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## Whistleblower Protection

Whistleblowing can be an effective way of uncovering fraud and other misconduct which may not be identified by internal or external controls within an organisation. Life Choice is committed to the principles of transparency and accountability and views Whistleblowing as an opportunity to reflect upon organisational procedures and promote an ethical culture.

Where a governing body member, Director, employee, contractor or associate of the organisation believes, on reasonable grounds, that another person or persons associated with the organisation has been involved in illegal, improper or unethical conduct, they are encouraged and supported to report the conduct without reprisal or consequence.

Life Choice protects Whistleblowers from retaliatory action of any kind including:

- Dismissal;
- Demotion;
- Harassment or discrimination;
- Victimisation of any kind;
- Current or future bias; or
- Threats of any of the above.

### Record of policy development

Version	Date approved	Date for review
2020/5	November 2022	November 2024

### Responsibilities and delegations

This policy applies to	All Life Choice Board Directors and staff including permanent and casual, contract workers, temporary agency workers and volunteers
Specific responsibilities	All Life Choice staff are committed to providing services in a safe and honest way. We expect everyone to comply with all legal requirements. We will support and respect anyone who acts as a Whistleblower to draw attention to suspected inappropriate, corrupt or illegal conduct or behaviour
Policy approval	Board of Directors

<b>Policy context</b> – this policy relates to:	
Standards	<i>NDIS Quality &amp; Safeguarding Practice standards 2020</i>
Legislation	<i>The Corporations Act 2001</i> <i>The Tax Administration Act 1953</i> <i>The Fair Work Act 2009</i> <i>Carers Recognition Act 2010</i> <i>Disability Discrimination Act 1992</i> <i>Disability Services Act 2006</i> <i>Equal Opportunity Act 2010</i> <i>Work, Health &amp; Safety Act 2011</i> <i>Privacy Act 1988</i>
References	
Organisation policies	Code of Conduct policy Complaints policy Privacy policy
Forms, record keeping, other documents	Complaints form

## Definitions

**Anonymity:** is when one's identity is unknown. In the case of an anonymous Whistleblower, their identity is not known by anyone, including those who receive and investigate the report.

**Confidentiality:** is when one's identity is protected to prevent harm. In the case of a Whistleblower, their identity may be known to those receiving and investigating the report, but is protected from the broader organisation and public.

### Reportable conduct:

- Life Choice Code of Conduct
- Criminal acts

**Whistleblower:** is a person associated with the organisation, whether it be a governing body member, CEO, employee, former employee, contractor, volunteer or their spouse / dependant; who discloses information regarding organisational wrongdoing/misconduct, and wishes to be protected against reprisal for reporting.

**Whistleblowing:** is the deliberate, voluntary disclosure of individual or organisation wrongdoing by a person with access to data, events or information about misconduct within the organisation.

**Wrongdoing** is illegal, improper or unethical conduct that:

- Is in breach of legislation or regulations, or which is otherwise illegal;
- Is fraudulent or dishonest;
- Could cause financial or non-financial damage to the organisation, or the reputation of the organisation;
- Is a breach of the organisation's Code of Conduct;
- Constitutes maladministration;
- Infringes on the rights of any person;
- Endangers the health and safety of others; or
- Is a misuse of organisational, public or other funds.

## **Procedures**

### **Development and review of this policy**

The governing body is responsible for implementing the policy, encouraging a culture of “speaking up”, and evaluating and making improvements to the effectiveness of the policy.

This policy will be reviewed and evaluated for effectiveness every two (2) years, ensuring that it reflects the most up-to-date legal and corporate governance requirements. Any changes made to the policy will be communicated to all staff and volunteers.

### **Awareness and education**

The organisation will inform and educate its staff, contractors, and volunteers of the Whistleblower policy, procedures for reporting, and the protections available to them in order to facilitate a safe environment in which concerns of misconduct may be voiced without reprisal.

Staff involved in the management of Whistleblower reports will receive appropriate training in dealing with reports, investigation, and supporting Whistleblowers and staff who are the subject of allegations.

The Whistleblower protection policy will be accessible to all staff and can be accessed from the staff page of the Life Choice website <http://lifechoicewbb.org/staff-access/>

### **Designation and responsibilities of Whistleblower Protection Officer/s (WPO)**

The Quality & Safety Leader is the organisation's WPO. Their responsibilities include:

- Implementing Life Choice's Whistleblower protection policy;
- Initial response to an accusation of wrongdoing;
- Ensuring the protection and/or anonymity of the Whistleblower, where possible;
- Conducting or assisting in investigations into alleged wrongdoings;

- Informing the Whistleblower of the progress and outcomes of investigations;
- Ensuring that Whistleblowers do not suffer any retaliation or negative consequences;
- Providing support and referrals for both Whistleblowers and those accused of wrongdoing.

Life Choice will ensure that all people associated with the organisation know who the designated WPO is and their contact details.

## **Support and protection for Whistleblowers**

Whistleblowers found to have made reports in good faith, according to organisational procedures and based on reasonable grounds will receive support and protection as below:

- The confidentiality of a Whistleblower's identity will be protected as far as the law allows;
- The Whistleblower will have the right to request positive action for the purposes of protection, such as relocation or a leave of absence while the matter is under investigation;
- The WPO will be responsible for ensuring that the Whistleblower receives any necessary support and referrals, and that they are not subject to any form of negative employment-related consequence as a result of reporting;
- If an act of reprisal is alleged, the Whistleblower will have the automatic right of appeal to an independent appeal body;
- Support from external Whistleblower support services.

## **Reporting framework**

If a person becomes aware of misconduct, internal reporting to the WPO must be the first step. However, if this has proven to be ineffective, externally reporting the misconduct may be used as a last resort.

### **Internal reporting**

To report internally, personnel should report the breach to the WPO.

If they believe that the WPO is involved in the breach they may report to the CEO.

If they believe that the WPO and CEO is involved in the breach that may report to the Board Chair.

### **External reporting**

If the Whistleblower believes that:

- all of the above internal persons are involved in the breach; or
- all internal measures have been taken to try to get the issue addressed; or
- the issue is significant and poses dangers to health or safety;

they may report the complaint to an external agency such as the Australian Charities and Not-for-profits Commission (ACNC), or in cases of serious illegal conduct, the police should be contacted.

### **Anonymous reporting**

The WPO will receive and consider seriously anonymous reports and ensure the anonymity of the

Whistleblower as far as is possible. Anonymous Whistleblowers must be aware that anonymous reporting may affect the outcome of the investigation, as evidence may be more difficult to substantiate.

### **Whistleblowing to media**

Protections will not be offered to personnel of the organisation who report internal wrongdoing to a journalist unless it can be established that the disclosure was made as a public interest disclosure or an emergency disclosure, in accordance with the terms of the *Corporations Act*.

### **External Whistleblowers**

Persons external to the organisation who wish to make a disclosure regarding organisational wrongdoing will be afforded the same protections as personnel of the organisation.

External persons may report wrongdoing to the organisation's WPO/CEO:

Alternatively, external persons may report wrongdoing to an external agency such as the Australian Charities and Not-for-profits Commission (ACNC) or the NDIA.

### **Investigation procedures**

All reports received will be considered seriously, and an internal investigation of the facts of the case will be conducted by WPO to verify the allegations made and take further action if necessary. An internal investigation will be undertaken if the matter does not necessitate a police investigation.

When a report is received, the WPO will use their discretion to decide whether legal advice is required.

### **Notification procedures**

The WPO will first notify the CEO of any alleged misconduct. The person/s accused will then be notified, so that they may present their case.

### **Investigation planning**

In consultation with the WPO, CEO and other relevant managers, terms of reference and an investigation plan will be prepared, which will include:

- The key issues to be investigated;
- The scale of the investigation, in proportion to the alleged wrongdoing;
- Allocation of resources.

### **Principles of conducting investigations**

Investigations will be undertaken applying fair and ethical principles, and as such:

- Any person accused of wrongdoing will have the presumption of innocence;
- All investigations will be conducted without bias;
- Persons accused of wrongdoing will be supported throughout the process and referred to external support services if necessary;
- Investigations will follow the procedures of natural justice;
- In circumstances where the Whistleblower is unable to remain anonymous, they must remain free from any retaliatory action;

- All disciplinary action will be proportionate to the seriousness of the breach.

## **Documentation**

Throughout the course of the investigation conversations, interviews, communications and relevant documents will be recorded and stored. Upon completion, an investigation report will be prepared and filed. The investigation report will include:

- The allegations;
- A statement of facts and the corroborating evidence;
- Conclusions reached by the investigation;
- Recommended amendments to organisational policy to avoid future wrongdoing.

All documents relating to Whistleblowing reports and investigations must be kept securely and confidentially, and access to documents granted only when necessary.

The Whistleblower will be kept informed of the progress and outcomes of the investigation.

## **Governance**

### **Changes to Life Choice Whistleblowers Protection Policy**

From time to time, Life Choice's whistleblowers protection policy will need to change to keep up with our values, best practices, improvements, as well as legislation and regulations. Any changes to our whistleblowing policy will be communicated with all employees and any relevant stakeholders. This policy and any changes made do form any contract of employment.

All changes will be reviewed and approved by the Board of Directors.

### **Reporting to the Board of Directors**

The Board of Directors is updated every quarter on Life Choice's whistleblowing program, inclusive of reports, investigations, and results. Reports or investigations carrying an undue amount of risk will be reported to the Board of Directors outside of the quarterly updates. The Board of Directors at any time can ask about anonymous reports, investigations, as well as the state of Life Choice's whistleblowing program.

Life Choice's whistleblowing program resides with the Governance, Audit & Risk Committee. They are responsible and accountable for the implementation and effectiveness of Life Choice's whistleblowing program.

## **False reporting**

If it is discovered that the Whistleblower knowingly and intentionally fabricated an accusation against an employee or associate of the organisation, for their own personal gain or with malicious intent, they may be subject to disciplinary action which may include dismissal, termination of services or cancellation of client relationship.

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