

2022

**THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY FOR THE
AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY**

STATEMENT

**ACT Government Fourth Annual Progress Report responding to Recommendations of the
Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to the Child Sexual Abuse**

**Presented by
Andrew Barr MLA
Chief Minister**

Madame Speaker, it is my privilege to table the ACT Government's Fourth Annual Progress Report responding to the Recommendations of the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse.

Since 2018, the ACT Government has reported annually on our progress towards implementing the recommendations of the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse.

From our last update in May 2021, we have completed work on an additional 42 commitments. We have now delivered on 209 recommendations. Work is in-progress on a further 75.

Work has progressed across all four themes of the Royal Commission's recommendations. I will highlight some updates against each of these themes in turn, followed by updates on the additional reports released by the Commission.

The first theme is Making Institutions Child Safe.

Work is progressing across a range of portfolios to ensure our institutions are child safe.

The Education Directorate has launched Phase One of a Child Safe Principles website, giving schools resources and guidance on identifying and responding to child sexual abuse. The website will become a central hub for child safety resources and, this year, the ACT Government will be expanding it to include information about responding to harmful sexual behaviours in children, staff sexual misconduct, and provide an information sharing toolkit for schools.

We are also contributing to the *National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children 2021-31*. The Safe and Supported Framework has

been developed by all Australian Governments with the Secretariat of National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care (SNAICC). The framework creates a national approach to reducing the rates of child abuse and neglect, and their intergenerational effects.

The second theme is an Oversight System that Responds to Child Safety.

In this reporting period, the ACT Government has made progress towards establishing an external review mechanism for child protection decision-making. The Community Services Directorate and the ACT Human Rights Commission hosted roundtables with ACT stakeholders and colleagues from Queensland and Victoria. The insights from these roundtables are being used to develop an external review mechanism which incorporates family-led, trauma-informed, strengths-based, transparent, and restorative approaches. The ACT Government has approved funding of \$200,000 to devise this model and concurrently implement practice reform in internal decision-making.

The Territory Records Office continues to work towards improvements in recordkeeping practice and access arrangements that advance the principles articulated in Volume 8 of the Royal Commission's report.

The Territory Records Office has been leading work done by the Council of Australasian Archives and Records Authorities to develop guidelines on maximising access to care leavers' records. The Territory Records Office also participated in work by Monash University on a Charter of Lifelong Rights in Childhood Recordkeeping in Out-of-Home Care.

The third theme is Services for Children and Young People

To support children with harmful sexual behaviours, the Education Directorate has developed a 'what you need to do' quick reference guide for schools and 'what you need to know' comprehensive resource for staff. These resources aim to improve schools' responses to students with harmful sexual behaviours whilst also improving awareness and understanding of harmful sexual behaviours. The Health Directorate has undertaken consultation and commenced a Service Mapping Analysis to tailor the responses for harmful sexual behaviours to the ACT context.

Moving to the fourth and final theme, Tailored Support through Specialist Services.

The ACT Government has made a firm commitment to fully embed the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Placement Principle into legislation, policy and practice, recognising its importance and its role in reducing the disproportionate representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in the child protection and out of home care systems.

In 2021, the ACT Government commenced foundation, consultation and research work required to ensure the Principle is appropriately described in the *Children and Young People Act 2008*. The Our Booris, Our Way Oversight Committee agreed to the ACT Government's draft discussion paper and draft community engagement plan and provided advice on culturally appropriate consultation with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community. The Secretariat of National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care (SNAICC) will meet with communities later in 2022.

This work will help keep children connected to their families, communities, cultures and country, and ensure the participation of

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in decisions about their children's care and protection.

The ACT Government has also engaged SNAICC to deliver related training to all Child and Youth Protection Services staff to ensure that, for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children coming into contact with the care and protection system, staff have the cultural knowledge to respond appropriately and sensitively to them and their families.

In February 2021, the Functional Family Therapy – Child Welfare program was established with ACT Together, to stabilise foster and kinship care placements and to support the restoration of children in care with their birth families. Functional Family Therapy addresses safety concerns in the family environment with a holistic approach. The program works *with* families to improve home dynamics, decrease dysfunctional behaviour patterns, and reduce the risk of abuse and neglect so that children can remain safe at home.

The ACT also helped develop and endorsed the *National Strategy to Prevent and Respond to Child Sexual Abuse*. By contributing to the National Strategy, the ACT is helping to drive a long-term, nationally consistent and coordinated approach to preventing child sexual abuse in families, in online environments, and in institutions.

We are continuing to address recommendations from the Redress and Criminal Justice Reports.

The ACT joined the ten-year National Redress Scheme on 1 July 2018. The Scheme is an important step to acknowledging the long lasting and severe injuries that can affect survivors for the rest of their lives. In 2020-21, we received and responded to 21 requests for information from the National Redress Scheme Operator. Three offers of redress were made

by the Scheme Operator in response to applications relating to ACT Government institutions.

The ACT Government received three requests for Direct Personal Responses to meet the needs of survivors in 2020-21 and Victim Support ACT continues to provide counselling in response to referrals from the Scheme.

A total of 71 recommendations from the Criminal Justice Report are now complete.

I highlight here the ACT's highly successful Intermediary Program. The Intermediary Program was fully established in 2020 and ensures that people with communication difficulties are supported by an independent communication specialist to give their best evidence to police and to the Court. The ACT Program is the only scheme in Australia that operates 24 hours a day/7 days a week, and which has been able to allocate an intermediary to every referral it has received.

As at 31 January this year, the ACT Intermediary Program has received 391 referrals from ACT Policing, 54 referrals from ACT Courts and 12 referrals from ACT Legal Aid. In 2021, the ACT Government allocated funding to continue the intermediary scheme for a further two years.

In closing, ensuring children and young people's safety is a fundamental responsibility of society. We are proud to be making transformational changes to how we prevent and respond to child sexual abuse in the ACT.

We will continue to report on our progress to the Assembly and to the ACT community. I look forward to sharing our progress to implement the Royal Commission's recommendations with you in 2023.

Thank you.