

Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse, Commonwealth Government

2012 – 2017

URL: <http://childabuseroyalcommission.gov.au>

Details

The Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse was announced on 12 November 2012 by Prime Minister Julia Gillard. Its terms of reference were wide-ranging, examining how institutions had responded to child sexual abuse, both in the past and present. The Royal Commission investigated a wide range of institutions including religious organisations, state care providers, not-for-profit bodies, child service agencies and the police. This included investigating the responses of institutions who were responsible for Homes and other residential institutions.

The Royal Commission's work operated across three channels: private sessions, public and private hearings for case studies, and a research and policy stream. It published 57 case studies, 11 issues papers and more than 50 research reports. It also released an interim report in 2014; and a redress and civil litigation report in 2015, before its 17-volume Final Report was handed down in December 2017.

Calls for a royal commission into the abuse suffered by people who were in institutional 'care' date back to 2004, and Recommendation 11 of the Senate's 'Forgotten Australians' report. The subsequent Inquiry in 2009 into the implementation of the recommendations of the 'Lost Innocents' and 'Forgotten Australians' reports contained submissions from stakeholders calling for a royal commission. The submission from Care Leavers of Australia Network (CLAN) noted institutions, agencies and facilities had not cooperated with authorities investigating historical crimes, and the Alliance for Forgotten Australians (AFA) stated that a royal commission or formal inquiry into state government, charitable and church-run institutions may be the only way to obtain the truth and to bring accountability.

On 12 November 2012, Prime Minister Julia Gillard announced she would recommend to the Governor-General that a royal commission be established to enquire into institutional responses to child sexual abuse. Gillard further commented that the emphasis was on institutional responses as the issue was recognised as being one of systemic failure in institutions responding to issues around child sexual abuse, and therefore she wanted the royal commission to provide recommendations to stop this systemic failure from happening again.

On 11 January 2013, the Governor-General of the Commonwealth of Australia issued Letters Patent, which included the formal establishment of a Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse, appointment of six Commissioners and set out the Terms of Reference. The six commissioners were: The Hon. Justice Peter McClellan AM (Chair), The Hon. Justice Jennifer Coate, Mr Bob Atkinson AO APM, Mr Robert Fitzgerald AM, Professor Helen Milroy and Mr Andrew Murray.

The Terms of Reference required the Royal Commission to inquire into, and report on, “institutional responses to allegations and incidents of child sexual abuse and related matters”. There was criticism from the outset that focussing only on sexual abuse was unfair to survivors who had experienced other forms of abuse at institutions in childhood. It was noted that sexual abuse was often accompanied by physical and emotional abuse; however, for those survivors who had experienced other forms of abuse but not sexual abuse, their suffering and experiences were ignored, and also made them ineligible for redress and other forms of acknowledgement.

The Royal Commission’s work was done in three streams: through the investigation of Case Studies, a policy and research program, and private sessions. Case studies were informed by public hearings, and were designed to examine and illuminate systemic issues. Nine case studies specifically examined historical residential institutions, either as single institutions or in groups.

The policy and research arm operated through developing consultation papers calling for submissions, convening roundtables and forums, and commissioning experts to write research reports on specific topics and to fill gaps. The research program was divided into eight themes, including the theme of “institutional responses”, which included research into the history of Australian inquiries about institutions who provided ‘care’ for children; the history of institutions providing out-of-home residential care, and the history of child protection legislation. The research program resulted in five consultation papers, 11 issues papers, seven public and private roundtables, and 62 published research reports.

Private sessions enabled survivors to tell their stories and provide evidence to the Royal Commission, in a private and supported environment. This was the first time a Royal Commission had held private sessions, and the Royal Commissions Act 1902 (Cth) was amended to allow private sessions to be part of the Royal Commission’s remit. While the information imparted in private sessions was not publicly published or identified in case studies or the Final Report, it was used to inform the Royal Commission’s research work, identify systematic issues, and where the focus of case studies should be. In many cases, de-identified narratives were constructed and published with survivors’ consent.

As part of the Royal Commission’s publications, a book entitled *Message to Australia*, containing quotes and messages from survivors to the Australian public, was presented to the National Library of Australia. By the time the Royal Commission concluded, it heard over 8000 private sessions with over one third (35.9%) of these relating to abuse in “historical residential institutions” (Royal Commission Final Report Vol 11).

The Royal Commission travelled across Australia to conduct hearings and private sessions, including holding hearings and private sessions in youth detention centres and prisons.

It also had the power to refer criminal matters to police, where a survivor consented to this. By its conclusion, the Royal Commission had made over 2,500 referrals to police and other authorities.

The Royal Commission was originally required to provide its Final Report in 2015. However, once it began, it became clear that more time would be needed to properly investigate. In June 2014, the Royal Commission released its Interim Report and soon after, the Government announced that the Royal Commission would be extended until December 2017.

The Royal Commission’s Final Report was handed to the Governor-General on 15 December 2017. It consisted of 17 volumes containing 189 recommendations. The Final Report included *Volume 8: Recordkeeping and information sharing*, which included recommendations around how organisations could improve records access processes for survivors; and *Volume 11: Historical residential institutions*, which looked at the experiences of former residents of Homes who gave evidence during private sessions.

In response to the Royal Commission’s recommendations, the Government launched a National Redress Scheme for people who have experienced institutional child sexual abuse in July 2018. The scheme is to run for 10 years. On 22 October 2018, there was a National Apology to Victims and Survivors of Institutional Child Sexual Abuse in Parliament House, Canberra.

Gallery



CLAN postcard "Royal Commission into Child Sexual Abuse"

Description: This is an image of a postcard printed by CLAN as part of its campaign for a Royal Commission into child sexual abuse. This postcard was addressed to the Premier of Victoria.



Final sitting: Commissioners and Dr Marie-Louise Ayers, the Director-General of the National Library with the Message to Australia book

Description: This is an image of the six commissioners of the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse with Dr Marie-Louise Ayers (centre), displaying the Message to Australia book. This image was published on the Royal Commission's website.



Final Report

Description: This is an image of the published Final Report of the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse. It shows all 17 volumes of the final report. This image was published on the Royal Commission's website.

More info

Related Entries

Related Events

- [Inquiry into Children in Institutional Care, Parliament of Australia \(2003 - 2005\)](#)
- [National Apology to Victims and Survivors of Institutional Child Sexual Abuse, Parliament of Australia \(22 October 2018\)](#)
- [Inquiry into the Implementation of the Recommendations of the Lost Innocents and Forgotten Australians Reports, Parliament of Australia \(2008 - 2009\)](#)
- [Case Study 30: Youth detention centres, Victoria, Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse \(2015\)](#)
- [Case Study 03: North Coast Children's Home, Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse \(2013 - 2014\)](#)
- [Case Study 05: The Salvation Army boys' homes, Australian Eastern Territory, Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse \(2014\)](#)
- [Case Study 07: Parramatta Training School for Girls, Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse \(2014\)](#)
- [Case Study 11: Christian Brothers, Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse \(2014\)](#)
- [Case Study 17: Retta Dixon Home, Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse \(2014\)](#)
- [Case Study 19: Bethcar Children's Home, Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse \(2014\)](#)
- [Case Study 26: St Joseph's Orphanage, Neerkol, Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse \(2015\)](#)
- [Case Study 33: The Salvation Army children's Homes, Australia Southern Territory, Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse \(2015\)](#)
- [Case study 42: The Anglican Diocese of Newcastle, Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse \(2017\)](#)

- [National Redress Scheme, Australian government \(2018 - current\)](#)

Related Organisations

- [Care Leavers Australasia Network \(2000 - current\)](#)
- [Department of Social Services, Australian government \(2013 - current\)](#)
- [Alliance for Forgotten Australians \(2006 - current\)](#)
- [Broken Rites \(1992 - current\)](#)

Resources

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