



National Centre for Action
on Child Sexual Abuse

Pre-Budget Submission to Department of Treasury

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January 25, 2024

Acknowledgements

The National Centre for Action on Child Sexual Abuse (the National Centre) respectfully acknowledges and celebrates the many Traditional Owners of the lands throughout Australia and pay our respects to ancestors of this country and Elders past and present. We recognise that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, culture and lore have existed within Australia continuously for over 65,000 years.

We acknowledge the ongoing leadership of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities across Australia and those who have and continue to work tirelessly to address inequalities and improve Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander justice outcomes for children and young people. The National Centre is committed to ensuring that the voices of those whose lives are affected by the decisions governments make should fundamentally inform those decisions. First Nations voices must be heard, raised and amplified through a Voice to Parliament. It is time for genuine and significant reform to progress healing through the Uluru Statement from the Heart.

We seek to honour the lived expertise of all survivors of child sexual abuse, harnessing all ages, cultures, abilities and backgrounds, and commit to substantially addressing the harm of child sexual abuse, now and well into the future. We recognise that there are children and young people today who are experiencing sexual abuse and dedicate ourselves to doing all we can to promote their effective protection and care.

Our Commitment

The establishment of a National Centre to raise awareness and understanding of the impacts of child sexual abuse, support help-seeking and guide best practice advocacy and support and therapeutic treatment was a key recommendation (9.9) of the 2017 Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse. The Royal Commission identified that ongoing national leadership is necessary to improve outcomes for victims and survivors of past child sexual abuse and prevent future child sexual abuse.

Established in late 2021, the National Centre is a partnership between three respected organisations with strong histories of leadership in responding to the child sexual abuse – Australian Childhood Foundation, Blue Knot Foundation and the Healing Foundation.

The National Centre has an integrated governance structure that embeds the expertise of adults with lived and living experience of child sexual abuse, the rich strength of knowledge of First Nations Peoples and the voices of children and young people, as well as the expertise of researchers, practitioners, justice organisations, corporate entities, government and policy leaders.

At its core, the National Centre is a symbol of hope and an essential vehicle for action for many victims and survivors of child sexual abuse. Its vision is for a community where children are safe and victims and survivors are supported to heal and recover, free of stigma and shame – a future without child sexual abuse. Our mission is to disrupt the dynamics that have failed to stop child sexual abuse and prevented victims and survivors from being believed, validated and supported in the ways they need.

To achieve its vision, the National Centre:

- ensures the knowledge and voice of victim survivors of child sexual abuse is at the core of all of its activities
- commissions critical research; builds the workforce capability of organisations working with victims and survivors of child sexual abuse
- strives to raise community awareness of the nature of child sexual abuse and how to prevent it.

About the National Centre for Action on Child Sexual Abuse

The National Centre for Action on Child Sexual Abuse (the National Centre) welcomes the opportunity to make a pre-budget submission.

The National Centre is an independent organisation established to increase community understanding of child sexual abuse, promote effective ways for protecting children, guide best practice responses and reduce the harm child sexual abuse causes.

The National Centre's recently released strategic plan, *Here for Change – Five Year Strategy*, frames seven critical challenges that represent what must change in preventing and better responding to child sexual abuse and launched our first Annual Report in October 2023.
<https://nationalcentre.org.au/>

The National Centre is independent of government, but the federal government funded our establishment in 2022 and funding is now additionally drawn from other state and federal departments. Planning and building the financial sustainability of the organisation is a key goal of the Board of the National Centre. Additionally, we play a key role in the National Office for Child Safety's 10-year Strategy. Our work has national and state and territory implications and spans multiple jurisdictions and agencies including the e-Safety Commissioner and the Australian Centre to Counter Child Exploitation and the National Indigenous Agency of Australia.

Overview of this Submission

The participation of lived experience is considered essential in the human rights movement with the Safety and Quality Standard 2 'Partnering with consumers' placing increased emphasis on the need for meaningful collaboration with people who have a lived experience.

The National Centre has established a framework and have engaged lived experience in the establishment of all its work. However, the demand for consultation from within our organisation and the broader sector outstrips the capacity of our small, supported group of victims and survivor representatives.

This Submission seeks funding (\$500k over 3 years) to expand the lived experience platform to include the coordination, training, support, engagement, and leadership of a **100-person victim and survivor expert panel**, who will act across all levels of policy, legislation, planning, program design, service delivery and evaluation.

Participation may occur in a range of ways from advisory groups, systemic advocacy, research, education, and project consultation. Increased demand for external participation is beyond our current Colleges whose Terms of Reference and engagement focus is on informing the National Centre itself, not sector partners, government entities or other providers.

Additionally, the expanded platform will be a coordinated entry point for the growing number of victims and survivors reaching out to be heard, skilled and supported to make an impact directly and in their own right on responses to child sexual abuse. The platform will work across multiple sectors and jurisdictions to deliver an advocacy network that is a valued, trusted, accessible and trauma informed source of lived expertise advice and impact.

Notably the Panel will draw together victims and survivors across the age range and life span, and across representative groups within the Australian population including priority groups such as the First Nations, LGBTIQ+, Culturally and Linguistically Diverse and disability communities.

The Proposal:

Establish a panel of experts-by-experience to be trained and supported to provide advice across governments and organisations on the prevention of and response to child sexual abuse.

Background

The Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse at Recommendation 9.91 articulated the scope of the National Centre and underlined our approach stating, “the National Centre should partner with survivors in all its work, valuing their knowledge and experience”. We laid important groundwork with our framework of Engagement, the establishment of our Adult Survivor-Led College (15 people), First Nations College (7 people) and Child and Youth Engage project, who contributed to the co-design and establishment of our commissioned research program, our learning development program, strategic agenda and our identity as a new centre. They continue to work in an embedded way across the work of the National Centre.

The Problem

The emergence of the National Centre and our College’s work has triggered increased engagement from victims and survivors within the community who want to contribute their expertise to the movement for change. At the same time a range of organisations and government departments, researchers and policy leaders have approached the National Centre seeking access to the expertise of those with lived experience, noting and respecting that those involved as advisors rightly need appropriate support to engage in co-design and to capably inform policy and programs. This requires investment in expert trauma responsive structures and processes, resources that could be pooled and made available through the National Centre as the only independent Australian entity focused specifically on child sexual abuse.

The National Centre is not currently equipped to respond to requests to expand the pool of advisors and activate their availability for external projects.

Further, the size of the proposed panel (100 people) is required to adequately represent specific priority groups which include First Nations, rural and remote populations, those living with a disability, LGBTQIA+ populations, culturally and linguistically diverse populations, early childhood populations (<5yo) and those living in poverty/low socioeconomic status.

The Proposed Solution

Recommendation

This Submission seeks funding of \$500k over 3 years to establish and expand the lived experience platform already in place at the National Centre to include the coordination, training, support, engagement, and leadership of a **100-person victim and survivor expert panel**, who will act across all levels of policy, legislation, planning, program design, service delivery and evaluation.

Participation may occur in a range of ways from advisory groups, systemic advocacy, research, education, and project consultation. Increased demand for external participation is beyond our current Colleges whose Terms of Reference and engagement focus on informing the National Centre itself, not sector partners or other providers.

Despite the known benefits and often required inclusion of lived experience participation, there is little understanding of the challenges faced by lived experience experts engaging in this capacity. Many professionals still don’t credit this involvement, which contributes to negative experiences and inadequate outcomes. Thus, the proposed expansion will include training not only for lived experience participants but also for partner organisation leaders, so they understand factors that contribute to the

successful and safe inclusion of lived experience advisory roles. This project will ensure the lived experience panel has appropriate training, remuneration, position descriptions and access to supervision and debriefing as well as raising awareness of career opportunities.

Key components of the Program will include:

- Recruitment & training of a project lead and trainer – each being a person with their own lived experience.
- Codesign of **partner organisation** training modules and facilitation and delivery of training
- Codesign of **lived experience** training modules and facilitation and delivery of workshops
- Marketing and communication activities associated with recruitment of the panel
- Webpages, forms and digital assets design and implementation
- Development of lived experience role descriptions and remuneration policies.
- Expanded capacity of supervision and debriefing function to meet the needs of 100-person Panel.

The Expected Benefit for governments and the Australian community

The need to increase understanding of, better respond to and prevent child sexual abuse is a national policy priority, within which the National Centre is a key initiative. Australian, state and territory governments have committed to make the 'fundamental right to be protected and safe from sexual abuse' a reality for every child.

For governments to achieve this, there is a need for a stronger human rights approach in Australia and one that has a child-specific focus. In the context of child sexual abuse, a child-focused human rights approach should reflect understandings of trauma, gender, culture and multiple and intersecting forms of disadvantage, and is sensitive, inclusive and responsive to the needs of different communities particularly those within the LGBTIQ+ community who have been found to be three times more likely to experience child maltreatment than heterosexual Australians or cisgendered males¹. These are critical foundations upon which to build improved prevention of child sexual abuse and more appropriate responses to children who experience child sexual abuse through listening to and supporting victims and survivors in childhood and into adulthood.

With child sexual abuse as its singular focus, the National Centre sees victims and survivors of child sexual abuse as its primary priority population. To truly shift the dial on the prevalence and impact of child sexual abuse, the spotlight must remain on the experience and impacts of victims and survivors of child sexual abuse across all ages, stages, socioeconomic and demographic groups.

There are currently 1.4 million Australians who have experienced sexual abuse as a child. This investment aims to improve the way their experience is recognised and harnessed to inform system and policy changes-with a view to ending child sexual abuse before it begins.

The intermediary beneficiaries will include researchers, clinicians and the staff of sector organisations such as National Office of Child Safety, Australian Federal Police, and the Department of Health and Human Services (DSS) who will have improved access to a diverse, supported and trained network of people to improve project, policy and program outcomes. Additionally, the 100 people with lived experience will benefit not only through the training and support provided to them, but from the peer interactions and validation of making a meaningful contribution to a future without child sexual abuse.

The National Centre commends this proposal for funding given its potential for high impact and quality outcomes in the fight against child sexual abuse and its impact across the Australian community.

¹ Higgins, D., Lawrence, D., Haslam, D. M., Mathews, B., Malacova, E., Erskine, H. E., Finkelhor, D., Pacella, R., Meinck, F., Thomas, H. J., & Scott, J. G. (2024). [Prevalence of diverse genders and sexualities in Australia and associations with five forms of child maltreatment and multi-type maltreatment](https://doi.org/10.1177/10775595231226331). *Child Maltreatment*, 1226331, 1-21. <https://doi.org/10.1177/10775595231226331>

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