

Royal Commission into Institutional Responses
to Child Sexual Abuse
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To Whom It May Concern,

Response to the Royal Commission Consultation Paper: Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse in Out-of-Home Care

The Australian Psychological Society (APS) welcomes the opportunity to respond to the Consultation Paper on institutional responses to child sexual abuse in out-of-home care (OOHC). This submission is further to our original 2013 submission in response to Issues Paper 4 (Preventing sexual abuse of children in OOHC) in which the APS made eight recommendations.

In general, the APS commends the Commission on a comprehensive report. In particular, the APS is delighted to see the following included:

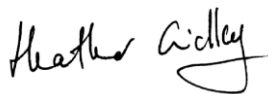
- Acknowledgement of the importance of the rights of children in OOHC, particularly in the knowledge that the rights of children in OOHC have historically not received the respect or protection they require (p.11). In this respect, the APS reiterates Recommendation 5 in our original submission that a Charter of Rights is adopted across jurisdictions, to include the right to safety, privacy, and participation in decision-making.
- A proposed national approach to data collection and analysis which acknowledges the need for consistency in definitions and thresholds across states and territories (p.46).
- A section (4.1) on regulation which includes issues relating to accreditation of OOHC providers, carer authorisation, carers registers and mandatory reporting (pp.47-53). This aligns with the APS recommendation which called for all states to adopt [consistent] processes for protection of children in OOHC.
- A section relating to oversight processes (pp.54-55) which seeks feedback about the shape and structure of an independent systemic monitoring and review process.

- A chapter (7) dedicated to the prevention of child sexual abuse in OOHC and a proposal national strategy (pp.98-99) to prevent child sexual abuse in OOHC. This chapter includes an important focus on child-safe organisations, which the APS has emphasised in several of its submissions to the Commission.
- Detailed barriers to disclosure (p.27). In response to these barriers, the report notes that it is "critical for organisations to address these issues by implementing adequate complaints processes for children in OOHC" (p.85). The importance of training for carers and staff in promoting disclosure is also highlighted.
- Acknowledgment of the need to improve protections against child sexual abuse for children in kinship/relative care, with a specific focus on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children. In particular, the risks specific to kinship care have been highlighted (p.16), as is the need for expert support and training for the increasing number of kinship and relative carers to prevent placement breakdown (p.9) and enhance placement stability (p.104).

As the APS has previously highlighted, optimal child development requires a safe and supportive physical, social and psychological environment. Children in OOHC are among the most vulnerable in the community and the APS believes society has an obligation to protect children and young people from harm. In relation to the prevention of child sexual abuse, the APS supports a holistic approach which delivers preventive actions at multiple levels that can target the individual child, parent, family and perpetrator, as well as institutions and the broader social environment. The APS would be very pleased to collaborate with the Royal Commission in elaborating a plan to develop a nationally consistent therapeutic framework for OOHC service delivery that encompasses research and evaluation strategies and evidence-informed training for carers and practitioners, in the areas of therapeutic care and responding to the indicators and impacts of sexual abuse.

The APS has made a commitment to support the work of the Royal Commission and as such we would be happy to provide further comment about this Consultation Paper should you require it; or for further information about our submission please contact me directly on 03 8662 3327.

Yours sincerely,



Ms Heather Gridley FAPS
Manager, Public Interest
Australian Psychological Society

About the Australian Psychological Society

The APS is the premier professional association for psychologists in Australia, representing more than 22,000 members. Psychology is a discipline that systematically addresses the many facets of human experience and functioning at individual, family and societal levels. Psychology covers many highly specialised areas, but all psychologists share foundational training in human development and the constructs of healthy functioning. A key goal of the APS is to actively contribute psychological knowledge for the promotion and enhancement of community wellbeing.

This submission has been developed through the cross-collaboration of two APS departments: Professional Practice and Psychology in the Public Interest.

- The Professional Practice team develops guidelines and standards for practitioners, provides support to APS members, and liaises with community groups and other professional organisations whose work may impact upon the psychology profession.
- Psychology in the Public Interest is the section of the APS dedicated to the application and communication of psychological knowledge to enhance community wellbeing and promote equitable and just treatment of all segments of society.