

The **National Redress Scheme's** Eighth Anniversary Review

Principal Commissioner Luke Twyford

The Commission's central submission is that the National Redress Scheme is an essential component of Australia's response to institutional child sexual abuse, but it cannot substitute for a broader, coordinated and properly funded system of lifelong support for victim-survivors.

Drawing on *In Plain Sight*, the Scheme's consultation findings and its published performance data, this submission identifies three priorities: strengthening trust and accessibility, reversing the decline in application timeliness, and closing the gap between funding to apply for redress and funding to heal.

How the Scheme ensures survivors know about it and can access the application process

Evidence gathered through the Scheme's own consultation processes points to a consistent theme: barriers to access are less about awareness of the Scheme's existence, and more about trust in how survivors will be received once they engage with it.

At the Perth Survivor Roundtable in March 2024, attendees identified barriers to awareness and access and called for better access to records and improved transparency through the application process.¹ At the Adelaide Survivor Roundtable in October 2024, survivors raised fear of not being believed, particularly where records do not exist, as a barrier to applying at all, alongside literacy and application-complexity barriers.²

These concerns are consistent with the broader evidence gathered through *In Plain Sight* about how systems respond when victim-survivors disclose abuse or seek assistance. *In Plain Sight* found that effective responses to disclosure must be trauma-informed and victim-survivor centred: services that are empathetic, confidential and empowering reduce the risk of re-traumatisation, while systems compound harm when they fail to listen, fail to believe and fail to respond.³ One victim-survivor put it directly:⁴

"When I disclosed my abuse, I was asking for help, not a criminal process."

Access barriers to the Scheme mirror barriers to disclosure more broadly. The available evidence indicates that fear of not being believed, system complexity and concern about how victim-survivors will be treated are significant barriers to people coming forward. Awareness activity alone will not address these concerns. The Commission therefore submits that the Review should make trust, accessibility and trauma-informed engagement central to the Scheme's access strategy.

Make trust, accessibility and trauma-informed engagement central to the Scheme's access strategy

¹ Australian Government – Department of Social Services (2024). *National Redress Scheme Survivor Roundtable Overview and Outcomes — Perth, 6 March 2024*. Accessed via: <https://www.nationalredress.gov.au/about/about-scheme/reports-and-statistics>

² Australian Government – Department of Social Services (2024). *National Redress Scheme Survivor Roundtable Overview and Outcomes — Adelaide, 16 October 2024*. Accessed via: <https://www.nationalredress.gov.au/about/about-scheme/reports-and-statistics>

³ Queensland Child Death Review Board (2025). *In Plain Sight*, Part E, pp.371–372, 377

⁴ Ibid. p.380

How the Scheme can deliver timely and quality application outcomes in the time remaining

Against the Scheme's own target of covering at least 95 per cent of applications in progress with an on-board institution, the Scheme has consistently exceeded this benchmark since 2021–22, with 99 per cent of applications in progress currently naming an institution that has already joined.⁵

Application timeliness has declined against the Scheme's own performance target, that at least 75 per cent of applications naming a participating institution will have a decision communicated within six months of all necessary information received. The Scheme met this target for 77 per cent of applications in 2022–23. That figure fell to 52 per cent in 2023–24, then to 27 per cent in 2024–25 and stands at just 17 per cent in 2025–26 to date. The average time to process an application has grown to 15.3 months.

As at 31 December 2025, the Scheme had 45,495 applications on hand. This included 5,755 applications received in 2022–23 or earlier, including 144 received during the Scheme's first year. The Scheme notes that some long-term applications may be on hold at the applicant's request, because contact cannot be established or because an institution is not participating. Even with these qualifications, the number and age of applications remaining on hand warrant urgent attention to processing capacity and the management of long-term applications.⁶

This decline is not simply an administrative concern. It has a direct bearing on survivor wellbeing. At the Adelaide Survivor Roundtable, survivors described reliving their experience to apply as something that "can be re-traumatising," and reported that Scheme staff were not consistently trauma-informed.⁷ Direct Personal Response uptake was described as inconsistent, driven by both re-traumatisation risk and a sense that institutions were unprepared to deliver it well. A lived experience advisor described this dimension of harm to the Board:⁸

"The trauma of child sexual abuse is not limited to the act itself... [families are] navigating through the system in the aftermath."

In Plain Sight identified fragmented safeguarding responsibilities and the effects of federalism on executive decision-making as recurring national concerns.⁹ The Scheme's performance data illustrates a system struggling to respond to increasing demand. Institutional participation remains high, but application timeliness has deteriorated significantly. While the published data does not establish a single cause for this decline, it demonstrates the need to examine whether the Scheme's capacity, processes and resourcing remain adequate. Quality and timeliness cannot be treated separately when prolonged uncertainty may compound trauma for applicants.

The Commission submits that the Review should identify and recommend the operational, process and resourcing changes required to reverse the deterioration in application timeliness, resolve long-term applications and provide applicants with timely, transparent and trauma-informed communication.

Identify and fund the operational changes required to reverse deteriorating application timeliness

⁵ National Redress Scheme, *Strategic Success Measures*, December 2025, "2b. Maintaining Institutional Participation," p.11

⁶ National Redress Scheme, *Strategic Success Measures*, December 2025, "1d. Application Timeliness," p.7, Figure 3 and Table 1

⁷ Australian Government – Department of Social Services (2024). *National Redress Scheme Survivor Roundtable Overview and Outcomes* — Adelaide, 16 October 2024. Accessed via: <https://www.nationalredress.gov.au/about/about-scheme/reports-and-statistics>

⁸ Queensland Child Death Review Board (2025). *In Plain Sight*, Part E, p. 371.

⁹ Luke Twyford, *Submission to the Joint Standing Committee on Implementation of the National Redress Scheme*, 6 February 2026

Lessons from the Scheme's operation to inform future support and services for survivors

In Plain Sight found that the National Redress Scheme has, in practice, become the default vehicle through which the Commonwealth reports progress against its broader support obligations to victim-survivors. This obscures the extent to which those broader obligations remain unmet.

The Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse made nine recommendations specifically directed at strengthening advocacy, support and therapeutic treatment services for victim-survivors. The Australian Government accepted or accepted in principle six of these. Two remain, in the Government's own most recent reporting, "for further consideration", establishing a national website and helpline and establishing a national centre to raise community awareness and practitioner competence. A ninth, concerning funding for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander healing approaches, was noted rather than accepted, on the basis that the Government considered it a matter for state and territory governments.

Of the recommendations reported as progressed, the Board found that several have in substance been answered only by reference to the Redress Scheme. Recommendation 9.1, for example, calls for funding of dedicated, accessible, trauma-informed community support services for victim-survivors; the Government's progress reporting addresses this almost entirely through funding for Redress Support Services to assist victim-survivors making applications to the Scheme. It does not fund broader, ongoing therapeutic support. Nor does it reach victim-survivors whose abuse falls outside the Scheme's scope.¹⁰ Recommendation 9.3, concerning services for victim-survivors with disability, is reported against in the same way, with no clear articulation of specialist support beyond Redress Scheme application assistance.

This pattern matters because the underlying need has not gone away. *In Plain Sight* found that, despite recent funding increases, specialist sexual abuse counselling and support services nationally remain under strain: funding falls short of demand, trauma-trained clinicians are in short supply outside metropolitan areas, access is disproportionately harder for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and culturally and linguistically diverse communities, and quality of care varies across regions and providers.

The Redress Scheme was never designed to answer these gaps. In practice, it has come to stand in for a broader system of support that remains under-resourced. A victim-survivor described what that support should actually look like:¹¹

"Support and treatment needs to be ongoing, specialised and consistent. A one stop shop where a survivor can seek assistance at different stages of life where they don't have to repeat themselves, and their experiences are heard and understood."

The Scheme's eligibility settings also demonstrate why it cannot meet the needs of all victim-survivors. Applicants must have been born before 30 June 2010, be an Australian citizen or permanent resident, and have experienced abuse before 1 July 2018. While these settings reflect the Scheme's defined

¹⁰ Queensland Child Death Review Board (2025). *In Plain Sight*, Part E, p.394–395, Table 2 (Recommendation 9.1)

¹¹ Queensland Child Death Review Board (2025). *In Plain Sight*, Part E, p.392

purpose and historical scope, they exclude many victim-survivors identified through the Board's case review and others nationally.¹² Child sexual abuse is a life-course issue requiring sustained support from childhood through adulthood. The Scheme should therefore be understood as one part of the national response, rather than the principal mechanism for meeting the lifelong support needs of all victim-survivors.¹³

The Board reached these findings independently through its examination of the National Redress Scheme and the broader Commonwealth support architecture relevant to victim-survivors. Ten of the report's 28 recommendations are directed specifically at the Australian Government, reflecting the Commonwealth's central role in a system that, on the Board's evidence, remains fragmented and under-delivering well beyond the Scheme's own administrative performance.¹⁴ These recommendations should remain a live reference point as the Australian Government considers the future design of national redress and victim-survivor support arrangements.

The Commission submits that any future national redress or survivor-support architecture should close the gap between funding to apply and funding to heal and should not treat the Redress Scheme as a substitute for the broader system of trauma-informed support it was never designed to provide.

Queensland's response to the *In Plain Sight* report offers one indication of what a more coordinated model can look like. On 16 June 2026, the Queensland Government accepted or accepted in principle 24 of *In Plain Sight*'s 28 recommendations and announced the establishment of the Queensland Protection Commission. It will be a dedicated child safeguarding entity bringing the Reportable Conduct Scheme, Child Safe Standards, Working with Children Checks and Disability Worker Screening Checks under one roof, supported by a Child Safeguarding Intelligence Hub. The Queensland Government has committed \$255 million over four years to establish the new Commission.

The Queensland Protection Commission is a funded reform response to the fragmentation and cross-agency information-sharing problems identified in *In Plain Sight*. It is still being established, subject to legislation, and will have no direct role in administering or overseeing the National Redress Scheme. Its relevance is structural: its proposed coordinated, intelligence-led model demonstrates an approach to bringing related safeguarding functions, intelligence and accountability mechanisms together within a single institution.

Establish a broader national framework for lifelong specialist support that is distinct from assistance to make a redress application.

¹² Ibid. p.395, citing National Redress Scheme eligibility criteria

¹³ Queensland Child Death Review Board (2025). *In Plain Sight*, Part E, p.370

¹⁴ Luke Twyford, *Submission to the Joint Standing Committee on Implementation of the National Redress Scheme*, 6 February 2026

