



Left Write Hook
470 St Kilda Road
Melbourne VIC 3004
hello@leftwritehook.org
leftwritehook.org
ABN 48 664 485 134

Submission to Parliament

Submitted by:

Left Write Hook

Founder and CEO: Dr Donna Lyon

Associate Professor, University of Melbourne

5 February 2026

RE: Inquiry into the Continuing Operation of the National Redress Scheme

Dear Members of the Joint Standing Committee on the Implementation of the National Redress Scheme,

This submission is made to the Parliamentary inquiry into the continuing operation of the National Redress Scheme to share the work of Left Write Hook (LWH), a survivor-led charity responding to the lifelong impacts of child sexual abuse through trauma-informed writing and boxing programs. **Left Write Hook (LWH)** is a survivor-led charity providing trauma-informed writing and boxing programs that respond to the lifelong impacts of child sexual abuse, with evidence of meaningful, real-world improvements for survivors.

The purpose of this submission is threefold:

- to acknowledge the importance of the National Redress Scheme in recognising and compensating victim-survivors for crimes committed against them
- to highlight the limits of the current scheme, particularly for survivors of intrafamilial abuse who remain excluded
- to present Left Write Hook as an evidence-based, lived-experience-led model that addresses contemporary research and aligns with recommendations from the Royal Commission into Victoria's Mental Health System (RCVMHC: referred to here as the Mental Health Royal Commission)),

particularly the call for lived experience to lead intervention, design and delivery.

Who we are: Left Write Hook

Left Write Hook was founded by Dr Donna Lyon, a survivor of childhood sexual abuse and family violence and an Associate Professor at the University of Melbourne. The organisation was born from lived experience, creative practice research, and a recognition that many victim-survivors continue to fall through gaps in formal justice, compensation, and therapeutic systems.

While these systems are essential and often well-intentioned, they can struggle to engage with victim-survivors as unique individuals or to meet people where they are in their recovery. As a result, many survivors continue to seek approaches that offer more personalised, relational, and practical pathways for working through trauma over time.

Left Write Hook delivers trauma-informed programs combining facilitated writing, non-contact boxing, and peer support. The model is survivor-led, research-backed, and grounded in the understanding that recovery from complex trauma requires more than clinical intervention alone. It requires agency, dignity, connection, and opportunities to reclaim voice and bodily autonomy.

Our programs work with adult victim-survivors of child sexual abuse, many of whom have experienced years, and often decades, of cumulative harm. And despite the best efforts of countless support systems, find themselves let down by the many systems designed to help them.

Engagement with the National Redress Scheme

A significant number of victim-survivors who participate in Left Write Hook programs have engaged with the National Redress Scheme. We write to acknowledge the importance of redress schemes in formally recognising harm, validating survivor experiences, and providing financial compensation for crimes committed against them.

For many participants, redress represents the first time their abuse has been formally acknowledged by the state. This matters deeply.

At the same time, we wish to acknowledge the many victim-survivors in our programs who are ineligible for the National Redress Scheme because their abuse

occurred within the institution of the family. This exclusion is not marginal. It is central.

The majority of participants in Left Write Hook programs have experienced intrafamilial child sexual abuse. Their abuse occurred in environments characterised by secrecy, power imbalance, dependency, and prolonged exposure. The betrayal of trust this represents is typically acute. These survivors live with lifelong impacts that are no less severe because the harm did not occur in a formally recognised institution.

Health and psychosocial impacts observed in participants

Participants who attend Left Write Hook consistently present with complex and chronic impacts associated with childhood sexual abuse. These include, but are not limited to:

- PTSD and Complex PTSD (cPTSD)
- Chronic anxiety, depression, and stress-related disorders
- Suicidality and self-harm
- Cardiovascular disease
- Dissociation, avoidance and numbing
- Addiction and substance abuse
- Diabetes
- Obesity
- Chronic fatigue and pain
- Long-term mental and physical health comorbidities

Beyond diagnosable conditions, almost every participant carries deep wounds that affect sense of self, self-worth, capacity for self-advocacy, trust in systems, and belief in their own value.

These impacts do not resolve through compensation alone. They require sustained, relational, and embodied responses that restore agency and connection.

Evidence of impact

Left Write Hook is engaged in ongoing research with the University of Melbourne. Preliminary findings of our 8-week survivor-led writing and boxing program demonstrate:

- reductions in symptoms of PTSD and cPTSD
- reductions in depression and stress

- increases in personal agency
- increased sense of belonging and connection
- increased resilience

Building on this work, Left Write Hook and the University of Melbourne are collaborating on a Medical Research Future Fund (MRFF) randomised controlled trial. This study compares boxing-only interventions with the integrated Left Write Hook writing and boxing model.

This research reflects our commitment to evidence-based practice, accountability, and contribution to the broader knowledge base around trauma recovery.

Lived experience leadership and post-traumatic growth

In line with the mental Health Royal Commission's recommendation that lived experience should lead intervention design and delivery, Left Write Hook trains facilitators with lived experience of childhood sexual abuse and other forms of family violence. All are graduates of our own programs. We also employ survivors and are proud to say we are 90% staffed by lived/living experience (with all of our charity employees past program participants).

Our training and employment pathways provide meaningful volunteer and paid employment, skills development, leadership development, and post-traumatic growth. Survivors are not positioned as passive recipients of care, but as knowledge holders, leaders and agents of change through a purposely self-actualising generative pathway.

This approach challenges deficit-based narratives and reflects a strengths-based understanding of recovery.

Justice beyond formal systems

Of particular relevance to the National Redress Scheme inquiry is the work undertaken by Dr Donna Lyon in collaboration with researchers, of note Dr Dave McDonald, a criminologist and senior lecturer at the University of Melbourne.

Dr McDonald's research highlights longstanding challenges associated with conventional criminal justice responses to sexual violence. Decades of research show that victim-survivors frequently experience silencing, exclusion, lack of agency, and retraumatisation through police processes, prosecutorial decisions, and adversarial court structures.

A 2024 review by the Victorian Victims of Crime Commissioner found that many victims did not feel like participants in the justice system. They reported feeling excluded from decision-making, inadequately informed, lacking agency, and unsafe. Almost half indicated they would not want to participate in the justice system again.

These experiences reflect what is known as secondary victimisation, where responses to harm compound the original trauma.

Importantly, Dr McDonald's work draws on international research, including studies by Judith Lewis Herman and by Clare McGlynn and Nicole Westmarland, which demonstrate that justice for victim-survivors is not linear, finite, or reducible to legal outcomes alone.

Victim-survivors in these studies identified justice as encompassing:

- Recognition
- Dignity
- Voice
- Prevention
- Connectedness

Justice, from this perspective, is relational, social, and unfolds over time.

Left Write Hook as an alternative justice model

Drawing on this extensive body of work, Dr McDonald identifies Left Write Hook as an alternative model of justice. Not a substitute for formal justice or redress, but a complementary domain where empowerment, validation, and community recognition occur.

Left Write Hook provides a space where survivors are witnessed by peers, facilitators, audiences, and broader communities. Through writing, boxing, and, in some cases, film and public engagement, survivors reclaim voice and bodily agency in ways that conventional systems often fail to support. Of note is the *Left Write Hook* feature documentary film funded by state and national screen agencies, a recipient of the Melbourne International Film Festival and Audience Award Winner of the Australian International Documentary Award and now available on Netflix.

As Judith Lewis Herman has written, whether survivors seek resolution through legal or informal means, their most important objective is often validation from the community. This quest for validation is central to healing.

The *Left Write Hook* film and recovery programs operate as forms of cultural testimony. They contribute to social understanding, collective memory, and public education about the realities of child sexual abuse and its aftermath.

This work demonstrates that justice is not only legal. It is also social, cultural, and embodied.

Implications for the National Redress Scheme

The National Redress Scheme plays a vital role in recognising institutional abuse. However, its current scope leaves many victim-survivors without access to recognition or compensation, particularly those harmed within families.

The National Redress Scheme plays a vital role in recognising and responding to institutional child sexual abuse. However, its current scope is limited to abuse that occurred within formal institutional settings. As a result, many victim-survivors who were harmed outside institutional contexts, including those abused within families or other informal care arrangements, remain without access to recognition.

This submission urges the Committee to consider:

- the profound and lifelong impacts experienced by survivors excluded from the scheme
- the need for complementary justice responses beyond financial compensation
- the value of lived-experience-led, community-based, evidence-informed models in supporting recovery and agency
- the importance of recognising alternative forms of justice that restore dignity, voice, and connection

Current demand and future considerations

To date, the Left Write Hook charity has a waitlist of more than 700 people seeking to participate in our programs. This level of unmet demand makes clear that victim-survivors are actively seeking integrated recovery approaches that go beyond compensation alone. Survivors are looking for ways to take back their power, heal, to make meaning of their experiences, and to do so in community, with dignity, agency, and connection.

Left Write Hook currently operates through a combination of philanthropic funding, small grants, a pay what you can program model, and community donations. While this funding has been sufficient to support establishment,

delivery, and proof of concept, it is not adequate to meet the scale of need that continues to present, nor the growing demand from communities across Victoria and nationally.

We acknowledge that one purpose of this submission is to bring the work of Left Write Hook to the attention of the government. Survivor-led, evidence-informed, and community-based models such as ours require sustained policy recognition and investment if they are to complement formal justice and redress mechanisms in a meaningful way.

We believe that addressing the long-term impacts of childhood sexual abuse, particularly for those excluded from existing redress frameworks, requires a broader conception of justice, recovery, and responsibility. Government attention and support are a critical part of building systems that do not leave survivors to navigate recovery alone.

Conclusion

Left Write Hook writes in support of the continuation and strengthening of redress mechanisms, while also calling attention to their limitations. Survivors' needs do not end with compensation. For many, justice is a long, non-linear process that requires recognition, community validation, and opportunities to reclaim power over their own narratives and bodies.

We thank the Committee for the opportunity to contribute to this inquiry and welcome further dialogue about how survivor-led models can inform more just, inclusive, and effective responses to child sexual abuse in Australia.

Yours sincerely,



Dr Donna Lyon

Founder | CEO

Left Write Hook

Associate Professor, Faculty of Fine Arts and Music

University of Melbourne



Dr Dave McDonald

Senior Lecturer in Criminology
Director, Education and Students
School of Social and Political Sciences
University of Melbourne
Parkville VIC 3010

Dr Daniel Rylatt

Principal Clinical Psychologist
Alfred Care Group (Bayside Health)

Left Write Hook (Program Graduate and Facilitator)

Employed as a Principal Clinical Psychologist within the public health system; views expressed are my own and do not represent any employer.

PO Box 315
Melbourne VIC 3004

Dr Lauren Matthews

Sessional Academic, Researcher, Social Worker & Survivor.

Left Write Hood Board Director

References

Dumaresq, E., McDonald, D., Lauren. (2024). Voices to be Heard: An Arts, Health and Justice Perspective on Healing and Recovery from Child Sexual Abuse. (Eds. S. Owen & D. Lyon). University of Melbourne. DOI: 10.26188/27167280. Available at www.leftwritehook.film.

Herman, Judith Lewis (2005) 'Justice from the victim's perspective', *Violence Against Women*, 11(5): 571-602. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1077801205274450>

Heydon, Georgina, Henry, Nicola, Loney-Howes, Rachel, and Hindes, Sophie (2023) *Alternative Reporting Options for Sexual Assault: Investigating their use, purpose and potential*. Australian Institute of Criminology. <https://www.aic.gov.au/crg/reports/crg-2519-20>

McGlynn, Clare and Westmarland, Nicole (2019) 'Kaleidoscopic justice: Sexual violence and victim-survivor's perceptions of justice', *Social & Legal Studies*, 28(2): 179-201. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0964663918761200>