



Australian Government
National Office for Child Safety

Submission to the Parliamentary Joint Committee on Law Enforcement

Inquiry into law enforcement capabilities in relation to child
exploitation



Our work

About the National Office for Child Safety

The National Office of Child Safety (National Office) was established on 1 July 2018 in response to the Final Report of the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse (Royal Commission). The National Office provides national leadership to deliver policies and strategies that enhance children's safety and reduce future harm, with a particular focus on child sexual abuse¹. This includes leading or co-leading the implementation of 34 Royal Commission recommendations and working across governments and sectors to support the implementation of child safety policies.

As the inquiry's objectives relate mainly to the Home Affairs Portfolio, this submission focuses on where the National Office's national policy leadership role intersects with the inquiry's Terms of Reference.

National Strategy to Prevent and Respond to Child Sexual Abuse

The National Office is responsible for the design, implementation and oversight of Australia's forthcoming *National Strategy to Prevent and Respond to Child Sexual Abuse 2021-2030* (National Strategy). The National Strategy is a key Royal Commission recommendation.

The National Strategy is a 10 year, whole-of-nation framework to establish a coordinated and consistent approach to prevent and better respond to child sexual abuse in all settings, including within families, by other people the child or young person knows or does not know, in organisations, and online. Initially, the National Strategy will be driven by two action plans, both spanning 2021-2024:

- ▶ the First National Action Plan will focus on initiatives to be delivered jointly by the Australian Government and state and territory governments
- ▶ the First Commonwealth Action Plan will focus on measures to be delivered by the Australian Government.

It is likely these will be followed by two sets of three year action plans (2025-2027 and 2028-2030 respectively) to cover the National Strategy's full 10-year lifespan.

The National Strategy has five themes:

- ▶ Theme 1: Awareness raising, education and building child safe cultures
- ▶ Theme 2: Supporting and empowering victims and survivors
- ▶ Theme 3: Enhancing national approaches to children with harmful sexual behaviours
- ▶ Theme 4: Offender prevention and intervention
- ▶ Theme 5: Improving the evidence base

Themes 1, 4 and 5 are particularly relevant to the inquiry's Terms of Reference.

The National Strategy will be a truly whole-of-nation response to child sexual abuse. It was developed in consultation with governments, non-government organisations, academics, victims and survivors, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, and people with disability.

In Budget 2021-22, the Australian Government announced \$146 million over four years for the first phase of the National Strategy. Additional measures and funding will accompany the full National Strategy's release later in 2021. The National Strategy will include a strong monitoring and evaluation framework to assess how well its measures achieve the National Strategy's vision, objective and values.

¹ This submission uses 'child sexual abuse' to refer to any act that exposes a child or young person to, or involves them in, sexual activities that they do not understand; they do not or cannot consent to; are not accepted by the community; and are unlawful. This definition includes grooming behaviours, contact/physical abuse, and conduct involving child abuse material. In line with the [Luxembourg Terminology Guidelines](#), this definition captures a more expansive range of behaviours than the term 'child exploitation'.

Measures of relevance to the Terms of Reference

Funding law enforcement and prosecutorial agencies

To keep pace with the increasing scale and complexity of Commonwealth child sexual abuse cases, including where offences are committed online, the National Strategy includes:

- ▶ \$59.9 million worth of initiatives to be delivered by the Australian Federal Police to combat child sexual abuse, including an additional \$35.4 million for new frontline operational activities
- ▶ \$13.9 million to bolster the capabilities of AUSTRAC, the Australian Institute of Criminology, the Australian Border Force, the Australian Criminal Intelligence Commission, and the Department of Home Affairs to equip intelligence, research and border protection agencies to disrupt the cash flow behind child sexual abuse, prevent and disrupt livestreamed child sexual abuse, intercept material and offenders at the border, and enhance our ability to identify offenders within the community
- ▶ \$24.1 million to strengthen the Commonwealth's capacity to prosecute child sexual abuse cases.

Recognising online child sexual abuse as a priority area

The National Strategy will oversee development of the capabilities, partnerships and strategic insights needed to respond to all forms of online child sexual abuse. Under the National Strategy, the Australian Government will engage key stakeholders to prevent and raise awareness of harmful behaviours online through:

- ▶ providing \$3.0 million to the Office of the eSafety Commissioner to deliver targeted online education programs to support parents and families to prevent online harms to children
- ▶ providing \$2.95 million to help the Department of Home Affairs build relationships with the digital industry to drive a coordinated and collaborative charge against offenders' exploitation of online platforms to commit child sexual abuse-related crimes.

Enhancing our understanding of the link between accessing online child abuse material and contact offending

The National Strategy will address gaps in research and data relating to child sexual abuse. This work will enhance law enforcement, intelligence and research agencies' ability to identify offenders within the community, including those engaging in technology-facilitated abuse overseas, and gain insight into offending trajectories.

The Australian Government has already separately funded the first wave of the Australian Child Maltreatment Study (ACMS), which aims to determine the prevalence of all forms of child maltreatment (including sexual abuse) in Australia. The ACMS includes questions on the incidence, context and disclosure of online child sexual abuse, and its co-occurrence with other forms of child maltreatment. The ACMS commenced in January 2019, with preliminary results expected in late-2022 and final results in 2023.

Integrating victim-survivor perspectives to our criminal justice response

Victims and survivors of child sexual abuse face many barriers to disclosing their experiences. Their needs must inform policy design and service delivery. National Strategy measures will be designed using trauma-informed approaches, including where law enforcement and criminal justice outcomes are concerned. Specific measures concerning victims and survivors will be released with the full National Strategy in late 2021.

