

National Strategy to Prevent and Respond to Child Sexual Abuse 2021-2030

National Strategy Advisory Group Model Public Consultation Paper



To:	The Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet
Email:	nationalofficeforchildsafety@pmc.gov.au
From:	Barnardos Australia
Contact:	Dr Robert Urquhart - Head of Knowledge, Outcomes and Research
Subject	Response to National Strategy Advisory Group Model Public Consultation Paper (February 202)
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Thank you for providing Barnardos Australia (Barnardos) with the opportunity to comment on the proposed model for an Advisory Group and complementary non-government consultation mechanisms, which will provide regular advice and input on implementing the National Strategy's First National Action Plan and First Commonwealth Action Plan.

Barnardos is a not for profit children's social care organisation providing direct support to 15,000+ children and their families in the Australian Capital Territory (ACT) and New South Wales (NSW) each year, in addition to foster care and open adoption for approximately 1500 children. In our family support work we focus on the most vulnerable children at risk of separation from their families, and interventions to ensure children and young people are safe in all areas of their lives is a strong feature of this work. For close to 100 years, we have been working together with children, young people and families to break the cycle of disadvantage, and create safe, nurturing and stable homes, connected to family and community.

Our expertise in the area

As a large non-government provider of safety and prevention services to children and families vulnerable to child sexual abuse, Barnardos is deeply committed to successfully implementing the measures under the First National Action Plan and First Commonwealth Action Plan. We are well known for our substantial investment in effecting the National Principles for Child Safe Organisations throughout our organisational culture and practices. The children, young people, families, kin, and carers we work closely with fall within all the National Strategy's priority groups. Notably:

- victims and survivors of child sexual abuse (CSA) and their advocates
- children and young people and their support networks
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples
- culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) communities
- people with disability
- LGBTQIA+ people
- people living in regional and remote communities

Further, Barnardos has extensive experience in working with the following important sub-groups, and we would be happy to provide our expertise and knowledge when individual actions are being implemented for the two Action Plans:

- children living in out of home care (OOHC) and who have left care both as victims/survivors of child sexual CSA and/or exhibiting harmful sexual behaviours.
- people receiving family preservation and support services for non-offending parents and their children.
- professionals assisting victims and survivors of CSA.

Our potential contribution to the work of the Advisory Group

Barnardos works with one of the most vulnerable cohorts of children and young people at risk of CSA, notably children living in the care system where a Court has decided they cannot live safely at home. These children and young people have frequently been victims of child sexual abuse. Due to their history of trauma and consequent high level of vulnerability, they often find themselves targeted by perpetrators on an ongoing basis.

Our CEO, Deirdre Cheers, is a respected leader in Australian child protection and social care, with an extensive professional social work research and management career and an influential Australian advocate for vulnerable children and young people in the care system. Most recently she is a member of the International Network on Infants and Toddlers in Child Protection and has contributed to public debate and social policy reform at the national and international levels. Ms Cheers can consult with her relevant specialist, practitioner, advocate and service user networks where this would help assist the work of the National Office.

Our responses to the Consultation questions are below.

Consultation Questions

1. The proposed model of the National Strategy Advisory Group and any criteria for selecting membership

Barnardos endorses the proposed model for the Advisory Group, noting the following suggestions and queries:

- **Membership:** Under the current proposal, there would be 15 members nationally. We note that notionally this represents two members approximately per state and territory.
- However, in our experience, this group size may not be large enough to provide both a degree of geographic representativeness and the range of input required to fully understand the scope, depth, and breadth of views and experiences of the National Strategy priority groups and target audiences the complexity of their issues.
- Our strong view is that the views and experiences of Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations (or their peak bodies), culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) communities and victims and survivors of child sexual abuse and their advocates should inform the work of Advisory Group. Achieving this core representation is essential to successfully shaping the design, implementation and evaluation of the National Strategy's measures and should be part of the criteria for selecting membership.
- **Role:** What support and structures will the National Office make available to enable members to consult internally and within their networks?
- **Time-limited working groups:** This is a welcome feature of the proposed model, as it will ensure the right voice and expertise on specific measures are available when needed. Again, what will the National Office provide in terms of support and structures to support these working groups?
- **Term:** Barnardos supports the proposed approach.
- **Expression of interest process:** Barnardos supports the proposed approach.

2. What should be included in the Terms of Reference for the Advisory Group?

In Barnardos' view, the Terms of Reference should have a clear purpose and scope. Clarity regarding administrative supports provided to the Group and preferred methods of engagement/consultation with the National Office will assist the members in undertaking their roles effectively. As part of good governance, agreed processes for replacing members and

appropriate delegation should be delineated. In addition, the Terms of Reference should also define the review mechanism and proper term, noting the proposed mid-way review point.

3. If you are a victim or survivor, or an advocate, what additional alternative ways for engaging and partnering with us would you like to see established? For example, would a separate, dedicated victim-survivor advisory group be beneficial?

We would welcome consideration of a separate, dedicated victim-survivor advisory group. Recognising the vulnerability of victims or survivors, we anticipate that some may prefer a voice to express their views on their behalf. In contrast, others may not have trust in organizations to do this. In the latter case, advocacy groups may meet this need, or informal opportunities for individual engagement with the National Office could be offered.

To engage with these groups, support to overcome language and disability barriers (such as use of interpreters, support persons) and appropriate access to networks and technology (which may be missing in many rural and remote areas) will also be required.

4. Whether other priority groups, such as people with disability, should be engaged in additional alternative ways?

Amplifying the 'voice and views' of other priority groups and ensuring they are heard is critical for the effectiveness of the proposed consultation mechanisms.

We strongly support seeking advice on culturally safe and inclusive approaches from Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations (or other relevant bodies) on engaging Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples with particular attention to the preferences of those living in remote Aboriginal communities (as distinct from Aboriginal groups living in metropolitan areas).

In our view, the best way to establish additional alternative ways to engage with people with disability is to seek specific advice from disability peak bodies (or other relevant bodies) on the best approaches (if this has not already been undertaken).

Regarding engaging culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) communities, we would suggest the advice of expert practitioners working with CALD children and families should also be sought.

5. The establishment of the proposed stakeholder consultation list

Barnardos supports the establishment of this list and the methodology for engagement. Will the National Office call for expressions of interest for the consultation list? If so, the National Office will need to consider all methods of communication in order to have as much reach as possible, not only via established networks but local community groups, neighbourhood support systems, etc.

Please do not hesitate to contact Dr Robert Urquhart, Head of Knowledge, Outcomes & Research on rurquhart@barnardos.org.au, tel (02) 9218 2392 or mobile 0431 404 199 if you require further information on our feedback.