



16 January 2018

*Submission to Senate Community Affairs Legislation Committee inquiry into the Commonwealth Redress Scheme for Institutional Child Sexual Abuse Bill 2017 and related bill.*

The Australian Childhood Foundation is a national not for profit organisation which delivers:

- specialist therapeutic programs for children and young people who have been affected by trauma arising from abuse and family violence. It currently runs these programs in Victoria, Tasmania, Northern Territory, South Australia, the Australian Capital Territory and Western Australia.
- national professional education and development programs focused on neurobiology, trauma and attachment. It reaches more than 7000 professionals each year nationally. It runs a range of workforce development programs for a number of state and territory government departments in Australia including Education Departments in South Australia, where it has run the SMART (Strategies for Managing Abuse Related Trauma) Program for the last nine years across SA, in the Northern Territory where it replicated the SMART Program across schools in the NT, and has had a contract with the Tasmanian Department of Education to implement a similar initiative addressing the issues of student engagement and disconnection in secondary school. The Foundation has also run workforce development programs for child protection staff and managers in Tasmania, the Northern Territory and the Australian Capital Territory.
- a range of national community awareness and child abuse prevention initiatives. These have included Play Your Part and Stop Child Abuse Now campaigns.
- Safeguarding Children Program is unique in Australia and provides effective standards, training and an accreditation program that help organisations to strengthen their capacity to protect children and young people in their care. The Foundation has a long history of advocating for the development of child serving systems which place the safety of children at the centre of individual, organisational and community decision making. Such systems achieve their mission through an honest acceptance of the risks of abuse and exploitation that adults can pose to children.

The Australian Childhood Foundation welcomes the Australian Government's proposal to establish the Commonwealth Redress Scheme for Institutional Child Sexual Abuse, as recommended in the Final Report of the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse.

The proposed Scheme provides a safety net and some surety for survivors of sexual abuse who are unable to seek redress through civil litigation or other means including the various redress mechanisms established by organisations in response to sexual abuse claims.

Whilst in theory the proposed Scheme provides this safety net, its successful operation is potentially undermined by several factors.

As an opt-in process, the Scheme will only be successful if key stakeholders opt-in. Responses to the issue of redress are already fragmented with many key organisations currently operating redress schemes with no consistent guiding principles or monitoring.

*Lack of State Government opt-in*

The National Scheme is an opportunity for all governments to demonstrate a commitment to responding in a coordinated consistent manner to the sexual abuse of children.

The Royal Commission is a significant landmark in relation to the consideration of the need for Australia's children to be protected against sexual abuse. Its Report is a watershed in relation to understanding the sexual abuse of children in institutions and the community's response to that abuse. The Royal Commission Report contains numerous recommendations about the need for a National approach in relation to things like Working with Children Clearances and a Redress Scheme. The proposed Scheme provides an opportunity for all governments to demonstrate a commitment to developing more consistent and coordinated responses to child sexual abuse. The failure of some States to opt-in to the Scheme would not only eschew this opportunity but reflect an entrenched resistance to nationally consistent legislation needed to properly protect our children.

*Lack of non-government opt-in*

The Commonwealth Government needs to significantly invest in efforts to engage non-government organisations to 'opt in' to the Scheme. Key organisations already operating redress schemes should be encouraged to opt-in to the Scheme. The Commonwealth should actively pursue their involvement and ensure that sufficient benefits accrue to those organisations that opt in. The engagement of as many stakeholders as possible in the Scheme will not only ensure that responses to the needs of survivors of child sexual abuse receive a consistently fair treatment but will also signal the adoption of a cooperative approach that is required to address the multitude of cross-jurisdictional responses need to protect children.

