

Keeping Children Safe

ACT will introduce a single national Working with Children Card to improve child safety while reducing duplicated bureaucracy for employers and community organisations.

Parents should be able to leave their children with a teacher, coach, afterschool carer, or volunteer knowing the adults around them have been properly checked and remain safe to work with children.

The current system does not provide that assurance. Safety checks are carried out by individual employers and generally only re-checked every three years. This provides only a snapshot of a person at one point in time, with no consistent system for identifying risks that emerge between checks.

ACT will introduce a single national Working with Children Card that follows the worker, is continuously monitored, considers additional relevant information, and replaces duplicated screening by individual organisations.

Queensland has operated a similar system called the Blue Card since 2001. Today, more than one million people hold Blue Cards. In the 2025/26 financial year, 2,438 cards were cancelled or suspended and 6,403 individuals applied and were prevented from obtaining a card, and therefore prevented from working with children.

Every Australian state now operates a form of working-with-children clearance.

01 One card

People working with children should not need to undergo the same checks again every time they change jobs or volunteer for another organisation.

ACT will introduce a Working with Children Card that belongs to the individual rather than the employer and is valid for three years.

Once issued, the card could be used across eligible jobs, schools, clubs, businesses, and community organisations. Instead of each organisation conducting its own Police check, employers would simply verify that the person holds a valid card.

This will reduce duplication, free up Police and Ministry of Justice resources, and make it easier for small organisations to meet their child-safety responsibilities.

02 One clear standard

Whether someone is safe to work with children should not depend on which organisation happens to assess them.

ACT will establish a single national standard for determining eligibility for a Working with Children Card. Assessments would consider relevant criminal convictions, disciplinary findings, and other records relating to children or child-related work.

Serious offences against children would result in automatic disqualification. More complex cases would be assessed against clear risk criteria rather than leaving individual employers to interpret records and make difficult judgement calls themselves.

The same standard should apply to every applicant, wherever they work.

03 Continuous safety monitoring

A safety check should not become outdated the day after it is completed.

ACT will link the Working with Children Card to ongoing information from Police and relevant regulatory bodies. If a cardholder is charged with a disqualifying offence, their card could be suspended or revoked and their employer notified. Employers would no longer have to wait for the next three-year check to discover that a worker's circumstances have changed.

The system would also share relevant information with professional regulators, employers and other organisations that work with children. Someone removed from a regulated profession such as teaching because they pose a risk to children should not be able to move into an unregulated role and continue working with them.

Eligibility to work with children will be monitored in real time, not checked once every three years.

04 No card, no start

Children should not be placed at risk while an adult's safety check is still being completed.

ACT will require a person to hold a valid Working with Children Card before they begin child-related work. Queensland provides a useful benchmark. Straightforward applications with no relevant Police or other information can often be processed within five days, while more complex cases can take several weeks.

During that assessment period, the applicant would not be permitted to begin working with children. The principle is simple: no card, no start.

05 Training before they start

Anyone trusted to work with children should understand the basic responsibilities that come with that role.

ACT will require every Working with Children Card holder to complete a short, standardised child-protection course before beginning work. Similar to a first-aid course, the training would establish a common baseline of knowledge for people working in child-related roles.

It would cover professional boundaries, recognising and responding to concerns, reporting procedures, and relevant obligations under New Zealand law. Training would be refreshed when the card is renewed.

Costing

The estimated cost of the scheme is scaled from Queensland, which has a comparable population and operates a similar system.

The estimates assume some existing screening and administrative infrastructure can be reused, reducing establishment and operating costs. Paid workers would pay a modest application fee, often covered by the employer. Volunteers and students undertaking placements would be exempt or pay a discounted rate.

Queensland currently charges \$108.30 for paid applicants, while checks are free for volunteers and students.

Cost component	Estimated cost (Saving)
One-off establishment cost	\$12–20 million
Annual operating cost	~\$50 million per year
Revenue recovered through application fees	(~\$37.5 million per year)
Net annual cost to taxpayers	~\$12.5 million per year

On these estimates, application fees would recover around 75 per cent of annual operating costs, leaving a net ongoing cost to government of approximately \$12.5 million a year.