



Joint Standing Committee on Implementation of the National Redress Scheme.

Full Stop Australia
Submission to the Joint Standing Committee
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About Full Stop Australia

Full Stop Australia is a nationally focused not-for-profit organisation that provides expert and confidential telephone, online and face-to-face specialist trauma counselling to people of all genders who have experienced sexual, domestic or family violence. We also offer specialist training and professional services to frontline workers, government, for profit and not for profit sectors.

Full Stop Australia, established in 1974 as Australia's first sexual assault service, brings over 50 years of expertise in supporting those impacted by sexual, domestic and family violence (SDFV). Delivering a high-quality, trauma informed, culturally safe, accessible and inclusive service is at the core of what we do.

Full Stop Australia Clinical and Client Services

Full Stop Australia's Counselling and Trauma Recovery Services comprise of a range of 24/7 telephone, online, and face to face services which work along the continuum of care from crisis to recovery. Our operational scope encompasses several well-known and respected 24/7 trauma specialist counselling helplines, including:

- NSW Sexual Violence Helpline (NSWSVH) **1800 424 017**
- National Sexual Abuse and Redress Support Service (Redress Service) **1800 211 028**
- 1800 FULL STOP (National Line) **1800 385 578**
- Rainbow Sexual, Domestic and Family Violence Helpline (Rainbow Line) **1800 497 212**

We deliver the following additional services:

- Healing and Recovery for Survivors (HeRS) Counselling Program, which provides specialised face-to-face counselling for adult women victim-survivors of childhood sexual abuse located at six Women's Health Centres (WHC) across NSW.
- Fee for Service (Professional Services) trauma specialist counselling, clinical supervision, vicarious trauma management and consultancy.

Our service approach

Our service has its foundations in deep understanding of trauma and its impacts. Our approach is built on the following key features:

- **Strength and empowerment:** We focus on empowering survivors, helping them to regain control and rebuild their lives.
- **Recovery-oriented:** Our services support long-term recovery within a phased approach, addressing immediate and ongoing needs.
- **Culturally responsive and intersectional:** We ensure our services are culturally responsive, recognising and centring our clients' diverse identities and cultures.
- **Trauma specialist:** Our approach is grounded in understanding trauma and its impacts, providing specialist care that addresses complex trauma comprehensively.

Our helplines connect clients directly with trauma specialist counsellors who provide immediate therapeutic support in a compassionate and trauma-informed space. We support victim-survivors with trauma-specialist counselling across the care continuum, loved ones and community remembers with guidance on responding to disclosures, and frontline professionals with expert advice on how to handle complex situations involving SDFV.

We are a recognised provider of the NRS and have been providing nationwide services to victim-survivors of institutionalised child sexual abuse since 2013.

Full Stop Australia's National Sexual Abuse and Redress Support Service

This service provides accessible, culturally responsive services in every state and territory, including:

- **Trauma-informed counselling:** national 24/7, free and confidential telephone and online counselling, information, advice, support, and referrals.
- **Individualised casework:** delivered face-to-face, by telephone, or via video to assist client understanding and building readiness to apply to the Scheme.
- **Application support:** for all stages of engagement, including preparing an application, tracking progress and responding to an S24, preparation and support for outcome meetings, Direct Personal Response and future planning.
- **Community outreach:** targeted strategies to identify and engage clients with a range of vulnerabilities that create barriers to service access and may otherwise disengage with the Redress process due to the impacts of trauma.

Full Stop Australia's National Sexual Abuse and Redress Support Service has two service components focused on engaging clients who have experienced institutional child sexual abuse in the NRS. These services are operated through Full Stop Australia's Clinical Services. They are integrated to promote effective internal referrals for clients who engage through our 24/7 phone and online counselling services and/or via our service partners. The services are:

1. A 24/7 Nationwide phone and online services that enables timely and seamless access to specialist trauma and culturally informed information, counselling and referral.
2. Access to phone, video and community-based counselling and case management support. Referrals can be received internally or from external agencies.

From inception we continue to experience increased demand for our service. In the last reporting period, we provided support to **696** clients across **2,521** occasions of service through the 24/7 National Sexual Abuse and Redress Support, and application and counselling support to **383** clients across **3,591** occasions of service in 2024-2025. These figures are consistent with previous reporting periods.

On average, we receive approximately **50** new clients per month to the 24/7 National Sexual Abuse and Redress Support Service helpline and **65** new clients per month for application and counselling support.

Consistent issues:

From Redress Support Services' perspective, the National Redress Scheme has faced consistent concerns about delays, complex administration, and processes that can retraumatise survivors. Many applicants experience long waiting periods, are required to repeatedly recount traumatic experiences, and are put in a position to justify their experiences of abuse. There are also concerns about inconsistent or inadequate payment amounts, limited access to counselling and culturally appropriate support, and challenges with receiving meaningful apologies through Direct Personal Responses. Accepting redress also requires survivors to waive future civil claims, which can create difficult legal and emotional decisions. While the Scheme provides acknowledgment and financial recognition, these systemic issues can significantly impact clients' emotional wellbeing, sense of validation, and trust in institutions.

Case Study:

Maria (pseudonym), a woman in her late 50s, engaged with Full Stop Australia to apply to the National Redress Scheme for abuse she experienced in institutional care as a child. She initially delayed applying due to anxiety about recounting her experiences and confusion about the legal implications of accepting an offer, including the requirement to waive future civil claims. When she began the process independently, she found the forms overwhelming and was distressed by the level of detail required, which triggered sleep disturbance and heightened Post Traumatic Stress Disorder symptoms, directly related to the childhood institutional sexual abuse she experienced.

The Full Stop Australia provided trauma-informed, step-by-step assistance with the application, helping Maria break the process into manageable stages. A redress case worker attended appointments with her, clarified legal information in plain language, and arranged a referral to Knowmore legal services so she could make an informed decision about her engagement with the national redress scheme. Full Stop Australia also coordinated an internal referral to a Trauma Specialist Counsellor, to receive six scheduled counselling sessions on managing trauma impacts, whilst having her application drafted by a Redress Case Worker.

Processing delays caused Maria significant distress and led her to fear that her application had been "forgotten." The redress case worker maintained regular contact, provided updates where possible, and reinforced coping strategies. Maria received an ineligible outcome on the basis that she could not have recalled such detailed memories from the age of 3-4 years old. Additionally, Maria had provided care records confirming some experiences of abuse documented whilst in care. Maria perceived the outcome response as a rejection, being disbelieved and told that she had basically exaggerated her experience of abuse. Maria lost hope in the system and initially declined a referral to Knowmore legal services to consider review processes. With emotional and psychological support from Full Stop Australia, Maria engaged in preparing a review of considerations for the National Redress Scheme.

Through consistent advocacy, emotional support, and practical guidance, Full Stop Australia helped Maria navigate administrative complexity, manage the impacts of traumatisation, and make informed decisions. While the process remained challenging, she reported feeling supported, heard, and less alone throughout the journey.

This case study demonstrates the challenging nature of the Redress application process and the importance of specialist, ongoing and accessible care to ensure victim-survivors are afforded the outcomes that are in line with and recognise the harm they experienced.

Our response

We strongly recommend that the scheme be extended beyond its 10-year timeframe.

As a trauma-specialist service, we recognise that disclosure of child sexual abuse is often profoundly difficult and may take decades. In institutional contexts this creates an added layer of complexities.

Survivors frequently require significant time to develop the trust, safety, and emotional readiness needed to disclose their experiences. Barriers to disclosure commonly include the impacts of trauma, shame, fear of not being believed, self-blame, distrust of institutions, and the risk of re-traumatisation. These factors can substantially delay engagement with formal processes, such as reporting to police and applying for redress. A 10-year cutoff does not reflect the lived realities of survivors and risks excluding those who are not yet ready or able to apply. A trauma-informed approach requires timeframes that accommodate individual recovery journeys rather than imposing rigid limits.

The impacts of child sexual abuse are lifelong. It is not uncommon for these impacts to intensify with ageing, illness, or major life transitions. Many survivors only seek redress later in life, when the cumulative effects of trauma become overwhelming or when they feel sufficiently supported to engage with the process.

In addition to individual assistance and support, Full Stop has conducted community outreach as part of its redress service. Below, we share our observations from contacts with victim-survivors.

- Many survivors were not aware of the redress scheme until Full Stop's community outreach sessions. It is likely there are victim-survivors who are not yet aware of the Scheme. After outreach, Full Stop receives a greater volume of calls seeking help with applications
- Meaningful outreach to marginalised communities requires time and sometimes several repeat visits to build trust.
- There have been increased demands on Redress Support Services resulting in extensive waitlists which adds to the disadvantage individuals may already be facing.
- Many people have become aware of the scheme late in its operation, particularly older survivors, those living in regional or remote areas, people with disabilities, and individuals from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds.
- The application process is emotionally demanding and administratively complex. Survivors often need time to locate records, seek legal advice, and build trust and readiness with support services.
- Victim-survivors may experience delays from slow institutional responses or incomplete historical records. Survivors should not be penalised for systemic or institutional delays beyond their control.

Full Stop believes an extension to the Scheme will promote more access to redress and support. Full Stop advocates that every survivor's voice is heard through a trauma-informed framework, noting the importance for survivors that the harm done to them is acknowledged. Full Stop believes in the restorative purpose of the scheme and argues for an extension as a demonstration of government accountability, recognition, and justice.

Full Stop Australia recommends that further work is undertaken to improve public awareness of the scheme.

In relation to transition, Full Stop Australia recommends that:

- All reforms and improvements should be underpinned by a trauma-informed, survivor-led framework that prioritises safety, dignity, equity, and healing over administrative efficiency.
- The Scheme is extended with guaranteed ongoing funding for Redress Support Services beyond the conclusion of the Scheme to ensure continuity of care for survivors who remain engaged in or affected by the redress process.
- Any transition of services is guided by trauma-informed principles, including survivor choice, continuity of trusted providers, and adequate timeframes for handover and relationship-building.

In relation to Case Management issues Full Stop Australia recommends several improvements to service capacity and operational models:

- Address current case management capacity constraints by increasing Scheme staffing levels in administration and Independent Decision Makers and general resourcing within the Scheme and associated support services to reduce waitlists, wait times, delays, and survivor distress.
- Improve response times to the survivor.
- Allow flexible and extended timeframes for survivors to respond to information requests, recognising the emotional toll of the process and the practical challenges of accessing historical records.
- Ensure survivors are not disadvantaged by delays arising from institutional responses, record retrieval, or administrative backlogs. Where delays occur, proactive communication and interim support are critical.
- A consistent Independent Decision Maker framework to support the decision-making process and responses, supported by more thorough trauma specialist training for all NRS staff, particularly Independent Decision Makers, to reduce systematic inequality in outcome variation.

In relation to outstanding applications and determinations, we recommend the NRS:

- Commit to finalising all applications lodged before the Scheme's closing date, regardless of when determinations are made.
- Ensure survivors are not excluded or unfairly impacted by administrative or institutional delays.

- Maintain trauma-informed, survivor-centred evidentiary standards, recognizing the limitations of historical records and the centrality of survivor testimony.
- Allow flexible timeframes for responding to information requests, particularly as the Scheme approaches closure.
- Ensure continued access to Redress Support Services until all outstanding determinations are finalised.

Provide post-scheme care through accessible trauma specialists and culturally safe services. Full Stop Australia's 24/7 National Sexual Abuse and Redress Support Service is a unique national model, in operation since 2013 and well placed to continue post scheme support.

Planning for a possible increase in applications as the Scheme winds up:

- Extend and secure funding for Redress Support Services to manage increased demand as the Scheme approaches conclusion and to ensure continuity of care for survivors with outstanding or late applications.

Full Stop is available to meet with the Committee and would welcome the opportunity to provide further information.

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