



A brief guide to the Final Report

The Final Report contains information about child sexual abuse that may be distressing. We also advise Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander readers that information in the report may have been provided by, or refer to, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who are deceased.

About this guide

This guide explains how information is organised in the Final Report of the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse. It is for a broad audience including survivors, their families and supporters, professionals and volunteers working with children and all those looking to quickly find the information they need.

About the Final Report

The Final Report brings together what the Royal Commission learned during our five-year inquiry. It sets out what we have heard, our conclusions and our recommendations to better prevent and respond to child sexual abuse in institutions.

The Final Report is made up of a preface and executive summary and 17 volumes. A complete list of volumes and related reports is on page 12 of this guide.

About our inquiry

All children are vulnerable to sexual abuse in institutional contexts. The Royal Commission looked at institutions' responses to such abuse. We heard from thousands of people who had been sexually abused as children while in an institution. We also heard from experts, governments, services and other interested people.

Through our inquiry we have heard about the sexual abuse of children in institutions covering many decades and we know the risk remains today. To fully examine institutional responses to child sexual abuse and how we can better protect children, the Royal Commission:

- held **private sessions** – for people to tell us their story of abuse in a protected and supportive environment
- held **public hearings** – to examine institutional responses to child sexual abuse
- built a **policy and research** program – to increase our understanding of the nature, cause and impact of child sexual abuse and look at ways to improve children's safety into the future.



FIND OUT MORE

Volume 1, *Our inquiry* contains information about how we set up private sessions, public hearings, and our policy and research program.



Private sessions

PRIVATE SESSIONS AT A GLANCE

Number of survivors whose experiences we heard about in private sessions as at 31 May 2017:

6,875

Males:

64.3%

Females:

35.4%

Survivors aged 50 and over at time of their private session:

57.4%

Children and young people (aged under 25 years at the time of their private session):

4.1%

People with disability at the time of the abuse:

4.3%

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander survivors:

14.3%

Survivors from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds:

3.1%

Survivors in prison at the time of their private session:

10.4%



In private sessions, survivors spoke confidentially to one or more Commissioners about their experience of child sexual abuse and institutional responses. Survivors were offered counselling and other forms of support before, during and after their private session.

In listening to survivors, we heard about lifelong impacts of child sexual abuse as well as sources of strength. We also gathered information about institutional responses.



FIND OUT MORE

In the Final Report, we often use survivors' own words to give real-world examples of some of the concerns we have identified. To make sure private sessions remain confidential, we do not use survivors' real names or any information that could identify them.

Volume 5, *Private sessions* provides more detailed information about what we heard from survivors.



Public hearings

We held 57 public hearings to examine particular institutions' responses to allegations of child sexual abuse. Case studies were carefully chosen for public hearings so that our work covered a variety of types of institutions such as churches, schools, sports clubs and out-of-home care providers in cities and towns across Australia.



FIND OUT MORE

Information about our public hearings is available online including lists of witnesses and the documents we examined as well as our case study reports. Visit: www.childabuseroyalcommission.gov.au

Policy and research

The Royal Commission also gathered information through its policy and research program.

For our policy work, we consulted widely with many people including survivors and their supporters, governments, institutions and experts, inviting them to express their views at roundtables and contribute to issues papers and consultation papers.

Our research program aimed to improve knowledge about the nature, extent and impacts of child sexual abuse in institutions and ways to prevent and respond to the abuse. We published 59 research reports.



FIND OUT MORE

The Royal Commission's published research reports and policy papers are available online at www.childabuseroyalcommission.gov.au



THE SCOPE OF OUR INQUIRY

Private sessions

6,961*

private sessions (as at 31 May 2017)

Other contacts

992

written accounts (as at 31 May 2017)

39,700

calls (as at 31 July 2017)

2,252

referrals to authorities (as at 31 July 2017)

Policy and research

59

published research reports

35

roundtables

869

submissions to issues papers

519

submissions to consultation papers

Public hearings

57

public hearings

444

hearing days

1,302

witnesses

1.2m

documents reviewed



What we learned from survivors

We heard about what has helped survivors manage the impacts of abuse and what they would like to see happen to better protect children into the future.

While each survivor's experience is unique, many of those we spoke to shared things in common. These included issues relating to:

- their experiences of abuse
- the impact of the abuse on their wellbeing
- speaking up about the abuse.

Experiences of abuse

During private sessions, survivors were free to choose what they shared with Commissioners. The majority spoke about the nature of the sexual abuse they experienced, including what happened, the institution where it happened and the roles held by the person who abused them.

More than half of survivors told Commissioners about their experiences of other forms of abuse during and after the sexual abuse. Most often this was physical and emotional abuse.

The Royal Commission used many sources of information to reach its conclusions and recommendations

* The number of private sessions held is more than the number of survivors whose experiences we heard about. This is because there was a small number of instances in which a survivor's story was shared during more than one private session.

Other things we heard about survivors' experience of abuse include:

- their age when the abuse started
- the frequency, type and duration of sexual and other abuse
- the types of institutions where the abuse occurred.



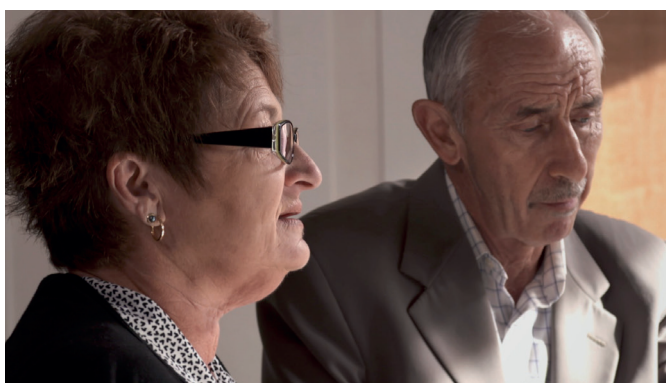
FIND OUT MORE

Volume 2, *Nature and cause* provides information about child sexual abuse, what we learned about how and why it occurs and how common it is in Australia.

Wellbeing

In private sessions and public hearings we learned a great deal about the impact of abuse on survivors' sense of wellbeing, across many areas of their lives and over many years. Some said the impact was immediate, for others it was triggered years after they were abused.

We also heard how support from family and friends, and counselling, were sources of strength.



Almost all survivors told us that they experienced poor mental health as a result of child sexual abuse.

Survivors told us about the impact of child sexual abuse on their wellbeing in a number of areas including:

- mental health, behaviour and personal relationships
- physical health
- education levels, employment and economic security.



FIND OUT MORE

Volume 3, *Impacts* describes how child sexual abuse in institutions affects victims as well as their families, friends and the broader community.

Telling others about the abuse

Many survivors said that speaking up about what happened to them was difficult and not a one-off event. Talking about their experience involved telling parents, partners, families, friends and institutions at different stages of their lives. For those we heard from, it took an average of almost 24 years to tell someone they had been sexually abused as a child.

In some cases parents, partners and close friends supported survivors when they were told about the abuse. However, many survivors told us that at the time of the abuse adults responded poorly. When survivors told an institution's staff or management about the abuse, the reaction was almost always negative.



Of the survivors who spoke about who they told, one in 10 said speaking to the Royal Commission was the first time they had told anyone about the sexual abuse they experienced as a child.

We heard about:

- experiences of first speaking about the abuse, as children and as adults
- barriers that prevented survivors speaking about the abuse.



FIND OUT MORE

Volume 4, *Identifying and disclosing child sexual abuse* describes what we have learned about survivors' experiences of speaking about child sexual abuse and barriers to disclosure. We discuss why early disclosure is important – it can mark the end of the abuse and the beginning of recovery. It may also reduce the ongoing risk to potential victims.

What we recommend for the future

From the information we received through private sessions, public hearings, and policy and research, we learned about the way institutions have responded to child sexual abuse.

Some information we received was about how institutions were run in the past, and some was about the way they are run today. This has helped us to make recommendations for the future.

Our recommendations focus on:

- preventing abuse or, at the very least, identifying it as early as possible
- improving the way perpetrators are investigated, prosecuted and sentenced
- improving survivors' access to justice and ongoing support.

Our recommendations recognise that governments, institutions and the broader community share responsibility for keeping children safe. We make recommendations about the following areas:



Making institutions safer for children

Recommendations in Volumes 6 to 8 set out ways communities, institutions, governments and individuals can make institutions safer for children. They focus on ways that institutions can better prevent, identify, respond to and report child sexual abuse. These recommendations cover:

- approaches to community-wide prevention
- 10 Child Safe Standards to make institutions safer and ensure children's best interests are central to their operation
- strengthening children's safety online and improving the way institutions respond to online abuse
- improving the way institutions respond to and report matters relating to child sexual abuse
- strengthening recordkeeping practices and information sharing.



FIND OUT MORE

Volume 6, *Making institutions child safe* includes information about our Child Safe Standards and their implementation. Volume 7, *Improving institutional responding and reporting* and Volume 8, *Recordkeeping and information sharing* look at best practice complaint handling, recordkeeping and strengthening information sharing across sectors.

Advocacy, support and treatment services for survivors

Our recommendations on advocacy, support and treatment services will be of interest to survivors, services that support survivors, and those who fund services and cover:

- providing victims and survivors with access to tailored treatment and support services for as long as needed
- creating strong national leadership to reduce the stigma of child sexual abuse to encourage victims and survivors to seek support and treatment
- promoting good practice in services that provide treatment and support for survivors.



FIND OUT MORE

In Volume 9, *Advocacy, support and therapeutic treatment services* we look at what we learned about survivors' needs and gaps in the service system and discuss ways survivors can be better supported.



Responding to children with harmful sexual behaviours

Children with harmful sexual behaviours are different to adults who commit child sexual abuse. They require specific responses that take into account the nature of their behaviours, different contributing factors and the child's particular situation.

We make a number of recommendations about what institutions, governments and communities should do to respond to harmful sexual behaviours. These cover:

- increasing knowledge and awareness of children's harmful sexual behaviours
- improving responses to children with harmful sexual behaviours
- best practice principles for therapeutic treatment.



FIND OUT MORE

In Volume 10, *Children with harmful sexual behaviours* we discuss what we have learned about harmful sexual behaviours by a child, and how institutions respond.



Improving the response of different types of institutions

Commissioners selected six types of institutions for in-depth examination in the Final Report.

Volume 11, *Historical residential institutions* describes what we learned about residential institutions that operated before 1990. We paid close attention to the lessons learned from institutions that have since closed down and what survivors told us would make a difference to inform institutions operating today.

The recommendations in Volumes 12 to 16 look at making particular types of institutions safer for children such as out-of-home care; schools; sport, recreation, arts, culture, community and hobby groups; youth detention settings; and religious institutions.

Each volume looks at specific features of each type of institution and recommendations cover areas such as:

- implementing Child Safe Standards
- improving regulation and oversight
- improving the way complaints and disclosures about child sexual abuse are handled
- providing workers with skills and knowledge to keep children safe
- ensuring the safety and wellbeing of children.



FIND OUT MORE

To see what we have learned about different types of institutions read Volume 11, *Historical residential institutions*, Volume 12, *Contemporary out-of-home care*, Volume 13, *Schools*, Volume 14, *Sport, recreation, arts, culture, community and hobby groups*, Volume 15, *Contemporary detention environments* and Volume 16, *Religious institutions*.

Beyond the Royal Commission



Since we started our work, community awareness about the failure of many trusted institutions to protect children from sexual abuse has grown.

With the handover of the Final Report to government, our work is complete.

Australia's governments and institutions are now responsible for responding to the Royal Commission's recommendations and delivering the changes that the community has rightly come to expect.

We have asked the Australian Government and state and territory governments to respond to our Final Report within six months of its release. In their response, governments should tell the community which of our recommendations they plan to act on and which they do not.

As we understand that change will take some time, we have also asked that every year for the next five years all Australian governments submit a report to their parliaments that shows their progress towards implementing our recommendations.



FIND OUT MORE

Volume 17, *Beyond the Royal Commission* describes the impact of the Royal Commission and discusses monitoring and reporting on the implementation of our recommendations.

WHY WORDS ARE IMPORTANT

Those who have experienced child sexual abuse, have told us that language matters. The words used to describe the abuse and its victims can silence survivors and invite shame or guilt. When used well, words can help survivors feel understood and empowered.

We have provided definitions for some key words and phrases that are used in the Final Report. A more detailed list is in the Glossary in Volume 1, *Our inquiry*.

Child sexual abuse

'Child sexual abuse' includes any act which exposes a child to, or involves them in, sexual processes beyond their understanding or contrary to accepted community standards.

Victims and survivors

The words 'victim' and 'survivor' both refer to a person who has been sexually abused as a child.

We use the word 'victim' when speaking of a person at the time of their abuse. We use the word 'survivor' when speaking of a person after their abuse, such as when they are sharing their story or accessing support. We understand that many people do not like the terms 'victim' or 'survivor'.

Institution

An institution is any organisation that now, or in the past, has had contact with children. This includes government departments, religious organisations, charities, schools, out-of-home care, juvenile justice settings, sporting or other clubs and businesses.



Reading the Final Report

How the Final Report is structured

The Final Report includes a preface and executive summary and 17 volumes.

Each volume is designed to be read on its own. To help readers understand how each volume relates to the rest of the Final Report, every volume points to relevant information in other volumes. For example, a reader of Volume 13, *Schools* will come across references to other volumes such as Volume 6, *Making institutions child safe*.

Each volume provides an overview of the entire report, including:

- a complete list of all volumes
- a brief summary of the main topics covered in each volume.

Also in the Final Report

Terms of Reference

In our Terms of Reference, the Australian Government set out the Royal Commission's task. These are published in full in Volume 1, *Our inquiry* and are also available online at www.childabuseroyalcommission.gov.au

Preface and executive summary

The Preface and executive summary provides an outline of the Final Report and features a summary of the main themes of each volume. It also includes a complete list of the Royal Commission's 409 recommendations.

Survivors' accounts

With permission, we have published a selection of narratives based on survivors' accounts as told to us in private sessions as an online appendix to Volume 5, *Private sessions*. These narratives do not contain information that could identify individual survivors.

Accessing the Final Report

The Final Report is available online at www.childabuseroyalcommission.gov.au Printed copies of the report may be viewed in a number of libraries across Australia.



Our other final reports

The Royal Commission also made recommendations in three previously published reports:

- *Working With Children Checks* (2015)
- *Redress and civil litigation* (2015)
- *Criminal justice* (2017)

Other guides in the series

This guide is one of four developed to meet the interests of different audiences. The other guides are:

- *A brief guide to the Final Report: Disability*
- *A brief guide to the Final Report: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities*
- *A brief guide to the Final Report: Children and young people*

All guides are available online at www.childabuseroyalcommission.gov.au

ABOUT THE USE OF PRIVATE SESSIONS INFORMATION IN THIS GUIDE

When writing this guide, we used information from private sessions that were held between May 2013 and May 2017.

The Final Report has been published with a separate fact sheet with updated information from private sessions held between May 2013 and November 2017.

The fact sheet is available online at www.childabuseroyalcommission.gov.au

Complete volume list

| | |
|---------------|--|
| | <i>Preface and executive summary</i> – includes a summary of each volume and a complete list of all recommendations. |
| Volume 1 | <i>Our inquiry</i> – introduces the Final Report and describes the establishment, scope and operations of the Royal Commission. |
| Volume 2 | <i>Nature and cause</i> – describes what the Royal Commission learned about the nature and cause of child sexual abuse in institutional contexts. |
| Volume 3 | <i>Impacts</i> – explains the impacts of child sexual abuse in institutional contexts on survivors and often their family members, friends, and entire communities. |
| Volume 4 | <i>Identifying and disclosing child sexual abuse</i> – describes what we learned about survivors’ experiences of disclosing child sexual abuse. |
| Volume 5 | <i>Private sessions</i> – describes survivors’ experiences of child sexual abuse as told to Commissioners during private sessions. |
| Volume 6 | <i>Making institutions child safe</i> – outlines a national strategy for child sexual abuse prevention and proposes child safe standards including how institutions may implement them. |
| Volume 7 | <i>Improving institutional responding and reporting</i> – looks at institutions’ responses to complaints of child sexual abuse and how they report these matters to external government authorities. |
| Volume 8 | <i>Recordkeeping and information sharing</i> – examines the records, recordkeeping and information sharing of institutions that care for or provide services to children. |
| Volume 9 | <i>Advocacy, support and therapeutic treatment services</i> – looks at what we learned about survivors’ needs in terms of advocacy, support and treatment and offers recommendations for improving service systems to better respond to survivors’ needs. |
| Volume 10 | <i>Children with harmful sexual behaviours</i> – examines what we learned about institutional responses to children with harmful sexual behaviours. |
| Volume 11 | <i>Historical residential institutions</i> – describes what we learned about survivors’ experiences of, and institutional responses to child sexual abuse in residential institutions, pre-1990. |
| Volume 12 | <i>Contemporary out-of-home care</i> – examines what we learned about institutional responses to child sexual abuse in contemporary out-of-home care. |
| Volume 13 | <i>Schools</i> – describes what we learned about institutional responses to child sexual abuse in schools. |
| Volume 14 | <i>Sport, recreation, arts, culture, community and hobby groups</i> – looks at what we learned about institutional responses to child sexual abuse in sport and recreation contexts. |
| Volume 15 | <i>Contemporary detention environments</i> – reviews what we learned about institutional responses to child sexual abuse in contemporary detention environments. |
| Volume 16 | <i>Religious institutions</i> – examines what we learned about institutional responses to child sexual abuse in religious institutions. |
| Volume 17 | <i>Beyond the Royal Commission</i> – describes the impact and legacy of the Royal Commission and discusses monitoring and reporting on the implementation of our recommendations. |
| Other reports | <i>Working With Children Checks</i> <i>Redress and civil litigation</i> <i>Criminal justice</i> |

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