

Inquiry into the Implementation of the
Recommendations of the Lost Innocents and
Forgotten Australians Reports

Supplementary information

Department of Families, Housing, Community
Services and Indigenous Affairs

The Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (FaHCSIA) provided a submission summarising its understanding of the implementation of Commonwealth focused recommendations in the Forgotten Australians Report. This submission was to inform the Committee's Inquiry into the Implementation of the Recommendations of the Lost Innocence and Forgotten Australians Reports. Departmental officers appeared at the Canberra hearing on 8 April 2009 where they agreed to provide supplementary information.

Senator HUMPHRIES asked about progress with the National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children.

Additional Information

The Government is keenly aware of the suffering experienced by victims of child abuse and neglect. Abuse and neglect endured by any child is a tragedy and as we know, many individuals, families and the wider community carry the consequences through life.

The challenge of helping survivors of child abuse and neglect form part of the national approach to protecting children. The Council of Australian Governments recently endorsed *Protecting Children is Everyone's Business: National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children* – an ambitious, long term national approach to ensuring the safety and wellbeing of Australian children. This National Framework recognises the importance of ensuring that people who have experienced abuse and neglect are provided high-quality services and interventions, as they are among the most vulnerable in our community. A copy of the National Framework is attached for the Committee's information.

Developed collaboratively by the Australian, State and Territory Governments, through the Community and Disability Services Ministers Conference, in consultation with the non-government sector, the National Framework is underpinned by a number of supporting outcomes, strategies and indicators of change. Two of the six supporting outcomes are of particular relevance to Forgotten Australians and other survivors of child abuse and neglect:

Outcome 4: Children who have been abused or neglected receive the support and care they need for their safety and wellbeing; and

Outcome: 6 Child sexual abuse and exploitation is prevented and survivors receive adequate support.

The Framework will operate through to 2020 with a series of action plans. The initial action plan includes initiatives such as:

- enhancing access to appropriate support services for recovery where abuse or neglect has occurred;
- therapy programs and better targeting of the Personal Helpers and Mentors Program (PHaMs);
- ensuring survivors of sexual abuse have access to effective treatment and appropriate services; and
- supporting workshops for adult survivors of sexual abuse and spouses.

The National Framework also recognises the need to involve children and young people in decisions affecting their lives and the Government is exploring the potential role for a National Children's Commissioner. In addition, under the Framework the Government will develop a nationally consistent approach to working with children checks and child safe organisations.

Senator BOYCE asked about progress with the Victorian *Who am I* project.

Additional Information

The Victorian *Who am I* project aims to investigate archiving and record keeping practices to support current and historic care leavers in the construction of their identity. Led by the University of Melbourne, the project will see academic social workers, historians and archivists work with the Victorian community services sector and Department of Human Services over the next three years to develop a digital archive consolidating the records of Victorian out-of-home care providers. The project is limited to Victoria.

The project will receive \$550,000 in funding, over three years, from the Australian Research Council, a statutory authority within the Government's Innovation, Industry, Science and Research portfolio. Several Victorian organisations and the Victorian Department of Human Services have provided additional funding. The project responds to several recommendations of the Forgotten Australians report and builds a context that interconnects current records, archives and publications and identifies improved strategies for future record keeping.

Senator MOORE asked about the response to Recommendation 39, that courses of study focused on child protection and related issues be established.

Additional Information

In its response, the former Government supported this recommendation but noted that universities are self-accrediting institutions that decide the courses they will offer, within broad profiles agreed with the Australian Government.

The *National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children* recognises the need to work across the Government and non-Government sectors to educate and engage the community to influence attitudes and beliefs about abuse and neglect.

Actions under the Framework will support community organisations to deliver cost effective, community based initiatives, including information and awareness activities. In addition, initial actions under the Framework include a commitment by the Commonwealth to lead a partnership with States and Territories to support a National Research Agenda for Child Protection.

Senator MOORE asked about Commonwealth funding for CLAN.

Additional Information

CLAN is acknowledged as a key organisation maintaining a national profile and providing national support and advice to Forgotten Australians. CLAN's website is a leading resource for care leavers and it advocates for improved responses across Australia.

In conjunction with the former Government's response to the Forgotten Australians report, in 2004-06 CLAN was provided with \$100,000 to provide a counselling service in conjunction with the Inquiry process.

To continue support and maintain CLAN's ongoing viability, in 2008-09 the Government provided CLAN with \$50,000 funding. This funding was in response to a direct approach by CLAN.

Senator MOORE and Senator BOYCE asked about the response to Recommendation 18, that the Commonwealth request all Freedom of Information (FoI) regimes be reviewed to ensure that they do not hinder access by care leavers to information about their childhoods and families, and Recommendation 22 that State Government funded services for care leavers be available to all care leavers in the respective State, irrespective of where the care leaver was institutionalised.

Additional Information

The Queensland Department of Communities invited all jurisdictions to provide information on current practices in relation to FoI regimes and information on the availability of State funded services. Final outcomes from this process have yet to be provided by the Queensland Department of Communities.

Senator BOYCE asked about the Personal Helpers and Mentors Program.

Additional Information

The Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs is preparing to undertake Round 4 of the Personal Helpers and Mentors Program (PHaMs). PHaMs uses a functional assessment rather than a clinical diagnosis of mental illness, has broad program entry pathways, provides flexible, tailored service options and is not time limited for participant involvement.

PHaMs round 4 will target specific vulnerable groups including:

- the Indigenous Stolen Generation;
- homeless;
- humanitarian entrants; and
- Forgotten Australians.

Approximately 10.2 % (as at December 2008) of PHaMS clients identify as being institutionalised as a child.

To assist the department ensure PHaMs round 4 targets Forgotten Australians and to ensure the selection process selects appropriate providers and services, FaHCSIA consulted with Alliance for Forgotten Australians and Care Leavers Australia Network regarding:

- specific support needs, services or issues faced by Forgotten Australians;
- demographic information and what locations would be best to ensure we reach these groups;
- key organisations or service providers that could help target these groups or be potential service providers;
- what approaches would successfully open pathways to our program;
- identifying service gaps; and
- how can FaHCSIA best target these particular vulnerable groups.

Senator BOYCE asked about the proposed changes to the Commonwealth Freedom of Information Act.

Additional Information

The Australian Government announced as part of its 2007 election policies that it would reform the Commonwealth Freedom of Information Act 1982 (FOI Act) to promote a pro-disclosure culture and build a stronger foundation for greater Government openness. The Commonwealth's FOI Act applies only to the federal public sector.

The then Cabinet Secretary and Special Minister of State, Senator the Hon John Faulkner, released the draft Information Commissioner Bill 2009 and the draft Freedom of Information Amendment (Reform) Bill 2009 for public consultation. Following consideration of comments on the draft Bills, the Government proposes to introduce the Bills into the Parliament in 2009.

The proposed reforms focus on:

- ensuring that the right of access to documents under the FOI Act is as comprehensive as it can be, limited only where a stronger public interest lies in withholding access to documents;
- giving greater weight to the role that the FOI Act serves in the pro-active publication of Government information; and
- introducing structural reforms designed to deliver a platform for system wide information policy development across Government.

A new office overseen by three independent statutory office holders is proposed to be established and operational by January 2010. The office holders will have functions under both the Privacy Act 1988 and the FOI Act. The proposed Office of the Information Commissioner will be headed by the Information Commissioner (a new office holder) who will be supported by the Privacy Commissioner (an existing office holder) and the FOI Commissioner (a new office holder).

The Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet can provide further information.

Senator BOYCE asked what has been done in term of encouraging State Governments to fulfil their responsibilities in regard to the Lost Innocence.

Clarification

The Department's opening statement noted that Minister Macklin's support for the Alliance for Forgotten Australians (AFA) will enable Forgotten Australians to share information across State boundaries and encourage States to fulfil their responsibilities.

The Government's response to the Lost Innocence report is the policy responsibility of the Department of Immigration and Citizenship, so it would be best placed to provide any further information.