal history information would provide better screening for prospective ECEC employees who have lived overseas. Overall, the proportion of workers born overseas (30.5%) in the ECEC sector is comparable to that of all Australian occupations (28.5%). However, the number nears 40% for specific roles with significant child-facing components, such as family day care educators (~40%) and child carers (37.4%). Child carers are also one of the fastest growing roles in the ECEC sector. Further, this study is derived from the 2021 Census, which it notes may lead to the underrepresentation of foreign-born workers due to ongoing Covid-19 restrictions on entries (Jobs and Skills Australia, 2024).

Griffith committed offences against children in Italy while working there in 2013–2014 before returning to work in Australia. He had no reported contact with the Italian police (*R v Griffith* [2024] QDC 207 [22]) but even if he had, such activity would not have been discovered via the current WWCC model.

The Irish Garda vetting model has a mechanism for including checks on overseas employment. It requires all applicants who have lived in an overseas jurisdiction for any period greater than 6 months, after their 18th birthday, to provide a police check or similar document from these jurisdictions during the vetting process, and a failure to do so results in the application being rejected (*National Vetting Bureau (Children and Vulnerable Persons) Act 2012 and 2016*).

The New Zealand model similarly requires applicants to disclose a police check or (as a last resort) a statutory declaration with evidence of attempts to obtain a police check and statements as to no prior convictions, guilty findings or charges, covering the period in any jurisdiction they had lived in for over a year in the 10 years prior to the application (Te Tāhuhu o te Mātauranga, Ministry of Education, 2024a).

Accessing a broad scope of information

The Victorian Ombudsman and the Tasmanian Commission both recommend that WWCCs should have access to a broader scope of information on applicants (Glass, 2022; Tasmanian Commission, 2023e). The Victorian Ombudsman specifically recommended that WWCCs should be empowered to ‘obtain and consider any information that may be relevant to an applicant’s suitability to work with children’ (Glass, 2022, p. 80).

Obtaining a wider range of information is important given the gaps that can arise in police reports and due to possible lapses in proactive information sharing between regulatory agencies and child-facing organisations. According to media reports, at least three reports were allegedly made to the Queensland Police Service (QPS) regarding Ashley Paul Griffith since 2009 (Nolan, 2025; *Griffith*), but only one of these reports reached the threshold required to culminate in an investigation, and this investigation was ultimately dropped (*Griffith* [51]). Indicative media reporting alleges that none of the reports were referred to blue card services and that QPS states these reports did not reach the threshold to do so (Nolan, 2023), meaning this information may not have been available to be considered in any renewal or potential review of his blue card.

Establishing alerts for important information

The Tasmanian Commission (2023e) found that the threshold evidentiary requirements for a reassessment of a RWVP are too high, leading to insufficient reviews for workers who have some history of suspicious behaviours.

This finding is also relevant for Queensland, given none of the allegations against Ashley Paul Griffith appear to have been referred to blue card services – potentially indicating that the threshold for information to be considered relevant for the blue card system’s attention is too high.

Reliance on historical instances of abuse

The literature notes that worker screening may have a limited influence on preventing the broader problem of CSA (i.e. beyond the *Griffith* case), given a study from 2001 which found that many perpetrators have no known history of sexual offending prior to their first offence and therefore would not be captured during WWCC screening (Smallbone, 2017, citing Smallbone & Wortley, 2001; see also Assini-Meytin et al., 2020). As explained earlier, the motivation for some perpetrators to engage in CSA arises *during* their involvement with an organisation and therefore may not be captured by any pre-employment measures (Smallbone, 2017). This limitation is an inherent weakness of worker screening, as it is impossible to screen for potential future behaviours. An overreliance on WWCCs as a universal preventative system without an understanding of this limitation has been identified as a more serious issue (QFCC, 2017; RCIRCSA, 2015).

What do best practice WWCCs look like?

Access to information about historical allegations

A best practice WWCC model should have a strong and proactive review system, where once a certain number of allegations are made against an individual or the severity of the reports reaches a certain level – even when the individual allegations or reports were deemed as having too little evidence to formally investigate – their WWCC is immediately placed under review.

ACECQA’s 2023 review of Australia’s child safety arrangements recommended the creation of a secure mechanism for regulatory authorities to record and share information about ‘persons of interest’ who may be subject to unsubstantiated allegations, or potential concerns for the safety, health or wellbeing of children, with other regulators. A similar recommendation was made following the review of the Tasmanian Education department’s response to CSA, i.e. to ensure data collection of all allegations of CSA, whether substantiated or not (Smallbone & McCormack, 2021).

Such an information register would need to be linked to the WWCC system to facilitate the level of proactivity required for best practice. This would enable screening processes to flag and scrutinise individuals who have not yet offended but present a reasonable and significant risk of offending, or individuals who have already offended but with little or insufficient compelling evidence.

Creating an information register to record unsubstantiated and/or weak allegations (i.e. with limited evidence) can raise concerns around privacy. Therefore, significant protections would need to be in place for employees to avoid data being released in case of malicious or other reports.

Access to extensive information from police records

A best practice WWCC model should also give police the power to disclose a sufficiently wide range of information to facilitate informed decision making by regulators.

The UK DBS model allows for greater discretion among relevant local police forces in disclosing information for applicants to high-risk professions, including ECEC. Police forces and law enforcement agencies can provide any information on file, including allegations, investigations or any court orders to the DBS if it is deemed by the Chief of Police or the agency to be relevant to the applicant's desired profession and position (DBS, 2021).

Although the effectiveness of this model is subject to police force attitudes towards, and understanding of, CSA and the importance of allegations (see also the section [above](#) about a culture of safety), it can lead to greater scrutiny of individuals with some suspicious behaviours, even where no formal investigation has occurred.

Access to information from overseas

The screening of workers who may have offended or displayed concerning behaviours overseas is also an important element of an effective WWCC scheme. Currently, the Commonwealth Government allows for approved agencies to undertake limited information sharing with New Zealand Police (The Beehive, 2015; CFCA, 2023), and further collaborative criminal record sharing for WWCCs is being explored at the federal level (QFCC, 2024a).

The Irish and New Zealand models allow for more extensive information to be gathered from overseas. Both models require applicants to provide a police check or a similar formal document that indicates their criminal history in any jurisdiction they lived in for a significant period prior to their application for a WWCC/equivalent (*National Vetting Bureau (Children and Vulnerable Persons) Act 2012 and 2016*; Te Tāhuhu o te Mātauranga, Ministry of Education, 2024a).

A similar approach could provide a greater prohibitive barrier for individuals who have offended or otherwise come to the attention of police forces internationally.

Built in reviews and evaluations

A best practice WWCC scheme should mandate regular and in-depth evaluations to proactively identify weaknesses and continue to adapt to best practices in worker screening. In Australia, only 4 states have conducted formal evaluations of their WWCC schemes – the 2017 Queensland Blue Card Review (QFCC, 2017), the 2019 Auditor-General report in WA (Office of the Auditor-General Western Australia [OAG WA], 2019), the 2022 Victorian Ombudsman report (Glass, 2022) and the 2023 Tasmanian Commission (2023e). However, only the Blue Card Review (QFCC, 2017) and the Auditor-General report (OAG WA, 2019) are solely dedicated to reviewing a WWCC scheme.

Ireland's Garda vetting scheme has not been publicly evaluated but is currently being reviewed in relation to re-vetting requirements (O'Callaghan, 2025). The New Zealand Police vetting scheme however was evaluated in 2016 (Independent Police Conduct Authority & Office of the Privacy Commissioner, 2016), as was the UK DBS scheme in 2023 (Bailey, 2023).

The 2017 Blue Card Review further highlights that a significant proportion of submissions supported regular reviews of the WWCC legislation, noting that Blue Cards had not been reviewed between their introduction in 2001 and 2017 (QFCC, 2017). A best practice WWCC scheme should mandate regular and in-depth evaluations to proactively identify weaknesses and to continue to adapt to best practices in worker screening.

Information sharing

Information sharing between practitioners, local services and those who work with children is crucial for the early identification and proactive prevention of CSA (RCIRCSA, 2017i; SafeLives,

2019). Organisations may hold relevant information about risks and/or historical incidents of inappropriate conduct that, when combined with other sources, provides a clearer picture of risks to children (Department of Justice, Tasmania, 2023b). This can reduce the burden on the children involved in those incidents by limiting the need for repeated interviews, reducing inconsistent statements,⁷ and avoiding re-traumatisation (ACT Ombudsman, 2020).

No single institution collects all the necessary information or has all the appropriate tools to adequately protect children in [child-facing] sectors, and so the information collected must be shared to ensure an effective response

(Adams & Lee-Jones, 2016).

Failure to share information in a timely and effective manner can have serious consequences for the health, wellbeing and safety of children. For example, it may enable perpetrators to continue posing risks to children by remaining in institutions where they have access to them and moving between different institutions, including across jurisdictions (RCIRCSA, 2017i).

Promising examples of information sharing from Australia

Unlike for WWCC, there are no national standards or guidelines that indicate best practice for information sharing in Australia. However, all Australian jurisdictions now have laws that enable entities to share information relevant to children's safety and wellbeing. Common strengths include:

- Wide-reaching information sharing expectations or requirements for information sharing entities (ISEs).
- Strongly encouraged or mandated information sharing.
- Clear prioritisation of a child's wellbeing and best interests over confidentiality, privacy rights or the need for consent prior to sharing information. This allows organisations to raise concerns and exchange vital information without fear of liability.

However, WWCC schemes often encourage consent to be properly considered whenever safe and where practicable (see e.g. *Child Protection Act 1999* (Qld) s 159B (g) (i)(ii)).

A snapshot of the information-sharing schemes related to the safety of children that exist in each Australian state and territory are outlined in [Appendix E](#). Their strengths and weaknesses are outlined in the table below and more details about the exemplary Victorian scheme follows.

Table 4: Strengths and weaknesses of information sharing schemes across Australian jurisdictions

Jurisdiction	Strengths	Weaknesses/Limitations
ACT	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Cross-border consistency with NSW, which aims to prevent childcare workers from exploiting jurisdictional differences (ACT Government, n.d.) ▪ Mandates information sharing upon receiving a valid request 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Limited to reportable conduct bodies, excluding a broader range of organisations responsible for the safety of children and child wellbeing (RCIRCSA, 2017i) ▪ Limits information sharing between reportable conduct bodies to 'reportable conduct information', excluding broader information

⁷ It is important to note that it is *normal* for statements to have some inconsistencies, due to the fallibility of memory generally (Rydberg, 2017) and specific difficulties recalling memories in a linear fashion, particularly for people who are affected by trauma (Franklin, Bouffard, Goodson & Garza, 2023).

Jurisdiction	Strengths	Weaknesses/Limitations
		<p>related to the safety of children and child wellbeing (RCIRCSA, 2017i)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Cross-jurisdictional information sharing is not supported (ACT Ombudsman, 2020)
NSW	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Information-sharing provisions apply to a wide range of government and non-government agencies, organisations and service providers ▪ Mandatory information sharing between prescribed bodies upon a valid request ▪ Helped to 'set aside the privacy debate' and had led to a significant increase in information sharing compared to before its implementation (RCIRCSA, 2017i) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Prescribed entities sometimes struggled to obtain necessary information from other prescribed bodies, facing individual, institutional and cultural resistance to information sharing (RCIRCSA, 2017i)
NT	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Mandates information exchange between a broad range of professions (AIS) upon a valid request ▪ Not required to get consent to share information, although it is good practice to do so when practicable (Northern Territory Government, 2023) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Cross-jurisdictional information sharing is not supported (Northern Territory Government, 2023) ▪ No independent oversight
QLD	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Broad information sharing provisions encourage proactive information sharing ▪ Not required to get consent in certain circumstances 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Aside from specific requests, the scheme largely enables rather than mandates information sharing ▪ Cross-jurisdictional information sharing is not supported ▪ No independent oversight
SA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Not required to get consent to share information in certain circumstances, although it is good practice to do so when practicable (Department for Child Protection, South Australia, 2019) ▪ Interjurisdictional information sharing is supported 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Does not require information to be shared upon receiving an appropriate request (RCIRCSA, 2017i) ▪ No dedicated information sharing scheme – information sharing is split across various guidelines and Acts which may cause confusion ▪ No independent oversight
TAS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Under the <i>Children, Young Persons and their Families Act 1997</i> (Tas) (CYPTF Act), failure for required ISEs to provide information to the Secretary will incur a fine not exceeding five penalty units (CYPTF Act, s 53B). This clear legal consequence may promote compliance and accountability ▪ The Independent Regulator oversees the Framework, helping ensure organisations fulfil their obligations (Department of Justice, Tasmania, 2023a) ▪ In the first few months of the Framework's introduction, surveyed organisational leaders reported changes such as implementing information sharing strategies and updating information tools and websites, to support compliance (Department of Justice, Tasmania, 2024) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Conversely, early review findings noted challenges such as organisational resistance to change, limited resources and a need for more practical tools and templates (Department of Justice, Tasmania, 2024) ▪ Provisions for mandated information sharing for relevant purposes are not as broad as in provisions/schemes from other jurisdictions

Jurisdiction	Strengths	Weaknesses/Limitations
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Both schemes mandate information sharing under certain circumstances Interjurisdictional information sharing is supported 	
VIC	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Mandates information sharing when legal requirements of the scheme are met Not required to get consent in certain circumstances, therefore, child protection is prioritised over privacy (Victorian Government, 2024c) Under CISS, an Information Sharing Entity (ISE) is required to record the prescribed details of its collection, use and disclosure of confidential information in accordance with the <i>Child Wellbeing and Safety Act 2005</i> (Vic), s 41ZC CISS explicitly prioritises cultural safety for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people (Victorian Government, 2024c) when undertaking information requests The Act requires independent reviews of CISS within 2 and 5 years of commencement (ss 41ZN–41ZO) The 5-Year Review found significant improvement in the willingness to share information, reflecting a positive cultural shift, that has enhanced organisations' ability to support child wellbeing and safety (Victorian Government, 2024a) CISS strengthened collaboration and coordination among ISEs, fostering a shared responsibility for child wellbeing and safety. The Two-Year Review highlighted how peak bodies joined working groups to build new relationships and co-develop resources for their workforces (Victorian Government, 2024a) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The 5-Year Review reported instances where ISEs shared more information than necessary, likely due to uncertainty about what was appropriate to share in different circumstances (Victorian Government, 2024a) The decentralised oversight model could have unintended consequences on vulnerable populations if guidelines regarding cultural safety are not followed (Victorian Government, 2024a) Cross-jurisdictional information sharing is not supported
WA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Does not distinguish between children's safety in different contexts – e.g. institutional or familial (RCIRCSA, 2017i) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Doesn't allow for broad information sharing – e.g. doesn't allow information sharing between authorised entities (RCIRCSA, 2017i) The current provisions may not extend to all private ECEC services if they don't fall under the defined category Prescribed entities are not explicitly required to share information upon a valid request Cross-jurisdictional information sharing is not supported

Victoria

In response to the Victorian Royal Commission into Family Violence, the state introduced several reforms, including the Child Information Sharing Scheme (CISS). CISS enables ISEs to share confidential information in a timely and effective manner to promote children's safety or

wellbeing. It operates alongside the Family Violence Information Sharing Scheme (FVISS) and Child Link, with the Multi-Agency Risk Assessment and Management Framework (MARAM) guiding information sharing in contexts involving family violence (FV) (Victorian Government, 2024a). Child Link and MARAM are discussed further [below](#), in the *Collaborative approaches to CSA prevention* section.

CISS addresses key barriers to effective information sharing, such as legal complexity and organisational resistance, that may have previously hindered opportunities for early intervention and contributed to adverse outcomes for children (Victorian Government, 2024a).

Aligned with the 2017 RCIRCSA recommendations, particularly for ECEC settings, CISS represents a national best-practice model. Its strengths include:

- **Expanded scope** – CISS broadens the circumstances under which prescribed ISEs can share confidential information, explicitly including ECEC services.
- **Proactive/mandatory sharing** – CISS encourages proactive information sharing; ISEs must share relevant information upon request if legal requirements are met, unless an exception applies (*Child Wellbeing and Safety Act 2005* (Vic), s 41W).
- **Legal clarity** – The *Child Wellbeing and Safety Act 2005* (Vic) overrides certain secrecy provisions to enable lawful sharing of confidential information (Victorian Government, 2024c) and protects individuals who act in good faith to safeguard children (s 41ZB).
- **No consent required** – Information relevant to a child's safety, welfare or wellbeing can be shared without consent (Victorian Government, 2024c).
- **Accountability** – There are significant penalties for the misuse or improper disclosure of information (*Child Wellbeing and Safety Act 2005* (Vic), s 41ZL).
- **Recordkeeping** – An ISE must record the required details of its collection, use and disclosure of confidential information (*Child Wellbeing and Safety Act 2005* (Vic), s 41ZC).
- **Built in evaluation** – Mandated independent reviews of the scheme's operation within 2 and 5 years of its commencement (*Child Wellbeing and Safety Act 2005* (Vic), s41ZN and s41ZO).
- **Support for professionals** – Professionals receive practical tools, templates, and guidance to navigate the scheme (Victorian Government, 2024d).
- **Cultural safety for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people** – The scheme explicitly embeds cultural safety as a core aspect of child wellbeing. It requires ISEs to actively value and respect a child's Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander identity (*Child Wellbeing and Safety Act 2005* (Vic), s 41U; Victorian Government, 2024c). Demonstrating a strong commitment to culturally safe information sharing, the 5-Year review evaluates the impact of CISS on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities (Victorian Government, 2024a).

Operating in conjunction with other Victorian information sharing schemes and digital tools, CISS forms a key component of a comprehensive, integrated framework. It has significantly reduced siloed practices and fostered a stronger culture of information sharing and collaboration among relevant entities. By enabling the timely and direct exchange of information across a broad range of prescribed bodies, CISS strengthens the prevention, identification and response to CSA in ECEC settings (Victorian Government, 2024a).

Promising international examples of information sharing

This report identified two promising information sharing schemes related to the safety of children that exist overseas, in the UK and Wales. The strengths and weaknesses of these schemes are outlined in the table below and more detailed information follows.

Table 5: Strengths and weaknesses of information sharing schemes from overseas jurisdictions

Jurisdiction	Strengths	Weaknesses/Limitations
UK	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> An individual's consent is not necessary to share their personal data when such disclosure is necessary to prevent harm A formal format and framework is provided to organisations to govern information sharing Arrangements exist through which the Police, Probation and Prison Services work together to manage risks posed by known perpetrators Local authorities, chief officers of police and clinical commissioning groups are required to form Safeguarding Partnerships (SPs), which nominate relevant agencies and then make information sharing arrangements between them SPs may require any person/organisation to provide them, any 'relevant agency' for the area or another person/organisation with specified information SPs must release a yearly public report to highlight their safeguarding and review actions There must be arrangements for independent scrutiny of the SP and of safeguarding actions in the local area Statutory agencies have a legal duty to share information for safeguarding purposes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The system is not mandatory There is no standardised nationwide system or format for information sharing It is not considered an offence to refuse a request for information sharing from an SP Coordination or handover between services is sometimes ineffective There is a lack of formal training for staff of ECEC institutions around information sharing
Wales	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Same legal framework encouraging information sharing as the UK (see above) Childcare centres must have a registered person prioritising the safety of children, a written child protection policy, and a trained staff member responsible for liaising with child protection agencies Local authorities have a duty to provide information, advice and assistance service to practitioners, including childcare providers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> There are currently no criminal sanctions for individuals who fail to report child abuse or fail to share information

The United Kingdom

Legal and policy framework

The *Data Protection Act 2018* and UK's General Data Protection Regulation permit organisations – including ECEC services – to share an individual's personal data without that individual's consent, provided this is necessary to protect vital interests, prevent abuse or harm, or uphold public safety (Information Commissioner's Office [ICO], 2021).

The UK Information Commissioner also provides a formal format and framework that organisations can use to govern any information sharing under the *Data Protection Act 2018* and the *General Data Protection Regulation* (UK) (GDPR) in their Data Sharing Code of Practice (ICO, 2021). There is no legal obligation for organisations to share information in the absence of a formal agreement, but having these agreements is strongly encouraged. The ICO's Code of Practice notes that 'it is good practice to have a data sharing agreement' (ICO, 2021).

The UK model also encourages:

- Inter-organisational Information Sharing Agreements (ISAs), which formalise data-sharing processes between agencies, specifying lawful bases, purposes, and security measures (NHS Counter Fraud Authority, 2023).
- Child Protection-Information Sharing (CP-IS), which flags vulnerable children in NHS systems, enabling real-time alerts for social workers and health professionals (Department for Education, UK, 2023a).
- Secure Data Environments (SDEs), which allow cross-jurisdictional analysis of anonymised data for population health planning. For example, the North West London SDE integrates GP, hospital, and social care records (North West Secure Data Environment, n.d.).

Further information sharing can occur through Multi-Agency Public Protection Arrangements (MAPPA), which is the set of arrangements through which the police, probation and prison services work together to manage risks posed by known perpetrators living in the community. These are primarily designed to assist agencies to better discharge their statutory obligations. Information shared under these arrangements includes information about known perpetrators, or about children and other vulnerable individuals deemed to be at risk from these perpetrators (UK Government, 2023; HM Inspectorate of Probation, n.d.).

Although childcare providers are not considered to have a duty to cooperate under MAPPA, they are considered Associate Agencies that may be included on a case-by-case basis where necessary. Information sharing between organisations and the police force occurs through this mechanism as well as through Local Safeguarding Partnership arrangements (UK Government, 2023).

Local safeguarding partnerships

In the UK, under the *Children's Act 2004*, local authorities (councils or other local government bodies), chief officers of police and clinical commissioning groups are required to form Local Safeguarding Partnerships (LSPs) (Department for Education, UK, 2023b). There are currently around 140 LSPs in the UK (Cogley et al., 2025). These partnership groups are then required by *The Child Safeguarding Practice Review and Relevant Agency (England) Regulations 2018* to nominate 'relevant' agencies, meaning those integral to child safeguarding, including ECEC agencies. SPs must then make further child abuse prevention and information sharing arrangements with these relevant organisations or agencies in their local regions.

A key recommendation of the *Working Together to Safeguard Children 2023 Statutory Guidance* was to more heavily integrate ECEC organisations into the multi-agency SP system (UK Government, 2023). Accordingly, 85% of SPs have taken steps to ensure the role of ECEC organisations is strengthened in these arrangements since 2023 (Cogley et al., 2025).

Safeguarding partners may require any person, organisation or agency to provide them, any 'relevant agency' for the area, or another person/organisation with specified information. This information should be information that enables and assists the SPs to safeguard and promote the welfare of children in their area. The person or organisation to whom the request is made must comply, or the SPs can take legal action against them. However, it is not considered an offence to refuse a request for information sharing. SPs are encouraged to establish further policies and procedures through the SP arrangement mechanism to support greater information sharing policies or procedures between relevant agencies (UK Government, 2023).

Transparency for safeguarding partnerships

All SP arrangements must be published in a public report, and SPs must release a yearly report to highlight their safeguarding and review actions. SP arrangement reports must include how SPs and safeguarding partners will collaborate, how all schools (including early years and childcare settings) will be included in the safeguarding arrangements, how safeguarding partners will share and use information and data, including processes and principles for sharing.

These arrangements should be updated at least yearly or whenever there are key changes, and all reports containing these arrangements must be sent to the Department of Education. Each SP must also ensure that there are arrangements for independent scrutiny of the partnership and of safeguarding actions in their local area, helping to ensure that their systems are accountable and transparent (UK Government, 2023). Currently, 94% of local areas have some form of independent scrutiny in place (Cogley et al., 2025). The form in which this independent scrutiny is best performed is up to each SP, but the possible mechanisms include multi-agency audits, reviews or multi-agency dashboards (UK Government, 2023).

Data sharing and legal obligations

Statutory agencies such as local authorities, the police, health services, and education providers have a legal duty to share information for safeguarding purposes, relying on the UK GDPR and *Data Protection Act 2018*, which allow sharing without consent if necessary to prevent harm (Department for Education, UK, 2023b; ICO, 2024). Charities like the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (NSPCC) are not statutory agencies but will refer safeguarding concerns to statutory bodies, triggering their legal duty to act and share information as required (NSPCC, 2020).

Future initiatives and reforms in the United Kingdom

The UK Government has committed to improving multi-agency information sharing by introducing a single unique child safeguarding identifier for children to bolster privacy, in addition to an information sharing duty that will provide a legal basis for organisations to share information for child safeguarding. There are additional proposals to utilise the NHS Number ascribed to each child as a common identifier to further improve interoperability between health and social care systems, although enhanced system linkages would be required (Home Office, 2025b).

Wales Child Safeguarding Information Sharing scheme

The Welsh child safeguarding information sharing model is similar to the UK model but provides further guidelines for organisations. The Welsh model is enshrined in the *Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014*. Wales has 6 local-level regional Safeguarding Children Boards that are responsible for managing child-facing agency information sharing, as well as broader child protection policy, procedure and guidance. Each board must include all local authorities, chief officers of police, local health boards, NHS trusts and providers of probation services in their regions (NSPCC, 2024a).

The Llywodraeth Cymru (Welsh Government) has created a [*Working Together to Safeguard People: Code of Safeguarding Practice*](#) document that indicates the principles required for a successful safeguarding system, including child-serving organisations sharing appropriate information, and operating in a multi-agency and cooperative way (Llywodraeth Cymru, Welsh Government, 2022).

According to this Code of Practice, child-facing services (including ECEC organisations) must develop safeguarding arrangements which include information-sharing protocols (in accordance with the UK's data protection legislation) (Llywodraeth Cymru, Welsh Government, 2022).

Local authorities in Wales have a duty to provide relevant information under the *Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014*. This information is to be made readily available to practitioners, including in ECEC contexts. However, there are currently no criminal sanctions for individuals who fail to report child abuse or fail to share information. Any failure to report by a professional is referred to internal disciplinary processes or professional regulators (Foster, 2025).

Challenges with using information sharing to prevent child sexual abuse

Balancing human rights

A challenge in relation to information sharing is the tension between children's safety as the ultimate priority and an individual's rights to privacy (as protected in each jurisdiction) (Adams & Lee-Jones, 2016). It can be particularly difficult for individuals and organisations to understand how best to manage information across jurisdictions. This challenge, particularly where there are serious punitive measures in place to respond to breaches of privacy, can contribute to organisational culture that is risk averse when it comes to sharing information (Adams & Lee-Jones, 2016).

The absence of a consistent or universal approach

Despite Australia's commitment to a shared national goal of protecting children from CSA (National Office for Child Safety, 2021), inconsistent laws across Australian jurisdictions can create fragmentation in the approach to using information sharing to advance this goal. There is an 'absence of a consistent and coherent national framework to manage risks of "persons of interest" including knowledge about how and when to share information about these persons both within and across jurisdictions' (ACECQA, 2023, p. 3).

When information-sharing provisions differ between jurisdictions, this inconsistency can impede timely and effective information exchange, largely due to confusion or uncertainty among professionals about their legal obligations (RCIRCSA, 2017i; see also RCIRCSA, 2017e). This can lead to a culture of anxiety and a reluctance to share (RCIRCSA, 2017e). Confusion can be

exacerbated by a lack of trust or limited understanding of different roles across sectors (RCIRCSA, 2017i; RCIRCSA, 2017e), as well as limited or inadequate education and training, resources, practical tools and templates (Department of Justice, Tasmania, 2024; RCIRCSA, 2017i).

The UK approaches to information sharing provide some guidance as to how fragmentation and confusion might be overcome. These approaches bring together clear, overarching guidance that map out the conceptual framework for best practice information sharing (at a [societal level](#)) together with place-based, local knowledge and mechanisms for information sharing in practice (e.g. through MAPPAs and SPs) (at a [community and organisational level](#)). This ensures child-facing organisations can each understand and aim for the same approach to information sharing, while focusing on applying that approach in practice in their immediate and unique context, with support that is close and readily accessible to them. However, this approach is not yet operating with total efficiency due to gaps in understanding, coordination and standards (see [below](#)).

Another model that may be useful for overcoming the lack of national consistency is Australia's Connect for Safety (CfS) platform. This is a national information-sharing platform that enables child protection authorities to identify when adults or children are known to authorities in other jurisdictions, prompting follow-up with the relevant authorities for further information (DFFH, 2022). Developing a similar platform or database that enables sensitive information to be shared in the ECEC sector to include 'persons of interest' could strengthen national coordination and risk management.

- The *Independent Inquiry into the Tasmanian Department of Education's Responses to Child Sexual Abuse* included a recommendation for such an information-sharing database specifically for recording allegations, concerns and incidents of CSA (Smallbone & McCormack, 2021). The recent ACECQA (2023) review of child safety arrangements made a similar recommendation, indicating the need for a mechanism to improve record keeping and monitoring of persons suspected of unsubstantiated CSA allegations.

Limited understanding or awareness

An independent analysis of case reviews of child abuse in the UK published by local safeguarding partnerships between 2017 and 2023 found the following notable weaknesses (NSPCC, 2024b).

- **Lack of effective coordination or handover between services:** This indicates the need for clear and concise processes and language, trust and support, transparent communication and greater follow ups and updates across agencies (NSPCC, 2024b).
- **Lack of understanding about where to refer risks:** Case reviews found that many professionals were unsure who or where to refer relevant information meaning even when risks were identified, some cases failed to progress to relevant authorities. This could indicate the need for the clear designation of communication partners (NSPCC, 2024b).
- **Absence of universal information sharing standards:** The review found that many professionals were constrained by the lack of a centralised or standardised information sharing system or platform. Some partners report communication issues with other agencies with incompatible electronic systems. This points to a universally compatible system being best practice for information sharing (NSPCC, 2024b).
- **Lack of staff training or awareness:** The review found that data protection legislation was often misinterpreted by staff, leading to privacy and data protection being prioritised

above sharing safeguarding information. ECEC institutions need to be formally trained and aware of their requirements in information sharing schemes (NSPCC, 2024b).

The Tasmanian Commission (2023e) similarly found a lack of publicly available guidance on the Tasmanian Government's framework for managing and sharing information on child safety matters.

Limited interjurisdictional sharing

Interjurisdictional sharing remains limited, often relying on informal cooperation. While some states like TAS and SA permit cross-border sharing, the lack of national alignment undermines effectiveness. In Victoria, for example, an inability to share information with interstate or Commonwealth bodies has impeded investigations (Department of Families, Fairness and Housing [DFFH], 2024). These gaps can allow critical information to fall through the cracks and enable perpetrators to exploit jurisdictional differences and continue posing risks to children (RCIRCSA, 2017i).

Limited oversight

The absence of independent oversight in most jurisdictions limits system-wide responses, as critical information may not be centrally coordinated and shared across all relevant services. Independent oversight may also address conflicts of interests that arise when institutions investigate their own staff (RCIRCSA, 2017e).

The lack of cultural safety for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples

Individuals' cultural safety is often overlooked – noting most frameworks do not embed it explicitly. Reviews such as Victoria's 5-Year CISS Review, highlight the lived experiences of Indigenous Australians who reported that information shared about them often served the interests of state authority and control rather than their care and wellbeing (Victorian Government, 2024a). Embedding cultural safety is essential to ensure information sharing supports, rather than harms, the communities it aims to protect (Victorian Government, 2024a).

What does best practice in information sharing look like?

The Victorian model

The present desktop review suggests that Victoria now offers the most comprehensive information sharing framework for promoting the safety and wellbeing of children in Australia, following reforms in response to the RCIRCSA 2017 findings. Key elements of Victoria's information sharing model, including:

- broadly mandating information sharing upon a valid request
- mandatory recordkeeping
- requirements to undertake a review of how the information-sharing scheme is operating.

An oversight body

Establishment of an independent oversight body, as exists in Tasmania (the Independent Regulator). Such a body can enhance accountability, ensure organisations meet their obligations to uphold children's safety and provide additional safeguards.

Multi-agency cooperation

An international model that could be drawn from is the UK's information-sharing framework. While the UK's framework system is not mandatory, the various collaborative systems within it

work to facilitate information sharing for child safeguarding purposes at an organisational level (UK Government, 2023), regional level (Department for Education, UK, 2023b; NHS England, n.d.) and local level (Cogley et al., 2025; UK Government, 2023).

The UK model presents a more unified and cohesively integrated legislative framework to encourage consistency and simplicity for potential information sharers, although there are still issues around the formatting of shared information and on the compatibility of inter-organisational systems (NSPCC, 2024b). Importantly, a best practice model of information sharing should provide clarity around both how to access and provide child safeguarding information, as well as information-sharing practices.

Interjurisdictional cooperation and standards

Information sharing should ideally involve interjurisdictional cooperation and alignment in terms of best practice standards and processes. However, there is currently no national Australian framework of this kind. In the absence of such a national framework, Queensland could consider learning and adopting standards or practices from other jurisdictions and cooperating interjurisdictionally on a discretionary basis – as Victoria Police have reportedly done to prevent CSE (Joint Committee on Law Enforcement, Parliament of Australia, 2023 citing Victoria Police, 2023).

Clear training, support and guidance

A best practice information-sharing scheme should be accompanied by training, support and guidance for the organisations bound by (or recommended to follow) it. This should aim to improve organisations' understanding of the scheme, give them practice tools to facilitate compliance, and set out clear chains of command and structured channels for the efficient flow of information. Greater clarity, and opportunities for support as needed, might overcome the existing culture of anxiety, reluctance and risk aversion to information sharing in some instances.

Built in reviews and evaluations

A best practice information-sharing scheme should mandate periodic and comprehensive evaluation of its operation. Such evaluation allows for ongoing improvement of systems and ensuring the scheme remains effective in safeguarding children.

While some Australian jurisdictions are required to review certain aspects of their child protection legislation or the entire Act itself, Victoria is the only one explicitly required to conduct independent review of their information-sharing scheme's operation within 2 and 5 years of its commencement. These reviews must consider adverse effects of the scheme and may include recommendations (*Child Wellbeing and Safety Act 2005* (Vic), s 41Zn and s 41ZO).

Reporting schemes

A key policy measure that governments have adopted to support prevention of CSA has been to adopt mandatory reporting duties for workers in certain occupations that interact with children – requiring workers to notify an independent oversight body about certain 'reportable'⁸ issues, including allegations, conduct or convictions (RCIRCSA, 2017e). Such reporting obligations have been shown to have a positive impact on identification of CSA (Mathews, Bromfield & Walsh, 2020).

The RCIRCSA (2017e) made a recommendation (7.9) that states and territories should introduce reportable conduct schemes along the lines of those which existed at the time in

⁸ 'Reportable' issues are defined differently in each of the jurisdictions that have implemented a reportable conduct scheme (see [Appendix F](#)).

NSW. This recommendation listed clear guidance on the elements that a reportable conduct scheme should include:

- an independent oversight body
- obligatory reporting by the relevant organisations' leadership
- clear definitions – including for 'reportable conduct' and 'employees'
- specific oversight powers
 - scrutiny of institutional systems for handling and responding to reportable behaviours or convictions
 - monitoring the progress of investigations and complaints by institutions
 - investigative powers
 - power to exempt some conduct as reportable
 - building capacity through training and education
 - requirement to report publicly on the operation of the scheme (RCIRCSA, 2017e).

Promising examples of reporting schemes from Australia

A snapshot of the reporting schemes that exist in each Australian state and territory is outlined in [Appendix F](#). The strengths and weaknesses of these schemes are outlined in the table below.

Table 6: Strengths and weaknesses of reporting schemes across Australian jurisdictions

Jurisdiction	Strengths	Weaknesses/Limitations
ACT	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Requires employers to perform an internal investigation with findings submitted to ACT Ombudsman 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Limited scope of coverage – organisations providing services to children not covered by the scheme include sporting clubs, private tutors, activity-based organisations, babysitting (ACT Ombudsman, n.d.)
NSW	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Regulated by the same entity as the Child Safe and WWCCs, allowing for simpler collaboration between these initiatives ▪ Provides an accessible and detailed Mandatory Reporter Guide that can guide decision-making (ChildStory, 2025) ▪ Heads of relevant entities must notify the Office of the Children's Guardian (OCG) within 7 days of becoming aware of reportable conduct ▪ Requires employers perform an internal investigation with findings submitted to the OCG ▪ Has an emphasis on proactive information sharing between the OCG and prescribed information-sharing agencies 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Requires the head of a relevant entity to provide an internal investigation of reportable conduct, which is difficult if they are the target of the allegation
NT	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Mandatory reporters include all adults in NT 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Broad mandatory reporter definitions may lead to fear or hesitation towards reporting if an individual believes they will be penalised for not reporting earlier

Jurisdiction	Strengths	Weaknesses/Limitations
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Most adult citizens may not be aware of how to report or to who, particularly without formal evidence Does not have a formal reportable conduct scheme
QLD	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Mandates reporting of a 'suspicion' of past, present or future CSA, lowering the evidential basis for a report 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Does not currently have a reportable conduct scheme (to be operational in July 2026)
SA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Department for Child Protection provides detailed guidelines for which behaviors must be reported by mandatory reporters 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Does not have a formal reportable conduct scheme No dedicated body for reports, as mandatory reports must go to Department for Child Protection
TAS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A reportable conduct scheme was implemented in 2024 with broad data collection, information-sharing and investigative powers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Low reporting thresholds need to be integrated into the state's reportable conduct scheme due to the need to create an environment conducive to reporting within organisations
VIC	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Heads of relevant entities must notify the Commission for Children and Young People (CCYP) within 3 business days of becoming aware of reportable conduct, with further information provided within 30 business days The reportable conduct scheme has been evaluated and is performing as intended (see below) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Requires the head of a relevant entity to provide an internal investigation of reportable conduct, which is difficult if they are the target of the allegation Most reports under the scheme are directed to Victoria Police.
WA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The reportable conduct scheme has been evaluated and is largely performing as intended (see below) Notifications have been increasing gradually since the scheme was implemented in 2023, indicating growing awareness 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Many organisational barriers related to internal policies and procedures are limiting the reportable conduct scheme Currently, under-reporting due to a lack of cultural readiness to report is limiting the efficacy of the reportable conduct scheme

Tasmania, Victoria and WA have produced some specific insights into reportable conduct schemes through inquiries and reviews conducted in those jurisdictions.

The Tasmanian Commission (2023e) noted the importance of incorporating low reporting thresholds into a reportable conduct scheme due to the need to create an environment conducive to reporting within organisations. Such an environment prioritises the safety of children and supplements the practical mechanisms and systemic infrastructure that safeguards children (as discussed [above](#)).

The 2024 *Review of Victoria's Reportable Conduct Scheme* highlighted numerous positive findings about the scheme.

- From the introduction of this scheme to 30 June 2022, 55%–60% of all reports were forwarded to Victoria Police.
- Structurally, the scheme was essentially operating as intended.
- Extensions to the Victorian scheme have increased or are likely to increase notifications. Further expansion will need to be considered as a balance of funding sustainability issue against a risk basis for harm (DFFH, 2024).

The 2025 Review of Western Australia’s reportable conduct scheme also highlighted various positive findings, as well as shortcomings, that are useful to consider in designing and implementing an effective scheme.

- Awareness and understanding of the scheme are low but developing.
- 72.6% of all organisations surveyed reported at least partial implementation of all required systems.
- One shortcoming of the scheme is that under-reporting is very likely due to cultural constraints – highlighting that a cultural readiness to report within organisations is imperative.
- Improvements must be made to assist in storing and disclosing investigation information.
- 20.9% of all reportable allegations originate from the sector, with under 12% of allegations involving sexual offences, and around 70% involving physical assault.
- Of organisations that have implemented the reportable conduct scheme:
 - only 67% are involved in training or raising staff awareness around the scheme
 - only 48% provide guidance on how the scheme interacts with other reporting obligations, such as mandatory reporting laws
 - only 47% report having child-safe reporting systems
 - only 53% allow for anonymous reporting.
 - only 39% provide guidance on how to manage investigations if an employee leaves the organisation (Ombudsman WA, 2025).

Promising examples of reporting schemes from international jurisdictions

The UK scheme appears to offer the most opportunity for improved reporting. Its strengths and weaknesses are outlined in the table below and more detailed information follows.

Table 7: Strengths and weaknesses of reporting schemes from overseas jurisdictions

Jurisdiction	Strengths	Weaknesses/Limitations
UK	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Structured reporting pathways▪ Designated officer responsible for overseeing all allegations against adults across the children’s workforce in a local region▪ Mandatory training in data protection and safeguarding for all staff handling sensitive data▪ Organisations are legally required to provide clear whistleblowing policies and accessible reporting channels▪ Organisations must retain data relating to allegations according to certain statutory timelines	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ The system is not mandatory

United Kingdom

Procedures for whistle-blowing and empowering staff

While the UK does not have a mandatory duty to report yet (Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse [IICSA], 2022; Home Office, 2025b), it does provide legal protections and formal

procedures for disclosing reports or allegations of CSA. When a staff member, volunteer, or member of the public raises a safeguarding concern or allegation about someone working with children in the UK, a structured pathway ensures the information is handled appropriately, reaches the Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO) and, if necessary, informs the enhanced DBS system.

Organisations are legally required to provide clear whistleblowing policies and accessible reporting channels. Staff and volunteers can report concerns internally to a designated safeguarding lead through anonymous online portals or by using external hotlines such as the NSPCC Whistleblowing Advice Line (0800 028 0285) (NSPCC, 2020).

If an individual feels their organisation is not handling the allegation properly, or if the concern is particularly serious, they may report directly to the LADO or to prescribed bodies such as Ofsted, or to the police (Department for Education, UK, 2023b; National Crime Agency, n.d.). Whistleblowers can request anonymity and organisations must protect their identity unless disclosure is legally mandated. Organisations should provide feedback to whistleblowers on the progress and outcome of their report, within the bounds of confidentiality (Department for Business Innovation & Skills, UK, 2015).

Escalation to the LADO

Once a safeguarding allegation is raised (whether internally, via an external hotline, or to the police), the LADO must be notified within one working day if the allegation concerns someone working or volunteering with children (Department for Education, UK, 2023b). The LADO oversees and coordinates the management of the case, ensuring a thorough and fair investigation is conducted by the appropriate agency (e.g. employer, police or social care). The LADO keeps detailed records of all advice, actions and decisions, and stores this information securely in accordance with statutory requirements (Royal Borough Windsor & Maidenhead Safeguarding Partnership, n.d.).

Data retention

Allegations not leading to convictions may be retained for 10 years if deemed to be high risk by local police (Disclosure and Barring Service, 2018). Minor or historical offences are automatically removed after set periods (e.g. 11 years for adult convictions) (Unlock, n.d.). Organisations must also retain data relating to allegations according to certain statutory timelines (e.g. 6 years for unsubstantiated allegations), while ensuring it is stored securely via encrypted systems or locked cabinets (NSPCC, 2023).

Training and governance

Effective safeguarding in the UK relies on well-trained staff and strong inter-agency collaboration, particularly when managing allegations against adults who work with children. LADOs play a central role in this process, ensuring that concerns are addressed promptly, fairly and in accordance with statutory guidance. The LADO is an officer employed by a local authority to manage and have oversight of all allegations against adults across the children's workforce in a local region (Hillingdon Safeguarding Children Partnership, n.d.).

LADO training focuses on managing allegations, navigating complex legal frameworks and leading multi-agency collaborations (National LADO Network, 2024). In addition, all staff handling sensitive information (in local and private sectors) are required to undertake mandatory training in data protection under the GDPR and safeguarding, equipping them to recognise abuse indicators and share information securely (ICO, 2021). The LADO coordinates investigations, chairs strategy meetings, and ensures that information is shared appropriately

between police, social care and employers, maintaining oversight from the initial concern through to the conclusion of a case (National LADO Network, 2024).

Challenges with using reporting schemes to prevent child sexual abuse

Overlapping investigations and responses

An issue noted in the review of the Victorian Scheme is the overlap of the Child Safeguarding regulatory framework that may duplicate administrative costs and might result in multiple investigations regarding the same incident by sector regulatory bodies, Victoria Police and CCYP (DFFH, 2024). However, the review also notes that the scheme focuses very much on the individual organisation and the individual whose behaviour has been reported (DFFH, 2024).

The Victorian review also noted challenges with having reporting requirements for the CCYP while also having specific Departments overseeing the sector, as this requires management of two sets of different reporting mechanisms with potentially different emphasis and risk thresholds (DFFH, 2024). It found that different definitions and requirements can make evidence gathering and investigations more complex (DFFH, 2024).

The RCIRCSA (2017e) provides some guidance as to how these kinds of overlaps and potentially different guidance frameworks can be overcome. It noted overlaps could be rendered more efficient with sufficient collaboration, information sharing and efficient regulation practice (2017e).

Balancing reporting requirements of individual belief

In Victoria, there is a requirement for reporters to hold a 'reasonable belief' about the conduct they are reporting, to strike a balance between overreporting and the potential for pernicious reports (DFFH, 2024). The Victorian Review (DFFH, 2024) identified some confusion around this requirement, which had created a lack of clarity in practice as to whether it was the individual who had raised the report initially, or the head of the organisation they came from, that was required to hold the 'reasonable belief' (DFFH, 2024).

Other jurisdictions do not have the reasonable belief requirement. The approaches used in other jurisdictions include:

- Tasmania's requirement of a 'reasonable suspicion'
- ACT's requirement of a 'reportable allegation' as 'an express assertion that reportable conduct has happened'
- WA's requirement for a 'belief on reasonable grounds' (CFCA, 2023).

Requiring a 'suspicion' may lower the evidentiary basis required for a formal report, and therefore for a resulting investigation, although this is unlikely to have a major impact on reporting rates in practice (CFCA, 2023). A clearer and more consistent approach to defining reportable conduct is likely to contribute to a more effective reporting framework.

The importance of strong reporting systems within organisations

A robust and effective reporting scheme requires organisational adherence and cooperation with the scheme to effectively limit the ability of employees to offend. The Western Australian Review of its reportable conduct scheme indicated some challenges with organisational adherence and cooperation with the scheme that aims to limit the ability of employee offending.

The review found that, noting the scheme had only been in place for 2 years, a reporting friendly process or guidelines for staff had not been implemented by many organisations (Ombudsman WA, 2025).

The review also found that, even where the required policies and procedures had been implemented, major gaps remained, particularly in relation to staff-facing policies or procedures (Ombudsman WA, 2025).

Similar findings emerged from the Victorian Review, where despite sustained improvement, there remain systemic issues relating to organisational investigations, including:

- poor policies for reporting and responding to allegations
- no arrangements for engaging or supporting children in an investigation
- a lack of resourcing for investigative teams or processes
- a failure to adequately engage with the scheme's purpose or principles (DFFH, 2024).

Reportable conduct schemes in Australia, including the Victorian and NSW model, encourage organisational accountability by enabling leads of organisations to investigate and report findings to the scheme's overseeing body (who can authorise independent investigation).

However, the Victorian Review highlights the importance of ensuring organisations can provide an alternative investigative lead where the leadership is the subject of concern. It should be noted that Ashley Paul Griffith was in a leadership role in at least one childcare centre he offended at (*Griffith*).

What do best practice reporting schemes look like?

Australian reportable conduct systems have been identified as internationally relevant models by the *Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse in the UK and Wales* (IICSA, 2022) and New Zealand's *Joint Review into the Children's Sector* (Poutasi, 2022).

The NSW model was highlighted by the RCIRCSA (2017i) as a leading example for other Australian jurisdictions to follow. It has since been adopted by the ACT, WA and TAS. The NSW Office of the Children's Guardian suggests the NSW model still offers the most comprehensive model for a reportable conduct scheme in Australia – promoting the safety of children while ensuring procedural fairness for employees during investigations (OCG, 2025). Queensland could benefit from adopting key elements of the NSW model, as outlined further below.

Robust systems for prevention, identification and response

Organisations covered by the NSW scheme are required to have robust systems in place to prevent, identify and respond to reportable conduct and reportable convictions. The head of each relevant entity holds ultimate responsibility for ensuring these systems are effectively implemented. As an allegations-based scheme, it mandates that relevant entities notify the OCG whenever a reportable allegation is received or observed.

Relevant entities must also perform their own internal investigation into the allegation or incident, and a report detailing the investigation's processes and findings must also be provided to the OCG. The OCG may conduct its own investigation or refer the allegation to another body, such as the NSW Police, when appropriate.

Clear guidelines and procedures

Given the challenges identified by the WA and Victorian reviews into the reportable conduct schemes in their respective jurisdictions (Ombudsman WA, 2025; DFFH, 2024), it is important to provide clear guidance and procedures to support the implementation of such a scheme.

NSW provides a [Mandatory Reporter Guide](#) to assist with reporting decision making. Other jurisdictions also provide various levels of guidance (see [Appendix F](#)), signalling a large-scale commitment to ensuring reportable conduct schemes have their intended effect in practice.

Procedural evaluation

Ensuring regular evaluations of reporting schemes is especially important for protecting children from CSA, as all mandatory systems are subject to organisational culture and policies. The effects of these factors can be largely invisible without formal reviews.

The NSW scheme does not appear to be formally evaluated despite its introduction in 1999. An absence of evaluative or review processes built into these schemes limits the ability of jurisdictions to determine best practice approaches to CSA, or address shortcomings of existing systems.

Most current Australian reporting schemes have been introduced since 2017 as a recommendation of the RCIRCSA, indicating that a lack of review may not yet be an area of concern. However, in implementation of a new reporting scheme, a system of evaluation or formal scrutiny should be included to ensure ongoing practicality, effectiveness and currency.

Individual and interpersonal level regulatory prevention efforts

This report specifically considers institutional CSA in ECEC contexts. The regulatory frameworks it primarily focuses on are how the socio-ecological models at the [communities](#), [organisations](#) and [societies at large](#) levels can safeguard children against CSA. It should be noted however that individual and interpersonal circumstances and dynamics can influence perpetration and victimisation.

In acknowledgement of this, [Appendix G](#) presents a brief outline of interventions targeted at the individual and interpersonal level, which are designed to manage attitudes, behaviours and interactions.

A collaborative approach to CSA prevention

Key takeaways

- **The evidence base identifies the importance of a collaborative, multi-level approach to CSA prevention, and the importance of the socio-ecological model for conceptualising collaborative prevention.**
- **A range of models to support collaboration exist within Australian and international contexts, often based on combatting FV or advancing child protection.**
- **The Victorian Family Violence Multi-Agency Risk Assessment and Management Framework (MARAM) represents a comprehensive example of collaboration, albeit in the separate (but sometimes overlapping) space of FV.**
- **Child Advocacy Centres – which operate across Europe, Canada, USA and the UK – represent an effective example of multi-stakeholder collaboration to address CSA.**

Reviews of the literature on multi-disciplinary responses to CSA suggest that a clearly planned, multi-disciplinary approach is effective (Elmqvist et al., 2015; Herbert & Bromfield, 2016; Herbert & Bromfield, 2017a; Nwogu et al., 2015). Multi-agency cooperation and cross-sector partnerships recognise that effective risk management requires coordinated efforts across various institutional levels (ACECQA, 2023; Gerda, 2023).

Collaborative CSA prevention can involve direct engagement strategies and systemic support structures (Gerda, 2023; Vosz et al., 2023). It is important that they involve non-institutional actors, including children's advocates and their non-abusive carers (Herbert & Bromfield, 2019). These strategies and supports can be pitched at multiple levels – for example:

- **Educational empowerment** – involving direct engagement collaboration between ECEC providers and children; building children's knowledge and awareness of CSA through age-appropriate education that enables them to understand and participate in their own protection (Ubaidillah et al., 2023). This approach emphasises the importance of children being granted agency, while maintaining age-appropriate, developmental considerations.
- **Caregiver integration** – involving direct engagement with caregivers, as essential partners and collaborators in the process of safeguarding their children from CSA (Clara, 2022). This approach recognises that effective prevention requires a comprehensive support system where caregivers are integrated into the broader protective framework rather than serving as passive recipients of information.

- **Systemic collaboration** – involving multi-agency cooperation and cross-sector partnerships, to engage both directly and systemically, to create safeguards against CSA (Gerda, 2023). This approach acknowledges the requirement for coordinated efforts across various stakeholders, creating an interconnected support network that enhances protective factors and identifies and manages risk factors.

Multi-level approaches to collaboration reflect the fact that CSA safeguarding efforts exist within a broader [social-ecological](#) framework, where multiple levels of influence interact to create protective environments (Vosz et al., 2023).

There are multiple examples of collaboration across the system, and select exemplars are discussed in the next section. This selection was chosen with the following factors in mind:

- There are many examples of collaborative approaches to safeguard children from CSA in ECEC contexts, but many of these are ad hoc, discretionary and lack conceptual clarity or clearly measurable outcomes (see, e.g. Herbert & Bromfield, 2016; Herbert & Bromfield, 2017a; Herbert & Bromfield, 2019; McKibbin & Humphreys, 2020; Parker et al., 2025).
- Some of the examples we explore do not specifically relate to CSA, ECEC contexts and/or safeguarding, but they are nevertheless relevant because they indicate the infrastructure, practices and culture required to facilitate effective collaboration towards a shared goal.

Family Violence Multi-Agency Risk Assessment and Management Framework

The Family Violence Multi-Agency Risk Assessment and Management Framework (MARAM) is a collaborative model from Victoria, designed to create a shared understanding and response to FV across the sectors that work with people who are experiencing FV or are likely to experience it (Victorian Government, 2025c).

Although the focus of this report is on regulatory safeguards in ECEC contexts, MARAM is nevertheless useful to consider as it demonstrates how various agents, across multiple levels and sectors, can work collaboratively towards a common goal (in its case: increasing the safety and wellbeing of people who have experienced or are experiencing FV).

MARAM's overarching purpose is to ensure that FV risk is assessed and managed using a common, evidence-based approach, irrespective of the service/s an individual engages with. This consistency enhances collaboration, enables services to speak a shared language and work together more effectively to protect people who experience FV and hold perpetrators accountable (Victorian Government, 2023a). MARAM achieves this consistency by requiring certain organisations ('framework organisations') to align their policies, procedures, practice guidance and tools with MARAM (Office of Family Violence Reform Implementation Monitor, 2023).

Although MARAM offers rigorous guidance, information and training to support framework organisations to comply with it, these organisations are expected to apply MARAM's guidance and tools with flexibility, rather than strictly adhering to their original form, thus allowing for nuanced application across various services in unique contexts (Victorian Government, 2023a).

MARAM is built on the following four pillars – which could potentially be tailored and applied to managing the risks of CSA in ECEC contexts (and beyond):

- **Pillar 1: Shared understanding** – involving recognition of the various forms, drivers and risk factors for FV, as well as adopting an intersectional and trauma-informed approach

- **Pillar 2: Consistent and collaborative practice** – involving a shared approach to identification, screening, assessment and management of FV risk
- **Pillar 3: Responsibilities for risk assessment and management** – involving organisations assigning and equipping their workforces with the necessary tools, resources and training to comply with any of the 10 MARAM responsibilities applicable to them
The MARAM responsibilities are respectful, sensitive and safe engagement; identification of FV; intermediate risk assessment; immediate risk assessment; seek consultation for comprehensive risk assessment, management and referrals; contribute to information sharing with other services; comprehensive risk assessment; comprehensive risk management and safety planning; contribute to coordinated risk management; and collaborate for ongoing risk assessment and management.
- **Pillar 4: Systems, outcomes and continuous improvement** – involving a commitment to implementation, continuous improvement and understanding of the evidence base, including by participating in data collection and evaluation of FV responses (Victorian Government, 2020).

Across a range of sectors, MARAM was considered a ‘valuable central repository of information’ and has contributed to ‘promoting a more integrated service response by improving consistency and breaking down silos’. Additionally, following the introduction of MARAM and the information-sharing schemes, there has been an improvement in collaboration within and across sectors in terms of identifying and responding to risks of FV (Allen + Clarke Consulting, 2023).

One of the strengths of MARAM has been its ability to create a *cultural shift* away from maintaining the privacy of FV perpetrators towards sharing information to keep people who experience FV safe and hold perpetrators accountable (Office of Family Violence Reform Implementation Monitor, 2023). However, a review of MARAM by the Office of Family Violence Reform Implementation Monitor (2023) identified that some sectors had changed their culture more successfully than others and noted that the significant cultural and organisational change required to comprehensively implement and comply with MARAM would take time as well as ongoing and dedicated efforts.

Child Link

Child Link is a key enabler of the CISS, designed to improve the wellbeing and safety of children by supporting authorised professionals to access a timelier and clearer picture of a child’s circumstances. It is a digital tool that contains a profile for every child in Victoria and is used to provide authorised professionals (i.e. early childhood providers operating a service with a funded kindergarten program for 3- and/or 4-year-old children) with key information about a child, such as their participation in ECEC services. Authorised users of Child Link can delegate access to other roles that have management responsibilities within the organisation who would typically be individuals who have responsibility for a child’s safety or wellbeing (Victorian Government, 2025a).

Authorised professionals may include:

- Key staff in ECEC services
- Child protection workers
- Maternal and child health nurses.

By offering a centralised, real-time view of a child’s participation across ECEC services, Child Link enables these professionals to more easily identify other services or individuals involved in a child’s care. This improved access to information may strengthen CISS’s ability to support

child wellbeing and safety by supporting earlier recognition of concerning patterns, reducing information gaps and enabling faster intervention and more effective collaboration across organisations and services (Victorian Government, 2024a; Victorian Government, 2025a).

The Domestic and family violence common risk and safety framework (CRASF)

CRASF is a 'whole-of-system' framework that aligns risk assessment and safety planning in family and domestic violence (FDV), improving the safety of people who experience FDV and holding perpetrators accountable through a shared language and coordinated response.

- Level 1 – Adult and child screening tool
- Level 2 – Risk assessment and safety planning tool
- Level 3 – Multi-agency risk assessment and safety management tool.

These planning tools provide structured guidance and promote an integrated approach to assessing and managing FDV risk (Queensland Government, 2022).

In 2019, an independent evaluation by the Griffith Criminology Institute found that integrated responses and high-risk teams enhanced information sharing, informed decision-making, accountability, and monitoring of persons using violence. In 2021, the CRASF was reviewed and updated to reflect contemporary best practices (Department of Child Safety, Youth and Women, Queensland Government, 2019).

Operation RESET

Operation RESET is an example of collaboration in the context of Aboriginal communities. It is a proactive multi-agency child protection strategy targeting CSA in remote Western Australian Aboriginal communities. It involves a 'mobile multi-disciplinary specialist child abuse team' of detectives and social workers, emphasising that CSA prevention is a shared responsibility (Mace et al., 2014).

Key strengths identified:

- Proactive outreach – engages communities before formal reports are made
- Dedicated unit – builds trust and a sense of safety
- Timely response – deescalates further risk of harm
- Capacity building – empowers and upskills families, professionals and communities
- Holistic approach – success relies on collaboration among local services, NGOs, and community leaders
- Trust and confidentiality – early interactions dictate the relationship between the team and the community, consistency and discretion is crucial (Mace et al., 2014).

Impact:

Operation RESET has improved relationships between Indigenous communities and government, contributing to better justice outcomes and victim wellbeing (Mace et al., 2014). More recent consultations suggest Operation RESET remains a more popular approach in addressing CSA in Indigenous communities involved in the operation (Bailey et al., 2020).

Child Advocacy Centres

Child Advocacy Centres (CACs) follow a service provision model that aim to support children and their families in the aftermath of a CSA incident (Development Services Group Inc., 2025).

Although the focus of this report is on regulatory safeguards that support prevention rather than responses to CSA, CACs nevertheless provide a useful example to consider as to how organisations can work together to share information and collaborate in the ECEC sector.

The CAC model is a comprehensive, multidisciplinary response to CSA that includes:

- coordinated services delivered in child-friendly environments (Herbert & Bromfield, 2016)
- integration of investigative and support services (Herbert & Bromfield, 2016)
- community-based, child-focused programs for investigation, treatment and case management (Cossel, 2010).

There are currently three CACs identified in Australia: the George Jones Child, Youth and Family Centre (opened in 2011), the Stan & Jean Perron Child, Youth and Family Centre (opened in 2019), and the Rockingham Child, Youth and Family Centre (opened in 2024). All 3 are created and operated by Parkerville Children and Youth Care and are all located in suburbs of Perth (Parkerville Children and Youth Care, n.d.). From 2011 to 2018, the George Jones Centre had supported almost 20,000 children, young people and parents (The West Australian, 2018).

Each of these CACs incorporates a community-specific Multiagency Investigation & Support Team (MIST). A formal evaluation determined that WA's MISTs were effective at responding to CSA. They were found to mirror international best practice, while comparing favourably to other Australian CSA responses. The evaluation specifically notes that the MIST response provided significantly faster police investigations, significantly higher policing responsiveness and greater collaboration between practitioners. Practitioners, staff and caregivers also reported high levels of satisfaction with the MIST response and its victim-centred approach. The evaluation ultimately recommended that MISTs be expanded across WA (Herbert & Bromfield, 2017b).

Canadian model of CACs

Since 2010, Canada has been developing a nationwide network of CACs, although the Canadian model refers to some CACs as CYACs (Child and Youth Advocacy Centres). The *National Guidelines for Canadian Child Advocacy Centres/Child and Youth Advocacy Centres* (National Guidelines) establish information sharing and multi-agency collaboration as key components of an effective CSA response model (Child and Youth Advocacy Centres, 2021).

The Guidelines establish that when responding to a case, CYACs are encouraged to provide a Multi-Disciplinary Team (MDT) that addresses that case's circumstances, recommending that specific agencies or professions become involved. The core MDT of a CYAC should include:

- police services
- child protection services
- medical services
- mental health services
- victim support and advocacy for the child and their family, including through any court processes
- Crown prosecution service
- forensic interviewers (Child and Youth Advocacy Centres, 2021).

CYACs include training for MDT staff, to bolster cross-organisational competencies (Department of Justice Canada, 2018).

A majority of CYACs in Canada reported having information-sharing protocols or Memoranda of Understanding with the member agencies of their MDT (Stumpf, 2024), facilitating a collaborative approach to CSA.

The Guidelines recommend that other relevant community partners are integrated where appropriate, such as Indigenous Elders or teachers (Child and Youth Advocacy Centres, 2021). This allows for the CYACs to embed cultural safety for First Nations and other communities into their practices, and to ensure continued communication with cultural bodies. CYACs in Canada are highly diverse structurally due to their community-centred approach. As a result, the practitioners, organisations and agencies included in MDTs may differ between CYACs (Stumpf, 2024). However, the Canadian CYAC models still adhere to the core CAC model, with child-friendly environments, integration of support and investigative systems and case management, although altered to reflect how cases work in the Canadian legal system (Bertrand et al., 2015). As of 2023, there are 51 operational CYACs in Canada (Stumpf, 2024).

Beyond abiding by the 10 National Guidelines, each Canadian CYAC is encouraged to adapt its model to best suit the local community – for example, the Toronto Boost CYAC incorporates the Children's Aid Society of Toronto alongside demographic outreach groups such as Jewish Family and Child and the Native Child and Family Services of Toronto (Deloitte, 2017).

Conversely, in Yukon, due to the geographic challenges and the population scarcity across the region, a 'virtual CYAC' is in development, which aims to integrate the same collaborative service approach and child-friendly format in a non-place-based service model under the name of 'Project Lynx' (Child and Youth Advocacy Centres, n.d.).

Notably, an evaluation by the Canadian Department of Justice in 2018 found that the diverse governance structures of CYACs had little impact on their service delivery, and that open communication and knowledgeable management had far greater impact on outcomes. CYACs were found to reduce both financial and non-financial hardship for clients and assist clients to connect with relevant government services. The evaluation also found that there were benefits to co-location, as it facilitated quick responses, information sharing and coordinated support between services (Department of Justice Canada, 2018).

Irish adoption of European Barnahus model

The Barnahus ('children's house') model to collaborative CSA prevention is derived from the CAC model, involving multidisciplinary teams in each location able to provide a child-centred coordinated response to CSA. However, the Barnahus model involves greater integration across state legislative processes and court structures, and it focuses on preventing re-victimisation by emphasising the avoidance of child victims having to testify in court (Johansson et al., 2017).

The Barnahus model was initially implemented in Iceland but has since been adopted across many European countries through the PROMISE Barnahus network as a primary model for responding to CSA. This network, together with existing evaluations and research around the Barnahus model, facilitates international collaboration and a best practice approach to CSA, informed in part by other jurisdictional experiences (Wenke & Heiberg, 2017). The Barnahus model is now the foremost CSA response model across the European Union and has been endorsed by the Committee of the Parties to the Lanzarote Convention (The Council of Europe Convention on Protection of Children against Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse) as an example of a promising response model to CSA (Council of Europe, 2018).

Ireland has recently begun implementing the Barnahus model, with 2 out of 3 planned locations in operation, after pilot programs were completed in 2019 (Barnahus Ireland, n.d.; Council of Europe, n.d.). Although each model is adapted to the implementing state's jurisdictional specificities, they follow the PROMISE Quality Standards (Lacey et al., 2023). Further, the Irish models include Tusla (the Child and Family Agency responsible for child protection and safeguarding), the Garda (National Police), Children's Health Ireland and Health Service Executive and Sexual Assault Treatment Unit (Barnahus, n.d.).

The Barnahus model, alongside other CAC models, promotes interagency collaboration and information sharing, while also providing both a criminal justice response and a therapeutic response to CSA. It was noted by the UK's Children's Commissioner that during the 16-year period after the 1998 introduction of the Barnahus model in Iceland, the number of CSA cases prosecuted in Iceland had tripled and convictions had more than doubled, meaning the model facilitates the detection and investigation of CSA (Children's Commissioner UK, 2017).

Other collaborative models

United Kingdom's collaborative framework

The UK incorporates many different but interconnected collaborative information-sharing practices and models across childcare, healthcare, police and other agencies, designed to balance confidentiality with child safeguarding responsibilities. Important collaborative models include:

- **Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hubs (MASH)** – collaborative hubs that often involve co-location; integrating professionals from children's social care, police, health, education and probation to assess risks and coordinate responses for children at risk. They operate under joint information-sharing protocols, enabling the secure exchange of data to facilitate triaged referrals, assign risk ratings and determine interventions (Home Office, 2014; Ofsted, 2023). For example, health professionals within MASHs provide critical insights into medical histories, while police contribute to risk assessments (Home Office, 2014; Waltham Forest Safeguarding Children Partnership, 2015).
- **Integrated Care Systems (ICS)** – collaborative systems that bring together NHS trusts, local authorities and voluntary sectors to plan joined-up health and social care services. Provider collaboratives under ICSs share data across primary, community, and acute care settings to address health inequalities and improve safeguarding (NHS England, n.d.). For instance, NHS England's Child Protection-Information Sharing (CP-IS) system allows health and social care practitioners to access alerts about children at risk (Department for Education, UK, 2023a).
- **Local Safeguarding Partnerships (LSPs)** – statutory arrangement to ensure local authorities, police and integrated care systems work together with other relevant agencies to safeguard and promote the welfare of children in their local area. Discussed in more detail [above](#).

Speak Up. Be Strong. Be Heard (SUBSBH) model

The SUBSBH is a police-led community response to CSA in Far North Queensland, developed and implemented by the Cairns Child Protection Investigation Unit of the Queensland Police Service. It has been implemented in at least 26 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities across the Far North Queensland Police District between 2016 and 2019.

The initiative involves delivering educational sessions to a variety of community audiences, including school children, parents, stakeholders and other community members. These sessions include attention to grooming behaviours, community consultations (often involving Elders), ongoing relationship-building and strengthening partnerships with local stakeholders and key government services (Carrington et al., 2019). These educational sessions include involvement from members of community organisations, such as Apunipima, an Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation (Coolican, 2016).

An evaluation of this model identified significant positive community feedback surrounding the initiative, increased reporting of CSA, and determined that the initiative was a cost-effective approach to achieving these outcomes (Carrington et al., 2019).

What do best practice collaborative CSA models look like?

Collaborative and multidisciplinary models such as CACs are an effective and practical response model for CSA. These models also facilitate the involvement of relevant community groups including Indigenous organisations, as well as a variety of applicable disciplines, in addressing CSA.

Evaluations of the CAC model and the UK's MASH/LADO frameworks highlight some key elements that contribute to a successful collaborative approach against CSA, such as:

Multidisciplinary integration

The success of CAC models highlights the importance of centring multidisciplinary teams and coordinated services in addressing CSA (Herbert & Bromfield, 2017a). The MASH model also supports this theme through its emphasis on the need for clear communication protocols during multi-agency collaborations (Abdou & Tan, 2022)

Service delivery

The original CAC model suggests focusing on support, alongside providing an evaluation of a CSA allegation through a mixture of child-centred medical examinations, forensic interviews and a communicative approach to joint investigations including experts, children and families (Smith et al., 2006; Ornstein & Smith, 2011). The MASH model also mirrors this service-centric approach by providing frameworks to support clear decision-making standards through referrals, proper threshold applications (known as coloured thresholds) and clear guidelines on documentation quality, with ongoing audits and training to support staff involved in the process (Abdou & Tan, 2022).

There is a specific focus in the MASH framework on strengthening a multidisciplinary 'shared report' when an allegation is made, to expand on comprehensive health information available to guide decision making (Abdou & Tan, 2022). If a similar collaborative or multidisciplinary practice is put in place, it will need regulatory bodies, agencies or roles such as a LADO to assist in the regulation of documentation standards for CSA reports. These entities or individuals are also necessary for the ongoing training of staff who are expected to contribute to reports in a collaborative or multidisciplinary workplace.

Outcome measurements

Due to jurisdictional and regional differences between different multidisciplinary place-based models, the ongoing evaluation of the efficacy of collaborative models is essential to inform their continual improvement. Some current measurements of the positive impacts of these systems identified in evaluations include:

- monitoring of the CSA prosecution rate (which is currently high in the US states that use CAC models, as well as EU states with the Barnahus model)

- case substantiation rates
- mental health referrals
- caregiver satisfaction (Westphaln et al., 2021).

Policy and practice implications

Key takeaways

- Aim for a holistic approach that consistently articulates the safety of children as the highest priority in all policy elements.
- Develop a strongly connected network of protective schemes that emphasises collaboration and the shared responsibility of CSA safeguarding. This should include a mechanism for recording allegations or concerns around CSA.
- Consider place-based collaboration and information sharing at the local community level.
- Strengthen reporting procedures and mechanisms to encourage reporting at the organisational level.
- Implement a system of quality training that empowers staff, management, parents and children with the knowledge and skills to recognise, respond to and safeguard against CSA.
- Evaluate new schemes, practices and regulations to measure effectiveness and identify opportunities for improvement.

Several critical implications for policy and practice emerge from the findings of this desktop review. These are intended to support further investigation and consideration, rather than act as a final answer or definitive recommendations. Noting Queensland is still considering how best to revise and refine its policy and practice with respect to safeguarding against CSA following the *Griffith* case, the following implications may guide and strengthen the development of these revisions and refinements, based on best practices and lessons from similar jurisdictions.

Prioritise and articulate a culture of child safety and wellbeing

The literature analysed in this desktop review consistently indicates that cultural change is critical to supplement systemic improvements to regulatory safeguards. This suggests that **regulatory safeguards at all levels of the socio-ecological model should clearly articulate an intention to create a culture that prioritises the safety of children above all else.**

Cultural change requires clear and consistent language to achieve (Tucci et al., 2015), as well as significant time and effort (Office of Family Violence Reform Implementation Monitor, 2023). The Australian Government has indicated a change towards this approach nationally. It has used clear language around the importance of cultural change towards a culture that prioritises the safety of children, including in ECEC contexts – most notably in its [National Strategy to Prevent and Respond to Child Sexual Abuse 2021-2030](#) and [National Principles for Child Safe Organisations](#). Further, it has set up mechanisms to channel time and effort into long-term cultural change. For example, the National Office for Child Safety has a national annual reporting framework for organisations to [report on their progress](#) towards a child safe culture.

Queensland has adopted the national language in its *Child Safe Organisations Act 2024* (Qld), which embeds the National Principles into its Child Safe Standards (see [Appendix C](#)). The first principle/standard requires that 'child safety and wellbeing is embedded in the entity's organisational leadership, governance and culture' (AHRC, 2018; QFCC, 2025c). QFCC tracks this by [monitoring](#) whether relevant organisations have implemented child safe standards.

Build an aligned network of regulatory safeguards and database of reports

The literature indicates that regulatory frameworks, practices and mechanisms are most effective at safeguarding against CSA when they operate as a network rather than in siloes. This suggests that **regulatory safeguards should unite as a network to share common goals, language, collaborative practices, and learnings from successes and mistakes.** This may include mechanisms like reporting schemes and information sharing schemes, as well as cultural frameworks like policies and protocols which ensure a consistently child safe culture across the social ecology.

One feature of a strong network of CSA safeguards may be a database in which concerns, allegations and incidents involving ECECs and their employees can be recorded and accessed by a range of relevant, interconnected organisations (as briefly introduced in the [Information Sharing](#) section earlier in this report). Such a database may:

- ensure cases that fall below the evidentiary thresholds for formal reporting are not overlooked
- allow for identification of patterns of grooming or offending which are only clear when several incidents (that may otherwise appear minor in isolation) are viewed collectively
- trigger increased monitoring of a particular individual or within some ECECs
- provide opportunities for improved understanding and analysis of CSA incidents in the ECEC sector, noting information in the database (if entered clearly and consistently) may be reviewed to gather insights into behaviours, dynamics and reporting of incidents.

Although Australian information-sharing schemes explicitly articulate the prioritisation of children's wellbeing over privacy concerns, a database such as this one would require stringent privacy and data-sharing protocols— whether this is a specific ECEC sector regulator or a government agency. Further, it would have to be very carefully and sensitively managed in order to balance competing rights and protect individuals from malicious or incorrect reports of concern.

The UK provides several examples to consider for this type of sensitive data collection and sharing, such as Local Safeguarding Partnerships and the NHS information sharing model. Queensland does not currently have such a model of a broad information database, and the information it holds/shares is limited to what is prescribed by the *Child Protection Act 1999* (Qld) (i.e. *only* information (facts or opinions) that a person reasonably believes may help support a child who is currently in need of protection or may become in need of protection if support is not provided) (see also [Appendix F](#)).

Support place-based collaboration and information sharing at the local level

The literature indicates that one way to ensure clear, consistent and collaborative safeguarding is to encourage **local, place-based cooperation, where relevant entities and staff from public and private ECEC services regularly meet to discuss the needs of the local sector.** Local stakeholders may discuss CSA concerns, allegations and incidents, as well as ideas to support CSA prevention and risk management. The local collaboration would ideally support and maximise the efficiency of individuals' efforts to culturally and practically prioritise the safety

of children, for example by helping reduce individual workload burdens, foster mutual trust, and promote a shared understanding of the issues, solutions and associated responsibilities.

Examples of place-based collaborative models include [ICSs](#), [LSPs](#) and [MASH](#) in the UK. Queensland does not currently have such a model, but it does have existing infrastructure that could be leveraged for it – including, for example, Local Government Areas, who could champion leadership and convene forums to discuss CSA safeguarding at their local area level. Governmental involvement could also extend to the police, whose input is critical for investigating and taking legal action in relation to substantiated allegations of misconduct. By providing police with access to a range of potential sources of local intelligence, they may be better able to pursue reports. Further, police could provide feedback on how to report and what evidence they need.

Another example of place-based collaborative models is the CAC. CACs primarily deliver responsive services, rather than regulatory safeguards. However, they are highly regarded and evaluated models of collaboration and are therefore useful to consider in this context. Examples of CACs exist in UK, Canada, Europe, the UK, the US, and WA (see [above](#)). Like the other local collaborative models, CACs involve the police and other key stakeholders. In Canada, CACs (known as CYACs) also involve trained forensic interviewers, who further support and inform best practice in reporting and evidence gathering.

The Canadian CYAC model is also particularly relevant for this report because it suggests possible ways to engage Indigenous communities and organisations in responding to CSA – noting their Guidelines recommend the involvement of Indigenous community partners where appropriate (Child and Youth Advocacy Centres, 2021). Australia (including Queensland) cannot duplicate the Canadian model exactly, as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have their own unique needs and perspectives that cannot be assumed to be the same as Indigenous Canadians. However, the CYAC model could be a starting point to tailor an appropriately culturally responsive, inclusive and safe model for unique Australian contexts.

Strengthen procedures and mechanisms to encourage reporting of behaviours of concern

Australia's reporting schemes and mandatory reporting obligations are considered robust and world leading – with other jurisdictions such as New Zealand and the UK looking to Australian systems to inspire the design and implementation of their own reporting policies and legislation (Poutasi, 2022; IICSA, 2022).

However, the literature AIFS analysed in this desktop review indicates that reporting schemes could be further improved by:

- **encouraging relevant organisations to emphasise reporting CSA and related concerns through culture, guidelines and practices**
- **supporting staff to understand how and what to report, through rigorous and regular training and informational resources**
- **providing staff with a clear pathway to reporting, with systems that guide them to and through the reporting process (e.g. designated staff, forms and policies)**
- **enabling staff to feel comfortable to report concerning behaviour**, even if the behaviour does not seem to fit the description of CSA but still generates unease.

This factor ties into the database discussed in the second implication (above), noting such a database would not only hold incidents that meet legal standards for formal reports, but incidents that appear to be minor but nevertheless caused staff concern.

A body external to the sector could potentially help organisations and employees' confidence in reporting potential incidents by strengthening their knowledge and understanding of CSA. This body could potentially handle the information-sharing database discussed in the second implication, so that relevant people can report directly to it. One advantage of this is its impartiality – circumventing issues that may arise when reporting internally in an ECEC, such as if an offending employee held a position of authority (as in the *Griffith* case) or if an employee felt that their organisation was not properly following up on an allegation or concern.

The UK provides models of independent reporting to external bodies – for example to LADO, Ofsted or the Police. Queensland also has its own model, due to commence in July 2026, with staggered implementation to lead to full operation by July 2027 (QFCC, 2024b). Under this model, relevant people will be able to report concerns to QFCC (however, what people can currently report is limited to allegations or convictions that constitute reportable conduct under the *Child Safe Organisations Act 2024* (Qld); see [Appendix F](#)).

Ensure the ECEC sector is a supported, valued and professional sector skilled in the safety and wellbeing of children

The ECEC sector plays an important role in supporting children, including during the developmentally vital early childhood period (Australian Government, Department of Education, 2024). It is also widely used, with most (52.2%) Australian children aged 0–12 years using some form of ECEC from 2011 to 2017 (ABS, 2018).

Despite its importance and popularity, the ECEC sector experiences challenges including:

- staffing issues (e.g. shortages, reliance on trainees, poor worker retention, transience (e.g. temporary visas) and gaps in qualifications (e.g. 18.7% of paid contact staff having no qualification in an ECEC field) (Australian Government, Department of Education, 2024))
- relatively low pay, compared to other occupations and given qualifications
- minimal rewards for further study (e.g. wages not reflective of higher qualifications)
- minimal opportunities for ongoing professional development (Jobs and Skills Australia, 2024)

These challenges may need specific consideration in the context of the for-profit ECEC services. Evidence shows that not-for-profit services have consistently delivered higher quality education and care than for-profit services over the years (ACCS, 2021). Not-for-profit ECEC services may benefit from centralised infrastructure and support, such as structured access to government-provided training and professional development (ACCS, 2021).

It is critical that these challenges be carefully considered, because the capacity of the ECEC workforce directly affects its ability to implement cultures and practices that guarantee children's safety and wellbeing. Essentially, the ECEC sector must be supported to grow in size and professionalism, to keep up with demand and provide top quality, safe services for children (Jobs and Skills Australia, 2024). Robust human resource management, including thorough screening processes, clear policies for addressing staff allegations, and information sharing, is vital (Letourneau et al. 2020).

Belonging, Being and Becoming: The Early Years Learning Framework for Australia provides an independent (non-government) training and development program for the sector. Various governments and peak bodies have adapted this Framework into professional development programs delivered in their respective jurisdictions. In Queensland, for example, the C&K (Children & Kindergarten) and the Queensland Curriculum & Assessment Authority offer professional development for kindergarten teachers (Queensland Government, 2018). However, these programs do not include specific reference to CSA, and there is no clear approach to educating and developing ECEC workers skills in understanding or safeguarding against CSA.

The literature indicates that additional education and training may be a promising way to develop the professionalism of the sector, given that educational programs for professionals which specifically focus on CSA have been successful in increasing their knowledge, attitudes and preventative behaviours (Rheingold et al., 2015; Rudolph & Zimmer-Gembeck, 2018).

Embed review and evaluation into regulatory safeguards

Effective prevention and protection from CSA requires wide-reaching aims and methods to be implemented across the social ecology. It is critical that new schemes and regulatory measures consider and design in evaluation or review at the earliest stage of development. This enables improved understanding of effectiveness and identification of opportunities for improvement. In recognition of the value of rigorous evaluation, the Australian Government has created the [National Strategy Monitoring and Evaluation Framework](#) (the National Monitoring Framework) (Commonwealth of Australia, Attorney-General's Department, 2024), to ensure evaluation is positioned to inform best practice and ensure transparency.

QFCC has developed 'Indicators' that can be checked against the 'Key Action Areas' under its Child Safe Standards (QFCC, 2025a). Further, it publishes annual reports that convey QFCC's achievements, government arrangements, strategic objectives and overall performance. However, CSA is not a discrete or explicit focus of QFCC's child safety indicators – with none of them specifically referring to 'child sexual abuse'. Therefore, there is less clarity around how government specifically evaluates its progress with safeguarding children against CSA.

As noted earlier, Victoria has prioritised review and evaluation of its regulatory schemes by embedding mandatory review provisions in legislation. For example, the Victorian information sharing scheme includes legislated requirements for independent reviews at 2 and 5 years from commencement. Ensuring any new regulatory scheme includes levers for review will embed early and well-planned consideration of how effectiveness will be measured in the operation of such regulatory schemes.

Measuring against a separate or expanded set of child safety indicators that squarely focus on CSA may be a possibility. Most of the evaluations mentioned throughout this report were conducted by independent bodies. However, the benefits of embedding evaluation into the design of any regulatory scheme will support more effective reviews and deepen understanding around a scheme whether or not these evaluations are conducted by independent bodies. At the systems level, evaluation can be embedded into the governmental approach to CSA, following the national model of the *National Monitoring Framework*.

Conclusion

In recognition that CSA is pervasive in Australia and worldwide (Mathews et al, 2023; UNICEF, 2024), there have been calls for greater initiatives to safeguard children from CSA. There have been historical failures to channel these efforts into a coherent and coordinated public policy, in part due to the complexity of CSA and the highly emotive elements surrounding it, which can trigger emotional and/or defensive responses (Letourneau et al., 2014; Vosz et al. 2023).

This report has considered some of the strengths and weaknesses in existing policies, legislative measures, and protocols to safeguard against CSA in different jurisdictions. Given the limited timeframe for this review, this report has focused on schemes that could potentially inform the development of further safeguards for children.

The existing evidence base identifies several overlapping themes. A key implication is that creating a culture of child safety is critical to supplement regulatory approaches to CSA safeguarding. This should be clearly and consistently articulated and embedded at all levels of the socio-ecological model. A culture that prioritises the safety of children above all else would ideally deter CSA offending and encourage people to report concerns. This dovetails into the related implication: that organisations should aim to build capacity and support around reporting, for example through providing training and clear guidelines that explain how and what to report.

The need for safeguarding (both culturally and practically) to be delivered through a network, with common goals, language, practices and learnings was also identified. This could include a shared database or related mechanism to collate allegations, concerns and incidents. This overlaps with the importance of place-based collaboration, involving multi-agency partnerships between local entities to share local issues and help to resolve them. The evidence indicates that regulatory safeguards, including information sharing frameworks and reporting schemes, are most effective when operating with a unified, consistent and collaborative approach across entities and jurisdictions.

Furthermore, the evaluation of regulatory safeguards is critical to measure their effectiveness and to identify any opportunities for improvement. Regular review and evaluation at all levels of the socio-ecological model will also drive accountability and transparency.

There are also key implications that relate to implementation at an organisational level. ECECs must implement policies and protocols while navigating other relevant considerations, such as staffing challenges, the privacy rights of employees and families engaged with the ECEC and the costs of taking practical steps towards CSA safeguarding (e.g. increased monitoring) alongside cultural ones (e.g. increased training). The ECEC sector and workforce must therefore be well supported and properly valued. This applies both for public and private ECEC providers, noting both must maintain efficiency and viability as businesses and service providers.

The consequences of failing to safeguard children against CSA are clearly seen in the earlier section of this report that outlines the devastating impacts of CSA. Systematically safeguarding against CSA is therefore critical to ensure the safety and wellbeing of Australian children and has significant implications for the associated costs of lives impacted by trauma and distress.

Matters outside the scope of this report

While this report considers specific best practice examples of policies, legislative measures and protocols to safeguard children against CSA in Australia and select overseas jurisdictions, it may also be useful to consider other examples of interventions that can prevent CSA. The Eradicating Child Sexual Abuse (ECSA) website [Interventions Database](#) lists over 200 interventions to prevent CSA from around the world, together with basic evaluations of them.

Appendix A

Table 8: Examples of interventions, adapted from materials provided to Eradicating Child Sexual Abuse by the Lucy Faithfull Foundation (Eradicating Child Sexual Abuse, n.d.)

	Primary prevention	Secondary prevention	Tertiary prevention
Perpetrators	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> General deterrence Developmental prevention 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Interventions with populations at risk of offending 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Early detection Specific deterrence Offender treatment and risk management
Victims and survivors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Resistance training Resilience building 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Resilience building and other interventions with populations at risk of being victimised 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ameliorating harm Preventing repeat victimisation
Situations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Opportunity reduction Controlling precipitators Extended guardianship 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Situational prevention in at-risk places 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Safety plans Organisational interventions
Systems	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Parenting education Community capacity-building 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Responsible bystander training Enabling guardians Interventions with communities at risk of failing to prevent CSA 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Interventions with families, peers, schools, service agencies and communities at risk of failing to prevent CSA

Appendix B

Table 9: Example of risk factors *potentially* associated with CSA (*not exhaustive and not determinative*: RCIRCSA, 2017h)

Individual/developmental factors	Environmental/ecological factors	Situational factors
Risk factors for perpetrators		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> child maltreatment child removal and placement in out-of-home care contact with the youth justice system for non-sexual offences (McKillop et al., 2018a, 2018b)sexual problems (e.g. sexual interest in children and/or hyper-sexual behaviour) internalising problems (e.g. depression) social deficits (e.g. loneliness) offence-supportive attitudes and conditions (e.g. the belief that victims and survivors 'get what they deserve') (Seto et al., 2023) externalising behaviours (e.g. aggression and/or substance abuse) (Letourneau et al., 2020) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> socio-economic disadvantage and inequality limited mechanisms for addressing psychosocial needs arising from trauma associated with adverse experiences in childhood (Cant et al., 2022, citing Quadara, 2019) exposure to institutional factors in institutions that normalise CSA (see below) exposure to operational factors in institutions that fail to safeguard against CSA (see below) (RCIRCSA, 2017g) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> experiencing 'stressors' – e.g. social isolation, mental health issues, alcohol and other drug problems, and a lack of positive adult relationships and low self-esteem consumption of violent pornography and/or CSAM placement in institutions that facilitate contact with children (RCIRCSA, 2017g)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> adverse experiences in childhood interpersonal, relationship and emotional difficulties (e.g. difficulty connecting with other adults, intimacy problems and poor social skills, and emotional affiliation with children) distorted beliefs and cognitive distortions that are supportive of CSA distorted attitudes around sex deviant sexual interests poor socio-affective functioning 		

Individual/developmental factors	Environmental/ecological factors	Situational factors
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> poor self-management (RCIRCSA, 2017g) 		
Risk factors for victims and survivors		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> prior experiences of CSA victimisation (of the child and/or their family members) physical and/or mental chronic condition low levels of social skills or self-esteem (Assink et al., 2019; RCIRCSA, 2017h; see also Artus & Niemi, 2016) being a girl or gender diverse person (given victimisation statistics) (Mathews et al., 2023; RCIRCSA, 2017h; see also Artus & Niemi, 2016) qualities that may lead a person to be perceived as a 'suitable' target (i.e. more materially or symbolically 'valuable' to a perpetrator and/or more visible, accessible or unable to resist the CSA) (Cohen & Felson, 1979; RCIRCSA, 2017h) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a typically 'suitable' target may be a child with small size, physical weakness, emotional deprivation and/or psychological problems (Finkelhor & Asdigian, 1996)) qualities that may lead a person to be perceived as a 'gratifying' target (i.e. in possession of some quality, property, skill or attribute that a perpetrator wants to obtain, use, access and/or manipulate) (Finkelhor & Asdigian, 1996) living with disability having a non-heterosexual sexual orientation and/or a non-cisgender gender identity having little or no understanding about healthy and appropriate sexual behaviour and personal safety 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> parental problems and difficulties, including intimate partner violence (IPV), substance use or abuse, mental, psychiatric or physical health problems and/or a low education low quality parent–child relationship, including low parental attachment or affection/care, parental overprotection and/or low parenting competence problems in functioning of the family system, including social isolation and/or low socioeconomic status persistent moves/resettlement having a non-nuclear family structure having a stepfather (Assink et al., 2019; see also Artus & Niemi, 2016) being structurally vulnerable relative to adults (Cant et al., 2022 citing Quadara, 2019) family conflict, violence or breakdown having a poor relationship with a primary carer lack of parental supervision and availability family devotion to, or extensive involvement with, an institution where CSA is being perpetrated (RCIRCSA, 2017g) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> exposure to institutions that facilitate contact between adults and children being unsupervised or isolated (geographically and/or socially) being a high achiever in an institution where CSA is being perpetrated (RCIRCSA, 2017g) frequent use of the internet (Assink et al., 2019)

Individual/developmental factors (RCIRCSA, 2017g)	Environmental/ecological factors	Situational factors
Risk factors for situations		
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> adults in relationships with children who are not biologically related to them adults in relationships with children over whom they have a high level of control adults in relationships with children who have a disability or other qualities that may be (erroneously) construed in negative terms. These children may be perceived as 'antagonistic' targets, meaning they arouse the anger, jealousy and/or destructive impulses of the perpetrator (Finkelhor & Asdigian, 1996). This can include, e.g. a child with a race, gender, sex or sexuality that is marginalised, a child who is anxiously attached and/or a child with disability (Finkelhor & Asdigian, 1996; see also Artus & Niemi, 2016) (Assink et al., 2019) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> inadequate monitoring or supervision (Letourneau et al., 2020; RCIRCSA, 2017h)
Risk factors for systems		
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a lack of environmental protection, e.g. with policies that allow for poorly lit grounds, unlocked classrooms, staff offices whose doors lock automatically and lack embedded windows a lack of social/normative protection, e.g. with cultures in which staff have routine access to children outside structured environments (e.g. driving them home) or in inappropriate ways (e.g. playing roughly), or that accept unusual and/or developmentally inappropriate adult–child interactions (e.g. individualised interactions, sexualised banter) inadequate screening and hiring practices poorly defined roles (Letourneau et al., 2020) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> outdated policies and/or good policies that are inadequately communicated to staff/volunteers or are not enforced as intended (Letourneau et al., 2020) Cultivating physical and/or online spaces that enable potential perpetrators to access potential victims and survivors (RCIRCSA, 2017g)

Individual/developmental factors	Environmental/ecological factors	Situational factors
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ societal endorsement/normalisation of rigid attitudes that endorse men's social dominance, entitlement, authority and control (Cant et al., 2022 citing Quadara, 2019) ▪ institutional factors – i.e. exposure to a culture that inappropriately shapes assumptions, values, beliefs, norms and behaviours around children (e.g. by failing to listen to children, lacking awareness or education about healthy and appropriate sexual development, prioritising the reputation of the institution over children, cultivating secrecy and isolation, failing to see CSA prevention as a shared responsibility, failing to address prejudice and normalising harmful practices like bullying and hazing) ▪ operational factors – i.e. exposure to governance, internal structures, practices, policies and protocols that are not sufficiently safe for children or responsive to CSA (RCIRCSA, 2017g) 	

Appendix C

Table 10: Child safe principles across Australian jurisdictions

State and territory approaches to the National Principles		
Jurisdiction	Legislation	Guidance
ACT	The National Principles are embedded in the <i>Human Rights Commission Act 2005</i> (ACT) s 94V.	The ACT Child Safe Standards Scheme provides a suite of resources for organisations to assist them assessing current practices and identifying potential areas for improvement in terms of promoting and protecting the rights, safety and wellbeing of children and young people.

	The Children and Young People's Commissioner is responsible for regulating the implementation of, and compliance with, the Principles (<i>Human Rights Commission Act 2005</i> (ACT) s 19B).	One of the Key Messages from this Scheme is the requirement for organisations to apply child safe standards in a manner that is culturally safe and inclusive for all children and young people, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people (ACT Human Rights Commission, n.d.).
NSW	<p>The National Principles are embedded in the <i>NSW Children's Guardian Act 2019</i> (NSW) ss 8C–8D.</p> <p>The NSW Government Office of the Children's Guardian is responsible for regulating the implementation of, and compliance with, the Principles (<i>NSW Children's Guardian Act 2019</i> (NSW) s 6).</p>	<p>The NSW Child Safe Scheme provides tools, training and resources for organisations to better prevent and respond to child abuse (all forms), including a guide for ECEC contexts.</p> <p>The scheme also ensured various NSW Government agencies developed child safe strategies.⁹</p>
NT	<p>There are no statutory standards for child safe organisations in the NT. Although the National Principles are not mandatory, they are encouraged, with organisations that implement them being deemed 'organisations of choice' (Office of the Children's Commissioner [OCC] Northern Territory, n.d.).</p> <p>The OCC explicitly acknowledges its commitment to the cultural safety of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, although it does not specify how organisations must demonstrate that commitment in implementing child safe standards (OCC Northern Territory, n.d.).</p>	
QLD	<p>The National Principles are embedded in the <i>Child Safe Organisations Act 2024</i> (Qld) ss 9, 11.</p> <p>The QFCC is responsible for promoting, monitoring and enforcing the implementation of, and compliance with, the child safe standards (<i>Child Safe Organisations Act 2024</i> (Qld) s 13).</p>	<p>QFCC provide tools, training and resources to help organisations embed the child safe standards into their policies and practices.</p> <p>QFCC explicitly acknowledges that organisations must provide an environment that promotes and upholds Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children's right to cultural safety (the Universal Principle for Aboriginal Cultural Safety) (QFCC, n.d.).</p>
SA	<p>The National Principles are not mandatory in SA, but they are considered the 'gold class' standard (Connolly, 2020, p. 28).</p> <p>Child safety principles are embedded in Chapter 8 of the <i>Children and Young People (Safety) Act 2017</i> (SA), which ensures organisations that work with children must develop child safe policies and processes that must be submitted to the Child Safe Environments unit of the Department of Human Services (DHS).</p>	<p>The Child Safe Environments Program provides guidelines and resources to help organisations create and keep environments that are safe and welcoming for children and young people – including a guide on how to be more child friendly and safe.</p>

⁹ The Department of Communities and Justice's [Child Safe Action Plan \(April 2023\)](#); the Ministry of Health's [NSW Health Child Safe Action Plan: 2023–2027](#); the [NSW Department of Education Child Safe Action Plan 2023–2026](#); the Office of Sport's [Child Safe Action Plan \(2023–2027\)](#); the Department of Planning and Environment's [Office of Local Government Child Safe Action Plan \(August 2023\)](#); The [Inspector of Custodial Services: Child Safe Action Plan](#) (2023); the NSW Education Standards Authority's [Child Safe Action Plan 2023–2027](#).

	<p>The Chief Executive of DHS is responsible for developing, providing guidance and monitoring codes of conduct and principles of good practice (<i>Children and Young People (Safety) Act 2017</i> (SA) s 145).</p> <p>DHS developed a Child Safe Environments, Principles of Good Practice Guide (CSE Guide) with 7 key safety principles:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. identify and analyse risk of harm 2. develop a clear and accessible child safe policy 3. develop codes of conduct for adults and for children and young people 4. choose suitable employees and volunteers 5. support, train, supervise and enhance performance 6. empower and promote the participation of children and young people in decision making and service development 7. report and respond appropriately to child and young person suspected to be at risk (Government of South Australia, DHS, 2019) 	
TAS	<p>The National Principles are embedded in the <i>Child and Youth Safe Organisations Act 2023</i> (Tas) s 14; Sch 1.</p> <p>The Independent Regulator is responsible for promoting, monitoring and enforcing the implementation of, and compliance with, the child safe standards (<i>Child and Youth Safe Organisations Act 2023</i> (Tas) s 13).</p>	<p>The Child and Youth Safe Organisations Framework provides information and resources to support organisations to understand and build capacity to keep children and young people safe.</p> <p>The Tasmanian Government explicitly acknowledges that organisations must give effect to the Universal Principle for Aboriginal Cultural Safety (Department of Justice, Tasmania, 2025d).</p>
VIC	<p>The National Principles are mandatory via the <i>Child Wellbeing and Safety Act 2005</i> (Vic) ss 19– 21, 23, 23A. They are reflected on the Commission for Children and Young People's (CCYP) website.</p> <p>In addition to the National Principles, organisations in Victoria are also required to 'establish a culturally safe environment in which the diverse and unique identities and experiences of Aboriginal children and young people are respected and valued' (CCYP, 2022).</p> <p>The CCYP is responsible for promoting, monitoring and enforcing the implementation of, and compliance with, the child safe standards (<i>Child Wellbeing and Safety Act 2005</i> (Vic) s 24).</p>	<p>The CCYP (Vic) provides information, resources and tools to support organisations to understand and build capacity to keep children safe from harm and abuse.</p>

WA	There are no statutory standards for child safe organisations in WA, but the National Principles are strongly encouraged (Western Australian Council of Social Service Inc, n.d.).	<p>The Government of Western Australia's Department of Communities has implemented a broad platform, <i>Safer WA for Children and Young People</i> (Safer WA), to guide its approach to implementing the RCIRCSA's recommendations</p> <p>Safer WA provides information, resources and support to organisations to become a child safe organisation, as well as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ information for families and carers to identify child safe organisations ▪ information and resources on child and young peoples' rights when engaging with organisations ▪ examples of organisations implementing the National Principles ▪ promotional tools and templates. <p>The CCYP (WA) also provides a range of resources which reflect the National Principles.</p>
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Appendix D

Table 11: Working with children checks across relevant Australian and international jurisdictions

Jurisdiction	Legislation	Overview	Interaction with Reportable Conduct Scheme
QLD	<p><i>Working with Children (Risk Management and Screening) Act 2000</i> (Qld)</p> <p><i>Working with Children (Risk Management and Screening) Regulation 2020</i> (Qld)</p>	<p>In Queensland, there is a blue card system that involves WWCCs.</p> <p><u>ECEC relevance</u></p> <p>All prospective ECEC employees must have a WWCC before commencing relevant work in the sector.</p> <p>In 2020, Queensland passed the 'No Cards, No Start' law which removed the ability of individuals to work with children while a blue card application was being considered (Department of Children, Youth Justice and Multicultural Affairs, Queensland, n.d.).</p> <p><u>What information can be considered?</u></p>	N/A. Queensland's reportable conduct scheme is not yet operational (see Appendix F)

Jurisdiction	Legislation	Overview	Interaction with Reportable Conduct Scheme
		<p>Charges and convictions across Australia, child protection or domestic violence information, relevant information on the National Reference System (NRS), or from interstate police forces or WWCC bodies, any professional disciplinary information and any police investigative information relating to serious CSA.</p> <p><u>Period of validity before renewal</u></p> <p>2 years</p>	
TAS	<p><i>Registration to Work with Vulnerable People Act 2013 (Tas)</i></p> <p><i>Registration to Work with Vulnerable People Regulations 2024 (Tas)</i></p>	<p>In Tasmania, there is a Registration to Work with Vulnerable People (RWVP) system that involves WWCCs.</p> <p>A RWVP applies to working with any population deemed ‘vulnerable’ – it is also required for customer-facing roles involving people with disabilities and people in aged care, and therefore isn’t exclusive to child-facing positions (Department of Justice, Tasmania, 2025b).</p> <p><u>ECEC relevance</u></p> <p>All prospective ECEC employees must have a WWCC before commencing relevant work in the sector</p> <p>As of 2025, ongoing reforms to the RWVP system in Tasmania include the removal of the 7-day period of employment before a RWVP was required (Department of Justice, Tasmania, 2025b).</p> <p><u>What information can be considered?</u></p> <p>Charges and convictions across Australia, child protection or domestic violence information, relevant information on the NRS, or from interstate police forces or WWCC bodies, any professional disciplinary information.</p> <p><u>Period of validity before renewal</u></p> <p>5 years</p> <p>Within 10 working days after an employee or volunteer commences or ceases to be engaged in a regulated activity for that employer, the employer is</p>	<p>The Tasmanian RWVP links to its reportable conduct scheme.</p> <p>The Office of the Independent Regulator (OIC) overseeing reportable conduct provides relevant information to the RWVP (Department of Justice, Tasmania, 2025c).</p>

Jurisdiction	Legislation	Overview	Interaction with Reportable Conduct Scheme
		required to notify the Registrar of the commencement or cessation of work (CFCA, 2021).	
VIC	<i>Worker Screening Act 2020 (Vic)</i>	<p>In Victoria, there is a WWCC scheme.</p> <p><u><i>ECEC relevance</i></u> All prospective ECEC employees must have a WWCC before commencing relevant work in the sector Although most people are allowed to work pending a WWCC application, there are a few exceptions, including ECEC workers (Victorian Government, 2023b).</p> <p><u><i>What information can be considered?</i></u> Charges and convictions across Australia, child protection or domestic violence information, relevant information on the NRS, or from interstate police forces or WWCC bodies, any professional disciplinary information. The CCYP can also rule on professional conduct through reports submitted to the reportable conduct scheme (Victorian Government, 2025b).</p> <p><u><i>Period of validity before renewal</i></u> 5 years</p>	<p>The Victorian WWCC scheme links to its reportable conduct scheme</p> <p>The review of Victoria's reportable conduct scheme recommended that the CCYP should be empowered to provide more information on unsubstantiated allegations or other information provided under the scheme (DFFH, 2024).</p>
Republic of Ireland	<i>National Vetting Bureau (Children and Vulnerable Persons) Act 2012 and 2016</i>	<p>In the Republic of Ireland, there is a WWCC scheme for the early learning and care and school aged childcare sectors known as 'Garda Vetting'.</p> <p><u><i>ECEC relevance</i></u> Garda Vetting is required before commencing any relevant work in ECEC contexts (Childminding Ireland, 2025)</p> <p><u><i>What information can be considered?</i></u></p>	N/A. Ireland does not have a reportable conduct scheme.

Jurisdiction	Legislation	Overview	Interaction with Reportable Conduct Scheme
		<p>All police information considered relevant to the check in Ireland ('specified information') can be considered by Garda, including investigations, allegations or non-conviction findings of harm (An Garda Síochána, 2016).</p> <p>The vetting process also includes charges, convictions, child protection information or court records (Early Childhood Ireland, 2023). If any specified information is disclosed about an individual, Garda will provide an official statement including details and a decision on whether it is disqualifying (An Garda Síochána, 2016).</p> <p><u>Period of validity before renewal</u></p> <p>There is no requirement for renewal of Garda Vetting.</p> <p>However, Garda Vetting will reoccur when an individual applies for a new role or job. The Irish Government has considered introducing mandatory re-vetting since 2021 (Citizens Information, 2024). The Irish Government currently recommends renewing every 3 to 5 years (Childminding Ireland, 2025).</p>	
United Kingdom	<p><i>Protection of Freedoms Act 2012</i></p> <p><i>The Protection of Freedoms Act 2012 (Disclosure and Barring Service Transfer of Functions) Order 2012</i></p>	<p>In the UK, there is a Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) that includes WWCC checks.</p> <p><u>ECEC relevance</u></p> <p>A DBS Enhanced and Barred Check is required for ECEC sector work (Ofsted, 2024).</p> <p>Employers can hire individuals waiting on DBS checks but this is discouraged in almost all industries, including the ECEC sector, and the employer is liable for employing staff who later receive disqualifying disclosures on their DBS certificate (Personnel Checks, 2022).</p> <p><u>What information can be considered?</u></p> <p>DBS checks consider its Children's Barred List (held internally by DBS), followed by the Police National Database (DBS, 2025) and then any information on file by local police. Where there is a match between information held by police and a DBS applicant, the relevant police force will consider whether the held information is relevant to the applicant's sector. If</p>	England does not have a reportable conduct scheme, although Wales has elements of a reportable conduct scheme which is able to provide the DBS with necessary information (IICSA, 2022).

Jurisdiction	Legislation	Overview	Interaction with Reportable Conduct Scheme
		<p>they disclose any information to the DBS, the reason for their decision to disclose will also be recorded (DBS, 2021).</p> <p>Information about activities overseas may be available, noting individuals seeking a skilled worker visa in ECEC contexts must provide a criminal record certificate for any country where they have lived for 12 months or more since they were aged over 18 years of age, in the 10 years before the application (United Kingdom Home Office, 2025a).</p> <p><i>Period of validity before renewal</i></p> <p>None – a DBS check is issued for each job application, unless an applicant is subscribed to the Update Service.</p> <p>The voluntary Update Service keeps DBS certificates up to date and empowers organisations to check a certificate online.</p> <p>This both simplifies worker applications, and helps safeguarding, by ensuring the check is up to date and accessible. However, this service is voluntary, and carries a subscription fee, and therefore shouldn't be considered a primary mechanism of the DBS regime (DBS, 2025).</p>	
New Zealand	<i>Children's Act 2014</i>	<p>In New Zealand, there is a dual worker screening scheme consisting of both 'Safety Checks' and 'Police vetting'.</p> <p><i>ECEC relevance</i></p> <p>ECEC sector work requires safety checks organised by the employer, which also mandates the employer requesting a Police vet on the applicant's behalf (Te Tāhuhu o te Mātauranga, Ministry of Education, New Zealand, 2024a; 2024b).</p> <p><i>What information can be considered?</i></p> <p>The safety check must consider work history, referees, professional licensing, identity verification and an interview with the applicant on their attitudes to working with children. The safety check results in a 3-yearly updated risk assessment of the employee (Te Tāhuhu o te Mātauranga, Ministry of Education, New Zealand, n.d.).</p>	N/A. New Zealand does not have a reportable conduct scheme, nor does it have a mandatory reporting duty, although individual ECEC agencies/organisations may require it in their individual policies or guidelines (Poutasi, 2022).

Jurisdiction	Legislation	Overview	Interaction with Reportable Conduct Scheme
		<p>For the police vet, all police information considered relevant can be disclosed by New Zealand Police, including investigations or allegations that did not result in convictions or charges (New Zealand Police, n.d.).</p> <p>Information from overseas may be available, noting children's workers who have lived overseas for over a year in a 10-year period prior the applying for a Police vet must either provide a criminal record certificate from the country where they lived, or provide evidence that they attempted to acquire one. They must also make a statutory declaration with penalties for deception about whether they have any overseas criminal convictions (Te Tāhuhu o te Mātauranga, Ministry of Education, New Zealand, 2024a).</p> <p><u>Period of validity before renewal</u></p> <p>3 years – for both the police vet and the safety check risk assessment (Te Tāhuhu o te Mātauranga, Ministry of Education, New Zealand, 2024b; n.d.)</p>	

Appendix E

Table 12: Information sharing legislation across Australian jurisdictions

Jurisdiction	Legislation	Overview	Interaction with Reportable Conduct Scheme
ACT	<i>Children and Young People Act 2008</i> (ACT) Chapter 25	<p><u>Provisions overview</u></p> <p>The provisions in the Act allow designated entities subject to the reportable conduct scheme or a child safety information-sharing entity to exchange information relevant to the safety, welfare and wellbeing of children (ACT Ombudsman, 2020).</p> <p><u>ECEC relevance</u></p> <p>Early education is a designated entity subject to the reportable conduct scheme (ACT Ombudsman, 2020).</p>	The ACT information sharing scheme interacts with its Reportable Conduct Scheme (see Appendix F).

Jurisdiction	Legislation	Overview	Interaction with Reportable Conduct Scheme
		<p><u>Mandatory v voluntary sharing</u></p> <p>If an entity receives a request from another entity and holds the relevant information, it is required to share that information unless a valid legal exception applies.</p> <p>Entities can provide relevant information to another entity without a request (ACT Ombudsman, 2020).</p>	
NSW	<i>Children and Young Persons (Care and Protection) Act 1998</i> (NSW) Chapter 16A	<p><u>Scheme overview</u></p> <p>The scheme allows certain government and non-government agencies (prescribed bodies) to proactively share information related to the safety, welfare or wellbeing of children. This collaborative and simplified approach to information sharing effectively supports children's wellbeing (NSW Department of Education, 2024).</p> <p><u>ECEC relevance</u></p> <p>Prescribed bodies explicitly include ECEC services such as long day care, preschool, family day care, outside school hours care, occasional care, and mobile education and care services. They can provide and/or request information from another prescribed body that relates to the safety, welfare or wellbeing of a child, while being protected from liability (<i>Children and Young Persons (Care and Protection) Act 1998</i> (NSW) s 245G).</p> <p><u>Mandatory v voluntary sharing</u></p> <p>Prescribed bodies <i>must</i> provide relevant information upon request from other prescribed bodies – unless a valid legal exception applies (<i>Children and Young Persons (Care and Protection) Act 1998</i> (NSW) s 245D).</p> <p>Prescribed bodies may provide relevant information to another prescribed body without a request for information (<i>Children and Young Persons (Care and Protection) Act 1998</i> (NSW) s 245C).</p>	The NSW information sharing scheme interacts with its reportable conduct scheme (see Appendix F).

Jurisdiction	Legislation	Overview	Interaction with Reportable Conduct Scheme
NT	<i>Care and Protection of Children Act 2007</i> (NT) Part 5.1A	<p><u>Provisions overview</u></p> <p>The information sharing framework is based on the principle that people and organisations responsible for children should share relevant information to support child safety and wellbeing. The goal is to foster collaboration and ensure timely responses to legitimate information-sharing requests. Authorised Information Sharers (AIS) may share relevant information with other AIS, while being protected from liability (Northern Territory Government, 2023).</p> <p><u>ECEC relevance</u></p> <p>Providers of registered childcare services are AIS (<i>Care and Protection of Children Act 2007</i> (NT) s 293C).</p> <p><u>Mandatory v voluntary sharing</u></p> <p>When an AIS received a valid request, they <i>must</i> provide any information they reasonably believe will help protect a child's safety or wellbeing, unless a valid legal exception applies (Northern Territory Government, 2023).</p> <p>An AIS may share any information relevant to a child's safety or wellbeing (Northern Territory Government, 2023).</p>	N/A. NT has not yet implemented a reportable conduct scheme.
QLD	<i>Child Protection Act 1999</i> (Qld) Chapter 5A	<p><u>Provisions overview</u></p> <p>Modern information-sharing framework enabling relevant government and non-government agencies to share information that protects the safety, welfare and wellbeing of children and families (Department of Children, Youth Justice and Multicultural Affairs, Queensland, 2018).</p> <p><u>ECEC relevance</u></p> <p>Permits prescribed entities including licensed childcare services and other 'entities that provide a service to children and families that is prescribed by legislation' to exchange information for specific purposes (<i>Child Protection Act 1999</i> (Qld) ss 159MA–</p>	The Queensland information-sharing scheme interacts with its reportable conduct scheme (http://www.ocg.nsw.gov.au/organisations/reportable-conduct-scheme) (see Appendix F).

Jurisdiction	Legislation	Overview	Interaction with Reportable Conduct Scheme
		<p>159MD, 159N) while being protected from liability (<i>Child Protection Act 1999</i> (Qld) s 159Q).</p> <p><u><i>Mandatory v voluntary sharing</i></u></p> <p>Certain entities must provide specified information about a child, unborn child or another person to Child Safety (Department of Families, Seniors, Disability Services and Child Safety) upon request, unless a valid legal exception applies (<i>Child Protection Act 1999</i> (Qld) s 159N).</p> <p>The framework enables broad information sharing without consent for specific purposes between child safety, prescribed entities and service providers to address concerns related to child protection and wellbeing.</p>	
SA	<i>Children and Young People (Safety) Act 2017</i> (SA) s 152	<p><u><i>Provisions overview</i></u></p> <p>The provisions within the Act allow prescribed bodies to exchange information related to the health, safety, or wellbeing of children, to support their role in delivering services and support to children. These provisions are consistent with the long-standing Information Sharing Guidelines (ISG) (Department for Education, South Australia, 2023).</p> <p>The ISG provides a consistent state-wide approach for relevant government and non-government agencies to share information when a child's safety or wellbeing is at risk (Department of the Premier and Cabinet, South Australia, 2013).</p> <p><u><i>ECEC relevance</i></u></p> <p>The prescribed bodies include various government agencies, however, it is unclear how broad the range of bodies is intended to be (<i>Children and Young People (Safety) Act 2017</i> (SA) s 152(1)). They do not explicitly include early childcare services. The ISG applies to individuals who provides services to children and young people (Department of the Premier and Cabinet, South Australia, 2013).</p>	N/A. SA has not yet implemented a reportable conduct scheme.

Jurisdiction	Legislation	Overview	Interaction with Reportable Conduct Scheme
		<p><u>Mandatory v voluntary sharing</u></p> <p>In certain circumstances, the Department for Child Protection is mandated to share relevant information with another entity. When information sharing is mandatory, consent from the individual to whom the information relates is not required (Department for Child Protection, South Australia, 2019).</p> <p>The Act allows prescribed bodies to proactively share information in a culturally appropriate and safe manner to manage risk and support the care and protection needs of children and their families (Department for Child Protection, South Australia, 2019).</p>	
TAS	<p><i>Children, Young Persons and their Families Act 1997</i> (Tas) Part 5A</p> <p><i>Child and Youth Safe Organisations Act 2023</i> (Tas) Part 5</p>	<p><u>Provisions overview</u></p> <p>The <i>Children, Young Persons and their Families Act 1997</i> (Tas) (CYPTF Act (Tas)) includes provisions that allow prescribed ISEs and the Department of Community and Health Services (Secretary) to exchange information to support the safety, welfare, or wellbeing of a relevant person, while being protected from liability (CYPTF Act (Tas) s 53B).</p> <p>Building on this, the Child and Youth Safe Organisations Framework established under the <i>Child and Youth Safe Organisations Act 2023</i> outlines how organisations must prioritise children's safety and wellbeing and respond to concerns about a worker's behaviour towards children. Entities covered by the Framework may share information in specific circumstances with other leaders or regulators (Department of Justice, Tasmania, 2023b), while being protected from liability (<i>Children, Young Persons and their Families Act 1997</i> (Tas) s 58).</p> <p><u>ECEC relevance</u></p> <p>An ISE includes prescribed individuals such as principals and teachers in any educational institution (including kindergartens), individuals who provide childcare or operate a childcare service for a fee or reward, those involved in managing an approved education and care service within the meaning of the <i>Education</i></p>	The TAS information sharing scheme interacts with its reportable conduct scheme (see Appendix F).

Jurisdiction	Legislation	Overview	Interaction with Reportable Conduct Scheme
		<p>and Care Services National Law (Tasmania) or a child care service licensed under the <i>Child Care Act 2001</i> (Tas).</p> <p>Organisations required to comply with the Framework include childcare providers, commercial babysitting services, and other organisations that deliver services specifically for children (Office of the Independent Regulator, 2025).</p> <p><u>Mandatory v voluntary sharing</u></p> <p>Under the CYPTF Act (Tas), the Secretary can <i>require</i> an ISE to provide relevant information and must do so within the period specified by the Secretary (CYPTF Act (Tas) s 53B). An ISE can also proactively provide information to the Secretary or another ISE if it relates to the safety, welfare and wellbeing of a relevant person (CYPTF Act (Tas) s 53B).</p> <p>Entities <i>must</i> share relevant information as required under the 2023 Act. This may include reportable conduct information and non-compliance with Child and Youth Safe Standards. Entities may also proactively share certain information that seeks to promote the safety and wellbeing of children (Department of Justice, Tasmania, 2023b).</p>	
VIC	<i>Child Wellbeing and Safety Act 2005</i> (Vic) Part 6A	<p><u>Scheme overview</u></p> <p>The Child Information Sharing Scheme (CISS) enables prescribed ISEs to share information in a timely and effective manner to support the wellbeing and safety of children. CISS expands the circumstances in which ISEs can exchange confidential information if it meets a certain threshold (<i>Child Wellbeing and Safety Act 2005</i> (Vic) s 1; Victorian Government, 2024b).</p> <p><u>ECEC relevance</u></p> <p>ISEs explicitly include ECEC services such as kindergartens, long day care centres and before and after school hours care services.</p>	The VIC information sharing scheme interacts with its reportable conduct scheme (see Appendix F).

Jurisdiction	Legislation	Overview	Interaction with Reportable Conduct Scheme
		<p><u>Mandatory v voluntary sharing</u></p> <p>If the legal requirements of the scheme are met, an ISE <i>must</i> disclose relevant information to another ISE upon request, unless a valid legal exception applies (<i>Child Wellbeing and Safety Act 2005</i> (Vic) s 41W).</p> <p>If the legal requirements of the scheme are met, any ISE may voluntarily share confidential information to another ISE (s 41V), while being protected from liability (s 41ZB).</p>	
WA	<i>Children and Community Services Act 2004</i> (WA) ss 23–25	<p><u>Provisions overview</u></p> <p>The scheme allows public authorities to exchange information related to the safety and wellbeing of children with each other and with authorised entities (e.g. registered schools, prescribed NGOs), while authorised entities can only exchange information with public authorities (RCIRCSA, 2017i).</p> <p><u>ECEC relevance</u></p> <p>Although workers are mandatory reporters, ECEC services are not explicitly designated as ISEs. They may fall under the definition of a ‘non-government provider’ if they deliver social services under a contract with a prescribed authority and therefore may be able to share information (<i>Children and Community Services Act 2004</i> (WA) s 28A).</p> <p><u>Mandatory v voluntary sharing</u></p> <p>While workers must report a belief as soon as practicable after forming the belief under the reportable conduct scheme, they are not explicitly mandated to share information upon request (<i>Parliamentary Commissioner Act 1971</i> (WA)).</p> <p>In line with the Act, ISEs may proactively share relevant information to promote the wellbeing of children, while being protected from liability (<i>Children and Community Services Act 2004</i> (WA) s 23(5)).</p>	The WA information sharing scheme interacts with its reportable conduct scheme (see Appendix F)

Appendix F

Table 13: Reportable conduct schemes across Australian jurisdictions

Jurisdiction	Legislation	Overview	Supporting information
ACT	<i>Ombudsman Act 1989</i> (ACT)	<p>In the ACT, there is a reportable conduct scheme administered by the ACT Ombudsman. This scheme mandates employers notify the ACT Ombudsman within 30 days of becoming aware of a report.</p> <p>Employers must also perform an internal investigation and submit findings to the Ombudsman (ACT Ombudsman, 2025).</p> <p><u><i>Who is required to report?</i></u></p> <p>Specific organisations including all childcare services.</p> <p><u><i>What conduct is 'reportable'?</i></u></p> <p>Conduct (whether consensual or not) that results in:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> the ill treatment or neglect of the child exposing or subjecting the child to behaviour or a circumstance that psychologically harms the child exposing or subjecting the child to non-criminal sexual misconduct certain forms of criminal offending against the <i>Crimes Act 1900</i> (ACT), e.g. sexual offences certain forms of civil offending against the <i>Education and Care Service National Law</i> (ACT), e.g. inappropriate discipline or negligence <p>(<i>Ombudsman Act 1989</i> (ACT) s 17E).</p>	The ACT provides a reportable conduct resource kit to assist with reporting decision making.
NSW	<i>Children and Young Persons (Care and Protection) Act 1998</i> (NSW) – amended under the <i>Children's Guardian Act 2019</i> (NSW)	<p>In NSW, there is a reportable conduct scheme administered by the Office of the Children's Guardian (OCG). Reports under this scheme are not required to provide or obtain any evidence (OCG, 2025).</p> <p><u><i>Who is required to report?</i></u></p> <p>Specific organisations including all childcare services</p>	NSW provides a mandatory reporter guide to assist with reporting decision making.

Jurisdiction	Legislation	Overview	Supporting information
		<p>Contractors and subcontractors who are required to obtain a WWCC are also subject to reportable conduct obligations.</p> <p><u><i>What conduct is 'reportable'?</i></u></p> <p>Any suspicion or reasonable belief of CSA is to be reported, including additional suspicions after an initial report (ChildStory, 2025).</p> <p>Other forms of reportable conduct include a sexual offence, sexual misconduct, ill-treatment of a child, neglect of a child, an assault against a child and certain forms of criminal offending against the <i>Crimes Act 1900</i> (NSW) (e.g. negligence or failure to aid in the reporting, prosecution or conviction of CSA) and other forms of behaviour that causes significant emotional or physical harm to a child (<i>Children's Guardian Act 2019</i> (NSW) s 20).</p>	
NT		<p>NT does not yet have a reportable conduct scheme to guide reports of allegations of CSA. However, every adult is legally required to report any reasonable belief that a child has been or is at risk of harm of exploitation (including CSA) (<i>Care and Protection of Children Act 2007</i> (NT) s 26).</p> <p>NT remains the only Australian jurisdiction that has not yet criminalised a failure to protect a child from CSA (Dowling et al., 2024).</p>	The NT provides Guidelines and Procedures for mandatory reporting.
QLD	<i>Child Safe Organisations Act 2024</i> (Qld)	<p>Queensland's reportable conduct scheme will commence in July 2026, with staggered implementation to lead to full operation by July 2027 (QFCC, 2024b). It is administered by QFCC.</p> <p><u><i>Who is required to report?</i></u></p> <p>Specific organisations including all childcare services.</p> <p><u><i>What conduct is 'reportable'?</i></u></p> <p>A child sexual offence, sexual misconduct with the child as the victim and/or witness, ill-treatment of a child, significant neglect of a child, physical violence with the child as the victim and/or witness and other forms of behaviour that causes significant emotional or psychological harm to a child (<i>Child Safe Organisations Act 2024</i> (Qld) s 26).</p>	Queensland has not yet provided public guidance for its reportable conduct scheme.

Jurisdiction	Legislation	Overview	Supporting information
SA	<i>Children and Young People (Safety) Act 2017</i> (SA)	<p>South Australia has a mandatory reporting scheme that requires certain people to report to the Department for Child Protection if they suspect on reasonable grounds that a child is, or may be, at risk (including having suffered harm caused by sexual, physical, mental or emotional abuse or neglect which they should have been protected from) and this suspicion is formed in the course of their work (<i>Children and Young People (Safety) Act 2017</i> (SA) s 31).</p> <p>Further, the Department for Child Protection has provided official non-legislative definitions of harm, including actions such as grooming (Department for Child Protection, SA, 2023).</p> <p><u><i>Who is required to report?</i></u></p> <p>Specific organisations and professions, including childcare workers providing services directly to children.</p> <p><u><i>What conduct is 'reportable'?</i></u></p> <p>This scheme does not refer to 'reportable conduct'. Instead, it requires that reports be made about any reasonable suspicion of a child being 'at risk' (<i>Children and Young People (Safety) Act 2017</i> (SA) s 31). A child is taken to be 'at risk' if, for example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ they have suffered or are likely to suffer harm which they would ordinarily be protected from ▪ they are likely to be removed from the state to undergo a medical treatment that is unlawful in SA, or be part of a marriage that would be void or invalid in SA, or be involved in an activity that is a crime in SA ▪ the child's parents or guardians are unable or unwilling to care for them, have abandoned them, are absent (after reasonable inquiry) or are dead ▪ the child is of compulsory school age but is persistently absent (without satisfactory explanation) ▪ the child is of no fixed address ('homeless') <p>(<i>Children and Young People (Safety) Act 2017</i> (SA) s 18).</p>	SA provide a mandatory reporting information booklet and guidance around the process for making reports.

Jurisdiction	Legislation	Overview	Supporting information
TAS	<i>Child and Youth Safe Organisations Act 2023</i> (Tas)	<p>Tasmania has a reportable conduct scheme administered by the Royal Commission Response Unit within Tasmania's Department of Justice.</p> <p><u><i>Who is required to report?</i></u></p> <p>Specific organisations, including all childcare services.</p> <p><u><i>What conduct is 'reportable'?</i></u></p> <p>Certain forms of criminal offending against the <i>Criminal Code Act 1924</i> (Tas) (e.g. failure to report information relevant to a crime against a child, performing female genital mutilation), sexual misconduct against, with or in the presence of a child, physical violence against a child, grooming of child, significant neglect of a child, and other conduct that causes, or is likely to cause, significant emotional or psychological harm to a child (<i>Child and Youth Safe Organisations Act 2023</i> (Tas) s 7).</p>	Tasmania provides an information sheet and self-assessment tool to clarify understandings of its reportable conduct scheme.
VIC	<i>Child Wellbeing and Safety Act 2005</i> (Vic)	<p>Victoria has a reportable conduct scheme administered by the CCYP.</p> <p><u><i>Who is required to report?</i></u></p> <p>Specific organisations, including all childcare services.</p> <p><u><i>What conduct is 'reportable'?</i></u></p> <p>A sexual offence committed against, with or in the presence of, a child, sexual misconduct committed against, with or in the presence of, a child, physical violence committed against, with or in the presence of, a child, any behaviour that causes significant emotional or psychological harm to a child and significant neglect of a child (<i>Child Wellbeing and Safety Act 2005</i> (Vic) s 3).</p>	Victoria provides resources and support to help organisations comply with its reportable conduct scheme.
WA	<i>Parliamentary Commissioner Act 1971</i> (WA)	<p>WA has a reportable conduct scheme administered by the Ombudsman Western Australia office.</p> <p><u><i>Who is required to report?</i></u></p> <p>Specific organisations, including all childcare workers. Specific guidance, available online, is directed at ECEC centres and workers and identifies the</p>	WA provides information sheets and guidance as well as a register for webinars and training for organisations to support their understanding of its reportable conduct scheme.

Jurisdiction	Legislation	Overview	Supporting information
		<p>reporting obligations on workers and volunteers in the ECEC sector. The guidance outlines that reporting obligations will often require reporting to more than one regulatory body (Ombudsman WA, 2023),</p> <p><u><i>What conduct is 'reportable'?</i></u></p> <p>A sexual offence, sexual misconduct, a physical assault committed against, with or in the presence of a child, significant neglect of a child and any behaviour that causes significant emotional or psychological harm to a child (<i>Parliamentary Commissioner Act 1971</i> (WA) s 19G),</p>	

Appendix G

Developmental crime prevention

One of the primary ways to disrupt perpetration before it potentially occurs is through developmental crime prevention. This involves providing resources and support to certain individuals and/or groups of individuals (e.g. communities and families) to redirect them away from a path that may lead to crime (McKillop et al., 2018a, 2018b). This approach often focuses on intervening with children, but it can also involve older cohorts, including high school students (Assini-Meytin et al., 2020; McKillop et al., 2018a). Generally, the earlier the intervention, the greater the benefits (e.g. reducing risk factors, securing developmental, educational and social benefits to individuals, and securing benefits to society at large) (Artus & Niemi, 2016).

Examples of regulatory approaches to developmental crime prevention include policies that introduce mandatory education programs or awareness raising campaigns designed to curb the development of attitudes and behaviours that may be supportive (directly or indirectly) of crime. These are often situated in a broader context of promoting prosocial and developmentally appropriate behaviour, for example, addressing CSA by promoting a clearer understanding of consent, healthy boundaries, intimacy and sex education (see, e.g. Assini-Meytin et al., 2020; Letourneau et al., 2017).

Letourneau and colleagues (2017, p. 108) have found that '[u]niversal school-based prevention approaches that aim to deter older children and adolescents from engaging younger children in sexual behaviours have the promise to prevent a sizable portion of CSA in a cost-effective manner' and '[t]here is a need for school-based prevention programs that target the onset of CSA'.

Psychosocial treatment programs

Another primary way to disrupt perpetration *after* it has commenced is through psychosocial treatment programs, or 'sex offender treatment programs' (SOTPs), often offered to offender populations in correctional facilities.

Psychosocial treatment programs can also be accessed through specialist organisations such as the [Help Wanted Prevention Intervention](#) (USA based), [Safer Lives](#) (UK based), the [Specialist Treatment Organisation for Perpetrators and Survivors of Sexual Offending \(StopSO\)](#) (UK based) and the [Lucy Faithfull Foundation](#) (UK based).

The Lucy Faithfull Foundation established a Stop It Now! helpline and campaign that has spread internationally, including to Australia. The [Australian Stop It Now! website](#) links users to anonymous services, including self-help modules, which they can access if they are concerned about sexual thoughts and/or behaviours towards children (Stop It Now!, n.d).

Given that individuals who self-identify as being sexually attracted to children have indicated a willingness to seek help (Grady et al., 2019; Levenson & Grady, 2019; see also Assini-Meytin et al., 2020), such treatment programs have promise, and studies suggest treatment has preventive potential (see e.g., Cant et al., 2022 citing, most recently, Caldwell, 2016; Hanson et al., 2018; UNICEF, 2020). However, evaluations as to the effectiveness of SOTPs have produced mixed results (Assini-Meytin et al., 2020; Gannon et al., 2019; Mews et al., 2017; Van Horn et al., 2015).

In their review of SOTP programs, Gannon and colleagues (2019) noted the following factors were found to increase effectiveness:

- having a qualified, licensed psychologist consistently present
- ensuring the staff delivering the program are supervised by psychologists
- having the program participants rate its quality highly (perceived efficacy)
- delivering the program in groups
- focusing on managing sexual arousal
- not using polygraph testing ('lie detector' testing).

Managing individuals' behaviours

Managing perpetrators' behaviour and movements in the community is another theoretical approach to preventing perpetration (Zgoba & Mitchell, 2021). One example of a management approach is having a perpetrator's address and information about their movements documented on a register and/or notified to police. Each Australian jurisdiction has such a register, and the National Child Offender System (NCOS) allows Australian police to record and share child offender information online (ACIC, n.d.). The NCOS consists of:

- the Australian National Child Offender Register (ANCOR), which includes police records
- the Managed Person System – including information on alleged offenders who are charged but not convicted and offenders whose reporting obligations have lapsed (ACIC, n.d.).

Another example of a management approach is having a specialist team monitor a suspicious individual's movements and intervening in circumstances where risks of offending arise. This team could exist in a criminal justice context (e.g. police) or may be a more informal grouping of support people, as with Canada's 'Circles of Support and Accountability' (Richards, 2022).

The effectiveness of monitoring and restriction mechanisms at the individual level is mixed. Sex offender registers have been found to be ineffective in that they do not reduce the commission of sexual or non-sexual crimes and because they can lead to societal disenfranchisement which can actually be more problematic (Zgoba & Mitchell, 2021). However, other monitoring efforts have been found to be more effective, including specialist teams and support groups that monitor past perpetrators and/or intervene to prevent further offences (Richards, 2022).

References

Case law

R v Griffith [2024] QDC 207

Legislation and regulations

Australian

Care and Protection of Children Act 2007 (NT)

Children and Community Services Act 2004 (WA)

Children and Young People Act 2008 (ACT)

Children and Young People (Safety) Act 2017 (SA)

Children and Young Persons (Care and Protection) Act 1998 (NSW)

Child and Youth Safe Organisations Act 2023 (Tas)

Child Protection Act 1999 (Qld)

Child Safe Organisations Act 2024 (Qld)

Child Wellbeing and Safety Act 2005 (Vic)

Children, Young Persons and their Families Act 1997 (Tas)

Crimes Act 1900 (ACT)

Crimes Act 1900 (NSW)

Crimes Act 1958 (Vic)

Criminal Code 1983 (NT)

Criminal Code Act 1899 (Qld)

Criminal Code Act 1924 (Tas)

Criminal Code Act 1995 (Cth)

Criminal Code Compilation Act 1913 (WA)

Criminal Law Consolidation Act 1935 (SA)

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