



Australian Government
National Office for Child Safety

National Office for Child Safety

Public Consultation Report

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Acknowledgement

The National Office for Child Safety (National Office) acknowledges the significant contribution of all participants involved in a co-design process to inform the development and implementation of key initiatives recommended by the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse (Royal Commission) that are led by the National Office.

The National Office pays respect to, and acknowledges the contributions made to this report by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, victims and survivors of child sexual abuse and their advocates, child protection experts, clinical practitioners, non-government organisations, academics, institutions and government officials. Their wisdom, knowledge and insights continue to be instrumental in shaping the initiatives led by the National Office.

The National Office would like to thank The Healing Foundation which facilitated a number of the co-design workshops which have informed this report.



Executive Summary

This report is informed by a series of co-design workshops and individual consultations held by the National Office for Child Safety with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, victims and survivors of child sexual abuse and their advocates, child protection experts, clinical practitioners, non-government organisations, academics, institutions and government officials.

This report first provides an overview of stakeholder feedback received on the development of the National Strategy to Prevent Child Sexual Abuse (National Strategy). The absence of a trauma-informed, culturally safe, accessible and responsive service system to address the impacts of child sexual abuse was identified as a critical gap. The need to raise public awareness of child sexual abuse, reduce stigma to improve disclosure and help-seeking, and embed cultural understanding were also emphasised as important areas for the National Strategy to address.

Stakeholders identified the need for the National Strategy to include a significant focus on offender prevention, including age appropriate responses to children with harmful sexual behaviours. Responses should include educating people on the difference between healthy and unhealthy sexual development, and providing training for professionals engaging with these children in order to improve evidence-based therapeutic responses and reduction in recidivism.

Finally, Stakeholders noted the need for the National Strategy to have a significant research agenda focusing on developing a better understanding of sexual abuse and the underlying causes, on what works and is successful in prevention, and on trauma informed approaches to the delivery of services.

Next, this report provides an overview of stakeholder feedback received on the implementation of the National Principles for Child Safe Organisations (National Principles). Stakeholders highlighted that the National Principles are not well known among organisations or in the community. Work needs to be done to raise awareness of the National Principles and their scope in particular with small and volunteer organisations.

The National Office should provide support for organisations to assist them to implement the National Principles. Stakeholders also strongly emphasised the importance of legislative frameworks to support enforcement of the National Principles and to achieve a national standard of safety for children. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander stakeholders highlighted the need for culturally relevant principles for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations. Stakeholders also identified the absence of a focus on children who abuse other children as a critical gap in the principles.

Lastly, this report provides an overview of stakeholder feedback on the strategic direction of the National Office. Stakeholders emphasised the need for the National Office to set clear, measurable outcomes in order to monitor the National Office's progress in achieving its strategic goals and directions.

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Introduction

This report is informed by a number of co-design workshops and individual consultations with a range of stakeholders with diverse experiences and knowledge, including:

- ▶ An Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Victim-Survivor Co-Design Workshop hosted by the National Office and facilitated by The Healing Foundation – 5 December 2018;
- ▶ A Co-Design Workshop hosted by Griffith University – 18 February 2019;
- ▶ A Victim-Survivor Co-Design Workshop hosted by the National Office and facilitated by The Healing Foundation – 13 March 2019;
- ▶ General Co-Design Workshops with Child Protection Experts hosted by the National Office and facilitated by The Healing Foundation – 22 and 29 March 2019;
- ▶ A Co-Design Workshop hosted by the National Office at the Families Australia Child Aware Conference – 16 May 2019; and
- ▶ Individual consultations with a range of stakeholders led by the National Office – July 2018 – June 2019.

Consultations were an opportunity for stakeholders to help shape the role of the National Office and its key priorities including the design of the National Strategy and the implementation of the National Principles. This report provides a summary of consistent themes that emerged from consultations and reflects the community voice rather than individual contributions.

This report also reflects the first stage in the co-design process for the National Strategy. It will shape further targeted consultations anticipated for the second half of 2019.

National Strategy to Prevent Child Sexual Abuse

The National Office is overseeing the design and implementation of a National Strategy to Prevent Child Sexual Abuse. The National Strategy was a key recommendation of the Royal Commission (Recommendations 6.1 - 6.3), and will consider child abuse in all settings including institutional and non-institutional settings such as within families.

In keeping with the Royal Commission's recommendation, the National Strategy will encompass a range of initiatives with a particular focus on cultural change, including through education and awareness raising, and measures which provide survivor-victims of child sexual abuse with access to the right supports at the right time.

The National Strategy will also include specific consideration of the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, culturally and linguistically diverse communities, people with disability, and regional and remote communities. Consideration will also be given to the needs of other vulnerable cohorts such as children and youth in out-of-home-care and youth detention, and LGBTQIA+ communities.

A summary of the views voiced in the stakeholder consultations to inform the development of the National Strategy are detailed below.



Education

Stakeholders prioritised the need for the National Strategy to incorporate education about child sexual abuse across all layers of society, including within families, institutions and communities.

For Children

Education initiatives should be culturally sensitive, age-appropriate, trauma-informed and evidence-based to engage children and young people about safety. The national curriculum for sex education needs to be standardised and age-appropriate information needs to be systematically delivered from a young age.

Sex education for children and young people should incorporate information about:

- ▶ Children's rights;
- ▶ Healthy relationships and healthy sexual development;
- ▶ Informed consent and bodily autonomy;
- ▶ Characteristics of perpetrators (often known to the victim) and concepts such as grooming; and
- ▶ Online safety including pornography.

For Families and Communities

The need to educate families and communities about child sexual abuse was also emphasised by stakeholders. This should include information about:

- ▶ How to talk to children and young people about sex and appropriate sexual development;
- ▶ The importance of listening to, believing and supporting children when they disclose child sexual abuse;
- ▶ How to respond to a disclosure and where to seek help;
- ▶ Concepts such as grooming; and
- ▶ The interrelationship between sexual abuse and other forms of abuse.

Education in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities needs to be culturally appropriate and be delivered by trusted community members with a strong focus on healing.

For Professionals

Further training and education for all professionals engaging with children was emphasised by stakeholders. This should include similar information to that listed above, as well as how to:

- ▶ Create safe spaces for children;
- ▶ Incorporate specialist and evidence-informed training to build workforce capability;
- ▶ Recognise and understand trauma and embed trauma-informed practice; and
- ▶ Provide culturally competent care.

This information should be embedded in university core curriculum for all relevant professions.



Online Safety

Education about online safety is needed across all layers of society. In addition to the need for general public awareness campaigns, online safety information needs to be embedded in school curriculum, relevant university degree courses and ongoing development for professionals. It is crucial to start teaching children about online safety from a very young age to ensure protective factors are embedded into their online ethos.

Creating a Trauma-Informed, Responsive Service System

The absence of a trauma-informed, culturally safe, accessible, integrated and responsive service system to address the impacts of child sexual abuse was identified as a critical gap which the National Strategy should address.

Therapeutic Services

Stakeholders said that there are a number of issues associated with service design including eligibility criteria, duration and entry points to services. Stakeholders identified the need for changes to the service system to:

- ▶ Significantly increase the number of universal access points including services that respond to complex trauma;
- ▶ Increase available services in regional and remote Australia;
- ▶ Provide specific support services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, people with a disability and from culturally and linguistically diverse communities;
- ▶ Recognise the differing treatment needs of adults and children and provide different service models to address these needs; and
- ▶ Understand and address harmful sexual behaviours in both children and adults.

Increased Funding

Stakeholders stated that the current approach to service delivery is heavily under resourced and siloed both across and within jurisdictions. Stakeholders said that there needs to be an investment in services across the spectrum from generalist access points through to specialist services.

Stakeholders said that the National Strategy should:

- ▶ Identify services or initiatives that are working well which need only reasonable additional funding or support in order to improve their delivery or reach;
- ▶ Leverage successful initiatives from other sectors, for example family and domestic violence initiatives;
- ▶ Support the creation of a community of practice for support services and practitioners; and
- ▶ Ensure that new initiatives are created through a child safety lens.



Cohort Specific Consideration

Stakeholders noted the need to build a service system which responds to the specific needs of children, with particular consideration given to the needs of children in out-of-home-care and youth detention.

The National Strategy also needs to include a specific focus on the following population groups:

- ▶ Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people;
- ▶ People from culturally and linguistically diverse communities;
- ▶ People with a disability;
- ▶ People who identify as LGBTQIA+; and
- ▶ People living in regional, rural and remote areas.

While the need for services that are trauma-informed and offer healing was recognised broadly, this priority was emphasised by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander stakeholders. An effective healing service for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people needs to:

- ▶ Understand the importance of kinship and connectedness;
- ▶ Restore family structures;
- ▶ Be culturally informed;
- ▶ Engage clients on a long-term journey of healing;
- ▶ Include support services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander child safety workers;
- ▶ Include safe reporting options for children to disclose abuse; and
- ▶ Be targeted to individuals, families and communities.

Stakeholders emphasised the importance of supporting and funding Aboriginal organisations that have the skills and knowledge to effectively work with communities.

Capacity and Capability Building

Workforce capacity and capability for the future was a prominent theme emerging from consultations. The National Strategy should address:

- ▶ The need for vicarious trauma supports for professionals to support workforce mental health and promote career longevity;
- ▶ The creation of sustainable communities of practice to provide peer support and build expertise; and
- ▶ Improving the specialised training offered to professionals to build their capacity to understand and respond to child sexual abuse.

Nationally Consistent Regulation

Stakeholders noted a need for national minimum standards for services and initiatives which respond to child sexual abuse. These standards can then be adopted and adapted and delivered in a way that is evidence and trauma informed, culturally appropriate, and suited to the local community and geographic region.



In particular, stakeholders highlighted the need for:

- ▶ A national Working with Children Check scheme;
- ▶ Reforms to existing state and territory risk assessment process for out-of-home-care placements;
- ▶ Reforms to the residential care sector;
- ▶ A nationally consistent online child abuse material classification system; and
- ▶ Uniform management, referral and reporting laws relating to child abuse material.

Awareness, Cultural Change and Understanding

The need to raise public awareness of child sexual abuse, reduce stigma and embed cultural understanding were emphasised as important areas for the National Strategy to address.

Awareness Raising

Stakeholders noted that extensive work needs to be done to raise awareness of child sexual abuse and make it part of the public discourse.

Stakeholders expressed that awareness raising activities should:

- ▶ Be conducted on mainstream media;
- ▶ Be both community wide and targeted (where appropriate);
- ▶ Focus on changing the conversation about child sexual abuse to dispel myths and reduce the stigma of child sexual abuse;
- ▶ Focus on creating a child safety culture and that it is everyone's responsibility to protect children from harm;
- ▶ Include different messages at the primary, secondary and tertiary prevention levels;
- ▶ Aim to educate parents and children about normal sexualised behaviours and protective strategies/behaviours as well as behaviours that require intervention;
- ▶ Draw upon Victoria's 'Respectful Relationships' program;
- ▶ Provide clear advice about appropriate supervision for children (particularly children who are vulnerable);
- ▶ Providing clear advice on actions people can take to prevent and respond to child sexual abuse including available resources and referral pathways; and
- ▶ Celebrate and amplify good practice and success stories of organisations and communities building a child safe environment.

Stakeholders said that the key messages for awareness raising include:

- ▶ What is child sexual abuse? What does it look like? What are the signs to look out for (including the early signs)?
- ▶ What is grooming and how do you recognise it?
- ▶ What are harmful sexual behaviours and how do you recognise them in children? What does healthy sexual development look like?



- ▶ How can you intervene or respond to a disclosure of child sexual abuse?
- ▶ How do you prevent child sexual abuse in spaces with fewer protective factors?
- ▶ How can you create safe spaces for people to discuss and disclose sexual abuse?

Reducing Stigma

Stakeholders noted that true understanding and awareness of child sexual abuse will require real cultural change, supported by policies that are underpinned by clear values and principles ensuring children are at the centre. The importance of believing victims, commending their courage and reinforcing that it is not their fault were considered critical in reducing ongoing trauma for victims.

Challenging the stigma associated with child sexual abuse is another priority identified by survivors, who note that stigma is recognised as discouraging disclosure. A strategy is needed to address misconceptions about the impacts of abuse including to remove damaging myths which are not evidence based. There is a need to promote awareness of the pathways to, and benefits of, support and advocacy for survivors.

There is also a need to challenge community attitudes about who is a 'deserving' or 'non-deserving' survivor, with stakeholders recognising there is less compassion in society towards survivors who have turned to substance use or ended up in the criminal justice system.

Embedding Cultural Understanding

Stakeholders expressed the need for the National Strategy to recognise Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural law and embed cultural sensitivity and understanding. This will require:

- ▶ Ongoing engagement with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people;
- ▶ Embedding child safety within communities and into cultural community structures;
- ▶ A focus on kinship structures; and
- ▶ Communicating using different platforms in a culturally informed manner.

Offender Prevention

Stakeholders emphasised the need for the National Strategy to incorporate services for offender prevention including understanding risk factors and increasing education and training for professionals to enable them to appropriately respond to offenders.

Services

The lack of services and initiatives directed at offender prevention was a key theme throughout all consultations. Offender prevention strategies need to:

- ▶ Be evidence-based and address the spectrum of offending through deterrence, prevention and intervention;
- ▶ Provide non-punitive support and intervention;
- ▶ Respond to children with harmful sexual behaviours;



- ▶ Incorporate self-referral and peer-referral for men who have concerns about their attractions and behaviours and want help to prevent them from offending; and
- ▶ Provide support to non-offending partners and their children.

The need for a Stop it Now! style initiative in Australia was emphasised as a priority at many of the consultations. Stop it Now! is a primary and secondary prevention initiative which provides anonymous, safe and private services for adults and young people worried about their sexual thoughts and behaviours.

Risk Factors

Stakeholders expressed that in most cases, children with harmful sexual behaviours have experienced adverse life events/trauma including abuse. Children with harmful sexual behaviours often have multiple health problems and misdiagnosis is a significant issue.

Stakeholders also highlighted that the prevalence of peer-to-peer child sexual abuse (where the perpetrator is themselves a child) is increasing and there needs to be much more education and support in this area.

Stakeholders noted that there needs to be a particular focus on boys between the ages of 10-12 and males between the ages of 25-30 as these are 'offending peaks'.

Stakeholders noted the role of pornography in fuelling harmful sexual behaviours.

Education and Training for Offender Prevention

Stakeholders highlighted the need to equip communities to know how to engage with perpetrators, recognising that even those that are punished will eventually return to the community.

Stakeholders also noted that the existing service system for offenders relies on poor research and evidence. Stakeholders expressed the view that, in particular when developing a response for children with harmful sexual behaviours, the focal point should be on therapeutic intervention and that the response to this issue should be led by appropriately trained health professionals in each state and territory.

Research

Stakeholders noted the need for the National Strategy to have a research agenda focusing on developing a better understanding of sexual abuse and the underlying causes, trauma informed approaches to the delivery of services, on what works and is successful in prevention, and on what international evidence is available to support improvements in policy and service delivery.

The need for improvements in data collection and availability was also a prominent theme.

Stakeholders noted that research themes could include:

- ▶ What are the drivers of child sexual abuse (who, why, what contexts)?
- ▶ What creates the enabling environments for child sexual abuse to occur in families, extended families and other contexts?
- ▶ What are the parallels/linkages between domestic violence and child sexual abuse?
- ▶ What are the best public/primary health care models for prevention strategies?



- ▶ How can we protect children online including from pornography & online grooming?
- ▶ What are the individual trajectory's of children with harmful sexual behaviours including with respect to recidivism and the transition to adult offending?
- ▶ What is the prevalence of children with harmful sexual behaviours?
- ▶ What are the comorbidities of children who have been sexually abused?
- ▶ Developing measures of levels of abuse and trends over time, in order to tell what is working. It's important to include measures of children's perceptions of safety – and how this is changing in response to the implementation of new policies.

Stakeholders also noted the gap in evaluation of existing programs and services. As a long-term strategy, stakeholders noted that the National Strategy will need to incorporate monitoring and evaluation to measure the outcomes being achieved. It is important that head line outcomes; for example the overall prevalence of child sexual abuse, are measured over time. The need for quaternary prevention in order to measure the impact of tertiary interventions was also emphasised.



National Principles for Child Safe Organisations

The National Principles were developed in response to early findings of the Royal Commission to make organisations safe for children and young people, and reduce future harm in institutional settings.

The National Principles are ten high level principles that provide a nationally consistent approach to cultivating organisational cultures that foster child safety and wellbeing across all sectors in Australia. The National Principles embed the Royal Commission's recommended child safe standards and are the vehicle for giving effect to recommendations relating to the standards.

The National Principles were endorsed by the Council of Australian Governments in February 2019.

A summary of the views voiced in the stakeholder consultations to inform the implementation of the National Principles are detailed below.

Awareness Raising

Stakeholders highlighted the need to raise awareness of the National Principles among organisations (particularly small and volunteer organisations) and the broader community.

Awareness raising should:

- ▶ Include sharing examples of good practice;
- ▶ Target information to different audiences (e.g. large organisations vs. small organisations);
- ▶ Support smaller organisations with limited staffing and financial resources to implement the National Principles;
- ▶ Create a one-stop-shop of tools and resources; and
- ▶ Include practical steps organisations can take to be child safe.

Stakeholders also emphasised that the National Principles document is designed for organisations staffed by adults and that the National Principles should also be translated into a version for children.

Giving Voice to Survivors

Stakeholders emphasised the power of telling real survivor stories and there is an opportunity for survivors to be trained to promote awareness of the National Principles through an ambassador program.

Concerns were raised that the Royal Commission's focus on historical abuse could lead to perceptions that child sexual abuse is a thing of the past. Communities need to be aware that the National Principles are meaningful principles informed by the lived experience of survivors in all contexts including online platforms. Child focused complaint handling processes should be implemented to support children to raise concerns or make a complaint.



Implementation Support

There was agreement that communities are ready for the National Principles and will support their implementation. It is important for all governments to show leadership and clearly communicate and demonstrate how government programs have incorporated the National Principles. Stakeholders noted that Commonwealth funding for schools and services should require implementation of the National Principles in all funding contracts.

Stakeholders noted that implementation supports could include:

- ▶ A national media campaign supported by a package to help community leaders and workers to promote awareness locally.
- ▶ Training and education materials including guides and online modules; and
- ▶ Clear advice and guidance on how the principles translate from policy into everyday practice.

Survivor advocates stressed the importance of having accessible, adequately resourced services available to respond to the needs of survivors after any communications strategy because media stories may trigger disclosures or survivor distress about past abuse.

An Enforceable Legislative Framework

The importance of enforceable legislative frameworks to support the National Principles was strongly emphasised by stakeholders. This should include a regulatory component to monitor and assess the implementation of the National Principles in organisations. This is also important to ensure consistency between the National Principles and existing state and territory child safe principles.

An Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Framework for Child Safety

Discussion suggests there is a need for culturally relevant principles for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations, with resounding agreement that the National Principles need to embed a culturally appropriate language.

Stakeholders said that in addition to a need for resources in community language, consideration should be given to including an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspective and convey recognition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander concepts of social and emotional wellbeing. There is a need to work with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations to develop culturally specific child-safe principles through a cultural lens. Educating the broader audience about the meaning of key terms such as 'culturally safe' and 'wellbeing', was also emphasised by stakeholders.

A Focus on Children Who Abuse Other Children

Stakeholders identified the need for the National Principles to focus on children with harmful sexual behaviours or who otherwise abuse other children as an area for further development moving forward. Stakeholders emphasised the need to talk about the issue and support communities to understand the needs of these children and to ensure our services are equipped to provide healing for them and their families and communities as well as their victims and their families.



Monitoring and Measuring Outcomes

Lastly, this report provides an overview of stakeholder feedback on the strategic direction of the National Office.

A Successful National Office for Child Safety

Stakeholders emphasised that the National Office has a primary role in providing national leadership. Stakeholders considered that the role of the National Office is to generate support within government for longer-term, generational programs of change. This could include setting national policy priorities and leading a national policy agenda.

Stakeholders considered that the National Office needs to centre children at the core of its work. The role of the National Office is to represent and amplify the voices and needs of children.

Stakeholder's views on success indicators for the National Office include:

- ▶ The creation of a warm and welcoming environment where people feel they can seek advice about child safety and openly discuss reforms to prevent and respond to child sexual abuse;
- ▶ Employing a consultative approach which seeks ongoing feedback and input from stakeholders;
- ▶ Recruiting employees from specific cohorts of people (e.g. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, people with a disability);
- ▶ Advocating for or driving the successful implementation of large national reforms, such as, working with children checks, and which creates national consistency between relevant Commonwealth, state and territory plans and frameworks;
- ▶ Employing an advocacy approach to promote children's rights including in the media;
- ▶ A measurable improvement to the current service system including:
 - an improved range of options for survivors around healing and recovery;
 - adequately funded services and clear pathways for people to access support; and
 - an increased in trauma-informed and trauma-competent services.
- ▶ Increased community awareness about child sexual abuse which changes the culture, dispels myths and removes stigma, and ultimately leads to a decrease in child sexual abuse in Australia; and
- ▶ Children having an improved understanding of their rights, particularly their right to safety.



Measuring Success

Stakeholder's views on measures of success for the National Office include:

- ▶ An increase in community awareness of child sexual abuse;
- ▶ An increase in reporting of child sexual abuse;
- ▶ A reduction in the longer-term in the prevalence of child sexual abuse (noting successful awareness raising may produce a spike in reporting);
- ▶ Child safety and child sexual abuse remaining on the national agenda in the longer-term; and
- ▶ The National Office having a high profile as a hub for people seeking knowledge and support.

