

30 July 2026

Mr Michael Manthorpe PSM
National Redress Scheme Eighth Anniversary Review

Dear Mr Manthorpe

I am writing to provide you with a submission from the National Centre for Action on Child Sexual Abuse to the eighth anniversary review of the National Redress Scheme.

The National Centre welcomes this independent review and is pleased that it will focus on priority areas for improvement, what should be prioritised as the Scheme approaches closure, and what lessons can inform future supports for victim-survivors. We also welcome the review considering past reviews and submissions to the current Joint Standing Committee (JSC) inquiry.

The National Centre made a submission to the JSC inquiry in March 2026 and appeared at a public hearing on 8 April 2026. Our submission to the JSC was developed drawing on insights from the National Centre's Lived Experience team, the National Centre's Lived Experience Advisers and submissions from people with lived experience to the National Centre's *Voices for Action* campaign. Our submission includes recommendations articulated directly by people with lived experience of child sexual abuse.

Our submission is attached for consideration by the eighth anniversary review, along with the opening statements made by myself and by three of our Lived Experience Advisers at the 8 April public hearing of the JSC.

As stated in our submission, the National Centre acknowledges that, for some victim-survivors of child sexual abuse, the National Redress Scheme has been life-changing and has provided the recognition, healing and compensation they needed.

However, we continue to hear that some victim-survivors still face challenges in accessing the Scheme; in obtaining sufficient support to navigate the process; and in receiving what they feel to be an outcome that appropriately acknowledges the harms they have suffered. Victim-survivors also continue to report varied experiences with the Scheme, including harmful experiences. That these inconsistencies remain suggests there is still significant room for improvement in ensuring that all victim-survivors who apply to the Scheme experience a trauma-informed process and they are able to access the support they need to navigate it without it causing them further harm.

In our attached submission, we address the following key concerns:

- The prospect that some victim-survivors may miss out on receiving redress due to a lack of awareness of the Scheme or inaccessibility of adequate support, including culturally safe support, to apply by the legislated closing date.
- The need for advance planning to ensure that redress support services are provided with funding certainty and can provide continuity of support to victim-survivors navigating the Scheme until its closure.
- The need to provide options and supports for groups that may miss out on accessing redress under the Scheme altogether – in particular, children and young people.

- The need for a thorough consideration of what ongoing supports are needed by victim-survivors of all forms of child sexual abuse – not just institutional abuse – outside and beyond the life of the Scheme.

The National Centre continues to recommend that:

- The Australian Government and state and territory governments should ensure that all victim-survivors who wish to apply to the Scheme have the opportunity to do so, by extending the current legislated application closure date of 30 June 2027 by two years and urgently launching a public awareness campaign to ensure that victim-survivors are aware of the new application closing date.
- This extension should be used as an opportunity to address the known issues with the Scheme's implementation that have been raised by people with lived experience of child sexual abuse in submissions, by the JSC and by other key stakeholders. This should include addressing the particular support needs of Stolen Generations victim-survivors.
- The Australian Government should ensure that additional funding is allocated in advance to ensure that redress support services will be sufficiently resourced to provide support to Scheme applicants until all applications are fully finalised and all redress outcomes are delivered, noting this is likely to occur well beyond the current legislated Scheme end date in July 2028.

We also continue to advocate for reforms outside the Scheme, to ensure that victim-survivors who cannot, or choose not to, access the Scheme have real alternatives to obtain some form of justice for the abuse they experienced as children – and can access the supports they need to heal.

We consistently hear from victim-survivors that current systems do not reflect the lifelong nature of the harms caused by child sexual abuse; are difficult to navigate; and often fail to provide timely, continuous and safe support. Victim-survivors emphasise the need for support that is available across the lifespan, does not require repeated disclosure and is grounded in trust, safety and choice.

Based on these lived experience insights, the National Centre's position is that lifelong access to support for victim-survivors of child sexual abuse must be embedded as a core principle of national policy and service system design. This requires urgent system-level reform and sustained, coordinated investment in integrated, survivor-centred supports. Importantly, these reforms must be co-designed with victim-survivors of child sexual abuse, ensuring they reflect lived experience, support diverse needs and enable recovery over time.

The National Centre recommends that the Australian, state and territory governments:

- implement major system-level reforms and integration to address fragmentation, establish lifelong eligibility for support and build coordinated responses across sectors
- address existing gaps in victim-survivor support by properly funding, under the Second Action Plan of the *National Strategy to Prevent and Respond to Child Sexual Abuse 2021-2030*, a nationally consistent Lifespan Supports Program for victim-survivor healing and recovery.

These reforms are detailed further in Recommendation 9 in our submission.

Thank you for your consideration of these issues as part of your review.

Kind regards,



Dr Janine Bush
Chief Executive Officer

ATTACHMENTS:

- Submission by the National Centre to the Joint Standing Committee inquiry into the continuing operation of the National Redress Scheme, March 2026
- Opening statements made to the 8 April 2026 public hearing of the Joint Standing Committee inquiry by:
 - National Centre CEO, Dr Janine Bush
 - National Centre Lived Experience Adviser, Mrs Laura-Jane Phoenix Singh
 - National Centre Lived Experience Adviser, Ms Sandra Collins
 - National Centre Lived Experience Adviser, Mr Robbie Gambley

Submission to the Joint Standing Committee

**Inquiry into the continuing operation
of the National Redress Scheme**

March 2026



Acknowledgements

The National Centre for Action on Child Sexual Abuse (National Centre) respectfully acknowledges and celebrates Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Nations and we pay our respects to ancestors and Elders past and present.

We recognise that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, culture and lore continue to lead Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and acknowledge the tireless work to pursue justice outcomes for children and young people.

The National Centre supports decisions affecting people's lives being fundamentally informed by those people. And upholds truth telling and agreement making for justice as essential components of healing.

We seek to honour the lived and living expertise of all victim-survivors of child sexual abuse, harnessing all ages, cultures, abilities and backgrounds, and commit to substantially addressing the harm of child sexual abuse, now and well into the future.

We recognise that there are children and young people today who are experiencing sexual abuse and dedicate ourselves to doing all we can to expedite and promote their effective protection and care.

Our Commitment

The establishment of a national centre to raise awareness and understanding of the impacts of child sexual abuse, support help-seeking and guide best practice advocacy and support and therapeutic treatment was a key recommendation (9.9) of the 2017 Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse. The Royal Commission identified that ongoing national leadership is necessary to improve outcomes for victim-survivors of past child sexual abuse and to prevent future child sexual abuse.

Established in late 2021, the National Centre is a partnership between three respected organisations with strong histories of leadership in responding to child sexual abuse - Australian Childhood Foundation, Blue Knot Foundation and the Healing Foundation (each a Founding Member). The National Centre has an integrated governance structure that embeds the expertise of adults with lived and living experience of child sexual abuse, the rich strength of knowledge of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and the voices of children and young people, as well as the expertise of researchers, practitioners, justice organisations, corporate entities, government and policy leaders.

At its core, the National Centre is a symbol of hope and an essential vehicle for action for many victim-survivors of child sexual abuse. Its vision is for a community where children are safe and victim-survivors are supported to heal and recover, free of stigma and shame – a future without child sexual abuse.

To achieve its vision, the National Centre:

- ensures the knowledge and voice of victim-survivors of child sexual abuse is at the core of all of its activities
- commissions critical research
- builds the workforce capability of organisations working with victim-survivors of child sexual abuse
- strives to raise community awareness of the nature of child sexual abuse and how to prevent it.

A note on terminology

In this submission, we have used the terms:

- **victim-survivor** to refer to people who have experienced child sexual abuse. This includes those who are alive and with us today, and those who are no longer with us. In line with a trauma-informed approach, we acknowledge that victim-survivors have the right to define their identity, and the terms “victim” and “survivor” can for some be considered as existing on a continuum of recovery. We also recognise that some people may not identify with either of these terms.
- **LGBTIQA+SB** to refer to Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Intersex, Queer and Asexual people and Sistergirls and Brotherboys.

For further reference, we have developed the Child Sexual Abuse Language Guide, designed for anyone working in child protection, policy, practice, education, healthcare, research, justice or communications.¹ It provides language informed by victim-survivors and definitions that are respectful, inclusive and trauma-informed. The guide reflects the perspectives of more than 100 victim-survivors of child sexual abuse, who identified terms that reduce harm and support recovery and those that should be avoided.

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About this submission

The National Centre makes this submission to the Joint Standing Committee on Implementation of the National Redress Scheme (Committee) in its Inquiry into the continuing operation of the National Redress Scheme.

This submission focuses on the following terms of reference:

- the Scheme's operational timeline, and the potential for this timeline to be extended
- the accessibility, funding, and transition plans for support services as the Scheme concludes
- any other matters associated with the conclusion of the National Redress Scheme that survivors would like to make known to the Committee.

Recognising the experience, insights, and expertise of victim-survivors of child sexual abuse, the National Centre consulted with Lived Experience Advisers to understand and convey their views to the Committee. Their insights are reflected in this submission and its recommendations. We thank them for giving generously of their time and expertise.

Overview and recommendations

The establishment of a survivor-focused redress scheme was a key recommendation of the Royal Commission.² The creation of the National Redress Scheme is, in many ways, a major achievement to be applauded. However, at the same time, the Scheme has faced numerous challenges in meeting the needs and expectations of victim-survivors of child sexual abuse.

In its 2024 report, *Redress: Journey to Justice*, the Committee highlighted numerous ways in which the Scheme was not meeting the needs or expectations of victim-survivors.³ The National Centre has heard similar concerns from people with lived experience of child sexual abuse, as described below in 'What we heard from victim-survivors'.

In making this submission and its recommendations, the National Centre aims to:

- elevate the voices and views of those with lived experience of child sexual abuse in the national conversation around redress for victim-survivors
- ensure that all victim-survivors of institutional child sexual abuse who wish to do so have the opportunity to apply to the Scheme
- ensure that all victim-survivors of child sexual abuse are provided with appropriate and adequate supports throughout the remainder of the Scheme and beyond it.

Recommendations by people with lived experience of child sexual abuse:

The following recommendations have been articulated directly by people with lived experience of child sexual abuse through consultation with the National Centre, and are submitted to the Committee as calls for change led by victim-survivors, which the National Centre supports:

1. Institutional vulnerability under the National Redress Scheme should be automatically recognised for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander applicants, including recognition of cultural loss and intergenerational harm as extreme circumstances warranting maximum redress.
2. There should be a national commitment to building Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander specific child sexual abuse services across advocacy, legal support, therapeutic care and cultural healing – services that are designed and led by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.
3. Redress, civil litigation and criminal justice systems and processes should be reformed to build in safeguards to ensure that victim-survivors are not re-traumatised by navigating these systems and processes. Victim-survivors navigating these systems and processes must have access to free, culturally safe, trauma-informed therapeutic support throughout the entire journey.
4. Non-state wards who were 'voluntarily' placed into care arrangements with the knowledge of government authorities should be recognised as care-leavers under the National Redress Scheme.
5. Victim-survivors of child sexual abuse in all settings, not just institutional settings, should have access to funded legal advice and support for considering and navigating their legal options, including the National Redress Scheme.

Additional recommendations by the National Centre:

6. The Australian Government and state and territory governments should ensure that all victim-survivors who wish to apply to the National Redress Scheme have the opportunity to do so, by extending the current legislated application closure date of 30 June 2027 by two years and urgently launching a public awareness campaign to ensure that victim-survivors are aware of the new application closing date.

This extension should be used as an opportunity to address the known issues with the Scheme's implementation that have been raised by people with lived experience of child sexual abuse in this submission, by the Committee and by other key stakeholders. This should include addressing the particular support needs of Stolen Generations victim-survivors.

7. The Australian Government should ensure that additional funding is allocated in advance to ensure that redress support services will be sufficiently resourced to provide support to applicants to the National Redress Scheme until all applications are fully finalised and all redress outcomes are delivered, noting this is likely to occur well beyond the current legislated end date of the Scheme in July 2028.
8. The Australian Government should ensure that the legislated eighth anniversary review of the National Redress Scheme is conducted in an open and transparent manner which provides opportunities for victim-survivors, along with other key stakeholders, to contribute their views on matters including the ongoing support needs of victim-survivors of child sexual abuse beyond the Scheme.

9. The Australian, state and territory governments should address existing gaps in victim-survivor support by properly funding, under the Second Action Plan of the *National Strategy to Prevent and Respond to Child Sexual Abuse 2021-2030*, a nationally consistent Lifespan Supports Program for victim-survivor healing and recovery. The model and approach should be co-designed with victim-survivors of child sexual abuse.

A properly funded Lifespan Supports Program should enable support, recovery and healing services to be embedded in trauma-responsive and culturally safe community services across Australia:

- Where services already exist, the Program would fill critical service gaps and/or cut waitlists.
- Where local capacity does not already exist, the Program would enable the funding of new or expanded services.

The Lifespan Supports Program should include the following minimum service and model elements (subject to co-design with victim-survivors):

- Ensure access to free, trauma-responsive, culturally safe specialist supports including counselling, peer support and community-based healing programs. This should include adequate funding for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander specific services and healing practices.
- Enable victim-survivors to access, re-enter or transition between supports as their needs change over their lifetime, through a flexible and responsive service model that recognises that recovery is not linear and victim-survivors may need support over the course of their life in different ways. The model should enable re-entry to services without time limits or the need for repeated disclosure or reassessment processes.
- Facilitate integrated care models including providing referrals to other supports across the service system while maintaining continuity and case management within the Lifespan Supports Program.
- Prioritise place-based service delivery that recognises the specific needs of victim-survivors, including priority populations including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, LGBTIQA+SB communities, culturally and racially marginalised communities, migrant, refugee and diasporic communities, people with disability and incarcerated people, ensuring services are accessible across urban, regional, rural and remote areas.
- Embed lived and living experience and expertise within the service system including through models of peer support.

10. The Australian Government and state and territory governments should ensure that national action addressing child sexual abuse for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples is grounded in sovereignty, self-determination and community-controlled leadership. This should include:

- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander led design, governance and delivery that centre the skills, wisdom and knowledges of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in all prevention, intervention and responses
- recognition of relationship and trust building (key cultural aspects of service design and delivery) as valuable outcomes in metrics for funding
- adherence to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander data sovereignty principles.

Sustained and adequate funding should be provided to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander governed and led organisations to:

- support place-based service delivery models informed by community-centred Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander healing approaches (physical, psychological, spiritual and cultural), with recognition of the impacts of colonisation, forced child removal and intergenerational trauma
- expand and embed culturally led resources across all sectors and service providers nationally.

Background: The need for a victim-survivor focused redress scheme

Many survivors discussed the need for appropriate redress for what had happened to them. They said redress schemes needed to acknowledge the trauma of children who had been sexually abused in institutions, and noted the importance of recognising and remembering what had happened in a way that would help child sexual abuse survivors in the future. They wanted redress schemes to be efficient and straightforward, and for institutions and those responsible for the abuse to bear the cost.

Royal Commission, Final Report, Volume 5, p302

The Royal Commission heard from thousands of victim-survivors of child sexual abuse. Most described how institutions responded to their experiences of abuse in ways that affected them negatively. Many said that redress, including compensation, was an important element of addressing the injustice they had experienced. Some spoke about the re-traumatising effects of seeking redress from the institutions in which their abuse took place. According to the Royal Commission, 'it was clear that victims' recovery and healing was tied to the nature of the response they received to disclosure and in seeking redress'.⁴

In making its recommendations, the Royal Commission emphasised why a redress scheme was needed:

'Our case studies and private sessions to date leave us in no doubt that many people, while children, were injured by being subjected to child sexual abuse in institutions or in connection with institutions. In some cases, their injuries are severe and long lasting. People can be affected by these injuries for the rest of their lives.

Because of the nature and impact of the abuse they suffered, many victims of child sexual abuse have not had the opportunity to seek compensation for their injuries that many Australians generally can take for granted. While it cannot now be made feasible for many of those who have experienced institutional child sexual abuse to seek common law damages, there is a clear need to provide avenues for survivors to obtain effective redress for this past abuse.'⁵

The Royal Commission recommended a redress scheme that would 'provide equal access and equal treatment for survivors – regardless of the location, operator, type, continued existence or assets of the institution in which they were abused'.⁶

Based on what was learned by the Royal Commission, the National Redress Scheme Act includes guiding principles for the Scheme, including that:

- Redress should be survivor-focussed.
- Redress should be assessed, offered and provided with appropriate regard to: what is known about the nature and impact of child sexual abuse, and institutional child sexual abuse in particular; the cultural needs of survivors; and the needs of particularly vulnerable survivors.
- Redress should be assessed, offered and provided so as to avoid, as far as possible, further harming or traumatising the survivor.⁷

In its 2024 report, *Redress: Journey to Justice*, the Committee noted the expectations of victim-survivors in relation to the Scheme. The Committee acknowledged what the Scheme has achieved for many victim-survivors and recognised the hard work and effort that go into administering the Scheme.⁸ However, the Committee also highlighted numerous ways in which the Scheme was not meeting the needs or expectations of victim-survivors, including:

- that applying for redress was complex and had been a traumatic experience for many victim-survivors
- that redress outcomes took too long and were sometimes unexpected, unfair or inconsistent
- that some victim-survivors need reasonable adjustments to be able to engage with the Scheme
- that redress support services were overwhelmed with requests for help.⁹

The National Centre has heard similar concerns from people with lived experience of child sexual abuse, as described below in ‘What we heard from victim-survivors’.

The particular needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander victim-survivors

What we do have is our memory of being removed. Our siblings saw the abuse. That was the evidence. But that’s not the kind of evidence the Scheme wants.

Hanina Rind; Yamatji, Badimaya and Balouchi Muslim woman;
Principal Lawyer and Survivor Advocate at Yarn Legal

The Healing Foundation, one of the National Centre’s three Founding Members, is the national organisation that platforms and elevates the voices and lived experiences of Stolen Generations victim-survivors, their families, and their communities. The Healing Foundation works closely with victim-survivors and communities to create environments for people to tell their stories and drive their healing. The Healing Foundation has made a standalone submission to the Committee’s inquiry. This submission refers to some aspects of The Healing Foundation’s submission.

The Royal Commission identified the overrepresentation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people as survivors of child sexual abuse.¹⁰ The Royal Commission’s final report noted that the ‘the legacy of colonisation and forced removal of children is part of the experience of many of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander survivors’.¹¹

Prior to the Royal Commission, the National Inquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children from Their Families was a groundbreaking process of truth-telling in Australia, where Stolen Generations survivors’ voices were elevated, and the intergenerational impacts of their experiences of removal were heard across the nation. That inquiry identified a direct link between removal, experiences of abuse, and the ongoing intergenerational impacts of trauma.

The nature of forced removal of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children under previous governments’ policies means that a significantly high proportion of Stolen Generations were exposed to abuse as children while institutionalised.

Around a third of applicants to the National Redress Scheme identify as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander.¹² This is a high proportion of applicants and grossly disproportionate to the general Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population in Australia, which is 3.8%.¹³

Stolen Generations victim-survivors are a critical group for the Scheme. They have unique and specific needs resulting from their forced removal, exposure to abuse, and the ongoing impacts of colonisation, including racism and discrimination, that must be met by the Scheme to ensure equitable and safe access to redress and to meet the Scheme's objectives of impact alleviation and justice.

The Committee's 2024 report, *Redress: Journey to Justice*, identified key issues with the Scheme and identified Stolen Generations victim-survivors as a cohort likely to be impacted by those issues.¹⁴ The primary concerns relevant to Stolen Generations victim-survivors are briefly summarised as follows:

- access to the Scheme: lack of culturally and/or linguistically appropriate information and support, exacerbated by inconsistent and/or confusing information
- limited support services for the application, assessment, and outcome stages
- application form: difficult, lengthy, bureaucratic and re-traumatising
- outcomes: inconsistent, unfair, and lacking transparency.

The National Centre has heard similar concerns from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander victim-survivors and people who have supported them with redress applications, as described below.

What we heard from victim-survivors

Views of Lived Experience Advisers

I trusted the government and the Royal Commission after giving evidence, but they did not respect survivors of child sexual abuse and nothing changed...

The Royal Commissioners recommended \$200,000, which never should have been lowered to \$150,000 – it was never enough, and rarely does anyone get the maximum amount...

The National Redress Scheme has just been difficult for so many people, especially those who are older, and it's, as I said, to me, it's a shame, and it hurts.

Robbie Gambley, Lived Experience Survivor

Recognising the experience, insights, and expertise of victim-survivors of child sexual abuse, the National Centre consulted with Lived Experience Advisers to understand and convey their views to the Committee, in connection with this aspect of its terms of reference: 'any other matters associated with the conclusion of the National Redress Scheme that survivors would like to make known to the Committee'. Their insights are reflected below.

The National Centre acknowledges that these views are not representative of all victim-survivors of child sexual abuse who have engaged with the Scheme. For some victim-survivors, the Scheme has been life-changing and has provided the recognition, healing and compensation they needed.

However, for others, including those who have shared their experiences with the National Centre, the process has been stressful, re-traumatising and/or disappointing; they lacked adequate support to navigate it; and they either received rejections based on what felt like arbitrary requirements or

received redress payments that were too low to make a significant difference to their circumstances after a lifetime of enduring the impacts of the abuse they experienced as children.

Hanina's experience

Hanina Rind is a Yamatji, Badimaya and Balouchi Muslim woman. She is Principal Lawyer and Survivor Advocate at Yarn Legal.

Hanina articulated that the National Redress Scheme is structurally incompatible with the lived experiences of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander victim-survivors, particularly those affected by removal, incarceration, poverty, and systemic and institutional neglect. She described how Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are disproportionately excluded from redress because the Scheme relies on documentary evidence that often does not exist for Stolen Generations survivors, people placed through informal or unrecorded systems, or those whose records were never created, lost, or deliberately withheld.

Hanina emphasised that despite repeated acknowledgements by government and the Royal Commission that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are less likely to have records such as birth certificates, placement documents or institutional files, the Scheme continues to demand these materials and rejects applications when they cannot be produced. She further argued that institutional vulnerability should be automatically recognised for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander applicants, including recognition of cultural loss and intergenerational harm as extreme circumstances warranting maximum redress.

Hanina highlighted the disproportionate exclusion of incarcerated Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, noting that survivors with criminal convictions, frequently connected to their own childhood abuse, face additional ministerial barriers that are slow and effectively inaccessible. In her view, the Scheme reproduces colonial logics of proof, credibility, and worthiness, privileging institutional survivors with records while systematically excluding Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, criminalised survivors, and those most harmed by the system itself.

Sandra's experience

Sandra Collins is an Aboriginal woman and a Lived Experience Adviser.

Sandra described the National Redress Scheme as having a significant impact on her life. She spoke about sharing her story during the time of the Royal Commission and this was a healing experience for her. When it comes to engagement with the Scheme, she describes it as an offering of acknowledgement without providing the long-term support, information or financial recognition required to address the lifelong impacts of child sexual abuse. While she showed appreciation for being accepted into the Scheme, Sandra explained that the process left her feeling exposed, confused and unsupported, with limited follow-up at times of acute distress. She was not adequately informed about the maximum available payment, the criteria used to determine the amounts, or that accepting redress would permanently exclude her from pursuing a civil action.

Sandra emphasised that the payment she received, even though significant in the context of experiencing lifelong poverty, was not sufficient to address decades of trauma, disability, and the cumulative cost of therapy and lost opportunities. Drawing a powerful comparison to war veterans, Sandra described herself as a "CSA war veteran," noting that society accepts lifelong care and recognition for returned soldiers but fails to offer comparable lifespan support to survivors of child sexual abuse. In Sandra's view, the Scheme operates as short-term compensation rather than a meaningful response to lifelong injury, failing to recognise that survival does not end the harm, and that healing is ongoing, uneven, and costly across the lifespan.

Kat's experience

Kat Burns is a Social Worker and a Lived Experience Adviser.

Kat spoke from her experience as a social worker. She pointed out the significant structural barriers faced by victim-survivors attempting to engage with the National Redress Scheme after incarceration. Kat described how people who experienced abuse in youth detention centres, out-of-home care, and church-run institutions struggle to access redress due to accessibility, criminal records, homelessness, addiction, and limited literacy or administrative capacity.

Kat noted that victim-survivors leaving custody or actively managing substance use issues often lack the support required to navigate the complex application process, gather documentation, or sustain engagement with legal and redress processes. In practice, most victim-survivors only progress through applications when supported intensively by community workers rather than by the redress system itself.

She also raised serious concerns about the management of redress payments for people with histories of addiction, including cases where compensation was placed under state trusteeship, requiring survivors to justify every purchase and effectively removing their financial autonomy. Kat noted that this approach reproduces institutional control and undermines the purpose of redress as a form of recovery and accountability for victim-survivors. She stressed that engagement with redress can be retraumatising for people managing addiction and post-release; without trauma-informed supports, many survivors disengage entirely or are excluded from accessing compensation intended to acknowledge the harms they experienced in state and institutional care.

Robbie's experience

Robbie Gambley is a Lived Experience Survivor.

Robbie described his engagement with the National Redress Scheme as deeply re-traumatising and harmful. He has contributed significantly to multiple reviews and consultations about the Scheme. He also bravely gave evidence to the Royal Commission, where he held genuine hope that the Scheme would offer recognition, dignity and meaningful compensation for the lifelong impacts of child sexual abuse. Instead, he experienced a system he described as "shameful," characterised by poor communication, administrative failures, and a lack of trauma-informed care and practice.

Robbie's application was supported by police evidence, court outcomes and detailed documentation; he assumed it was a strong application. He initially submitted it without support but was advised to withdraw his application and to be supported in resubmitting through Knowmore Legal Services. During this time, his records were mishandled, original documents were destroyed, and he was provided with damaged copies that were returned in disarray, which was distressing and re-traumatising.

He was later offered a payment of an amount he experienced as profoundly inadequate considering the abuse he endured, which has resulted in lifelong consequences that followed, including chronic pain, disrupted employment and ongoing health issues. The way the offer was delivered increased his experiences of distress. He felt unsupported and unheard. Robbie declined the offer and was effectively pushed into pursuing civil litigation, a process he found traumatising and financially exploitative. He described being taken advantage of by legal representatives who received substantial portions of settlement funds, leaving him with limited compensation after fees and deductions.

Robbie reflected that the Scheme's failure not only denied him fair recognition but also exposed him to further harm through the civil court. For Robbie, the contrast between the hope he felt when giving evidence and the Royal Commission and the reality of the violence he experienced during the redress process has had enduring impacts on his wellbeing, financial security and sense of justice, reinforcing a perception that victim-survivors were asked to share their stories for change that ultimately did not come.

Paul's experience

Paul G. Klotz is a Lived Experience Advocate.

Paul described the National Redress Scheme as fundamentally failing to recognise the lifelong impacts of child sexual abuse and the ongoing needs of victim-survivors across the lifespan. For Paul, the Scheme did not meaningfully acknowledge the long-term physical, psychological, social, and economic consequences of abuse, instead operating as what he described as a short-term financial transaction that fails to consider a survivor's past, present, or future needs.

He spoke about the connection between child sexual abuse and complex trauma, severe mental health challenges, suicidality, addiction, physical illness, disability, and disrupted employment. He stated that none of these issues are adequately recognised within redress applications and assessments.

Paul emphasised that healing from child sexual abuse is not a one-off event but a lifelong process requiring sustained, trauma-informed support, yet the Scheme offers time-limited counselling, inadequate financial recognition, and little understanding of how disclosure and recovery unfold over time. He described how both the Royal Commission and the introduction of redress initially created hope for victim-survivors, only for that hope to diminish as systems failed to deliver meaningful change or implement recommendations.

In Paul's view, the Scheme has compounded harm by creating further frustration, re-traumatisation, and a sense of being dismissed once again by institutions meant to provide justice. He stressed that redress does not meaningfully account for reduced life opportunities, chronic illness, disability, loss of earning capacity, or the enduring social and emotional consequences of abuse, leaving many victim-survivors to navigate ongoing hardship with limited support.

Voices for Action: Calls for change from victim-survivors

A submission by LW

A little something about recovery

Reimagining my past is a heavy task,
a ghost I have carried,
a shadow in my smile.
It lingers in the quiet,
in the space between laughter,
a whisper of all I have lost.
Survival is not just breathing,
not just waking each day;
it is choosing to stay,
to fight for my own story; for my truth and my voice.
To rewrite the echoes
that tell me I am broken,
to hold myself close
when the weight of it all pulls me under.
I wear my success
like a shield,
but beneath it,
I am stitched together.
With sadness, strength, and survival.
It is the wisdom of ancestors, who remind me,
I was never meant to carry this shame.
It doesn't belong to me.
I am more than the harm done to me.
I am more than the hands that tried to take my spirit.
The silence that tried to still my smile.
I am fire,
I am a story,
I am the bloodline of warriors, healers, and heart.
For every dark night,
I find a reason to rise,
My children's laughter,
The colors of a sunrise,
the quiet knowing that I matter.
That I have always mattered.
So, when the past calls me back,
I try not to answer.
I stand in today,
in the fight for my future,
in the fire,
in the promise of tomorrow,
In love, I am still learning to give myself.
This is my beginning.

In October 2025, on the 7th anniversary of the National Apology to Victims and Survivors of Institutional Child Sexual Abuse, the National Centre launched a new campaign to hear directly from victim-survivors of child sexual abuse. The campaign, *Voices for Action*, provides a secure online portal for victim-survivors to share their views on their key priorities for change, and what would help

make things safer and more supportive for children and young people, victim-survivors and communities.¹⁵

In one submission, LW¹⁶ told the National Centre about important reforms needed to ensure that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander victim-survivors receive the support they need to navigate the Scheme and other systems and processes:

A submission by LW

The one change I want to see is a national commitment to building Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander-specific child sexual abuse (CSA) services – services that are led by community, designed for us, by us. It needs to be funded on a national and state level, and if not sole organisations, but a dedicated work force within the existing services.

We need advocacy, legal support, and recovery pathways that are not always clinical or focus on a biomedical model/reactive care but instead hold space for healing, truth-telling, and cultural connection. Mob deserve places where victim-survivors and their families are believed, supported, and wrapped in care that makes sense for them – not care that is imposed, standardised, or disconnected from their lived experience.

Alongside this, there must be urgent advocacy to reform the legal system, as it currently operates in a way that is traumatising. The redress has failed so many victims, myself included, and civil systems have become sites of further harm. There are no real rules governing how lawyers behave, no limits on legal fees, and no safeguards to stop victim-survivors being pushed, questioned, and retraumatised by their own legal teams, as well as by perpetuating institutions or individuals.

It is unacceptable that, after the Royal Commission, the burden of proof still rests so heavily on the shoulders of those who have already endured so much. Justice shouldn't feel impossible, and the process itself should never be damaging.

Victim-survivors navigating these systems must have access to free, culturally safe, trauma-informed therapeutic support throughout the entire legal journey – not as an optional extra, not at an extra cost or done in way but as a right. Advocacy should be embedded, not left for individuals to fight for while trying to heal from harm that was never their fault.

If we are serious about change, then we must build systems that protect, uplift, and honour victim-survivors, starting with culturally led CSA services and a legal process that heals rather than harms.

I say this because my own life has been shaped by the consequences of systems that were meant to protect me but instead exposed me to harm. I was abused in a child-care setting and later exploited through the education system and out-of-home care. There was no support. No information. No intervention. My family was left to carry the weight alone, and the suffering that followed became deeply entrenched, the kind of suffering I have had to untangle as an adult inside medical and legal systems that are still not supportive, still not accountable, still not built for people like me.

This is the reality for far too many children. Child sexual abuse (CSA), child sexual exploitation (CSE), and institutional abuse are not rare events – they are contemporary crises that continue because our systems refuse to confront their own failures. The truth is that these experiences can be life-destroying. Not everyone makes it out alive. And this alone should be enough to demand change.

We need national action on prevention, early intervention, and recovery, not afterthoughts or one-size-fits-all programs. Communities need proper education and awareness; families require clear information and support; and children need systems that identify harm and act promptly. We need responses that reflect the diversity of victim-survivors – including those of us who were “too complex”, “too hard”, or “too unwell” for mainstream services.

A submission by LW – continued

We especially need Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander-specific services across advocacy, legal support, therapeutic care, and cultural healing; services led by mob, designed with our families, and built around our worldviews. Our young people deserve pathways that centre culture, Country, and community, not just clinical models that strip away identity.

We also need the legal system to change urgently. Currently, the criminal justice, redress, and civil processes retraumatise people who are already carrying the heaviest load. There are no real protections from harmful legal practices, no limits on fees, no accountability for how lawyers treat victims, and no consistent trauma-informed approaches. Justice shouldn't require us to be harmed all over again.

At the heart of the change I want to see is this:

No more abandoning victim-survivors.

No more leaving children and families to navigate lifelong consequences alone.

No more systems that punish complexity instead of understanding it.

We need planning, investment, community education, and funding that support prevention and healing.

We need care that is flexible, culturally safe, person-centred, and responsive – not clinical boxes, not pathways that shut people out, and not silence.

If we truly want to keep children safe, then we must build systems that are capable of holding their stories, responding to their needs, and walking with them through recovery – for as long as it takes.

In another submission, the National Centre heard from Lived Experience Advocate, Tracie M. Oldham. Tracie told the National Centre that:

- Non-state wards who were 'voluntarily' placed into care arrangements with the knowledge of government authorities should be recognised as care-leavers under the National Redress Scheme.
- Victims should be automatically assigned a lawyer.¹⁷

Tracie's experience

'They accepted me, then they rejected me. They told me I could do an interview, listened for an hour and a half, then sent paperwork that had my name wrong, my date of birth wrong; were they even listening?'

Tracie M. Oldham is a Lived Experience Advocate.

Tracie described the National Redress Scheme as deeply flawed, biased, and failing many victim-survivors it was intended to support. She expressed strong concern that the Scheme prioritises institutional abuse cases where financial liability is clearer, while excluding survivors who experienced abuse through voluntary placements or informal care arrangements, despite governments having knowledge of, and responsibility for, those children.

Tracie spoke about the burden of proof still sitting heavily on victim-survivors, particularly those without paperwork due to poor historical record-keeping, resulting in people being accepted and then rejected by the Scheme. She emphasised that this exclusion has left many survivors unrecognised as care leavers, effectively rendering them invisible within the system.

Tracie also raised serious concerns about long delays, lack of follow-up after submissions, and the emotional toll of being required to continually advocate for recognition, often while ageing, unwell, or re-traumatised.

In her view, the Scheme has failed to deliver justice, accountability, or dignity, and instead perpetuates systemic prejudice by determining whose abuse "counts" and whose does not.

Based on what we have heard from victim-survivors of child sexual abuse, the National Centre urges the Committee to make the following recommendations.

Recommendations by people with lived experience of child sexual abuse:

The following recommendations have been articulated directly by people with lived experience of child sexual abuse through consultation with the National Centre, and are submitted to the Committee as calls for change led by victim-survivors, which the National Centre supports:

1. Institutional vulnerability under the National Redress Scheme should be automatically recognised for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander applicants, including recognition of cultural loss and intergenerational harm as extreme circumstances warranting maximum redress.
2. There should be a national commitment to building Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander specific child sexual abuse services across advocacy, legal support, therapeutic care and cultural healing – services that are designed and led by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.
3. Redress, civil litigation and criminal justice systems and processes should be reformed to build in safeguards to ensure that victim-survivors are not re-traumatised by navigating these systems and processes. Victim-survivors navigating these systems and processes must have access to free, culturally safe, trauma-informed therapeutic support throughout the entire journey.
4. Non-state wards who were 'voluntarily' placed into care arrangements with the knowledge of government authorities should be recognised as care-leavers under the National Redress Scheme.
5. Victim-survivors of child sexual abuse in all settings, not just institutional settings, should have access to funded legal advice and support for considering and navigating their legal options, including the National Redress Scheme.

Ensuring all victim-survivors can apply to the Scheme

Most people we work with would never complete the paperwork without intensive support...

Unless you're stable, housed and supported, how are you supposed to navigate a system that's meant to help you but is so hard to access?

Kat Burns, Social Worker and Lived Experience Adviser

Under its terms of reference, the Committee will consider 'the Scheme's operational timeline, and the potential for this timeline to be extended'.

The legislated date for closure of applications to the Scheme is currently 30 June 2027¹⁸ and the legislated sunset date of the Scheme is 1 July 2028.¹⁹

In its November 2024 report, *Redress: Journey to Justice*, the Committee raised concerns that:

- the Scheme is running out of time
- redress applications and requests for support are being received in far greater numbers than expected
- there are long waiting lists and lengthy wait times for some redress support services
- some victim-survivors are not aware that redress is available under the Scheme – in particular, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in rural or remote areas and people with disability
- some victim-survivors may not be aware that applications close on 30 June 2027
- unless changes are made, some victim-survivors could miss out on receiving redress.²⁰

The Committee recommended that:

- the Department of Social Services urgently undertake a public information campaign to increase awareness of the Scheme and redress support services, including information about the closing date for applications²¹
- the Australian Government begin a public awareness campaign to ensure that 'survivors and potential redress applicants know that they have limited time to make an application' and 'survivors with an application on hold are told that the Scheme is closing'²².

The Committee also recommended that the Australian Government seek agreement from state and territory governments to extend the Scheme beyond 2028,²³ or failing that, governments should consider asking potential applicants to register by a set date to allow those registered to apply for redress after 30 June 2027.²⁴

Like the Committee, the National Centre is concerned about the prospect that some victim-survivors may miss out on receiving redress due to a lack of awareness of the Scheme or inaccessibility of adequate support to apply by the legislated closing date of 30 June 2027.

The National Centre also notes the concerns raised by The Healing Foundation in its submission, that members of the Stolen Generations may not be applying to the Scheme because of a lack of culturally safe information and wrap around support. The Healing Foundation recommends, in its

submission, that the Scheme should be extended and that this should be accompanied by changes to the how the Scheme is implemented, including acknowledging the unique needs of Stolen Generations victim-survivors. The Healing Foundation's submission sets out in further detail the issues that should be addressed as part of an extended Scheme.

In addition, the National Centre is also concerned about groups that may miss out on accessing redress under the Scheme – in particular, children and young people. The National Centre acknowledges that the Scheme was primarily designed to recognise and respond to historical child sexual abuse in institutional settings; however, institutional child sexual abuse continues in Australia today. This is a particular risk for children and young people in out-of-home care and those engaged with the youth justice system.

These victim-survivors should be eligible for the Scheme once they turn 18 years old. However, when the Scheme ends, they will be left with limited options to seek justice through either the criminal or civil systems, both of which remain deeply inequitable, re-traumatising, and difficult to access for many victim-survivors.

The Australian Government should consider what role the Royal Commission's findings and recommendations will play for the next generation of children and young people who have experienced institutional child sexual abuse. Without a clear pathway forward, we risk failing those who are currently being harmed within the very systems meant to protect them. Below, in 'Support for victim-survivors beyond the National Redress Scheme' we discuss the need for a thorough consideration of what ongoing supports are required by victim-survivors of all forms of child sexual abuse outside and beyond the life of the Scheme.

The National Centre urges the Committee to recommend that:

Recommendation:

6. The Australian Government and state and territory governments should ensure that all victim-survivors who wish to apply to the Scheme have the opportunity to do so, by extending the current legislated application closure date of 30 June 2027 by two years and urgently launching a public awareness campaign to ensure that victim-survivors are aware of the new closing date.

This extension should be used as an opportunity to address the known issues with the Scheme's implementation that have been raised by people with lived experience of child sexual abuse in this submission, by the Committee and by other key stakeholders. This should include addressing the particular support needs of Stolen Generations victim-survivors.

Support for victim-survivors during the National Redress Scheme

To me, it was almost like a clinical financial transaction; A plus B equals C. You've had trauma, so we'll give you some money and close the book...

They don't acknowledge what happened, they don't look at what your life is now, and they don't look at what the rest of your life is going to be like...

It's creating more harm, more re-traumatisation, more frustration.

Paul G. Klotz, Lived Experience Advocate

Under its terms of reference, the Committee will consider 'the accessibility, funding, and transition plans for support services as the Scheme concludes'.

In its November 2024 report, *Redress: Journey to Justice*, the Committee reported on evidence it had received around:

- the importance of victim-survivors being able to access free and accurate legal advice on their redress or civil litigation options
- the importance of victim-survivors being able to access free support services to assist with making applications to the Scheme
- the demand for redress support services exceeding available resources
- limited access to redress support services outside major cities
- the high rate of applications to the Scheme and the likelihood that the Scheme will not be able to finalise all applications by its legislated end date of 1 July 2028.²⁵

In that report, the Committee recommended that the Scheme be extended beyond 2028, and that the Australian Government extend funding terms for redress support services until 2 years following the extended expiration date of the Scheme.²⁶ Those recommendations have not been implemented.

The legislated date for closure of applications to the Scheme is currently 30 June 2027²⁷ and the legislated sunset date of the Scheme is 1 July 2028.²⁸

Since the Committee's November 2024 report, applications to the Scheme have continued to be high and to far outstrip the rate at which applications are being finalised.

As of 30 November 2025, there had been 71,485 applications to the Scheme. Of those:

- 25,061 applicants had been advised of their outcomes
- 3,750 applications had been withdrawn or closed
- 42,674 applications were yet to have their outcome advised, of which 28,398 applications were actionable by the Scheme.²⁹

Over the six months to November 2025, the Scheme received an average of 1,512 applications per month. This far outpaces the rate at which applications are finalised. In the month of November 2025, for example, 883 applications were resolved.³⁰

It is clear that, unless there is a radical change in the rate at which applications are assessed, the Scheme will not be able to finalise all applications – including potential reviews – and deliver all redress outcomes until significantly beyond its legislated end date in July 2028.

The Australian Government should transparently communicate how long it anticipates this will take, based on the modelling it receives, and plan now to ensure that all applicants to the Scheme will be able to access redress support services until their applications have been finalised and their redress outcomes have been delivered. It is important that this planning and communication be done as soon as possible, so that redress support services can be provided with funding certainty and can provide continuity of support to victim-survivors. This is more than just an administrative and budgetary matter; it is key to taking a trauma-informed approach by ensuring that applicants will have adequate support throughout the redress process.

At its 8 December 2025 meeting, the Ministers' Redress Scheme Governance Board reportedly discussed the legislated end date for the Scheme, and 'discussed the importance of clear and consistent communication with survivors, jurisdictions, participating institutions, and service providers', indicating that it 'will be a priority'.³¹

Blue Knot Foundation, one of the National Centre's Founding Members and a long-term provider of redress support services, notes in its submission to the Committee that evidence from service delivery consistently shows that applicants' support needs do not diminish after they lodge their application; rather, they intensify at later stages, including during information requests, determinations, reassessments, and internal reviews. Blue Knot submits that funding for redress support services should be extended until at least June 2030 to ensure that victim-survivors are not abandoned mid-process and to maximise just outcomes as the Scheme approaches its conclusion.

The Healing Foundation, in its submission, highlights the need for additional resourcing for culturally appropriate wrap around support services to assist victim-survivors with process, legal and financial considerations, and to support ongoing healing during and following the redress process. In particular, the specific and unique needs of Stolen Generations victim-survivors should be met, with investment in local Aboriginal Controlled Community Organisations. Additional resourcing is also needed to extend the availability of support services in regional and remote communities.

The National Centre urges the Committee to recommend that:

Recommendation:

7. The Australian Government should ensure that additional funding is allocated in advance of the Scheme's closure to ensure that redress support services will be sufficiently resourced to provide support to applicants to the National Redress Scheme until all applications are fully finalised and all redress outcomes are delivered, noting this is likely to occur well beyond the current legislated end date of the Scheme in July 2028.

Support for victim-survivors beyond the National Redress Scheme

Listening to victim-survivors about the supports they need

While \$30,000 is an incredible amount of money to someone who's lived on the breadline, it didn't go very far in today's world.

Sandra Collins, Lived Experience Adviser

It should not be down to a victim to have to advocate for themselves.

Tracie M. Oldham, Lived Experience Advocate

Under its terms of reference, the Committee will consider 'transition plans for support services as the Scheme concludes'.

The National Centre has heard from people with lived experience of child sexual abuse that many victim-survivors are ageing; that some struggle to financially meet their basic living needs; and that for many, redress payments have not been enough to make a significant difference.

The Healing Foundation, in its submission, highlights the need for ongoing wrap around support extending beyond the life of the Scheme, through investment in community-based organisations, to ensure that the needs of Stolen Generations victim-survivors are met.

With the Scheme currently legislated to close in July 2028, now is the time for a thorough consideration of what ongoing supports are required by victim-survivors of child sexual abuse outside and beyond the life of the Scheme. This should be a broad consideration of the lifespan support needs of victim-survivors of child sexual abuse in all settings, not just institutional settings.

This consideration should be had in direct conversation with people with lived experience of child sexual abuse. The legislated eighth anniversary review of the Scheme, required to commence as soon as possible after 1 July 2026, should seek the views of victim-survivors on the ongoing supports that will be required beyond the life of the Scheme.³²

At its 8 December 2025 meeting, the Ministers' Redress Scheme Governance Board reportedly discussed the upcoming eighth anniversary review and indicated that it 'will prioritise survivor voices and experiences to inform how the Scheme has operated, identify lessons for future policy, and consider enduring support for survivors'. Ministers also 'recognised the importance of the continuity of these supports after the Scheme closes'.³³

The National Centre urges the Committee to recommend that:

Recommendation:

8. The Australian Government should ensure that the legislated eighth anniversary review of the National Redress Scheme is conducted in an open and transparent manner which provides opportunities for victim-survivors, along with other key stakeholders, to contribute their views on matters including the ongoing support needs of all victim-survivors of child sexual abuse beyond the Scheme.

Support for victim-survivors across the lifespan

I feel like I am a child sexual abuse kind of war veteran. It has affected my life so much, and I have been in therapy since I was 20; I'm 68 now.

Sandra Collins, Lived Experience Adviser

Child sexual abuse remains one of the most serious and pervasive forms of harm in Australia, with alarmingly high prevalence rates. An estimated 29% of Australians have experienced some form of child sexual abuse, including more than one in three girls, nearly one in five boys, and over one in two gender-diverse children.³⁴

Child sexual abuse has broad and long-lasting consequences. The specific adverse impacts vary depending on a complex interplay of personal, social, and contextual factors, including:

- the nature, duration and frequency of the abuse
- the relationship between the perpetrator(s) and the child
- the social, historical and institutional contexts in which the abuse occurred
- individual circumstances and characteristics, such as age, gender, disability, prior maltreatment and experience of disclosure.³⁵

The impacts of child sexual abuse are often compounded by other forms of interpersonal violence and trauma experienced during childhood or adulthood. For Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander victim-survivors, these impacts are intertwined with the historical and ongoing impacts of colonisation and systemic violence.

Beyond the individual impacts of abuse, inadequate, delayed or harmful community or system responses can exacerbate trauma and harm.³⁶

These impacts 'ripple' throughout a person's life, varying in intensity and duration. Some effects may be acute and temporary, while others may be chronic, or may re-emerge at different life stages or in response to significant events.³⁷

The Royal Commission recommended a holistic and coordinated response to victim-survivors through a cohesive, survivor-centred service system that provides flexible and ongoing care and support.³⁸ Nearly 10 years on from the Royal Commission, the system is still failing victim-survivors.

The child sexual abuse service 'system' remains fragmented, inadequately resourced and underfunded.³⁹ Inquiries at state and Commonwealth levels have found that existing service system responses are woefully inadequate.⁴⁰ Victim-survivors continue to fall through the gaps of this fragmented and under-resourced system.

For victim-survivors, access to appropriate levels and forms of services and supports at different points in their lives remains one of the highest priorities.⁴¹ The lived and living experiences of victim-survivors must be at the centre of policy and system reforms. Every victim-survivor should be able to access timely and culturally safe supports across their lifespan, regardless of their age, circumstances or place of residence.

Recognising the experience, insights, and expertise of victim-survivors, the National Centre consulted with Lived Experience Advisers to better understand the support needs of victim-survivors across their lifespan.⁴² Based on their insights, the National Centre calls for lifespan supports for victim-survivors, as follows:

Recommendation:

9. The Australian, state and territory governments should address existing gaps in victim-survivor support by properly funding, under the Second Action Plan of the *National Strategy to Prevent and Respond to Child Sexual Abuse 2021-2030*, a nationally consistent Lifespan Supports Program for victim-survivor healing and recovery. The model and approach should be co-designed with victim-survivors of child sexual abuse.

A properly funded Lifespan Supports Program should enable support, recovery and healing services to be embedded in trauma-responsive and culturally safe community services across Australia:

- Where services already exist, the Program would fill critical service gaps and /or cut waitlists.
- Where local capacity does not already exist, the Program would enable the funding of new or expanded services.

The Lifespan Supports Program should include the following minimum service and model elements (subject to co-design with victim-survivors):

- Ensure access to free, trauma-responsive, culturally safe specialist supports including counselling, peer support and community-based healing programs. This should include adequate funding for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander specific services and healing practices.
- Enable victim-survivors to access, re-enter or transition between supports as their needs change over their lifetime, through a flexible and responsive service model that recognises that recovery is not linear and victim-survivors may need support over the course of their life in different ways. The model should enable re-entry to services without time limits or the need for repeated disclosure or reassessment processes.
- Facilitate integrated care models including providing referrals to other supports across the service system while maintaining continuity and case management within the Lifespan Supports Program.
- Prioritise place-based service delivery that recognises the specific needs of victim-survivors, including priority populations including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, LGBTIQ+SB communities, culturally and racially marginalised communities, migrant, refugee and diasporic communities, people with disability and incarcerated people, ensuring services are accessible across urban, regional, rural and remote areas.
- Embed lived and living experience and expertise within the service system including through models of peer support.

Meeting the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander victim-survivors

Responses to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander child sexual abuse must be led by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. In Australia, settler-colonial racism, white privilege and white-Western bias have driven interventions and responses to child sexual abuse in communities. This has exacerbated the trauma and marginalisation experienced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and has not improved child safety.

Believe Inquire Respond to Disclosures, SNAICC, 2023

Child sexual abuse remains a profound and ongoing harm experienced by many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children experience disproportionately high levels of childhood trauma compared with non-Indigenous children and young people.⁴³ These disparities sit within the lasting impacts of colonisation and are driven by systemic factors like racism, intergenerational trauma, socio-economic disadvantage, and limited access to culturally safe services.

For many children and young people, abuse occurs in institutional settings, compounding trauma and undermining safety, healing and trust in systems that are meant to protect them. The *Our Ways – Strong Ways – Our Voices: National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Plan to End Family, Domestic and Sexual Violence 2026–2036* recognises that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children must be supported by responses that are grounded in culture, connection to community and Country, and the strengthening of family and kinship systems.⁴⁴

The need for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander-led responses to prevent and respond to child sexual abuse is not new. For decades, Aboriginal community-controlled organisations, Elders, and survivors have provided clear evidence, solutions, and leadership. Their work has consistently highlighted the links between colonisation, intergenerational trauma, domestic and family violence, and child sexual abuse, as well as the ongoing impacts of structural and institutional violence.

Under the First Action Plan for the *National Strategy to Prevent and Respond to Child Sexual Abuse 2021–2030*, some progress has been made through the development of a culturally appropriate national training program – *Believe Inquire Respond to Disclosures (BIRD) Training Package*. This came from a collaboration between Yamurrah (Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander experts working with victim-survivors of complex and collective trauma) and SNAICC, National Voice for our Children. It should be considered as a best practice approach. Ongoing funding should be committed to ensure the needs of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander victim-survivors and communities are met.

The National Centre urges the Committee to recommend that:

Recommendation:

10. The Australian Government and state and territory governments should ensure that national action addressing child sexual abuse for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples is grounded in sovereignty, self-determination and community-controlled leadership. This should include:

- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander led design, governance and delivery that centre the skills, wisdom and knowledges of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in all prevention, intervention and responses
- recognition of relationship and trust building (key cultural aspects of service design and delivery) as valuable outcomes in metrics for funding
- adherence to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander data sovereignty principles.

Sustained and adequate funding should be provided to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander governed and led organisations to:

- support place-based service delivery models informed by community-centred Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander healing approaches (physical, psychological, spiritual and cultural), with recognition of the impacts of colonisation, forced child removal and intergenerational trauma
- expand and embed culturally led resources across all sectors and service providers nationally.

As the National Redress Scheme approaches its conclusion, the National Centre remains committed to working alongside victim-survivors, governments and the sector to ensure that the lessons of the Scheme are translated into enduring, victim-survivor centred systems that support healing, justice and prevention well beyond the life of the Scheme.

Endnotes

- ¹ The National Centre for Action on Child Sexual Abuse (2025), Child Sexual Abuse Language Guide. At [1.-NC-Language-Guide_FINAL.pdf](#).
- ² Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse, *Redress and civil litigation*, 2015, at [Final report - Redress and civil litigation](#).
- ³ Joint Standing Committee on Implementation of the National Redress Scheme, *Redress: Journey to Justice*, 2024, chapters 1 and 3, at [Redress: Journey to Justice – Parliament of Australia](#).
- ⁴ Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse, *Final report, Volume 3: Impacts* (2017), pp 172, 177, 183, at [Final Report - Volume 3, Impacts](#).
- ⁵ Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse, *Redress and civil litigation*, 2015, pp3-4, at [Final report - Redress and civil litigation](#).
- ⁶ Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse, *Redress and civil litigation*, 2015, recommendation 1, at [Final report - Redress and civil litigation](#).
- ⁷ *National Redress Scheme for Institutional Child Sexual Abuse Act 2018*, s10.
- ⁸ Joint Standing Committee on Implementation of the National Redress Scheme, *Redress: Journey to Justice*, 2024, chapter 1, at [Redress: Journey to Justice – Parliament of Australia](#).
- ⁹ Joint Standing Committee on Implementation of the National Redress Scheme, *Redress: Journey to Justice*, 2024, chapters 1 and 3, at [Redress: Journey to Justice – Parliament of Australia](#).
- ¹⁰ Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse, *Final Report: Volume 2: Nature and cause*, 2017, p.11 – 14, at [Nature and cause | Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse](#).
- ¹¹ Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse, *Final Report: Volume 2: Nature and cause*, p.90, at [Nature and cause | Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse](#).
- ¹² See eg National Redress Scheme, December 2025 Newsletter, <https://www.nationalredress.gov.au/news/december-2025>, which indicates that in the month of November 2025, 35.4% of applicants identified as First Nations.
- ¹³ Australian Bureau of Statistics at <https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/people/aboriginal-and-torres-strait-islander-peoples/estimates-aboriginal-and-torres-strait-islander-australians/latest-release>.
- ¹⁴ Joint Standing Committee on Implementation of the National Redress Scheme, *Redress: Journey to Justice*, 2024, at [Redress: Journey to Justice – Parliament of Australia](#).
- ¹⁵ See [Voices for Action Campaign - The National Centre for Action on Child Sexual Abuse](#).
- ¹⁶ Submission 47 to *Voices for Action* campaign.
- ¹⁷ Submissions 18 and 41 to *Voices for Action* campaign.
- ¹⁸ *National Redress Scheme for Institutional Child Sexual Abuse Act 2018*, s20(1)(e).
- ¹⁹ *National Redress Scheme for Institutional Child Sexual Abuse Act 2018*, s193(1)(a).
- ²⁰ Joint Standing Committee on Implementation of the National Redress Scheme, *Redress: Journey to Justice*, 2024, chapters 1, 3, 6, 7 at [Redress: Journey to Justice – Parliament of Australia](#).
- ²¹ Joint Standing Committee on Implementation of the National Redress Scheme, *Redress: Journey to Justice*, 2024, recommendation 11, at [Redress: Journey to Justice – Parliament of Australia](#).
- ²² Joint Standing Committee on Implementation of the National Redress Scheme, *Redress: Journey to Justice*, 2024, recommendation 4, at [Redress: Journey to Justice – Parliament of Australia](#).
- ²³ Joint Standing Committee on Implementation of the National Redress Scheme, *Redress: Journey to Justice*, 2024, recommendation 1, at [Redress: Journey to Justice – Parliament of Australia](#).
- ²⁴ Joint Standing Committee on Implementation of the National Redress Scheme, *Redress: Journey to Justice*, 2024, recommendation 2 at [Redress: Journey to Justice – Parliament of Australia](#).
- ²⁵ Joint Standing Committee on Implementation of the National Redress Scheme, *Redress: Journey to Justice*, 2024, chapters 1, 9, 11, at [Redress: Journey to Justice – Parliament of Australia](#).
- ²⁶ Joint Standing Committee on Implementation of the National Redress Scheme, *Redress: Journey to Justice*, 2024, recommendations 1, 23, at [Redress: Journey to Justice – Parliament of Australia](#).

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- ²⁷ *National Redress Scheme for Institutional Child Sexual Abuse Act 2018*, s20(1)(e).
- ²⁸ *National Redress Scheme for Institutional Child Sexual Abuse Act 2018*, s193(1)(a).
- ²⁹ National Redress Scheme Newsletter, November 2025, at [November 2025 | National Redress Scheme](#).
- ³⁰ National Redress Scheme Newsletter, November 2025, at [November 2025 | National Redress Scheme](#).
- ³¹ Ministers' Redress Scheme Governance Board Communique, 8 December 2025, at [Ministers' Redress Scheme Governance Board Communique | Department of Social Services Ministers](#).
- ³² The eighth anniversary review is required under s192 of the *National Redress Scheme for Institutional Child Sexual Abuse Act 2018*.
- ³³ Ministers' Redress Scheme Governance Board Communique, 8 December 2025, at [Ministers' Redress Scheme Governance Board Communique | Department of Social Services Ministers](#).
- ³⁴ Australian Child Maltreatment Study. *Prevalence of child sexual abuse across all Australians*. 2023 [cited 2025 Nov 13]. At <https://www.acms.au/resources/prevalence-of-child-sexual-abuse-across-all-australians/>.
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- ⁴² The National Centre acknowledges that not all perspectives and lived experiences are represented and this section is not intended to represent all victim-survivors.
- ⁴³ Alam, M. A., Ward, J., Callaway, L. K., Huda, M. M., Shahunja, K. M., & Mamun, A. (2026). Adverse childhood experiences among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and adolescents in Australia: Role of a family with strong kinship and economic well-being. *Public health*, 250, 106061. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.puhe.2025.106061>.
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Opening statements made to the 8 April 2026 public hearing of the Joint Standing Committee inquiry by:

- **National Centre CEO, Dr Janine Bush**
 - **National Centre Lived Experience Adviser, Mrs Laura-Jane Phoenix Singh**
 - **National Centre Lived Experience Adviser, Ms Sandra Collins**
 - **National Centre Lived Experience Adviser, Mr Robbie Gambley**
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Dr Bush: I'll start, and then our three lived experience advisers will speak as well.

Thank you, Chair. Thank you to the committee for the opportunity to appear today. I also want to thank our lived experience advisers for sharing their experiences with the committee today. I also acknowledge that we're meeting on unceded Aboriginal land, the land of the Ngunnawal people, and pay my respects to elders past and present. I also extend that respect to First Nations people present today.

The national centre is an independent organisation established following the royal commission, and our role is to improve how systems respond to child sexual abuse. We do this by bringing together lived experience and evidence and by being clear about where systems help and where they cause harm. One of our core goals is to make sure that survivor experience shapes national decisions. That's why our submission reflects both lived experience and what we see nationally about when survivors are able to come forward.

The creation of the National Redress Scheme was a significant achievement. For many survivors, it's been life changing. It's offered recognition, acknowledgement and a pathway to justice.

But we also know from survivor feedback and evidence that the scheme hasn't worked well for everyone. For some people, the process has been complex, distressing or retraumatising. Others have experienced long delays, difficulty accessing support or outcomes that didn't reflect the harms that they endured. These experiences matter, particularly for people who've already waited decades to be ready to engage.

From a systems perspective, the central issue before this committee is how survivors seek redress and whether public schemes are designed around that reality. What we see consistently is that readiness doesn't follow a timetable. Many survivors are only able to engage later in life once safety, stability or trust has been established. If access to the scheme is closed before that point, those survivors are effectively locked out of redress, regardless of the legitimacy of their experience. That exclusion causes further harm and undermines confidence in the public commitments made after the royal commission.

From the national centre's perspective, challenges in how the scheme operates are not a reason to close access; they're a reason to improve how the scheme works. We recognise that issues such as delays and administration need attention, but those challenges shouldn't determine whether survivors can apply. We're also mindful that governments operate within real funding constraints, and our point would simply be that the need for support doesn't disappear if access to redress ends. The cost doesn't go away. It just shifts to somewhere else in the system.

Looking ahead, we're concerned about what happens beyond the scheme. Planning for survivor access to justice and support can't wait until 2028. It really needs to begin now. In our submission, we also stress the need to plan beyond the life of the scheme. Survivors will still need legal support. They will still need access to ongoing support over their lifetimes.

Thank you. We welcome the opportunity to assist the committee in its work while we're here today and to answer your questions. I will hand over to Laura-Jane, who we also call LJ.

Mrs Singh: Thank you for having me.

My name is LJ. I'm a proud Aboriginal woman. I am an academic and I am an advocate. I was born on Ngunnawal country, raised on the east coast of Australia between Batemans Bay on the Yuin nation and Meanjin on Yuggera country. For the past nine years, I have called Wathaurong country home. Before anything else, I am a daughter, a granddaughter, a mother, a sister, an aunty and a wife. But today I stand here as a victim-survivor of institutional child sexual abuse and child sexual exploitation. I'm here to remind the committee of the failure of the Redress Scheme, not just for me but for many other people like me.

I was 23 years old when I gave evidence to the royal commission in Meanjin. I believed in it; I believed in what it promised—closure, justice and recovery. But, after four years in the scheme, my claim was rejected. It broke me—a promise betrayed. Because of this failure, I and many other victims-survivors like me and our families have been forced into civil court. My case has already been going on for nearly five years in a violent system that is not trauma informed but that has commodified and capitalised on child sexual abuse. The failures of the Redress Scheme have a lot to answer for, including this. I'm still seeking justice for harm that occurred within an institution over 25 years ago, but, in a way, that replicates the very abuse I have already endured.

My story is not unique; my voice represents the voices of many. The Redress Scheme was meant to be an alternative. It was meant to spare us from this. If it had worked as intended, if it had honoured the promises of the royal commission, we would not be here. Instead, the legal system has decided to profit off our pain.

This harm is not equal, either. It is deeper for those who are already marginalised, especially mob. Aboriginal children have always been overrepresented in institutions. From the stolen generations to today, we are overrepresented in out-of-home care, in youth justice and in prisons. This is not accidental; these are the ongoing impacts of colonisation—the very system where institutional abuse began.

And yet the Redress Scheme—the so called pathway to justice—fails this cohort the most. The very children most impacted by institutional harm are the ones most likely to be excluded, disbelieved or retraumatised.

Children are still being abused in institutions today, so I ask: What justice will they have? What option will exist once the scheme ends? The only pathway will be civil court, where institutions are protected, where survivors are worn down, where lawyers profit and where people become suicidal under the weight of it all.

Who is accountable for that? Where does change actually happen? When will the promises of the royal commission be realised?

None of us are free unless all of us are free. And, right now, victims-survivors are still trapped—trapped in a system that promised justice, protection and recovery but, instead, continues to harm.

We are 10 years on and still waiting. I am still waiting. I will likely be in court for many years to come. My life is on hold. I am suffering, my family is suffering and another cycle is repeated.

All I wanted was justice, acknowledgement and accountability, and yet, to date, all I have received is further trauma and further harm. It's heavy, I know. I want to know how we are expected to survive this. Why must we keep carrying what was never ours to hold? The scheme has deepened the harm for those already subjected to brutal and violent abuse. We are people. We deserve justice. We deserve a pathway out, and that should have begun with accountability.

Ms Collins: That was great, LJ.

As you know, I'm Sandra, a lived experience adviser. I'm also an activist who's aligned with the national centre. It's an honour for me to represent other CSA victims-survivors today.

I invite all of us to take a deep breath now for those of us who didn't make it through.

I have slipped through the cracks many times in my life. I learnt at a young age that the system wasn't there for kids like me. All these decades later, this situation still holds true with my experience of the Redress Scheme.

My grooming began when I was in nappies. I was born into a pedo patriarchy built on the bones of children's stolen innocence. I have risen from death, not because I wanted to but because I was willing to live to protect other kids. I existed fully inside an atrocious nightmare for over 19 years.

I carry strength, resilience and wisdom that you cannot measure. My hypervigilance is such that I can map danger before it even has a name. I am, as others are, a plundered and ravaged prisoner of severe childhood sexual trauma, with a body labelled 'used goods' by society.

No Victoria Cross for us, even though I was extremely brave in the presence of my enemy. No validation like for war veterans. No lifelong tailored programs for our changing needs, including navigating intimate relationships.

I was informed about the Redress Scheme by an agency dealing in other matters. With no access to information options about entitlements, I was forced to make an uninformed decision about what was available. What I received only touched the edges of payments that I continued to make and that have kept me on the poverty line all my life.

I notice a real lack of equity in the scheme. Institutional abuse was given preference when most CSA happens within the family, as mine did. Where is the equity for familial CSA survivors? In a family setting, there are many types of sexual abuse and torture, plus duration of abuse compounds the trauma. How come this isn't being given the focus it deserves? There needs to be a substantial increase in the amount of redress offered, according to individual experiences.

Mr Gambley: I brought a photo if you would like to see this. The significance of that photo is that my family were struggling. My father had beef cattle properties. We didn't have a camera for about 10 years. It was just by chance—we had a lot of horses, red kelpie cattle dogs, chooks and everything on the farm—that there was a Boy Scout that came. I was in the Boy Scouts. He came from Brisbane, and he absolutely loved the property, seeing the chooks, the cattle and the dogs. He said, 'Robbie, can you take me for a ride on Brownie?' That photo was taken before the horrific abuse. To me, that shows the wonderful, beautiful, glorious innocence of children—the way they should, and the way they have a right to, live their lives.

It's truly an honour to speak here today. Firstly, Chair, I would like to thank you and the committee members for doing this difficult work.

I also ask: please don't look at me the way I am now. Try to imagine a 14-year-old young, naive teenage boy living on an isolated cattle property. That's how I was when the abuse started, and it continued for three years. I was attending Bonalbo Central School, where the perpetrator, a science schoolteacher, operated. Please remember that brave survivors were children who had their glorious lives ahead of them, as I did.

I gave evidence to the wonderful the Honourable Justice Peter McClellan AM. I was treated extremely well by the royal commission people. I gave my evidence in Sydney. I trusted that the Australian government would listen to my story and the stories of other brave survivors of child sexual abuse.

I submitted my extensive application, with my police statement and many supporting documents in pristine condition, to the National Redress Scheme. My package was about one inch, or three centimetres, thick. I worked very hard on my NRS application. Then I found out about Knowmore Legal Service. I spoke to them. I rang the NRS and asked to withdraw my application. I spoke to a male. There was silence. Then I asked: 'So what happens now? Do I get my documents back?' I was

told very bluntly and coldly, 'Your documents are being put on digital form and your originals have been destroyed.' They only had my documents for about a week and a half. There was no respect, no empathy. I was crying after that horrible phone call. Photocopies of my pristine papers were posted to me. They were terribly faded, out of order and a total mess.

With Knowmore, when the NRS was ready to make me an offer, there was supposed to be a three-way phone call with my Knowmore lawyer, the NRS and myself. That did not happen. With the NRS people, a lady rang me: 'Mr Gambley, we have your offer. Shall I tell you the amount?' or words to that effect. This person just went ahead and told me my compensation amount—a pathetic, cruel amount—without my Knowmore lawyer there. The phone call ended. Five minutes later, I was in tears again, crying. I composed myself and rang my Knowmore lawyer. She was very disappointed with what was done.

I was determined to get justice. I waited for a second chance civil action in New South Wales. I found an excellent lawyer—a compassionate lady. The second chance civil action payment I was awarded through mediation was better than the NRS's. The NRS was far more traumatic than the second chance civil action and the mediation I went through.

For me, the NRS has been a painful and shameful chapter in Australia's history. The dreadful wrongs of many decades of neglect and child sexual abuse could have been put right, but they were not. Brave survivors have been traumatised all over again and this never should have happened.

Thank you.