

Submission:

National Strategy Advisory Group Model

The Centre for Excellence in Child and Family Welfare (the Centre) welcomes the opportunity to provide a short submission on the *National Strategy Advisory Group Model Public Consultation Paper* for consideration by the National Office for Child Safety.

The Centre is the peak body for child and family services in Victoria. For over 100 years we have advocated for the rights of children and young people to be heard, to be safe, to access education and to remain connected to family, community and culture. We represent over 150 community service organisations, students and individuals throughout Victoria working across the continuum of child and family services, from prevention and early intervention to the provision of out-of-home care.

The Centre acknowledges the significant role the Advisory Group will play in shaping culture and embedding practices that will work toward eliminating child sexual abuse. We welcome the opportunity the Advisory Group will provide for capturing and embedding the views and perspectives of priority groups and recognise the Advisory Group's role in the sensitive and compassionate provision of support to victims and survivors of child sexual abuse.

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

The consultation paper indicates seven priority groups. The Centre recommends there should be at least one representative from each of these groups. Given the proposed size of 15 members, that would leave seven further positions to be filled. These could come from organisations with demonstrated experience in advocating for and working with one or more of the listed priority groups. Given the cap on 15 positions, it would make sense, where possible, to recruit organisations that represent a wide pool of stakeholders.

In accordance with the Themes listed in the First Action Plans, and the identified priority groups, we recommend that consideration be given to representatives from organisations with:

- Up-to-date knowledge and expertise in areas related to the plan, including preventative measures aimed at eliminating the risk of child sexual abuse and related harms for all Australian children.
- Capacity to reach stakeholders in all, or at least some of, the priority groups. We support the consultation paper statement that 'Members, where representing organisations or specific cohorts, will be asked to consult internally or with relevant networks where appropriate'. The Centre for Excellence in Child and Family Welfare, as a peak body, represents member agencies who work with all seven priority groups listed in the consultation paper, and has ready-made avenues and pathways for consulting with priority groups.

- Direct experience of engaging with, or at least a sound understanding of, the sensitivities required to engage with victim and survivor groups which could be through service provision or academic research involving victims and survivors.
- Familiarity with and application of evidence-based practice, including the incorporation of research, practice expertise and client perspectives to prevent or respond to child sexual abuse and embed child safe cultures within the community.
- Existing and wide-reaching relationships with government and non-government organisations, and community members to promote the values and strategies aligned with the strategy.
- A strong awareness of historical national and offender preventative and intervention strategies, which could help shape frameworks to promote child safety.
- Experience in, or expert knowledge of, support services available for victims and survivors and proven models of therapeutic interventions.

2. What should be included in the terms of reference for the Advisory Group

The Centre makes the following recommendations for inclusion in the Terms of Reference:

- That members are able to provide the Advisory Group with clear and concise information obtained from consultations with stakeholders and networks related to specific agenda items and themes to be discussed at meetings.
- That if a specific representative is not able to attend a meeting then the organisation will provide a delegate from that organisation with authority to be able to make informed decisions and agreements with the other members of the group.

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?

Victims and survivors need to be able to express their views and share their experiences in a non-threatening, supportive environment. They need the time and resources to help develop strategies to prevent sexual violence against children and young people, and to offer protection and support to other victims.

The Centre believes this can best be achieved through victim and survivor representation on the Advisory Group, but also by having an additional group that is dedicated to victims and survivors.

Representation of victims and survivors on the Advisory Group Committee would send a message that their voices matter, would help promote a more authentic conversation in the Advisory Group, and provide a critically important context to shape implementation of the framework and strategies.

Having an additional victim and survivors group would provide more time to be heard and could create a safe environment where they may feel more confident to speak openly of their recommendations and ideas.

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

In accordance with the actions, themes and priorities of the National Strategy, there should be a diverse range of groups represented and supported to participate in the Advisory Group, and to contribute to any additional groups that may inform the Advisory Group.

The Centre recommends that the Advisory Group include an organisation or academic expert capable of representing the needs of children in care, people with a care experience, and/or carers. The National strategy makes no specific mention of this group and they are not a priority group. Yet we know from our members' work with children in residential care that their trauma experiences mean they are particularly vulnerable to sexual exploitation.

All priority groups need the opportunity to engage and the necessary supports to enable safe participation. Members should be encouraged to nominate any supports that would facilitate their participation, and this process should be made easy and comfortable for each representative. For people with a disability, the range of supports needed might vary but no person should be excluded from being heard or from participating on the basis of their disability.