

Safeguarding children
is the responsibility of
every business.

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Background

Significant steps have been made in making community sector organisations safer for children. But sadly, the Australian business sector has lagged behind. The On Us: Australian Business Coalition for Safeguarding Children was established in 2021 in recognition that there is a lot of work to be done.

With seed funding from the Westpac Safer Children, Safer Communities Grant, Australian Childhood Foundation and the Y Australia set out to co-design an approach that would strengthen the commitment and capability of Australian businesses to adopt safeguarding policies and practices to help protect children and young people.

Throughout 2022 and 2023, a number of co-design workshops were held with leading Australian corporates to examine how best practice approaches to safeguarding children could be adapted and implemented in the operations of business. These workshops identified a number of areas of concern for businesses in relation to child safety.

• There is a low awareness of risks

A recent survey of 500 businesses in Australia found that there is a major knowledge gap among business decision makers and leaders, with 65% of businesses believing that child exploitation could not occur within their industry.^A

At an individual sector level, the study found that 76% of leaders in banking and finance, 75% of leaders in technology, engineering and design, 58% of leaders in industry, automotive and manufacturing, 55% of leaders in medical and healthcare sectors and 59% of leaders in retail, entertainment, tourism, hospitality, and transport believe there is no potential for child exploitation or abuse to occur within their business or industry.

• There are gaps in internal expertise, culture and mindset

Businesses lack the expertise, knowledge or experience needed to develop holistic and comprehensive child safeguarding policies and systems as well as strengthen their internal culture around child safeguarding.

• There are no consistent national 'standards' relevant to business

Less than half of business leaders have policies in place that protect children when engaging with their businesses' services, products or activities.

• There are limited business practices for addressing cross-sector risks

Business practices are disjointed and inoperable across sectors. This impacts the ability of business to properly manage risk and for stakeholders to keep children safe.

• There is a lack of collaborative cross-sector action

There are few opportunities for businesses from different sectors to learn from each other and collectively problem solve challenges faced when safeguarding children.

The corporations who participated in the co-design workshops acknowledged that these are complex problems for which isolated efforts are inadequate. They supported and called for collective action to impact effectiveness by:

- bringing together many voices to amplify the issue and build awareness across a range of industries and business sectors;
- creating learning environments that promote leading practice for business;
- sharing capability, skills and resources across their sectors and business more broadly to enact change;

- leading to new collaborations that overcome old challenges; and,
- working with a wide network of employees and customers, to build safer environments for children and young people.

The co-design workshops supported the genesis of the On Us coalition to inspire all businesses to appreciate the importance of their role in helping to keep children and young people safe from abuse and exploitation.

The founding members of the On Us coalition are Westpac, InterContinental Hotel Group, The GPT Group, TBWA, The Y Australia and TikTok.

The purpose of the On Us coalition is to drive the commitment of business in Australia to see the issue, understand the critical role they play and help them to take action to better protect children and young people. It will do this through:

Leadership - empowering business to build a commitment to the need for robust child safeguarding practices and culture;

Awareness and Education - resourcing business to understand the scale and importance of the risks associated with creating a child safe culture across corporate Australia; and,

Driving Excellence - implementing best practice solutions that give business the knowledge, tools, capabilities and expertise to effectively act to safeguard children.

The On Us coalition's name derives from the insight that it is never the responsibility of children to protect themselves from abuse and exploitation. It is on us as adults, as communities, as businesses to take the required action to make all environments and relationships safe for children and young people.

The On Us coalition is an initiative of Australian Childhood Foundation, a national not for profit organisation that aims to prevent child abuse and exploitation and reduce the trauma it causes to children, families and the community. It provides specialist therapeutic services to children and young people affected by violence. It is one of the founding organisations in the establishment of the National Centre for Action on Child Sexual Abuse funded by the Commonwealth Government. It is a leading expert in supporting organisations to change and strengthen their safeguarding children culture and operations.

Introduction

Children are amongst some of the most vulnerable individuals in our community. They rely on adults for their safety and protection and the meeting of their most basic needs. They are voiceless in the development of policies or processes that impact their lives. We like to think that our collective actions are always in the best interests of children in our community. And yet, we often fail them.

The trauma caused to children and young people as a result of abuse and violence lead to lifelong scars. Without collective efforts to protect children and intervene early where abuse is occurring, families and communities contend with downstream consequences that affect everyone. As adults, these children and young people are more likely to experience mental health and/or substance abuse issues, homelessness, family violence, unstable employment and interaction with criminal justice systems. Such complex social problems come at a cost to the community and to business.

The abuse of children is poorly understood in our community. It is an issue that research shows we consistently push to the periphery of our awareness. Our preference is to believe that it is a problem that occurs somewhere else, in communities and neighbourhoods that are somehow different to theirs. Even when a child discloses abuse, many adults are not inclined to believe them.

It stands to reason that these community attitudes are also reflected in business environments.

It is a sad reality that adults who intend to exploit children and young people use the environments, services and products that businesses offer to abuse and harm. Inadvertently, businesses can also impact on the safety and well-being of children and young people through their own practices and actions. And for many businesses, young people are a key part of their workforce.

The safeguarding of children and young people from abuse and violence is a neglected but core aspect of Environmental, Social and Governance (ESG) practices for business.

This report outlines the case for why the protection of children and young people is a critical concern for all businesses and what they can do now to realise a sustained commitment to safeguarding children and young people.

What does safeguarding children mean?

Safeguarding children refers to the process of protecting children and young people from harm, abuse, neglect, and exploitation and to promote their well-being, safety, and development. It involves a range of proactive and preventive measures designed to create a secure environment in which children can grow, learn, and thrive. Safeguarding children and young people encompasses various aspects:

Protection from Abuse: Safeguarding children and young people aims to prevent and address physical, emotional, or sexual abuse directed at children and young people, whether by family members, caregivers, or other individuals.

Prevention of Neglect: It involves efforts to ensure that children and young people's basic needs, such as food, shelter, education, and healthcare, are met, and they are not subject to neglect.

Child Welfare: Safeguarding children and young people covers promoting their overall wellbeing, including physical and mental health, emotional stability, and educational opportunities.

Online Safety: In the digital age, it extends to protecting children and young people from online risks and cyberbullying, ensuring safe internet use and privacy.

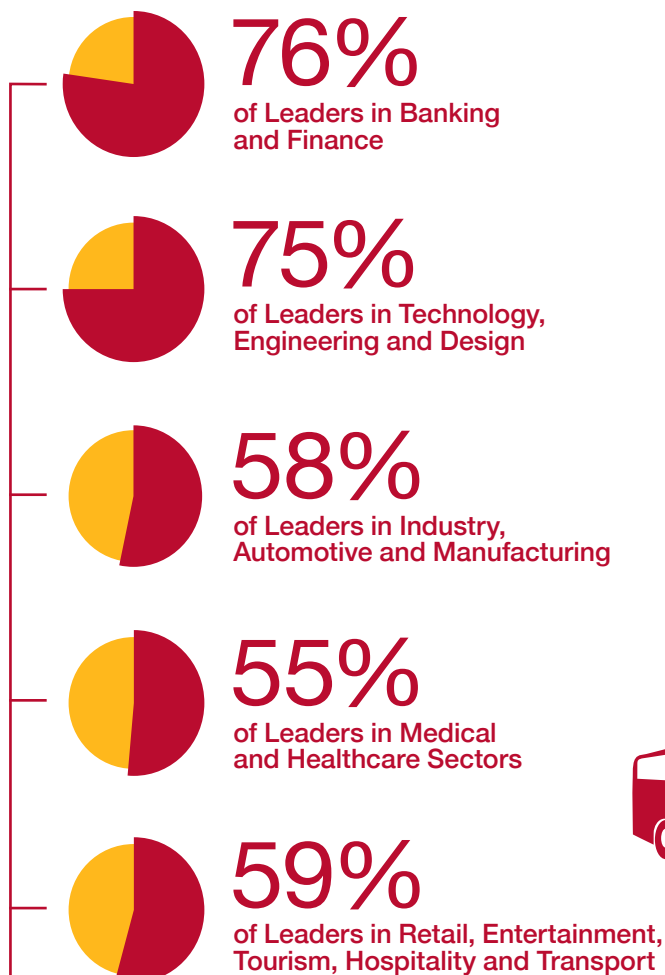
Advancing the rights of children: Taking action to promote and uphold the basic entitlements of all children and young people not only ensures that their needs for love, family, culture and education are met but it also supports community attitudes which embrace collective accountability for the ways that adults behave towards them.

Listening to Children: Actively involving children and young people in decisions that affect their safety and wellbeing, as well as creating an environment where they feel safe to express their concerns.

Safeguarding children and young people is a shared responsibility that ensures that children and young people grow up, live, learn, play and work in environments where they are protected, nurtured, and can reach their full potential, free from harm and exploitation.

Child abuse and exploitation in Australia is an urgent, growing and critical problem.

Australia is one of the **largest and fastest** growing markets for child sexual abuse materials in the world, growing by **129% in 2019-20[#]**



believe there is **no potential** for child **exploitation or abuse** to occur within **their business or industry.**^Δ

CHILD ABUSE RELATED OFFENCES GREW BY

310%

ACROSS AUSTRALIA
IN 2019 — 2020[^]



In a 2021 national community survey, **child abuse rates lower** on a **list of community concerns** than **problems with public transport and roads**[~]



1 in 5 are **not confident** they could **recognise** if a **child** was being **abused or neglected**[~]

Child abuse costs
Australians

\$24.5b

in productivity losses
and reduced
quality of life^o



1 in 5 Australian adults are not confident about knowing what to do if they suspected a child was being **abused or neglected**^r



1 in 6 people are uncertain or would be **reluctant to report** a child being **abused** or neglected even if they were **sure of the facts**^r



One child is reported **abused** or **neglected every two minutes** in Australia^{*}

4 OUT OF 5

Australians believe that if action is not taken now, there will be long-term consequences for the community^r



Horrifically, a significant proportion of **living Australians** experienced **more than one type of abuse** concurrently as children[‡]

6x

Child sexual abuse rarely happens only once, with **almost 2.5 million** adults experiencing **sexual abuse more than six times** as children[‡]

4.8m

INDIVIDUALS HAVE ENDURED BETWEEN 3 AND 5 TYPES OF ABUSE AT THE SAME TIME DURING THEIR CHILDHOOD[‡]

1 in 3 Australian adults do not believe children who report child abuse, despite **cases of abuse on the increase**[~]



65%

of 500 businesses surveyed in 2023 believed that child exploitation could not occur within their industry[^]

BALENCIAGA IS BEING ACCUSED OF PROMOTING CHILD ABUSE IN ITS LATEST CAMPAIGN. HERE'S WHY THE LUXURY BRAND IS IN HOT WATER

Images from Balenciaga's latest holiday campaign have been described as "disturbing" and "child exploiting". The set of photos, used in advertisements for the Spanish fashion label's Spring/Summer 2023 collection, triggered a flood of outrage when they were posted on Instagram to the brand's 14 million followers. The company pulled the campaign and released an apology on Instagram for what many perceived as the sexualisation of children. "Our plush bear bags should not have been featured with children in this campaign," Balenciaga wrote in a post on their Instagram story. The brand also stated it will take legal action "against the parties responsible" for the creating the campaign and "including unapproved items" in the photo shoot. "We strongly condemn abuse of children in any form," Balenciaga wrote.

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SLAMMING THE HOTEL DOOR ON CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE MATERIALS - CISCO, MARRIOTT, AND THE INTERNET WATCH FOUNDATION PARTNER TO THWART ACCESS TO HARMFUL ONLINE CONTENT

Last year, over 32 million reports of suspected child sexual exploitation came into the U.S. CyberTipline. An astounding 99.5 percent of these reports were about child sexual abuse material (CSAM). Millions more images and videos continue to circulate online that have never been reported.

Every time such heinous images are shared, circulated, accessed, it perpetuates the abuse.

People who commit the crime of accessing these horrible materials often seek the perceived anonymity of a hotel room to do so. This is a serious concern for the hotel industry.

Marriott has established a new Global Property Network Standard to have hotels block access to websites with CSAM from the hotels' guest network. As part of this initiative with the Internet Watch Foundation (IWF), Marriott is working with Cisco to implement its security technology to block access to CSAM-containing webpages on the IWF's blocked URL list

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EX-EMPLOYEE OF STATE INSURANCE REGULATOR CHARGED OVER CHILD ABUSE MATERIAL, DRUG SUPPLY

Dylan Terence Khqustiaan, until recently a NSW state government employee, was arrested at his home in Bankstown after the Australian Federal Police received a tip-off from an international law enforcement agency last month. The tip-off to the Australian Centre to Counter Child Exploitation alleged Mr Khqustiaan had been using social media to send child abuse material online.

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AUSTRALIAN CHILDREN REMOVED FROM HARM AND 19 MEN CHARGED WITH CHILD ABUSE OFFENCES

Nineteen men have been charged and 13 Australian children have been removed from harm under an AFP-coordinated investigation into a sophisticated online child abuse network. Operation Bakis was a joint investigation with state and territory police that had its origins in the murder of two FBI agents in Florida in 2021. Most of the alleged Australian offenders, some who are also accused of having produced their own child abuse material to share with other members of the network, were employed in occupations that required a high degree of IT knowledge. Members used software to anonymously share files, chat on message boards and access websites within the network. Network members were able to search for and distribute images and videos of child abuse material and allegedly used encryption and other methods to avoid law enforcement detection.

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EMPLOYEE OF PM'S DEPARTMENT ARRESTED OVER CHILD SEX ABUSE

Malcolm Turnbull has promised a robust investigation and called for child abuse to "always be exposed" after an employee of his department was charged with sex crimes allegedly committed in a remote Central Australian community over Christmas. The man has worked with a range of community organisations, which yesterday also rushed to condemn child abuse.

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30TH MARCH, 2020

AUSTRALIAN FLIGHT ATTENDANT JAILED FOR ABUSE OF CHILDREN OVERSEAS

A 52-year-old Melbourne man was sentenced to 18 and a half years imprisonment by Melbourne Magistrates Court after sexually abusing children in the Philippines. The offender, who was employed as an international flight attendant with a commercial airline, travelled to the Philippines on a regular basis in both private and professional capacities and offended on 25 separate occasions over a seven year period (between 2010 – 2017).

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21ST JANUARY, 2021

OPERATION ARKSTONE: MAN WHO SPARKED NATIONWIDE ARRESTS JUSTIN RADFORD PLEADS GUILTY TO CHILD ABUSE

Former Nine Network tape library assistant Justin Kenneth Radford has confessed to filming himself sexually violating two children and sharing the sick videos with an online network of creeps. Radford, of Wyong on the Central Coast, was the first domino that fell in Operation Arkstone – an Australian Federal Police taskforce that has so far laid more than 800 child sex offence charges. Radford pleaded guilty to 18 charges including sexually touching a child, possessing child abuse material, transmitting child abuse material and using a child to make child abuse material.

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16TH AUGUST, 2023

MAN ARRESTED OVER ALLEGED OBSCENE ACTS IN FRONT OF YOUNG GIRLS AT PERTH SHOPPING CENTRES

A West Australian man has been charged for allegedly exposing himself and performing obscene acts in public - including in front of young girls - over a period of six months at shopping centres across Perth. The 33-year-old Beckenham man began offending in March, police allege. Since then, he has either exposed himself or committed an obscene act at department stores inside shopping centres in the Perth suburbs of Armadale, Booragoon, Cannington, Spearwood and Success, including in front of teenage girls.

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3RD FEBRUARY, 2023

LEEDS UNDERCOVER OPERATION ON CHILD SEXUAL EXPLOITATION AWARENESS IN THE CITY

The operation, which was in north-west Leeds on Saturday night, saw police officers and safeguarding teams work to a script and play the roles of older men and young teenage girls. Working to a carefully devised script, the teams engaged in 'red flag' behaviour while trying to book hotel rooms or while on private hire journeys. This included overt conversations about having condoms, lying about being over 18, agreeing not to tell parents where they were, reminding them about gifts bought and referring to buying alcohol. Detective Superintendent Lee Berry, Head of Crime and Safeguarding for Leeds, said: "This operation was not about catching people out but about identifying where the risks are and raising awareness so we can work together to prevent, deter and disrupt this type of offending."

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16TH MARCH, 2023

METROPOLITAN POLICE LAUNCH TRAINING FOR BUSINESSES AT MAJOR SHOPPING CENTRE TO 'SPOT SIGNS OF CHILD EXPLOITATION'

The London Met Police has launched awareness training for staff at business at the Stratford Westfield Shopping Centre on how to spot signs of child exploitation and modern slavery. The programme is part of Operation Makesafe, a national campaign which is focussed on raising community awareness of child exploitation. Its aim is to help businesses and organisations to help tackle child exploitation through 'increased awareness and training'.

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Why should business be concerned about child abuse?

All businesses can inadvertently enable harm to children.

Typically, businesses that work directly with children and young people are mandated or regulated to meet certain standards. However, many other businesses impact children and young people through their products and services, supply chains, marketing and distribution methods, and relationships with and investments in local communities. Every business has at the very least, an ethical obligation to keep children and young people safe. The risks differ across sectors, but the consequences are the same – children and young people feeling unsafe or at worst exposed to abuse and exploitation.

Expectations on business to act on child wellbeing and safety are rapidly changing.

The Australian public expects business to proactively address social issues, including child wellbeing and abuse. At the same time, the public is sceptical that business gives these issues enough attention. Almost 90 percent of respondents to a consumer poll disagreed or strongly disagreed that Australian businesses already give enough consideration to how their activities and operations can impact on vulnerable children and young people. Governments are enacting legislative and other regulatory frameworks that are shaping the way that business considers and mitigates risks for children and young people, including human trafficking legislation, stronger online privacy protection for children and young people. These trends mean the public and governments will increasingly expect that business takes meaningful action to address child wellbeing and safety.

It makes good business sense.

Businesses that adopt practices that safeguard children and young people as part of their commitment to effective governance can strengthen their purpose and align interests with key stakeholders, including customers, the community and government. It is likely to support more effective employee recruitment, engagement and retention. Strong action on sustainability also creates shareholder value through stronger customer relationships, improved regulatory compliance and reduced commercial costs.

The consequences of inaction are immeasurable.

In comparison, inaction or poor management of children's rights can result in harm to children and young people that causes a wide range of commercial, legal, operational and reputational risks. The human consequences can lead to significant commercial consequences, including market, regulatory and commercial costs.

Safeguarding children is a core element of ESG accountability.

Specifically incorporating a safeguarding children focus into Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) practices is crucial for businesses for the following reasons:

Reason 1 Ethical Responsibility

Business has a moral obligation to protect the rights and well-being of children and young people. This includes

ensuring their safety, health, education, and general welfare. Safeguarding children practices meets the standards for Responsible Business Conduct.

Reason 2 Risk Mitigation

Neglecting child safeguarding can lead to significant legal, reputational and operational risks. Businesses that fail to address these issues may face litigation, regulatory fines or public backlash, damaging their brand and financial performance.

Reason 3 Brand Reputation

Demonstrating a commitment to child safeguarding and children's rights can enhance a company's reputation. Consumers and investors increasingly prefer socially responsible businesses, which can lead to increased market share and positive public perception.

Reason 4 Sustainable Development

Focusing on children's rights as part of ESG aligns with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly Goal 4 (Quality Education) and Goal 16 (Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions). It contributes to a more sustainable and equitable world, which can be a driving force for long-term business success.

Reason 5 Legal Compliance

Incorporating child safeguarding measures ensures compliance with laws and regulations aimed at protecting children and young people, such as child labour laws, human trafficking, age-appropriate marketing, and data protection regulations.

Reason 6 Workforce Productivity and Morale

A company that values child safeguarding is likely to foster a culture of care and responsibility. This can lead to improved workforce morale and improved wellbeing outcomes for their workforce and their families.

What does safeguarding children mean for business?

Safeguarding children is an essential element of responsible conduct for all businesses. It is an approach that places children and young people at the centre of due diligence processes that businesses regularly undertake on a range of critical issues.

It applies best practice knowledge so that businesses consider more explicitly how they engage children and young people in their business practices, products, services and supply chains.

Safeguarding children empowers businesses to make a significant contribution to community-wide efforts to protect children and young people from abuse and exploitation.

Businesses play a vital role in ensuring that children and young people are protected from harm and exploitation, both within their operations and through their influence in supply chains and major business relationships. Their commitment to child safeguarding reflects their ethical responsibility, legal obligations, and contribution to creating a safer and more secure environment for children and young people.

**Australian Childhood Foundation
makes the following recommendations**

RECOMMENDATION

01

Business and industry sectors commit themselves to the safety of children and young people.

RECOMMENDATION

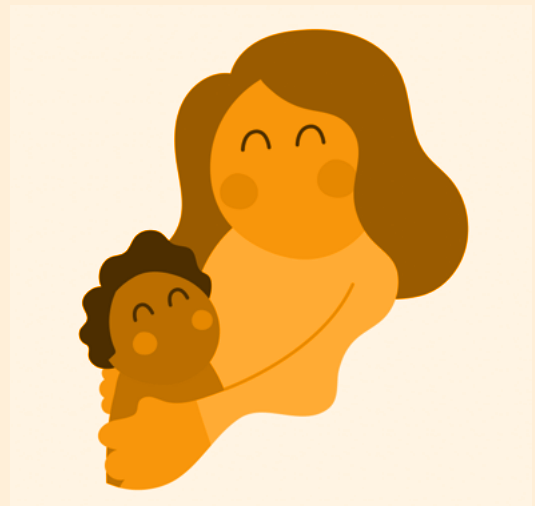
02

Businesses collaborate in the development of a fit for purpose set of child safeguarding principles.

RECOMMENDATION

03

Businesses engage with the communities in which they operate to support local safeguarding initiatives.



RECOMMENDATION

04

Business and industry leaders join and access the support of the On Us coalition to receive support, guidance, training and resources to support their safeguarding efforts.

RECOMMENDATION

05

Businesses share knowledge and information about how to best safeguard children and young people in through the products services and activities they provide.



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