

Child sexual abuse training in Australia



What training is available and where do you get it?

Building the capability of the workforce who respond to victims and survivors of child sexual abuse through a range of training, learning and professional development activities is critical for victims and survivors to receive the services they require. What do we know about the training landscape to equip the workforce?

In a rapid workforce review undertaken by Nous Group, in collaboration with Blue Knot Foundation and the Australian Childhood Foundation and commissioned by the National Centre for Action on Child Sexual Abuse (the National Centre) in 2022, pre-service training (undergraduate and vocational courses), continuing professional development and informal or accredited training, as well as postgraduate qualifications in Australia, was examined in relation to content and knowledge about child sexual abuse. Based on this preliminary scanning of publicly available data, it was identified that:

- training is delivered by a range of providers from peak bodies, vocational education providers, registered training organisations, not-for-profits, through to universities
- pre-service training is very limited, which leaves a significant work-readiness gap, including training related to child sexual abuse and harmful sexual behaviour-specifically, and complex trauma therapeutic approaches for adults with child sexual abuse experiences
- it appears that child sexual abuse and harmful sexual behaviour-specific, and complex trauma training, is delivered by a small list of not-for-profit providers, and mostly through online self-paced modules and short webinars, with face-to-face and multi-day workshops being less common
- training costs vary depending on the length and complexity of the course for example \$200-\$500 for self-paced online modules, to \$5,000 for multi-day workshops and more than \$15,000 for qualifications.

What formal pre-service training is available and being used?

The National Centre's Learning and Development Survey undertaken in late 2022 asked participants if they believed that formal study adequately equipped them to respond effectively to child sexual abuse, harmful sexual behaviour and trauma-related impacts across the lifespan. Of the 1,032 participants who answered this question, indicating that they had completed an undergraduate, postgraduate or a formal program of study, only 9% said they believed their tertiary education had adequately equipped them with the required skills and knowledge to work in these areas. Of those who had completed tertiary education (at Masters and Bachelor level qualifications), most came from the fields of social work and social science; psychology, counselling, psychotherapy and play therapy; teaching and education; law and justice; and health.

An analysis concluded that some of the reasons for such low rates of knowledge acquisition about child sexual abuse, related to the fact that primary qualifications were in many cases completed some years ago, when child sexual abuse was not as readily identified or acknowledged. It is clear that embedding appropriate skill and knowledge within key undergraduate and postgraduate qualifications is now required.



What else do we know?

We know that training, particularly beyond pre-service level training, requires a blend of offerings that span formal study, accredited and non-accredited options and short courses and modules. Learning needs to be non-burdensome, include team-based and peer learning, and integrate supervision which can include knowledge transfer from senior staff. Workers need to have access to self-directed learning, appropriate resources and materials. The different options available for people to access knowledge must appreciate and consider workloads and life pressures, as well as clearly signpost where and how to access learning within a crowded and disconnected learning environment.

While there is a heavy focus on the training landscape, training is only one part of building workforce capability and capacity. The success of workforce capability building will be best supported by best practice training, tailored learning and development opportunities, and knowledge translation and exchange activities tailored to the needs of different workforces.

Please help us understand your learning needs by emailing us at practice@nationalcentre.org.au.