



National Apology to Victims and Survivors of Institutional Child Sexual Abuse Reference Group

Key themes from the national consultation process

On Monday 22 October 2018, the Prime Minister of Australia, the Hon Scott Morrison MP, delivered the National Apology to Victims and Survivors of Institutional Child Sexual Abuse at Parliament House in Canberra.

The Apology was developed on the advice of an independent, survivor-focused [Reference Group](#) and feedback from survivors, their families and support people received during the national consultation process from May to July 2018. The national consultation process included 58 face-to-face consultation meetings and over 360 written submissions.

The Reference Group's advice to the Australian Government was provided with the intention of ensuring that the preparation and delivery of the National Apology reflected survivors' experiences and wishes for the occasion, and to ensure that survivors' wellbeing was placed at the heart of this national commemoration.

Key themes in the advice

Survivors identified important key themes during their consultations with the Australian Government:

- The delivery of the National Apology needs to be *heartfelt* and the victims, survivors, their families and supporters need to feel that it is heartfelt
- The National Apology needs to be *meaningful and supported by genuine, real, concrete, substantive action* causing powerful reform to ensure that, as far as possible, this cannot happen again.
- The National Apology should acknowledge the courage of survivors who came forward to the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse, at the risk of being re-traumatised, in the hope that their experiences and accounts would protect children in the future.
- There should be one minute's silence to acknowledge those who have not survived to witness, or hear, the National Apology.
- The National Apology needs to:
 - be made to victims, survivors, their supportive families and their children
 - acknowledge that the abuse was perpetrated on children (the most vulnerable in our society who often had no one else to turn to) by the people who were supposed to care for them
 - acknowledge and describe the life-long impact of the abuse and the effect on the family, including the ability of victims and survivors to contribute to society and their ability to parent
 - acknowledge that most victims and survivors have not met their full potential
 - acknowledge the criminality of the actions of perpetrators and institutions and that the abuse occurred by fellow Australians in positions of trust
 - appropriately reflect what the Government can apologise for (for example, a recurring theme is that the Government cannot apologise for the actions of perpetrators themselves but can apologise for policies, inaction, wilful blindness and societal attitudes)

- acknowledge that sexual abuse was accompanied by physical, mental, psychological and emotional abuse and neglect
- acknowledge that children were exploited as a form of punishment and forced to work and perform physical labour
- acknowledge that the hierarchy within institutions enabled sexual abuse to occur, and to go on for decades, by concealing perpetrators and moving them around, rather than dealing with them appropriately
- acknowledge sexual abuse that has occurred, and is occurring, outside of institutions in our families and communities (noting that it is outside the scope of this Apology), and
- acknowledge that sexual abuse is ongoing and continues today; it is not simply a part of history.
- The Apology should be survivor-focussed and the presence of responsible institutions at the National Apology could re-traumatise attendees but institutions should be held to account.
- No one group of victims and survivors should be acknowledged specifically – ie Child Migrants, Forgotten Australians, Care Leavers, Stolen Generation – but the repeated cycle of trauma should be.
- Viewing events should be encouraged throughout Australia to enable those who do not wish to travel to Canberra to attend in their local area, with appropriate supports in place (such as counselling).

Delivery of the National Apology

Survivors also provided feedback about the delivery of the National Apology. Whilst consensus was not reached on all aspects, a number of survivors indicated that the following elements are important:

- the National Apology should be delivered by the Prime Minister on the floor of the Parliament, with Senators invited to House of Representatives for the Apology delivery
- that the Leader of the Opposition should be invited to speak following the Prime Minister
- survivors, their families and victims' families, and representatives of survivor organisations should be seated on the floor of the Parliament, or in the viewing galleries
- other survivors, their families and victims' families, and representatives of survivor organisations should be present at a function in the Great Hall to watch the delivery of the Apology via a telecast
- following the Apology, the Prime Minister and Opposition Leader should address attendees in the Great Hall within Parliament House
- the National Apology should be broadcast on national television and radio
- psychological support should be available on the day to survivors, their families and victims' families, including the provision of appropriately trained counsellors, and
- financial assistance should be provided for people to attend the Canberra event.

A national memorial to victims and survivors

The national consultation process also invited feedback about establishing a national memorial to victims and survivors of child sexual abuse in institutional contexts, as recommended by the Royal Commission (recommendation 17.6).

General support was expressed for a national memorial in Canberra and some support was expressed for memorials in each state and territory.

A diverse range of views were provided on the memorial design, and no clear consensus was reached. Many survivors suggested that any such memorial be enduring, and not permanent or fixed, to reflect the life-long journey of survivors, such as incorporating gardens, water or some form of kinetic moving sculpture.