



Inquiry into annual and financial reports 2024–2025

Answer to question on notice

Asked by: Mr Thomas Emerson MLA

Addressed to: Minister for Children, Youth and Families

Reference: HCSD

Hearing: 12 November 2025

In relation to: Child and youth protection services and Predatory behaviour and child sexual exploitation

Question received: 14 November 2025

Answer Due: 27 November 2025

1. Is the government doing any work to directly address issues of child sexual exploitation in the ACT, including within the child protection system?
2. I understand that there are no proactive mechanisms available to interrupt predatory behaviour when it is identified by child support/child protection workers, or even by ACT Policing. Services need to wait until an offence has occurred before they can take any action, unless the vulnerable child involved is willing to make a disclosure - which they may not be willing or able to do. Is that correct?
 - a. Has this issue been reported to the government?
 - b. Does the government have any plans for legislative change to address this barrier to intervention?
 - c. Has the directorate issued any cease-and-desist notices over the last five years in relation to potential or actual sexual exploitation of, or inappropriate relationships with, children in its care?

Mr Michael Pettersson MLA: The answer to the Member's question is as follows:

1. A range of safeguards operate in the ACT to protect children from sexual exploitation and other types of harm. Together, these aim to limit the risk of problematic behaviour in people who work with or support children and young people. Key safeguarding mechanisms include:
 - **Working with Vulnerable People (WWVP) scheme** – provides an assessment of whether a person is suitable to engage in work or volunteering that involves children or vulnerable adults.

- **Reportable Conduct Scheme** – oversees how organisations prevent and respond to allegations of child abuse and misconduct. Under the Scheme, certain employers who work with children are required to investigate claims of sexual misconduct by their staff and volunteers, and report to the ACT Ombudsman any allegations or convictions of child-related misconduct by an employee.
- **ACT Child Safe Standards scheme** – establishes 10 Standards to promote and protect the rights, safety and wellbeing of children and young people. Legislation changes in August 2024 made it mandatory for ACT organisations providing services to children and young people to begin implementing the Child Safe Standards.

Child sexual exploitation is an issue all jurisdictions face and the causes are complex and multi-faceted. The Health and Community Services Directorate (HCSD) work closely with ACT Policing, other key Directorates and community services to do as much preventative work as possible. This includes:

- Sharing information to offer the best opportunity to disrupt the unsafe interactions and support young people.
- Establishing a cross agency working group to share contemporary information about young people at risk or currently being exposed to exploitation to better understand the risks and develop a preventative plan for each young person.
 - The working group is closely aligned with the Recidivist Offender Multi-Agency Round Table (ROMART) meeting where there may be young people engaged in multiple different types of anti-social and self-harmful behaviour. ROMART also includes representation from multiple agencies and ACT Police to discuss young people at risk of recidivism.
- ACT Government has funded Sexual Health and Family Planning ACT (SHFTPACT) to deliver a child sexual exploitation prevention project. The project will:
 - Scope the issue of child sexual exploitation and service system touchpoints in consultation with stakeholders;
 - Facilitate a Community of Practice among relevant stakeholders; and
 - lead the co-design and development of sector resources.
- Services provided by the Rape Crisis Service and other medical professionals, such as General Practitioners.
- Referrals to the Therapeutic Support Panel (TSP). Under the *Children and Young People Act 2008*, an organisation can make a referral to the TSP if the entity believes on reasonable grounds that the child or young persons has a genuine need for therapeutic support services and is at risk of engaging in harm to themselves or someone else such as a risk of sexual exploitation. The TSP must carry out an assessment and may develop a therapy plan for the young person to support the person to enable them to prevent future sexual exploitation.

- Utilisation of cease-and-desist letters to support behaviour change before escalating to applications for Personal Protection Orders where more enforcement is required.

Work in this space is ongoing and requires all levers across government to support both disruption, criminal prosecution and victim support, including recognition of the role of substance misuse.

2. It is not the case that a criminal offence must have occurred before any action can be taken that will reduce the risk of harm (or further harm) to children.

There are several mechanisms that allow for conduct below a criminal threshold to be reported, investigated, and acted upon in order to prevent harm. One example is the Reportable Conduct Scheme, which applies to all ACT Public Servants, as well as a range of other designated entities, including approved kinship and foster care organisations, approved residential care organisations, education and care services, and more. Similarly, when a child young person is at risk of significant harm, reports can and should be made to Children Youth and Families.

Government continues to explore what further opportunities are available to strengthen safeguards for young people. This includes continuous review legislative and non-legislative mechanisms to support the prevention of child sexual exploitation.

With respect to part (c), yes, the HCSD, Director-General has issued Cease and Desist notices over the last five years. HCSD works proactively in this space to disrupt the behaviour of the alleged perpetrators by using 'Cease and Desist' letters and applying for and having Personal Protection Orders served on alleged perpetrators.

Approved for circulation to the Standing Committee on Social Policy

Signature:



Date: 29.1.26

By the Minister for Children, Youth and Families, Mr Michael Pettersson MLA