

Note: The information in this sheet is of a general nature and is applicable to the state of Victoria only. For information about working with children in other states of Australia, please contact the relevant body in that state.

What is a Working with children's check?

The Working with Children Check (WWC Check) is a system, introduced in Victoria in 2006 as a way of protecting children, under the age of 18, from sexual and physical harm. The *Working with Children Act 2005* requires that some people, who want to work, or volunteer, in child-related work, apply for and pass, a WWC Check.

Applicants are checked to make sure they don't have any criminal offences or findings from professional disciplinary bodies which makes them unsuitable for working with children. The issued check looks similar to a plastic licence card and contains identification information including the date of expiry of the card and the name and photo of the card holder.

A five year phasing in plan was put in place to assist not-for-profit organisations and businesses, doing child related work, to implement the system. The WWC Check will continue to be phased in until 2011.

Is the WWC Check different to a Police Check?

Yes. A Police check or National Police Certificate (see information sheet) is different to a WWC Check in that it is only valid up to the date of issue. A WWC Check checks a person's name against certain types of offences relating to children and is valid for five years (unless it is revoked). These offences generally include, but are not limited to, crimes of a violent or sexual nature against children. In addition to checking criminal records, WWC Check's may include checks against sex offender registers and may search for adverse findings on professional disciplinary registers such as Professional Teacher's registers.

It is important to remember that within the five year period, holders of a WWC Check continue to be checked for any new offences; however, a new check is not required if you change to a different volunteering group or organisation.

Remember: There are two different types of WWC Check. One is for volunteer work and one is for paid employment. If a volunteer changes their role to become a paid employee engaged in child related work they will need to re-apply. Paid employees may use their check for both paid and voluntary work.

When do our volunteers need a WWC Check?

Your volunteers need a WWC Check if:

- Their work is in connection with one of the services, bodies, places or activities listed in the five year phasing in plan. A copy of this plan can be accessed online. Go to www.justice.vic.gov.au/workingwithchildren or phone 1300 652 879.
- Your group or organisation involves work, or is likely to involve work, that includes regular and direct contact with children who are under 18 years of age. Some exemptions may apply but it is your responsibility to find out if a WWC Check is needed.

Remember: It is a criminal offence for your volunteers to start or continue "child-related" work without having applied for a WWC Check if the services, bodies or activities you are working - or associated with - have already been phased in. Your group or organisation could be heavily fined if found to be negligent in this area.

Benefits of the Check

Whilst many small community groups and organisations find that legislative requirements can be burdensome, there are specific benefits to the WWC Check, which outweigh the issues.

- An independent government organisation is maintaining the ongoing checking of a person's criminal record while the individual

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Working With Children Check

volunteer's WWC Check is valid. Victoria Police will notify the Department of Justice of any new relevant offences that applicants or WWC Check card holders are charged with, convicted of, or found guilty of. The department is also advised of any future relevant findings made against a person currently registered with the Victorian Institute of Teaching.

- The WWC Check provides employers, volunteer groups and organisations and other agencies with the ability to verify WWC Check cards at any time.
- Card holders do not need to apply for a new WWC Check when they change their volunteer group or organisation, unless they are moving from volunteer to paid work. WWC Check Cards are valid for five years, unless revoked because of a relevant change in the holder's circumstances or voluntarily surrendered by the holder.
- The WWC Check is only necessary for volunteers if they are **directly** engaged in child-related work as defined by the *Working with Children Act 2005*. If volunteers are supervised by staff or another holder of the check, they do not necessarily need to have the check themselves.
- The WWCC is free of charge for volunteers. Fees are applicable only when the applicant is in a paid position.

How do we apply for WWC Check's for our volunteers?

1. Obtain an Application Guide and form from a participating Australia Post outlet.
2. Complete the Application form attached to the Application Guide.
3. Submit the application, together with Proof of Identity documents, including a passport sized photo of the applicant to a participating Australia Post outlet.

Note: A fee is payable for paid positions involving child-related work and this fee changes annually on July 1st.

Conclusion:

A Working with children's Check is an important legal requirement if your group or organisation works in any child-related activities as defined by the *Working with children Act 2005*. The check is one way that the community is protecting young children from sexual and other forms of violent harm. The process of applying for the check is not difficult and it is free for volunteers.