

Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse

Factsheet for mental health sector service providers

What is the Royal Commission?

The Royal Commission was set up in January 2013 to look into how institutions with a responsibility for children such as schools, churches, sporting clubs and foster care, have responded to allegations and instances of child sexual abuse. Six commissioners were appointed to conduct the inquiry and will make recommendations on how to improve laws, policies and practices in Australia to better protect our children.

You can learn more about the Royal Commission here:
<http://www.childabuseroyalcommission.gov.au>

Why is it relevant to the mental health sector?

Many people who were sexually abused as children go on to develop mental health issues as a result of their trauma, and some experienced other abuses and violations at the same time.

The Royal Commission wants to give anyone who was sexually abused as a child the opportunity to tell their story, including those with significant mental health issues. For many, telling their story may be a step in their recovery, and one of the core focuses of the Royal Commission is to support people through this process. Some may only be able to do this with the support of mental health services and providers.

Even if they decide not to tell their story to the Royal Commission, survivors of all forms of trauma may be affected by the media coverage. Members of the general public may also be affected by the shocking nature of many of the stories. Mental health service providers have a role in listening and responding to those who disclose, as well as supporting those who are affected.

Mental health workers already have close contact with survivors of child sexual abuse, and are well placed to help clients with complex mental health needs access the Royal Commission. This could mean providing information, being aware of complex trauma and its impacts, or providing ongoing support or specialist referral.



How can I support people to tell their story?

Many people who have not shared their story of abuse before will consider doing so now as a result of the Royal Commission. It is critical that all people who are affected receive the support and care they need.

To best support people you can:

1. Be aware, empathetic and caring when interacting with people who have experienced childhood trauma of any sort
2. Learn about the Royal Commission and its processes
3. Share this information with your colleagues as well as with consumers and carers
4. Attend trauma informed care training or other professional development
5. Support people with mental health issues to access the Royal Commission

Understanding the process

Contacting the Royal Commission

There are a number of different ways for people to contact the Royal Commission. They, or an advocate on their behalf, can register over the phone or in writing. Royal Commission staff will explain the process and work out the best way to share their story. People may also be referred to organisations which support survivors of child sexual abuse and their families for additional support.

Call: 1800 099 340

Email: contact@childabuseroyalcommission.gov.au

Write: GPO Box 5283, Sydney NSW 2001

Private Sessions

Private sessions are one way that people can share their stories with the Royal Commission, in a confidential, informal setting that is not open to the public or media. A private session allows survivors to speak directly with a Commissioner about their experiences. People can bring their carers and other support people to the private session. There are many people waiting for a private session, and it may take some months. People who cannot wait this long have the option of sharing their story in writing or in a recorded interview. The Royal Commission is able to talk through these options with you.

- Read more: <http://childabuseroyalcommission.gov.au/share-your-story>

National support services

A range of additional supports are in place to make it as easy as possible for people who wish to share their stories with the Royal Commission, or to assist those who are affected in any way. People can be referred to counsellors or advocacy groups who provide support to survivors of child sexual abuse and their families. Information about national and state-based support services is available on the Royal Commission website.

- View support services: <http://childabuseroyalcommission.gov.au/support-services>



Legal Advice

While most people do not need legal assistance, a free and independent advice service called knowmore has been set up to provide information to people who have legal questions or concerns. The service provides advice on the Royal Commission's powers, procedures and guidelines as well as the effect of confidentiality agreements in past proceedings and the availability of compensation.

- More information: <http://knowmore.org.au/>

Resources

Videos, brochures and guidelines have been produced explaining the work of the Royal Commission and what to expect when attending a private session or a public hearing. You can also order free resources.

- View resources: <http://childabuseroyalcommission.gov.au/resource-centre>

Professional development for you

Four national providers have been funded to deliver training programs and materials to health practitioners, organisations and supporters, aimed specifically at dealing with complex trauma. More details are available on the Royal Commission website.

- Read more: <http://childabuseroyalcommission.gov.au/support-services>

How can I get involved in the work of the Royal Commission?

Submissions and policy

Service providers can keep up to date with the progress of the Royal Commission by signing up to receive alerts on the Royal Commission's homepage. Organisations and individuals are encouraged to provide submissions to the Royal Commission, including by responding to issues papers. The Royal Commission also holds roundtables to focus on key issues.

- Read more: <http://childabuseroyalcommission.gov.au/research/issues-papers-submissions>

Research Program

The Royal Commission has developed an extensive research program to support its work. The research program covers the areas of prevention, reporting and responding to allegations of child sexual abuse as well as support and redress. A full list of research projects can be found on the Royal Commission's website.

- Research Projects: <http://childabuseroyalcommission.gov.au/research>



What should I do now?

1. Be aware that people with mental health issues may have a lived experience of childhood trauma
2. Learn about the Royal Commission and its processes and share your knowledge
3. Take a training course in trauma informed care from one of the funded trainers
4. Contribute to the learnings of the Royal Commission through its issue papers
5. Connect with staff at the Royal Commission and ask any questions (email stakeholders@childabuseroyalcommission.gov.au)
6. Take care of yourself, be aware of the possibility of vicarious trauma and find the support you need

Support Statement

If you or someone you are supporting are in need of help related to the lived experience of child sexual assault contact one of the support services listed at <http://childabuseroyalcommission.gov.au/support-services>

If you or someone you are supporting are in need of crisis support please contact Lifeline on 13 11 14 or the Suicide Call Back Service on 1300 659 467.

