



Tasmanian Council of Social Service Inc.

TasCOSS Input to the Child Sexual Abuse Strategy and Action Plan

April 2024



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About TasCOSS

TasCOSS's vision is for one Tasmania, free of poverty and inequality where everyone has the same opportunity. Our mission is two-fold: to act as the peak body for the community services industry in Tasmania; and to challenge and change the systems, attitudes and behaviours that create poverty, inequality and exclusion.

Our membership includes individuals and organisations active in the provision of community services to Tasmanians on low incomes or living in vulnerable circumstances. TasCOSS represents the interests of our members and their service users to government, regulators, the media and the public. Through our advocacy and policy development, we draw attention to the causes of poverty and disadvantage, and promote the adoption of effective solutions to address these issues.

Please direct any enquiries about this submission to:

Adrienne Picone

Chief Executive Officer

Phone Number: (03) 6231 0755

Email Address: adrienne@tascoss.org.au

1. Introduction

The Tasmanian Government has commenced the work of implementing all recommendations from the Commission of Inquiry into the Tasmanian Government's Responses to Child Sexual Abuse in Institutional Settings ('the Commission of Inquiry'). TasCOSS is a partner for the Government's implementation project ('the Commission of Inquiry Implementation Project').

This submission focuses on Recommendation 19.1 of the Commission of Inquiry, which relates to the development of a whole of government child sexual abuse reform strategy ('the Tasmanian Strategy'), to be followed by an action plan ('the Action Plan') for preventing, identifying and responding to child sexual abuse. TasCOSS has been asked to consider:

- the system we are trying to achieve and how we will know it is working
- the guiding principles and objectives informing the prevention, identification and response to child sexual abuse
- how to identify the agencies, entities and organisations involved
- how consultation on these issues should take place
- considerations relevant to particular priority groups of children and young people.

2. Overarching Recommendations

In responding to these questions, and with the safety of Tasmanian children in mind, TasCOSS has formulated overarching recommendations which we strongly believe are crucial to any reform in this area:

A focus on prevention:

- We must be investing in protecting children, families and communities from abuse — not merely responding to acts of harm: 'While responding to incidents of sexual abuse and the needs of victims is an important priority, the greatest efforts must be directed towards prevention'.¹
- The Tasmanian Strategy and Action Plan must focus on the prevention of abuse more broadly, not only institutional abuse — better support for Tasmanian communities and families will also contribute to safer and healthier institutions.
- All Tasmanians should be supported to learn about child abuse, including its impacts and how best to respond to promote and protect the safety of children. This includes more comprehensive prevention education for children (as recommended by the Commission of Inquiry), but also ensuring that the broader community has a strong understanding of child sexual abuse, including risk factors and how to identify and respond to potential harm.
- Children should be empowered to feel strong and safe, and their rights should be upheld, protected and promoted by communities, organisations and institutions.
- Aboriginal leaders and organisations are best placed to design and lead early intervention and prevention initiatives to support Aboriginal families and children.

¹ Kaufman, K. and Erooga, M., 'Risk profiles for institutional child sexual abuse: A literature review', Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse, p. 86 (2016).

Strong, well-connected communities:

- Children and families are safest when they can access a range of supports in the community— this includes their family and carers, but also community organisations, associations and networks. Well-connected communities can intervene early to help children and families in need, recognising when they might be struggling and supporting them to access services or other assistance.
- Strategies and reforms should focus on how we can better support families and groups to provide community-based care for their children and young people and reduce their institutionalisation (for example, within the justice system or out of home care).
- Strong networks require a well-resourced and well-supported community services industry to provide a wide range of accessible and effective support.
- Tasmanian Aboriginal children, young people and families are best supported by strong, empowered Aboriginal communities.

Transparent and accountable institutions:

- The safety and wellbeing of children and families will be greatly enhanced by increasing institutional transparency and accountability. Tasmanians must have trust in the institutions that are intended to protect and assist the most vulnerable.
- To increase understanding of and engagement with Government processes, Tasmanians should be given more information about how institutions operate and how institutional decision-making takes place. They should also be given greater opportunities to meaningfully participate in decision making in areas that impact them.
- The Government's work in this area must be consistent with national strategies, recommendations and priorities, including the National Strategy to Prevent and Respond to Child Sexual Abuse (‘the National Strategy’)² and best practice from other jurisdictions.
- The implementation of the Tasmanian Strategy and Action Plan and any other major reforms must be subject to rigorous independent evaluation processes that involve the public and whose outcomes are publicly available.
- The implementation of the Tasmanian Strategy and Action Plan and any other major reforms must include strengthened advocacy for Aboriginal families and children through the Commissioner for Aboriginal Children and Young people and the Department for Education, Children and Young People's Executive Director for Aboriginal Children and Young People.
- The Government's work in this area must be consistent with national frameworks to support Aboriginal children and families.³

This submission will provide a brief overview of how the Tasmanian Strategy and Action Plan can better meet these three key objectives (in the context of the parts of Recommendation 19.1 we have been asked to consider).

² Commonwealth of Australia, *National Strategy to Prevent and Respond to Child Sexual Abuse (2021-30)*, Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet (2021).

³ This includes the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander action plan developed as part of ‘Safe and Supported: The National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children 2021-2031’ – Commonwealth of Australia, ‘Safe and Supported: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander First Action Plan 2023-2026’ Department of Social Services (2023).

3. What are we Trying to Achieve?

TasCOSS believes the purpose of the Tasmanian Strategy and Action Plan is to create and maintain a Tasmania where all children feel safe and protected, families are well-connected and supported to take care of each other, and institutions support and protect families, children and communities.

3.1 What would successful prevention look like?

- Tasmanians understand child safety and wellbeing and can identify and respond to child safety concerns.
- Tasmanian families are supported to provide safe, nurturing environments for their children, reducing their involvement where possible in institutional systems (such as the child safety and criminal justice systems) and focussing on community-based supports which keep families together.
- Tasmanian institutions have processes in place to protect children from harm, and to identify and respond to harm if it occurs.
- Tasmanian community organisations are supported to meaningfully collaborate on and co-design prevention initiatives which respond to identified community needs.
- Prevention and early intervention initiatives (such as community awareness campaigns) are developed and delivered in a range of formats to ensure they are appropriate for a wide range of cohorts (including, for example, culturally safe information and education for Aboriginal families and children) and should recognise the differing needs of diverse groups (for example, how to recognise or identify signs of child abuse in children with disability).

3.2 What do strong, well-connected communities look like?

- Tasmanians are able to access a wide range of community-based supports to meet their physical, psychological and social needs. This requires fully resourced community organisations who are funded to meet agreed and evidence-based outcomes.
- Community organisations are supported to collaborate with Government-led or Government-funded research into alternative models, strategies and plans to support child safety and wellbeing.
- The Tasmanian Government adopts an intersectional approach to working with children and families, involving specialist organisations who have existing strong relationships with identified priority groups (such as children and families with disability, LGBTQIA+ families and families from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds).
- Tasmanian institutions (and Government initiatives) work in ways that are trauma-informed, culturally safe and inclusive of diversity.
- Tasmanian Aboriginal communities are resourced to provide community-led services to Aboriginal children young people and families.
- Organisations providing specialist services must ensure they are working in ways that are culturally safe – for example, as recommended by the Commission of Inquiry, providers of therapeutic interventions should have Aboriginal representation in their governance structure.⁴

⁴ Recommendations 21.7 and 21.8 of the *Commission of Inquiry into the Tasmanian Government's Responses to Child Sexual Abuse* (Report, August 2023), Volume 1: Recommendations, pp191-192.

3.3 What do transparent and accountable institutions look like?

- Tasmanians trust the institutions and systems intended to protect children and respond to abuse.
- The Tasmanian Government (and government entities) has processes for ongoing feedback and evaluation to measure whether services or initiatives are meeting needs. This should include, for example, regular review periods for newly implemented strategies or plans to allow for ongoing input into how actions can create and maintain tangible change.
- Community organisations (including Aboriginal organisations) are resourced to share their experience and expertise with Government as part of continuous monitoring, evaluation and reform. This includes resourcing to engage in community consultation to measure progress — for example, to measure attitudes and beliefs relating to child safety and whether these have changed following the implementation of the Tasmanian Strategy and Action Plan.

4. Guiding Principles and Objectives

TasCOSS strongly supports a broad Tasmanian Strategy which incorporates a whole of community and whole of government approach to child sexual abuse, noting such an approach is consistent with the National Strategy. The Tasmanian Strategy must therefore respond to the recommendations of the Commission of Inquiry, as well as encompass principles and actions targeting child sexual abuse in the wider community, not just in institutions.

Alongside our three overarching principles outlined above, the following is a brief exploration of key principles we believe must be incorporated in the Tasmanian Strategy.

4.1 Principles relating to prevention

A public health approach to child sexual abuse

- Child sexual abuse must be recognised as a preventable issue which can be addressed by focussing on the underlying factors contributing to sexual abuse (both those who experience and perpetrate abuse).
- Government should draw on the extensive Australian and international research into child sexual abuse in communities in addressing these underlying factors.
- The whole of community must be educated about child sexual abuse prevention.
- Organisations and institutions must be supported to implement child-safe practices.
- Aboriginal organisations are empowered and trusted to implement culturally appropriate child-safe policies and practices.

Recognising and addressing underlying risk factors

- While child sexual abuse can happen to anyone (regardless of financial circumstances, cultural background or family situation), research shows that some children are at elevated risk, and that most children who have experienced child sexual abuse have also experienced other types of maltreatment (such as neglect or exposure to family violence).⁵

⁵ Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse Final Report, vol. 2, p. 180 (December 2017); Divna, H et al, *The Prevalence and Impact of Child Maltreatment in Australia: Findings from the Australian Child Maltreatment Study: Brief Report*, Australian Child Maltreatment Study, Queensland University of Technology, p. 22 (2023).

- The Tasmanian Strategy must explicitly acknowledge underlying issues which can contribute to or exacerbate child sexual abuse.
- The Action Plan should include concrete initiatives (with measurable targets) to address risk factors.
- Current social issues must be addressed so that reform can respond to systemic issues currently impacting the safety and wellbeing of Tasmanian families. Risk factors include (but are not limited to):
 - Poverty and financial insecurity
 - Research demonstrates the significant impacts of poverty on the health and wellbeing of Tasmanian families, including on the safety and wellbeing of children.⁶
 - More Tasmanians than ever before are struggling to pay their rent, provide enough food for their families, or afford reasonable medical expenses.⁷ Poverty places enormous pressure on families, which can affect their ability to ensure the wellbeing of their children.⁸
 - Housing and homelessness
 - Many Tasmanians do not have a safe place to live, which affects their safety: precarious and unstable housing (both for children and their families) impacts wellbeing and is a risk factor for child sexual abuse.⁹
 - Family and gendered violence
 - Although child sexual abuse and family/intimate partner violence should be recognised as separate issues, research demonstrates clear links between the two, as they share common risk factors and are often co-occurring.¹⁰
 - Like family and intimate partner violence, child sexual abuse is a gendered issue: women report significantly more childhood sexual abuse than men, and most adult abusers are male.¹¹
 - Health and mental health
 - The cost of living crisis is forcing many Tasmanians to go without doctors visits or medication due to the prohibitive cost.¹² Lack of access to affordable and comprehensive health care has

⁶ For example, see Hinton, T, Anglicare Tasmania Social Action and Research Centre, *Breaking the Cycle: Supporting Tasmanian Parents to Prevent Recurrent Child Removals*, pp. 121-122 [September 2018]; Fidler, L, Anglicare Tasmania Social Action and Research Centre, *In Limbo: Exploring Income and Housing Barriers for Reunifying Tasmanian Families*, pp. 49-68 [September 2018].

⁷ These issues were highlighted in our recent budget priorities statement, see TasCOSS, *Supporting Tasmanians in a Worsening Cost of Living Crisis, 2024/25 TasCOSS Budget Priorities Statement* [2023].

⁸ National Association for the Prevention of Child Abuse and Neglect (NAPCAN), *Submission to Inquiry into the Extent and Nature of Poverty in Australia to the Senate Community Affairs References Committee*, pp. 6-8 [February 2023].

⁹ Australian Government, Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, *Australia's Youth: Homelessness and Overcrowding* [June 2021]; Shelter Tasmania, *Submission to the National Strategy to Prevent Child Sexual Abuse: Final Consultation Paper*, p. 2 [May 2021].

¹⁰ Gracia, E, Martin-Fernandez, M & Marisol, L, *Acceptability of Family Violence: Underlying Ties Between Intimate Partner Violence and Child Abuse*, *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, no. 35, pp. 3217-36 [2020]; also recognised in Commonwealth of Australia, Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, *National Strategy to Prevent and Respond to Child Sexual Abuse (2021-30)*, p. 64 [2021], which states that, '[s]exual abuse rarely occurs in isolation. It often happens alongside other forms of child maltreatment... [which] includes physical, sexual and emotional abuse, neglect [and] exposure to domestic and family violence.'

¹¹ *Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse Final Report*, vol. 2, p. 126 [December 2017]; Divna, H et al, *The Prevalence and Impact of Child Maltreatment in Australia: Findings from the Australian Child Maltreatment Study: Brief Report*, Australian Child Maltreatment Study, Queensland University of Technology, p. 21 [2023].

¹² Recent consultations with Tasmanians on low incomes (which included discussions of difficulties accessing health care) have been cited in recent submissions: TasCOSS, *Draft Long-Term Plan for Health Care in Tasmania 2040*, Department of Health [May 2023] & TasCOSS, *Inquiry into Tasmanian Experiences of Gendered Bias in Health Care*, Joint Sessional Committee on Gender and Equality [April 2023].

implications for child safety, as doctors and medical professionals can play a key role in identifying and responding to abuse.¹³

- Those residing in regional or remote communities have limited access to GPs, and an overall lack of specialist services — including mental health services — is impacting the health and wellbeing of families and children.¹⁴
- Research shows preventative health measures can also increase the safety and wellbeing of children and families.¹⁵

Building and maintaining strong and healthy families

- Where possible, families should be linked in with supports which allow them to stay together and receive assistance as needed in community.¹⁶
- This is particularly important for families with elevated risk of institutional involvement — for example, families with disability or Aboriginal families who experience an increased risk of involvement in both criminal justice and child safety systems.¹⁷

Children's rights must be recognised, upheld and promoted

- Preventing the abuse of children requires the promotion of the rights of children and young people.
- Reform should focus on how children and young people can be supported to identify and recognise their rights, and how they can be provided with the skills, information and resources to act to protect or empower these rights.
- All children must be supported — within their communities, in interactions with community and specialist organisations, and by government agencies — in ways that are trauma-informed, align with best practice and promote their rights.

4.2 Principles relating to strong, well-connected communities

A whole-of-community response

- The Tasmanian Strategy must encompass the entire community and the different roles and responsibilities we all have in preventing, identifying and responding to abuse.

¹³ Royal Australian College of General Practitioners, *Abuse and Violence: Working with our Patients in General Practice*, p. 125 (April 2022).

¹⁴ For example, see Centre for Community Child Health, Murdoch Children's Research Institute, *Reporting the Health and Development of Children in Rural and Remote Australia*, pp. 3-6 (2017); Women's Health Tasmania, *Talking to Women in Rural and Remote Tasmania*, pp. 8-12 (2019).

¹⁵ This is echoed in existing Tasmanian policy, including the *Child and Youth Wellbeing Strategy ('It Takes a Tasmanian Village')* and the *Healthy Tasmania Five Year Strategic Plan (2022-26)*.

¹⁶ Examples found in Sculthorpe, H, Tasmanian Aboriginal Centre, *luwutina mana-mapali krakani waranta ('Keeping Our Children With Us'): Report to Government and the Aboriginal Community about Changes Needed to the Child Protection System in Tasmania* (2014); Hinton, T, Anglicare Tasmania Social Action and Research Centre, *Breaking the Cycle: Supporting Tasmanian Parents to Prevent Recurrent Child Removals* (September 2018); Fidler, L, Anglicare Tasmania Social Action and Research Centre, *In Limbo: Exploring Income and Housing Barriers for Reunifying Tasmanian Families* (September 2018).

¹⁷ For example, see Libesman, T et al, Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of People with Disability, *Parents with Disability and their Experiences of Child Protection Systems* (2023); Tasmania Legal Aid, *Children First: Children in the Child Safety and Youth Justice System* (2021); Victorian Aboriginal Legal Service, *Submission to the Inquiry into Victoria's Criminal Justice System* (2021).

- Education and early intervention initiatives should include a focus on how to create and maintain safe and healthy relationships with children and young people in families, communities and organisations.
- All Tasmanians should be able to identify child safety risks and feel confident to respond.
- Community organisations already play a central role in empowering and engaging with Tasmanians around the prevention, identification and response to child sexual abuse. They should be funded to continue and expand on this work.
- Community organisations should be empowered to collaborate with Government in developing strategies and initiatives needed to further strengthen community networks.
- Alongside generalist community organisations, specialist services — which support those who have experienced abuse or have displayed harmful sexual behaviours — must also be resourced to expand existing services. This includes organisations who have expertise working with priority groups and are best placed to advise on how services can meet their needs.
- The Tasmanian Government should ensure all reforms are focused on the principle of Aboriginal self-determination, to ensure the implementation of recommendations is effective and responsive to the needs of Aboriginal communities across Tasmania.

4.3 Principles relating to government transparency and accountability

A whole-of-government response to child sexual abuse

- The Tasmanian Strategy should work across agencies and departments to prevent, identify and address intersecting issues posing risks to child safety.
- Oversight bodies (such as the Tasmanian National Preventative Mechanism) should be involved in the development and implementation of targeted prevention education strategies.
- The Government should work proactively with the Child Safety Reform Implementation Monitor to increase community engagement with the Commission of Inquiry Implementation Project, raise awareness of child safety issues, and ensure greater transparency of Government decision-making.

5. Who are the Agencies Involved in Preventing, Identifying and Responding to Child Sexual Abuse?

As outlined above, the prevention of child sexual abuse is a whole of community issue. There are therefore numerous agencies, entities and organisations involved in the development and implementation of measures aimed at preventing, identifying and responding to child sexual abuse.

We understand the Government is currently engaged in a mapping exercise of all relevant entities, which includes Government departments and agencies as well as community organisations. We strongly recommend the Government include in this mapping exercise all community-based organisations currently providing:

- support to Aboriginal communities and families (including Aboriginal community organisations)
- services for Tasmanians with disability and their families
- support to LGBTIQ+ children and families

- mental health support to Tasmanian children and young people
- services for culturally and linguistically diverse communities
- housing and homelessness support
- services addressing financial disadvantage
- family, parenting and care support
- generalist support to young people or engaged in research/advocacy relating to child and youth safety/wellbeing
- prevention or responses to family and intimate partner violence
- support for children and families involved in the child safety system, including out of home care
- support for children (and adults) with criminalised behaviours or in detention.

6. How Can We Better Support Priority Groups?

Research clearly demonstrates some children are at a higher risk of experiencing child sexual abuse.¹⁸ The Tasmanian Strategy and Action Plan should include targeted measures and actions to support priority groups. These groups are listed in Recommendation 19.1 as:

- Aboriginal children
- children with disability
- children with mental illness
- children who identify as LGBTIQ+
- children from culturally and linguistically diverse communities.

Whilst strongly supporting specific and targeted measures targeting the above communities, TasCOSS also recommends including as priority groups other children who are at particular risk of experiencing institutional abuse, due to sustained contact with institutions: children who are involved in the criminal justice system, children in detention, and children in out of home care.¹⁹ We believe the inclusion of these groups as priority cohorts in the Tasmanian Strategy and Action Plan is consistent with the evidence and findings of the Commission of Inquiry, which focused on those institutions, as well as research demonstrating the vulnerability of children within these institutions.²⁰

6.1 and 6.2 Principles relating to prevention and strong, well-connected communities

We recommend that the Government establish and maintain ongoing consultation mechanisms with these priority groups, including children and families, community members, community organisations, academics and leaders. This includes membership on any Commission of Inquiry Implementation Project reference or advisory groups, and resources to allow relevant organisations to engage in consultation with community members. This will allow Government to comprehensively assess the needs of these groups and target prevention and support actions accordingly.

¹⁸ *Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse Final Report*, vol. 2, pp. 182-199 (December 2017).

¹⁹ *Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse Final Report*, vol. 2, p. 181 (December 2017).

²⁰ *Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse Final Report*, vol. 2, p. 178 (December 2017).

Further, there is a wealth of information, evidence and personal experiences that has already been shared with state and territory governments, along with the Commonwealth Government, on how best to support priority groups, which should be included in the Tasmanian Strategy. Before progressing any new strategies or projects, the Government should first engage in a comprehensive review of literature related to these groups, including academic research and investigations and inquiries. This should include not only finalised national inquiries and relevant inquiries or investigations from other Australian jurisdictions, but also emerging work — for example, the current Tasmanian Legislative Council Inquiry into Adult Imprisonment and Youth Detention.²¹

6.3 Principles relating to Government transparency and accountability

In order to evaluate the effectiveness of the Tasmanian Strategy and Action Plan for priority cohorts, the Government should utilise the consultation mechanisms identified above to assess need and the impact of actions on an ongoing basis. The Action Plan should include measurable actions and outcomes related to priority groups that are independently evaluated.

7. Consultation Recommendations

To inform our response to this question, TasCOSS has undertaken research into effective Government consultation as well as sought input from member organisations about how they would like to be consulted on child sexual abuse reform. As a result of this research and engagement, we have developed a standalone consultation strategy (‘the TasCOSS Consultation Strategy’) to inform how the Government should consult with Tasmanian communities and community-based organisations throughout their reform implementation project. We also hope the alternatives explored in the TasCOSS Consultation Strategy could be implemented for community engagement generally (not just engagements limited to this project).

We asked community organisations to reflect on consultation models and the principles underpinning effective consultation. The feedback we received indicated that most current consultation processes are inadequate, with one respondent stating ‘the current ways the Government consults are not working: they need to be more proactive, and change quite a lot to better involve community.’ Some central messages were that consultation must be an iterative process rather than a one-off event, that place-based consultations are essential to capture localised needs, and that consultation must elicit a plurality of voices.²²

We outline below our recommendations for undertaking more accessible, respectful and effective consultation, in the context of our three overarching principles.

7.1 How can consultation better support the prevention of child sexual abuse?

Recognise the role consultation can play in raising awareness and educating the community

²¹ Tasmanian Legislative Council Sessional Committee Government Administration B, *Inquiry into Tasmanian Adult Imprisonment and Youth Detention Matters*, Parliament of Tasmania (2023).

²² Refer to the *TasCOSS Consultation Strategy — Reform Implementation Project* at Appendix A for a summary of this research.

- Effective consultation (which includes a broad cross-section of the community) is an opportunity for education and awareness-raising, which are key to the prevention of child sexual abuse.

Broad, inclusive and accessible

- As child sexual abuse is a whole of community issue, consultation must encompass a broad range of views, experience and expertise. This will ensure the Tasmanian Strategy meets the needs of different groups: one survey respondent noted that the Government ‘response has to be flexible enough to cater to the needs of different groups, especially taking into account cultural, religious and ethnic needs.’
- Consultation must include several ways to contribute, such as written submissions, surveys, reference groups, targeted focus groups, forums in different locations, video and audio submissions.
- Government should also invite and consider ongoing feedback on how consultation processes are working to identify and address gaps and participation challenges.

A range of consultation models

- It would appear (from our research and engagement with community organisations) there is no one model that would best fit all community groups or organisations.
 - For example, while there was support for models such as regular online network meetings, reference or advisory groups and co-designed local consultation, respondents also noted that the success of such models would depend on the general improvement of consultation processes.
- Ultimately, the diverse needs of different communities are most likely to be met if the Government employs a range of methods to consult effectively on child sexual abuse reform.
- A mixed-methodology consultation strategy would also provide the most information on how child sexual abuse should be prevented, identified and responded to in Tasmania.
 - For example, one survey respondent told us: ‘a mixture of models would enable adaptability for the subject matter to ensure those with specialist knowledge are consulted where required; whilst also ensuring consultation for those with lived experience and those in regions.’

7.2 How can consultation support and strengthen community connections?

Reducing and recognising work involved

- Government must be proactive in reviewing and analysing information that has already been provided on child sexual abuse and related areas.
 - Community organisations and individuals have already made submissions, published research, given evidence at hearings, participated in consultations, and contributed their views in other ways.
 - It is unreasonable to require community organisations to reproduce or reiterate information already provided.
- Government must recognise the burden of participating in consultations and support community members and organisations to be meaningfully involved.
 - For example, allowing more time to provide feedback on drafts (we recommend a minimum of 4–6 weeks), utilising existing networks, offering incentives or compensation, and providing multiple engagement options.

Central online portal

- Any consultation strategy should be supported by an online portal where community members and organisations can access all information related to child sexual abuse reform, with an emphasis on accessibility and inclusion.
- The portal should include a document library, a timeline of proposed reforms, information about all consultation opportunities, and clear avenues to seek assistance.²³
- This portal would act as a means of providing accessible information and having broad reach across different areas of the community.
 - For example, one respondent told us it would be ‘a useful means of information distribution and contribution that stakeholders can access at a time that is suitable for them. It also avoids only certain groups having access to information.’

7.3 How can consultation increase Government transparency and accountability?

Transparency of information and processes

- Government must share detailed, accessible, and easy to understand information about current projects to facilitate informed public debate and meaningful consultation.
 - This should include Plain English documents, videos, resource lists, and detailed fact sheets/explanatory memoranda.
- Government must be transparent about why they are seeking information, who will be accessing the information, and how it will be used.
- The Government should ‘close the loop’ — all consultations should be followed by a publicly available response outlining how information gathered has been weighed in the decision-making process.

²³ Examples of websites include the ACT Government [Open Government website](#), which is designed to promote transparency and civic engagement and includes a range of resources, such as Government reports, Cabinet decisions and links to engagement programs for members of the public; and the South Australian [YourSAy website](#), which is an online platform for public engagement on specific issues and lists current consultation projects with links for the public to access information about proposed reforms (including documents such as issues papers, key dates and timeframes for the project, and frequently asked questions).