



CATHOLIC HEALTH Australia

1 July 2011

Committee Secretary
Senate Standing Committees on Community Affairs
PO Box 6100
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

Dear Committee Secretary

Inquiry into the Commonwealth Contribution to Former Forced Adoption Policies and Practices

It is with a deep sense of regret and heartfelt sorrow that I advise the Inquiry that in June 2011 Catholic Health Australia learnt of concerns of several women about their different experiences of unwanted adoption practices in a small number of Catholic hospitals and women's homes during the 1950s, 60s and 70s.

As we have gradually become aware of the matters involved we have learnt that each case is complex. We have learnt that each case is deeply personal. We have concluded that only the mothers, children, and families involved can adequately speak to the details of their circumstances. It would be inappropriate for us to speak on their behalf.

We do however acknowledge the pain of separation and loss felt then and felt now for the mothers, fathers, children, families and others involved in some of the practices of the time. For this pain that arises from the practices of the past, we are genuinely sorry.

Over the last two decades a number of people have come forward to governments, hospitals, and different churches with concerns about adoption practices that were regrettably common in many maternity hospitals across Australia in the past.

These practices of the past are no longer tolerated, nor allowed by today's law, and are deeply regrettable.

In some cases, the adoption practices of thirty to sixty years ago had devastating and ongoing impacts on mothers, fathers, children and families.

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In 2000, the NSW Legislative Council Inquiry into past adoption practices found these *“past adoption practices were misguided, and that, on occasions unethical or unlawful practices may have occurred causing lasting suffering for many mothers, fathers, adoptees and their families.”* We echo that finding.

At this NSW Parliamentary Inquiry, representatives of Catholic adoption services that operated in the 1950s, 60s, and 70s apologised for the practices of that era and the pain felt by some. We echo that apology, and again through your Inquiry say sorry for the role of Catholic hospitals in past adoption practices that are no longer considered appropriate.

There are likely to be people within our community who continue to live with pain and grief as a result of adoption practices of the past. Some have come forward, others may yet do so. We have no adequate method of identifying just how many may have been affected and may come forward.

Our anecdotal experience is that those who do come forward find accessing their records, making contact with their family members, seeking counselling for their grief, and seeking to remedy any wrongs overly complex. State Government, community agencies, and Church bodies do offer support, but they do not appear to be coordinated, and anecdotally they do not always provide the type of outcome that may be desired.

Catholic Health Australia would endorse a proposal to establish a national framework to aid those dealing with their post adoption circumstances. We are not expert in what such a framework should entail, but would envisage it should include a single identifiable access point, sufficiently resourced to enable access to records, support with family reunion where possible, counselling for those who seek it, and a fund for remedying established wrongs.

The national framework would ideally engage all State and Territory Governments who have primary responsibility for these matters, but also find a place for the participation of those community and Church groups with historical involvement in adoption and current capacity to bring healing to those in need.

Were we more skilled in post adoption care, we would bring other proposals to this Inquiry. Our expertise is in health and aged care, but we now seek to better respond to the needs of those experiencing adverse consequences of adoption.

I make myself available to give evidence to this Inquiry in the event that an expression of our sorrow and regret for involvement in past adoption practices would bring healing and comfort to those living with the pain and grief of the adoption practises of another era.

Yours sincerely

Martin Laverty
Chief Executive Officer