



POLICY AND PROCEDURE

Multilink Community Services Inc.
38 Blackwood Road,
Logan Central 4114.
PO Box 146, Woodridge 4114.
Telephone: (07) 3808 4463
Fax: (07) 3808 6337
Email: reception@multilink.org.au
ABN 21728003819

WHISTLEBLOWER POLICY

BACKGROUND

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. MultiLink Community Services Inc. (MultiLink) 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 an employee, contractor, consultant, supplier, volunteer, management committee member or service user (including their family, supporters and carers) 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.

MultiLink 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.

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 Qualifying Disclosure.

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 Qualifying Disclosure, but their identity is protected from the broader organisation and public.

Discloser (or Whistleblower): Any person who makes a Qualifying Disclosure about a suspected contravention or misconduct, wrongdoing or regulatory breaches relating to MultiLink' services, operations, governance or legal obligations, including but not limited to aged care services.

Detriment: Any disadvantage, harm or adverse treatment including dismissal, demotion, discrimination, harassment, intimidation, injury, property damage, reputational harm, or threats of these.

Qualifying Disclosure: A disclosure of information by a person which:

- is made to one of the people or entities set out in Section 547 of the Act;
- is made either orally or in writing, and either anonymously or not; and
- the Discloser has reasonable grounds to suspect indicates that an entity may have contravened the Act.

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Responsible person: A member of the Management Committee or a senior officer formally authorised by the organisation to receive and manage whistleblower disclosures.

Whistleblower Protection Officer (WPO): A designated senior role responsible for implementing this Policy, receiving and triaging disclosures, safeguarding disclosers, coordinating investigations and system improvements.

PURPOSE AND SCOPE

Multilink is committed to the highest standards of integrity, transparency and accountability in the delivery of aged care services. This policy provides for a safe, confidential process for any person to raise concerns about suspected or actual misconduct and reflects the mandatory whistleblower protections in the *Aged Care Act 2024* and the *Aged Care Rules 2025*.

Who this policy applies to

This policy covers all people who interact with MultiLink, including:

- employees (permanent, part-time, casual, fixed term and agency staff);
- contractors, consultants and suppliers of goods and services;
- volunteers, students and management committee members; and
- service users, their supporters, representatives, family members, carers and independent advocates.

PROCEDURES

Development and review of this policy

This policy is established in consultation with management, employees, volunteers and, where appropriate, service users and their representatives, including consideration of their views on reporting mechanisms and protections.

The Management Committee is responsible for implementing this policy, fostering a culture of ‘speaking up’, and evaluating and improving its effectiveness.

This policy will be formally reviewed at least every 12 months and immediately following any regulatory changes to whistleblower requirements.

Any amendments will be approved by the Management Committee and communicated to all staff, volunteers, contractors and where relevant, service users, their families and advocates.

Awareness and education

Multilink will ensure that all people associated with the organisation, including employees, contractors, volunteers, management committee members, service users, their supporters, representatives and advocates, are informed of their rights and responsibilities under this Whistleblower Protection Policy.

Multilink will communicate regularly through induction, training and organisational communication channels,, and at least monthly, to workers, management committee members and other responsible persons, and service users, that Qualifying Disclosures are welcome.

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MultiLink will:

- provide mandatory training for all staff, contractors and volunteers on how to recognise and report misconduct or breaches, how to access internal and external reporting channels, and the protections and support available to whistleblowers;
- include policy information in onboarding materials for new staff and volunteers and provide refreshers at least annually;
- make this policy accessible; and
- train managers and designated Whistleblower Protection Officers (WPOs) in handling disclosures, maintaining confidentiality and supporting both whistleblowers and individuals named in Qualifying Disclosure.

MultiLink will review training content and delivery methods as part of its annual policy review to ensure ongoing compliance.

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

The management committee will nominate from time to time an appropriately qualified/experienced WPO.

The CEO is the organisation's WPO. Their responsibilities include:

- Implementing and overseeing MultiLink's Whistleblower Protection Policy;
- Providing an initial response to an accusation of wrongdoing;
- Ensuring the protection and/or anonymity/confidentiality of the Whistleblower, where possible;
- Conducting or assisting in investigations into alleged wrongdoings;
- Assessing and managing risk of detriment;
- Monitoring for retaliation during and after any investigation;
- Informing the Whistleblower of the progress and outcomes of investigations;
- Ensuring that Whistleblowers do not suffer any retaliation or negative consequences; and
- Providing support and referrals for both Whistleblowers and those accused of wrongdoing.
- MultiLink will designate at least two eligible recipients for whistleblower disclosures, typically including the CEO and the Chair of the Management Committee

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

REPORTING FRAMEWORK

Qualifying Disclosures

A disclosure qualifies for protection if the Discloser has reasonable grounds to suspect a contravention of the *Aged Care Act 2024*, and the disclosure is made orally or in writing, including anonymously – to any of the following:

- an Appointed Commissioner or member of the Department of Health and Aged Care Quality and Safety Commission;

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- the System Governor or an official of the Department of Health and Aged Care;
- a registered provider, a reasonable person of a registered provider, or an aged-care worker of a registered provider;
- a police officer; or
- an independent aged-care advocate.

Internal reporting

To report internally, the recipient of the Disclosure should report the breach to the WPO.

Multilink's WPO is Kim Jones (Chief Executive Officer):

Email: kim@multilink.org.au

Phone: 07 3808 4463

How to speak up

People are encouraged to report in a way that they are comfortable with. This may depend on the seriousness of the reportable conduct or who it is believed is responsible for that conduct.

Individuals can report by:

- Speaking directly to CEO or;
- By sending an email to the WPO email address: wpo@multilink.org.au

(NB: The recipients of any correspondence sent to this email address are the CEO and the Chair of the Management Committee, Christine Mudavanhu-Makumbe. Access to this email address is restricted to these responsible persons.)

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 Aged Care Quality and Safety Commission, Department of Health and Aged Care, an independent aged care advocate or in cases of serious illegal conduct, the police should be contacted.

Anonymous reporting

The WPO will receive and seriously consider anonymous Qualifying Disclosures and ensure the anonymity of the Whistleblower as far as is possible. Anonymous Whistleblowers should be made aware that anonymous reporting may affect the outcome of the investigation, as evidence may be more difficult to substantiate.

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Where a Discloser requests anonymity, the recipient of the Qualifying Disclosure must take all reasonable steps to protect the identity of the Discloser and any other person named in the request. It is a contravention of the Act to disclose the identity of a Discloser, or information likely to lead to the identification of a Discloser, if that information was obtained directly or indirectly because of a Qualifying Disclosure, unless an authorised exception applies.

Authorised exceptions occur when the Discloser consents in writing, or the Qualifying Disclosure is made to one of the persons listed above (Commissioner, System Governor, registered provider, police officer or an independent aged-care advocate).

Where disclosure of non-identifying information is reasonably necessary to investigate the matter, MultiLink will take all reasonable steps to minimise the risk of identifying the Discloser.

External Whistleblowers

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

External persons may report wrongdoing to the organisation's WPOs/Responsible Persons as follows:

Individuals can report by:

- Speaking directly to CEO or;
- By sending an email to the WPO email address: wpo@multilink.org.au

(NB: The recipients of any correspondence sent to this email address are the CEO and the Chair of the Management Committee, Christine Mudavanhu-Makumbe. Access to this email address is restricted to these responsible persons.)

Alternatively, external persons may report wrongdoing to an external agency such as the Aged Care Quality and Safety Commission, Department of Health and Aged Care, an independent aged-care advocate or in cases of serious illegal conduct, the police should be contacted.

INVESTIGATION PROCEDURES

All Qualifying Disclosures received will be considered seriously, and an internal investigation of the facts of each one will be conducted by the WPO (i.e., CEO) 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. The WPO will acknowledge receipt of the disclosure within five working days and will aim to complete a preliminary assessment within 14 days.

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

If the WPO is implicated, the matter will be referred to a responsible person of the organisation or an independent investigator.

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Notification procedures

The WPO will first notify the Management Committee Chair 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 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; and
- 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;
- During and after the investigation the WPO should monitor for any detriment or threats towards the Whistleblower from any member of the organisation; and
- 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; and
- Recommended amendments to organisational policies and procedures to avoid future wrongdoings of a similar nature.

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. If the discloser is dissatisfied with the outcome of the investigation, they may request that the matter be reviewed by the Chair of the Management Committee or an independent external investigator.

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SUPPORT AND PROTECTION FOR WHISTLEBLOWERS

Multilink is committed to protecting anyone who makes a Qualifying Disclosure under this Whistleblower Protection Policy. Whistleblowers found to have made Qualifying Disclosures 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 kept confidential as required, unless disclosure of their identity is:
 - Consented to by the whistleblower, or;
 - Required by law (for example, to a regulatory authority to protect health and safety);
- The Whistleblower can elect for their Qualifying Disclosure to be handled as a complaint or feedback and can withdraw their Qualifying Disclosure at any time;
- 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;
- The Whistleblower will be able to request an interpreter or other translation aids for reporting their Qualifying Disclosure and obtaining appropriate support;
- If an act of reprisal is alleged, the Whistleblower will have the automatic right of appeal to an independent appeal body;
- The Whistleblower will not be subject to any civil, criminal or administrative liability for making the disclosure;
- No contractual or other remedy or right can be exercised against the Whistleblower for their Qualifying Disclosure;
- If the Whistleblower believes that they have been subjected to reprisal, they may lodge an internal complaint with the WPO or escalate directly to the Aged Care Quality and Safety Commission;
- A contract to which the Whistleblower is a party may not be terminated on the basis that the disclosure constitutes a breach of the contract; and

Protection from Victimisation

Multilink strictly prohibits any conduct that causes or threatens detriment, including dismissal, demotion, harassment, discrimination, disadvantage or harm, because a person has made, may make or intends to make a Qualifying Disclosure.

A 'threat' may be express or implied, conditional or unconditional and liability does not require proof that the person feared the threat would be carried out.

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Note: reasonable administrative action taken to protect a person from detriment is not victimisation.

REVIEW

Based on the recommendations made by the investigation report, the CEO will review, evaluate and amend relevant organisational policy every at least annually in order to avoid future wrongdoing and increase organisational transparency.

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.

RELATED DOCUMENTS

- Corporations Act 2001 (Cth)
- Taxation Administration Act 1953 (Cth)
- Australian Securities and Investments Commission (ASIC) / Australian Prudential Regulation Authority (APRA) obligations
- Work Health and Safety Act 2011 (Qld)
- Aged Care Act 2025
- Aged Care Rules 2025
- Privacy Act 1988 (Cth)
- 03.00.0032 Psychosocial Hazard Prevention Plan
- 03.00.0021 Safeguarding Policy
- 03.00.0022 Safeguarding Code of Conduct
- 03.00.0013 Rights and Responsibilities of Volunteers and Students
- 03.00.0002 Workplace Code of Conduct Policy

MULTILINK CONTACT

Any questions in relation to this Policy should be directed to the Chief Executive Officer.

VARIATIONS

MultiLink reserves the right to vary, replace or terminate this Policy from time to time.

VERSION AND REVISION INFORMATION

Policy authorised by:	Chief Executive Officer
Policy maintained by:	Chief Executive Officer
Approved by:	Management Committee
Approval date:	21 March 2023
Version:	V2

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