

National Strategy to Prevent and Respond to Child Sexual Abuse

2021–2030

An initiative of the Australian,
state and territory governments





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National Strategy to Prevent and Respond to Child Sexual Abuse 2021–2030

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VERSION

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Help and support

Child sexual abuse is a challenging issue. Reading this document may bring up strong feelings for some people. Please take care of yourself as you read the National Strategy and ask for help if you need it. You might want to talk to your family and friends, or your counsellor, doctor, or Aboriginal Medical Service.

The following services can also give you help and support:



CRISIS AND SUICIDE PREVENTION

If you are, or someone else is, in immediate danger, call Triple Zero: **000**

Lifeline: **13 11 14** or www.LifeLine.org.au



MENTAL HEALTH SUPPORT AND ADVICE

Kids Helpline: **1800 55 1800**
or www.KidsHelpline.com.au

Beyond Blue: **1300 22 4636**
or www.BeyondBlue.org.au

MensLine Australia: **1300 78 99 78**
or www.MensLine.org.au

QLife: **1800 184 527**
or www.QLife.org.au



FAMILY AND DOMESTIC VIOLENCE SUPPORT

1800Respect: **1800 737 732**
or www.1800Respect.org.au



CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE SUPPORT AND ADVICE

Blue Knot Foundation: **1300 657 380**
or www.BlueKnot.org.au

Bravehearts: **1800 272 831**
or www.BraveHearts.org.au

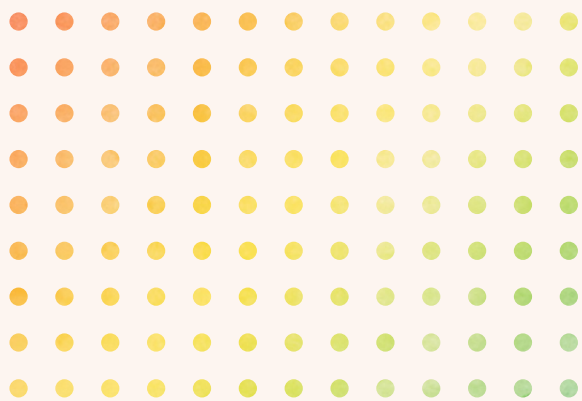
Care Leavers Australasia Network (CLAN) Inc:
1800 008 774 or www.Clan.org.au

National Redress Scheme: **1800 737 377**
or www.NationalRedress.gov.au

Survivors & Mates Support Network (SAMSN):
1800 472 676 or www.Samsn.org.au

For local sexual assault services, go to HealthDirect:
www.HealthDirect.gov.au/sexual-assault-and-abuse-helplines

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: www.ChildSafety.pmc.gov.au



Reporting child sexual abuse

Help is available if you have experienced, are experiencing, or are at risk of child sexual abuse. If you are worried that you, your child, or a child or young person you know is at risk, it is important to act on it and report it.





If you are, or someone else is, in immediate danger, call Triple Zero on **000**.

If you want to report a crime, contact your local police on **131 444**.

If you want to report a crime anonymously, you can visit Crime Stoppers at www.CrimeStoppers.com.au or call their toll-free number on **1800 333 000**.

You can report online child sexual abuse, including online grooming, to the Australian Federal Police's Australian Centre to Counter Child Exploitation at www.accce.gov.au/Report.

If you want to report illegal or harmful online content, including photos or videos, you can contact the eSafety Commissioner at www.eSafety.gov.au/Report.

If you suspect a child or young person is at risk, contact your relevant state or territory child protection organisation. This includes children at risk of:

- harm
- sexual abuse
- physical or emotional abuse
- family violence
- neglect.

You can find links to these organisations on the National Office for Child Safety website at www.ChildSafety.pmc.gov.au.

Dedication

We dedicate the *National Strategy to Prevent and Respond to Child Sexual Abuse 2021–2030* (the National Strategy) to the thousands of victims and survivors who shared their stories and experiences with the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse (the Royal Commission). We also dedicate the National Strategy to all the victims and survivors of all forms of child sexual abuse who came before, during and after the Royal Commission. Many of their stories have never been heard.

We recognise your strength and courage.

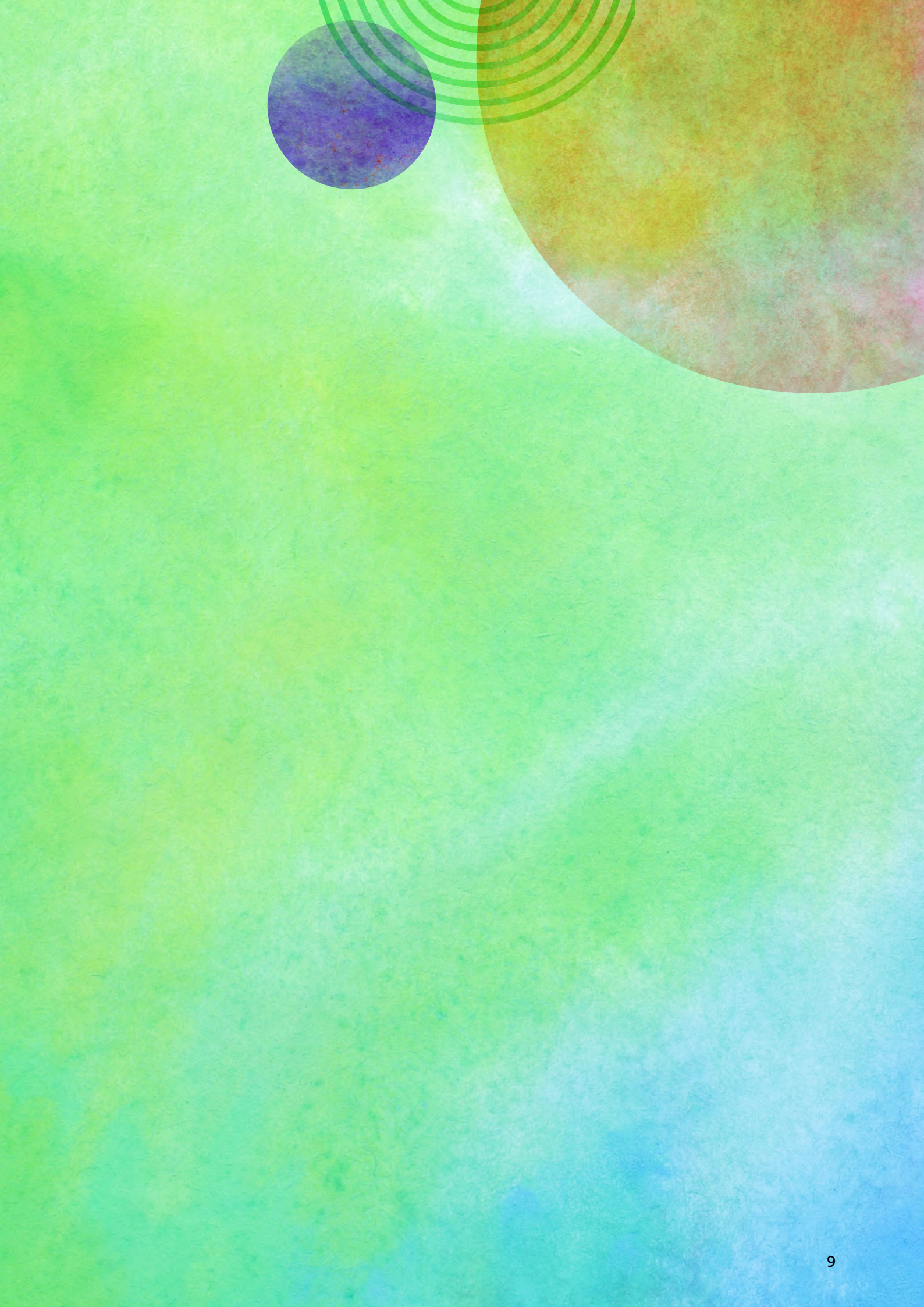
We recognise your pain and suffering.

We recognise the people who helped you carry the burden of your experience.

We recognise the tragedy of those who have lost their lives.

The National Strategy is our commitment to ongoing and meaningful change to protect children and young people now and into the future, and to help those affected by abuse.

We hope that the National Strategy, and other reforms inspired by the Royal Commission, will put the words of the National Apology to Victims and Survivors of Institutional Child Sexual Abuse into action. We want the National Strategy to make Australia safer for all children and young people.





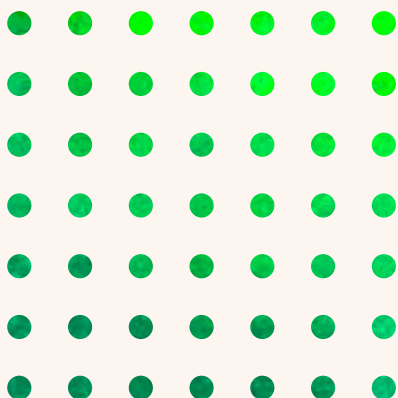
Acknowledging contributions to the National Strategy

Australian, state and territory governments acknowledge the important contributions of everyone involved in developing the National Strategy.

This includes:

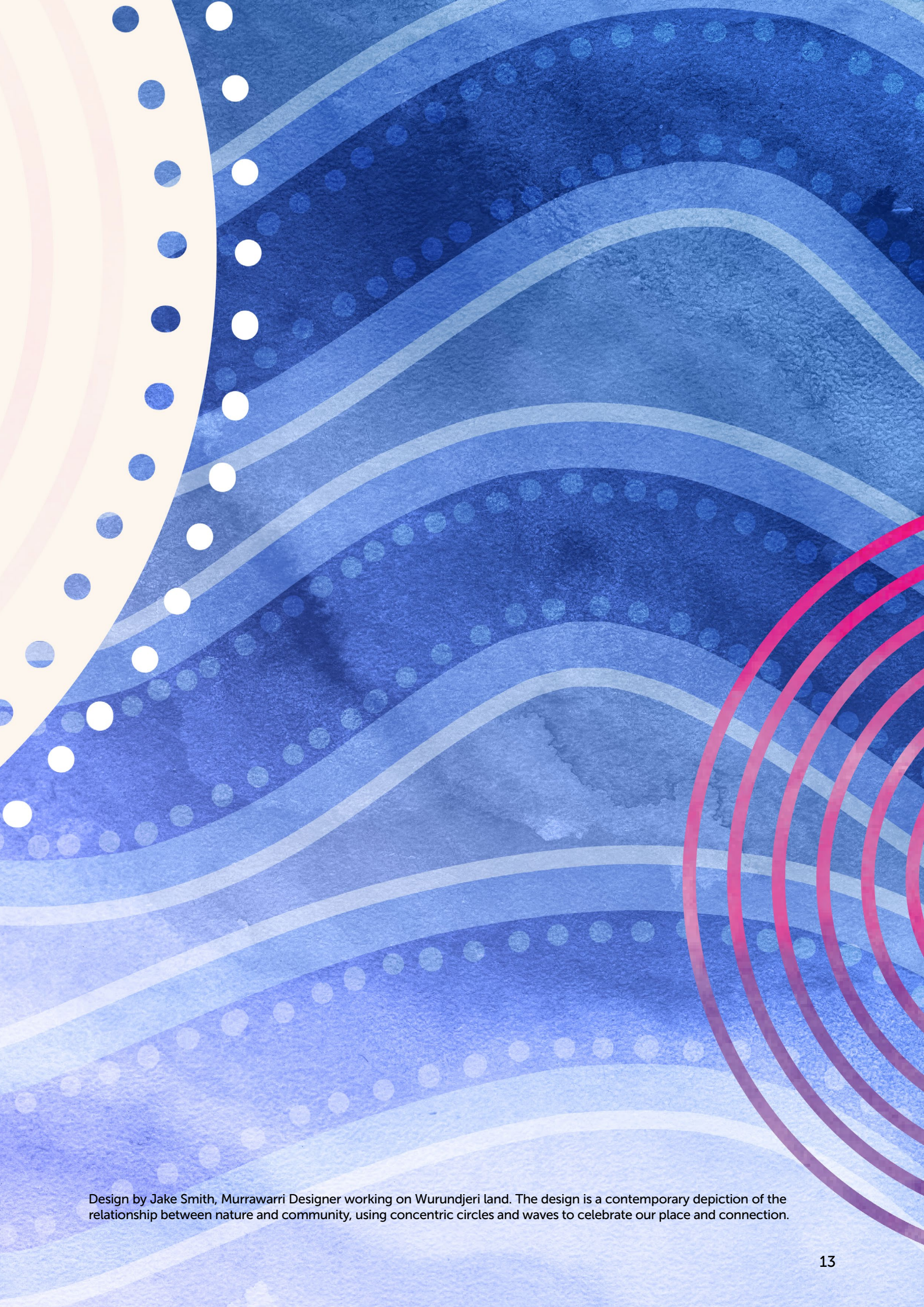
- victims and survivors of child sexual abuse and their advocates
- children and young people
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples
- people with disability
- culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) communities
- LGBTQIA+ communities
- child protection experts
- clinical professionals
- organisations
- academics.

We could not have created this National Strategy without their wisdom and knowledge.



Acknowledgement of Country

Australian, state and territory governments acknowledge the Traditional Custodians of this Country. We pay our respects to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' continuing connection to the land, waters, community and cultures past, present and emerging.



Design by Jake Smith, Murrawarri Designer working on Wurundjeri land. The design is a contemporary depiction of the relationship between nature and community, using concentric circles and waves to celebrate our place and connection.



Foreword

Child sexual abuse is a complex and difficult thing for us to talk, think or read about. It forces us to confront physical and mental abuse, and horrific sexual crimes. But our collective silence perpetuates suffering. Often, victims and survivors don't talk about their experiences for many years – if ever.

The devastation child sexual abuse causes for children and young people, their supporters, and those who help carry the burden of their experiences demands we keep our hearts and minds open, and take action.

It takes immense courage for victims and survivors to report child sexual abuse. Too often, they face significant challenges coming forward, including institutional and social barriers. It is our collective responsibility to make sure they are believed, protected and supported, and that perpetrators are held accountable.

The Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse taught us more about the nature of child sexual abuse and its impacts. It highlighted the failings of governments, organisations, communities and individuals to protect and nurture children and young people for so many years.

While the Royal Commission focused on child sexual abuse in institutional settings, we know that the majority of child sexual abuse is perpetrated by someone known to the child or young person, including family members. We also know the online world presents increasing threats that are no less damaging. For these reasons, the *National Strategy to Prevent and Respond to Child Sexual Abuse* focuses on child sexual abuse in all settings, including in organisations, online, within families, and by other people known and unknown to the child or young person.

The National Strategy – a key recommendation of the Royal Commission – is the first of its kind in Australia. It is a whole-of-nation policy approach that provides the strategic framework for increasing our understanding of, better responses to, and prevention of child sexual abuse over the next 10 years. It will also support and complement existing Australian Government and state and territory reforms.

Every child and young person has the fundamental right to be protected and safe from sexual abuse. We will continue to strive to make this their reality.

**The Hon
Scott Morrison MP**
Prime Minister of Australia

**The Hon
Dominic Perrottet MP**
Premier of New South Wales

**The Hon
Daniel Andrews MP**
Premier of Victoria

**The Hon
Anastacia Palaszczuk MP**
Premier of Queensland

**The Hon
Mark McGowan MLA**
Premier of Western Australia

**The Hon
Steven Marshall MP**
Premier of South Australia

**The Hon
Peter Gutwein MP**
Premier of Tasmania

Andrew Barr MLA
Chief Minister of
the Australian Capital Territory

**The Hon
Michael Gunner MLA**
Chief Minister of
the Northern Territory

A guide to this document

The National Strategy runs from 2021–2030.

Australian, state and territory governments will put the National Strategy into practice through action plans. The first 2 plans – a First National Action Plan and a First Commonwealth Action Plan – will run for 4 years from 2021–2024. These action plans are being implemented from the end of 2021, when the National Strategy was published and will continue until the end of the 2024–2025 financial year. Therefore, funding for and activities under these action plans will cover the 2021–2022 to 2024–2025 financial years:

- The First National Action Plan (see page 33) includes measures that the Australian, state and territory governments will deliver together. It includes large-scale national programs like:
 - raising public awareness
 - population studies
 - national measures to stop people from offending
 - working towards a national response to children with harmful sexual behaviours.

- The First Commonwealth Action Plan was published at the same time as the National Strategy. The First Commonwealth Action Plan includes measures that focus on Australian Government priorities and responsibilities, such as online child sexual abuse. Australian Government departments will deliver the First Commonwealth Action Plan, including programs like:

- improved intelligence to identify offenders at our border
- new ways to access legal aid for children at risk of harm, and for adult victims and survivors
- working with countries in the Indo-Pacific and South-East Asia regions to improve their ability to respond to child sexual abuse.

The action plans focus on areas of national effort (First National Action Plan) or Australian Government effort (First Commonwealth Action Plan). State and territory governments already have their own plans to implement the Royal Commission's recommendations. They also have policies or ways to report on their actions to prevent child sexual abuse.

THE NATIONAL STRATEGY

First National Action Plan 2021–2024	Second National Action Plan 2025–2027	Third National Action Plan 2028–2030
First Commonwealth Action Plan 2021–2024	Second Commonwealth Action Plan 2025–2027	Third Commonwealth Action Plan 2028–2030

Two additional 3-year action plans will likely follow from 2025–2027 and 2028–2030. These plans will build on what we have done through the First National Action Plan and First Commonwealth Action Plan. Future action plans may change priorities to meet new issues, trends and evidence about what works.

Terminology

We recognise that not everyone agrees on terminology. We have carefully considered the terms we use in the National Strategy. They are based on the opinions of many victims and survivors, and people with understanding and knowledge in these areas.

We use the terms:

- **child sexual abuse** for any act that exposes a child or young person to, or involves a child or young person in, sexual activities that:
 - they do not understand
 - they do not or cannot consent to
 - are not accepted by the community
 - are unlawful.
- **children and young people** for people under the age of 18.
- **children with harmful sexual behaviours** for a broad range of sexual behaviours in children and young people. This includes behaviours that affect their own development, as well as behaviours that are coercive, sexually aggressive or predatory to others.

- **offender** for a person who is found by a court to have done something unlawful.
- **perpetrator** for an adult who has sexually abused a child or young person, but who may or may not have been convicted of this crime.
- **victims and survivors** for those who have experienced child sexual abuse. We recognise that not all people with lived experience of child sexual abuse will identify with these terms.

For a glossary of the key terms we use in the National Strategy, please see page 57.



1. National Strategy to Prevent and Respond to Child Sexual Abuse

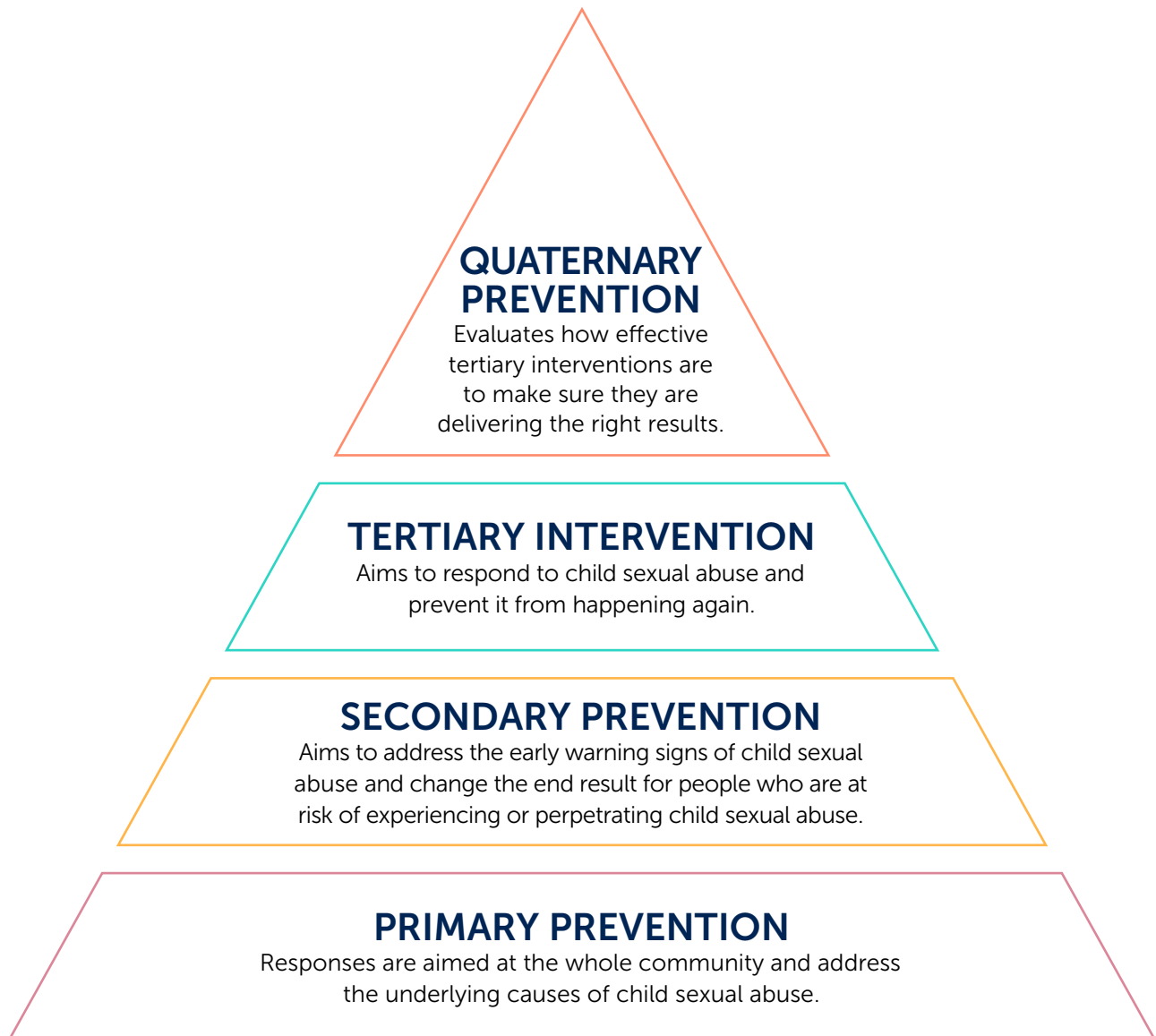
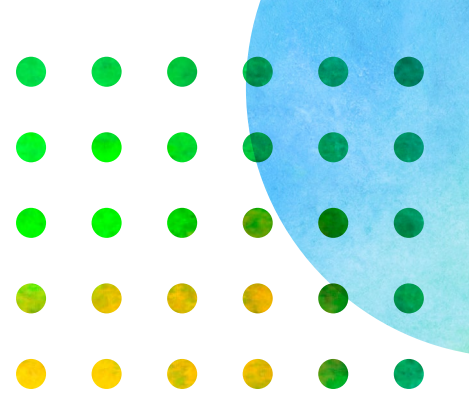
The National Strategy is the first of its kind in Australia. It is a strategic framework for preventing and responding to child sexual abuse. The National Strategy sets up a nationally coordinated and consistent way to prevent and better respond to child sexual abuse in all settings. This includes:

- **within families**
- **by other people the child or young person knows or does not know**
- **in organisations**
- **online.**

The National Strategy recognises that child sexual abuse is preventable. Addressing child sexual abuse requires a range of prevention programs and plans, as well as trauma-informed responses and supports for people who have experienced or been affected by it.

The National Strategy recognises that protecting children and young people and promoting their safety is everyone's responsibility. It considers their best interests as a priority. This means valuing children and young people, as well as their views and experiences.

The National Strategy is based on a public health approach. This means it includes primary, secondary, tertiary and quaternary measures to better identify, prevent and respond to child sexual abuse.



Refer to the glossary for a full definition of these terms (pages 60–61).

While the focus of the National Strategy is on preventing and responding to child sexual abuse, we also expect measures to reduce the prevalence of other forms of child maltreatment. The five forms of child maltreatment are physical, emotional and sexual abuse, exposure to domestic and family violence, and neglect.



1.1 VISION

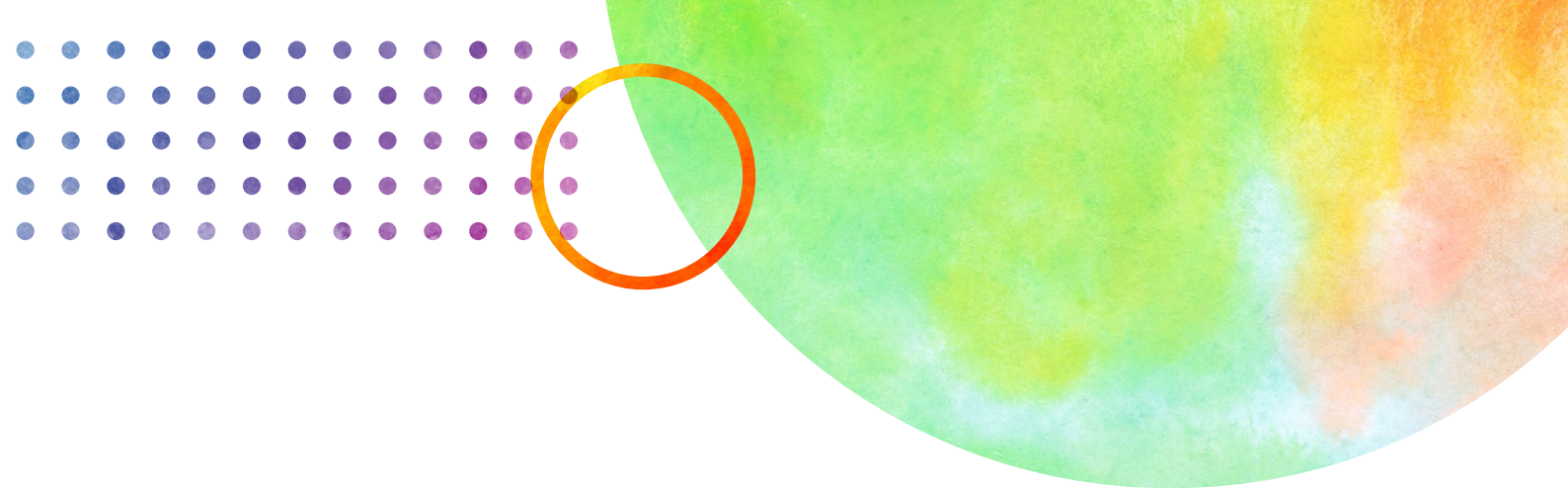
The vision explains what the National Strategy wants to achieve over the next 10 years.

All children and young people are protected and safe from sexual abuse. Victims and survivors are supported and empowered.

1.2 OBJECTIVE

The objective explains what it will look like if the National Strategy is successful. It will be the basis of a long-term evaluation of the National Strategy.

The National Strategy will reduce the risk, extent and impact of child sexual abuse and related harms in Australia.



1.3 VALUES

These values guide the work we are doing to achieve the National Strategy's vision and objective. This includes how we design and implement the National Strategy's measures.

Child safety is everyone's responsibility. Australian, state and territory governments, organisations, industry, communities, families, kin, carers and individuals all have a role to play.

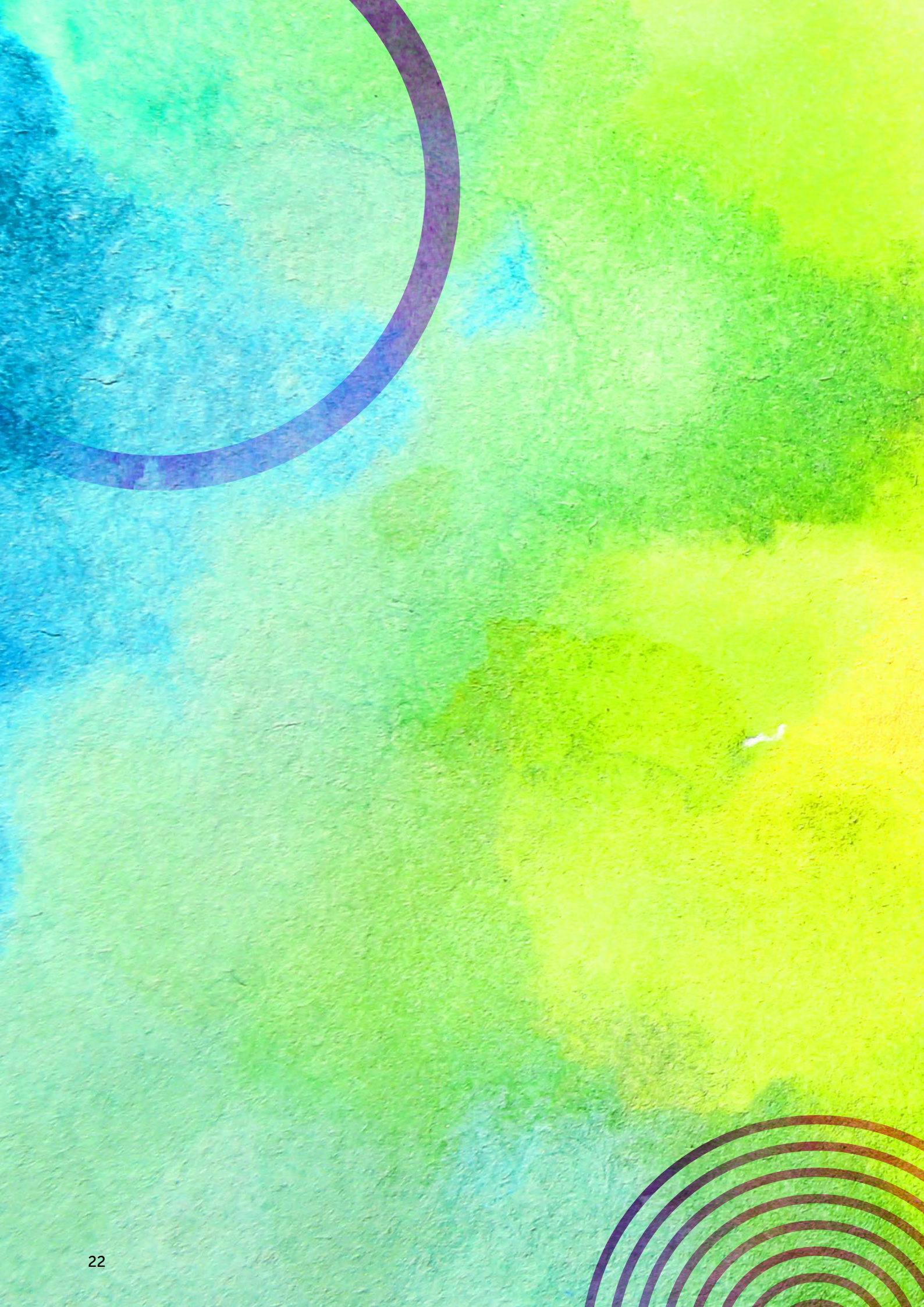
The views and experiences of victims and survivors are a priority, and their needs shape our efforts.

Children and young people's voices and views, experiences and participation are central to the decisions we make.

We hear and value the diverse views and experiences of all Australians. The work we do to prevent and respond to child sexual abuse is:

- culturally safe
- developmentally and age appropriate
- trauma-informed
- accessible and meets diverse needs and circumstances.

Evidence, data, research and evaluation informs our policies, programs and reforms.



1.4 A NATIONAL STRATEGY FOR EVERYONE

This National Strategy is for:

- victims and survivors of child sexual abuse of all ages
- children and young people
- families, kin and carers
- communities
- organisations and governments.

We all have a role to play in protecting children and young people.

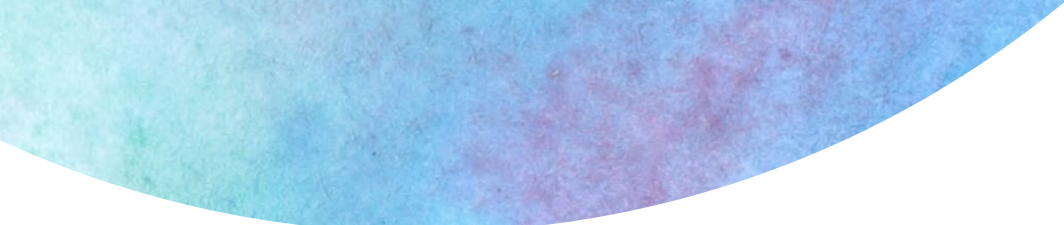
Victims and survivors of child sexual abuse come from all walks of life. We developed the National Strategy and its action plans in consultation with a wide range of people, including people from the National Strategy's priority groups. These groups deserve and need measures to be implemented in a way that is specific to them. This includes how we deliver, and talk about, the National Strategy.

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.

We understand there is diversity in and across the priority groups. We also understand that some people may be part of more than one group. When we design and implement each National Strategy measure, we will work with each group and:

- hear and prioritise their experiences
- act in meaningful ways to meet their needs
- communicate in a way that is accessible and appropriate, including developing resources for different audiences – such as creating a children and young people's guide to the National Strategy
- recognise the effects that intergenerational trauma has, including the impact of colonisation and dispossession, and disconnection from culture and Country
- honour all parts of a person's identity and experience.



1.5 WHY WE NEED A NATIONAL STRATEGY

Many children and young people in Australia experience sexual abuse.

Children and young people have the right to feel loved, nurtured, safe and protected from harm. Children and young people have this right no matter their:

- culture and cultural background
- age
- religion
- sex
- sexual identity
- gender
- ability
- location
- education
- financial situation.

The Royal Commission uncovered the hidden nature, complex causes and devastating impacts of child sexual abuse in institutions in Australia. This includes where a child or young person was in institutional care, for example out-of-home care.

The Royal Commission held 8,000 private sessions and received more than 1,000 written accounts.¹ The National Strategy is a key recommendation of the Royal Commission.

You can find more information on the Royal Commission in Appendix A (page 62). You can also read more about the victims and survivors' stories and experiences told to the Royal Commission at www.RoyalCommission.gov.au.

TRENDS

79% ABUSED BY A RELATIVE,
FRIEND OR NEIGHBOUR

Research and data indicates that child sexual abuse does not only happen in institutions. In a study of people who experienced sexual abuse before they were 15 years old, 79% were abused by a relative, friend, acquaintance or neighbour.² Only 11% of people who experienced sexual abuse before they were 15 were abused by a stranger.³

21% INCREASE IN REPORTED
SEXUAL ASSAULTS

Reports of child sexual abuse are increasing. Between 2014 and 2019, the number of sexual assaults against children and young people (aged zero to 17 years old) recorded by police increased by 21% (from 13,353 to 16,140).⁴

122% INCREASE IN REPORTED
ONLINE ABUSE MATERIALS

The way in which children and young people are sexually abused can change over time.⁵ For example, reports of online child abuse material increased by 122% during Australia's first COVID-19 lockdown in April to June 2020, compared to April to June 2019.⁶

10.7% OF WOMEN SEXUALLY
ABUSED AS A CHILD

4.6% OF MEN SEXUALLY
ABUSED AS A CHILD

All children can be affected by child sexual abuse, but a higher number of girls report experiencing abuse. Around one in 10 (10.7%) women report that an adult sexually abused them before they turned 15, while one in 20 (4.6%) men reported that an adult sexually abused them before they turned 15.⁷

93.9% OF OFFENDERS
ARE ADULT MEN

There is also a difference between men and women when it comes to child sexual abuse offending. Of the victims and survivors who told the Royal Commission about sexual abuse by an adult, almost all (93.9%) said they were abused by a man. Studies of child sexual abuse show that men are also more likely than women to commit abuse in other environments (for example online or in the family home).⁸

Communities and people across Australia vary widely in their social, cultural and financial situations. These affect people's experiences of, and the response to, child sexual abuse. There are gaps in the data around the experiences of:

- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people
- children and young people from CALD backgrounds
- children and young people with disability
- children and young people who live in rural and remote communities.





RISKS AND INDICATORS

The Royal Commission found a number of risk factors that can be linked to child sexual abuse.

Some of the risk factors include a child or young person's:

- age and stage of development
- family situation, such as unstable living arrangements
- past experiences of abuse.

The Royal Commission also identified some 'protective factors' that can lower the risk of child sexual abuse and help protect the child or young person. These include the child or young person's:

- access to trusted adults and peers
- understanding of personal safety
- strong community or cultural connections.⁹

Victims and survivors of child sexual abuse tell people about the abuse in different ways. Generally, victims and survivors are more likely to tell someone they trust. However, only a small number of children and young people will tell someone outright that they have been sexually abused. It is more common for children and young people to tell people indirectly. They might do this by making tentative statements and through changes in their behaviour. It is important that adults are aware of the behaviours that show that a child or young person may have experienced sexual abuse. These behaviours are listed in Appendix B (page 67).

There is no typical profile of a person who sexually abuses children and young people. Not all perpetrators have the same traits, behaviours and motivations as one another. They come from different backgrounds and circumstances. There is often very little that makes people who sexually abuse children and young people stand out from the general population, except for their criminal behaviour.

Some risk factors that may play a role in someone's decision to sexually abuse a child or young person are in Appendix B (page 64). While understanding the factors that can affect child sexual abuse offending is important to respond to and stop the abuse from happening, there is never an excuse for child sexual abuse. These factors do not diminish a perpetrator's responsibility.

Some children and young people experience child sexual abuse by other children and young people. The Royal Commission used the term 'harmful sexual behaviours' to cover a wide range of behaviours. These range from behaviours that are inappropriate for the child's age and development to serious sexual assault. While the impact of sexual abuse by other children or young people can have the same devastating effect as abuse by adults, the dynamics are very different. Research in this area is still quite new. However, we know many children and young people with harmful sexual behaviours have also been victims of child maltreatment. We also know that most children and young people do not continue harmful sexual behaviours into adulthood, particularly if they are able to access early support and therapeutic interventions.

You can read more information about children with harmful sexual behaviours in Theme 3 (page 43) and on page 68.

We know there is more we can do to improve our understanding of the prevalence, nature and effects of child sexual abuse in Australia. We must push for cultural change to reduce the shame and stigma that victims and survivors experience. We want to overcome the barriers that people face to reporting abuse and to sharing their experiences with others. We need to address misconceptions about who sexually abuses children and young people. We must hold perpetrators to account.

1.6 THE ROLE OF GOVERNMENT, BUSINESS AND THE COMMUNITY

ROLE OF THE AUSTRALIAN GOVERNMENT

The Australian Government has a significant role in preventing and responding to child sexual abuse. Working alongside state and territory offences, the Commonwealth Criminal Code includes criminal offences for child sexual abuse committed:

- online
- via postal services
- overseas – in cases where the person is an Australian citizen.

The number of people committing these offences is increasing, and with it, the Australian Government's responsibility to respond.

The Australian Government also plays a key role in protecting children and young people from abuse and harm more broadly.

The National Office for Child Safety in the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet was established in July 2018 in response to the Royal Commission. The National Office provides national leadership to strengthen child safety policies and reduce future harm to children and young people. It has a particular focus on child sexual abuse, including oversight of the National Strategy.

The Australian Centre to Counter Child Exploitation was established in 2018 to drive a joint effort to counter online child sexual abuse. It provides a consistent, holistic and coordinated response to counter child sexual abuse in Australia. It does this by using the expertise of law enforcement agencies, governments, non-government agencies, academics and industry.

The eSafety Commissioner promotes online safety education for Australian children and young people, educators and parents. It also provides a complaint process for children and young people who experience serious cyberbullying and for Australians to report illegal or offensive online content.

The Department of Social Services is responsible for policies and programs that support the safety and wellbeing of Australia's children, women and families. This includes oversight of:

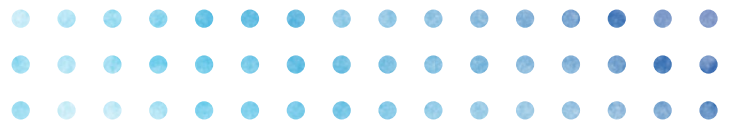
- *Safe and Supported: The National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children*
- the *National Plan to End Violence Against Women and Children*
- the *National Disability Strategy*.

Other Australian Government departments play key roles in managing areas of law and policy that relate to:

- initiatives for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples
- child safety – including family law
- online safety
- technology-facilitated crimes
- crimes committed overseas involving Australians
- workplace and employment law
- health and mental health
- migration.

The National Children's Commissioner plays a key role in:

- raising awareness of issues affecting children and young people
- undertaking research and education programs
- consulting with children and young people and representative organisations
- examining Commonwealth legislation, policies and programs relating to children and young people's human rights.



ROLE OF STATE AND TERRITORY GOVERNMENTS

State and territory governments are responsible for protecting children and young people experiencing, or at risk of, abuse and neglect. They are also responsible for criminal offences relating to a range of child sexual abuse offences. State and territory courts and child protection agencies have a wide range of powers to protect children and young people's welfare.

State and territory governments manage areas of law, policies and services relating to child safety, including:

- domestic and family violence
- education
- juvenile justice
- health, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Community Controlled Health Services
- mental health and therapeutic services for children and young people.

ROLE OF LOCAL GOVERNMENTS

Local governments play a key role in promoting safety and are responsible for community roles that impact children and young people. This includes providing services such as:

- libraries
- swimming pools
- holiday programs
- childcare
- spaces for community activities.

In regional and remote areas, local governments often play an even greater role as the main provider of services and information for the community.

ROLE OF ORGANISATIONS

Government and non-government organisations provide important support services and information to victims and survivors. They also do research and raise awareness.

Organisations have a key role in providing services to children and young people in a child safe way. These organisations include:

- schools
- sporting organisations
- hospitals
- disability support services
- community health services.

These organisations are in a good position to identify and respond to concerns about child sexual abuse. They may also have mandatory reporting obligations – where they must report suspicions of child sexual abuse.

Organisations are also responsible for creating child safe environments and should implement the National Principles for Child Safe Organisations.¹⁰

ROLE OF THE AUSTRALIAN COMMUNITY

The Australian community plays an important part in creating child safe environments. Everyone has a role to play in keeping children and young people safe. The Australian community can do this by:

- understanding child sexual abuse
- identifying risks and protective factors
- knowing what to do if a child or young person is, or is at risk of, being sexually abused.

INTERNATIONAL FRAMEWORKS

Measures under the National Strategy are in line with Australia's commitments under international law. This includes as a signatory to the United Nations *Convention on the Rights of the Child and its Optional Protocol on the Sale of Children, Child Prostitution and Child Pornography*.

You can find more information about legal and policy frameworks relating to children and young people in Appendix C (page 70).





1.7 LINKS TO OTHER INITIATIVES

NATIONAL CENTRE

In 2019, the Australian Government agreed to spend \$22.5 million over 5 years (from 2021) to set up a National Centre. This was a recommendation of the Royal Commission.

The National Centre will:

- raise community awareness and aim to stop the stigma of child sexual abuse
- improve the skills of the workforce to better help child and adult victims and survivors of child sexual abuse
- lead new or improved models to support adult and child victims and survivors of child sexual abuse through national research and program evaluation.

The National Office for Child Safety will work closely with the National Centre when it is set up.

OTHER NATIONAL AGREEMENTS

The National Strategy will be implemented alongside other policies and frameworks that make sure children and young people are safe and well in all areas of their lives. These include:

- *Safe and Supported: The National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children*
- the *National Plan to End Violence Against Women and Children*
- the *National Agreement on Closing the Gap*.

Australian, state and territory governments will continue collaborating to make sure these policies work together.

You can find a list of policies and frameworks in Appendix C (page 70).





2. First National Action Plan

The First National Action Plan has 5 themes.

1	Awareness raising, education and building child safe cultures
2	Supporting and empowering victims and survivors
3	Enhancing national approaches to children with harmful sexual behaviours
4	Offender prevention and intervention
5	Improving the evidence base

Each measure under the First National Action Plan has been assigned to a main theme. Some measures are relevant to more than one theme. The links between and across the themes will be carefully considered during the National Strategy's implementation.

The First National Action Plan focuses on responding to specific Royal Commission recommendations as well as the broad intent of the Royal Commission's findings. We have also designed some measures to:

- apply best practice to implementing Royal Commission recommendations
- where appropriate, apply the intent of Royal Commission recommendations to child sexual abuse in all settings, rather than limiting reforms to child sexual abuse that happens in institutions
- set up an evidence base to evaluate measures
- support the design and implementation of future action plans.

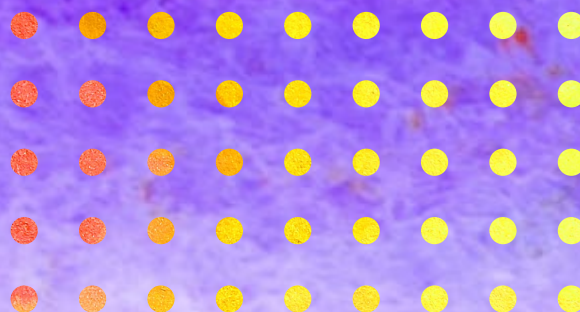
You can find a full list of the Royal Commission's recommendations on the Royal Commission website www.RoyalCommission.gov.au.

Each measure has an Australian Government department lead. State and territory government departments will work in partnership with the Australian Government on all measures.

Over the 4 years of the First National Action Plan, we will monitor our work on child sexual abuse to make sure we are meeting new challenges. We will do this as part of the monitoring and evaluation explained in section 4.2 (page 55).

A snapshot of the First National Action Plan's themes and measures

THE THEMES	THEME 1: AWARENESS RAISING, EDUCATION AND BUILDING CHILD SAFE CULTURES	THEME 2: SUPPORTING AND EMPOWERING VICTIMS AND SURVIVORS
THE MEASURES	1 Implement and promote the National Principles for Child Safe Organisations 2 Set up an ongoing national annual reporting framework for non-government organisations to report on their progress to create and maintain child safe cultures 3 Enhance national arrangements for sharing child safety and wellbeing information 4 Support the provision of resources for teachers, children and young people's education in areas focused on wellbeing, relationships and safety, including online safety 5 Work with the National Centre to develop and deliver education and capacity-building measures 6 Deliver a national awareness raising campaign on child sexual abuse	7 Deliver a website and helpline to assist victims and survivors to access help and information 8 Deliver a trauma-aware, healing-informed and culturally appropriate resource to improve early disclosure experiences of, and access to specialist services for, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander victims and survivors 9 Enhance legislative protections for vulnerable witnesses 10 Set up a national support service for non-offending family members of child sexual abuse perpetrators 11 Share opportunities to improve child witness interviewing



THEME 3: ENHANCING NATIONAL APPROACHES TO CHILDREN WITH HARMFUL SEXUAL BEHAVIOURS

- 12** Set up a National Clinical Reference Group
- 13** Develop national standards for responding to, supporting and safeguarding children with harmful sexual behaviours
- 14** Set up a national clinical framework for responding to children with harmful sexual behaviours
- 15** Increase workforce capability for preventing and responding to children with harmful sexual behaviours
- 16** Support the community to better understand and respond to developmentally appropriate sexual behaviours and harmful sexual behaviours in children

THEME 4: OFFENDER PREVENTION AND INTERVENTION

- 17** Embed members of all Australian and New Zealand police forces in the Australian Federal Police-led Australian Centre to Counter Child Exploitation
- 18** Implement a National Victim Identification Framework for online child sexual abuse
- 19** Deliver a Digital Field Triage Tool and Training Program
- 20** Set up a victim coordinator liaison capability
- 21** Launch an offender prevention service for adults who have sexual thoughts about children or young people
- 22** Progress legislative reforms to the Uniform Evidence Law. Explore operational reforms for securing digital evidence

THEME 5: IMPROVING THE EVIDENCE BASE

- 23** Develop and deliver a Strategic Child Safety Research Agenda
- 24** Complete a baseline analysis of specialist and community support services for victims and survivors of child sexual abuse
- 25** Set up a monitoring and evaluation framework under the National Strategy
- 26** Complete a monitoring and evaluation data feasibility assessment study
- 27** Develop an evaluation framework on the implementation and effectiveness of the National Principles for Child Safe Organisations
- 28** Conduct a second wave of the Australian Child Maltreatment Study
- 29** Develop a scoping study for, and establish, an Australian Child Wellbeing Data Asset



Theme 1: Awareness raising, education and building child safe cultures

Better and targeted child sexual abuse education and awareness raising will prevent abuse. It will give victims and survivors access to the information they need. It will also change the misconceptions and stigma that stop people from asking for help.

Children and young people are part of many communities and organisations. Making these places child safe plays a key role in preventing harm. We can do this by:

- strengthening organisations' cultures and leadership
- supporting children and young people to speak up
- improving transparency and accountability
- raising awareness of child sexual abuse
- making child safe practices a key part of daily business.

THE FOCUS OF GOVERNMENT MEASURES

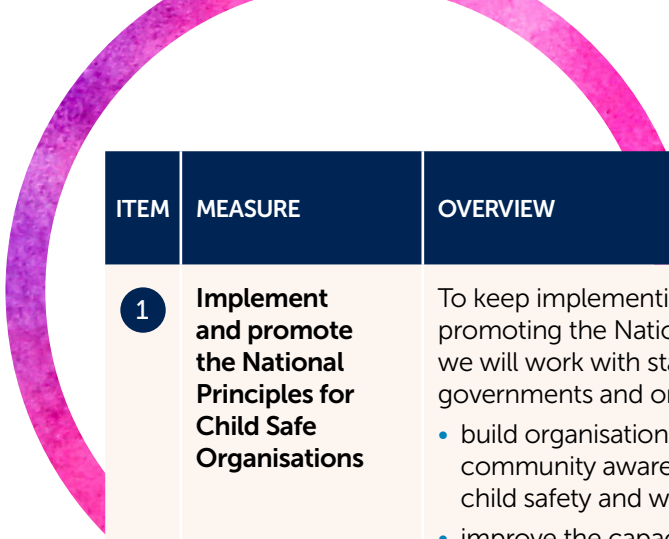
Measures under this theme will:

- add to a culture that respects the rights of children and young people to be protected, safe and listened to. This includes continuing to implement and promote the National Principles for Child Safe Organisations (the National Principles)
- improve information sharing across states and territories and sectors to promote child safety and wellbeing

- engage, educate and empower children and young people, parents, kin, carers, families, communities and organisations to prevent, identify and respond to child sexual abuse
- educate and train organisations and professionals working in, and students studying for, roles that work with children and young people
- help prevent child sexual abuse by educating children and young people about:
 - sexual development
 - healthy relationships
 - sexual behaviours
 - sexual abuse
 - personal safety
 - body autonomy
 - online safety
- meet diverse needs including those of:
 - Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people
 - children and young people with disability
 - children and young people from CALD backgrounds
 - LGBTQIA+ children and young people
 - children and young people in regional and remote communities.

WORKING CLOSELY WITH ORGANISATIONS

To promote child safety and prevent child sexual abuse, we need to work closely with organisations. Organisations deliver services, education and awareness raising programs in the community. They play a key role in building and promoting child safe cultures.



ITEM	MEASURE	OVERVIEW	ROYAL COMMISSION RECOMMENDATION	LEAD AUSTRALIAN GOVERNMENT DEPARTMENT
1	Implement and promote the National Principles for Child Safe Organisations	To keep implementing and promoting the National Principles, we will work with state and territory governments and organisations to: • build organisational and community awareness about child safety and wellbeing • improve the capacity of organisations to keep children and young people safe.	Recommendations from the <i>Final Report</i> relating to the Child Safe Standards	National Office for Child Safety
2	Set up an ongoing national annual reporting framework for non-government organisations to report on their progress to create and maintain child safe cultures	A national reporting framework will mean that a range of non-government organisations can report on their progress to create and maintain child safe cultures. This goes beyond the 5 years of reporting the Royal Commission recommended. We will develop the framework by consulting with stakeholders to make sure it complements the National Principles. We will also make sure it does not duplicate state and territory reporting requirements.	Recommendations 6.14, 17.3 from the <i>Final Report</i>	National Office for Child Safety
3	Enhance national arrangements for sharing child safety and wellbeing information	Over the 10 years of the National Strategy, governments will enhance how they share child safety and wellbeing information across jurisdictions and sectors. This will improve results for children and young people and their families.	Recommendations 7.3, 8.6 to 8.8, 8.17 and 8.19 to 8.23 from the <i>Final Report</i> and relevant recommendations from the <i>Working with Children Checks Report</i>	National Office for Child Safety
4	Support the provision of resources for teachers, children and young people's education in areas focused on wellbeing, relationships, and safety, including online safety	Support will include nationally consistent advice for all teachers and principals on how to prevent and respond to child sexual abuse. It will also include resources that encourage the use of best practice educative ways to support student wellbeing. Support for children and young people will include providing resources on respectful relationships and online safety. For example, resources on appropriate, inappropriate and unlawful sexual behaviours to help children and young people create positive, safe and healthy relationships.	Recommendations 6.2, 6.19 and 13.7 from the <i>Final Report</i>	Department of Education, Skills and Employment

ITEM	MEASURE	OVERVIEW	ROYAL COMMISSION RECOMMENDATION	LEAD AUSTRALIAN GOVERNMENT DEPARTMENT
5	Work with the National Centre to develop and deliver education and capacity-building measures	The National Centre will: - raise community awareness and aim to stop the stigma of child sexual abuse - improve the skills of the workforce to better help child and adult victims and survivors of child sexual abuse - lead new or improved models to support adult and child victims and survivors of child sexual abuse through national research and program evaluation. Australian, state and territory governments will work with the National Centre to develop and deliver education and capacity-building measures. These programs will be aimed at children and young people, parents, carers and families, professionals and tertiary students.	Recommendations 6.2, 6.11 and 6.21 from the <i>Final Report</i> Recommendation 67 from the <i>Criminal Justice Report</i>	National Office for Child Safety
6	Deliver a national awareness raising campaign on child sexual abuse	A national campaign on child sexual abuse will: - improve understanding of child sexual abuse in Australia - promote changes in behaviour and culture to prevent child sexual abuse - help people to recognise and respond to warning signs that a child or young person is at risk of child sexual abuse - encourage people to access trauma-informed help and support. The campaign will work alongside other awareness campaigns that are shaping community attitudes to children's safety.	Recommendations 6.2 and 6.3 from the <i>Final Report</i>	National Office for Child Safety

Theme 2: Supporting and empowering victims and survivors

The effects of child sexual abuse can be cumulative, complex and long-lasting.

It can affect people's:

- mental and physical health
- relationships
- sexual identity, gender identity and sexual behaviour
- spiritual and cultural connection
- education
- employment
- financial security.¹¹

Victims and survivors need access to trauma-informed help from a range of services during their lives and as their needs change. People that help them may also need support, such as:

- secondary victims
- family members, kin and carers
- witnesses to the abuse
- teachers and other school workers – including student support officers.

THE FOCUS OF GOVERNMENT MEASURES

Trauma-informed services can improve victims and survivors' wellbeing and quality of life. They can also help interrupt cycles of trauma.

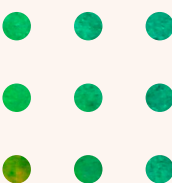
Measures under this theme will:

- promote and support accessible, high-quality, trauma-informed and culturally safe support services
- include a range of services to make sure help is available throughout people's lives and as their needs change
- support healing for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander victims and survivors, their families, kin and community
- increase support for non-offending family members of child sexual abuse perpetrators
- share information and encourage collaboration across and within states and territories.

WORKING CLOSELY WITH THE NON-GOVERNMENT SECTOR

The non-government sector plays an important role in delivering support services. Australian, state and territory governments will continue to work with the non-government sector to make sure Australia's services:

- are holistic
- work together
- are accessible
- meet the needs of victims and survivors.



ITEM	MEASURE	OVERVIEW	ROYAL COMMISSION RECOMMENDATION	LEAD AUSTRALIAN GOVERNMENT DEPARTMENT
7	Deliver a website and helpline to assist victims and survivors to access help and information	The website and helpline will help victims and survivors, professionals and the general public to get information and resources. It will also provide referrals to local support services. Trained staff will provide trauma-informed, culturally safe and accessible advice. They will be able to provide it in a way that meets people's diverse needs.	Recommendations 9.1 and 9.5 from the <i>Final Report</i>	National Office for Child Safety
8	Deliver a trauma-aware, healing-informed and culturally appropriate resource to improve early disclosure experiences of, and access to specialist services for, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander victims and survivors	The National Indigenous Australians Agency will work with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander experts to design and trial a resource to support frontline health workers. The resource will support trauma-aware, healing-informed and culturally safe conversations where victims and survivors can share their experiences. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and mainstream services will be able to use the resource.	Recommendation 9.2 from the <i>Final Report</i>	National Indigenous Australians Agency
9	Enhance legislative protections for vulnerable witnesses	This measure will strengthen protections for vulnerable witnesses giving evidence in criminal proceedings for child sexual abuse-related Commonwealth offences.	Recommendations 52, 54 and 60 from the <i>Criminal Justice Report</i>	Attorney-General's Department
10	Set up a national support service for non-offending family members of child sexual abuse perpetrators	The national support service will provide support and advocacy for non-offending family members of child sexual abuse perpetrators. The service will also work with enforcement agencies to support how officers engage with secondary victims.	Recommendation 9.1 from the <i>Final Report</i>	National Office for Child Safety
11	Share opportunities to improve child witness interviewing	Through the relevant national law enforcement working group, Australian, state and territory government agencies will, where appropriate, share best practice approaches to child witness interviewing. They will also consider opportunities for greater national consistency in line with those practices.	Recommendation 9 from the <i>Criminal Justice Report</i>	Australian Federal Police





Theme 3: Enhancing national approaches to children with harmful sexual behaviours

The Royal Commission defined ‘children with harmful sexual behaviours’ as children and young people under 18 years old who have sexual behaviours that are outside the range typically accepted as within the norm for their age and level of development. The term ‘harmful sexual behaviours’ recognises the seriousness of the behaviours. It also recognises the significant impact the behaviours can have on victims and survivors, as well as on the child or young person themselves.¹²

SUPPORTING CHILDREN WITH HARMFUL SEXUAL BEHAVIOURS

The Royal Commission found that there was no nationally comprehensive and coordinated policy approach for preventing, identifying or responding to children with harmful sexual behaviours. There are large inconsistencies and gaps in how Australia deals with this issue. There is also limited knowledge and education about the issue in the community.

Lack of common understanding and response to children with harmful sexual behaviours means children and young people may face stigma and not be able to access the support they need when they need it. Their behaviour may also be seen as sexual experimentation and the impacts not recognised as harmful. We need a holistic response to address these issues.

We also need more research to better respond to children with harmful sexual behaviours. This includes research into the role of pornography, the internet and other media and technologies. Research will also make sure our responses include the best ways to support children and prevent further harm. Research shows that most children and young people with harmful sexual behaviours do not go on to commit sexual abuse as adults. It suggests that if children and young people are provided with an appropriate and holistic assessment, and a therapeutic response tailored to

their individual needs, harmful behaviours are more likely to stop and less likely to escalate. However, we need more research in this area, including research to better understand which specific therapeutic approaches prevent adult offending.¹³

Measures under theme 5 (page 49) will consider these gaps as part of a national research agenda.

THE FOCUS OF GOVERNMENT MEASURES

Australian, state and territory governments will work together to develop a framework to prevent and respond to children with harmful sexual behaviours. This framework will be based on a public health model. This means we act early when harmful sexual behaviours first appear, we assess children with harmful sexual behaviours and help them to access therapeutic intervention.

Measures in the First National Action Plan will build our foundational national capability to prevent and respond to children with harmful sexual behaviours. State and territory governments have an important role in providing services to children with harmful sexual behaviours, such as youth justice and therapeutic services. These measures will allow state and territory governments to keep developing their own responses, while also lifting the national standard and encouraging people to work together across Australia.

ITEM	MEASURE	OVERVIEW	ROYAL COMMISSION RECOMMENDATION	LEAD AUSTRALIAN GOVERNMENT DEPARTMENT
12	Set up a National Clinical Reference Group	The National Clinical Reference Group will support governments' work to better design and implement responses to children with harmful sexual behaviours. The reference group will likely include experts such as health care professionals and academics.	Recommendations 10.1 and 10.2 from the <i>Final Report</i>	National Office for Child Safety
13	Develop national standards for responding to, supporting and safeguarding children with harmful sexual behaviours	Australian, state and territory governments will develop and agree on national standards for children with harmful sexual behaviours. The standards will be a high level and consistent way to identify, refer, treat and provide ongoing support for children with harmful sexual behaviours. This may include developing nationally consistent terminology and harmonising frameworks. The national standards will consider governments' local situations and could be applied flexibly.	Recommendations 10.1, 10.2, 10.5 and 13.6 from the <i>Final Report</i> Recommendation 84 from the <i>Criminal Justice Report</i>	National Office for Child Safety
14	Set up a national clinical framework for responding to children with harmful sexual behaviours	The national clinical framework will include advice and best practice ways to help health professionals provide therapeutic treatment and ongoing support for children with harmful sexual behaviours. This measure will likely start once the national standards are progressed.	Recommendations 10.1 to 10.7 and 12.12 from the <i>Final Report</i>	National Office for Child Safety
15	Increase workforce capability for preventing and responding to children with harmful sexual behaviours	This will include developing standards and benchmarks to increase workforce capability. It will support a multidisciplinary response. The standards may include: • professional qualifications • clinical supervision • staff retention • culturally safe practices and systems • providing specialist practice resources. It may also include training people who work with children to identify and respond to children with harmful sexual behaviours. This measure will likely start once the national standards are progressed.	Recommendations 10.1, 10.6 and 12.13 from the <i>Final Report</i>	National Office for Child Safety

ITEM	MEASURE	OVERVIEW	ROYAL COMMISSION RECOMMENDATION	LEAD AUSTRALIAN GOVERNMENT DEPARTMENT
16	Support the community to better understand and respond to developmentally appropriate sexual behaviours and harmful sexual behaviours in children	We will deliver this measure as part of the national awareness raising campaign under measure 6. It will address misinformation and community stigma about children with harmful sexual behaviours. This measure may include developing targeted resources and information for: • children and young people • parents • kin and carers • families • organisations • early childhood services. Awareness raising may cover things like: • healthy and unhealthy sexual development • the signs and effects of harmful sexual behaviours • responding to children and young people who have engaged in, or been affected by, the harmful sexual behaviours of others • information on referrals and support services. This part of the awareness raising campaign will happen once we have started the other measures on children with harmful sexual behaviours.	Recommendation 10.1 from the <i>Final Report</i>	National Office for Child Safety



Theme 4: Offender prevention and intervention

Offender prevention and intervention measures are critical to reducing the risk and extent of child sexual abuse.

ENHANCING LAW ENFORCEMENT RESPONSES

Australian law enforcement agencies work closely together to investigate child sexual abuse. This often happens through Joint Anti Child Exploitation Teams, which are combined Australian Federal Police and state or territory police child protection teams located across Australia.

We will build on these and other partnerships and activities to:

- improve nationally consistent approaches to child sexual abuse victim identification
- train law enforcement to better support and work with child sexual abuse victims
- deliver a digital tool to support investigators in real time
- enhance law enforcement cooperation by seconding state, territory and New Zealand police members into the Australian Centre to Counter Child Exploitation
- continue to look at reforms for evidence law and digital evidence to improve outcomes in child sexual abuse cases.

IMPROVING OFFENDER PREVENTION AND INTERVENTION SERVICES

Measures under the National Strategy target those who have a fixed, persistent sexual interest in children or young people. They are also aimed at offenders who are opportunistic or situational, and may not have a fixed sexual interest in children and young people. These measures strengthen our criminal justice response and include early intervention and management programs for potential and existing offenders.

In Australia, there is a lack of early intervention services for people who have sexual thoughts about children or young people. Further, Australian

support programs for offenders are only available to people who have been convicted of child sexual abuse offences. They are often delivered in prison or after the person has been released. Access to psychological services is also affected by location, availability and cost. There are compelling reasons why services must be available for adults who, without intervention, may go on to sexually abuse a child. International research suggests people with a sexual preference for children or young people are often aware of their attraction for some time before they are known to the criminal justice system or seek treatment.¹⁴ Interventions must be used during this time to stop possible perpetrators from ever harming a child or young person. For this reason, the Royal Commission recommended that Australia introduce an offender prevention program based on the UK's *Stop it Now!* program.

Community programs that intervene before a child or young person has been harmed, mean law enforcement can focus their resources on particularly harmful or high-risk offending – where a strong criminal justice response will always be needed.

THE FOCUS OF GOVERNMENT MEASURES

Measures under this theme will:

- enhance law enforcement cooperation and activities to prevent and respond to child sexual abuse
- build support programs that prevent offending, intervene before offending occurs and reduce repeat offending.

Measures under this theme will work alongside those in the First Commonwealth Action Plan. We will balance community prevention and intervention programs against new and stronger law enforcement and intelligence responses to fight child sexual abuse. We will also use a strong data, research and evidence agenda to better understand and intervene in child sexual abuse offending. Please refer to theme 5 (page 49) for further information.

ITEM	MEASURE	OVERVIEW	ROYAL COMMISSION RECOMMENDATION	LEAD AUSTRALIAN GOVERNMENT DEPARTMENT
17	Embed members of all Australian and New Zealand police forces into the Australian Federal Police-led Australian Centre to Counter Child Exploitation	This measure will second members from state and territory police forces and New Zealand Police into the Australian Centre to Counter Child Exploitation. This will improve frontline national and regional coordination to fight online child sexual abuse, including improved covert activities, child protection triage and identifying victims.	Recommendation 6.24 from the <i>Final Report</i>	Australian Federal Police
18	Implement a National Victim Identification Framework for online child sexual abuse	The National Victim Identification Framework will bring together state and territory law enforcement agencies into a national victim identification capability. This will create a sophisticated and nationally consistent approach to identifying victims and offenders.	Recommendation 6.24 from the <i>Final Report</i>	Australian Federal Police
19	Deliver a Digital Field Triage Tool and Training Program	The Digital Field Triage Tool and Training Program will support investigators to triage electronic devices containing child abuse material. It will also help officers comply with evidentiary standards.	Recommendation 6.24 from the <i>Final Report</i>	Australian Federal Police
20	Set up a victim coordinator liaison capability	The Australian Federal Police will set up a victim coordinator liaison capability to work with Joint Anti Child Exploitation Teams to train and support police who come into contact with child sexual abuse victims.	Recommendations 3 and 14 from the <i>Criminal Justice Report</i>	Australian Federal Police
21	Launch an offender prevention service for adults who have sexual thoughts about children or young people	This service will deliver a program similar to the UK's <i>Stop it Now!</i> program. It will use online services and a helpline.	Recommendation 6.2 from the <i>Final Report</i>	National Office for Child Safety
22	Progress legislative reforms to the Uniform Evidence Law. Explore operational reforms for securing digital evidence	This will include continuing Uniform Evidence Law reforms, as agreed through the former Council of Attorneys-General. It may also include looking at reforms to improve national approaches to capture and secure digital evidence.	Recommendations 44 to 51, 69 and 85 from the <i>Criminal Justice Report</i>	Attorney-General's Department (Uniform Evidence Law) and Department of Home Affairs (digital evidence)





Theme 5: Improving the evidence base

A strong data, research and evaluation agenda will build our evidence on the nature, causes and impacts of child sexual abuse in Australia.

A strong evidence base is the best way to understand how to prevent and respond to child sexual abuse. It also helps make sure our work is:

- culturally safe
- age and development appropriate
- trauma-informed
- designed to meet people's different needs and circumstances.

THE FOCUS OF GOVERNMENT MEASURES

Australian, state and territory governments will identify where there are gaps in the evidence base and work together to develop and implement solutions. This includes running future waves of the Australian Child Maltreatment Study to work out how many Australians have experienced child maltreatment and whether this is changing over time.

Fieldwork for the first Australian Child Maltreatment Study started in 2021. It will provide baseline data for the National Strategy's Monitoring and Evaluation Framework. The second wave of the Australian Child Maltreatment Study should run from 2024 to 2025. It will include specific methods to capture representative data for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and people with disability.

We will set up a strong monitoring and evaluation framework to assess how well the National Strategy's measures have been implemented. We will assess whether the National Strategy meets or achieves its vision, objective and values.

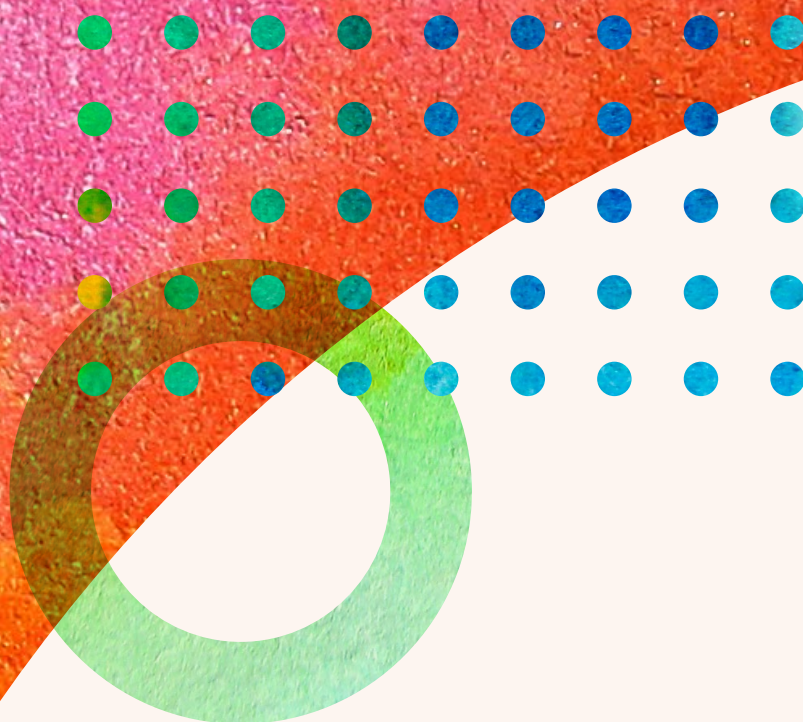
Australian, state and territory governments will work together to develop and implement a nationally coordinated strategic research agenda.

All measures under this theme will guide the design and ongoing improvement of our response to child sexual abuse.

ITEM	MEASURE	OVERVIEW	ROYAL COMMISSION RECOMMENDATION	LEAD AUSTRALIAN GOVERNMENT DEPARTMENT
23	Develop and deliver a strategic child safety research agenda	The National Strategy's research agenda will coordinate and drive national research to prevent and respond to child sexual abuse. The research agenda will: • build our evidence on the risk, extent and impact of child sexual abuse victimisation in Australia • assess how effective child sexual abuse offender programs are • guide how we develop and improve new policy interventions. Australian, state and territory governments will work together with the National Centre to develop and implement the strategic research agenda.	Recommendation 6.3 from the <i>Final Report</i>	National Office for Child Safety and Australian Institute of Criminology
24	Complete a baseline analysis of specialist and community support services for victims and survivors of child sexual abuse	The baseline analysis will: • agree on a threshold for service standards – this will work out which services meet government expectations • identify Australian services that meet the agreed standards • find gaps in the service system • make recommendations for expanding or developing new support services – including for the National Strategy's priority groups • make recommendations on the feasibility of developing a nationally consistent minimum data collection for relevant support services • make recommendations for developing new or expanding services under the National Strategy's second action plan.	Recommendations 9.2, 9.3 and 9.6 from the <i>Final Report</i>	National Office for Child Safety and Australian Institute of Health and Welfare
25	Set up a monitoring and evaluation framework under the National Strategy	The monitoring and evaluation framework will assess the progress of the National Strategy's measures and objectives. The framework will, where appropriate, build on and align with any indicators and reporting processes developed for the Child Abuse Royal Commission Evaluation Framework (recommendation 17.4). We will update it at the beginning of each new National Strategy action plan to include new or improved data sources and performance indicators.	Recommendation 6.3 from the <i>Final Report</i>	National Office for Child Safety

ITEM	MEASURE	OVERVIEW	ROYAL COMMISSION RECOMMENDATION	LEAD AUSTRALIAN GOVERNMENT DEPARTMENT
26	Complete a monitoring and evaluation data feasibility assessment study	This study will review existing data sources against the National Strategy's monitoring and evaluation framework to find gaps and opportunities to improve national data on child sexual abuse victimisation and offending.	Recommendation 6.3 from the <i>Final Report</i>	National Office for Child Safety and Australian Institute of Health and Welfare
27	Develop an evaluation framework on the implementation and effectiveness of the National Principles for Child Safe Organisations	The evaluation framework will develop a nationally consistent set of indicators and data sources to assess how organisations are implementing the National Principles for Child Safe Organisations. It will also look at the effectiveness of the National Principles.	Recommendation 6.14 from the <i>Final Report</i>	National Office for Child Safety
28	Conduct a second wave of the Australian Child Maltreatment Study	A second wave of the Australian Child Maltreatment Study will produce reliable prevalence estimates for child maltreatment in Australia. This will include estimates for key groups, such as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, people with disability and people from CALD backgrounds. The study will have a focus on 16–24 year olds to produce prevalence estimates for recent child maltreatment that happened in the past 12 months.	Recommendation 2.1 from the <i>Final Report</i>	National Office for Child Safety
29	Develop a scoping study for and establish an Australian Child Wellbeing Data Asset	This measure will deliver a scoping study for a national, child-focused, linked data set to support the holistic analysis of children and young people's pathways through government services. This may include services like: • education • health services • child protection • youth justice • mental health services • hospitals • police services. The measure will also support setting up this data set.	Recommendations 2.1 and 6.3 from the <i>Final Report</i>	Australian Institute of Health and Welfare





3. Commitments

The Australian Government has committed \$307.5 million to support the National Strategy's implementation. This includes support for the First National Action Plan and the First Commonwealth Action Plan.

State and territory governments are responsible for funding, administering and delivering initiatives to protect children and young people. They are also responsible for responding to those experiencing, or at risk of, abuse and neglect. State and territory governments will support the First National Action Plan through continued efforts under existing areas of responsibility. They will also partner with the Australian Government to design and deliver the National Strategy's First National Action Plan measures.

4. Evaluation and reporting

4.1 GOVERNANCE

National Strategy and First National Action Plan governance and oversight will involve:

- Australian, state and territory governments
- non-government organisations
- people from the National Strategy's priority groups (see list on page 23).

NATIONAL STRATEGY TO PREVENT AND RESPOND TO CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE 2021–2030
FIRST NATIONAL ACTION PLAN 2021–2024 IMPLEMENTATION GOVERNANCE STRUCTURE



4.2 MONITORING AND MEASURING PROGRESS

We will be accountable and transparent in how we implement the National Strategy, including its First National Action Plan.

The main method we will use for assessing our progress will be regular reporting under a monitoring and evaluation framework. The National Strategy Monitoring and Evaluation Framework will track progress against short, medium and long-term outcomes. The National Strategy Monitoring and Evaluation Framework will work alongside, but not duplicate:

- the Child Abuse Royal Commission Evaluation Framework – including the Australian Government's Annual Progress Reports into the implementation of the recommendations of the Royal Commission, which focus on child sexual abuse within institutions
- other existing reporting methods.



Glossary

CHILD ABUSE MATERIAL

Section 473.1 of the *Criminal Code Act 1995* (Cth) defines 'child abuse material' as: 'material that depicts or describes a child, or a representation of a child, who is or appears to be under the age of 18, and who is or appears to be in a sexual pose or sexual activity, or that shows or describes the person's sexual organs or breasts as a dominant characteristic'. This definition also includes material that depicts or describes a child, or a representation of a child, as a victim of torture, cruelty or physical abuse.¹⁵

The term 'child pornography', and others like it, are not used. They are inaccurate and harmful. The word 'pornography' is usually used to describe content depicting consenting adults engaging in lawful activity. In most cases, children and young people cannot lawfully consent to these activities, and child abuse material depicts criminal activities. Child abuse material may be used to normalise abuse with children and young people. Framing child sexual abuse materials as 'pornography' may also make it easier for perpetrators to disconnect from the child or young person. This can mean adults see children and young people as willing participants or actors in pieces of acceptable media content, rather than as victims.

CHILD MALTREATMENT

Child maltreatment refers to:

- physical abuse
- emotional abuse
- sexual abuse
- exposure to domestic and family violence
- neglect.¹⁶

CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE

We use the Royal Commission's definition of child sexual abuse, which is: 'any act that exposes a child to, or involves a child in, sexual processes that are beyond their understanding, are contrary to accepted community standards, or are outside what is permitted by law'.¹⁷

Sexually abusive behaviours can include:

- the sexual touching of genitals
- masturbation
- oral sex
- vaginal or anal penetration by a penis, finger or any other object
- sexual touching of breasts
- voyeurism – spying on or watching another person doing something private without their permission
- exhibitionism – exposing yourself in public
- exposing the child or young person to pornography
- grooming (see definition on page 59).¹⁸

CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE

People under the age of 18.

CHILDREN WITH HARMFUL SEXUAL BEHAVIOURS

Children with harmful sexual behaviours are children or young people under 18 years old who have behaviours that fall across a range of sexual behaviour problems. These include behaviours that are problematic to the child's own development, as well as those that are coercive, sexually aggressive or predatory towards others.¹⁹

The term 'harmful sexual behaviours' recognises the seriousness of these behaviours and the significant impact they can have on the child or any victims and survivors. It also recognises that the age or capacity of a child who displays harmful sexual behaviours does not determine the harm those behaviours can cause to victims and survivors.²⁰

Terms such as 'child paedophile' or 'child perpetrator' are not accurate. They are harmful and cause stigma. We do not use them in the National Strategy.

CONTACT CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE

Contact child sexual abuse is when a person physically sexually abuses a child or young person. There are criminal offences for different types of contact child sexual abuse. These are sometimes called 'contact offences'.

CULTURAL SAFETY

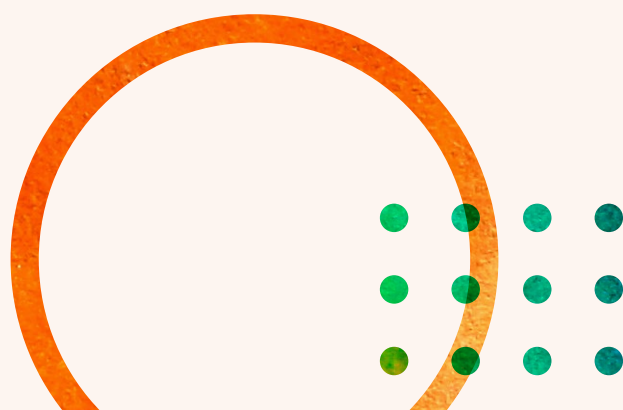
Cultural safety refers to an environment 'where there is no assault, challenge or denial of [a person's] identity, of who they are and what they need'.²¹

It refers specifically to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. This includes Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' own assessment of their safety and capacity to engage meaningfully and on their own terms with a non-Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander person or organisation. This requires a non-Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander person or organisation to listen, enable and support these environments, with accountability to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander colleagues or service users.²²

DOMESTIC AND FAMILY VIOLENCE

Domestic violence refers to acts of violence that happen between 2 people who are, or were, in an intimate relationship. It includes physical, sexual, emotional, psychological and financial abuse.²³ While there is no single definition, the central element of domestic violence is behaviour motivated by gendered drivers of violence that can involve controlling a partner through fear, coercion and intimidation. For example, by using behaviour that is violent and threatening. In most cases, the violent behaviour is part of a range of tactics to exercise power and control over women and children. It can be both criminal and non-criminal.²⁴

Family violence refers to violence between family members, as well as between intimate partners. It involves the same sorts of behaviours as described for domestic violence, but includes the broader range of marital and kinship relationships where violence may happen. For this reason, it is the most widely used term to identify the experiences of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, as it captures the broader issue of violence within extended families, kinship networks and community relationships. It also covers intergenerational issues.²⁵ Family violence is a relevant term when referring to complex forms of violence where family and in-laws, as well as other family members of the abusive spouse, can arrange for violent acts to be committed against the victim or are themselves abusive toward the victim.²⁶



GROOMING

Grooming describes behaviours that manipulate and control a child, their family, kin and carers or other support networks, or organisations. The intent of manipulation is to:

- gain access to the child
- obtain the child's compliance
- maintain the child's silence
- avoid discovery of sexual abuse.²⁷

Grooming can be done by people already well known to the child, including by a child's family member, kin or carer.

Grooming can take place in person and online, and is often difficult to identify. Behaviours related to grooming are not necessarily explicitly sexual, directly abusive or criminal. They may only be recognised in hindsight. Some grooming behaviours are consistent with behaviours or activities in non-abusive relationships. In these cases, the main difference between acceptable behaviours and grooming behaviours is the motivation behind them.²⁸

Online child grooming refers to the process of establishing and building a relationship with a child through the use of the internet or other technologies to facilitate sexual contact with that child, either physically or online.²⁹ Online grooming may include perpetrators encouraging victims to engage in sexual activity or to send the perpetrator sexually explicit material. It may lead to perpetrators meeting the victim in person or blackmailing the victim to self-produce explicit materials. To evade detection in the grooming phase, perpetrators may also convince the victim to migrate to and from multiple online platforms, including those using encrypted technologies.³⁰

INTERGENERATIONAL TRAUMA

Intergenerational trauma refers to trauma that is passed from the first generation of survivors who have experienced trauma, down to future children, grandchildren, nieces, and nephews. If the trauma is unresolved, next generations have a higher risk of developing trauma symptoms. An example is where parents have been denied the right to develop safe attachments with their children and provide those children with predictable home environments. In that case, children may be vulnerable to developmental delay, poor education outcomes, interpersonal issues, disability, and higher chances of coming into contact with the criminal justice system. The likelihood of intergenerational trauma is high in families of once Stolen Generation children.³¹

MANDATORY REPORTER

A person who is required by either state or territory law to report known and suspected cases of child abuse and neglect to a nominated government department or agency. Usually, they need to report to a child protection authority.³²

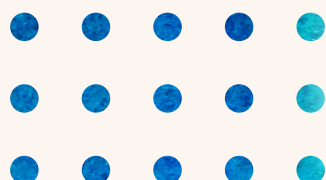
OFFENDER

Offender refers to a person who is found by a court to have done something that is prohibited by law.³³

ORGANISATION

Organisation means an incorporated or unincorporated group, body, entity or institution. For example, a sports club, school, religious organisation, or government body.

We use the term 'organisation' to describe any entity that provides, or has at any time provided, activities, facilities, programs or services of any kind that facilitates access to children by adults, including through their families. Where information relates to findings of the Royal Commission, we use the term 'institution'.



PERPETRATOR

Perpetrator refers to an adult who has sexually abused a child, including offenders who have been convicted by a court.³⁴

PRIMARY PREVENTION

Primary prevention responses are aimed at the whole community and address the underlying causes of child sexual abuse. Primary prevention looks at the social conditions that excuse, justify or enable child sexual abuse. Primary prevention measures can include public education, such as awareness raising campaigns, and programs to create child safe cultures and environments. This may be done through changing or creating new laws.

PROCUREMENT OFFENCES

Procurement offences usually involve a person arranging to engage in sexual activity with a child. The person can encourage, entice or recruit the child to engage in sexual activity. They can also persuade the child – including through threats or promises – to engage in that activity. Procuring may be done by grooming the child or someone with access to the child (refer to the definition of grooming on page 59).³⁵

QUATERNARY PREVENTION

Quaternary prevention evaluates how effective tertiary interventions are to make sure they are delivering the right results.

SECONDARY PREVENTION

Secondary prevention aims to change the end result for people who are at risk of experiencing or perpetrating child sexual abuse. Also called early intervention, secondary responses address the early warning signs of child sexual abuse. This includes responding early to harmful sexual behaviours to prevent them from going further or from allowing ongoing harm. Secondary prevention measures can include therapeutic services for people who have sexual thoughts about children or young people.

SECONDARY VICTIMS

Secondary victims refer to people who are affected by child sexual abuse, but are not the primary (the 'abused') victim. The secondary victim's exposure to the abuse may be because of their connection to the primary victim or their connection to the perpetrator. Secondary victims can include perpetrators' partners and children, parents and carers of abused children, and people who witnessed abuse.³⁶

Secondary trauma can extend across generations, and whole communities or populations can experience collective trauma.³⁷



TERTIARY INTERVENTIONS

Tertiary interventions aim to respond to child sexual abuse and prevent it from happening again. Tertiary interventions can include:

- trauma-informed support services and health care for victims and survivors
- specialist support services for children with harmful sexual behaviours
- criminal justice responses, which may deter people through criminal laws
- therapeutic interventions for adult offenders to stop them offending again.

TRAUMA-AWARE, HEALING-INFORMED PRACTICE

A strength-based approach to healing that is guided by a shared understanding of, and responsiveness to, the impacts of trauma.

A trauma-aware, healing-informed practice prioritises cultural, spiritual, physical, psychological, and emotional safety. However, it does not avoid addressing important issues that are likely to be sensitive and trigger trauma responses. Service providers need to be highly skilled in ways to manage the effects of triggering conversations. They also need to be able to empower people through upskilling and increasing understanding. Service providers need to work in ways that result in 'no further harm'.³⁸

TRAUMA-INFORMED

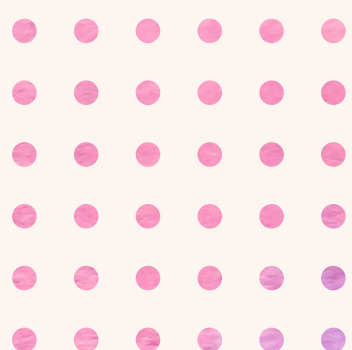
Trauma-informed approaches ensure practices, policies and culture recognise and respond to the effects of trauma on a person's wellbeing and behaviour. A trauma-informed approach is distinct from trauma-specific interventions or therapeutic treatments. These interventions are part of, but not the same as, a system-wide trauma-informed approach. A trauma-informed approach does not require a service to provide therapeutic treatment addressing the symptoms of trauma.³⁹

VICTIMS AND SURVIVORS

Victims and survivors refers to people who have been sexually abused as children or young people. We use both terms in an attempt to capture victims and survivors' preferences for terminology, and to capture current and historical abuse. In some contexts, the term 'victim' has a defined legal meaning.

We recognise that some people prefer the term 'survivor' because of its association with resilience and empowerment. We also recognise many have lost their lives as a direct result of abuse, or do not feel they have 'survived' the abuse and its impacts. In these cases, the term 'victim' may be more appropriate.

We recognise that some people do not identify with either of these terms.⁴⁰



Appendix A – The Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse

On 12 November 2012, the then Prime Minister, the Honourable Julia Gillard AC, announced the establishment of a Royal Commission in response to allegations of significant child sexual abuse in Australian institutions.

The Royal Commission ran for 5 years. It found that child sexual abuse had happened in a wide range of Australian institutions, affecting tens of thousands of people over many years.

The Royal Commission uncovered the hidden nature, complex causes and devastating impacts of institutional child sexual abuse in Australia. It highlighted the failings of governments, institutions and communities to protect and nurture children and young people.

Although the Royal Commission focused on child sexual abuse in institutions, it recognised that most allegations of child sexual abuse relate to abuse outside institutions. It recognised that child sexual abuse is mostly perpetrated by someone the child or young person knows, including a family member.⁴¹

The Royal Commission published its *Final Report* in December 2017.

The Royal Commission made 409 recommendations to Australian, state and territory governments and institutions to better protect children and young people from child sexual abuse.

The Australian, state and territory governments agreed to report on how they are implementing the Royal Commission's recommendations each year for 5 years. This reporting started from December 2018.

The Australian Government also supports organisations that work with children and young people to produce their own annual progress reports.

PRIVATE SESSIONS

During the Royal Commission's private sessions, more than 8,000 victims and survivors, or their supporters, shared their stories.⁴²

From the Royal Commission's private sessions (as at May 2017):

- most of the victims and survivors who told their stories were men (64.3%)
- almost all victims and survivors (93.8%) were abused by a man
- of those who gave their age, more than half were first sexually abused when they were between 10 and 14 years old
- female victims and survivors were generally younger than males when they were first sexually abused
- of the 67.3% of victims and survivors who gave the age of the perpetrator at the time of their sexual abuse – 83.8% were abused by an adult
- of the 6,875 victims and survivors who attended private sessions, 1,129 (16.4%) were abused by another child
- 14.3% of all victims and survivors were Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples

- 4.3% of all victims and survivors shared that they had a disability at the time of the abuse, however, many people with disability face extra barriers to telling people about abuse
- the most common roles of adult perpetrators in institutions were teachers and people in religious ministries.⁴³

WHEN INSTITUTIONS FAIL TO PROTECT CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE

The Royal Commission looked at how the cultures and practices in institutions allow child sexual abuse to happen. It also looked at how they can get in the way of detecting and responding to it.

Signs that an institution's culture may fail to prevent child sexual abuse from happening or respond well when it does, include:

- a culture of secrecy, power and control
- a lack of leadership and governance that promotes and embeds child safety
- not telling children and young people about their rights or not including them, or their families, kin and carers and communities, in making decisions
- not treating children and young people equally because of their disability, sex, gender or cultural, social or financial background

- poor screening or training for staff and volunteers who work with children and young people
- unsafe physical environments and poor protections in online environments
- not having good, publicly available or regularly reviewed child safeguarding policies, such as complaint handling processes.

The Royal Commission identified structural protections that make institutions safer for children and young people. The 10 National Principles for Child Safe Organisations explain what these protections are. All Australian, state and territory governments endorsed the National Principles in February 2019.

MORE INFORMATION

You can find more information about the Royal Commission on the Royal Commission website www.RoyalCommission.gov.au.

You can read more about Australian, state and territory governments' responses to the Royal Commission, and annual reports from governments and organisations, on the Australian Government Response to the Royal Commission website.⁴⁴

Appendix B – Trends, risks and indicators

THE PREVALENCE OF CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE

The Royal Commission found that there were significant gaps and limits in the available data measuring the extent, cause and effects of child sexual abuse in Australia.

Data from the Australian Bureau of Statistics 2016 Personal Safety Survey estimated that:

- 1.4 million Australian adults experienced sexual abuse before they were 15 years old
- one in 10 women (10.7%) and one in 20 men (4.6%) experienced sexual abuse before they were 15 years old.⁴⁵

This is a conservative estimate because it does not include victims and survivors aged 15 to 17 at the time of the abuse. It also does not include sexual abuse by other children and young people.

This estimate is affected by under-reporting and people not sharing their stories until well after the abuse has happened. It is also affected by extra barriers to reporting for some groups – such as people with disability.

From July 2019 to June 2020, the Australian Federal Police received more than 21,000 reports of online child abuse materials. Each report could contain hundreds or thousands of images and videos. The Internet Watch Foundation says that every 4 minutes worldwide, a webpage shows a child or young person being sexually abused.⁴⁶

IMPACTS OF CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE

The 3 main impacts of institutional child sexual abuse that victims and survivors reported during the Royal Commission's private sessions were impacts on:

- mental health (95%)
- relationships (67%)
- education and finances (56%).⁴⁷

There are also big financial and other costs of violence against children and young people. A 2019 report by Deloitte Access Economics calculated that:

- in the 2016–17 financial year, the lifetime financial cost for new cases of violence against children and young people in Australia was \$16.1 billion
- other costs from things like lower quality of life and early death were \$62.3 billion.⁴⁸

The Australian Bureau of Statistics reported that women and men who experienced child sexual abuse were 3 times more likely to experience intimate partner violence as an adult than those who had not experienced child sexual abuse.⁴⁹

LINKS TO OTHER FORMS OF MALTREATMENT

Sexual abuse rarely occurs in isolation. It often happens alongside other forms of child maltreatment. Child maltreatment includes:

- physical, sexual and emotional abuse
- neglect
- exposure to domestic and family violence.

There is currently no national data source that measures how often sexual abuse happens along with other forms of child maltreatment.

PERPETRATOR CHARACTERISTICS

People who commit contact child sexual abuse

Contact child sexual abuse is when a person physically sexually abuses a child or young person. The characteristics of perpetrators of contact child sexual abuse vary a lot. While we know that people who sexually abuse children and young people are mostly men, there is no reliable or consistent profile for perpetrators.⁵⁰ There is often very little that makes people who sexually abuse children and young people stand out from the general population, other than their criminal behaviour.⁵¹ Perpetrators of child sexual abuse are usually



people the child or young person know – such as a relative, friend or neighbour.⁵² They also have different reasons to offend, and their behaviours can change over time.⁵³

While researchers have developed different ways to understand perpetrator behaviour, perpetrators do not fit neatly into discrete categories. For example, they can show motivations or actions that fit with more than one type of offending. While recognising these limits, the Royal Commission identified 3 types of perpetrators:

- **Fixed, persistent perpetrators** tend to have a long-term sexual attraction to children or young people. They are often repeat offenders, abusing multiple children and young people throughout their lives. They are more likely than other perpetrators to have a paedophilic interest in children and young people, and are less likely to have age-appropriate sexual relationships. Most perpetrators do not fall in this category, even though it matches common stereotypes.
- **Opportunistic perpetrators** tend to be less fixated on the sexual abuse of children and young people. They may also be involved in criminal behaviour other than child sexual abuse. They may not be more sexually attracted to children or young people than adults. However, they do use children or young people for sexual gratification. These perpetrators are less likely than other adult perpetrators to deliberately create situations where they can abuse children and young people. They abuse children or young people when they see an opportunity. They are less likely to use grooming strategies.
- **Situational perpetrators** do not usually have a sexual preference for children or young people. They tend to have similar patterns of sexual arousal to people who do not sexually abuse children and young people. They sexually abuse children or young people in response to things happening in their own lives. This can include things like social isolation, lack of positive adult relationships and low self-esteem.⁵⁴

A range of risk factors may play a role in someone's decision to sexually abuse a child or young person, or the possibility that they will commit child sexual abuse. While most people with these factors in their lives will not sexually abuse a child or young person, some examples include:

- adverse experiences in childhood, such as physical, emotional and sexual abuse and neglect
- having interpersonal, relationship or intimacy difficulties, such as difficulties connecting with other adults
- distorted beliefs that may lead to child sexual abuse, such as the belief that abuse is not harmful
- indirect influences, such as the situation they are in or 'trigger' factors. For example, severe stress, substance abuse and mental health issues.⁵⁵

These factors are not an excuse or justification for child sexual abuse. However, they show some of the things that can contribute to someone perpetrating child sexual abuse. They also show us opportunities for early intervention. It is important to note that some perpetrators of child sexual abuse may not show any risk factors.

People who access, share or produce online child sexual abuse materials

The characteristics of those who solely access online child sexual abuse materials, including livestreamed child sexual abuse, are different from the characteristics of those who commit contact child sexual abuse. Perpetrators who solely access online child sexual abuse material are less likely to have:

- histories of physical and sexual childhood abuse
- severe mental illness or substance use problems
- direct access to children or young people – unless they are producing materials.⁵⁶

They are more likely to:

- be a young adult, Caucasian, highly educated and employed



- have difficulties with intimate relationships, sexual intimacy, self-esteem and assertiveness
- have difficulties with sexual regulation preoccupation – for example, they might have higher rates of masturbation and pornography use and use sex as a coping mechanism
- have problematic patterns of general internet use.⁵⁷

WHY PERPETRATORS TARGET CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE

Child sexual abuse is always the fault of the perpetrator. Perpetrators of child sexual abuse will often look for vulnerability in a child or young person when choosing a victim. There are a range of social, cultural and environmental factors that affect whether a perpetrator will target a child or young person. These factors also affect how likely it is the abuse will be identified, reported and responded to appropriately. However, a child or young person can be sexually abused even in situations where there are no obvious risk factors.

Factors that can reduce the likelihood of a perpetrator targeting a child or young person include:

- supportive and trustworthy adults
- supportive peers
- education about sexual development and healthy relationships, including sexual abuse, personal safety and body autonomy
- strong community or cultural connections.⁵⁸

Factors that can impact the likelihood of a perpetrator targeting a child or young person include:

- the gender of the child or young person
- the age and developmental stage of the child or young person
- whether the child or young person has experienced child abuse, neglect or other adverse events

- whether the child or young person has a disability and the type of disability
- the child or young person's family circumstances, for example family violence, family breakdown or homelessness
- the child or young person's level of social isolation
- the child or young person's level of understanding of sexual behaviour, including sexual abuse and personal safety
- the child or young person's level of self-esteem.⁵⁹

Particular groups of children and young people are more vulnerable to sexual abuse because of their exposure to certain risk factors. This can make it less likely that they are able to tell someone about or report the abuse. It may also make it less likely that they will get an appropriate response. There are much higher numbers of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and children with disability in some high-risk institutional settings. This is due to a range of historical, social and financial reasons, including colonisation.⁶⁰

INDICATORS OF CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE

A child or young person, or someone they know, may disclose child sexual abuse to you. They may tell you in a range of ways or in stages over time. Any direct or suspected disclosure of child sexual abuse should always be believed and must always be responded to. For more information about how to respond, refer to 'Reporting child sexual abuse' (page 6).

Children and young people may show a range of physical, behavioural and emotional symptoms that could mean they are distressed or going through trauma, including sexual abuse. The age and developmental level of the child or young person will affect how any indicators show up. Some children and young people who have been sexually abused will not show any symptoms.



Physical symptoms that may present after child sexual abuse include:

- headaches
- stomach aches
- bed-wetting
- loss of appetite and weight loss
- nightmares and sleep disturbances.⁶¹

While rare, conclusive indicators of sexual abuse in children and young people are:

- the presence of semen
- pregnancy
- sexually transmitted infections or diseases – if transmission during pregnancy and childbirth or through medical treatment can be ruled out⁶²
- anal and genital injury and symptoms – such as soreness or bleeding.⁶³

Children and young people who are sexually abused may find it difficult to deal with or regulate their distress after the trauma they have experienced. Emotional or behavioural changes could include:

- depression, anxiety and mood changes, including social withdrawal and disassociation
- self-harm or attempted suicides
- poor self-care or personal hygiene
- harmful and volatile substance use
- over-compliance and eagerness to please
- aggressiveness and anger
- running away
- desexualisation – for example, wearing baggy clothes to hide their gender
- anxiety-related illnesses – such as anorexia or bulimia
- fear and avoidance of certain people and places.⁶⁴

For very young children, or children and young people with disability, there are extra things to consider:

- behavioural issues, particularly those the child or young person has not shown in the past – including emotional outbursts, self-harm and heightened aggression
- regression in developmental achievements
- developmental delays – for example, delayed speech, crawling or walking
- self-stimulatory behaviours – for example, rocking and head banging.

If a child or young person is a victim of grooming, blackmail or sexual exploitation, they may show some or all of the following signs:

- developing an unusually close connection with an older person
- arriving at school with gifts or money given by new friends or having large amounts of money that they cannot account for
- being very secretive about their phone, internet and social media use
- going missing for long periods or appearing at school extremely tired
- being dishonest about where they have been and who they were with
- substance abuse
- assuming a new name, having false identification, a stolen passport or driver's licence, or a new phone
- being collected from school by an older or new friend.⁶⁵

One key behavioural change that may indicate sexual abuse is a child or young person's display of harmful sexual behaviours. This could include:

- inappropriate or unusual sexual knowledge or behaviours



- drawings or descriptions of stories that are sexually explicit and not age-appropriate
- sexual behaviours directed towards themselves or other children or young people who:
 - are unexpected for their age or their stage of development
 - may cause developmental harm
 - are abusive, such as aggressive, explicit or sexual behaviour that takes advantage of others
- sexual behaviour with adults
- excessive concern with genitalia or sex
- problematic use of pornography
- engagement in unprotected sex
- sex with multiple sexual partners.⁶⁶

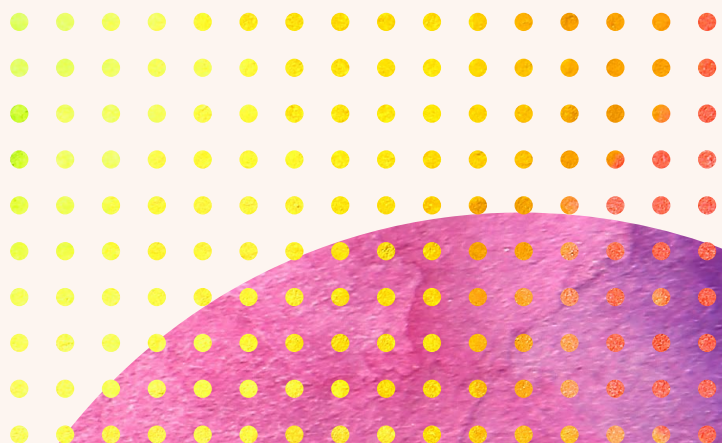
You can find more information about the indicators of sexual abuse in children and young people in Volume 4 of the Royal Commission's *Final Report* – '3.2 Indicators of sexual abuse in children'.⁶⁷

CHILDREN WITH HARMFUL SEXUAL BEHAVIOURS

Some children and young people may take part in sexual behaviours that harm themselves or others. The Royal Commission used the term 'harmful sexual behaviours' to cover a wide range of behaviours, from things that are inappropriate for the child's age and development to serious sexual assault. These behaviours can have devastating and lifelong effects on the child or young person, as well as any victims and survivors. However, we should not look at children and young people in the same way as adults, as far as their sexual, cognitive and emotional development, or their legal responsibilities go.⁶⁸ The Royal Commission stated that harmful sexual behaviours in children and young people can be determined by looking at:

- the context of the behaviours
- how severe the behaviours are
- the impact of the behaviours on others
- how different the behaviours are from what we would expect from healthy development.

The table on the next page shows examples of healthy sexual development.



Royal Commission Table 10.1: Expected sexual development in children, by age group⁶⁹

DEVELOPMENT STAGES	DESCRIPTION OF EXPECTED SEXUAL DEVELOPMENT AND BEHAVIOURS
0–4 years	Children may display exploratory behaviours – touching and looking at bodies are common. Children in this age group often like to be naked, and games such as ‘mummies and daddies’ may be played. Some children will touch their genitals as a way of comforting themselves.
5–7 years	Children may engage in more exploratory behaviours, ask questions about bodies and compare their bodies to those of their peers. They may have a greater desire for privacy. Gender socialisation is beginning. The main influences on socialisation are parents, carers and the community.
8–12 years	Children in this age group are asking more informed questions. Their knowledge about bodies, sexual behaviours and procreation is growing, although myths about sex and babies flourish, often because the influence of peers and older siblings. Puberty has begun for some children.
13–15 years	Children have the beginnings of fully developed adult bodies. More advanced relationship behaviours are displayed – attachments are longer in duration and generally occur one at a time. Consensual sexual activity with a partner of a similar age and developmental ability may occur. Some children may be comfortable with their sexuality, while others may struggle not to be seen as different. The viewing of materials such as online pornography for sexual pleasure is not unusual.
16–18 years	Children will have adult sexual knowledge and language and may engage in sexual behaviours that include oral sex and intercourse. These older children are more likely to be settling into longer-term relationships that include intimacy and a need for emotional closeness along with sexual desire and pleasure.

Children with harmful sexual behaviours are often victims or survivors themselves. They may have been affected by one or more adverse childhood experiences. These include:

- sexual, physical and emotional abuse
- neglect

- exposure to family violence
- exposure to and use of pornography.

Children with harmful sexual behaviours may have an intellectual impairment, learning difficulty, or neurodevelopmental disorder.

Appendix C – Links to legislation, policies and frameworks



LEGISLATION

There is a broad range of Australian, state and territory government laws related to child safety, child protection and child sexual abuse.

CRIMINAL LAW

Australia has an extensive criminal justice system to prevent, investigate and prosecute all forms of child sexual abuse. State and territory criminal laws include child sexual abuse offences. They also set an age of consent for sexual activities. Commonwealth law includes offences that happen through carriage and postal services in Australia and offences that Australians commit overseas. It is against Commonwealth law to import and export child abuse material. Commonwealth law also restricts reportable child sex offenders' ability to leave Australia without permission.

CHILD PROTECTION AND CHILD SAFETY LAWS

The states and territories are responsible for child protection laws and services. Child protection laws give courts, child protection agencies and authorities such as police, statutory powers to protect children and young people from harm or significant risk of harm. Child protection laws mean authorities can intervene in a family setting where there is an allegation of harm or significant risk of harm to a child or young person. In some situations, the intervention may mean legal guardianship or custody of a child or young person is transferred to another person or a government department. This option is only used once other options to protect the child or young person have been exhausted.

To keep children and young people safe, child protection laws mean that some professionals must report it if they suspect child abuse. In some states and territories, all adults must legally report it if they suspect child abuse.

Each state and territory has a working with children checks scheme. This makes sure that people who work or volunteer with children or young people do not pose an unacceptable risk to the safety of children and young people. A working with children check is an ongoing assessment of a person's eligibility to work or volunteer with children and young people. It includes a check of a person's criminal history, child protection history and other information.

NATIONAL REDRESS SCHEME

The National Redress Scheme for Institutional Child Sexual Abuse recognises the impact of past child sexual abuse that happened in an institution. It provides redress payments to eligible victims and survivors.

ONLINE SAFETY LEGISLATION

The Australian Government passed the *Online Safety Act 2021* (Cth) (Online Safety Act) on 23 June 2021. The Online Safety Act improves Australia's world-leading online safety framework by delivering new and stronger statutory schemes, functions and powers for the eSafety Commissioner.

The Online Safety Act includes an expanded cyberbullying scheme for children. This scheme will allow cyberbullying material to be removed from online platforms where children are now spending time, such as games, websites and messaging services, as well as social media platforms. The Online Safety Act introduces new requirements for industry to take down harmful content within 24 hours (rather than 48 hours) of receiving a removal notice from the eSafety Commissioner. This includes image-based abuse, cyberbullying material and seriously harmful content. The Online Safety Act gives the eSafety Commissioner improved information gathering powers. It allows the eSafety Commissioner to take steps to identify anonymous online accounts used to bully, abuse or humiliate others, or to exchange illegal content.

The Online Safety Act maintains and updates the Online Content Scheme. This scheme requires industry to keep their users safe online through updated industry codes or standards. Where ordered by the eSafety Commissioner, the scheme also requires industry to remove class 1 'refused classification' online content that is accessible to end-users in Australia, no matter where it is hosted.

These protections are backed by civil penalties for service providers who fail to comply. Parliament also passed the *Online Safety (Transitional Provisions and Consequential Amendments) Act 2021*. This Act increases maximum criminal penalties for using a carriage service to menace, harass or cause offence from 3 years in prison, to 5 years in prison.

CIVIL LAW

Civil law aims to restore a victim or affected person to the place they were before the event causing loss or harm happened. Under state and territory civil law systems, victims and survivors of child sexual abuse can seek personal damages.

YOUTH JUSTICE SYSTEM

The youth justice system manages children and young people who have committed, or allegedly committed, a criminal offence. Each state and territory has its own youth justice laws, policies and practices.

Having a separate justice system for children and young people recognises that they are different from adults regarding their:

- level of responsibility
- potential for rehabilitation
- need for protection.

Research shows that children and young people who have been abused or neglected are at greater risk of being involved in criminal activity and going into the youth justice system.⁷⁰

FAMILY LAW

Family law provides a legal system for resolving arrangements for children and young people after a relationship breakdown. It also allows for reporting risk and harm to state agencies, including

sexual harm and risk of sexual harm. A court can make parenting orders under family law that set up the parenting arrangements for a child or young person. This can include:

- living arrangements
- contact with each parent and significant others
- how a child or young person will communicate with a parent or significant other
- any other aspect of care.

The 'best interests of the child' is the court's key consideration when looking at parenting matters.

DOMESTIC AND FAMILY VIOLENCE LEGISLATION

Domestic and family violence laws aim to protect people, including children and young people, who fear, experience or are exposed to family violence. Domestic and family violence laws give police special powers to arrest, detain and search people in connection with protection orders. Domestic and family violence laws can also protect people suffering or witnessing family violence to give evidence and protect their identity.

COMMERCIAL, CORPORATE AND TAXATION LAWS

Commercial, corporate and taxation laws (where the latter relates to charity status) aim to make sure corporations are responsible for matters relating to child sexual abuse. This may include:

- hosting child sexual abuse on an online platform
- facilitating financial transactions related to child sexual abuse – including for child abuse materials
- liability for child sexual abuse perpetrated by a person connected to a corporation
- payment of redress, restitution and settlement of damages.

INTERNATIONAL ARRANGEMENTS

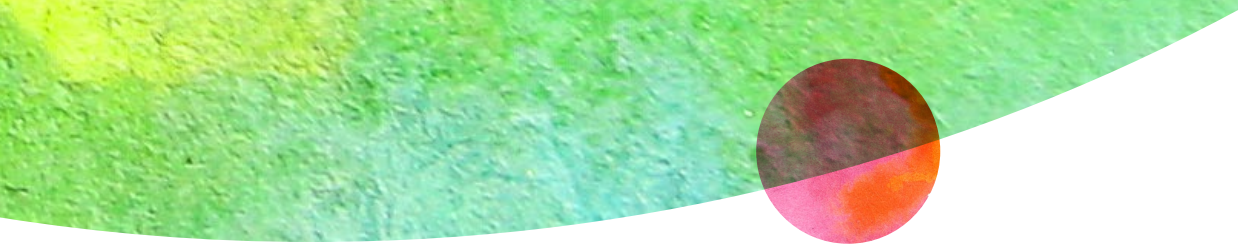
Measures under the National Strategy meet Australia's commitments under international law. This includes our commitment as a signatory to the United Nations *Convention on the Rights of the Child and its Optional Protocol on the Sale of Children, Child Prostitution and Child Pornography*.



POLICIES AND FRAMEWORKS

The National Strategy will be implemented alongside other policies and frameworks that make sure children and young people are safe and well in all areas of their lives. These include the following:

Child and youth wellbeing	Australian Student Wellbeing Framework 2018 www.StudentWellbeingHub.edu.au/Educators/Framework/ National Youth Policy Framework (forthcoming) National Standards for out-of-home care (2011) www.dss.gov.au/Our-Responsibilities/Families-And-Children/Publications-Articles/An-Outline-Of-National-Standards-For-Out-Of-Home-Care-2011
Safety	National Principles for Child Safe Organisations https://ChildSafety.pmc.gov.au/What-We-Do/National-Principles-Child-Safe-Organisations National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children 2010–2022 www.dss.gov.au/Women/Programs-Services/Reducing-Violence/The-National-Plan-To-Reduce-Violence-Against-Women-And-Their-Children-2010-2022 The National Plan to End Violence Against Women and Children (forthcoming) National Action Plan to Combat Modern Slavery 2020–2025 https://www.HomeAffairs.gov.au/Criminal-Justice/Files/Nap-Combat-Modern-Slavery-2020-25.pdf Second Australian National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security 2021–2031 www.dfat.gov.au/Publications/Australias-National-Action-Plan-On-Women-Peace-And-Security-2021-2031 Australian Federal Police Child Protection Plan 2020–2022 www.afp.gov.au/What-We-Do/Crime-Types/Child-Protection Safe and Supported: The National Framework for Protecting Australia’s Children 2021–2031 (forthcoming) National Quality Framework (for early childhood education and care) www.acecqa.gov.au/National-Quality-Framework National Integrity Framework https://www.SportIntegrity.gov.au/What-We-Do/National-Integrity-Framework
Online	Australia’s 2020 Cyber Security Strategy www.HomeAffairs.gov.au/About-Us/Our-Portfolios/Cyber-Security/Strategy Australia’s International Cyber and Critical Technology Engagement Strategy https://www.InternationalCybertech.gov.au/ eSafety Strategy 2019–2022 www.eSafety.gov.au/About-Us/Who-We-Are Best Practice Framework for Online Safety Education Stage 1 2020 www.eSafety.gov.au/About-Us/Research/Best-Practice-Framework-For-Online-Safety-Education Five Country Ministerial Voluntary Principles to Counter Online Child Sexual Exploitation and Abuse www.WeProtect.org/Library/Voluntary-Principles-To-Counter-Online-Child-Sexual-Exploitation-And-Abuse/



Health	National Children’s Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy (forthcoming) Healthy, Safe and Thriving: National Strategic Framework for Child and Youth Health 2015 www.CoagHealthCouncil.gov.au/Publications/Reports/ArtMID/514/ArticleID/89/Healthy-Safe-and-Thriving-National-Strategic-Framework-for-Child-and-Youth-Health National Action Plan for the Health of Children and Young People 2020–2030 (builds on framework above) www.Health.gov.au/Internet/Main/Publishing.nsf/Content/Child-And-Youth-Action-Plan The Fifth National Mental Health and Suicide Prevention Plan 2017–2022 www.MentalHealthCommission.gov.au/Monitoring-And-Reporting/Fifth-Plan/5th-National-Mental-Health-And-Suicide-Prevention
Priority population groups	National Agreement on Closing the Gap 2020 www.ClosingTheGap.gov.au/National-Agreement National Strategic Framework for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples’ Mental Health and Social and Emotional Wellbeing www.niaa.gov.au/resource-Centre/Indigenous-Affairs/National-Strategic-Framework-Mental-Health-Social-Emotional-Wellbeing-2017-23 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health and Cultural Safety Strategy 2020–2025 www.ahpra.gov.au/About-Ahpra/Aboriginal-and-Torres-Strait-Islander-Health-Strategy.aspx National Disability Strategy 2010–2020 www.dss.gov.au/Our-Responsibilities/Disability-And-Carers/Publications-Articles/Policy-Research/National-Disability-Strategy-2010-2020 Recommendations from the Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of people with Disability (forthcoming) National Disability Insurance Scheme Quality and Safeguarding Framework https://www.dss.gov.au/disability-and-carers/programs-services/for-people-with-disability/ndis-quality-and-safeguarding-framework

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