



# Public consultation to inform a national point of referral to assist victims and survivors of child sexual abuse to access help and information

Discussion Paper - October 2023



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# Acknowledgments

## Acknowledgment of Country

The National Office for Child Safety acknowledges Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as custodians of Australia and we pay our respects to Elders, past and present. We acknowledge their ongoing connection to land, sea and communities throughout Australia, and their contributions to the lives of all Australians.

We pay respect to the Ngunnawal people as the Custodians of the land on which the National Office for Child Safety is based, and recognise all other people or families with connection to the lands of the ACT and region.

## Acknowledgement of victims and survivors

We wish to pay our respects to all victims and survivors of child sexual abuse and acknowledge the enormity of the trauma they suffered as children.

We endeavour to learn to better protect children and young people, and dedicate our ongoing efforts to improving supports for all victims and survivors.

We endeavour to enhance our efforts to prevent child sexual abuse and ensure our children and young people are safe from all forms of child sexual abuse and harm.



# Help and support

Child sexual abuse is a challenging issue. Reading this paper may bring up strong feelings for some people. Please take care of yourself as you read this paper and ask for help if you need it. You might want to talk to your family and friends, or your counsellor, doctor, or Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health service.

We are seeking information and feedback on your experiences engaging with the service sector and ways to make services trauma-informed, culturally safe, inclusive and accessible. We are not seeking details of lived experience and cannot assist with, or intervene in, individual cases. If you have concerns about a child's safety or wish to make a report, please visit the **Make a report** page at [www.childsafety.gov.au](http://www.childsafety.gov.au).

The following services can also give you help and support:

## Crisis and suicide prevention

**If you or a child are in immediate danger, call Triple Zero (000).**

- ▶ [Lifeline](#) (13 11 14) – National crisis support and suicide prevention service, available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.
- ▶ [13YARN](#) (13 92 76) is an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander crisis support. You can call 13YARN on 13 92 76, available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week

## Child sexual abuse and other support and advice

- ▶ [Bravehearts](#) (1800 272 831) - Bravehearts Information & Support Line provides support and advice regarding child sexual abuse, available 8:30am – 4:30pm, Monday to Friday AEST/AEDT (hours may vary on public holidays).
- ▶ [Blue Knot Foundation](#) (1300 657 380) - National service for anyone affected by complex trauma, available 9:00am – 5:00pm AEST/AEDT, Monday to Sunday.
- ▶ [SAMSN – Supporting Male Survivors of Childhood Sexual Abuse](#) (1800 472 676) - Provides free support to male victims and survivors of child sexual abuse, their families and supporters, available 9:00am – 5:00pm AEST/AEDT Monday to Friday.
- ▶ [PartnerSPEAK](#) (1300 590 589) – Operates in Victoria and provides advocacy and support for non-offending partners, family members, friends or anyone else who is affected by a person's involvement in child sexual abuse and child exploitation material, available Tuesdays 10:00am – 1:00pm, Wednesdays 6:00pm – 9:00pm, and Thursdays 3:00pm – 7:00pm AEST/AEDT.
- ▶ [Stop It Now! Australia](#) (1800 01 1800) – Offers support to anyone affected by child sexual abuse, including individuals concerned about their own or someone else's thoughts or behaviours towards children, available 10:00am – 2:00pm AEST/AEDT Monday to Tuesday and 1:00pm – 4:00pm AEST/AEDT Wednesday to Thursday.
- ▶ [National Redress Scheme](#) (1800 737 377) - Helps people who have experienced institutional child sexual abuse gain access to counselling, a direct personal response, and a Redress payment, available 8:00am – 5:00pm AEST/AEDT Monday to Friday.



- ▶ [Care Leavers Australasia Network \(CLAN\)](#) (1800 008 774) - Offers support to people who have grown up in orphanages, children's homes, missions and foster care in Australia and New Zealand, available 9:00am – 5:00pm AEST/AEDT, Monday to Friday.
- ▶ [Australian Sexual Assault Services Directory](#) - Provides access to a diverse range of specialist organisations who provide prevention and response services to people who are at risk or experience sexual violence in each state and territory.

## Mental health support and advice

- ▶ [Kids Helpline](#) (1800 55 1800) - National crisis support tailored for children and young people (aged 5 to 25), available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.
- ▶ [Beyond Blue](#) (1300 22 4636) - National mental health and crisis support, available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.
- ▶ [MensLine Australia](#) (1300 78 99 78) - National crisis support for men, available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.
- ▶ [QLife](#) (1800 184 527) - LGBTIQ+ peer support and referral, available 3:00pm to midnight, 7 days a week.

## Family and domestic violence support

- ▶ [1800Respect](#) (1800 737 732) - National Sexual Assault, Domestic and Family Violence Counselling Service, available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

## Further information

Non-English speakers can access these services through the Translating and Interpreting Services (TIS) by calling 131 450. TIS is available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

If you are deaf and/or find it hard hearing or speaking with people who use a phone, the [National Relay Service](#) (NRS) can help you. You can contact the NRS Helpdesk on 1800 555 660. The NRS is available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

You can find links and contact details for these organisations and for national, state and territory government services on the [National Office for Child Safety website](#) on our [Get support](#) page.



# Introduction

The National Office for Child Safety (National Office) was established 1 July 2018 in response to the [Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse](#) (the Royal Commission).

Our role is to provide national leadership for reforms which enhance children's safety and prevent future harm, with a particular focus on child sexual abuse. This includes leading the implementation of the [National Strategy to Prevent and Respond to Child Sexual Abuse 2021-2030](#) (National Strategy), a 10-year, whole-of-nation framework to enhance Australia's response to child sexual abuse.

The National Strategy was a key recommendation of the Royal Commission, and responds to approximately 100 other Royal Commission recommendations to address child sexual abuse in all settings, including within families, online and within organisations.

The Australian Government has invested \$307.5 million to support initial National Strategy implementation. The First National Action Plan includes national measures that the Australian, state and territory governments will deliver together, including National Action Plan measure 7 – a national point of referral.<sup>1</sup>

## National Action Plan Measure 7 (NAP 7)

NAP 7 is intended to establish a **national point of referral** to help victims and survivors of child sexual abuse, practitioners and the general public navigate the service system and access information, resources and support services.

This measure was designed to address the Royal Commission's recommendation to establish a national website and helpline to assist victims and survivors of child sexual abuse to access help and information (Recommendation 9.5).

We understand that the current service system in Australia is complex, often difficult to navigate, and that there is no single-entry point for victims and survivors and other people seeking information and support. The referral point **would not directly provide support services**, but would be a central and holistic point of access to **provide resources and referrals to targeted and broad support services**. Targeted services may include legal advice, counselling or therapeutic support. Broad services may include social welfare or housing support.

The referral point may include developing a **website and/or helpline**, but we are open to hearing feedback on how best to design a service that reduces the complexity of navigating the service system in a **trauma-informed, culturally safe and accessible way**.

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<sup>1</sup> The National Strategy refers to this measure as a website and helpline to assist victims and survivors to access help and information.



## Why do we need a national point of referral?

### **Victims and survivors face barriers to obtaining safe, reliable and accessible information and support.**

The Royal Commission found that a lack of safe, reliable and accessible information can leave victims and survivors and their families feeling confused and unable to access the services they need. The Royal Commission heard victims and survivors faced many barriers to obtaining assistance from services, including:

- ▶ difficulties finding relevant information
- ▶ not knowing what services existed
- ▶ problems finding a service that was available when it was needed and in an accessible format
- ▶ difficulty finding timely, appropriate and skilled help.

### **The current service system in Australia is complex and often difficult for victims and survivors of child sexual abuse to navigate.**

The Royal Commission found there is no single-entry point to the service system for victims and survivors of child sexual abuse. Victims and survivors might enter the system through, for example, a helpline, website, general practitioner or community health service. Victims and survivors need a place to go where they can easily access information about services grounded in a strong understanding of the impacts of child sexual abuse, with staff who know how to work alongside victims and survivors to address their support needs.

### **The National Strategy recognises the importance of supporting victims and survivors and the community to access help and support.**

Other measures under the National Strategy, including the national awareness and behavioural change campaign (National Action Plan measure 6), may increase reports of child sexual abuse and/or the number of people seeking support. Trusted, safe and accessible support, information and resources will not only benefit victims and survivors, but better inform families, communities and organisations.

## A national point of referral that meets people's diverse needs

Victims and survivors of child sexual abuse come from all walks of life. We are committed to consulting with diverse stakeholders to design a referral point which has genuinely considered the needs, aspirations and experiences of individuals and communities affected by child sexual abuse, including people from the National Strategy's priority groups.

Our priority groups are:

- ▶ victims and survivors of child sexual abuse and their advocates
- ▶ children and young people and their support networks
- ▶ Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples
- ▶ culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) communities



- ▶ people with disability
- ▶ LGBTQIA+ people
- ▶ people living in regional and remote communities.

These priority groups deserve and need measures to be implemented in a way that is specific to them. The Royal Commission outlined communities that should have measures tailored to them. The National Office also undertook consultations on what the National Strategy should look like, and we expanded the priority groups to reflect this feedback.

We understand there is diversity in and across the National Strategy's priority groups. We also understand that some people may be part of more than one group.

The National Office is also working with organisations representing or advocating on behalf of priority groups, including First Nations people, people with disability, CALD communities, and LGBTQIA+ people. Our consultation outcomes are aimed at making the national point of referral as accessible, effective and safe as it possibly can be. It also aims to safeguard our approach from stigmatising any member of, or groups within, the Australian community.

## More information

The National Office would also like to acknowledge the consultations, research and advocacy efforts that have preceded this process. To leverage these contributions and minimise stakeholder fatigue, the **background information** in this paper summarises what stakeholders, including victims and survivors and their supporters, have already told governments, including through the Royal Commission, as well as what the research tells us about existing challenges and best practice approaches.

Find out more at [www.childsafety.gov.au](http://www.childsafety.gov.au).

## How to share your views

The National Office is undertaking a public consultation process with diverse stakeholders to ensure the needs and expectations of victims, survivors and the public are met, while balancing the views and expertise of governments and the service sector.

You can share your views via our **online survey** or through making a **written submission**.

- ▶ To provide an online survey submission, visit our [Consultation Hub](#).
- ▶ To provide a written submission, upload it through the Contact Us page on the National Office website at <https://www.childsafety.gov.au> or can email it to [NationalOfficeforChildSafety@ag.gov.au](mailto:NationalOfficeforChildSafety@ag.gov.au).

In this discussion paper, we outline several questions that might help you understand the kinds of information we are looking for to inform the design and delivery of the national referral point. You might like to answer these questions when making a written submission but you do not have to respond to all, or any of these questions.

To submit your response in a different format (e.g. an audio visual submission), please email [NationalOfficeforChildSafety@ag.gov.au](mailto:NationalOfficeforChildSafety@ag.gov.au) to coordinate this response.

The closing date for submissions is **Friday 17 November 2023**.





# Privacy

The privacy and security of your personal information is important to us, and is protected by law. The National Office for Child Safety (National Office) within the Attorney-General's Department is seeking to collect your personal information (including some sensitive information, such as information about your racial or ethnic origin, sexual orientation or practices and health information). We are collecting this information to inform the design and delivery of a national point of referral. The national point of referral is intended to help victims and survivors of child sexual abuse, practitioners and the general public to navigate the service system and access information, resources and support services. Information you provide in response to this discussion paper, whether in writing or as part of the online survey, will be shared with First Nations Collective Consulting (First Nations Co.), a third-party supplier located in Australia, who is assisting us with these consultations.

Your participation in this consultation process is voluntary and you may withdraw at any time before you submit your response. We are encouraging you to include your name and contact details, however, you are welcome to use a pseudonym or preferred name in your response.

The National Office will publish a consultation report that provides an overview of the type and nature of the feedback we receive. We may publish quotes from submissions received with your consent, although we may redact any submission, or part thereof. If you consent to your quotes you're your submission being made public (anonymously or in your name), it may also be referenced in reports we prepare. You may indicate if you would like your submission to be kept confidential.

We will only use or disclose your personal and sensitive information for a different purpose with your consent, or where we are authorised or permitted to do so by law. For example, if there are immediate risks to a person's safety.

Please note that this is a consultation process to inform policy development, and that we cannot assist with, or intervene in, individual cases. The National Office has an overriding duty to make a report to police or other authorities if there is a significant risk to the safety and wellbeing of a child.

Submissions may be subject to freedom of information requests, or requests from the Parliament. Personal information shared through the consultation process will be treated in accordance with the *Privacy Act 1988*. For questions about participating in the consultation process, please email the National Office at [NationalOfficeforChildSafety@ag.gov.au](mailto:NationalOfficeforChildSafety@ag.gov.au).

Read our [Privacy Policy](#) to find out how you can ask to access or correct your personal information, or make a complaint about our privacy practices. For questions about our Privacy Policy, email [privacy@ag.gov.au](mailto:privacy@ag.gov.au), or **call 02 6141 6666**.



## Discussion questions

You might like to consider the following questions when making a written submission but you do not have to respond to all, or any of these questions.

1. Do you identify with any of the National Strategy's priority groups? If so, which priority group/s do you identify with?
2. Have you accessed information or help related to child sexual abuse? If so, you might like to share about:
  - a. Was the information or help specifically about child sexual abuse or a related issue?
  - b. What prompted you to seek this information or help?
  - c. Did you know where to seek information or help?
  - d. Where did you seek this information or help?
  - e. For online services, what search terms do you use?
  - f. What was your experience of accessing this information or help?
  - g. Were you able to get all the support you needed in one place, or did you have to seek help more than once or in more than one place?
  - h. Which services do you find most helpful?
  - i. Was the service specific to child sexual abuse support?
3. If you wanted to find information or help for yourself, victims and survivors of child sexual abuse, family members or supporters, where would you go to?
  - a. Are pathways and entry points to access services and support clear and accessible? What would assist in improving this?
4. Do you think people, other than victims and survivors and their supporters, have adequate access to information and help? For example, the general public, teachers, or parents?
  - a. Who do you think needs more help, information or support?
  - b. What environments are best to deliver help and support for other people?

The NAP 7 referral point may include developing a **website and/or helpline**, but we are open to hearing feedback on how best to design a referral point that meets people's diverse needs in a trauma-informed, culturally safe and accessible way.

5. How do like to receive information and support (for example, face to face, website, phone helpline, online chat, text messaging, mobile app, email service and call back service)?
  - a. What works best for you?
  - b. For online resources, what format would be most accessible or would enhance your user experience (written information, videos, etc)?



- c. Would providing information in a language other than English assist?
  - d. Are there any other considerations we should be aware of?
6. What makes services feel trustworthy, safe and/or effective (for example, choice of who to speak with; mode of delivery of the service or method of engagement, including face-to-face, peer support and online services; anonymous and confidential services; access to safe, dedicated physical spaces)?
- a. Who would you feel comfortable speaking with to get information or support (for example, a counsellor, psychologist, social worker, local service provider, Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander health worker)?
  - b. Would you prefer to access information and support from a government agency, or a non-government service or organisation, either or both?
  - c. What influences who you prefer seeking help and information from?

**Cultural safety** is the positive recognition and celebration of cultures.

It is more than just the absence of racism or discrimination and more than 'cultural awareness' and 'cultural sensitivity.' It empowers people and enables them to contribute and feel safe to be themselves.<sup>2</sup>

7. What makes services culturally safe?

**Childsafety.gov.au** is the main platform to find information about the Australian Government's efforts to prevent and respond to child sexual abuse. The **Childsafety.gov.au** website will also host content for a national awareness raising and behavioural change campaign on child sexual abuse which the National Office is developing.

8. Would you go to a government website, such as Childsafety.gov.au to access information, services and support related to child sexual abuse?
- a. What information should be included/not included on a national website?
  - b. What resources would be helpful on a national website (for example, videos, support services, education and training materials)?
  - c. Why would or wouldn't you seek information from a government website?

The National Office is open to hearing feedback about **other potential features** of the NAP 7 referral point, including warm referrals. **Warm referrals** are referrals that support a person to connect to services. You might also like to refer to the **Approaches to consider** below, including a website, helpline and/or advocate model.

9. What do you think are the best ways to deliver information, resources and support that is trauma-informed, accessible and culturally safe?

<sup>2</sup> National Office for Child Safety (NOCS), SNAICC - National Voice for our Children, and VACCA (Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency), [Keeping our kids safe: Cultural Safety and the National Principles for Child Safe Organisations](#), 2021, p. 7.



- a. How can service models be implemented in a way that meets the diverse needs of individuals and communities, including people from the National Strategy's priority groups?
10. What features do you think the referral point should include? (for example, a national website, a national helpline, an advocate you can see in-person, a virtual advocate)?
- a. Are there features the referral point should **not** include (for example, a government website or helpline, a non-government website or helpline, a government advocate, a non-government advocate)?



# Background information

## *National Strategy to Prevent and Respond to Child Sexual Abuse 2021-2030*

The National Strategy is the first of its kind in Australia, and provides a nationally coordinated, strategic framework for preventing and responding to child sexual abuse. It seeks to reduce the risk, extent and impact of child sexual abuse and related harms in Australia.

The Australian Government developed the National Strategy in partnership with state and territory governments and in consultation with a wide range of stakeholders, including:

- ▶ victims and survivors of child sexual abuse and their advocates
- ▶ children and young people and their support networks
- ▶ Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples
- ▶ culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) communities
- ▶ people with disability
- ▶ LGBTQIA+ people
- ▶ people living in regional and remote communities.

The National Strategy is initially driven by two four-year (2021-2024) action plans:

- ▶ The First National Action Plan (NAP) contained within the National Strategy document includes measures that the Australian, state and territory governments will deliver together. It focuses on priorities of shared responsibility between governments and those requiring national coordination, such as community education and awareness raising.
- ▶ The First Commonwealth Action Plan (CAP) works alongside the First National Action Plan. It includes measures that the Australian Government will largely deliver on its own. It focuses on Australian Government priorities and responsibilities, such as preventing and responding to online child sexual abuse.

The National Office is committed to engaging and consulting with stakeholders and the community on the design and evaluation of National Strategy measures, and the development of targeted resources and materials to meet diverse needs.

## **Approaches to consider**

We want to ensure the referral point is not duplicative of existing services and accounts for the limited capacity of existing services to meet increased demand, while considering the experience and needs of the end user throughout the design process.

To achieve the purpose of the Royal Commission recommendation and address stakeholder concerns about the current service system, careful consideration will be given to developing NAP 7 in a way that builds strong referral pathways and complements existing services.



The National Office has heard consistent feedback on the:

- need to avoid the duplication of services
- importance of genuine engagement with lived experience perspectives and the service sector
- need to consider the experience and needs of the end user at all stages of service design
- workforce capacity issues in terms of those fielding calls
- limited capacity of existing services to meet increased demand, and
- need to consider if a website and helpline, or an alternative model, best meets the intention of the Royal Commission recommendation.

The National Office has also undertaken scoping work to explore best practice approaches to support victims and survivors of child sexual abuse, and has been considering a number of **potential features** of the referral point, which are described below:

- ▶ A national **helpline and website** could enable victims and survivors, practitioners and the general public to access trusted information about appropriate services for children and adults who have experienced child sexual abuse.
  - A **helpline** could provide victims and survivors with a central point of contact to speak with staff who know how to work alongside victims and survivors to address their support needs, and provide warm referrals to local services grounded in a strong understanding of the impacts of child sexual abuse.
    - **Warm referrals** are referrals that support a person to connect to services. They can include phoning a service on behalf of another person, providing information to another service with the person's consent, or otherwise helping someone make contact with a service.
  - A **website** could include chat and email functions and can be an effective tool for educating children, young people, adults, families, carers, workers and the wider community about the impacts of child sexual abuse.
- ▶ An **advocate** is a trained individual who can help people to navigate a range of supports by identifying and removing barriers, facilitating warm referrals to services, and ensuring an individual's rights and entitlements are achieved.
  - Advocates could also play a role in connecting First Nations people with culturally safe services, helping people with disability to find a disability-competent service and linking people from culturally, religiously and linguistically diverse communities with culturally appropriate services.
- ▶ A **flexible or blended approach** would involve a combination of service design elements to assist victims and survivors and their supporters, as well as those seeking further information and resources. Such an approach may be necessary to meet the intention of the Royal Commission recommendation as well as the diverse needs of victims and survivors, including service requirements identified during the consultation process.

All potential service models for the referral point would be delivered by trained staff who would provide trauma-informed, culturally safe, inclusive and accessible advice.

