**VICTORIAN AMATEUR FOOTBALL ASSOCIATION**

# CONCUSSION REPORTING POLICY

In line with VAFA's key values of RESPECT, INTEGRITY, INCLUSION, and COMMUNITY, VAFA are determined to protect the safety, welfare, and wellbeing of all VAFA participants.

This Policy, developed with the support of Monash University's Department of Neurosciences, aligns with and incorporates the latest principles, recommendations and tools published by the Australian Football League (AFL) and the Concussion in Sport Group (CISG).

The VAFA adopts the Concussion Policy outlined in Section 19 of the National Community Football Policy Handbook. Clubs are directed to the resources provided via the AFL Guidelines for The Management of Sport-Related Concussion.

*"In considering the best practice management of sport-related concussion, the priority remains the short- and long-term welfare of the player."*
- The Management of Sport-Related Concussion in Australian Football (AFL)

**Sport-Related Concussion Definition**
"*Sport-Related Concussion is a traumatic brain injury caused by a direct blow to the head, neck or body resulting in an impulsive force being transmitted to the brain that occurs in sports and exercise-related activities. This initiates a neurotransmitter and metabolic cascade, with possible axonal injury, blood flow change and inflammation affecting the brain. Symptoms and signs may present immediately, or evolve over minutes or hours, and commonly resolve within days, but may be prolonged."*
- 2022 International Consensus Statement on Concussion in Sport (CISG)

*"Concussion is characterised by a range of observable signs (such as lying motionless on the ground, blank or vacant look, balance difficulties or motor incoordination) or symptoms reported by the player (such as headache, blurred vision, dizziness, nausea, balance problems, fatigue and feeling "not quite right"). Other common features of concussion include confusion, memory loss and reduced ability to think clearly and process information. It is important to note that loss of consciousness is seen in only 10-20% of cases of concussion in Australian football. That is, the player does not have to lose consciousness to have a concussion."*
- The Management of Sport-Related Concussion in Australian Football (AFL)

**Recognising a Suspected Concussion**
*For non-medically trained individuals*, the Concussion Recognition Tool 6 (CRT6) is recommended to assist recognition and immediate management of suspected concussion. The Headcheck app is also suitable for this purpose.

*For healthcare professionals*, the Sports Concussion Assessment Tool (SCAT6) can be used to evaluate suspected concussion in adolescents and adults within 72 hours of injury.

If a player during a VAFA match or training is suspected of having concussion, the player is to be immediately removed from play and is not permitted to return to the field.

The CRT6 and SCAT6 are produced by the CISG, and feature overlapping 'Red Flags', 'Visible Clues' / 'Observable Signs', and 'Symptoms', allowing for consistent terminology for recognising and reporting a suspected concussion for sports trainers and health care professionals of varying levels of experience. VAFA club staff are advised to document these to assist subsequent medical assessment and incident reporting. The AFL 'Match Day Head Injury

Assessment and Referral Form' may be used for this documentation.

**Referring for Medical Assessment**

Urgent transfer to hospital must occur for cases with 'Red Flags' identified at any stage.

ALL players with a suspected concussion need a medical assessment (with a registered medical practitioner) to confirm diagnosis and provide guidance on management. This medical assessment should occur as soon as possible and no later than 72 hours from the time of injury.

Any player with suspected or diagnosed concussion must adhere to the AFL Concussion Management Return-to-Play Flowchart and successfully complete the 11-step (12-day minimum) return-to-play (RTP) protocols before returning to play.

**VAFA Concussion Reporting and Medical Clearance Policies. New for 2024**
The updated concussion policies outlined below, aim to maximise the number of VAFA players with suspected concussion proactively seeking early medical assessment, carefully following the graded return-to-play protocol, and obtaining medical clearance prior to engaging in full-contact training and matches. The responsibility lies with club trainers, staff and players to ensure transparent reporting of suspected concussions and completion of the return-to-play protocol.

**Concussion Reporting Policy. New for 2024**
Following a fixtured round of VAFA matches, all clubs are now required to notify the VAFA of the presence or absence of any suspected concussions for each team using the Club Concussion Reporting Form. Should a club have no suspected concussions that round, then simply select the 'all clear' option at the top of the form.

This form is to be **completed by midday each Wednesday** following a fixtured round.
**Form is for VAFA data capturing purposes only, no personal information is shared with third parties.*

**Medical Clearance Policy. New for 2024**
For players reported as having a suspected concussion, the VAFA will list the player as 'Unavailable to play due to concussion' in the Competition Management Platform (PlayHQ).

For a player with concussion to be cleared to return to play (minimum 21-days after injury), the club must then inform the VAFA of a player's successful completion of the RTP protocols with corresponding medical clearance from a registered medical practitioner, using the Club Concussion RTP Approval Form*.. **Form is for VAFA data capturing purposes only, no personal information is shared with third parties.*

***The VAFA will not automatically release a player to return to play as per 2023***.

The VAFA reserves the right to conduct investigations into a club's failure to adhere to this Policy. Clubs found to have breached this Policy will be subject to formal explanations, and further breaches may be subject to fines as per **Schedule C of the VAFA Rules** and/or other penalties at VAFA's discretion. Noting a failure to report a concussion is a breach of this Policy.

[+] Monash University Department of Neuroscience staff who supported the development and endorse this Policy include: Dr Stuart McDonald, Dr Blake Colman, Dr Wiliam O'Brien, Dr Duncan Austin, Professor Terence O'Brien, Professor Sandy Shultz, Dr Georgia Symons, Ms Lauren Evans.

Created: March 2024
Review Date: Annually