

National Strategy to Prevent Child Sexual Abuse Final Development 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 Final Development Consultation Paper - National Strategy to Prevent Child Sexual Abuse (March 2021)
Date submitted:	Friday, April 23 2021

Thank you for providing Barnardos Australia (Barnardos) with the opportunity to comment on the Final Development Consultation Paper for the National Strategy to Prevent Child Sexual Abuse.

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 responses to the Consultation questions are below.

Vision, objective and values

1. Do the proposed vision and objective reflect what our aim should be and what success should look like under the National Strategy?

Barnardos strongly endorses the proposed vision and objective to specify what the aim and success would look like if the National Strategy is effective. The proposed vision aligns with Barnardos Towards 2025 Strategic Directions Vision '*To empower every child in Australia to reach their full potential*'. If the National Strategy is effective the future and potential for Australian children will be greatly enhanced.

2. Do the proposed values reflect the values that should be guiding our work under the National Strategy?

Barnardos endorses the six identified values as the core principles guiding the work under the National Strategy. Values Three and Five particularly resonate with the values Barnardos hold for the work we do with vulnerable children, young people and families. We believe a commitment to listening, acting and advocating on behalf of children helps improve service response and life outcomes. Barnardos would like to see Value Four expanded to reflect the need for Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations to deliver the range of services and supports required for Aboriginal children, their families and communities.

Strategic priority themes

3. Do these strategic priority themes reflect the areas of focus for Australia over the life of the First National Action Plan and First Commonwealth Action Plan under the National Strategy (i.e. 2021-2025)?

Barnardos agrees with the five listed strategic priority themes. We note that:

- Regarding supporting and empowering victims and survivors (strategic priority theme #2), work is particularly required in the legal system and within Government to improve the understanding of the impact of child sexual abuse (CSA).

- In the out-of-home care (OOHC) sector, work needs to be urgently undertaken towards providing increased support services for children exhibiting harmful sexual behaviours (strategic priority theme #3) and offender prevention and intervention (strategic priority theme #4), where significant and concerning service gaps remain.

We would suggest consideration of the inclusion of the following additional strategic priority themes:

- Increased family preservation and support services for non-offending parents and their children.
- Access to support for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families experiencing or at risk of CSA.
- Access to support for culturally and linguistically diverse background children and families experiencing or at risk of CSA.
- Support services for workers at all levels working with children and young people as victims/survivors of CSA and/or exhibiting harmful sexual behaviours.
- Developing the understanding of the relationship between CSA and other non-sexual forms of abuse.

Working in partnership

4. What are the best ways for Australian, state and territory governments to listen, engage and collaborate with these groups / individuals? Are there any groups you feel are missing?

Barnardos suggests inclusion of the following groups which are missing from the list:

- Children living in OOHC and who have left care both as victims/survivors of CSA and/or exhibiting harmful sexual behaviours.
- Families of victims and survivors of CSA.
- Professionals assisting victims and survivors of CSA.

Useful channels to proactively engage and collaborate with the above groups include:

- Localised interagency forums and groups.
- Using case analyses as a tool (whilst avoiding generalising from a very small sample).

5. Are there best practice mechanisms, existing consultation mechanisms or comprehensive co-design approaches that Australian, state and territory governments should use to consult and partner with these groups / individuals?

The overarching principle should be for government to listen to what they have already been told by people directly affected by CSA and actively using this information to inform decisions, actions and subsequent resourcing. This would support real change and avoid any perception that the implementation of the strategy is to be an exercise in asking victims and survivors of CSA to identify the problems and potential solutions but without subsequent action.

For marginalised groups time spent understanding the context of their experience is critical and this understanding can be enhanced through engagement with a peak body, or relevant community organisation. Following the consultation, it is necessary to confirm with the group the feedback that has been provided to ensure correct understanding and following this continued communication as to how their feedback has been used to influence outcomes. This gains trust and support for future engagement.

Outreaching models of engagement and collaboration with rural and remote communities are essential using successful locally determined models and approaches. These must include engaging local professional and community representatives who are known and trusted by the communities.

Regarding collaborating and consulting with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander victims, communities and Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations (ACCOs), we note that: -

- To codesign systems and practices that engage Aboriginal victims and perpetrators successfully, identified First Nations representatives from ACCOs and communities must be essential participants and contributors.
- Consultation on culturally safe techniques is critical including ongoing staffing by Aboriginal people within the National Office for Child Safety.

6. Do you belong to or represent one of these groups and wish to be involved in design and implementation of individual actions under the National Strategy once it is launched?

Yes. Barnardos has extensive experience in working with the following groups and we would be happy to provide our expertise and knowledge when individual actions are being designed and implemented post-launch:

- Children living in OOHC and who have left care both as victims/survivors of CSA and/or exhibiting harmful sexual behaviours.
- Family preservation and support services for non-offending parents and their children.
- Professionals assisting victims and survivors of CSA.

a. If yes, please identify which priority themes appear most relevant to you, noting you will have the opportunity to confirm your involvement in individual actions once the National Strategy is launched (and your answer here will not prevent you from being invited to be involved in actions outside any priority themes you have identified).

The following three priority themes are highly relevant to our work and we would welcome being involved in individual actions once the National Strategy is launched:

- Education and building child safe cultures (strategic priority theme #1)
- Supporting and empowering victims and survivors (strategic priority theme #2)
- Support services for children exhibiting harmful sexual behaviours (strategic priority theme #3)

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.