

Theory of Change

February 2024

This document has been developed by the leadership team at the National Centre to identify the scope of our efforts and guide our priorities. This Theory of Change applies to the establishment of the National Centre as a whole entity.

The problem statement

The issue – what is the issue/s to be addressed?

Summary of the need:

Child sexual abuse is a national crisis that must be addressed. The statistics are alarming, with 1 in 3 girls, and 1 in 5 boys (28.5% of Australian adults) having experienced child sexual abuse (Australian Child Maltreatment Study). Child sexual abuse is associated with lifelong health, psychosocial, financial and economic impacts at individual, family, community and broader societal levels. People who experience child sexual abuse are also more likely to be victims of other forms of abuse over their lifetime. 1 in 3 girls, and 1 in 5 boys are being harmed as children from all backgrounds (Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD), First Nations, disability, religious, socio-economic and geographic locations). There are also significant lifelong impacts associated with complex trauma when victims and survivors are not appropriately responded to or supported to disclose, heal and recover from abuse.

Who – who experiences this problem?

- *Children, young people and adult victims and survivors of Child Sexual Abuse (CSA)*
 - *Children / young people engaging in Harmful Sexual Behaviours (HSB)*
 - *The parents, carers, family members and community members associated with victims and survivors of CSA and those engaging in HSB.*
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What – what are their experiences?

'Here for Change' articulates the highest priority issues (seven key challenges) to be addressed:

1. CSA and its effects across the lifespan of victims and survivors are not well understood nor identified in the community.
2. People with lived and living experiences of CSA are often not believed and responded to with compassion.
3. Children, young people and adults with experiences of CSA (or their parents or carers) are often not identified, protected or well supported when they raise concerns or disclose.
4. Children and young people who have displayed HSB require adults to better understand and meet their needs.
5. Victims and survivors of CSA are often unable to access the support and resources that meet their changing needs at different times in their lives.
6. Knowledge about complex and intergenerational trauma and dissociation does not generally inform responses to individuals with lived and living experiences of CSA.
7. CSA will not be stopped unless there is a comprehensive framework for addressing the power dynamics and factors which enable it.

Actions to realise change

Actions – what actions will be taken?

To address each of the key challenges, as articulated in its Operating and Business Plan, the National Centre will implement activities across **five functional areas**:

- Leadership and collaboration
 - Awareness raising
 - Stigma reduction
 - Capacity building
 - Research and evaluation
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How – how will this drive change? What is the mechanism for change?

The National Centre will ensure the needs of diverse and priority groups (First Nations, CALD, LGBTIQ+, people with lived experience of other complex trauma, family and domestic violence, forced adoption, care leavers, people with disability) are adequately covered. This will be done through the use of participatory, action research, partnership, collaborative and co-design approaches across multiple sectors and settings to target appropriate and relevant audiences/cohorts with resources, education, training, modelling and other interventions, in order to increase knowledge, skills and capabilities/competencies, and positively influence beliefs, values, attitudes and behaviours.

Enablers and opportunities – why do we believe that this theory of change will work and achieve expected results?

A key enabler is the establishment of the National Centre as a prominent entity to focus discussions and activities on child sexual abuse as an issue in its own right, distinct from adult-focused family and domestic violence, gendered violence and sexual violence. By co-ordinating with and acting complementary to these other areas, over time, the National Centre's efforts will disrupt the dynamics that have failed to **stop** child sexual abuse and have prevented victims and survivors from being **believed**, validated and **supported** in their recovery and healing.

Co-design/engagement – what engagement will be undertaken to co-design with people? Other key engagement activities?

The National Centre is uniquely placed to engage with people with lived experience of CSA. It has the mechanisms and processes to create the trusted relationships necessary for meaningful engagement, consultation, partnerships, collaboration and co-design activities, which will underpin all National Centre activities and operations.

Risks and barriers

The intended impacts and outcomes are complex, multi-faceted and long term at individual, community and societal levels, and there are significant barriers and inter-dependencies at all levels. Achieving these will rely on having effective ongoing and inter-sectoral partnerships, engaging with lived experience, and delivering activities with a considered and stepped approach.

Impacts

The National Centre seeks to have impacts across the five functional areas to address all seven key challenges. The National Centre's ultimate goal and vision is for a community where all children are **safe** and victims and survivors are supported to **heal** and recover, free of stigma and shame – **a future without child sexual abuse**.

The specific outcomes across the short, medium and longer term are articulated on the following five slides, grouped by functional area, with reference to the key challenges they seek to address.

Key challenges: 1-7

Functional area: leadership and collaboration

Short-term outcomes (2-3 years)	Medium-term outcomes (3-5 years)	The change we want to see (5+ years)
<p>The National Centre shows leadership, collaboration and responsiveness towards multiple stakeholders and cohorts in its design and delivery of its offerings and activities (e.g. resources, training, tools, discussion pieces).</p> <p>Cross-sector engagements and partnerships (such as with professional groups, education, victims and survivors and community groups) effectively foster conversations, build knowledge and create trauma-informed, safe spaces for conversations about CSA.</p> <p>Identification and dissemination of the preferences and needs of victims and survivors to be effective as advocates and leaders to share and engage in CSA-related activities and dialogues, e.g. communication strategy and best practice engagement guidelines developed to help channel and amplify victims and survivor voices.</p> <p>The National Centre makes progress in formalising partnerships identified as critical to stigma reduction, amplifying lived experience and forming a comprehensive evidence base.</p>	<p>Increased uptake of National Centre training, professional development resources and activities by the target cohorts/audiences, including increased uptake and quantum of tailored resources provided in community and public spaces.</p> <p>Key partnerships are operating effectively to inform the design, delivery and uptake of activities related to having safe and supportive conversations about CSA, HSB and associated life-long complex trauma.</p> <p>Stories and profiles of a diverse array of victims and survivors are publicly accessible to increase community understanding of CSA, reducing shame and stigma and encouraging appropriate disclosures.</p> <p>The National Centre is valued and sought out as a leader and trusted resource for building, translating and disseminating evidence and research findings (measurable through citations, partnerships, web hits, hashtags, conference presentations etc.).</p> <p>The preferred ways of communicating about CSA, HSB, complex and intergenerational trauma are known, accepted and utilised in key sectors such as research, health, social services and the media.</p>	<p>Victims and survivors receive the support they need, when and where they need it, to recover, heal and live fulfilling lives</p> <p>Providers across workforces are better equipped to respond to the complex needs of victim and survivors because:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - CSA is understood and discussed as an issue in its own right, distinct from gendered violence - CSA is embedded as part of all relevant education and training programs. <p>Health and ageing, community and justice systems are more aware of and responsive to people who have experienced child sexual abuse.</p> <p>Community members, leaders, decision-makers and service providers hold contemporary knowledge about how victims and survivors disclose their abuse experiences and seek support, leading to appropriate, trauma-informed and compassionate responses to promote victim-survivor and family wellbeing.</p> <p>More services and practitioners are better equipped to meet the support and therapeutic needs of victims and survivors of child sexual abuse.</p> <p>The National Centre is a respected thought leader and change agent.</p>

Key challenges: 2, 3 and 6

Functional area: awareness raising

Short-term outcomes (2-3 years)	Medium-term outcomes (3-5 years)	The change we want to see (5+ years)
<p>A communications strategy and best practice engagement guidelines are developed to help channel and amplify victim-survivor voices.</p> <p>The National Centre makes progress in formalising partnerships identified as critical to awareness raising and stigma reduction, amplifying lived experience and forming a comprehensive evidence base.</p> <p>The National Centre appropriately surveys and evaluates community attitudes and services against identified needs, (e.g. to assess child focus, extent of being trauma-informed, and informed about complex trauma, dissociation and intergenerational trauma).</p> <p>The National Centre starts to develop and disseminate knowledge resources, builds partnerships and effectively communicates to increase the focus on children and trauma and promote greater focus and compassion in relation to complex and intergenerational trauma and impacts over the lifespan.</p>	<p>The National Centre has provided guidance and support for the creation of culturally and age-appropriate, safe spaces for CSA to be discussed across more settings and for diverse cohorts.</p> <p>The National Centre's resources, tools and engagements with formal partners are resulting in more people feeling supported and more confident about discussing CSA matters and receiving informed responses (focused on victims and survivors, community members and those working in child-focused professions).</p> <p>The National Centre's commissioned research is translated into resources that are accessed by the service sector and broader community, focused on detection and identification of CSA, how to engage in supportive discussions, and how to provide effective support across the victim and survivor's lifespan.</p> <p>The National Centre's research and partnerships with higher education, vocational providers and professional bodies are supporting development of activities towards adoption of CSA and complex trauma-related content and curricula.</p>	<p>Victims and survivors of child sexual abuse, including those experiencing complex and intergenerational trauma, feel seen, believed and supported in ways that help them to heal with strength and connections to others.</p> <p>Community members and service providers hold contemporary knowledge about how victims and survivors disclose their abuse experiences and seek support, leading to greater victim and survivor wellbeing.</p> <p>The community is more compassionate and trauma-aware and there is a reduction in community member's harmful, stigmatising attitudes, beliefs and behaviours towards victims and survivors.</p> <p>The service system (health, ageing, legal etc.) is operating in trauma-informed and evidence-informed ways for CSA victims and survivors.</p> <p>The National Centre's resources and activities enable more services to self-assess and implement evidence-based, including therapeutic, interventions that are shown to be effective.</p>

Key challenges: 3, 4, and 5

Functional area: stigma reduction

Short-term outcomes (2-3 years)	Medium-term outcomes (3-5 years)	The change we want to see (5+ years)
<p>Community and workforce resources and tools are developed through collaboration and partnerships with stakeholders including service providers, experts and community leaders, to amplify the voices of victims and survivors and illuminate their stories, in order to reduce stigma and dispel harmful attitudes and behaviours.</p> <p>The National Centre has surveyed the community perceptions and attitudes towards victims and survivors of CSA and this data drives activities to reduce stigma and shame of victims and survivors.</p> <p>The National Centre engages with media, community leaders, legal experts and others to promote CSA as a children's rights and victims' human rights issue.</p>	<p>National Centre evidence and activity to increase community and service providers' knowledge of CSA translates into earlier disclosures and reporting of instances of CSA and improved responses to, and support for, victims and survivors across the lifespan.</p> <p>The community's attitudes and beliefs towards children and young people, adult victims and survivors of CSA are more compassionate, less harmful and non-stigmatising.</p> <p>The National Centre's voice actively and effectively communicates its position on child rights and CSA impacts:</p> <p>The National Centre's formal engagements with the legal sector and others results in specific strategies that elevate awareness of children's rights, as they relate to CSA, and the human rights of victims and survivors including lifelong impacts.</p>	<p>Community members and service providers hold contemporary knowledge about CSA and how victims and survivors disclose their abuse experiences and seek support, leading to improved responses and greater victim and survivor wellbeing.</p> <p>The community is more compassionate and trauma-aware and there is a reduction in community members' harmful, stigmatising attitudes, beliefs and behaviours towards victims and survivors across the lifespan.</p> <p>Due to reduced stigma and increased understanding and awareness of the needs of victims and survivors, there is a reduction in the average time taken to disclose CSA and therefore earlier and more informed opportunities to promote healing and recovery.</p>

Key challenges: 5, 6, and 7

Functional area: capacity building

Short-term outcomes (2-3 years)	Medium-term outcomes (3-5 years)	The change we want to see (5+ years)
<p>The National Centre maps the service systems that victims and survivors of CSA engage with over the course of their lives, and identify opportunities for upskilling in trauma-informed practice across these systems.</p> <p>The National Centre leverages its own research and key partnerships to explore practical options for increased understanding of CSA as a child-rights issue, promoting the rights of children and contributing to prevention efforts.</p> <p>The National Centre draws on its own research and key partnerships to identify current capacity building needs related to access and support gaps and barriers facing victims and survivors at different times in their lives.</p> <p>The National Centre develops training and other resources to build capabilities around complex and intergenerational trauma and dissociation, and disseminates information, training and resources across a range of sectors, platforms and languages.</p>	<p>The National Centre has engaged in broad outreach to increase capacity in a range of service contexts relevant to the lives of victims and survivors (e.g. educational institutions, workers unions, healthcare, early childhood services, therapeutic and counselling services etc.).</p> <p>The National Centre has further built capacity to enhance the understanding of the power dynamics and factors that enable CSA, including the need for potential legal and structural reforms.</p> <p>The National Centre has expanded its own capacity to engage with lived and living experiences of CSA across a range of diverse cohorts and integrates victims' and survivors' voices in all its activities.</p>	<p>Greater community, sectors and service-system awareness of CSA and its lifetime impacts is associated with safer, more supportive and trauma-informed workplaces and institutions for victims and survivors of CSA.</p> <p>Greater community and sector capacity to identify, prevent and support healing for victims and survivors across the lifespan, including those with experiences of complex and intergenerational trauma and dissociation.</p> <p>Service responses are trauma-informed and proactively supportive of children's rights, victims' and survivors' human rights, and their diverse and evolving needs.</p> <p>There have been meaningful structural and attitudinal changes associated with challenging and disrupting the power dynamics and other factors which enable CSA and perpetuate harm on victims and survivors.</p> <p>More services and practitioners are better equipped to meet the support and therapeutic needs of CSA victims and survivors.</p>

Key challenges: 1-7

Functional area: research and evaluation

Short-term outcomes (2-3 years)	Medium-term outcomes (3-5 years)	The change we want to see (5+ years)
<p>The National Centre commissions and conducts research and evaluations that address key evidence gaps to create a comprehensive, robust and contemporary publicly-available evidence base to inform policy, practice and decision making.</p> <p>The National Centre spearheads (through its own activities and partnership approaches) the translation of research and evidence into resources and practical tools to address the seven key challenges, including building the capability and capacity of workforces to contribute to prevention and support efforts.</p> <p>The National Centre identifies key indicators against which to collect data and measure changing community attitudes and knowledge regarding CSA.</p>	<p>The National Centre has developed evidence-informed resources to address the seven key challenges and emerging issues,</p> <p>The National Centre has established an accessible repository of translatable and applied CSA-related evidence for use by victims and survivors, community members, researchers, government stakeholders and relevant professionals, for knowledge and information, planning, decision-making and identifying emerging trends and future challenges.</p> <p>The National Centre utilises quality improvement and evaluative approaches for continuous improvement and innovation.</p>	<p>The National Centre’s research and evaluation activities build the evidence base and research capabilities, have impacts on decision-making at all levels and contribute to societal change.</p> <p>The National Centre is a recognised and trusted authority regarding CSA-related evidence creation and translation, including conducting ethical and trauma-informed research that is participatory, safe for victims and survivors, and advocates for their needs.</p>



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