International Best Practice for Protecting Children from Child Sexual Abuse

Preventing Child Sexual Abuse

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Australia

FOREWORD

Prevention of child sexual abuse is a global responsibility. While some educational and community-based prevention programs demonstrate indicators of promise for knowledge-acquisition, best-practice in child sexual abuse prevention must extend beyond established programs and evidence-based strategies to incorporate emerging research, theoretical developments, and innovative practices. A truly comprehensive prevention approach recognises the need to address not only individual risk factors, but also the broader social, environmental, and systemic conditions that create opportunities for abuse. By adopting a multi-faceted, layered approach, prevention efforts can be implemented across various levels and points in time, increasing the potential for sustained and meaningful change.
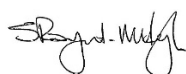
The Sexual Violence Research and Prevention Unit (SVRPU) at the University of the Sunshine Coast is at the forefront of advancing sexual violence prevention and response, including child sexual abuse. With a commitment to innovation and continuous improvement, the SVRPU challenges traditional approaches and drives new directions in research and practice. Its work strengthens how individuals, systems, and communities understand, prevent, and respond to sexual violence.

Collaboration, respect, and inclusion underpin all aspects of the SVRPU's work. The SVRPU partners closely with communities, victim-survivors, industry professionals, and government agencies to ensure that research is both ethically grounded and socially responsive. Special attention is given to safe and inclusive methodologies, particularly when working alongside First Nations Peoples and other groups affected by systemic disadvantage. Through ongoing knowledge translation efforts, the SVRPU ensures that its research reaches those who need it most, not only academics and policymakers but also frontline practitioners and the wider community. In doing so, the SVRPU plays a vital role in bridging the gap between research and practice, and in creating safer, more informed communities.

At the heart of the SVRPU's work is a deep commitment to real-world impact. Grounded in a "knowing before doing" philosophy, the SVRPU's interdisciplinary research generates both conceptual insights and empirical evidence to better understand the complex dynamics of sexual violence and identify effective prevention efforts. This report is no exception. As Co-Leaders of the SVRPU, we are proud to introduce this Final Report on *Preventing Child Sexual Abuse* as part of a larger project led by the Child Death Review Board on *International Best Practice for Protecting Children from Child Sexual Abuse*. We anticipate the findings and recommendations will help drive much needed positive change towards building a safer world that is free from child sexual abuse.

A/Professor Nadine McKillop   **Dr Susan Rayment-McHugh**   **Dr Lara Christensen**

Co-Leaders

Sexual Violence Research and Prevention Unit (SVRPU)
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TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES

LIST OF FIGURES

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

PROJECT TEAM

The project team, comprising **Associate Professor Dominique Moritz, Dr Stephanie Price, Laura Dodds** and **Dr Dale Mitchell,** are situated within the *Sexual Violence Research and Prevention Unit*.

The [Sexual Violence Research and Prevention Unit](#) (SVRPU) is based at the University of the Sunshine Coast (UniSC), and leads research, consultation, co-design and evaluation activities that advance the development, and refinement of, sexual violence prevention strategies across diverse settings. The SVRPU brings together a community of national and international researchers and students to understand, prevent, and respond to sexual violence and abuse. Collectively, the pioneering, interdisciplinary approach to research contributes to conceptual and empirical developments that help propel the field forward to reduce the extent and impacts of sexual violence in our community. By disseminating research to industry professionals and to the broader community, the SVRPU bridges the gap between research and practice.

The SVRPU leadership team (**Associate Professor Nadine McKillop, Dr Susan Rayment-McHugh** and **Dr Lara Christensen**) are recognised internationally as experts in sexual violence and abuse prevention. Their collective contributions to evidence-informed prevention and intervention are demonstrated by over $3.5 million in externally funded research projects. Their academic contributions include over 100 peer-reviewed publications (journal articles, books, book chapters, and Government reports), which document research, best-practice, and consultancies. Together, their work has led to changes in government agenda setting, policy, and practice frameworks.

Chief Investigators

Associate Professor Dominique Moritz (Project Lead and Chief Investigator) is an academic in law at UniSC and Core Member of the *SVRPU*. Dominique holds a PhD in law. She is an expert in children's law issues. Her extensive expertise spans criminal law and regulatory concepts with a particular interest in sexual violence criminalisation. She has published 19 peer reviewed articles in high quality journals including several articles on child sexual exploitation (Moritz 2022; Moritz, Christensen and Pearson 2022; Christensen, Moritz and Pearson 2021) and has a track record of leading successful and impactful projects receiving almost $1 million in external grant funding. Dominique is a qualified lawyer, being admitted to the Supreme Court of Queensland in 2013. She was also a police officer employed by the Queensland Police Service prior to entering academia.

Dr Stephanie Price (Chief Investigator) is a Research Fellow of the SVRPU at UniSC. She is a criminologist, with research and consultancy experience in the evaluation and design of youth sexual violence and abuse (YSVA) prevention initiatives and responses. She has successfully managed several projects involving collaborations with academic and industry partners, including the Queensland Department of Youth Justice and Queensland Department of Justice & Attorney-General, to the value of more than $450,000. Stephanie has co-authored several government and industry reports with the *SVRPU*, and has 10 publications, including a review of digital interventions as prevention measures to combat online child sexual abuse prevention and an exploration of professional development tools to upskill frontline workers in identifying and responding to harmful sexual behaviours. Stephanie has recently completed a literature review of the onset of and response to youth perpetrated sexual harm for the University of Tasmania, and is currently finalising a scoping review of restorative justice as a means to address sexual harm.

Laura Dodds (Chief Investigator) is an Associate Lecturer at UniSC, in the School of Law and Society and a Core Member of the SVRPU. Laura also maintains registration as a Social Worker and is a highly sought Single Expert Witness, having written more than 1000 reports for the Family and Federal Circuit Court of Australia. She has worked in child protection and risk assessment roles for over 21 years. Her expertise includes identifying, assessing, and interviewing

children who are alleged to have experienced sexual abuse, amongst other child abuse issues. Laura is ICARE trained and her former experience as a child protection worker has resulted in a long history of interviewing victim-children alongside police, responding to allegations of child sexual exploitation, providing support to victims and understanding perpetrator accountability from child safety and family court settings. Laura's doctoral thesis explores children's rights within decision-making in the existing adversarial family court system in Australia.

Dr Dale Mitchell (Chief Investigator) is a Lecturer in Law at UniSC, a Core Member of the SVRPU, and Co-Leader of the Society, Law and Humanities (SOLAH) Lab. Dale's scholarship explores the intersection between law and culture, drawing upon multidisciplinary approaches to explore emergent understandings of law and justice. In 2022, Dale's doctoral dissertation in law was awarded the Julien Mezey Dissertation Prize from the US-based Association for the Study of Law, Culture and Humanities, who hailed his work as 'innovative and rigorous' and demonstrating a 'theoretical clarity that pushes legal analysis forward in creative and engaging ways'. Dale has been invited to present his work at national and international conferences, and has published in high-ranking journals and presses. Dale was admitted as a lawyer to the Supreme Court of Queensland in 2014, and worked under the guidance of A/Prof **Dominique Moritz** in exploring community views on rape and sexual assault sentencing on behalf of the Queensland Sentencing Advisory Council.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Child sexual abuse is one of the most serious violations of a child's rights, with profoundly devastating and lasting impacts on the safety, wellbeing and development of children. Despite growing awareness and concern about child sexual abuse, it remains a pervasive issue, with an alarming prevalence. Recent data suggested almost one-third of Australians have experienced some form of child sexual abuse, and that many cases are not reported to police (Mathews et al., 2023; 2025). Recent events, such as the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse (2017), have exposed critical failings in the prevention and safeguarding of children. It is clear that the prevention and response to child sexual abuse requires a co-ordinated, multi-faceted and evidence-based strategy.

The Child Death Review Board commissioned a Review of System Responses to Child Sexual Abuse under section 29I of the *Queensland Family and Child Commission Act 2014*, at the request of the Attorney General on 4 December 2024. As part of this review, the University of the Sunshine Coast's Sexual Violence Research and Prevention Unit (SVRPU) was engaged to identify international best practices in preventing and responding to child sexual abuse. This report addresses the first of these two focus areas—*prevention*—by examining educational and community-based programs, and contextual prevention strategies for building protective environments, including culturally appropriate approaches for specific populations, such as First Nations communities.

The Queensland Family and Child Commission proposed two research questions:

1. What educational and community-based programs have proven successful in preventing child sexual abuse, and how do they foster protective environments and community awareness, particularly for vulnerable populations like Indigenous communities?
2. How do Australia's practices for protecting children from sexual abuse

compare with leading international models, and what lessons can be adapted to improve outcomes in the Australian context?

Research Design

This research uses the Integrated Prevention Matrix (Smallbone & Rayment-McHugh, 2017) as a framework, guiding the research design, data analysis and synthesis, and reporting of findings. This Matrix merges the Public Health Model (Smallbone et al., 2008) with Eck's (2003) crime prevention triangle, resulting in a 3x3 matrix, which offers a comprehensive framework for prevention. The Matrix addresses three core prevention targets—individuals who may perpetrate harm, those at risk of experiencing harm, and environments where abuse is more likely to occur—across the three levels of prevention: primary, secondary, and tertiary (Smallbone & Rayment-McHugh, 2017).

This Report adopts a two-part structure to establish best practice for the prevention of child sexual abuse. *Part A* responds directly to the project brief by examining educational programs and community-based prevention strategies with empirical support, focusing primarily on knowledge, awareness, and skill-building that may reduce abuse risk. *Part B*, however, expands the scope by exploring emerging innovations, such as contextual prevention, co-design approaches, and the importance of improving accessibility of prevention initiatives.

This research was conducted in two phases. Phase One (Part A) involved a critical review of national and international literature on educational programs and community-based prevention strategies. The review integrated scoping and rapid review structures, using PRISMA guidelines. A total of 6,476 sources were screened, narrowing down the included sources to 180 materials. Thematic analysis was then used to extract and synthesise data on program types and content, participant populations, implementation factors, and outcomes. Phase Two (Part B) complemented the findings of Phase One by addressing identified evidence gaps through a more flexible literature review

approach. This phase focused on emerging and innovative child sexual abuse prevention practices, particularly in areas where the formal evidence base was more limited.

Key Findings

The findings demonstrate the prevention of child sexual abuse demands a proactive, multi-faceted approach that considers the social, environmental, and situational factors that can contribute to abuse (Rayment-McHugh et al., 2024). Hence, effective prevention requires a whole-of-system approach, with meaningful prevention efforts drawing on both well-established prevention strategies and evolving, innovative practices.

Part A: Educational Programs and Community-Based Strategies

The findings revealed that most educational prevention programs operated at the primary and secondary level, with a strong focus on helping children to acquire knowledge and strategies to identify safe behaviour and communicate risk to trusted adults. Fewer programs aimed to prevent sexually abusive behaviour directly, though respectful relationships education stood out as a school-based initiative addressing both victimisation *and* perpetration. Parent-focused programs were present across primary and secondary levels, while professional development initiatives focused exclusively on primary prevention to help adults better protect children. Community-based strategies were broader, spanning both primary and secondary levels and addressing risks to children, potential perpetrators, and the environments where abuse might occur. Notably, only perpetrator-focused programs addressed the settings target, highlighting a gap in environmental-level interventions.

There were seven key findings identified in Part A, falling under three areas of consideration: (1) Fostering protective environments; (2) Program design implications; and (3) Community participation and awareness.

Fostering protective environments

There were two key findings specific to *fostering protective environments*. It was clear that

education is only one component of a comprehensive child sexual abuse prevention agenda, with broader systemic strategies and community responses also needed; and that early childhood should be a key target area for prevention of child sexual abuse initiatives.

Program design implications

There were two key findings regarding *program design implications*. Program design should meet cohort needs, be developmentally appropriate and delivered by trained and/or experienced facilitators. Child sexual abuse prevention efforts should also recognise that children are not responsible for protecting themselves, placing greater responsibility on adults.

Community participation and awareness

There were three key findings pertaining to the importance of increasing *community participation and awareness*. It was evident that culturally informed, developed and led community programs align with best cultural practice for First Nations Peoples. Additionally, it was found that educating caregivers and professionals to deliver prevention messaging to children increases dissemination opportunities, especially for children from culturally diverse backgrounds; and that prevention initiatives and programs must target people at risk of perpetration and settings where abuse may occur.

However, educational programs and community-based prevention strategies represent just one component in a comprehensive child sexual abuse prevention agenda. As noted, the project expanded the scope to include innovative and emerging practices, which extend this work to increase safety efforts and foster more protective environments for children.

Part B: Innovative Approaches

The literature on emerging and innovative prevention practices suggests, best-practice in child sexual abuse prevention must go beyond proven or promising programs and strategies to also include emerging theories, research, and innovative practices. A truly comprehensive approach must address not only individual risk factors but also the broader environmental and contextual conditions that enable abuse

(Rayment-McHugh et al., 2024). This multi-faceted approach allows for multiple initiatives and strategies to be applied across multiple points in time, to drive meaningful change. Part B extended the findings of Part A, to identify cutting-edge research and practices, focusing on: (1) Contextual prevention; (2) Co-design; and (3) Ensuring a *Just Prevention* agenda and (4) Extending evaluation beyond 'what works'.

Contextual Prevention

Rayment-McHugh and colleagues (2024) suggest contextual prevention is an umbrella term, whereby "contextual prevention of CSA comprises prevention efforts that target factors external to the individual, addressing macro- and micro-level structures, to create safer environments for children" (p.5). This approach acknowledges the impact context can have on human behaviour, where some environments may increase the level of risk to children. Hence, contextual prevention strategies focus on reducing the level of risk in the environments around children to foster safer, more protective environments for children.

These strategies include targeting individual (e.g., early childhood, perpetration prevention programs), proximal (e.g., place-based approaches, contextual safeguarding and extending guardianship), and systems levels (e.g., regulatory systems and child safety policy); as well as sociocultural or macro level considerations. At the macro level, strategies aim to address the underlying causes of abuse, in structural and systemic contributors to risk, such as poverty, inequality, and social norms that enable abuse. At this level, co-design with young people and *Just Prevention* are crucial for best practice.

Co-design

Prevention strategies are going to be most impactful when grounded in local knowledge and experience, developed through inclusive, collaborative partnerships. This means co-designing strategies with young people, in community. Four key recommendations emerge: (1) Ground prevention in local contexts; (2) Engage in collaborative, multi-sector partnerships; (3) Let context shape both the 'what' and the 'how'; and (4) Utilise both

organisational and community change mechanisms. Co-design ensures that strategies are relevant, trusted, engaging, and more likely to lead to meaningful and lasting behavioural change.

Just Prevention

Rayment-McHugh and colleagues (2025) introduced the *Just Prevention Framework*, which calls for prevention strategies that improve safety and wellbeing, deliver lasting benefits, are equitably accessible, and are achievable with available resources. Just prevention emphasises the need to go beyond selecting evidence-based approaches, emphasising a greater focus on *who* is being supported and *how*. Without addressing social justice issues and accessibility gaps, prevention efforts risk leaving vulnerable children behind. Hence, best practice in prevention requires greater investment in sustainable, contextually responsive prevention strategies to close critical gaps in child sexual abuse prevention.

Extending Evaluation Beyond 'What Works'

Robust research and evaluation are critical to ensuring that child sexual abuse prevention programs are effective, equitable, and continually improving. While existing evidence shows promise, significant gaps remain due to a lack of long-term, comparative, and culturally relevant evaluations. To build a stronger evidence base, evaluations must be embedded from the outset of program implementation and adopt a realist approach, which considers program mechanisms, delivery, and contextual factors, including cultural diversity. This is essential to understanding what works, for whom, in what circumstances. Increased investment in research will help close these gaps, enabling more effective program design, better-informed policy, and a greater impact in preventing child sexual abuse.

Importantly, these innovative approaches enhance educational programs and community-based strategies. Combining both the established and promising programs and strategies with these innovative practices produces a more theory-driven, evidence-based framework that can guide a comprehensive child sexual abuse prevention agenda.

Recommendations

Effective child sexual abuse prevention must address perpetration, victimisation *and* settings, and address each level of prevention (i.e., primary, secondary and tertiary) (Smallbone & Rayment-McHugh, 2017). This means, effective prevention must adopt a coordinated, layered, and contextually relevant approach, with multiple strategies, to disrupt pathways to harm at every potential point of intervention. Crucially, effective prevention depends not just on program implementation but on a deeper level of engagement with the local contexts in which harm occurs. Generic or externally imposed programs risk missing contextual nuances, unique to each community.

To be effective, prevention strategies must be grounded in local realities, co-designed with those who hold lived experience, and responsive to community-specific risks and protective factors. This is especially crucial in First Nations Communities, where prevention must be community-led, guided by Indigenous knowledges, and grounded in genuine partnerships. Collaboration across sectors, between government and organisations, is also essential, as is attention to structural reform, cultural safety, and community empowerment. When prevention strategies are co-developed with the people and communities they aim to serve–using inclusive, accessible, and culturally relevant content and modalities–they are more likely to be meaningful and achieve a greater level of success. Finally, effective prevention must be equitable, and accessible to all, aligning with the *Just Prevention* framework to ensure no child is left behind.

1.0 BACKGROUND

On 4 December 2024, the Attorney General requested the Child Death Review Board conduct a Review of System Responses to Child Sexual Abuse empowered by section 29I of the Queensland *Family and Child Commission Act 2014*. The Terms of Reference asked for the identification of best practice across Australia and internationally for protecting children from sexual abuse, identifying perpetrators and children at risk, and responding to allegations.

A Request for Quote process by the Queensland Family & Child Commission (QFCC), led to the University of the Sunshine Coast's Sexual Violence Research and Prevention Unit (SVRPU) being awarded funding to prepare this Report. The QFCC requested that research be undertaken to develop an international best practice response for protecting children from child sexual abuse to benchmark the latest practice, research and policy, globally. More specifically, the University of the Sunshine Coast was asked to address (1) the prevention of child sexual abuse; and (2) responding to allegations of child sexual abuse.

This Report addresses the first parameter about preventing child sexual abuse. The following two research questions are relevant for this purpose:

What educational and community-based programs have proven successful in preventing child sexual abuse, and how do they foster protective environments and community awareness, particularly for vulnerable populations like Indigenous communities?

> How do Australia's practices for protecting children from sexual abuse compare with leading international models, and what lessons can be adapted to improve outcomes in the Australian context?

Within those research questions, researchers were also asked to specifically:

- Highlight educational and community programs aimed at preventing child sexual abuse;
- Explore strategies focused on increasing community awareness, educating children about their rights, and fostering protective environments; and
- Assess culturally appropriate practices, particularly for vulnerable populations, such as First Nations and Indigenous communities.

2.0 INTRODUCTION

Child sexual abuse is a form of violence against children. It encompasses children being involved in, or exposed to, unlawful sexual acts which they do not understand, cannot consent to, and are not accepted within the community (Commonwealth of Australia, 2021; Matthews & Collin-Vezina, 2019). It can involve contact and non-contact sexual acts. The differing legal approaches, societal norms and research standards and practices internationally means child sexual abuse definitions and understandings can differ – though there are some universal themes (Mathews, 2017). Child sexual abuse can occur in all settings, from homes to within organisations, and online. Although more sexual abuses of children are perpetrated by other children and young people than any other class of perpetrator (i.e., peer sexual abuse), child sexual abuse offences are committed by family members, carers or strangers (Mathews et al., 2025). Children can be at greater risk of child sexual abuse when they are in institutional settings, such as out-of-home care environments (Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse, 2017).

Child sexual abuse is a serious and pervasive issue. The Australian Child Maltreatment Study found that 28.5 percent of Australians had experienced child sexual abuse, with females twice as likely to report the abuse than their male counterparts (Mathews et al., 2023). Although many child sexual abuse cases remain unreported, highlighting the need for better prevention and support systems (Mathews et al., 2025). Several recent events have also increased community awareness and concern about child sexual abuse, including the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse (2017), the Australian Child Maltreatment Study, the #MeToo social media movement and the Ashley Paul Griffith case, to name a few. As such, community recognition and understanding of the prevalence of child sexual abuse is becoming more prominent.

As one example, the recent Ashley Paul Griffith case demonstrated the vulnerability of children in care. The defendant, Griffith, pleaded guilty to

307 child sexual abuse offences against at least 69 children, including rape, repeated sexual conduct and indecent treatment, which occurred over a 19-year period (i.e., 2003-2022; *R v Griffith 2024*). Griffith had been a childcare worker during that period, which provided opportunities to commit these offences through his access to children under his care. This is particularly concerning as the Australian Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Sexual Abuse in 2017 addressed the pervasiveness of child sexual abuse in Australia, including specifically within childcare institutions. This Royal Commission led to 409 recommendations, including 24 specifically relating to making institutions safer for children and young people (Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse, 2017).

Child sexual abuse can cause both short-term effects and lifelong impacts on victim-survivors. Psychological, physical, social, educational and economic aspects of a person's life can be affected (Blakemore et al., 2017). More specifically, victim-survivors can experience post-traumatic stress, low self-esteem and suicidal ideation (Dassylva et al., 2025). There are links between child sexual abuse and substance abuse (Fletcher, 2020), and childhood violence can also hinder educational success (Fry et al., 2018). Young people who experience child sexual abuse before the age of 15 are also at a higher risk of experiencing sexual abuse as an adult (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2023). Hence, there is an urgent need for effective child sexual abuse prevention programs and strategies that not only protect children from harm but challenge the societal conditions that enable abuse to persist.

2.1 Child Sexual Abuse Prevention

Smallbone and Rayment-McHugh's (2017) Integrated Prevention Matrix has been used to frame this Report. The Integrated Prevention Matrix combines the Public Health Model with Eck's (2003) crime prevention triangle to produce a 3x3 (9-point) matrix. The matrix systematically addresses three key prevention

targets — people who have or may cause harm (perpetrators), people who have or may experience harm (victim-survivors), and places where sexual crimes are more likely to occur (settings) — across the three levels of prevention (i.e., primary, secondary, and tertiary), forming a comprehensive framework for child sexual abuse prevention (Smallbone & Rayment-McHugh, 2017). Figure 1 depicts the Integrated Prevention Matrix. The underpinning models are discussed briefly below.

Figure 1: Integrated Prevention Matrix

Target	Primary	Secondary	Tertiary
Perpetrator	Prevent risk of offending	Prevent behaviours from escalating into offending	Prevent repeat offending by addressing risks/needs
Victim-Survivor	Prevent risk of victimisation	Reduce risk of victimisation	Address harm caused by offence and prevent revictimisation
Setting	Prevent opportunities for offending	Reduce or limit opportunities for offending	Improve safety to prevent future offending

Public Health Model

Addressing child sexual abuse requires a holistic and coordinated response, with the public health model offering a strong framework for prevention (McKibbin & Humphreys, 2020). The model integrates primary, secondary and tertiary strategies to target child sexual abuse from a whole of community perspective (Lonne et al., 2019; Quadara et al., 2015; Figure 2). Primary prevention involves broad, universal strategies, that target the whole community to increase awareness, educate, and campaign to protect children from harm. Secondary interventions target specific individuals, groups or settings that present elevated risk of offending or victimisation, or to target those in the early trajectory of this behaviour. Finally, tertiary strategies are employed after harm has occurred. They target known individuals or places to reduce further offending behaviour or victimisation, addressing the incidence of child sexual abuse itself by considering the needs of those who have experienced harm and responding to others who have committed child sexual abuse offences (Cant et al., 2022; Smallbone et al., 2008). However, importantly, all three strategies are required to reduce the extent and impact of child sexual abuse (Quadara et al., 2015).

Figure 2: Public Health Prevention Model

Tertiary Prevention
Targeted at those directly affected by an incident of child sexual abuse, including those who have harmed and who have been harmed

Secondary Prevention
Targeted at 'at-risk' groups to alleviate problems and/or prevent escalation

Primary Prevention
Targeted at the entire population to prevent incidents from occurring in the first place
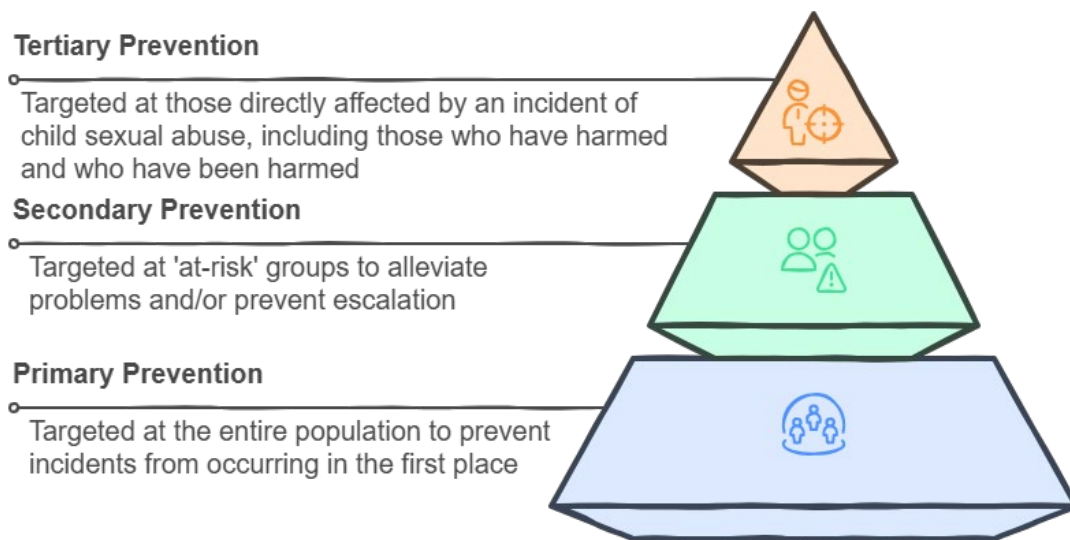
Eck's Crime Triangle

Eck (2003) expanded upon routine activity theory (Cohen & Felson, 1979), which proposed an explanation for how crime occurs – when a motivated offender and a suitable target (child), come together in time and place, in the absence of a capable guardian. Taking the concept of capable guardianship further, Eck (2003; 2010) proposed three forms of guardianship: (1) guardians who oversee the safety of a potential victim; (2) handlers, whose responsibility it is to oversee the behaviour of a potential perpetrator; and (3) the place manager, whose role it is to guard "place" where crime manifests (Figure 3). Hence, Eck's crime triangle indicates that crime may be prevented by:

- Addressing one or more of these elements;
- Reducing opportunity for potential perpetrators to engage in crime;
- Reducing the vulnerabilities of potential targets or victims; or
- Designing and using places in ways that make them less susceptible to crime (Smallbone & Rayment-McHugh, 2017).

Figure 3: Eck's Crime Triangle

2.2 Scope

As noted above, the Integrated Prevention Matrix guided the conceptualisation of this project and, more specifically, the research findings. The Integrated Prevention Matrix, depicted in Figure 3 above, was used as a guide in developing the initial search strategy, and inclusion criteria. The matrix was also used as a point of reference in critiquing the identified strategies and included sources throughout the findings. Finally, it informed the development of best practice considerations provided at the end of this Report, ensuring recommendations encompass each of the Integrated Prevention Matrix components for the most comprehensive and well-considered advice for effective child sexual abuse prevention strategies.

This Report focuses on programs that prevent the incidence of child sexual abuse *before* it occurs; that is primary and secondary prevention strategies. Aligning with the Integrated Prevention Matrix (Smallbone & Rayment-McHugh, 2017), the Report includes strategies that target perpetration, victimisation, and settings.

The Report adopts a two-part structure. Part A directly addresses the project brief and outlined research questions, targeting evidence supported educational and community prevention programs. However, best practice comprises more than documented evidence supporting past and present practice. Indeed, best practice encompasses practices that sit at the forefront of current thinking in the field. Thus, Part B of the Report discusses more recent innovations in child sexual abuse prevention, including contextual approaches to prevention, co-design processes, and a need to focus attention on accessibility of child sexual abuse prevention, particularly in the geographically dispersed and culturally diverse Australian context. In this way, the Report establishes a comprehensive best practice agenda for the prevention of child sexual abuse.

Tertiary prevention falls outside the scope of this Report and so has not been addressed. Although tertiary prevention shares the same targets as primary and secondary prevention under the Integrated Prevention Matrix, these strategies are delivered *after* an offence has occurred with the goal to prevent further offending and experiences of victimisation (Smallbone et al., 2008). These strategies often involve the justice system and/or therapeutic responses, which are addressed in a separate Report by Dodds and colleagues (2025).

We note that we have only targeted prevention programs that address child sexual abuse prevention in this Report. There are additional educational and community-based programs which aim to reduce harm to children more broadly and/or address all forms of child maltreatment. We have not included those programs within the scope of this Report due to the targeted focus of the research questions and the rapid timeframe to deliver the research findings.

There are several other considerations relevant to the project scope to note here, with respect to evidence supporting prevention efforts. Measuring the effectiveness of child sexual abuse prevention programs and interventions is a complex and challenging task. This involves measuring the lack or absence of the occurrence of child sexual abuse (Rayment-McHugh et al., 2025), which can take many years to become apparent. However, it is widely accepted that reported rates of sexual harm do not reflect the true prevalence of this crime, particularly in culturally and linguistically diverse communities (e.g., Quadara et al., 2015), so this may not be an accurate measure of program impact in any case. Additionally, there are often many moving pieces in program implementation, which may be influenced by contextual factors when delivered in the real world (Rayment-McHugh et al., 2025). Hence, valuing a program or intervention by its impact on safety outcomes alone will likely produce an inaccurate measure of effectiveness. Rather, prevention efforts should be assessed more broadly, considering their potential to effect change through a comprehensive theory of change. For example, an educational program may increase knowledge of child sexual abuse; this increased knowledge may, thereby, lead to an increased ability to prevent abuse – and considering 'what works, for whom, and in what contexts' (Pawson & Tilley, 1997; Rayment McHugh et al., 2025).

Part A of this Report prioritises educational and community-based programs that have some promising empirical support that suggest these

programs or interventions may contribute to the prevention of child sexual abuse. For example, studies have shown measured increases in knowledge, awareness, and skills following exposure to educational programs. These immediate outcomes may then be applied in the real world to prevent child sexual abuse. Programs shown to increase knowledge, and skills are thus considered to show promise in contributing to child abuse prevention, in the absence of longer-term follow-up or more rigorous evaluation that demonstrate increases in child safety. As such, some programs without known outcomes are still mentioned where they are theoretically informed, or show promise in the approach adopted, such as reflecting widespread practice support or aligning with or replicating existing programs with evidentiary support. Other prevention strategies which intersect with these programs have been excluded where they sit outside the specific educational and community scope of evaluated prevention programs, including partnership models between schools and other entities; tools, frameworks and practices for identifying children and perpetrators at risk (even where it could be used in a school setting); and practices for responding to alleged abuse. Responding to allegations where they arise in an educational or community setting is also not addressed in this Report. Additionally, this Report did consider programs that focused on other forms of violence, when it was likely they could encompass child sexual abuse, such as adolescent dating or peer-to-peer sexual violence.

Terminology

Child sexual abuse research interacts with sensitive and challenging material. Terminology is an important consideration as the use of language can have reductionist implications. The following terminology is particularly pertinent and has been carefully considered in the preparation of this Report:

Child

Child and *young people* is terminology often used to describe children of all ages from infant to teenager. We acknowledge literature also refers to *youth*, *young person*, *adolescent* and *juvenile*. In this Report, the term *child* will be used to indicate a person under the age of majority according to statutory measures: that is, a person under the age of 18 (*Law Reform Act 1995* (Qld) s 17).

Child sexual abuse

The terms *child sexual abuse* and *child sexual exploitation* are sometimes used interchangeably within literature, policy and law. Child sexual exploitation often refers to conduct containing an element of exchange with the child, while child sexual abuse does not require that exchange. Exchange might involve a gain, benefit or promise of something with a child, the perpetrator or another party (Greijer & Doek, 2016). Child sexual abuse is the broader terminology, which encompasses child sexual exploitation, referring to any sexual harm against a child. This will be the preferred language used in this Report.

Victim-survivor

Where possible, this Report adopts person-first language and uses the terminology *people who have experienced child sexual abuse*. However, where this was not practical (e.g., tables and figures), the terminology *victim-survivor* is used. This is in recognition of the gravity of the experience, the various stages of healing and recovery, and ongoing effects and harms felt by people who have experienced sexual harms (Force, n.d.; Victorian Government, 2022).

Perpetrator

There are many labels for people who have offended including *offender* and *perpetrator*. This Report adopts person-first language and uses the terminology *people who have committed or are at-risk of committing child sexual abuse offences* where possible, to distinguish the person from the act. When person-first language cannot be used, we use the term *perpetrator* sensitively, while acknowledging the challenges of this terminology.

First Nations

In Australia, the term First Nations Peoples refers to the many nations of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples. We adopt that language in this Report. Where we refer to international research, we may use the term *Indigenous* to describe the First Peoples in other jurisdictions.

3.0 Methodology

3.1 Research Design

The project was conducted in two phases. Phase One involved a critical review of extant literature on educational programs and community-based prevention interventions. The findings from this approach formed the basis for Part A of this Report. Phase Two involved a literature review of emerging practices in child sexual abuse prevention, and was adopted to fill the gaps in evidence reported below in Part A. The findings of this approach (i.e., Phase Two) formed the basis for Part B of this Report, provided below.

3.2 Phase One – Part A

The project team conducted a comprehensive, critical review with thematic analysis including international comparison to identify, analyse and synthesise issues associated with protecting children from sexual abuse. A critical review, also called an integrative review, "assess[es], critique[s], and synthesise[s] the literature on a research topic in a way that enables new theoretical frameworks and perspectives to emerge" (Snyder, 2019, p. 335). Critical reviews allow a more creative collation of sources because "a degree of analysis and conceptual innovation" is warranted (Grant & Booth, 2009, p. 93). They can also cross inter-disciplinary boundaries, which is essential in child sexual abuse prevention (Efron & Ravid, 2018). As such, a critical review was a particularly valuable methodology for this project given its cross-disciplinary nature and international scope.

The critical review also integrated structures of a rapid review. The timeframe for this project was incredibly tight, requiring the entire project to be commenced and concluded within a three-month period. The structures, outlined below, maintained scientific rigour while ensuring literature searching, screening and synthesis can be undertaken within the short timeframe of this research project.

Search strategy

Literature drew upon sources from law, criminology, psychology and social work. A wide range of sources were considered for inclusion in the review, including published articles, books and grey literature. Researchers targeted the following databases: PubMed, PsychNET (APA), SCOPUS, Web of Science, Criminal Justice Abstracts (EBSCO) and AustLII. Grey literature, government reports and working papers, were sourced from Government websites and Google search (first 10 pages).[1] Researchers also reviewed the reference list of included records to identify additional relevant records for consideration. Search fields within the databases were targeted by Title, Abstract and Keywords.

Keyword search terms used are set out in Table 1.

Table 1: Search terms

	Target group	Type of harm	Prevention	Type of prevention
Key words	K1 "child*" K2 "youth" K3 "young" K4 "adolescen*" K5 "juvenile*"	K6 "sexual abuse" K7 "sexual exploitation" K8 "sexual violence" K9 "molest*"	K10 "prevent*" K11 "protection" K12 "safety" K13 "safeguard*" K14 "deter*" K15 "reduc*"	K16 "education" K17 "community" K18 "program*" K19 "initiative*" K20 "strategy"

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[1] The first 10 pages was selected because of the time critical nature of the project, while also offering the most relevant sources according to Google's ranking algorithms.

The final search string used was:

> TITLE-ABS-KEY ((child OR youth OR young OR adolescen* OR juvenile) AND (sexual AND (abuse OR exploitation OR violence OR molest*)) AND (prevent* OR protection OR safety OR safeguard* OR deter OR reduc*) AND (education OR community OR program* OR initiative OR strategy))

The results from the literature searches were screened through Covidence. This platform was used for data screening and analysis because of the systematic and robust approach it facilitates to organising the literature. There were two stages of screening:

(1) Title and abstract screening; and

(2) Full-text screening.

The first stage – title and abstract screening – involved a surface level review of sources for immediate *potential* relevance to the research question/s. Using pre-defined inclusion/exclusion criteria, one research team member determined whether the source was relevant to progress to the full-text screening.

The second stage – full-text screening – delved deeper into each of the potentially relevant sources to confirm or deny relevance, identifying those sources that provided evidence to address the research question/s. Each source was viewed in detail by one researcher, considering methodology, population, interventions and outcomes. The pre-defined inclusion/exclusion criteria assisted the researcher determine whether the source was relevant. The Report leader randomly reviewed a selection of the early screened literature after 50 screenings to ensure the data screening process was capturing appropriate literature.

Inclusion criteria for source selection is set out below in Table 2.

Sources were excluded where the full-text could not be located; they were written in a language other than English; they lacked peer review rigour (i.e., excluding grey literature); they focused exclusively on tertiary prevention; or they were primary sources of law (i.e., legislation or case law).

Table 2: Inclusion criteria

Criteria	Particulars
Population, or participants and conditions of interest	Children and young people Community members Stakeholders involved in support services Vulnerable populations (First Nations communities, culturally and linguistically diverse, LGBTQIA+, people with disability, low socioeconomic groups)
Interventions or exposures	Educational programs, initiatives or strategies Community-based programs, initiatives or strategies Early intervention
Outcomes of interest	Improved child safety Reduced risk of child sexual abuse via evidence of reductions in child sexual abuse rates Attitude and/or behavioural change Increased awareness of child sexual abuse risks and responses
Setting	Community Schools and educational settings (including early childhood care) Online environments
Type of source	Peer-reviewed journal articles Government or industry reports Government or non-government organisation websites Conference papers Books or book chapters Dissertations
Date scope	January 2015 – January 2025
Language	English
Jurisdiction	Australia (all states, territories and Commonwealth) North America United Kingdom Europe Asia-Pacific

Search results

The data identification process involved the initial searching. Our searches captured 6,476 sources, incorporating database (n = 5,892) and grey literature (n = 584) searches. Of the sources from the initial source identification, 1,874 sources were removed due to duplication (n = 1,873) or manual ineligibility (n = 1). This screening was performed by the Report Leader and two research assistants.

The data screening was then undertaken by these three team members. During title and abstract screening, 3,577 sources were excluded. From the remaining 441 sources, there were 13 sources not able to be retrieved. As a result, there were 428 sources considered for full text screening. Of those, 248 were excluded due to scope, language or actionability issues. The final total of sources included in the critical review was 180.

The Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Meta-Analysis (PRISMA) (Moher et al., 2009) flowchart, in Figure 4, provides a visual depiction of the project's systematic approach to data identification, screening and inclusion.

Figure 4: PRISMA flowchart
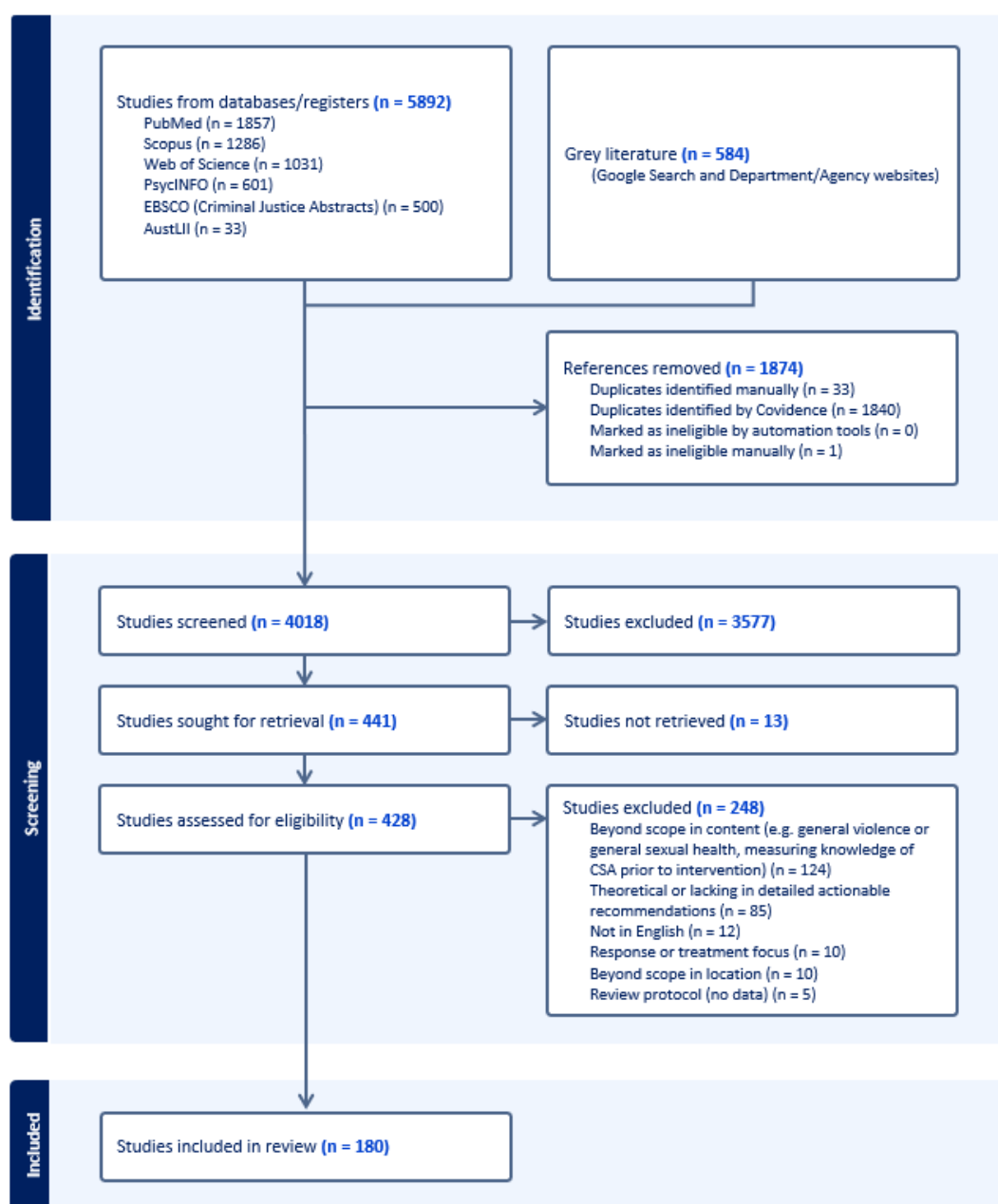
Analytic strategy

Following data identification and collation, data analysis and synthesis was undertaken thematically. A thematic analysis is a method for identifying, analysing, synthesising and reporting patterns, or themes, within the literature (Salehijam, 2018). Thematic analysis is particularly valuable as it allows a researcher to "examine *underlying* ideas, assumptions and conceptualisations, and ideologies" that shape surface issues (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 84).

A thematic analysis was chosen for several reasons. Primarily, it can synthesise large amounts of information and provide perspectives on issues that might not have been otherwise anticipated (Clarke & Braun, 2017). A quality appraisal of studies was not conducted due to the time critical nature of this research.

Thematic analysis commenced using Covidence. Researchers met for a brainstorming session to determine data extraction categories, which became the proposed themes for the project's thematic analysis. Data extraction was then completed within Covidence and exported into

Microsoft Excel. The following was collected for relevant studies:

- Citation (first author name, year, type of source);
- Country of study/focus;
- Type of program/initiative;
- Participant/Population descriptors;
- Details of program (i.e., implementation considerations); and
- Outcomes of program.

Extracted data was reviewed and cross-checked from 20 percent of included reports to ensure consistency, reduce researcher bias and enhance reliability. Disagreements were resolved through discussion with the broader research team.

This Report had originally included 38 published reviews in the analysis. These included systematic, scoping and meta-analyses, as well as industry or government reports, that adopted a broad international focus (i.e., sources were included from multiple regions). However, as most sources included within these reviews were also identified in this research, and most reviews included multiple program types, these reviews were ultimately excluded from the findings of this Report. Rather, these sources were utilised as validation checks for the key findings of this Report.

Additional research was conducted, during the project write-up, where gaps in research results were identified. Specifically, where the collected data identified a relevant initiative or concept, further research may have been undertaken to provide further context or bolster the analysis. As such, there may be sources relied upon, in this Report, which pre-date the 2015 – 2025 data range prescribed in the inclusion criteria and/or sit outside the 180 sources included in this review. While a rapid, systematic PRISMA method was selected for rigour, further research (as needed) ensured the most comprehensive interaction with the research and provided the best opportunity to address the research questions.

We further note that thematic analysis could only be conducted on published sources. As such, the analysis of program content contained in Part A was limited to how much detail was present in these sources. However, it was anticipated that authors would highlight the most significant key messages and content from their programs in their descriptions. Particularly in regard to Australian programs, the research team sought further evidence to validate their assessment through publicly accessible website and program materials, where available.

3.3 Phase Two – Part B

The project team conducted a simple literature review to fill the gaps in evidence reported in Part A. This approach allowed the project team to produce an overview of emerging practices in child sexual abuse prevention, and to position these practices in context, against the gaps reported in Part A (Green et al., 2006). A literature review approach allows for greater flexibility, than the critical review method adopted in Phase One. This was important because the aim of Phase Two was more targeted and focused on emerging approaches, whereby the literature was scarce but provided a range of varying perspectives (Snyder, 2019).

The literature review involved conducting a targeted search of institutional resources (i.e., academic databases) and Google Scholar for literature on innovative or emerging practices in child sexual abuse prevention, including contextual prevention strategies. As an informal approach, there were no formal inclusion or exclusion criteria. The aim was to capture a broad range of perspectives and insights, rather than to evaluate or appraise extant literature. The selection process was iterative, guided by the gaps in evidence identified in Part A and the themes emerging from the sources themselves. Similarly, no formal analytic approach was adopted, rather, key themes emerged from sources, which were synthesised and reported against the context of findings produced in Part A. The research design of Phase Two (Part B) was determined to complement the approach in Phase One and findings reported in Part A, see below.

4.0 Key Findings

Child sexual abuse prevention requires a multi-modal, pro-active approach, with strategies that consider the circumstances, and social and environmental factors, that may enable abuse to occur. In fact, child sexual abuse prevention requires a whole-of-system view, from broader sociocultural and systems considerations right down to individual perspectives (Rayment-McHugh et al., 2024). This aligns with Firmin's (2020) contextual safeguarding framework, which establishes that effective prevention practices must target the social conditions of abuse, incorporate protection and safeguarding practices into policy, frameworks and legislation, and establish collaborative partnerships with individuals and youth-serving organisations and government agencies.

Child sexual abuse prevention programming has developed into a substantial field of research. These efforts have generated detailed insights into the effectiveness of select programs, delivery methods, and the role of education, community-based, and situational or contextual prevention programs, in particular, in the broader child sexual abuse prevention agenda. Acknowledging the situational and contextual environmental factors that can both enable and inhibit the occurrence of sexual abuse, prevention efforts need to address broader systemic risk factors to influence change at an individual level. Australia has played a leading role in situational and contextual prevention, with much of the United Kingdom's work based on ideas developed in Australia. To date, there has been less evaluation on the work developed in Australia, however, there is promise in the emerging literature in this area, particularly the work of Rayment-McHugh and colleagues (2022; 2023; 2024). There is limited evidence of the efficacy of situational or contextual prevention programs or strategies, which target settings and opportunities for offending on an international scale, through a lack of research and evaluation. This disparity in research intensity across international jurisdictions highlights both the progress made and the pressing need for broader, context-specific investigation into what works to protect children across diverse settings.

When conducting this critical review, it became clear that child sexual abuse prevention relies upon both traditional and widely understood prevention principles as well as new, emerging and innovative practices. As such, we have structured this Report into Part A and Part B. To advance Queensland's efforts to prevent child sexual abuse, a child safeguarding system needs to be implemented that addresses all facets of society, from the sociocultural and systems factors, right down to the individual factors that can contribute to making children safe in our communities.

Part A addresses educational programs and community-based prevention strategies which have been evaluated in the previous ten years. We considered how these programs and strategies foster protective environments and community awareness, especially for populations considered more at risk of experiencing harm, like First Nations Communities. We compared Australia's practices for protecting children from child sexual abuse with leading international models. We have synthesised the results to produce a broad analysis, which evaluates areas of strength and promise, as well as gaps in research.

Part B extends on the evidence of best practice presented in Part A. We identify innovative research and practice that can lead to more comprehensive, forward-focused child sexual abuse prevention in Queensland. More specifically, we consider (1) contextual prevention; (2) co-design with young people; and (3) ensuring a 'just' prevention agenda so that no child misses out on protection. In this way, our findings in Part B add value to what has been accomplished in Part A. As such, a combination of programs and strategies from Part A and innovative, forward-focused practice in Part B is best practice for child sexual abuse prevention.

4.1 Part A – Educational Programs and Community-Based Strategies

We have conceptualised educational programs and community-based prevention strategies broadly. Programs refer to formal or structured

content delivery methods, with planned 'lessons'. Many of the examples explored in this Report are educative responses to build knowledge in participants, which can relate to community awareness. However, strategies and practices can also be used to foster protective environments and contribute to prevention efforts. Strategies and practices can include actions, methods or interventions that may be less formal or structured content delivery methods. Strategies are mostly utilised at a [2]

(1) What prevention messages are these programs/strategies delivering?

We considered the content and messaging of each program to determine whether, and how, they addressed the prevention of child sexual abuse. Content and messaging of prevention programs are vital considerations because effective messaging can inform and engage community and motivate change to support prevention initiatives (National Sexual Violence Resource Centre, 2015). The content and messaging spanned different themes, which were conceptualised based upon presence across all programs, both nationally and internationally. By identifying content and messaging themes across all literature and then tracking those themes in individual programs, we could identify common inclusions or notable gaps. In this way, we can suggest areas where further work is needed to improve prevention efforts across education and community programs.

(2) How are these programs/strategies delivering these messages?

Program delivery relates to the way programs were administered and facilitated. There were several delivery considerations. The program modality related to the forum for participation, including in person and online, as well as the way participants were engaged. For educational

community level and often have a broader scope than knowledge dissemination.

We have focused our key findings on programs with evidence of efficacy, although other programs are also featured, where relevant. To best contextualise the results in a meaningful way, this research focused on three areas of consideration that are essential for program delivery:

programs, this included videos, workbooks and activities. The facilitator's training and expertise in delivering prevention programs featured in determining efficacy. How participants were supported during their participation, such as parental involvement, was also relevant.

Selecting the appropriate forum, delivery mode and engagement technique for prevention programs was important. When prevention programs are delivered in a way that is cognitively appropriate for the target demographic, programs can achieve higher levels of engagement with content and messaging, which will lead to better knowledge absorption and retention (e.g., Gubbels et al., 2021; Kucuk et al., 2017).

(3) How do these programs/strategies address diversity?

There are many diverse cohorts that could benefit from tailored prevention programs. First Nations Peoples, culturally and linguistically diverse people, people living with disability and sexual and gender diverse people are examples. Each of these cohorts have unique needs that must be addressed to maximise program delivery outcomes.

The measure of "success" or "effectiveness" is challenging. The research questions challenged us to identify programs that have "proven successful" in preventing child sexual abuse. However, there is a stark difference between

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[2] These areas were determined by the research team upon consideration of the three key components of effective education: curriculum, delivery and assessment (ACECQA , n.d.); and recommendations by the Australian Education Research Organisation (n.d.) for evidence-based teaching practices, which include cultural responsiveness, family engagement and diverse learners. Note that *assessment* was not explicitly considered, as each of the sources identified in this research had featured unique assessments, with varying measures and processes, considered beyond the scope of this Report.

possible program outcomes for any prevention program, with building knowledge on one end of the spectrum and actively preventing child sexual abuse on the other. Knowledge acquisition is a key focus of child sexual abuse prevention programs (Ferragut et al., 2023), whereby building community knowledge about child sexual abuse challenges social norms and discomfort, which can result in better surveillance, reporting, disclosure, help-seeking and recovery for victim-survivors and their carers (National Centre for Action on Child Sexual Abuse, 2024). While building knowledge is an important first step to centralise child sexual abuse prevention as a significant community issue in need of prioritisation, it is not the panacea for child sexual abuse prevention. It is very difficult to measure the impact of programs on prevention efforts. As such, an integrated, system-wide prevention approach is needed which targets more than knowledge acquisition. We explore this further in the Report findings.

The parameters used to evaluate studies and initiatives also varies between sources. As such, there may be different understandings of promise depending upon individual study factors. In determining whether, or not, educational or community programs and strategies showed promise, we considered effectiveness according to the study's aims and reported outcomes for participants, in terms of positive results or achievements in knowledge gains, behavioural change or prevention outcomes. Specifically, these outcomes varied in their representation between programs and included changes in knowledge of child sexual abuse; awareness of abuse; rates of reporting and disclosure of harm; safety behaviours, including bystander actions; and rates of child sexual abuse offending or related behaviours.

Seven key findings emerged in our critical review for Part A and have been reported in Table 3 below.

We note that citations are included in the discussion below wherever practical. However, where findings have been synthesised from <u>all</u> sources pertaining to a particular intervention area, rather than any specific source, we may have only cited key examples rather than an exhaustive list of in-text citations. A detailed list of sources is provided within the reference list, with a breakdown by intervention area.

Table 3: Part A Key findings

Fostering Protective Environments	
Finding 1	Education is only one component of a comprehensive child sexual abuse prevention agenda, with broader systemic strategies and community responses also needed.
Finding 2	A key target area for child sexual abuse prevention initiatives should be early childhood, both as a target demographic and setting.
Program Design Implications	
Finding 3	Program design should meet cohort needs, be developmentally appropriate, and delivered by trained and/or experienced facilitators.
Finding 4	Child sexual abuse prevention efforts should recognise that children are not responsible for protecting themselves.
Community Participation and Awareness	
Finding 5	Culturally informed, developed and led prevention programs and strategies align with best practice for First Nations Peoples.
Finding 6	Educating caregivers and professionals to deliver prevention messaging to children increases dissemination opportunities, especially for children from culturally diverse backgrounds.
Finding 7	Prevention initiatives and programs must target people at risk of perpetration and settings where abuse may occur.

Each of these findings are explored further below.

<div style="border:1px solid;">

Finding 1

Education is only one component of a comprehensive child sexual abuse prevention agenda, with broader systemic strategies and community responses also needed.

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The purpose of this research was to explore education programs *and* community-based strategies that contribute to preventing child sexual abuse. Education programs can provide a cost-effective universal prevention strategy, reaching many children and adults from diverse backgrounds, especially in school settings (Guastaferro et al., 2024). Although there are also broader systemic and community strategies needed for an effective child sexual abuse prevention response.

Across each intervention area identified in the Integrated Prevention Matrix (see Figure 1 above), programs mostly targeted victimisation, with a focus on the broader population. As previously mentioned, targeting victimisation, especially in young children, has been criticised for placing the responsibility of preventing child sexual abuse on the child (Cody, 2017). However, there were examples that also corresponded with a secondary prevention approach, targeting both victimisation and perpetration with a specific focus on those at risk of experiencing or engaging in sexual harms, and crossing into situational prevention by targeting the circumstances enabling harms. Hence, *the most effective strategy to prevent child sexual abuse will involve a combination of prevention programs*, including educational programs and community-based strategies, as well as emerging, innovative and forward-focused practice from Part B.

The following sections in Part A will be separated into educational programs and community-based prevention strategies. We note there is some overlap between them.

4.1.1 Educational Programs

Educational programs have a key role to play in child sexual abuse prevention. Firstly, they raise awareness of child sexual abuse prevalence and the importance of prevention, as well as building knowledge around safety and recognition of child sexual abuse occurrence (Celik, 2024). Secondly, educational programs foster safe environments to ensure there is a safe disclosure culture, healthy relationships can be targeted and maintained, and the inherent stigma and bias associated with child sexual abuse is reduced (Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse, 2017). Thirdly, educational programs increase children's self-protective knowledge and awareness of risky behaviour. These programs also encourage children to seek help as needed, as well as develop relationships of trust between children and adults (Ferragut et al., 2023). Fourthly, strengthening community capacity is a key target of educational programs because it is only through a network of recognition and support at every level of the community that prevention can truly be achieved (Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse, 2017).

This Report identified three distinct types of child sexual abuse educational programs: school-based programs, parent-focused education and professional development and training. Each of these are described below.

School-based Prevention Programs

Child sexual abuse educational programs can be delivered within an early childhood or broader school setting. The ultimate goal of school-based education programs is to equip all children with the knowledge and skills to recognise unsafe situations, seek help, and assert their rights (Schneider & Hirsch, 2018). They empower children to protect themselves (Celik, 2024) and engage in healthy and safe behaviour towards others (Young & Mann-Williams, 2023). School-based educational programs are positioned at the intersection of victim-survivor and perpetrator targets with primary and secondary prevention, in the Integrated Prevention Matrix (see Figure 1 above).

School-based programs are largely aligned with primary prevention, designed for all children. They are delivered at a population-level to effect change in norms, attitudes, and behaviours at a

grand scale, meaning a large cohort of children can receive education about child sexual abuse victimisation and essential prevention strategies and skills (Celik, 2024). Some school-based prevention programs are designed specifically for groups of children considered most at risk, such as those children who live with an intellectual disability, which represents a secondary prevention approach.

There are limitations for school-based education programs to address child sexual abuse prevention. School-based prevention strategies miss a cohort of disengaged students, either because of non-attendance or lack of participation in program activities (e.g., Claussen et al., 2016). This is especially the case with early childhood programs where attendance at an educational facility is not mandatory. As such, there may be a group of children who do not receive the benefit of school-based prevention programs until entering primary school education. Although the early childhood setting itself may present risks to children (e.g., *R v Griffith* (2024)), so children who do not attend are not exposed to these specific risks. On the other hand, children can be exposed to higher levels of risk in other environments, including the home and community, such as at friends' houses (Mathews et al., 2024). All environments and settings can potentially pose a risk of child sexual abuse for children, which is why tailored prevention strategies are so important.

Additionally, the delivery of school-based child sexual abuse prevention is not mandated in Queensland state education curriculum, the Queensland Catholic Schools curriculum or the Australian Curriculum (Queensland Catholic Education Commission, 2021; Queensland Department of Education, 2024; Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority, 2025). There is no prescribed education curriculum in Queensland for home schooling; although, home schooled children must meet minimum state requirements to attain a Queensland Certificate of Education. This suggests that any integrated child sexual abuse prevention programs in a formal school curriculum should also be required to co-occur for children who complete their education via home schooling in Queensland. This should be

urgently addressed at a policy level by the Queensland Government.

The absence of mandated school-based child sexual abuse prevention strategies across state, Catholic, private, and the national curricula places the responsibility for delivering child sexual abuse prevention education initiatives upon individual schools and educators, creating an inconsistent approach to prevention. We emphasise the significant oversight in failing to provide school-based child sexual abuse prevention as part of the curriculum. However, we note the delivery of respectful relationships educative content has been mandated in the Queensland schools' curriculum, which is a positive inclusion and is discussed further below.

It is also relevant to note that the effectiveness of targeting children in child sexual abuse prevention has been questioned. Evidence suggests school-based learning may not translate into real-world *preventive actions*, where children may lack the capacity to implement the knowledge gained; and it wrongly places the onus of prevention on the child, instead of adults who should be responsible for creating safer spaces for children (e.g., Rudolph & Zimmer-Gembeck, 2018; Rudolph et al., 2022). However, school-based prevention programs can produce increased knowledge and self-protection skills, which are a vital component in a comprehensive child sexual abuse prevention agenda, and may support long-term change in norms and behaviours at a community or system level. They have also been shown to increase rates of disclosure and reporting, which are essential for tertiary prevention strategies (Blakey et al., 2019; Bright et al., 2022; see also Dodds et al., 2025). School-based education programs were the most common type of prevention program identified through this research, likely because these educative interventions are cost-effective strategies that can reach large numbers of the target population, that is, children, through mandatory schooling. Although, we note (again) that school-based child sexual abuse prevention does not feature as part of the Queensland state school curriculum. Alternative strategies that target adults in child sexual abuse prevention, such as parent-focused education, are discussed below.

School-based prevention programs feature content and messaging that is tailored to meet the developmental and emotional maturity of children and are delivered in age-appropriate ways. This section focuses on school-based prevention programs that address child sexual abuse broadly, both in-person and online offending. More specifically, there are three types of school-based prevention programs featured in the literature: early childhood programs, primary and high school programs, and respectful relationships education. Each of these are explored further below.

Finding 2
A key target area for child sexual abuse prevention initiatives should be early childhood, both as a target demographic and setting.

Early childhood

Within the broader category of school-based prevention initiatives, early childhood education programs are specifically tailored for children who are preschool-aged and participating in childcare or kindergarten. The early-childhood age bracket is generally between infant up to approximately 6 years old. At this age, children are developing a basic understanding of their world, which is driven through play-based learning that enables imagining, exploration, interaction and questioning (Queensland Government, 2023). Recognising the developmental stage of this age group, early childhood education programs rely mostly on highly interactive and engaging methods, such as storytelling, songs, puppetry, and games, to communicate key messages about child sexual abuse prevention.

There was only one Australian early childhood education program identified in the critical review: *Ditto's Keep Safe Adventure* (Ronken, 2017). Ditto's program focused on preventing victimisation by increasing a child's knowledge, awareness, and skills (1) to identify and reduce the level of risk present; and (2) to seek help and report harm. *Ditto's Keep Safe Adventure* also provided parents with tools/resources to encourage and support them to speak to children about sexual harm.

Figure 5 below provides a summary of Ditto's Program.

Figure 5: Ditto's Keep Safe Adventure

Ditto's Keep Safe Adventure Program is a Bravehearts initiative, delivered by professionals/trained facilitators, with support from teachers and parents/caregivers. It is available in South-East Queensland, and parts of New South Wales, Victoria and Tasmania. The program involves a 30-minute stage play that uses songs to provide an interactive and engaging program for young children. Additional program resources support the play including activity books (coursework), a game for mobile devices, downloadable songs, and storybooks that engage participants. Ditto's Program targets early childhood to primary school students (i.e., approximately 3-8 years of age), to educate children in recognising unsafe situations and knowing how to seek help. Ronken (2017) described *Ditto's Keep Safe Adventure* as "a gentle, non-confronting way" to deliver child sexual abuse prevention messaging, "using language and concepts that children, teachers and parents can feel comfortable using" (p. 8).

Key messages of the program include:
- Differentiation between "yes" and "no" feelings;
- Recognition of "warning" signs;
- Identification of private body parts;
- Defining "good" and "bad" secrets; and
- Knowing what to do if children feel unsafe or unsure.

Using feedback from 547 children aged five to nine, Ronken (2017) determined the program had succeeded in increasing children's knowledge of child sexual abuse and safety behaviours. However, this evaluation did not include early childhood participants. As such, program evaluation for the early childhood audience is currently unknown and recommended to extend the evidence base.

There is also clear variation in the availability and level of evaluation of early childhood sexual abuse prevention programs internationally. Programs were identified in the United States of America (US), Europe, and Asia-Pacific. Across all regions, programs shared common content themes, focusing mostly on body awareness, safe and unsafe touches, secrecy, and help-seeking (e.g., Melontige & Mangunsong, 2017; Tunc & Yavas, 2022; Zhang et al., 2021). These sources reported early childhood sexual abuse prevention programs had increased the knowledge of child sexual abuse and, in some sources, children had demonstrated increased safety behaviours (e.g., Vimukthi & Karunanaya, 2023). One prominent example from the US is *Safer, Smarter Kids,* a program delivered in public school kindergartens throughout the state of Florida and detailed in Figure 6 below.

Figure 6: Safer, Smarter Kids

Safer, Smarter Kids is a kindergarten child sexual abuse prevention curriculum established in Florida, United States of America. It is designed to build "children's knowledge of safety risk and self-protection strategies" (Brown, 2017, p. 213). The program is delivered across public school kindergartens, featuring activities within the early childhood education environment, with resources also provided to parents to continue education at home.

The *Safer, Smarter Kids* program deploys various forms of learning: observational, vicarious and participatory. Across six 30-minute lessons, children receive teacher-led, "didactic learning on recognising high-risk situations and practising self-protection behaviours", which is complemented by video material and class exercises (Brown, 2017, pp. 213-214). Importantly, this intervention "was specifically designed to help teachers meet existing education requirements while imparting critical safety information" (Brown, 2017, p. 214). This means that the *Safer, Smarter Kids* curricula aligns with existing State Standards, enabling teachers to provide consistent preventative information while also developing children's skills in art, theatre, social science, health education, literacy and reading.

The six learning objectives of the *Safer, Smarter Kids* program include:
- Understanding safety rules;
- Introducing the concept of a stranger versus a trusted grown-up "buddy";
- Listening to one's inner guiding voice;
- Body boundaries;
- Recognising safe versus unsafe secrets; and
- Knowing the difference between tattling and reporting.

Each of the toolkits provided to kindergartens include parent newsletters, homework for children to review with parents, alongside the curriculum lesson plans, class materials and video resources to deliver the program. Online resources are also available. Educators can connect with the programs' "Teacher's Corner" online to provide feedback on the curricula, and parents are also able to access a "Parent's Toolkit" via the web which provides interactive activities to complete with their children and further information on preventing child sexual abuse (Brown, 2017, p. 215).

In an evaluation of *Safer, Smarter Kids,* Brown (2017) found completion of the program resulted in "a significant improvement in students' knowledge of prevention concepts" (p. 218). Pretest and post-test data found children who participated in the program were better able to identify private parts of boy and girl bodies, safe and unsafe secrets, and the difference between tattling and reporting. For children to have gained a better understanding of private parts of the body – and across both sexes – reflects a better capacity for them to know when someone treats themselves or another person improperly. In being able to appreciate the nature of unsafe secrets (particularly when told "not to tell their parents") and the need to report, children are more empowered to report abusive and uncomfortable behaviours.

The significance of *Safer, Smarter Kids* in the context of early childhood prevention methods is that it is multi-factored. It is teacher-parent driven while also being child abuse prevention focused, but curricular aligned. It builds capacity for children to understand boundaries; and to build confidence in reporting. As with many intervention programs, *Safer, Smarter Kids* finds success in its utility and practicality as both a general education and prevention tool.

Understanding the limitations of early childhood interventions, and their effectiveness, is challenging. As Pitts (2015) notes, there is a general dearth of studies in prevention methods for these age groups, and where these studies do arise, they often lack statistically significant data

samples to assess viability or efficacy. Further, educators can also be perpetrators (or at risk of child sexual abuse offending) as *R v Griffith* (2024) demonstrated, so early childhood prevention strategies must be implemented in the context of creating child-safe environments that provide safety outside of the educators too.

Primary and high school

School-based child sexual abuse prevention programs for older children are delivered in primary and secondary school settings. Children in the school-based age group range from approximately 4 to 17 years, noting some overlap with the age ranges from early childhood education programs. School-based prevention programs are designed with numerous variabilities to align with the different and increasing cognitive, emotional, and social maturity of this broad age group. As such, these programs may include similar interactive modalities (i.e., storytelling and games) for younger children in junior primary school (e.g., Ünsal Seydooğullari & Kapçi, 2023) and then adopt more structured lessons, discussions, and multimedia resources to explore more complex topics within child sexual abuse prevention for older children in senior primary school through to high school (e.g., Muck et al., 2021).

There were four Australian school-based programs identified in the findings, which included *Speak Up. Be Strong. Be Heard* (Carrington et al., 2019); *Orbit* (Jones et al., 2020); *Operation RESET* (Mace et al., 2015) and *Ditto's Keep Safe Adventure* (mentioned above) (Ronken, 2017). Each program focused on preventing victimisation by increasing a child's knowledge, awareness and skills (1) to identify and reduce the level of risk present, and (2) to seek help and report harm – a primary prevention approach. The *Speak Up. Be Strong. Be Heard* program and *Operation RESET* were delivered in the community as well, and sought to prevent perpetration by increasing community knowledge and awareness of the impacts of child sexual abuse and risks for perpetrators, while encouraging bystander intervention (discussed further below). We note there are other examples of prevention programs that empower children to identify broader child maltreatment, which are not targeted exclusively to preventing child

sexual abuse, such as *Learn to be Safe with Emmy and Friends* (White et al., 2018); these have not been further considered in this Report as detailed above.

Across international contexts, child sexual abuse prevention programming for primary through to high school-aged children is more widespread and better documented than for early childhood populations. Programs were identified across the US (Guastaferro et al., 2025; Mozid, et al., 2024; Hjelm, 2024), United Kingdom (UK) (Farelly et al., 2023; May et al., 2021; Weston & Mythen, 2019), Canada (Tutty et al., 2020), Europe (Üstündağ, 2025; Tunc & Yavas, 2022; Finch et al., 2021), and Asia-Pacific (Zhang et al., 2021; Haneem et al., 2022). Programs sought to increase child (and parental) awareness of child sexual abuse, provide early intervention for children at risk of experiencing or engaging in sexual harm, and encourage bystander intervention to prevent the occurrence of child sexual abuse, incorporating primary and secondary intervention.

Respectful relationships education

Respectful relationships education programs address the underlying social attitudes, gender norms, and power imbalances that contribute to or enable sexual harm, to prevent adolescent dating violence and peer-to-peer sexual violence (e.g., Huber et al., 2021). These programs aim to promote healthy relationships (Eslek & Irmak, 2022; Tutty et al., 2020), and can address the increasing rates of adolescent child sexual abuse prevalence stemming from a culture of male entitlement (Mathews & Contos, 2024; Contos, 2023). Typically, grounded in a primary or secondary prevention approach, respectful relationships education often involves whole-of-school or whole-of-community strategies, engaging large student cohorts and simultaneously providing professional training and development (Walsh and Peters, 2011, p 17), while also including content for children who may be at risk of experiencing or engaging in sexual harm (Joyce et al., 2018). As such, respectful relationships education aims to prevent child sexual abuse arising from peer interactions. They are largely educational, delivered within schools, though they can also be delivered as community-based strategies. As

Rayment-McHugh and McKillop (2025) describe, it is important for respectful relationships programs to exist beyond schools, as they become "out of reach and not tailored to the needs of those marginalised youth who have been disengaged from education yet are at most risk of interpersonal violence" if they are only delivered in a school setting (p. 5).

Quality and quantity of program evaluations for respectful relationships education varies domestically and internationally. These programs are positioned within primary and secondary prevention, featuring content and messaging that is designed to address the growing prevalence of youth-perpetrated sexual harms (e.g., Cahill et al., 2024).

Respectful relationships programs have several key features. They are typically designed for early adolescent children through to teenagers (i.e., approximately 10-11 years up to 17 years) and can be delivered in both school and community settings (e.g., Huber Social, 2021). Much like school programs and community-based prevention strategies, these programs use a variety of modalities to deliver key content and messages, including engaging practices, such as drama, storytelling and games, alongside coursework and interactive workshops (e.g., Banyard et al., 2022; Hjelm, 2024). Programs can also be supported and reinforced through adult-focused education, including professional training and development programs for adults who work with children (e.g., McKibbin et al., 2023; described further below).

Respectful relationships education has strong government support. Acknowledging the harms of peer-to-peer violence and its correlation with child sexual abuse, respectful relationships content has been embedded in the Queensland education curriculum from kindergarten through to year 12 as mandatory learning (Queensland Department of Education, 2024). As such, respectful relationships education can reach a great number of students across Queensland. We also note that as respectful relationships education programs can be delivered in community settings, it is possible children who have disengaged from school could be reached in this setting (e.g., Rothman et al., 2021). Additionally, respectful relationships program evaluations, included in this Report, targeted children entering adolescence through to teenage years (e.g., Barnyard et al., 2022; Carmo et al., 2024). This suggests Queensland's broad program scope, capturing the later years of early childhood in the curriculum content, could be an innovative extension of this prevention strategy which does not exist elsewhere.

There were two Australian respectful relationships education programs identified in the findings: *Power to Kids* (McKibbin et al., 2023) and *Love Bites* (Huber Social, 2021). While designed for different cohorts, both programs focused on the prevention of victimisation by increasing the awareness of child sexual abuse and increasing a participant's ability to identify and respond to the risk of sexual harm. *Love Bites* also focused on the prevention of perpetration by providing education about healthy relationship dynamics. *Love Bites* has been further explored in Figure 7 below.

Figure 7: Love Bites

Love Bites is a respectful relationships education program delivered across Australia. Designed for children aged 11 to 17 years, the program is primarily delivered in schools but is also available as a community-based model upon request. The program involves interactive workshops and coursework, delivered as a full-day or multi-session program. The content addresses intimate and peer relationships, providing education about healthy relationships and bystander intervention strategies. *Love Bites* consists of three programs: *Junior, Senior* and facilitator training; reflecting the different emotional and sexual maturity of children in this cohort.

Love Bites Junior is designed for the younger children, 11 to 14 years. It covers three key topics:
- friends: communication, abusive behaviour and help seeking;
- Respectful relationships, bullying and gender: gender roles, stereotypes, sexual harassment and discrimination; and
- Relationships, love and control: gender expectations, abusive relationships, ending relationships.

Love Bites Senior is designed for older children, 15-17 years. It focuses on skill building through knowledge, attitude and behavioural change.

Facilitator training is available to interested adults who wish to deliver the *Love Bites* program themselves. The training program "ensures consistent, high-quality delivery of the program, while accommodating the different needs of local communities" (Huber Social, 2021).

An evaluation by Huber Social (2021) reported *Love Bites* had achieved target outcomes for children, using a sample of 63 children, such as increased knowledge and understanding of abuse, rejection of attitudes supporting violent behaviours and increased relationship skills. Additionally, 13 adults had indicated the facilitator training produced increases in skills to effectively educate children about respectful relationships, including increased bystander intervention actions. This suggests the *Love Bites* program is an effective child sexual abuse prevention program, across different cohorts and settings.

In New South Wales alone, "over 10,000 students participate annually" and more than "4,000 facilitators have been trained across all Australian states and territories to enable them to deliver the program into local schools" (NAPCAN, 2024). This positions *Love Bites* as a valuable resource for a comprehensive child sexual abuse prevention agenda. However, given the scope of *Love Bites* reaching such a large number of students, the evaluation was quite limited with feedback from only 63 children and 13 adults.

International findings show respectful relationships education programs are not widely available and lack substantive evaluation. Most respectful relationships programs are available in the US (e.g., Jaime et al., 2018; Letourneau et al., 2024; Rothman et al., 2021). There was only one source from the Asia-Pacific region (Madrid et al., 2020). Combined, common messages in these programs included the promotion of healthy relationships, emotional wellbeing, help-seeking and bystander intervention strategies and actions.

Best-practice for school-based education programs

There are two primary outcomes from school-based child sexual abuse education prevention programs. The evidence shows these educational prevention programs can produce increased knowledge and awareness of child sexual abuse, and increased safety behaviours (Ferragut et al., 2023), which can lead to increased reporting and disclosures as children develop a greater understanding of acceptable contact and behaviour (Elfreich et al., 2020). They could also

offer potential reductions in child sexual abuse and related offending, as a perpetration prevention outcome, when developed and implemented effectively (e.g., Edwards et al., 2023).

In relation to the first primary outcome, most sources focused on changes in knowledge, awareness and skill levels and increased safety behaviours (i.e., bystander intervention actions), which can lead to increased reporting and disclosures of harm (Kang et al., 2022; Letourneau et al., 2024; Young, 2025). However, as previously noted, these knowledge gains do not ensure real-world preventative actions (e.g., Rudolph & Zimmer-Gembeck, 2018), which creates a challenge for determining the actual success of these programs to *prevent* child sexual abuse. This limitation reinforces the need for a multifaceted approach to child sexual abuse prevention, where different types of prevention strategies may complement each other and produce a comprehensive prevention agenda.

The second primary outcome is changes in offence-related behaviours. However, these are difficult to capture at the primary and secondary prevention level, and were not explored in all sources, given the target of school-based education is children. We mainly saw perpetration prevention arising from respectful relationships education, where the focus was on preventing peer-to-peer incidents of abuse. While most sources had not directly explored changes in offending-related behaviours, again likely due to the complexities of this measure, some sources had provided evidence of changes in child sexual abuse and related behaviours, such as reduced experiences of dating violence and attempted unwanted sex (e.g., Jülich et al., 2015; Madrid et al., 2020), suggesting respectful relationships education could help to prevent the incidence of peer-to-peer sexual abuse.

Nonetheless, from these sources, several considerations for best practice for school-based child sexual abuse prevention programs emerged, aligned with the three focus areas of content and messaging, program delivery (i.e., facilitator, modality and duration) and tailoring programs to address the needs of populations considered more at risk of experiencing child sexual abuse. Each of these considerations are discussed below.

Finding 3

Program design should meet cohort needs, be developmentally appropriate, and delivered by trained and/or experienced facilitators.

Content and messaging[3]

There is a clear divergence between early-childhood, primary school and high school programs and respectful relationships programs in terms of content and messaging. Table 4 (below) sets out the inclusions and gaps in content and messaging in three Australian programs.

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[3] As noted above, all analysis of content and messaging was limited to what was detailed in the published evaluation materials. As such, it is possible more themes were evident in these programs but not reported.

Table 4: Content and Messaging in Australian School-Based Programs

Content and messaging themes	Child sexual abuse focused programs			Respectful relationships programs	
	Speak Up. Be Strong. Be Heard	Orbit	Ditto's Keep Safe Adventure Program	Love Bites	Power to Kids
Abuse is never a child's fault					
Body awareness and safety		X	X		
Emotional wellbeing		X		X	X
Family safety planning/trusted adults		X			
Help-seeking and disclosure		X	X	X	
Identifying potential perpetrators	X	X			
Online safety					
Safe/not safe touches	X				
Secret keeping and surprises	X	X	X		
Strategies and self-protection skills	X	X	X	X	X
Understanding and recognising abuse	X	X	X	X	X
Role of pornography				X	
Communication strategies					X
Consent				X	
Promotion of healthy relationships				X	
Reporting responsibilities					
Safety and risk taking				X	X
Sexual health and safety					X
Social norms and attitudes				X	
Stories of lived experience				X	
Therapeutic and disruptive interventions (including bystander actions)					
Additional notes	*Note.* Messaging and content not explicit for *Operation RESET*				

The overview of content and messaging in Australian programs highlights the identified educational prevention programs. *Orbit* (Jones et al., 2020) performed the strongest across the child sexual abuse focus, with eight themes addressed. From an international perspective, one leading example, *Anne's Secret*, featured six messages (see Rueda et al., 2022), indicating that Australia's *Orbit* program (Jones et al., 2020) may be one of the most comprehensive school-based child sexual abuse prevention programs internationally. In relation to respectful relationships programs, *Love Bites* performed the best across content and messaging, with 11 themes represented. For the respectful relationships program at an international level, *Youth Voice in Prevention* only featured eight key messages (Edwards et al., 2023), indicating that Australia's *Love Bites* may also be a global leader in comprehensive messaging.

Finding 4

Child sexual abuse prevention efforts should recognise that children are not responsible for protecting themselves.

Most of the themes in the child sexual abuse focused programs in Australia are evidently focused on raising children's awareness of child sexual abuse and encouraging self-protection. There is minimal focus on fostering protective environments to prevent the incidence of child sexual abuse. In this context, best practice initiatives need to take a broader systematic approach to ensure that funding and initiatives consider how societal structures and responsibility should be emphasised. Prevention that is led at a government level should be prioritised over programs that place the responsibility of change on the individual. Further research about what is effective in preventing child sexual abuse is recommended. This research should champion the voices of victim-survivors and their parents and caregivers to draw from their lived experiences and inform how prevention approaches can be better developed, targeted, and delivered (Warrington et al. 2023).

Family safety planning and identifying trusted adults, help-seeking and disclosure, and safety and risk taking were the only clear examples of fostering protective environments in these themes. In the sources identified in this Report, family safety planning involved teaching children how to identify trusted adults, such as police officers, and creating codewords for times where children may feel uneasy or unsafe and need a parent or adult to intervene (e.g., Rueda et al., 2022; Tunca et al., 2018). This closely aligns with ensuring children know how, and who, to ask for help. We note parent-focused education (described below) increases communication and vigilance, and more protective environments for children. Additionally, respectful relationships education programs include messaging about safety and risk taking, which may address the contextual factors that may increase the risk of harm (e.g., alcohol use; Edwards et al., 2020; see Wortley & Smallbone, 2017). As such, we emphasise the importance of combining prevention programs.

Respectful relationships programs have a much larger focus on sexual safety and healthy relationships, which was expected given the goals of these programs. As these programs aim to increase healthy relationships in intimate and peer relationships of older children and to reduce the incidence of children and young people demonstrating harmful sexual behaviours, themes such as consent, social norms and attitudes, and safety and risk-taking were understandable. These programs still featured some shared themes with the broader focused child sexual abuse prevention programs, such as understanding and recognising child sexual abuse, emotional wellbeing and help-seeking and disclosure.

There were several notable content and messaging considerations across Australian child sexual abuse programs that should be emphasised. All Australian programs appeared to exclude that children are never to blame for their victimisation and online safety messaging. These may be significant omissions, which are explored below.

Children are not to blame for their victimisation is a key message for Australian children. As noted

in this Report and well-documented elsewhere, when left unaddressed, the internalised shame and stigma that arises in response to experiencing child sexual abuse can have detrimental long-term impacts across several psychological and wellbeing indicators (Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse, 2017). Hence, ensuring program content and messaging explicitly inform children that abuse is never their fault could help to limit some of the longer-term harm, if a child does experience abuse.

Online safety also requires prioritisation and education programs can play a vital role. Internet use is a regular and consistent feature in children's lives (Gannoni et al., 2023). Children are routinely encountering strangers in online forums including social media, gaming and messaging (Third et al., 2024). The Internet Watch Foundation (2024a; 2024b; 2024c) has reported that the prevalence of online child sexual abuse is increasing, with a rise in reports of child sexual abuse materials, sexual image-based extortion and artificial intelligence-generated materials. The risk that the online environment poses to children is substantial (see Galingo-Dominguez et al., 2024; Price et al., 2024; Beier, 2016). Given the inescapable reality of internet-dependency in everyday life, it is essential that children are provided with specific knowledge and skills to protect themselves and prevent online harm to others. Educational programs are one forum to promote online safety as a necessary primary intervention and a lack of focus on online child sexual abuse prevention in Australian programs is concerning and needs to be addressed.

It was not clear from any source how many, or which, messages are optimal to achieve intended outcomes for children. For example, there is no best practice research about whether all themes should be addressed in school-based prevention programs or whether a clearer focus on fewer themes would be more digestible for children, particularly younger participants. As such, this is an area for further research and investigation.

Program delivery

Program delivery within school-based educational programs had several important features. These included the level of independence of the child in completing the program, the type of facilitator, program length and modality. These features were similar between child sexual abuse focused programs and respectful relationships education in relation to program delivery. Each of these features are explored below.

The independence of the child, in their interaction with the program, was notable. Some programs, particularly those in the early childhood setting (e.g., Cırık et al., 2020; Jin et al., 2019), engaged parents and caregivers to provide supplementary education at home, so that prevention messaging could be reinforced for greater retention. Other programs were engaged with more independently, such as online and digital games, which were often used by children with the support of teachers, as was the case with *Orbit* (Jones et al., 2020).

Different types of educational facilitators were involved in delivering school-based prevention programs. Teachers and other professionals (including police or content experts) predominantly delivered child sexual abuse focused prevention programs (e.g., Nickerson et al., 2019; Petkute & Daniunaite, 2015). There were three sources, in the respectful relationships programs, where parents and carers (as supplementary educators) were involved (Foshee et al., 2015; Jenkins, 2023; Letourneau et al., 2024). In some pilot programs, a research team facilitated the educational content. Hence, the level of expertise and experience varied significantly between programs.

The type of facilitator impacted the quality of delivery of school-based prevention programs. Zhang et al. (2021) suggested that researcher-led programs produced greater knowledge gains than those delivered by teachers, highlighting the potential importance of expertise in implementation. Chem & Yu (2017) reported that knowledge gains were greater among children who experienced a teacher facilitator over a parent. Interestingly, school-based prevention programs involving parental educators increased parental knowledge, but did not significantly improve understanding among their children (Üstündağ, 2025). However, parental involvement in supplementary communication

with children has been shown to positively influence child sexual abuse knowledge gains (e.g., Razzaq et al., 2023; Xu et al., 2024). As such, parents should be involved in child sexual abuse prevention education to support education efforts, in addition to professional facilitation. Parents and caregivers will likely require support to translate program learnings into a child's home environment.

The duration of programs varied considerably across contexts, with implications for both depth of engagement and consistency of delivery. Most methods of program delivery were based around a curriculum, with coursework spanning multiple sessions. Delivery times for programs ranged from single-session interventions (e.g., Guastaferro et al., 2022; Mozid et al., 2024); eight-week programs (e.g., Shafiq et al., 2024); and 12-week programs (Jaime et al., 2018). Australia's *Love Bites* offered a flexible delivery model, with program content delivered either as a single-day intensive course or over multiple sessions. Ferragut et al. (2023) suggested that a minimum of three sessions may be optimal for achieving knowledge gains. However, the length of sessions was not sufficiently considered; as such, the minimum time per session to achieve intended program outcomes could not be ascertained from the literature. It is most likely that programs must be flexible and attend to the developmental capacity for engagement of different aged cohorts.

The types of program modalities differed in the research. Modalities included theatre or drama, music or singing, and storybooks, as well as gaming or play, with puppets or dolls, or digital games. Additionally, some sources had reported that videos could be used in place of live productions or in conjunction with live facilitation (i.e., reducing the number of facilitators from two to one) with no detrimental impact on children's

knowledge gains (e.g., Mozid et al., 2024; Young, 2024). Gubbels and colleagues' (2021) study was the only study to compare the outcomes for children by modality, indicating gains in child abuse knowledge were larger when gaming (including puppets and quizzes) was used alongside coursework in content delivery. However, this particular comparison may not have been appropriate, as the reviewed sources included programs designed for children of varying developmental capacity (i.e., ages ranged from 4 to 18 years).

The research demonstrated a preference for combined modalities, which enhances program accessibility and supports different learning styles, also extending program reach. Programs often combined coursework modalities with other non-traditional modalities to enhance student engagement with program messaging. Combined modalities appeared in two Australian programs: *Orbit* (Jones et al., 2020) and *Ditto's Keep Safe Adventure Program* (Ronken, 2017). While *Orbit* featured coursework delivered in conjunction with a digital game, *Ditto's Program* combined five modalities: a stage play (performance), as well as activity books or coursework, a digital game (i.e., mobile app), music or songs, and a series of storybooks. This program adopted a whole-of-school or whole-of-community approach, by involving teachers and parents/caregivers in the delivery of program content, demonstrating a primary prevention strategy. Figure 8 provides an international example of program delivery for primary school-aged children using coursework combined with a novel Mobile Application, and multi-session delivery. The program produced sustained increases in children's recognition of child sexual abuse and, through self-reported data, increases in their capabilities to avoid or reduce the risk of experiencing sexual harm.

Figure 8: Korean Mobile Application

"Sexual abuse: What should I do?" was a sexual abuse prevention mobile application developed for Korean primary school children. The application was accessible on PC and smartphones. It featured five screen characters across several scenarios. Each scenario was developed into an animation, depicting a different example of harm or risk of harm. Examples included:

1. A classmate attempting to show pornography to a main character;
2. A neighbour attempting to lure a main character with a puppy;
3. A friend hugging a main character around the waist; and
4. A cousin kissing a main character on the lips while playing.

Animations were narrated with supporting text, and were followed by a true or false quiz, with suggestive responses. The app used child-friendly fonts, styles and sounds.

A pilot study by Moon and colleagues (2017) examined the impact of mobile app use on children's knowledge and skills in child sexual abuse knowledge prevention. The study compared outcomes for children who completed:

- the standard government issued school-based prevention coursework (3 sessions x 40mins) in conjunction with use of the mobile app;
- the same school-based coursework in conjunction with web-based delivery of the mobile app content; and
- the school-based coursework in conjunction with lecture-style delivery of the mobile app content.

The study found that children who used the mobile app had achieved higher rates of recognition and self-reported skills to avoid child sexual abuse than children who received the same content via a web browser and children who received the standard coursework. These findings were maintained and appeared to improve in a follow-up one month later. The authors noted that this modality "ensures continuous education without time and space constraints, since smartphones are part of the daily lives of primary school children in Korea" (p. 585). The authors also suggested that "watching character animations induces interest, such that the learner's attention, confidence, and satisfaction are greater than when learning with textbooks" (p. 586).

Addressing diversity

There was some evidence that school-based education programs are effective when they include content related to diversity, and when programs are designed specifically for cohorts considered more at risk of experiencing child sexual abuse. Aligning with a secondary prevention strategy, these programs address recognised risk factors for victimisation by targeting individuals from known at risk cohorts, providing tailored messaging to enhance self-protection knowledge and skills (e.g., Shafiq et al., 2024). In Australia, there were two examples, which were both designed for First Nations Communities: *Speak Up. Be Strong. Be Heard.* and *Operation RESET*. However, these programs were predominantly community-based public awareness campaigns, with a small school-based educational component delivered within that

model (i.e., single session program). There were no other Australian school-based prevention programs designed for other at risk cohorts. International models show promise for adoption into an Australian context.

While there were few programs for children with disabilities and First Nations (or Indigenous) children, no sources specifically focused on addressing the needs of culturally and linguistically diverse children or those who identify as sexual and gender diverse. Access to quality school-based prevention programs for a diverse cohort is important because these programs can share tailored messaging that may help children overcome barriers to engaging in discussion about sex and making disclosures (e.g., cultural barriers, such as protecting family name from shame; Sawrikar & Katz, 2017). As

such, further program availability and evaluation are needed in this space.

Online delivery can be an effective means of increasing program accessibility, to disseminate prevention messages to a larger number of children. The *Safer Dating for Youth on the Autism Spectrum* program is a strong example of an international respectful relationships program which was designed for children with autism. The study found that "technology-based interventions are viable alternatives to in-person interventions" (Rothman et al., 2021, p. 507). The surveys captured "changes in participant opinions in the desired direction about the healthiness of online behaviours", providing some indication as to the efficacy of this online intervention (Rothman et al., 2021, p. 508). The medium enabled them to engage more effectively as they "could use the chat to type thoughts while simultaneously listening to the conversation" and "use other Zoom features to doodle, fidget and interact", while also being able to "mute their video as needed" (Rothman et al., 2021, p. 506).

The international evidence also showed effective program design, for children who live with intellectual disabilities combined coursework with arts, such as drama or role play and storytelling, and were typically delivered by professionals, rather than teachers. A Turkish pilot program, outlined in Figure 9 below, combined storytelling with coursework to deliver prevention messaging across multiple sessions. This approach recognised the unique development needs of children who live with intellectual disability, by presenting information in different formats with a variety of teaching methods for diverse learning styles (Australian Disability Clearinghouse on Education and Training, 2025).

A pilot program for children living with intellectual disabilities was developed by Kucuk and colleagues (2017) and delivered in a Child Rehabilitation Centre in Türkiye. The program used storytelling to deliver child sexual abuse prevention messaging, through four illustrated storybooks. The stories were designed specifically to attend to the developmental capacity and needs of children living with intellectual disabilities. They featured one girl, one boy, a mother, a father, a grandmother, a grandfather and three perpetrators. The girl and boy characters were represented as 12-year-old siblings and the perpetrators were shown as well-dressed characters between 25-40 years old. The stories featured illustrations that represented "special body parts", the touch and threats of a perpetrator as well as the possible rewards and punishments a perpetrator may use. All storybooks used large, plain style font for increased accessibility.

Each book was titled:
- "Nurcan and Ercan Know Their Special Body Parts";
- "Nurcan and Ercan Learn Good Touch, Bad Touch and Saying No";
- "Nurcan and Ercan Knows Foreigns [sic]" and
- "Nurcan and Ercan Tell to Mother [sic]". (Kucuk et al., 2017, p. 154)

For four weeks, children also engaged in lessons, collectively for 20-25 minutes, using large scale pictures and reflection questions. Homework was also given to reinforce the messages of the stories.

As part of this pilot, a study was also conducted by Kucuk and colleagues (2017) with 15 children, ranging in age from 10 to 14 years old. Pre-test data was collected one week prior to the beginning of the study and post-test data was collected two weeks after the last session with the children. Findings showed that children's knowledge of child sexual abuse prevention strategies had increased significantly. Specifically, this included knowledge of special body parts, "good touch, bad touch and saying no", safety behaviours to reduce risk around strangers, and help-seeking and disclosure. Additionally, several children had advised they would disclose if they were to experience child sexual abuse in the future.

Kucuk and colleagues (2017) stated, "education programs should be conducted using a particular system and consistency and by taking into consideration the cognitive and intellectual abilities of disabled children" (p. 157). They also recommended the involvement of parents in prevention program delivery to reinforce knowledge, while simultaneously alleviating or reducing some concern held by parents about the risks to their children.

Finding 5

Culturally informed, developed and led prevention programs and strategies align with best practice for First Nations Peoples.

Effective school-based prevention programs that were designed for, or targeted, First Nations and Indigenous children also involved the community in program delivery and decision-making. Such an approach reflects acknowledgement that First Nations and Indigenous knowledges are essential for effective program development, to increase program uptake and engagement with these communities (Mace et al., 2015). As Gibbs and colleagues write, "Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities have expressed the need for cultural models of healing child sexual abuse" (Gibbs et al., 2024). It is important to remember First Nations Communities in Australia and around the world have been historically and contemporarily subject to extra-ordinary legal

interventions, often based on race, which has resulted in government distrust and an erasure of First Nations and Indigenous voices from programs and interventions (Gill & Begum, 2022; Howe, 2007). The intergenerational abuse and trauma result in systemic barriers to help-seeking and the disclosure of child sexual abuse (Vosz et al., 2022, p 96).

The partnership and involvement of First Nations and Indigenous Communities to inform, shape and co-design interventions is, therefore, key. In a study of interventions across First Nations Communities in Canada and the US, Barsalou-Verge and colleagues (2015) observed a need to ensure measures to prevent child sexual abuse should involve communities "at every step of program development and implementation" and centre the benefit to the community in its delivery (p. 75). This study described the perceived difficulty in "reconciling evidence-based therapies and culturally adapted therapies", but the necessity of culturally-informed, participatory priorities are recognised and addressed in a way that reflects what is important to the community (e.g., Anderson et al., 2022). There was one notable example of a targeted school-based prevention program designed for the Native American Lakota Community, which reflected local community knowledge. The program integrated culture, history and language, and the program involved Lakota adults from the

approaches to increase acceptance (Barsalou-Verge et al., 2015, p 75).

This study affirms the alignment between culturally-informed approaches and partnerships with effective intervention practices. In the *IMpower* program in the US, a Native American Community was consulted prior to the implementation of a school-based prevention program, to determine the most appropriate program model for their community (Edwards et al., 2020). As the community was involved in decision-making, the program was well received, resulting in high satisfaction ratings from children who engaged in the program, as well as observed increases in knowledge of child sexual abuse and prevention strategies.

However, designing a program and then consulting with First Nations Communities is not as strong as *co-designing* a program with First Nations Communities. Designing programs with community ensures First Nations voice and

community in program delivery as co-facilitators. *Youth Voices in Prevention*, described in Figure 10, demonstrates the benefits of utilising community knowledge in program design, where participation in the program resulted in increased knowledge of child sexual abuse and safety behaviours, and self-reported reductions in the perpetration of sexual harm.

Figure 10: Youth Voices in Prevention

Youth Voices in Prevention is an educational retreat for children in the US, delivered as an overnight or day camp. Children are nominated as opinion leaders by their peers, from middle and high schools, to attend this retreat. The *Youth Voices in Prevention* program provides training for these opinion leaders in child sexual abuse best practices, which include bystander intervention, social emotional skills and appropriate social norms. These children are also taught communication strategies for effective peer-to-peer message dissemination and encouraged to share key messages in prevention with their communities.

The program is delivered in communities across the US. In one small city where the program was delivered, there was a large community of Lakota People. In recognition of the unique culture and needs of this community, program developers worked with the Lakota People to integrate culture, history and language into program content and messaging. Additionally, the program encouraged Lakota adults to co-facilitate sessions to increase the accessibility and cultural appropriateness of program delivery. This particular program also featured opportunities for participation for sexual and gender diverse children to participate, with support from sexual and gender diverse adults. Additionally, the opinion leaders in this community were also invited to attend a variety of community-based after-school activities, including bowling and pumpkin painting. These extra activities served to reinforce prevention messages and skills in a fun and engaging way (Edwards et al., 2023).

A study by Edwards and colleagues (2023) examined self-reported violence and sexually abusive behaviours from 2,528 children in the Lakota Community school district over three years. During this time, 132 prevention events were delivered, which were attended by approximately 200 children. While this study had also considered general violence alongside sexual harassment and sexual violence, the findings suggest there was a reduction in both experiences of sexual victimisation and perpetration in this sample, with reduced severity and frequency in all forms of violence. Additionally, the study reported that results were most significant for children who had attended at least one *Youth Voices in Prevention* activity (Edwards et al., 2023). These findings provide support for the implementation of community-based child sexual abuse prevention activities for children, that are designed for and with the community for increased uptake, engagement, and increased efficacy. This is particularly important for First Nations and Indigenous Communities, where local knowledge and customs must be incorporated in program content and messaging for culturally responsive prevention programming.

Parent-focused Education Programs

Parent-focused child sexual abuse education prevention programs aim to equip parents and caregivers with knowledge, skills, and confidence to protect children from sexual harm, both in-person and online. These programs acknowledge parents' critical roles in early prevention, detection, and response to child sexual abuse; hence, building parent and caregiver capacity can create safer environments for children (Rudolph & Zimmer-Gembeck, 2018). This is particularly pertinent for children in the early-childhood cohort (i.e., 2-5 years), who are especially vulnerable to adverse and traumatic experiences and may experience detrimental long-term impacts (Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse, 2017; Trout, 2021). We acknowledge that carers may have a parenting role; and likewise, parents may not have a caring role with their children. As such, our discussion of parent-focused education programs considers that both parents and carers are encompassed within parent-focused education programs.

Parent-focused education programs are positioned within primary and secondary prevention because they feature content and messaging designed to prevent sexual harm before it occurs, and target adults who may be at risk of engaging in child sexual abuse. In many

cases, parents or carers are perpetrators of intrafamilial child sexual abuse or may fail to protect their children from other family members who are perpetrators, which emphasises the importance of secondary prevention, (Mathews et al., 2024; Warrington et al., 2023).

Parents and carers are an important resource in child sexual abuse prevention. Parents and carers are uniquely positioned to provide key messaging and reinforce children's learning about child sexual abuse prevention at home (Russell et al., 2024). However, they can be a challenging cohort to engage. Parents may dismiss concerns about potential child sexual abuse risks to their children or may be unwilling to engage with the subject matter due to personal discomfort (Livingston et al., 2020). Parents may offer misguided messages to children, such as overemphasising the risk from strangers and encouraging their child to physically retaliate if they are in a dangerous situation (Rudolph & Zimmer-Gembeck, 2018). These, and other, challenges – such as financial barriers – must be addressed in program design and delivery to ensure optimal efficacy.

However, a child's broader home environment is relevant to preventing child sexual abuse. Rudolph and colleagues (2022) suggested parent-focused prevention programs would be more effective by focusing on creating safer environments in the home. Best practice initiatives for child sexual abuse are identified as being associated with public health initiatives that promote the social determinants of health. These include service provisions to ensure that families have safe and adequate housing, access to education, mental health services and early intervention family supports (Donkin et al., 2018). To enable parents and carers to keep their children safe, they must be supported to meet their own personal needs, and those of their family, so they can take on an active role in the prevention of child sexual abuse.

Best-practice for parent-focused education programs

Parent-focused education programs work in several ways. They can increase parental awareness of child sexual abuse; bolster parental knowledge and ability to detect child sexual abuse; support parents to communicate safety messages to their children; or increase parents' skills and capacity to safely intervene if a situation is not appropriate. Parents can receive accurate information about what constitutes abuse, and the programs can dispel common myths around child sexual abuse risks (e.g., Kaçan & Sakız, 2024). In fact, parents can be supported to communicate safety messages to their children (Rudolph et al., 2017).

Several considerations for best practice for parent-focused education programs were identified. These factors are discussed below, considering content and messaging, program delivery and diversity considerations. However, they need to be considered within the broader consideration of the realities of the home environment and the importance of the home context on child sexual abuse prevention.

Content and messaging[4]

The content and messaging in parent-focused education programs addressed the prevention of both victimisation and perpetration. Parents can be both protector and abuser in relation to child sexual abuse (e.g., Gerke et al, 2021; Rudolph & Zimmer-Gembeck, 2018). As such, effective parent-focused programs must consider those dichotomous purposes.

There were 13 key themes identified across the Australian and international literature. These themes closely align with school-based messaging, with the addition of communication strategies. This is an important addition because it ensures parents can effectively share key prevention messages to their children (e.g., Kaçan & Sakız, 2024). Table 5 (below) compares two Australian parent-focused programs across the content and messaging themes: *Speak Up. Be Strong. Be Heard.* and *Power to Kids*.

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[4] As noted above, all analysis of content and messaging was limited to what was detailed in the published evaluation materials. As such, it is possible more themes were evident in these programs but not reported.

A comparison between the considered themes for these two Australian programs raised several key considerations. *Power to Kids* content and messaging seemingly reflected a greater focus on the direct education of parents, as the themes relating to communication and intervention strategies were addressed. However, neither program featured content about reporting responsibilities or risk of detection and consequences. As parents may be both protector and perpetrator, this may be a significant omission. Parent-focused prevention programs should include messaging that may also help to deter offending against children. However, as parents and carers may be resistant to engage with potentially more confronting messaging (e.g., Livingston et al., 2020), it is essential that key messages from child sexual abuse prevention be trialled to determine the most effective program content, which will deliver fundamental prevention messages while maintaining parental engagement. For example, Prikhidko and Kenny (2021) reported parents were more comfortable talking about child sexual abuse prevention with their children when they had been provided guidance and advice about having age-appropriate conversations (e.g., communication strategies). It was also evident that *Speak Up. Be Strong. Be Heard.* featured more key messages that could be easily relayed to children, such as safe and not safe touches.

Table 5: Content and Messaging in Australian Parent-Focused Programs

	Speak Up. Be Strong. Be Heard	Power to Kids
Communication strategies		X
Emotional wellbeing		
Help-seeking and disclosure		
Identifying potential perpetrators	X	X
Online safety		
Safe/not safe touches	X	
Secret keeping and surprises	X	
Sexual health and safety		X
Strategies and self-protection skills	X	X
Promotion of healthy relationships		
Reporting responsibilities		
Risk of detection and consequences		
Therapeutic and disruptive interventions (including bystander actions)		X
Understand and recognise child sexual abuse	X	

There were no programs in the international sources that featured all content and messaging. Most programs featured four or five key messages, with a few notable exceptions. One leading international example, *Prevent It!*, featured eight key messages, including online safety, reporting responsibilities and disruptive interventions (Martin & Silverstone, 2016). However, parents were just one target demographic of the *Prevent It!* Program, which was designed to also educate adults who may work with children, such as teachers, psychologists and social workers (Martin & Silverstone, 2016). This may account for the broader prevention messaging in this program; although broader messaging may prove to be burdensome for parents, who may benefit from more targeted program content.

Australian parent-focused programs should consider whether extending messaging is required to ensure key child sexual abuse content is featured, including messages intended for children and messages deterring perpetration. This will ensure parents are equipped with the knowledge and skills to support child sexual abuse prevention efforts. This approach aligns with the Integrated Prevention Matrix, by addressing both victimisation and perpetration at the primary and secondary prevention levels. However, as noted, optimal messaging has not been determined, so it is paramount that key prevention messages are trialled to ensure parental engagement is maintained.

Finding 3
Program design should meet cohort needs, be developmentally appropriate, and delivered by trained and/or experienced facilitators.

Program delivery

Across parent-focused programs in Australia and internationally, most were delivered by professionals and researchers. In one notable example, mothers worked through content themselves, while simultaneously providing education to their daughters (Foshee et al., 2015; Figure 12 below). This approach increased program flexibility and accessibility, where mothers could work through the program at their convenience, acknowledging the constraints of balancing parental responsibilities with work and other commitments.

An effective approach to child sexual abuse prevention includes parent-focused education programs. This is because parents are uniquely positioned, especially during vital early-development years, to provide essential knowledge and skills to children about child sexual abuse prevention (Russell et al., 2024). Hence, parents must be given the resources to effectively provide accurate information and teach proven self-protection strategies to their children.

Parent-focused program delivery predominantly involved coursework and interactive workshops,

lacking the more arts-based modalities employed with children. While this reflects the differing developmental needs between adults and children, it suggests a lack of consideration for those adults who may require alternative teaching styles. Much like children, some adults will likely benefit from more engaging or 'fun' modalities. Adopting developmentally appropriate multi-modal approaches for adults will ensure a greater level of engagement with the key content and messaging.

The duration of these programs varied. Some programs were single interventions, delivered as a two-hour workshop (e.g., Guastaferro et al., 2024). This included the Australian *Speak Up. Be Safe. Be Heard.* program (Carrington et al., 2019). Whereas, other programs were delivered across several sessions, ranging from three 30-minute sessions (e.g., Jin et al., 2017) to a three to five-month program (Foshee et al., 2015). The potential effects of this variance were not examined. As such, no optimal duration for parent-focused education programs could be determined.

Figure 11 describes the *Family Safe Dates* and *Moms and Teens for Safe Dates* programs, which

are self-driven, booklet-based programs completed by parents and children. The success of these programs can be found in the centring of the parent-child relationship and encouraging communication, awareness and engagement.

Figure 11: A Universal Dating Abuse Prevention Program for Children Exposed to Domestic Violence

Family Safe Dates is an evidence-based dating abuse prevention program suitable for the general population. The program is available throughout the United States of America and is published by Hazelden Publishing. *Family Safe Dates* is designed to motivate parental engagement by increasing their awareness of dating abuse and the "importance of being involved in their adolescent's dating" to prevent this abuse (Foshee et al., 2015, p. 2156). The program also facilitates parental engagement by increasing their understanding and knowledge of dating abuse, while building skills and providing parents with opportunities to communicate with their teenage children. The program has "demonstrated positive effects on dating abuse victimisation, with those not receiving the program reporting substantially higher odds of being victimised by dates than those who received the program" (Foshee et al., 2015, p. 2153).

The program provides the tools for parents to engage with children on dating practices. The program includes six booklets which parents and children complete together, including "role-plays, puzzles, games, scenario analyses [and] guided discussions" and is designed to be completed at home (Foshee et al., 2015, p. 2153). These activities relate to dating abuse prevention and decreasing the risk of "victimisation and perpetration" (Foshee et al., 2015, p. 2156). The program was typically completed over 3 to 5 months.

Addressing diversity

Parent-focused education programs are effective when they consider the needs of cohorts considered more at risk of experiencing child sexual abuse. This was particularly evident for parents of children who live with disability, with three sources detailing programs designed specifically for these parents (Jenkins, 2023; Kaçan & Sakız, 2024; Neherta et al., 2019). Programs for parents with disability were predominantly delivered by researchers, through coursework, with interactive workshop-style sessions, ranging from four to 20 sessions (e.g., Jenkins, 2023). The content and messaging included sexual health and safety topics, healthy relationships and self-protection strategies, with a specific focus on how these messages relate to disability. All three programs resulted in increased knowledge of child sexual abuse, with two programs also producing increases in self-reporting safety behaviours or bystander intervention actions (Jenkins, 2023; Kaçan & Sakız, 2024). One of these programs is described in Figure 12.

A psychoeducation program for parents of children with disabilities, detailed in Figure 12, offers a clear example of how targeted, parent-focused interventions can support child sexual abuse prevention at multiple levels to help prevent victimisation of children living with disability. By strengthening parental knowledge and resilience, the program aligns with both primary prevention, through increased awareness of abuse, and secondary prevention, through improved capacity to respond appropriately.

Figure 12: A Psychoeducational Program for Parents of Children with Disabilities

Kaçan and Sakız (2024) profile the development and delivery of a psychoeducation program for parents of children with disabilities in Kastamonu Province, Türkiye. The psychoeducation program was delivered over seven weeks, with three sessions per week. All weeks included six hours of content, except for the final week which included nine hours. Each week introduced a different topic as follows:

- Week 1: Importance of sex education and information about child sexual abuse;
- Week 2: Physical development, the human body and sexual development;
- Week 3: Disability and human development;
- Week 4: Risk factors for the sexual abuse of children with disabilities;
- Week 5: Educating children with disabilities about appropriate sexual behaviours and development;
- Week 6: Educating children with disabilities about preventing and coping with sexual abuse; and
- Week 7: Reducing child sexual abuse anxiety and improving coping (Kaçan & Sakız, 2024, p. 6).

The program featured a mixture of training methods and materials, including group and individual instruction across the first six weeks of the program, alongside individual and group tasks, questions and answers, discussions, and booklet and visual illustration exercises. Week 7 provided a different method, deploying "group counselling, applied relaxation, behavioural relation, [and] cognitive restructuring" (Kaçan & Sakız, 2024, p. 6). These techniques were drawn upon here to "help participants learn how to relax their bodies in response to anxiety-provoking situations", as well as replace negative thoughts and beliefs with "more realistic and positive thoughts" (Kaçan & Sakız, 2024, p. 7).

A total of 93 parents of children with disability participated in this study, with 45 completing the prevention program and 48 serving as the control group (Kaçan & Sakız, 2024). The psychoeducation approach of this intervention arose primarily in the focus on managing feelings of anxiety and stress related to child sexual abuse. When compared to the control group, participants who engaged in the psychoeducation program showed an increased ability to mitigate anxiety. This focus was significant for the developers of the program as "an informed and empowered parental role...may create a sense of confidence and trust" (Kaçan & Sakız, 2024, p. 12).

The intervention program showed signs of success with parents gaining increased knowledge of child sexual abuse prevention and response, as well as reducing anxious feelings about the topic. Kaçan and Sakız (2024) note that providing an understanding of child sexual abuse to parents of a child with a disability empowers them "to advocate more effectively for their child's safety and wellbeing", while also becoming more confident and proactive in preventative measures (p. 10).

The program's attentiveness to building knowledge, understanding, capacity and self-regulation among the parents of children with a disability seems important. As research elsewhere shows, children with a disability are at higher risk of abuse and neglect, and also have an under identification of this offending, illustrating the barriers which exist to disclosing abuse for these children (Klebanov et al., 2024). The novelty of this program by Kaçan and Sakız (2024) and its broader value when considering interventions for this group is its focus on increasing the resilience of parents of children with a disability. Helping these parents, many of whom are advocates for their children everyday, to feel an increased confidence and strength in understanding and preventing child sexual abuse.

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Finding 5

Culturally informed, developed and led prevention programs and strategies align with best practice for First Nations Peoples.

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There was limited evidence of program development targeted toward parents who identify as First Nations or Indigenous. One source included a program designed for First Nations Communities, the *Speak Up. Be Strong. Be Heard.* (Carrington et al., 2019) program. This program has been noted above. Briefly, it was a police-led educational public awareness campaign delivered in North Queensland, Australia. It targeted various cohorts including children, community members and parents. Hence, it was a parent-focused program in that regard, reflecting the importance of familial and kinship ties in First Nations Communities (Carington et al., 2019). However, there was a lack of detail around this program, including content development; whether First Nations Community representatives were involved in development; and how this program addressed the needs of parents, specifically.

Once again, there is a noticeable absence of sources that specifically address the needs of culturally and linguistically diverse children or those identifying as sexual or gender diverse, highlighting a significant gap in the research that warrants further exploration.

Professional Development and Training

Professional development and training programs for child sexual abuse prevention are an essential component of an effective prevention agenda. Adults who work with children, such as educators, childcare professionals or social support workers, for example, are uniquely positioned to support prevention efforts through high-frequency contact with a large number of children (Rheingold et al., 2015; Zhang et al., 2015). Professional development and training programs are structured educational programs designed to equip professionals, with the knowledge, skills, and confidence needed to prevent, identify, and respond to child sexual abuse (Nurse, 2018). These programs typically include content on understanding the nature and dynamics of abuse, recognising risk factors and warning signs, promoting protective behaviours,

and fostering open communication with children (e.g., Epstein & Crisp, 2018; Nurse, 2018; Rheingold et al., 2015). These programs operate primarily at the primary prevention level by building general awareness and strengthening protective factors before harm occurs, while also supporting secondary prevention by enhancing professionals' ability to identify risk and intervene safely. The overarching goals are to increase adults' knowledge and skills to take proactive and informed steps to increase children's safety (e.g., Darkness to Light, 2025).

The significance of professional development training is particularly key in industries and organisations, which not only directly work with children, but also have statutory obligations to report suspected child sexual abuse. Teachers, for example, have a mandatory reporting obligation in Australia, Canada and the US (Mathews, 2011). Additionally, in some jurisdictions where such legislative provisions do not exist, common law obligations may compel a person who owes a duty of care to the child (and their employer) to report the suspected abuse to prevent harm to the child (Mathews, 2011). Likely a result of these provisions, evidence has shown professionals are the most frequent reporters of child sexual abuse (Rheingold et al., 2015), which reinforces the necessity of professional development and training programs to ensure professionals do have the requisite knowledge and skills to identify the signs of child sexual abuse and respond appropriately.

Professional training and development focused programs were also shown to achieve increases in knowledge and awareness of child sexual abuse, as well as increased safety behaviours. Aligning with recommendations from the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse (2017), it is essential that all professionals who work with children receive training in preventing child sexual abuse, including identifying and responding to harm, to provide safe environments for children. This also includes adults who wish to provide care for

children who live in out-of-home care environments (e.g., Shuker & Pearce, 2019).

Additionally, professional development and training programs are an important tool to support and encourage contextual prevention strategies and practices explored in Part B of this Report. These programs can ensure that professionals have the fundamental knowledge and skills to perform these practices, such as increasing natural surveillance or controlling access within an organisation, in addition to designing clear organisational policies and enhancing formal regulatory controls (Rayment-McHugh et al., 2024). In this way, professional development can facilitate situational prevention as it can teach professionals how the child's environment can inhibit child sexual abuse.

Finally, professional development and training programs should encourage a trauma-informed approach to working with children, especially those who may be at risk of experiencing harm (Lefevre et al., 2024). This will support the development of trusting relationships that may facilitate help-seeking behaviours and disclosure of harm.

Best-practice for professional development and training

There were four Australian professional training and development programs identified in the findings, which included *Power to Kids* (McKibbin et al., 2023), a training program for foster carers and case managers*, J-Safe Protective Behaviours Teacher Training* (Epstein & Crisp, 2018), *Changing Futures* (Christensen et al., 2024) and *Love Bites* (Huber Social, 2021)*.* These programs focused only on preventing victimisation, by increasing the knowledge, awareness and skills of adults to identify and respond to the risk and incidence of child sexual abuse, also as a means of proactive bystander intervention.

Content and messaging[5]

The content and messaging in professional development and training programs were focused on the prevention of victimisation, by increasing the knowledge and awareness of child sexual abuse among adults and encouraging greater detection and disclosure of instances of abuse. However, there were no themes explicitly focused on how to create safer environments for children, which is a significant omission. As noted above, professional development and training programs should include a focus on contextual prevention strategies to support broader prevention efforts. There were no themes shared across the four Australian professional development and training programs, although there was a closer alignment in messaging between the *Power to Kids* program and the *Changing Futures* program, which likely reflects the targeted cohorts of each program (i.e., professionals working with children). The *J-Safe Protective Behaviours* program was designed specifically for teachers in the Jewish education system (Epstein & Crisp, 2018), whereas *Love Bites* (Huber Social, 2021) was designed for teachers or other adults interested in delivering respectful relationships education. In comparison, both *Power to Kids* and *Changing Futures* were more directed towards professionals who may work with children in community, in care and support roles (Christensen et al., 2024; McKibbin et al., 2023). Table 6 sets out the inclusions and gaps in content and messaging in these three Australian programs.

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[5] As noted above, all analysis of content and messaging was limited to what was detailed in the published evaluation materials. As such, it is possible more themes were evident in these programs but not reported. For example, the research team are aware the Daniel Morcombe Foundation's *Changing Futures* training program was more comprehensive than what was reported, and *did* include more themes within the training package. However, these themes were not included in this Report to maintain consistency.

Table 6: Content and Messaging in Australian Professional Development and Training Programs

	Power to Kids	J-Safe Protective Behaviours	Changing Futures	Love Bites
Body awareness and safety				
Communication strategies	X			X
Emotional wellbeing				X
Family safety planning/trusted adults				
Help-seeking and disclosure		X		X
Identifying potential perpetrators	X			
Online safety				
Safe/not safe touches				
Sexual health and safety	X		X	
Strategies and self-protection skills	X		X	
Promotion of healthy relationships				X
Reporting responsibilities				
Social norms and attitudes				
Therapeutic and disruptive interventions (including bystander actions)	X		X	X
Understand and recognise CSA		X	X	X
Additional notes	Note. Messaging and content of *Love Bites* differed for professionals, to children.			

The overview of content and messaging in Australian programs highlights the identified educational prevention programs. Based on the reported content, *Love Bites* (Huber Social, 2021) performed the strongest in terms of comprehensive messaging, with six themes addressed. From an international perspective, most programs featured four or five themes (e.g., Madrid et al., 2020; Dewi et al., 2021). However, one leading example, the *Don't Touch My Body Training Program* for future early childhood educators in Türkiye, also featured six themes (see Altundağ, 2020; 2023), indicating Australia's professional training and development programming may align with international standards for child sexual abuse prevention messaging. However, as we noted with other program types, there is no evidence of which messages, or how many messages, are essential for an effective child sexual abuse professional development and training program. As such, further research is required to pilot

various messages to expand best practice and ensure these programs are effective.

Most of the themes in the Australian professional training and development programs are evidently centred around ensuring professionals have the knowledge to recognise the signs of child sexual abuse and respond appropriately using disruptive interventions. This is favourable given it aligns with the recommendations from the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse (2017) noted above. Additionally, it was clear these programs also included messaging that was designed to be passed on to children to enhance their self-protection, such as sexual health and safety; promotion of healthy relationships; emotional wellbeing and strategies; and self-protection skills. These are important precautionary inclusions to empower children to protect themselves and seek help if needed, as evidence has shown these professionals may, themselves,

pose a risk to child safety (e.g., Mathews et al., 2024).

Hence, it is essential that a comprehensive child sexual abuse prevention agenda also include clear policy and guidelines around safeguarding in institutions. Organisations and institutions should adopt contextual prevention strategies and practices, such as crime prevention through environmental design, to limit the opportunities for offences to occur and create an environment in which children feel safe to ask for help (see Rayment-McHugh et al., 2024). Additionally, these efforts must be supported with an increase in research and evaluation to ensure these efforts are achieving the intended outcomes and fostering protective environments for children, such as environmental audits and safeguarding assessments of professionals in child-serving organisations (Rayment-McHugh et al., 2024; Russell & Higgins, 2019). Further exploration of these innovative approaches is undertaken in Part B.

Finding 3
Program design should meet cohort needs, be developmentally appropriate, and delivered by trained and/or experienced facilitators.

Program delivery

Professional development and training programs were delivered by experienced expert professionals and researchers, with one notable exception *Second Step Child Protection Unit* program which could be completed independently online (Kim et al., 2019). This approach provided a flexible training program that teachers could complete at their convenience, recognising the significant time burden of teaching workloads and other personal commitments.

Professional development and training programs were delivered through interactive workshops, both in person and online, or through coursework delivered across multiple sessions (e.g., Altundağ, 2023; Madrid et al., 2020). These programs may include role-playing, case study analysis, and collaborative problem-solving to engage participants actively and develop practical skills (e.g., Epstein & Crisp, 2018). Training programs ranged from a single 40-

minute training session (Altundağ, 2023) to a full two-day training program (Guastaferro et al., 2023), reflecting substantial variation in scope and depth of engagement with key messages. Shorter programs serve as an important introductory program to key concepts in prevention and increase professional awareness of child sexual abuse, while longer programs enable more intensive training, exploring key content and messaging in greater depth. Longer programs may also provide more opportunity for professionals to practice new skills, however, there was no evidence of optimal duration in the literature.

One of the most prominent examples of a training program for adults is the *Stewards for Children* program delivered by Darkness to Light. This brief intervention is a flexible and accessible program for teachers, professionals working with children and interested community members. Depicted in Figure 13, *Stewards of Children* has achieved significant increases in the knowledge and

awareness of child sexual abuse. The program is available in multiple regions across the world, demonstrating the remarkable reach of this child sexual abuse prevention program, and the utility of online program delivery.

Figure 13: Stewards of Children

Stewards of Children is a professional training and development program for adults in the community. It is suitable for teachers or professionals, as well as the general public, who may be parents or work with or spend time with children, in a more general capacity. The program is a 2.5-hour video-based educational workshop, that is delivered in one of three ways:

1. The first approach is an in-person, facilitated session, that is followed by a guided discussion;
2. The second approach is an online, interactive format that can be completed independently; and
3. The third approach is an online, facilitator-led session.

The video features stories of lived experiences of abuse, and content about child sexual abuse prevention strategies. It is delivered in a trauma-informed way, with program content and messaging centered around recognising the signs of abuse and strategies for intervention and/or response. It also includes messaging about the risks for perpetrators. The program adopts a social behaviour change approach to encourage bystander intervention, emphasising five actions adults can take to help reduce the risk of child sexual abuse. These actions can be applied in the home, in the community and in organisations.

As the program is accessible online and can be completed independently, the program has enormous scope. "Worldwide, nearly two million adults in 76 countries have completed the training, led by more than 12,000 Certified Instructors and Authorized Facilitators" (Todahl et al., 2021).

A study by Rheingold and colleagues (2015) focused on program delivery in the early childhood setting. Survey data from 352 childcare professionals indicated the program had increased knowledge and awareness of child sexual abuse and increased self-reported safety behaviours. The study also reported no significant differences in outcomes between professionals who completed the training in-person or online (i.e., facilitated version). Rheingold and colleagues (2015) stated, "web-based programs are of particular interest as they can be delivered widely, efficiently, and at low cost, making them accessible to agencies with limited resources. Thus, web-based approaches may assist in overcoming barriers to participation" (p. 384).

Finding 6

Educating caregivers and professionals to deliver prevention messaging to children increases dissemination opportunities, especially for children from culturally diverse backgrounds.

Addressing diversity

Professional development and training, specifically those programs designed for teachers, is a particularly effective way to encourage protective environments, and disseminate important child sexual abuse prevention messages to children. However, there was limited evidence of how diversity was considered or addressed in these programs, beyond tailoring program content to meet the needs of certain religious groups (i.e., Epstein & Crisp, 2018; Kantipudi & Chuemchit, 2024). These examples were designed for teachers working with children from strong religious faith backgrounds. This approach provides teachers with the knowledge and skills to effectively deliver prevention content and programs

themselves, where child sexual abuse prevention programming can be incorporated into the broader education curriculum and, therefore, be delivered to a much larger number of students (e.g., Weingarten et al., 2018).

Depicted in Figure 14, one community-based prevention strategy involved four-weeks of interactive workshops and coursework to increase primary teachers' ability to protect their students from sexual harm. *Teach to say "No"* prevention training explored messages on understanding child sexual abuse, legislation and reporting requirements, as well as messages directed toward children, such as strategies to prevent harm, body awareness and secret keeping. The training program achieved increased knowledge and awareness of child sexual abuse, as well as increased bystander intervention behaviours. Of particular note was the opportunity to educate students (through their teachers) who, according to religious upbringing, were otherwise not exposed to child sexual abuse prevention information.

Figure 14: Teach to say "No"

Teach to say "No" is a blended intervention program, featuring face-to-face and internet-based interventions targeted at primary school teachers in Phnom Penh, Cambodia. The face-to-face components of the program were delivered by teachers, who were provided a package of resources and activities (tasks, PowerPoint presentations, and cartoon videos) to engage in learning. The internet-based interventions were facilitated via Facebook, with participants encouraged to engage with a page on the social networking platform.

The program was delivered over four weeks, with a 45-minute course delivery as well as assignment and discussion each week. Topics included:
- Nature, and consequences of child sexual abuse and its prevention;
- Educate to be safe: My anatomy, safe touch and unsafe touch, uncomfortable feelings, safe secret and unsafe secret, who are strangers and safe strangers?; and information about who to tell about abuse; and
- Educate on mobile or internet usage: Including teaching how to report abuse on social networking apps, and how to maintain privacy online (including social media privacy settings).

Kantipudi and Chuemchit (2024) evaluated the effectiveness of the *Teach to say "No"* program. Participants recorded a significant increase in their knowledge of child sexual abuse and its prevention across the program. Participants also remarked on their increased knowledge of social media platforms, a clear knowledge gap for teachers yet strength for students. Online sexual abuse, including how online dating websites and games morphed towards child sexual abuse, was the area which most engaged participants.

Cambodia has a demographic make-up which predominantly identify as, and practice, the Buddhist faith. Kantipudi and Chuemchit (2024) described that this faith meant participants (whom were 100% Buddhist in this study) "culturally believe that educating students on child sexual abuse is not an obligatory essence" (p. 9). One participant remarked how educating children about sexual education or child sexual abuse prevention was "forbidden" on religious grounds as sex was "an intrinsic part", remarking that even Buddhist parents would not talk about such matters. Yet, these cultural barriers perhaps make forms of professional training and development like *Teach to say "No"* more important.

Kantipudi and Chuemchit (2024, p. 10) describe the attitudinal and educative change of participants who engaged in the program as "astonishing", with teachers who engaged with *Teach to say "No"* showing a "positive outlook on educating students about child sexual abuse prevention strategies and creating a supportive school environment".

Culturally responsive and appropriate programs are essential for effective program delivery because culture influences the way individuals view themselves and their environment (Marsiglia & Booth, 2015), including the social norms and attitudes toward child sexual abuse. The *J-Safe Protective Behaviours Teacher Training*, detailed in Figure 15, incorporated Australian-Jewish cultural beliefs and knowledge into the design of the *J-Safe* program. Using evidence from the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse (2017), the program adopts advice and recommendations provided by Jewish scholars, academics, rabbis, and people who have experienced sexual harm and their supporters, to address culturally specific ideas and attitudes towards child sexual abuse. Australian-Jewish day-school teachers participated in the program, reporting increases in knowledge and awareness of child sexual abuse, and increased safety behaviours (i.e., ability to respond to disclosures).

Figure 15: J-Safe Protective Behaviours Teacher Training

The *J-Safe Protective Behaviours Teacher Training* Project is child sexual abuse training specifically for the Jewish community, reflecting "culturally specific ideas and attitudes" to child sexual abuse and responses to disclosure. This community-based education strategy includes staff and teachers, and is also delivered in school settings to students, to both increase understanding and awareness of child sexual abuse and how to prevent it. The project is culturally contextualised, with knowledges and preventative behaviours situated in Jewish values.

Tzedek, an Australian Jewish community organisation established following the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse, facilitates the J-Safe Training Program. This content is delivered through small-group discussion and role-plays, as well as PowerPoint presentations containing information and guidance, across two 90-minute sessions.

In a study engaging teachers who participated in *J-Safe*, Epstein and Crisp (2018) found research participants had gained "increased awareness about incidence and behavioural indicators" of child sexual abuse (p. 533). One participant in a management role at school noted the training had "increased teacher interest and queries" around child sexual abuse (p. 533). The value of the training was also measured by requests for further support. One male participant expressed the need for more gender-specific roleplays to understand how to appropriately and acceptably navigate environments where they perceived the behaviour of male teachers was under increased scrutiny.

Despite the culturally situated nature of this training, "this did not appear to be particularly meaningful for some participants" (Epstein & Crisp, 2018, p. 534). Participants remarked that the religious context felt "interchangeable" with other religious settings (p. 530). Instead, participants placed greater emphasis on gaining the understanding that child sexual abuse within the Jewish community was no less prevalent than in the general population. This was significant for participants as they appeared to believe there was a "naiveté about the incidence of [child sexual abuse] in the Jewish community" (p. 530). Culturally situated training provides targeted educational and preventative responses to child sexual abuse, and it also increases awareness of its prevalence across all communities, which supports a comprehensive prevention agenda.

4.1.2 Community-Based Prevention Strategies

Child sexual abuse prevention delivered within the community are designed for children and adults to increase awareness and knowledge of child sexual abuse, both in-person and online offending (e.g., Kemshall & Moulden, 2017). They can provide brief educational messages about effective prevention strategies, such as bystander intervention, and may involve offering support to those most at-risk of victimisation *and* perpetration (e.g., Newman et al., 2024). Community-based prevention strategies are positioned at the intersection of primary and secondary prevention levels with perpetration, victimisation and setting targets (see Figure 1 above).

Finding 7
Prevention initiatives and programs must target people at risk of perpetration and settings where abuse may occur.

Community-based prevention strategies can align with both primary and secondary prevention, whereby programs can reach a whole community or be targeted towards individuals who may be at risk of engaging in an act of child sexual abuse. As a primary prevention strategy, community-based prevention strategies, such as public awareness campaigns, are an effective method for widespread message dissemination, aimed at increasing awareness of child sexual abuse to encourage adults and older children to take more responsibility in ensuring the safety of children (Mathews & Collin-Vézina, 2016; Kemshall & Moulden, 2017). However, Kemshall and Moulden (2017) reported several challenges of these strategies, including issues around accessibility (i.e., reach of programs within smaller community groups and community engagement) and financial considerations. Specifically, the authors acknowledged the initial planning and development of an effective public awareness campaign may be quite costly, and campaigns require an ongoing financial commitment to support prevention initiatives, such as training programs for professionals and increased infrastructure to meet an increase in demand on existing services (Kemshall & Moulden, 2017).

At the secondary prevention level, community-based prevention strategies, such as perpetration prevention interventions, target individuals at risk of perpetration and the moment of decision-making, where individuals may be contemplating engaging in a child sexual abuse offence (Prichard et al., 2022; Smallbone & Wortley, 2017). These strategies are significantly underutilised in the prevention of child sexual abuse (Austin & Salter, 2022), despite their necessity in a comprehensive child sexual abuse prevention agenda. Additionally, the limited examples available have shown some perpetration prevention programs can be very cost-effective (e.g., Scanlan et al., 2024), although these programs too will likely increase demand on existing services.

These are two areas of community-based prevention strategies described in this Report. Firstly, public awareness campaigns are initiatives designed to target knowledge and attitudes of child sexual abuse in the community. Secondly, perpetration prevention strategies address at risk individuals. Our categorisation of perpetration prevention programs includes helplines and support services, and online prevention strategies. Each of these community-based prevention strategy areas are explored further below.

Public Awareness Campaigns

Public awareness campaigns have two key features. They aim to raise awareness of child sexual abuse within the community, and promote proactive, protective behaviours within families and communities, including bystander intervention actions. As these campaigns are aimed at the broader community, they reflect a primary prevention approach, targeting both victimisation and perpetration within the community. This approach aligns with the third Child Safe Guideline recommended by the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse (2017), that "families and communities are informed and involved" in prevention efforts. Public awareness campaigns

often depend on mass media for wide-spread message dissemination, such as radio and online advertising (Kemshall & Moulden, 2017). In addition to increasing general knowledge, such programs may provide direct links to support services, enabling early intervention and assistance for those at risk of perpetration (described below; e.g., Beier, 2024; Newman et al., 2024).

Child sexual abuse prevention campaigns are not a new concept, having been implemented for more than 30-years (Walsh et al., 2023). Research has shown that public awareness campaigns must be multi-faceted and adopt a multi-modal delivery strategy for optimal engagement and efficacy (e.g., Kemshall & Moulden, 2017). Specifically, Kemshall and Moulden (2017) acknowledged that interactive modalities are an essential component of an effective public awareness campaign to encourage and practice skill development. Additionally, Fix and colleagues (2021) reported that the messages depicted in these campaigns are equally as important, and must adopt a positive frame – that child sexual abuse *is* a preventable problem.

There were two Australian public awareness campaign programs identified in the findings which included *Speak Up. Be Strong. Be Heard* (Carrington et al., 2019) and *Operation RESET* (both described above; Mace et al., 2015). Each program focused on preventing victimisation and perpetration by increasing community knowledge and awareness of the impacts of child sexual abuse and risks for perpetrators, while encouraging bystander intervention. These programs were also delivered in schools (described above).

Perpetration Prevention Strategies

Programs or strategies to prevent individuals from causing harm are a crucial part of a comprehensive child sexual abuse prevention agenda (Smallbone & Rayment-McHugh, 2017). These approaches can include anonymous helplines and support services that provide guidance and therapeutic interventions for individuals concerned about their thoughts or behaviours (e.g., Newman et al., 2024), as well as innovative online prevention strategies that

can disrupt potential offending behaviour to prevent the escalation into harmful actions (e.g., Prichard et al., 2021). By intervening early and offering non-punitive pathways to help, these strategies seek to reduce the incidence of abuse and support individuals in making safe choices to increase the safety of children. There is also some overlap with preventive educational programs, such as respectful relationships programs, which may contribute to perpetration prevention by promoting messaging about healthy relationships and appropriate sexual behaviours, and challenging social norms that may perpetuate harmful attitudes and behaviours and are addressed further in school-based prevention above. There are two perpetration prevention strategies addressed in this Report: helplines and support services; and online prevention interventions.

Helplines and support services

Helplines are, typically, free 24-hour services offered for individuals at risk of engaging in the perpetration of child sexual abuse (e.g., Stop It Now! UK, n.d.). They provide anonymous, confidential support to people who are concerned about their sexual thoughts, feelings, or behaviours (e.g., Beier et al., 2024). These services generally offer crisis counselling, information, and referral pathways and are delivered by trained professionals who can assess risk and provide appropriate guidance (e.g., Beier, 2016b). In some cases, helplines are linked to broader networks of support, including specialist therapeutic services, mental health care, behaviour change programs, and crisis intervention (Beier, 2016a; 2016b; Grant et al., 2019). By offering accessible and non-judgmental assistance, helplines can assist individuals to manage risk factors before harm occurs. This aligns with a key recommendation from the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse (2017), to implement "information and help-seeking services to support people who are concerned they may be at risk of sexually abusing children". However, a key consideration in effective implementation is to ensure crisis workers receive appropriate training and the program is adequately resourced, including ongoing support for crisis workers.

Assessing the success of helplines is useful. Stop It Now! services, for example, are available across Australia. An evaluation of this service is currently underway by researchers at the University of Melbourne (Stop It Now! Australia, 2025), however, program success is demonstrated in other international jurisdictions. For example, over a three-year period (2015-2018) Stop It Now! UK received over 11,000 calls for support, with many calls stemming from increased awareness of child sexual abuse from a public awareness campaign (Newman et al., 2024). With the same service model utilised in Australia, it is likely that the Stop It Now! Australia program will achieve similar results (see McKillop & Rayment-McHugh, 2022). However, further research is essential to determine efficacy. Importantly, this model was recommended for implementation by the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse (2017).

An example of a leading international model for perpetration prevention is *Prevention Project Dunkelfeld*, delivered in Germany. In that project, a helpline was made accessible to both children and adults who felt like they may have been at risk of sexually harming children, specifically by viewing or attempting to procure child sexual abuse material. *Prevention Project Dunkelfeld* also involved a public awareness campaign, which included media and prevention messaging for the general public, and the provision of 24-hour anonymous counselling support via a helpline, which directed users to a preventative therapeutic program (Beier et al., 2024). The program received significant community uptake, resulting in increased knowledge and awareness of child sexual abuse, as well as self-reported reductions in child sexual abuse behaviours. Figure 16 below outlines *Prevention Project Dunkelfeld*.

Hence, the value of public awareness campaigns lies in their ability to simultaneously direct and encourage community members to utilise helpline and support services. While these campaigns are situated within primary prevention, they contribute to secondary prevention efforts by facilitating early intervention for those at risk of engaging in harm towards children (Smallbone & Rayment-McHugh, 2017). Therefore, a public awareness campaign is essential for an effective helpline and support service program.

Figure 16: Prevention Project Dunkelfeld

Prevention Project Dunkelfeld (translation "dark field") is both a public awareness campaign and therapeutic support service for children and adults who self-identify as having a sexual attraction towards children. The public awareness component involved a public media campaign, with posters, radio and social media advertising, promoting a free and anonymous 24-hour helpline. The media campaign adopted a non-judgmental approach, with the slogan "You are not guilty because of your sexual desire, but you are responsible for your sexual behavior. There is help! Do not become an offender!" (Beier, 2016a, p. 512). The helpline was manned by clinically trained and experienced counselling support staff, to conduct screening of individuals for referral into the therapeutic support component of the project.

The therapeutic support component provided, *Berlin Dissexuality Therapy*, delivered a tailored treatment program for individuals who were referred through the helpline, that aligned with the integrated theory of sexual offending. The program adopted a group-based and multi-modal approach, including pharmacological and psychological intervention strategies. The program employed cognitive behavioural therapy, relapse prevention strategies, self-regulation and the Good Lives Model. The treatment program was delivered weekly for 45-50 three-hour sessions, lasting approximately 12 months. Although treatment is beyond the scope of this Report, this program was designed specifically for individuals who had not yet engaged in offending behaviour, as a secondary prevention strategy.

During the first 10-years of the project (i.e., 2005-2015), an average 15-20 people contacted the helpline per month, resulting in more than 2,100 applications for the treatment program, 906 assessments for treatment and offers for treatment to 459 people (Beier, 2016b, p. 262). However, early evaluation data indicated that people who had committed offences were also accessing the service, alongside those at risk of perpetration. Nonetheless, program data revealed that the treatment program had resulted in improved psychological functioning, with reductions in emotional deficits and pro-offending attitudes, and increased sexual self-regulation. In an offending sample of 53 participants, there was some evidence of a reduction in offending-related behaviours, though offending did persist for 29 of 32 child sexual abuse material users, highlighting the complexities of child sexual abuse and challenges of reducing further offending (Beier et al., 2014; Beier, 2016a; 2016b). However, in a more recent study, Beier and colleagues (2024) reported that the content or nature and frequency of child sexual abuse material offending had reduced among these participants. This showcases the value of targeted community-based prevention strategies that should be implemented alongside broader primary prevention strategies for a comprehensive child sexual abuse prevention agenda.

Online prevention strategies

Online or digital prevention interventions are an emerging and increasingly important part of a comprehensive child sexual abuse prevention agenda, particularly with the rapid growth in all forms of online and digital perpetration (Price et al., 2024). Among these strategies, and within the primary and secondary prevention space, are the use of prevention messages (i.e., warning or pop-up) and chatbots, which are designed to interrupt potentially harmful online behaviour to prevent escalation (Prichard et al., 2022). Public awareness campaigns and parent-focused education programs, described above, can also encourage parents to implement controls directly on their child's electronic devices to prevent victimisation, such as content blocking and limiting communication ability (eSafety, 2025).

Beyond these examples, most online interventions are situated within the tertiary prevention space (see Price et al., 2024 for a scoping review of digital interventions to address child sexual abuse material offending). To name a few examples, these tertiary prevention strategies include content blocking (i.e., on web searches), web crawlers combined with artificial

intelligence, facial recognition software, peer-to-peer network monitoring, and online stings (e.g., Cifuentes et al., 2022; Edwards et al., 2021; Steel, 2015; Wright, 2015). These strategies are implemented in response to child sexual abuse offending and are beyond the scope of this Report.

Digital prevention messages can be a valuable deterrent and educative tool in child sexual abuse prevention. These interventions can be implemented to appear as a pop-up window when individuals search for illicit content, or as a warning message when individuals attempt to upload child sexual abuse materials to certain cloud-based servers (Doffman, 2024; Price et al., 2024). They can work in several ways including delivering brief, targeted messages that challenge attitudes and beliefs toward online offending, offer warnings about the harms of online abuse and risks of detection, or direct users to support services (e.g., Prichard et al., 2021; Scanlan et al., 2024).

Chatbots are an innovative extension of prevention messaging. Similarly to pop-up messages, chatbots can be implemented at the moment an individual attempts to procure child sexual abuse material (Scanlan et al., 2024). The key point of difference is that chatbots can engage users in anonymous, automated conversations that can provide brief psychoeducation, and encourage access to therapeutic or helpline resources (Scanlan et al., 2024).

Online prevention strategies challenge the perpetrator's behaviour. They aim to disrupt potential offending trajectories, promote help-seeking, and reduce opportunities for harm by intervening at key moments of decision-making online: reflecting a secondary prevention strategy, targeting both perpetration and settings (Smallbone & Wortley, 2017). These interventions, once designed, can be very cost-effective strategies to prevent child sexual abuse online (Hunn et al., 2023). However, these strategies are dependent upon the support of

online service providers (e.g., pornography websites), internet service providers and governments to implement them (Hunn et al., 2023). Many service providers are privately owned, and so prevention efforts are often inconsistent. To provide guidance and support for the industry partners, Australia – along with the UK, US, Canada and New Zealand – has published the *Voluntary Principles to Counter Online Child Sexual Exploitation and Abuse* (We Protect, 2024). These principles include preventing the distribution of child sexual abuse material, targeting livestreaming and online predatory behaviour, blocking and filtering searches for illicit materials, and adopting a trauma-informed approach for children and individuals who have experienced sexual harms, while increasing collaborative efforts to address the issue of online child sexual abuse. These principles have been endorsed by some of the biggest names in tech, including Google, Meta, and TikTok (We Protect, 2024). Additionally, many of these companies have adopted these measures to prevent online child sexual abuse offending. For example, Meta (2021) have implemented pop-up warning messages on searches for illicit content and educative messages about the harms to children for users who share harmful materials.[6]

Nonetheless, the online environment presents unique risks and challenges that can enable online child sexual abuse. Digital platforms provide unparalleled opportunities for anonymity and accessibility, which can serve to lower inhibitions and increase the likelihood of harmful behaviour where an individual may minimise the perceived risk of detection and consequence (Smallbone & Wortley, 2017). People who commit online offences may use the internet to access illegal child sexual abuse material, contact and groom children, or connect with like-minded individuals who can reinforce attitudes and behaviours that enable or perpetuate abusive actions (Prichard et al., 2022; Smallbone & Wortley, 2017). Social media, gaming platforms, and encrypted messaging services can also be used to share illicit material or

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[6] However, Meta also introduced end-to-end encryption on messaging, which potentially "creates a sanctuary for perpetrators who, emboldened by increased privacy, might exploit these platforms to harm children" (ECPAT, 2025)

contact children (e.g., Internet Watch Foundation, 2025). Additionally, the ease and speed with which online child sexual abuse offences can be enacted, in particular, the distribution and access of illicit materials, increases the challenges for prevention efforts exponentially (Smallbone & Wortley, 2017). Hence, strategies that may challenge this environment are an essential component in a comprehensive child sexual abuse prevention agenda.

One notable example of an Australian online prevention strategy involved researchers deploying a web-based prevention messaging intervention (Prichard et al., 2022). Described below in Figure 17, online pop-up messages were introduced to deter internet users from attempting to access "barely legal" pornography as a surrogate or gateway into accessing child sexual abuse material. Research suggested "barely legal" pornography may serve as a precursor to child sexual abuse material offending, as it often depicts actresses as minors, by using actresses with smaller physiques in child-like clothing with child-like behaviours (Wortley et al., 2024). This strategy targeted perpetration, while simultaneously targeting the moment of deciding whether to view child sexual abuse.

The findings identify online and digital prevention as a space in dire need of further research, with just three other evaluated examples found in international literature (i.e., Henry, 2020; Kamar et al., 2022; Scanlan et al., 2024). This is likely because most online interventions are situated in the tertiary prevention space, focused on the detection of child sexual abuse materials and online child sexual abuse perpetration (Price et al., 2024). However, tertiary prevention, while essential, is not sustainable given the magnitude of online offending and can be expensive with the involvement of law enforcement (Giles et al., 2024), which reinforces the need for effective alternatives across the primary and secondary prevention levels.

Best-practice for Community-Based Prevention Strategies

As with educational programs, the evidence shows community-based child sexual abuse prevention strategies can produce increased knowledge and awareness of child sexual abuse, and increased safety behaviours, which can increase reporting and disclosures. They can also offer potential reductions in child sexual abuse and related-offending when developed and implemented effectively. However, changes in offending behaviours were also not explored in most sources. Several considerations for best practice for community-based child sexual abuse prevention strategies were identified and these factors are discussed below.

Figure 17: Online "Pop-Up" Prevention Message

A web-based prevention messaging intervention was developed by Prichard and colleagues (2022), to deter internet users from accessing child sexual abuse materials. Specifically, a pop-up message was utilised, activating when internet users attempted to access potentially illicit content. This intervention was tested in a randomised control trial, using a "honeypot" design. A *GetFit* website mimicked a legitimate men's fitness website to engage internet users and featured advertisements for a barely-legal pornographic website as the bait. Barely-legal pornography portrays young adults as minors, which can serve as a gateway into accessing child sexual abuse material (Prichard et al., 2022).

Users of the *GetFit* website who clicked on the pornographic website advertisement were directed to a fake pornography website created by the research team (Prichard et al., 2022). However, for most users, the prevention message displayed as a pop-up after clicking on the advertisement. Each user was randomly shown one of four messages or directed straight to the landing page of the pornography website (control group). The messages included:
1. "Health professionals believe this material may lead users to become sexually aroused by children";
2. "Health professionals believe the individuals shown may experience long-term feelings of distress";
3. "Police may obtain IP addresses to track users"; or
4. "Viewing this material may be illegal in some countries and lead to arrest" (Prichard et al., p. 112)

Prichard and colleagues (2022) reported that a total of 419 users clicked on these advertisements. These users' behaviours were tracked from this point, to examine the impact of the various warning messages on continuation of behaviour. Users could return to the *GetFit* webpage and not continue to the landing page, or they could close the pop-up message and continue. Once on the landing page of the pornography website, users could exit or click "enter". After five seconds, a second pop-up message would be delivered, stating "Sorry! We're undergoing routine maintenance. Please check back shortly."

The results of the study showed that warning messages were an effective prevention strategy, resulting in a reduction in offending-related behaviours (Prichard et al., 2022). This was evident in the rate of users not attempting to enter the pornography website, compared with the control group who did not receive the prevention message pop-up. Additionally, this outcome was most effective for users who received messages three or four, which increased the perception of risk, aligning with a situational or contextual prevention strategy. Prichard and colleagues (2022, p. 119) reported, "warning messages, delivered at the time that the individual is considering engaging in the activity in question, can significantly influence their decision making and deter them from proceeding."

Content and messaging[7]
The content and messaging in community-based prevention strategies addressed the prevention of both victimisation and perpetration, by increasing knowledge and awareness of child sexual abuse and its consequences for the child and the perpetrator. As expected, the messaging did vary by prevention intervention and was tailored to the target audience. There was one shared theme across two Australian community-based strategies which was to *understand and recognise* signs of abuse and what constitutes abuse. This was significant because it demonstrated a common goal of community-

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[7] As noted above, all analysis of content and messaging was limited to what was detailed in the published evaluation materials. As such, it is possible more themes were evident in these programs but not reported.

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based strategies, which is to raise awareness of child sexual abuse (Kemshall & Moulden, 2017). Table 7 sets out the inclusions and gaps in content and messaging in these two Australian

programs, which were the only examples identified in sources with details of program messaging included.

Table 7: Content and Messaging in Australian Community-Based Strategies

Content and messaging themes	Public Awareness Campaign	Perpetration Prevention Interventions
	Speak Up. Be Strong. Be Heard	Web-based Prevention Messaging Intervention
Body awareness and safety		
Emotional wellbeing		X
Help-seeking and disclosure		
Identifying potential perpetrators	X	
Online safety		
Reporting responsibilities		
Risk of detection and consequences		X
Strategies and self-protection skills	X	
Therapeutic and disruptive interventions (including bystander actions)		
Understand and recognise abuse	X	X
Additional notes	*Note. Operation RESET* is not included here as the messaging and content was not explicit	

The overview of content and messaging in Australian programs highlights two identified community-based prevention strategies. The public awareness campaign, *Speak Up. Be Strong. Be Heard.* (Carrington et al., 2019), represented three of six key prevention messages. Comparatively, one international example, a campaign delivered in Vinh City, Vietnam (Anh et al., 2022), featured five messages, suggesting public awareness campaigns in Australia *could* consider expanding the range of messages delivered to better

increase community awareness of child sexual abuse. However, it was not clear from the sources which messages, or how many, were essential for an effective awareness campaign. As such, program development should include piloting of key messages to determine the optimal public awareness campaign.

The perpetration prevention strategy (i.e., the web-based prevention messaging intervention) performed well, with three out of four key messages represented, although it missed messaging regarding therapeutic and disruptive

interventions (Prichard et al., 2022). This may be a significant omission, as the *reThink* chatbot project (Scanlan et al., 2024) demonstrated that therapeutic themed messaging could serve as an effective deterrent or redirection, which encouraged help-seeking behaviours; thereby, fostering protective environments for children by providing support to increase anti-offending attitudes and behaviours among individuals most at risk of engaging in harmful behaviours towards children. The *reThink* chatbot project (Scanlan et al., 2024) represented all four key messages. As an interactive prevention tool, chatbots enable several prevention messages to be delivered, which bolsters the ability to disrupt the trajectory of harmful behaviours.

The content and messaging themes in community-based prevention strategies in Australia targeted Australians in different ways. They were directed towards adults, or older children, with a greater focus on fostering

protective environments through increased vigilance and accountability. Through the public awareness campaign, community received messages designed to increase their ability to recognise signs of child sexual abuse, identify potential perpetrators and take action to create safer environments for children. The perpetration prevention strategy targeted adults who may be at risk of engaging in sexual behaviour towards a child, and deterred them from continuing their behaviour. Content and messaging provided knowledge of what constitutes child sexual abuse, increased the perceived risk of detection and consequences, and encouraged at risk adults to seek therapeutic support for long-term desistance. Increasing community vigilance aligns with a situational prevention approach as increasing observation of children can reduce the opportunity for child sexual abuse to occur (e.g., Rayment-McHugh et al., 2024), fostering protective environments for children.

Finding 3

Program design should meet cohort needs, be developmentally appropriate, and delivered by trained and/or experienced facilitators.

Program delivery

Across both types of community-based prevention strategies in Australia and internationally, most were delivered by professionals, including expert facilitators and police (e.g., Carrington et al., 2019; Child Frontiers, 2023). This simply reflects the fact that community-based strategies were largely provided by government and non-profit organisations, which employ and upskill professionals to deliver these programs. This becomes more apparent when considering the different target groups for community-based strategies and type of modalities used for program delivery.

Public awareness campaigns were the predominant delivery method for community-based strategies, which involved a variety of modalities tailored to the target groups. Specifically, public awareness campaigns included workshops and interactive events, including recreational activities for children and

sporting events for the wider community (e.g., Banyard et al., 2022; Mace et al., 2015). A combination of modalities was often employed to mobilise the community for change, by increasing engagement with campaign messaging (Kemshall & Moulden, 2017). However, Kemshall and Moulden (2017) also acknowledged the importance of effective messaging, and well-planned research and evaluation to ensure public awareness campaigns are achieving intended outcomes. Although campaigns may be delivered over a period of several weeks or months, community engagement with the campaign varied, from attendance at a single event to multiple campaign activities (e.g., Edwards et al., 2022).

As there were two distinct examples of perpetration prevention strategies, the modalities also varied between strategies. The helplines and support services involved 24-hour manned telephone and online chat support services, which referred callers to specialised

therapeutic treatment programs (Beier et al., 2024; Newman et al., 2024). As such, the duration of this program ranged from a single phone call to 12 months of targeted treatment (Beier et al., 2024; Bright et al., 2024). The second program type, online prevention strategies, included brief prevention messages (i.e., pop-up warning) and interactive chatbots (e.g., Scanlan et al., 2024). The Australian web-based prevention messaging intervention was delivered as one such pop-up message delivered through a web browser (Prichard et al., 2022). Similarly, the international *reThink* chatbot was delivered as a single intervention (Scanlan et al., 2024). Although, the chatbot modality enabled users to engage with the intervention, whereby several brief prevention messages could be delivered.

Finding 5

Culturally informed, developed and led prevention programs and strategies align with best practice for First Nations Peoples.

Addressing diversity

Community-based strategies targeted diversity in a very limited capacity, with just one cohort considered in the literature – people from First Nations and Indigenous backgrounds. Limited to evidence from the Australian public awareness campaign, *Operation RESET* (Mace et al., 2015), it was evident effective community-based prevention strategies designed for First Nations People involved these communities in the design and delivery of programs (e.g., Mace et al., 2015). The public awareness campaign was adapted to meet the specific needs of communities, with different content and messaging and modalities between communities, which enhanced community uptake and engagement. More broadly, this indicates realisation of First Nations and Indigenous Peoples' right to self-determination (e.g., Australian Indigenous Governance Institute, 2024), and appreciation for the knowledges held by these communities. Additionally, this approach shared some similarities with the Griffith *Neighbourhoods Project* (Tilley et al., 2014), described further below.

Detailed in Figure 18, *Operation RESET*, reflected a whole-of-community approach, with multiple modalities implemented across a range of community settings. *Operation RESET* was delivered in 12 First Nations Communities in Western Australia. Local community Elders and community members worked with police to develop prevention messages and delivery strategies that addressed unique issues within each of the communities (Mace et al., 2015). Although anecdotal, the evidence suggests this approach had increased prevention service accessibility, increased community awareness of child sexual abuse, and increased disclosure of harms.

The *Neighbourhoods Project* (Firmin & Rayment-McHugh, 2020; Tilley et al., 2014) demonstrated a groundbreaking approach to child sexual abuse prevention in First Nations Communities. Although outcomes from the project evaluation were not made public, there were valuable lessons learned about engaging with, and working in, First Nations Communities, which warrant inclusion. The *Neighbourhoods Project* was designed to address challenges of children and youth demonstrating harmful sexual behaviours in two First Nations Communities, Aurukun and West Cairns (Tilley et al., 2014). It applied a place-based approach in Far North Queensland, implemented from 2013 to 2019 (Firmin & Rayment-McHugh, 2020; Tilley et al., 2014). This project was an exemplar of comprehensive contextual prevention strategies to prevent child sexual abuse. Learnings from this project were used to develop six key principles for place-based prevention (described further in Part B; Rayment-McHugh et al., 2015).

Figure 18: Operation RESET

Operation RESET was a police-led public awareness campaign, involving a multi-agency community engagement strategy. The program was delivered by a support team, consisting of child protection detectives and social workers. The campaign was informed by community Elders and Leaders, and tailored to meet the specific needs of the communities where it was delivered. *Operation RESET* involved several initiatives over a period of 18 months, varying between communities, designed to bolster engagement with prevention messaging. Specifically, the program featured:

- Protective behaviour training program for teachers;
- Community awareness educational sessions;
- Promotion of 24-hour Sexual Assault Crisis Line;
- Work experience with Western Australian Police Force for interested children;
- Community *champions* program;
- Sporting event with prominent football team;
- School breakfast program;
- Targeted teenage alcohol use reduction strategy; and
- Increased inter-agency collaboration and partnership.

An evaluation by Mace and colleagues (2015) indicated the program had successfully increased community awareness of child sexual abuse and bolstered a more collaborative approach to prevention. Feedback from 64 stakeholders attributed program success to four features: "(a) proactive outreach (i.e. the model brought specialised services to the people), (b) capacity building (i.e. the model improved skills, competencies, knowledge and abilities of professionals and communities), (c) holistic and integrated service provision, and (d) genuine engagement based on trust" (p. 98). *Operation RESET* demonstrated the value of community participation in child sexual abuse prevention strategies, especially in First Nations Communities.

Aligning with *Operation RESET*, a multidisciplinary team, including specialised psychologists, worked *with* community through a series of consultations and workshops, obtaining feedback and advice from local representatives about what was needed to reduce offending (Firmin & Rayment-McHugh, 2020; Tilley et al., 2014). This increased community buy-in, and resulted in a tailored approach for each community, that included increasing surveillance and guardianship of high-risk areas known to the community (i.e., CPTED); implementing a public awareness campaign to provide educative messages about healthy relationships and consent, and helping to establish peer support groups; and improving familial supervision through parenting workshops and support services for families in need (Firmin & Rayment-McHugh, 2020; Tilley et al., 2014).

No sources specifically focused on addressing the needs of children who identify as sexual or gender diverse, which is a clear area for further research.

4.2 Part B – Innovative Best Practice Approaches to Prevention

To ensure best practice, approaches to prevention must be informed by the emerging and innovative theoretical, research, and practice developments in the field, in addition to what has been tried and tested, and what is showing promise. Importantly, a well-rounded and comprehensive prevention approach must consider not only people (i.e., individual risk factors), but also the broader environmental and contextual conditions that contribute to child sexual abuse (Smallbone & Rayment-McHugh, 2017; Rayment-McHugh et al., 2024). By doing so, it creates the opportunity to deploy multiple strategies at multiple time points to effect change. As such, Part B extends on the evidence of best-practice presented in Part A, to identify cutting-edge research and practice that can lead to a more comprehensive, forward-focused child sexual abuse prevention agenda for Queensland. These innovations centre on: (1) contextual prevention; (2) co-design; (3) ensuring a 'just' prevention agenda; and (4) more nuanced evaluation that goes beyond 'what works'. Each of these will be explored below.

4.2.1 Contextual Prevention

Contextual prevention creates safer environments for children, targeting factors external to the person, alongside individual-focused interventions. The term "contextual prevention" encompasses strategies aimed at addressing both large-scale (macro) and immediate (micro) structural elements that may facilitate child sexual abuse (Rayment-McHugh et al., 2024). This concept rests on the understanding that human behaviour, including the perpetration of child sexual abuse, is shaped by its surrounding context. Some environments inherently pose greater risks, and by modifying these environments, the safety of children can be improved (Rayment-McHugh et al., 2024). The central idea behind contextual prevention is to create environments that are less conducive to abuse, thereby serving as a primary safeguard for children. As child sexual abuse can take place across a range of settings, including homes, institutions, public spaces, online platforms, and within communities (Smallbone & McKillop,

2016; Rayment-McHugh et al., 2015), contextual prevention focuses on enhancing safety in these diverse environments. This involves adopting a problem-solving approach, informed by local knowledge, to identify and address specific risk factors in each setting (Rayment-McHugh et al., 2015). This positions the focus on *settings* and *environments* to extend the work being done with individuals, to reduce opportunities for abuse, and by targeting prevention efforts in locations where prevention strategies are most needed (Rayment-McHugh et al., 2015). In this way, prevention is aimed at making places safer, alongside making people safer.

Rayment-McHugh and colleagues (2024) explain how contextual prevention strategies span a macro to micro level continuum. At a macro level, prevention strategies aim to address social determinants, such as gender inequality and overall societal norms and values that contribute to child sexual abuse (Harper, 2000; Mathews & Collin-Vezina, 2016; Quadara et al., 2015). Similarly, formal regulatory controls like laws, policies, and protection systems (including policing operations, the criminal justice system, and the child protection system) strengthen prevention and response to child sexual abuse (Rayment-McHugh, 2020; 2023).

At the micro level, contextual prevention strategies target more proximal influences on behaviour. Situational risks, such as opportunities for abuse, lack of supervision, or features of the physical and social environment that might facilitate access to vulnerable children or hinder detection, all contribute to increased risk of child sexual abuse (Wortley & Smallbone, 2006). Moreover, the immediate social, and physical *settings* can precipitate sexually abusive behaviour and are also key aspects to address in the prevention of child sexual abuse, such as Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED) and situational crime prevention techniques (Rayment-McHugh et al., 2024). As risk factors vary across settings according to the opportunity structures, and social dynamics that prevail, prevention strategies must be tailored to the specific characteristics and needs of each context.

A comprehensive prevention agenda must assess the local context, and address factors in the physical and social environment that can enable child sexual abuse to occur. This entails a greater investment in targeted strategies that aim to reduce the opportunity and risk of perpetration. These strategies may encompass environmental and situational crime prevention strategies, aiming to reduce opportunities for child sexual abuse by modifying the immediate context in which abuse might occur. Three examples of contextual prevention are discussed below.

Place-Based Prevention

Place-based crime prevention strategies are targeted approaches to reducing crime in known places of high criminal activity or *hotspots* (Eck & Weisburd, 1995; Rayment-McHugh et al., 2015). The approach recognises the unique influence certain locations and circumstances can have on behaviour (Allard et al., 2012). Consequently, *place* may be broader than any one specific site and may include whole communities. Rayment-McHugh and colleagues (2015) developed six key principles for place-based prevention: (1) identify locations of concern; (2) understand the problem at a local level; (3) develop locally informed prevention plans; (4) establish and consult with local advisory groups and partners; (5) implement and monitor prevention activities; and (6) evaluate outcomes and disseminate new knowledge.

Place-based crime prevention strategies commonly depend upon CPTED elements and situational crime prevention strategies. One notable example of environmental and situational prevention discussed in Part A of this Report was the use of online interventions (i.e., warning messages and chatbots). These online interventions are a form of perpetration prevention by targeting the opportunity for online child sexual abuse offending. As Rayment-McHugh and colleagues (2024, p. 12) noted,

There is a critical need for evaluation research to test contextual prevention approaches. There is a strong evidence base supporting the effectiveness of situational crime prevention and crime prevention through environmental design with respect to other types of crime, and thus

good reason to have confidence in its relevance to preventing abuse.

CPTED and situational crime prevention are explored below.

CPTED focuses on altering physical spaces to deter potential offenders and increase supervision. Rayment-McHugh and colleagues' (2024) seminal work states that CPTED can involve environmental audits to identify risk points, improving visibility through lighting or architectural changes, and implementing access controls in settings such as schools or youth organisations. Emerging studies suggest CPTED may be particularly effective at reducing sexual offending in public spaces (Chiu et al., 2021).

From a child sexual abuse prevention perspective, specifically, different settings can utilise CPTED in different ways. For example, in an early childhood or school environment, CPTED could include designing spaces where guardians can observe children at all times, and where small internal spaces have windows that allow for observation, for example. Rayment-Hugh and colleagues (2024) suggest that strategies might include,

Enhancing surveillance such as by pruning trees and shrubs or installing CCTV to enhance line of sight surveillance in public spaces where risks have been identified, adding glass panels to school classrooms or interview rooms, or moving home computers out of private bedrooms into living room spaces, which are more easily supervised by parents (p. 7).

Situational crime prevention (SCP), by contrast, targets the specific circumstances surrounding abuse, aiming to increase the effort required to offend, raise the risk of being caught, reduce potential rewards, minimise provocations, and eliminate justifications for harmful behaviour. Morley and Higgins (2018) explain that SCP strategies include training staff to identify and respond to abuse, encouraging community involvement in safeguarding, and fostering protective parenting practices such as open communication and oversight in the home. Contextual safeguarding is one strategy that is currently being used with young people in extrafamilial environments in the UK and is

outlined below. The concept of 'extending guardianship' is also central to these strategies and is further explored below.

Contextual Safeguarding

Environmental criminology emphasises the dynamic interplay between individuals and their immediate surroundings, highlighting how specific environmental features can shape opportunities for criminal behaviour (Wortley & Mazerolle, 2008). This perspective underpins situational crime prevention and guardianship strategies, which seek to reduce offending by modifying environmental conditions to make crime more difficult or less rewarding. A key focus within this framework is the tendency for certain locations and time periods to experience higher concentrations of criminal activity, pointing to the criminogenic qualities of particular settings (Eck et al., 2005). Parallel insights have emerged in the fields of social work, sociology, and social policy, where scholars have explored how environmental and contextual factors influence the incidence of child abuse and the effectiveness of child protection efforts (Jack & Gill, 2010; Melton & Melton, 2015). Growing empirical evidence supports the view that child sexual abuse, including abuse occurring in institutional settings, often arises from situational and contextual vulnerabilities, rather than being solely the result of individual deviance (McKillop et al., 2019; Wortley & Smallbone, 2006). Research highlights the importance of addressing environmental risks, strengthening protective oversight in high-risk contexts, and challenging social norms or conditions that may enable or conceal abuse. In the UK, for example, *Contextual Safeguarding* is being implemented within extrafamilial settings with young people to address a range of harms that young people experience in extra-familial relationships and contexts. Contextual Safeguarding redesigns child-protection systems so that they are capable of both identifying places, and not just people, in need of response, and then coordinating social work and wider interagency plans to implement that response (Firmin, 2020).

As an example of how contextual prevention programs operate in different locations, Firmin and Rayment-McHugh (2020) conducted a cross-national pilot study of respective programs in the UK and Australia. Case study A, was called 'The Neighbourhoods Project' (*described in Community-Based Prevention Strategies in Part A*), and Case Study B, was Firmin's Contextual Safeguarding program. Although implemented in distinct communities and through varied approaches, both projects incorporated numerous elements typical of a contextual approach to addressing abuse. These included targeting local cultural norms and customs; local public spaces and associated key players in those spaces (such as security officers, child protection, law enforcement, and store managers and business owners); school settings, including the roles and responsibilities of professionals in those settings, and the physical risks identified in the structural environment of school spaces; police patrols to increase public space safety; parent education to improve home environments; and targeting a "hot spot" housing estate to reduce the risk of environmental factors that increased risks of offending in that location. The key findings of this comparative work underscore several important considerations: (a) the importance of identifying contextual factors that contribute to abuse within specific local settings and developing evidence-based prevention strategies that directly address these factors; (b) the value of close collaboration with community stakeholders and/or multi-disciplinary professionals to drive meaningful change; and (c) the necessity of grounding project design and implementation in the realities of the *local context*. Both community-level and organisational change strategies emerged as effective approaches (Firmin & Rayment-McHugh, 2020, p. 241). Notably, context played a central role in shaping both the focus of prevention efforts and the methods used to implement them, highlighting its critical influence on both what is targeted for change and how that change is pursued. Figure 19, sourced from Firmin & Rayment-McHugh (2020, p. 242) demonstrates the combined project approaches, with a focus on place rather than people as a path to prevent abuse.

Figure 19: Contextual Dynamics of Child Sexual Abuse Prevention
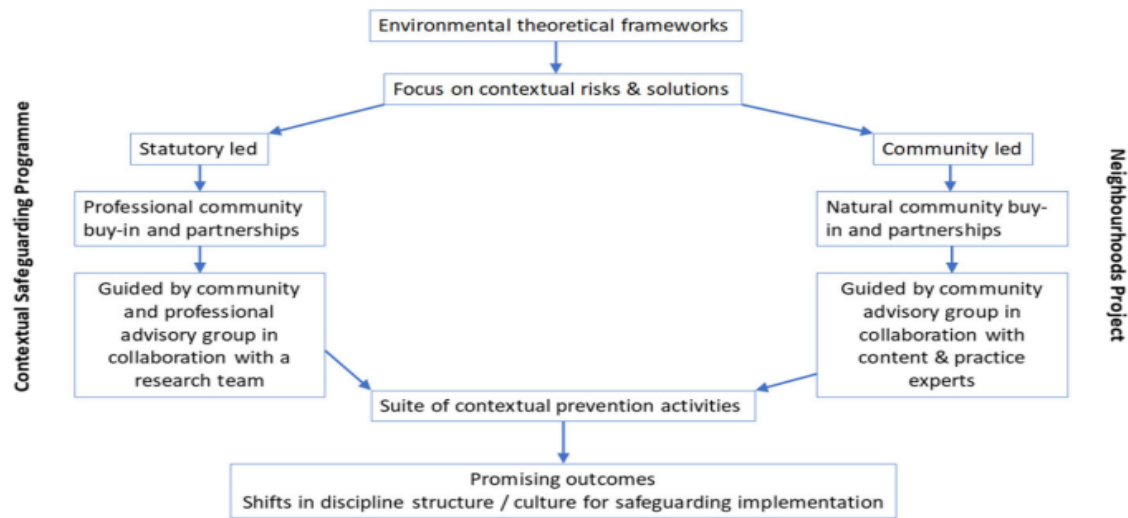
Extending Guardianship

Guardians also have an important role in prevention (McKillop et al., 2021). A guardian is a person, or *bystander*, who can intervene to disrupt offending (Hollis-Peel et al., 2011). While police and/or security guards could have a formal guardianship role, informal guardians could be any person present that could intervene prior to, or during, offending behaviour and take action to stop it (Reynald, 2017). For child sexual abuse specifically, guardians might exist in a home, school, or institutional setting. Teachers, school staff, neighbours, and friends could all exercise guardianship. Parents and carers may be guardians, for example, but a guardian does not need to be a parent or carer.

Educating and empowering a potential guardian to fulfil a proactive, diligent, and responsive role in being alert for indicators of potential abuse is a preventative mechanism (Lockitch et al., 2022; McKillop et al., 2021). There are numerous opportunities for guardians to become more involved in child sexual abuse prevention. Having open conversations about child sexual abuse and safety between family members is one example of active guardianship; creating communal spaces and enhancing line-of-sight within homes also enables guardians to supervise children during domestic routine activities (McKillop et al., 2021; Rudolph et al., 2018). Providing further support for a multi-dimensional approach to child sexual abuse prevention, these safeguarding strategies, or bystander interventions, may be taught through those parent-focused education and professional development and training programs described in Part A, where findings showed common themes did include communication strategies and disruptive interventions. Technological interventions, like warning messages in response to risky online behaviour, may also act as a layer of guardianship, in otherwise unsupervised online settings. Clear behavioural guidelines, such as staff codes of conduct, and safeguarding training, further help to establish protective norms and capacity to identify and respond to concerning behaviours, to improve capable guardianship.

Willingness to intervene is a critical component of extending guardianship. The seminal work of Reynald (2010) highlights this. Reynald's study contributed to a deeper understanding of what constitutes effective guardianship in crime prevention. It highlighted the value of engaging directly with active guardians to refine theoretical and conceptual frameworks. Central to the findings is the idea that a capable guardian is distinguished by a proactive stance, demonstrated through vigilance and intervention when encountering suspicious or illegitimate activity. Such proactive monitoring fosters familiarity with the environment, which in turn enhances situational awareness and intuitive judgment (Reynald, 2010). This heightened perception empowers individuals to act with greater confidence, thereby increasing their

capacity to prevent criminal behaviour. Ultimately, capable guardianship strengthens community members' control over their shared spaces, reinforcing informal social regulation. A key component of prevention should therefore extend to include the capability and willingness of guardian intervention, as indicated in McKillop et al. (2021) and Lockitch et al. (2022).

As we have outlined, in relation to the early childhood sector specifically, child sexual abuse prevention efforts require a system-level approach that combines contextual and individual responses. Protective features should be designed into the early childhood space to complement individual prevention efforts and ensure multiple safeguards are in place. Safeguarding environments, in this way, aims to reduce opportunities to offend and improve the chances of intervening earlier to prevent child sexual abuse.

4.2.2 Co-Design

Increasingly co-design is being used in the development of prevention strategies. Prevention messaging should be child and community-led in its development, drawing on the language, values, and lived experiences of the target cohorts, as with *Youth Voices in Prevention* (Figure 16) project. Co-design approaches ensure that program content and messaging is not only relevant and respectful but also engaging and trusted by participants (Rundle-Thiele et al., 2024; Willmott et al., 2023). Prevention programs need to be inclusive, resonant, and accessible, and more likely to lead to meaningful behavioural change across diverse cohorts and settings when they are co-lead and designed to address the local needs and risks of the community.

Co-design and community engagement approaches that are aligned with best practice principles for child sexual abuse prevention need further exploration. However, in one Australian study by Rundle-Thiele and colleagues (2024) they developed a child-led place-based pilot program aimed at delivering the highest level of engagement to understand what community members agree is needed to reduce youth sexual violence and abuse in their own communities. This pilot was not only child-led but also co-

designed, and highlighted the critical need for positive relationship role models and improved understanding of consent among children. Key outcomes included recommendations for education and training, a targeted community awareness campaign, sector collaboration, capacity-building, and tailored approaches for different audiences. The co-design process empowered the local community, leading to new partnerships, successful funding applications, and the development of a trial program aimed at providing a safe haven for children at risk of sexual violence and abuse (Rundle-Thiele et al., 2024).

A separate Australian study, undertaken by Rayment-McHugh and colleagues (2025) demonstrates the implementation of co-design at a tertiary prevention level. While we note that tertiary prevention was beyond the scope of this Report, it is an example of a strong, co-design project that is equally relevant to the design of primary and secondary prevention initiatives. The *Strong and Solid Spirit* program is a culturally tailored treatment initiative for Australian First Nations men who have committed sexual offences. This project demonstrates how culturally responsive approaches can enhance engagement, healing, and accountability. Key transferable practice lessons from this study include the importance of valuing First Nations voices and lived experiences through co-design; embedding culture at the centre of program design and delivery; and investing in the development of a strong First Nations workforce to lead and sustain change. These research projects support the view that child sexual abuse prevention efforts are most effective and relevant when they are localised, co-designed and guided by best practice principles grounded in current evidence about what works across different community and organisational contexts. In addition, they highlight the need to ensure that access to prevention strategies is not hindered by geographical barriers and are locally relevant and co-designed with the communities they are designed to serve.

4.2.3 Just Prevention

All children have the right to live a life "free from violence and exploitation" (Rayment-McHugh et

al., 2025, p. 2). It is not enough to know what good practice looks like, it must be accessible for all children so that no child misses out on protection. This is a significant gap in Australia's approach to child sexual abuse prevention currently. Past accessibility research in Australia demonstrates gaps in rural and remote settings (Stanley et al., 2003). Cultural safety gaps can render programs inaccessible geographically or through a lack of suitable cultural content (Quadara et al., 2015). To adopt leading child sexual abuse prevention in Australia, we must think beyond what prevention approaches to adopt and also consider who we are supporting, and how we can support them.

Building on the *Just Sustainabilities* model by Agyeman (2013), Rayment-McHugh and colleagues (2025) adopted a sustainability approach to child sexual abuse prevention to create the *Just Prevention Framework*. In doing so, Rayment-McHugh and colleagues (2025) recognised the impact of social justice issues on accessibility in child sexual abuse prevention policy and practice, calling for increased consideration and efforts to address these issues so that no child is left behind. There are four principles within the *Just Prevention Framework*: (1) to improve safety and wellbeing; (2) produce sustained safety benefits; (3) be equitable and accessible to all children and communities; and (4) be achievable with available resources. The *Just Prevention Framework* serves as a call to action, for greater investment in sustainable child sexual abuse prevention strategies. Rayment-McHugh and colleagues (2025) argued,

Prevention resources are not always targeted where they are most needed and are not accessible to all. Sustainability and fiscal implications have been largely ignored in the extant literature. This represents a significant loss of opportunity for potential impact and demands more to be done to address these inequalities, which cannot be ignored (p. 6).

This Report provides a similar call to action, noting the disparities in program availability, research, and evaluation. There is an urgent need for greater consideration of diverse needs in program development and greater investment in contextual prevention strategies to provide targeted and comprehensive child sexual abuse prevention.

Availability and accessibility of preventative services are an important consideration, especially in rural and remote areas which are otherwise under-resourced and under-supported. For example, the eSafety Commissioner provides free community education and training resources for professionals using social media, domestic and family violence workers, sporting organisations, businesses, people who work with children, and out of home care workers (eSafety Commissioner, 2025). However, as Rayment-McHugh and McKillop (2025) note, accessibility "requires more than a service or resource simply being available"; rather people "must be aware of the service, it must be affordable, and must be safe to engage with" (p. 5). Perpetration prevention needs to be prioritised in communities where barriers to availability and access to preventative services arise alongside increased rates of the reporting of child sexual abuse, such as rural and remote communities.

4.2.4 Extending Evaluation Beyond 'What Works'

Robust research and evaluation are essential to ensuring child sexual abuse prevention programs are effective, equitable, and continuously improving. The sources identified in this Report have demonstrated positive outcomes, indicating promise. However, there are substantial gaps in longer term evaluations regarding the effectiveness and impact of specific education and community programs. As such, the current evidence base remains fragmented, particularly in the Australian context. Most programs lack strong comparative evaluation, and few have been assessed for long-term impact, cultural relevance, or applicability across diverse cohorts and settings. This limits the ability to determine which approaches work best, for whom, and under what conditions (Pawson & Tilley, 1997).

Increased investment in research is critical to building an evidence-based prevention agenda. Evaluations should be developed and implemented simultaneously with programs, to allow for continued improvement and refinement over time (Queensland Treasury and Trade,

2014). Reflecting a realist philosophy, programs should consider the mechanisms of program delivery within the context in which the program is delivered, and then explore program outcomes (Pawson & Tilley, 1997). More specifically, this means that evaluations should include a focus on program theory and implementation components (i.e., *how* the program is delivered), and consider what external variables might influence the way the program is delivered, to impact program outcomes. These external variables will include many of the best practice considerations identified in this Report, such as the quality of program delivery and how well the program addresses diversity. This is particularly relevant for Australia's First Nations and multicultural communities. In terms of outcomes, evaluation should consider the outputs and short-term, long-term and larger impacts of prevention programs, with due consideration to in what context, and for whom (Pawson & Tilley, 1997).

Addressing these gaps will not only enhance the efficacy of existing programs but also guide future innovation in child sexual abuse prevention programming. A stronger, more coherent evidence base will support policymakers, educators, and community organisations to make informed decisions, scale promising models, and deliver prevention programs that are most effective.

4.2.5 Implementing Best Practice Approaches

A holistic approach to preventing child sexual abuse involves implementing strategies that safeguard individuals while simultaneously creating safer environments. Prevention responses must consider perpetrators, victim-survivors and settings at both a primary and secondary level. Figure 20 brings together innovative practices outlined in Part B that value-add to the educational programs and community-based prevention strategies outlined in Part A to demonstrate a comprehensive protective fabric in the prevention of child sexual abuse[8].

Figure 20: Updated Integrated Prevention Matrix

Target	Primary	Secondary
Perpetrator	School-based education (e.g., Respectful relationships) Public awareness campaigns	Targeted community programs (e.g., For at risk cohorts) Perpetration prevention (e.g., Helplines & early intervention)
Victim-Survivor	School-based education (e.g., Prevention education for children) Public awareness campaigns	Targeted school-based education (e.g., For at risk cohorts)
Setting	Extended guardianship (e.g., Professional development & training; Parent-focused education) Creating safer environments (e.g., CPTED; Opportunity reduction)	Extended guardianship in at risk settings (e.g., Professional development & training; Parent-focused education) Situational interventions in at risk settings (e.g., CPTED; Opportunity reduction)

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[8] This figure does not present an exhaustive list of prevention strategies, as it pertains only to the research explicitly addressed in this report (For a more comprehensive list see Smallbone et al. 2008; Smallbone & Rayment-McHugh, 2017).

There are several key considerations arising from this visual depiction of prevention programs and strategies in the Integrated Prevention Matrix framework. Firstly, educational programs, delivered to children and adults, spanned primary and secondary prevention levels at the perpetrator, victim-survivor and settings targets. While school-based education programs (i.e., delivered to children), specifically, occurred across primary and secondary prevention levels, only respectful relationships occurred with a perpetrator target. Hence, school-based education programs predominantly focused on victimisation prevention. Parent-focused education and professional development and training were represented at the primary and secondary levels as well, but were at the intersection with the settings target, as a means of extended guardianship. Secondly, community-based prevention, delivered to children and adults, spanned primary and secondary prevention levels at victim-survivor, perpetrator, and setting targets. Although, perpetration prevention was the only community-based prevention program to fall within the settings target. Thirdly, contextual prevention strategies were apparent at the intersection of primary and secondary levels, and the settings target. These strategies adopted a focus on 'place', reducing risk of harm within a child's environment. The broad representation of targets and prevention efforts reflect the importance of addressing perpetration, victimisation and settings, and highlight the significant role adults play in child sexual abuse prevention. As noted above, tertiary prevention strategies were beyond the scope of this Report so are not featured in Figure 20.

Implementing a holistic child sexual abuse prevention agenda should also include four key steps: (1) grounding prevention in local contexts; (2) letting context shape the "what" and the "how"; (3) engaging in collaborative, multi-sector partnerships; and (4) utilising both organisational and community change mechanisms. Each of these are described below in Figure 21.

In summary, context is crucial; it is foundational to both the design, implementation and evaluation of child sexual abuse prevention strategies. Embedding context into every stage of program development supports more effective, sustainable, and equitable outcomes for children and the communities that support them.

Figure 21: Implementing Child Sexual Abuse Prevention

01

Ground Prevention in Local Contexts

A critical first step is the identification of contextual factors that contribute to child sexual abuse risk within a specific local setting. These factors may be social, environmental, structural or cultural in nature. Prevention initiatives should be directly responsive to these locally identified drivers, rather than relying solely on generalised or externally developed models. Tailoring strategies in this way ensures that interventions are both meaningful and targeted. Identifying local context factors should be led by local community members for First Nations Peoples.

02

Let Context Shape Both the 'What' and the 'How'

The local context should inform not only what issues or risk factors are prioritised for intervention, but also how those interventions are delivered. This includes determining who leads prevention efforts, how resources are allocated, what language or messaging is used, and which community norms or dynamics are taken into account. Context-sensitive design enhances community buy-in and increases the likelihood of long-term impact. It is also a crucial element in fostering empowerment and returning power to First Nations Peoples and their communities. Appropriate use of terminology is also crucial for culturally appropriate engagement.

03

Engage in Collaborative, Multi-Sector Partnerships

Designing and delivering effective prevention strategies requires strong collaboration across community members, local organisations, and multidisciplinary professional networks. Partnerships with those who have a deep understanding of the community, such as educators, child protection workers, health professionals, and cultural leaders, help ensure that strategies are culturally relevant, feasible, and supported by those tasked with implementation. Partnership in this instance, should extend to co-design and delivery for rural and remote First Nations communities.

04

Utilise Both Organisational and Community Change Mechanisms

A dual focus on organisational systems (e.g., schools, youth-serving agencies) and broader community environments provides a comprehensive platform for prevention. Organisational change might involve reforms to policies, staff training, or environmental design, while community-level approaches could include public education, parent support initiatives, and collective advocacy for safer environments. Community change should be grassroots led, particularly for First Nations communities, where they are respected as the experts and knowledge holders of their community's needs and how change needs to occur.

4.3 Limitations

One key limitation of this research was the constrained timeframe within which it was conducted. The limited period available for searching, screening, and synthesising literature may have resulted in the omission of relevant sources, particularly those in grey literature or recently published materials that were not yet indexed. Additionally, the compressed timeline restricted opportunities for iterative searching or more complex thematic analysis. However, in saying this, the research adopted a very comprehensive search strategy, which resulted in thousands of results. As such, the main impact of the timeframe was on the ability to conduct additional searches, such as a detailed review of reference lists.

There was also a lack of experimental design in most sources, meaning most sources did not include comparative analyses of key program variables, such as delivery modality and program duration. While many sources provided descriptions of these variables, in most cases, there had been no alternatives 'piloted'. It was not appropriate to conduct comparisons between programs due to the significant variance in structure, content and program delivery. This lack of comparative analyses within evaluation research limited the ability to draw some conclusions as to the optimal program implementation. Future research would benefit from more experimental designs, with consideration of these key program variables to support clearer conclusions about optimal program design and delivery.

There was a significant lack of programs specifically designed to address diversity in a meaningful or targeted way. While many sources noted the inclusion of participants from cohorts considered more at risk of experiencing child sexual abuse within their sample descriptions, there was little evidence that program content, delivery, or messaging had been tailored to meet the specific needs of these populations. Moreover, outcomes were rarely disaggregated by diversity-related factors such as experience with disability, cultural or language diversity, or gender identity or sexual orientation, limiting the ability to assess whether the programs were equally effective across different groups. This is particularly relevant in the Australian context, where the population is highly diverse, encompassing a wide range of cultural, linguistic, and social backgrounds, including First Nations Communities, migrant and refugee populations, and sexual and gender diverse individuals. Without intentional design and evaluation that attends to this diversity, prevention programs risk overlooking the distinct experiences, barriers, and needs faced by these groups. This underscores the urgent need for more inclusive program development and more nuanced reporting to ensure equitable and responsive approaches in child sexual abuse prevention programming.

Additionally, this Report analysed program content and messaging as it was described in the included sources. Some program descriptions were high-level and lacking detail about program content. As such, some of the key themes identified in the findings are quite broad in scope and may have some overlap with more specific themes (e.g., emotional wellbeing and abuse is never a child's fault). It is possible that some of these more specific themes may have been addressed within broader themes. However, the lack of detail prohibits the research team from making these assumptions.

4.4 Concluding Remarks

This Report has utilised Smallbone and Rayment-McHugh's (2017) Integrated Prevention Matrix to conceptualise a holistic and evidence-informed framework for preventing child sexual abuse. By combining the Public Health Model with Eck's (2003) crime prevention triangle, the matrix provides a 3x3 structure that addresses three critical targets, those who cause harm (perpetrators), those who experience or are at risk of experiencing harm (victim-survivors), and the places in which harm is more likely to occur (settings), across the three levels of prevention: primary, secondary, and tertiary. This structure not only enables a systematic response to child sexual abuse but also reinforces the importance of coordinated, layered, and contextually relevant strategies to disrupt pathways to harm at every level of intervention.

The public health model's incorporation into this matrix adds value by reinforcing a whole-of-

community perspective, where prevention is understood as a shared responsibility. Primary prevention focuses on universal education, awareness-raising, and the promotion of protective social norms; secondary prevention targets those groups, individuals, or environments at elevated risk; and tertiary strategies respond directly to harm that has already occurred, seeking to reduce further victimisation or reoffending. Each level is necessary and interdependent, and comprehensive prevention strategies and practices require their concurrent and sustained implementation.

While the Integrated Prevention Matrix offers a robust theoretical and operational foundation, this Report argues that the effectiveness of any prevention strategy ultimately hinges on its capacity to be grounded in and responsive to local context and situational environmental factors. Program implementation alone will be ineffective without changes in the sociocultural, environmental, and structural context of the Queensland child sexual abuse prevention landscape. Social, structural, environmental, and cultural drivers of child sexual abuse vary between communities, and prevention efforts must be tailored accordingly. Generic, externally imposed interventions risk overlooking critical nuances and may fail to resonate with those they are intended to serve. Instead, prevention should begin with a deep understanding of the local landscape, including histories of trauma, systemic inequality, and intergenerational harm, and must be co-developed with those who hold lived experience and cultural knowledge.

For First Nations Communities, particularly in rural and remote areas, this means prioritising community-led processes and privileging Indigenous knowledges, values, and leadership in all stages of prevention planning and delivery. Approaches must move beyond tokenistic consultation toward genuine co-design and shared governance. This includes community ownership over the identification of local risk and protective factors, the design and implementation of initiatives, and the determination of how success is defined and measured. Respecting and restoring power to First Nations Communities is not only a matter of

cultural appropriateness but also a prerequisite for ethical and effective practice.

Collaborative, multi-sectoral partnerships are also essential to prevention. Schools, health services, child protection systems, law enforcement, and community organisations must work in collaboration, guided by shared values and clear mechanisms for communication, accountability, and action. These partnerships should be grounded in mutual respect and a commitment to cultural safety, especially when working with marginalised populations. Prevention efforts should also extend to organisational and systemic reform such as policy change, workforce development, and environmental design, while simultaneously fostering grassroots mobilisation and community empowerment.

Moreover, prevention messages and programs must be co-developed with, and led by, the communities and cohorts they aim to serve. As demonstrated by initiatives like *Youth Voices in Prevention*, drawing on the language, values, and lived realities of children, young people, and community members enhances both engagement and effectiveness. This includes using inclusive, accessible, and culturally resonant content that reflects the diversity of participants' experiences. When prevention strategies are built in partnership with those who have the most at stake, they are more likely to result in meaningful behavioural change and lasting social impact.

In summary, while frameworks such as the Integrated Prevention Matrix provide essential scaffolding for understanding and addressing the complex dynamics of child sexual abuse, their utility depends on thoughtful, localised, and collaborative implementation. Context is not an ancillary consideration, it is foundational to the success of any prevention effort. Effective strategies must be community-informed, culturally grounded, and equity-focused, with particular attention to amplifying the voices and leadership of First Nations Peoples. Only by embedding prevention in the realities, relationships, and aspirations of local communities can we hope to achieve sustainable, systemic change and ensure safer futures for all children.

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