

31 July 2026

Mr Michael Manthorpe PSM
Lead Reviewer
National Redress Scheme Eighth Anniversary Review

Mode of delivery: upload via DSS Engage

National Redress Scheme Eighth Anniversary Review – submission on behalf of the Relationships Australia Federation

Thank you for the opportunity to contribute to the Eighth Anniversary Review of the National Redress Scheme. Relationships Australia National Office is making this submission on behalf of the 8 member organisations of the Relationships Australia Federation. We understand that a number of our members are making their own submissions, and others have engaged directly with you in interviews during the Review. As such, we do not seek to replicate their specific practice insights and case studies, but rather to provide a consolidated overview of the Relationships Australia Federation's position. In doing so, this submission draws on consultations held in June and July 2026 with our members to harness the expertise of our staff across the country and the experiences of our clients and the communities we serve. If it would be of assistance to the Review to have access to any additional data from our members, please do not hesitate to contact us.

The work of Relationships Australia

Relationships Australia is a federation of community-based, not-for-profit organisations with no religious affiliations. Our services are for all members of the community, regardless of religious belief, age, gender, sexual orientation, lifestyle choice, cultural background or economic circumstances.

Relationships Australia has provided family relationships services for over 75 years, including counselling, dispute resolution, children's services, services for victims and perpetrators of family violence, services for older people, and relationship and professional education. We aim to support all people in Australia to live with positive and respectful relationships, and believe that people have the capacity to change how they relate to others.

The core of our work is relationships – through our programs, we work with people to enhance not only family relationships, but also relationships with friends, colleagues, and across communities. Relationships Australia believes that violence, coercion, control and inequality are unacceptable.

We respect the rights of all people to live life fully within their families and communities with dignity and safety, and to enjoy healthy relationships. These principles underpin our work.

Relationships Australia is committed to:

- Working in rural, regional and remote areas, recognising that there are fewer resources available to people in these areas, and that they live with pressures, complexities and uncertainties not experienced by those living in cities.
- Collaboration. We work collectively with local and peak body organisations to deliver a spectrum of prevention, early and tertiary intervention programs across generations and with men, women, young people and children. We recognise that often a complex suite of supports (for example, family support programs, mental health services, gambling services, drug and alcohol services, and access to safe and affordable housing) is needed by people affected by family violence and other complexities in relationships.
- Enriching family relationships, including providing support to parents, and encouraging good and respectful communication.
- Ensuring that social and financial disadvantage is not a barrier to accessing services.
- Contributing practice evidence and skills to research projects, the development of public policy and the provision of effective services.

Relationships Australia member organisations deliver Redress Support Services (RSS) across all Australian States and Territories, as well as a range of specialised services for individuals and families who have experienced trauma, upheaval and grief, including services for Forgotten Australians, Post Adoption Support Services and support services for members of the Stolen Generation.

Our approach to this Review

Relationships Australia welcomes the Eighth Anniversary Review and the approach that you have set for it. Our assessment of the Scheme's operation is already before the Review in our submissions to the Joint Standing Committee of 27 February 2023 and 6 February 2026. Consistent with your invitation, we rely on those submissions rather than repeat them, and this submission confines itself to the question you posed in your Open Letter:

What needs to happen next, as the Scheme heads towards its conclusion?

We make this submission in a constructive spirit, recording what has improved (Section 2), the practical reforms achievable in the Scheme's remaining life (Section 3), what a genuinely safe and orderly conclusion requires (Section 4), and the arrangements that should endure beyond it (Section 5).

Recommendations

After eight years of delivering redress support alongside the Scheme, our interest is the same as yours: that the Scheme finish well, and leave behind what survivors will still need. Accordingly, we make the following recommendations:

Recommendation 1 That the Scheme revise the standard language and processes of all survivor-facing communications in consultation with survivors and Redress Support Services.

Recommendation 2 That the Scheme review and reform its fraud-flagging processes so that:

- a) similarity between applications concerning the same institution and perpetrator is recognised as consistent with patterns of institutional offending rather than treated as an indicator of fraud; and
- b) where patterns emerge across applications concerning one institution, this triggers examination of the institution's history and records rather than additional evidentiary burdens on survivors.

Recommendation 3 That the Scheme:

- a) develop institutional context briefs for use by all Independent Decision Makers;
- b) remove applicants' incarceration status from material visible to decision makers;
- c) restore published visibility of the qualification mix of the decision-maker cohort; and
- d) publish how consistency and quality of decision-making are monitored, including as new decision makers are engaged.

Recommendation 4 That the standards governing DPRs be strengthened while the Scheme retains its leverage over participating institutions, and built to endure beyond the cessation of the Scheme, by introducing enforceable minimum standards requiring participating institutions to:

- a) honour the survivor's choice of form, including face-to-face delivery, except in genuinely exceptional circumstances that are documented and reviewable; and
- b) deliver the response in a trauma-informed manner and within the survivor's preferred timeframe.

Recommendation 5 That the Australian Government, in conjunction with state and territory governments, provide targeted surge funding to record-holding bodies to meet Scheme-related demand through to the conclusion of processing.

- Recommendation 6* That the funding scope of the Scheme's legal support services be expanded to include formal advocacy and representation for survivors seeking review of ineligible outcomes, ensuring every survivor has access to legally qualified support should they require it.
- Recommendation 7* That the Australian Government, working with state and territory governments, examine mechanisms to address claim farming directed at redress applicants specifically.
- Recommendation 8* That the Scheme provide survivors with realistic, regularly updated timeframe information based on actual processing data, and manage the release of outcomes to avoid concentrated surges.
- Recommendation 9* That the processing cut-off of 30 June 2028 be extended, or that the Act be amended to provide that every application lodged by the application deadline will be processed to completion, however long that properly takes.
- Recommendation 10* That the Scheme's final-year planning provide for:
- a) surge funding for Redress Support Services scaled to rising demand; and
 - b) intensified, funded, face-to-face outreach to identified underserved cohorts.
- Recommendation 11* Mandatory quality safeguards, including trauma-informed induction and training for all Independent Decision Makers, quality review of Statements of Reasons, and public reporting on decision consistency through to the conclusion of processing.
- Recommendation 12* That funding for Redress Support Services must extend, at minimum, to the conclusion of processing, and be confirmed early enough to retain the workforce through the transition.
- Recommendation 13* A continuing redress support function well beyond 30 June 2027.
- Recommendation 14* That the Scheme's lasting legacy be a permanent, funded specialist service for survivors of institutional child sexual abuse, accessible not only to survivors but also to family members affected by a survivor's experience.
- Recommendation 15* That the design of all post-Scheme arrangements be undertaken through funded co-design with survivors, commencing before the application closure date.
- Recommendation 16* That the Government invest in targeted, practical capability-building for the systems survivors most use, rather than a simple awareness campaign.

For ease of reference, the recommendations of our February 2026 submission (quoted as made), which we maintain, were:

- Recommendation 1* That the operational timeline of the Scheme be extended indefinitely.
- Recommendation 2* That the Committee give consideration to the need for the Scheme's eligibility criteria to be expanded to include additional cohorts of impacted individuals.
- Recommendation 3* The development and early communication of a formal transition plan for RSS services.
- Recommendation 4* Further reform of case management practices within the Scheme, including:
- reconfirmation of the commitment to a survivor-centred, trauma informed Scheme, with a presumption of belief rather than suspicion and a commitment to the principle of "do no harm",
 - measures to ensure consistency in processing approaches and evidentiary requirements across similar applications,
 - implementation of a health prioritisation protocol with clear criteria for survivors with terminal illnesses, serious health conditions, or other circumstances requiring expedited processing,
 - implementation of quality review of Statement of Reasons by a panel that includes survivor advocates, with particular attention to language, tone, and consistency of decision-making
 - greater utilisation of RSS providers as professional resources who can efficiently provide context and clarification, and
 - regular and proactive communication with survivors and their nominees about application status and transparency regarding timeframes and processing backlogs.
- Recommendation 5* That funding arrangements for the Scheme take into account the likelihood of increases in the number and complexity of applications over the coming years.
- Recommendation 6* That further effort be made to enhance the accessibility and effectiveness of the Scheme for vulnerable cohorts, including through:
- genuine co-design of access initiatives with representatives from vulnerable cohorts including Aboriginal and Torres

- Strait Islander peoples, people with disability, CALD communities, people in custody, and care leavers,
- adequate resourcing for culturally safe and accessible outreach, both by the Scheme and by RSS, to underserved communities, and
 - provision of accessible application alternatives for vulnerable cohorts.

Section 1: Guiding Principles for this Submission

This submission is grounded in principles Relationships Australia has advanced consistently across a variety of government inquiries and consultations, as follows:

Principle 1 - Commitment to human rights

Relationships Australia contextualises its services, research and advocacy within imperatives to strengthen connections between people, scaffolded by a robust commitment to human rights. Relationships Australia recognises the indivisibility and universality of human rights and the inherent and equal freedom and dignity of all. In our 2023 submission to the inquiry by the Parliamentary Joint Committee on Human Rights into Australia's human rights framework, we recommended that Government should introduce a Human Rights Act that provides a positive framework for recognition of human rights in Australia.¹ For survivors of institutional child sexual abuse, redress is a matter of right, not administrative grace.

Principle 2 – Commitment to centring lived experience in policy and service design, delivery and evaluation

Centring lived experience (including through authentic co-design²) in policy and service design supports the development of policy, legislation and services that uphold human rights – especially human rights of individuals and groups who have traditionally been marginalised and excluded from policy discourse, or been the 'objects' of such discourse. In addition, centring lived experience can enhance the transparency and public accountability in policy and programme development, and the efficiency of government services, by supporting the delivery of outcomes that are valued by service users, not just administrators.

Principle 3 - Cultural safety and responsiveness

Our commitment to upholding human rights necessarily includes a commitment to respecting epistemologies beyond conventional Western ways of being, thinking and doing. Of acute importance is a commitment to respecting epistemologies and experiences of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people as foundational to policy and programme development, as well as service delivery. Connection to Country, and context-specific experiences of kinship, for example, do not countenance the hyper-individualism that pervades Western assumptions about distribution of resources and obligations between the Western nation-state and

¹ Available at https://www.relationships.org.au/wp-content/uploads/PJCHRhumanrightsframework.FINAL_.pdf

² For discussion of the abasement of the term 'co-design', particularly in First Nations policy, see eg Butler et al, 2025.

individual taxpayers and among individual taxpayers. Centring the epistemologies and experiences of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people is a necessary (although not sufficient) step in achieving the targets in the National Agreement on Closing the Gap.

Principle 4 – Accessible and inclusive public institutions, regulation and service delivery

Relationships Australia is committed to universal accessibility of services, as well as inclusive and culturally safe services. Our clients (and staff) experience stigma, marginalisation and exclusion arising from diverse circumstances and positionalities, including:

- ‘postcode injustice’ in accessing health, justice and other social services that are of consistent standards of quality and safety, regardless of location
- poverty
- status as users of care and support
- disability and longstanding health restrictions (including poor mental health)
- intimate partner violence, abuse or neglect as an older person, and/or child maltreatment
- family separation
- being an adult informal carer for a child or other adult
- being a young person caring for a child or an adult
- housing insecurity and instability
- employment precarity, unemployment and under-employment
- misuse of alcohol and other drugs, or experience of gambling harms
- people who come from culturally and linguistically marginalised backgrounds (including people who have chosen to migrate and people who have sought refuge)
- people affected by complex grief and trauma, intergenerational trauma, intersecting disadvantage and polyvictimisation
- survivors of institutional abuse
- people experiencing homelessness or housing precarity
- people who identify as members of the LGBTIQ+ communities, and
- younger and older people.

None of these circumstances, experiences and positionalities exists at the level of an individual or family. They become barriers to full enjoyment of human rights and full participation in economic, cultural, and social life through the operation of broader systemic and structural factors including:

- legal, political and bureaucratic frameworks
- beliefs and expectations that are reflected in decision-making structures (such as legislatures, courts and tribunals)
- policy settings that inform programme administration, and
- biases or prejudices that persist across society and that are reflected in arts, culture, media and entertainment.

Additional Principles relating to the delivery of the National Redress Scheme

Two further principles are of critical importance to the National Redress Scheme. The first is **trauma-informed practice**: every interaction a survivor has with the Scheme is either an instance of trauma-informed practice or a fresh exposure to institutional harm (see further discussion at Sections 3.1, 3.8).

The second, and related to the first, is **belief of survivors**: the Scheme was founded on a presumption of belief and a standard of reasonable probability, and any practice that reverses that presumption, however administratively motivated, dismantles the Scheme's reason for being (see Sections 3.2, 3.3).

Section 2: Looking back: what has improved

Relationships Australia's assessment of the Scheme's operation over its lifespan is set out in our submissions to the Joint Standing Committee of 27 February 2023 and 6 February 2026. We rely on those submissions and do not repeat them here. We do, however, wish to begin by acknowledging what has improved.

Over the life of the Scheme, our members have observed genuine improvements, including:

- incarcerated survivors can now apply from prison, supported by dedicated Scheme arrangements;
- greater flexibility in how the Scheme works with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander clients;
- identity verification processes have been progressively simplified, including for people in custody;
- written outcome letters, with statements of reasons attached, are now provided at the time of decision rather than on request; and
- the Scheme's engagement with Redress Support Services has deepened considerably, with providers now contributing directly through established committees.

Our members also report that the Scheme's Direct Personal Response team has been highly responsive, managing complex issues with institutions and advocating effectively for survivors, and the Scheme has demonstrated a capacity to locate records that survivors and support services could not, enabling applications to proceed that would otherwise have stalled.

Finally, when the Scheme prioritises an application, as it does for survivors with terminal illness, it has shown it can deliver a compassionate outcome within weeks, although our members report that this prioritisation is applied inconsistently, a matter we return to in Section 3.

Each of these improvements traces to feedback given through earlier reviews and inquiries. We are confident that the Scheme is capable of meaningful reform when the recommendations of reviews and the feedback of survivors and support services are acted upon.

Section 3: What needs to happen next: practical improvements for the Scheme's remaining life

You have asked what needs to happen next. This section answers that question for the period in which the Scheme is still receiving and processing applications. Each of the improvements below is, in our assessment, achievable within the Scheme's existing legislative framework and operational structures. They are drawn directly from the current, frontline experience of Relationships Australia's Redress Support Services across the country as at July 2026.

The Scheme was founded on commitments made in response to the Royal Commission: that survivors would be believed, that decisions would be made on the standard of reasonable probability, and that every interaction would be trauma-informed. Our members' consistent observation across jurisdictions, and echoing evidence we have previously given, is that the Scheme has drifted from these commitments in practice, and that survivors now experience a process that can feel as demanding and adversarial as the civil litigation the Scheme was designed to spare them. The improvements that follow are not new obligations. They are practical means of restoring what was promised.

3.1: Trauma-informed communication and process integrity

The most immediate and achievable improvement available to the Scheme lies in how it communicates with survivors. Our members report consistently that the language of requests for further information under section 24, procedural fairness processes and Statements of Reasons are not trauma-informed. For many survivors, receipt of a section 24 request generates significant distress, anxiety and uncertainty. Clients have told our members that on receiving these requests they do not feel believed, and that they experience the Scheme itself as another institution retraumatising them. Revising the standard language of Scheme correspondence, in consultation with survivors and support services, is a reform that could be delivered within months and would change the daily experience of the Scheme for thousands of applicants.

The concern extends beyond language to the integrity of the processes themselves. Our members now report clients receiving multiple section 24 requests on a single application; requests for information our members consider irrelevant to the outcome; and survivors being asked to produce records that the responsible institution has itself advised the Scheme do not exist. Our members also observe a stark asymmetry: institutions may take more than twelve months to respond to requests for information, while survivors are initially allowed approximately eight weeks. Each of these experiences compounds the message that the burden of proof has shifted onto the survivor.

Trauma-informed practice must also extend to the conversations in which outcomes are delivered and choices are made. Members report that some survivors have found outcome calls distressing even when receiving the maximum payment, describing conversations that felt patronising, focused narrowly on the monetary component, and in which they were encouraged to feel grateful rather than having their experiences acknowledged. Outcome

discussions should give proper weight to the whole of the redress package with the payment presented as simply one component alongside acknowledgement, counselling and the Direct Personal Response.

The distress generated by Scheme communications is absorbed by survivors, by their families, and by support services and a mental health system already under strain. We maintain the recommendation made in our February 2026 submission for reform of case management practices, including quality review of Statements of Reasons (Recommendation 4, [2026]).

To further enhance trauma-informed practice within the Scheme, we further **recommend** that the Scheme revise the standard language and processes of all survivor-facing communications in consultation with survivors and Redress Support Services. (**Recommendation 1**)

3.2: Reforming fraud flagging on supported applications

While we acknowledge that the Scheme must protect itself against fraud, our members' experience is that current fraud-flagging practices are systematically misdirected.

Our members report clusters of section 24 requests raising fraud concerns in response to applications lodged from the same institution at the same time. In one instance, a member conducting outreach to a remote community noted fraud-related section 24 requests across a substantial proportion of those applications. These applications were similar in nature, not due to fraud among survivors, but due to the systematic practices of the institution. Members in other jurisdictions report the same pattern: applications flagged because accounts from survivors of the same institution are “reasonably similar”.

Similarity of accounts is not evidence of fraud. It is evidence of how this abuse was perpetrated. Perpetrators characteristically offend in consistent, repeated ways against many children in the same setting. Treating that similarity as suspicious inverts the reality of institutional abuse and asks each survivor to prove that their suffering was unique — something no survivor should be required to do.

The consequences fall hardest on the most vulnerable. Supported applications from remote and predominantly Aboriginal communities are being met with suspicion, and the trusted relationships that made those applications possible are damaged in the process. Where a pattern of similar applications emerges from a single institution, the appropriate response is scrutiny of the institution, not of the survivors.

For these reasons, we **recommend** that the Scheme review and reform its fraud-flagging processes so that:

- a) similarity between applications concerning the same institution and perpetrator is recognised as consistent with patterns of institutional offending rather than treated as an indicator of fraud; and
- b) where patterns emerge across applications concerning one institution, this triggers examination of the institution's history and records rather than additional evidentiary burdens on survivors. (**Recommendation 2**)

3.3: Consistency and transparency in decision-making

Inconsistency in assessment outcomes has been raised by our members throughout the life of the Scheme. Our 2026 submission to the Joint Standing Committee documented siblings with shared experiences receiving materially different outcomes. Members today continue to report significant variations in outcomes for survivors of the same institutional settings despite similar contexts and abuse experiences, including for survivors of youth detention. It is difficult to reconcile such outcomes with a Scheme founded on reasonable probability and belief.

Three practical reforms to the systems within which Independent Decision Makers operate would materially improve consistency.

First, equip decision makers with institutional context. Eight years in, the Scheme holds an unmatched picture of the institutions named in applications: their histories, their records practices, and the patterns of offending associated with them. Yet each decision maker appears to approach each application without that context, generating avoidable requests for information and divergent conclusions. The Scheme should prepare institutional briefs (factual summaries of institutional history and known patterns) available to every decision maker assessing an application concerning that institution.

Secondly, remove information that risks bias. An applicant's incarceration status is currently visible in material before decision makers. It is irrelevant to what happened to that person as a child, and its presence risks importing assessments of “worthiness” into a scheme that must have none. It should be removed from decision-facing material.

Thirdly, restore transparency. Earlier in the Scheme's life, the qualifications of each decision maker were visible, however it appears that this has been removed. At the same time, members observe that the composition of the decision-maker cohort appears to have shifted away from social work and psychology backgrounds. We do not suggest any profession is incapable of trauma-informed decision-making, but the Scheme should be transparent about what mix of expertise it maintains, and how quality and consistency are overseen, particularly as decision-maker numbers grow to address the backlog.

Accordingly, we **recommend** that the Scheme:

- a) develop institutional context briefs for use by all Independent Decision Makers;
- b) remove applicants' incarceration status from material visible to decision makers;
- c) restore published visibility of the qualification mix of the decision-maker cohort; and
- d) publish how consistency and quality of decision-making are monitored, including as new decision makers are engaged. (**Recommendation 3**)

3.4: Minimum standards for Direct Personal Responses

The Direct Personal Response (“DPR”) is one of the most meaningful components of redress for many survivors. Yet our members observe that the DPR has become neglected, receiving little attention in public discussion and, increasingly, in institutional conduct.

The problem does not lie with the Scheme's own DPR team. Our members' recent experience of that team has been positive, noting the team's responsiveness, effective management of complex issues and willingness to advocate for survivors.

Despite the Scheme presenting survivors with an apparent entitlement to a written apology, a face-to-face meeting, or another form of their choosing, our members report that in practice, institutions are putting up considerable barriers and declining face-to-face responses on grounds of cost, logistics, travel reluctance or asserted safety concerns. One member reports multiple face-to-face responses refused within a matter of months. Members have also encountered an institution participating in a DPR while telling the survivor's support service that it did not believe the survivor's claims, and institutions insisting the response occur on their timetable rather than the survivor's. This approach undermines the importance of the DPR and risks becoming a further experience of the exercise institutional power against survivors.

Demand for DPRs will long outlast the application deadline. Many survivors defer the DPR, understandably choosing, after a protracted application process, to pause and heal before deciding whether to face the responsible institution. Member data indicates substantial numbers of clients who have expressed interest in a DPR but not yet sought one.

We therefore **recommend** that the standards governing DPRs be strengthened while the Scheme retains its leverage over participating institutions, and built to endure beyond the cessation of the Scheme, by introducing enforceable minimum standards requiring participating institutions to:

- a) honour the survivor's choice of form, including face-to-face delivery, except in genuinely exceptional circumstances that are documented and reviewable; and
- b) deliver the response in a trauma-informed manner and within the survivor's preferred timeframe. (**Recommendation 4**)

3.5: Funding for record-holding bodies

Applications depend on records, and the availability of those records can depend on bodies that were never resourced for the demand the Scheme has generated. Our members report that obtaining records can take up to twelve months, with requests bottlenecking in under-resourced systems that face simultaneous demand from support services, historical institutions, and lawyers acting for institutions.

The Scheme has advised that survivors do not need their records to apply. That is formally true, but it misunderstands why survivors seek them. Our members' experience is that survivors want their records because they want to put their best and most accurate position forward.

In order to rectify this, Relationships Australia **recommends** that the Australian Government, in conjunction with state and territory governments, provide targeted surge funding to record-holding bodies to meet Scheme-related demand through to the conclusion of processing. (**Recommendation 5**)

3.6: Legal support for survivors seeking review of ineligible outcomes

Free, independent legal support has been one of the Scheme's design strengths. Survivors can obtain advice on whether redress or civil action better serves their interests, and our members report no difficulty securing initial advice appointments for their clients. Relationships Australia values its collaboration with the Scheme's legal support services, and nothing in this section should be read as criticism of those services or the practitioners within them.

The gap lies in what those services are funded to do. Our members' consistent experience is that when a survivor receives an ineligible outcome and seeks a review, formal legal support becomes unattainable. The funded legal service is able to provide advice, but is not funded to advocate against a Scheme decision. Survivors are instead directed back to their Redress Support Service, whose practitioners are social workers and counsellors, not lawyers, and who are therefore unable to provide the legal support a review requires. The result is that the survivors facing adverse decisions find themselves with the least support to contest them.

Relationships Australia therefore **recommends** that the funding scope of the Scheme's legal support services be expanded to include formal advocacy and representation for survivors seeking review of ineligible outcomes, ensuring every survivor has access to legally qualified support should they require it. (**Recommendation 6**)

3.7: Claim Farming

As public awareness of the Scheme rises in its final period, our members report a marked increase in claim farming, including through television campaigns, promising outcomes the Scheme may not deliver. Members observe that this activity creates confusion for survivors, sets potentially unrealistic expectations, and channels people away from the free, wrap-around support of Redress Support Services and the Scheme's own legal support arrangements. Members expect this activity to intensify as the application deadline approaches and awareness campaigns, media coverage and community word-of-mouth all peak at once.

Survivors are entitled to legal representation, however we remain concerned at the apparent solicitation of a uniquely vulnerable cohort, at a moment of urgency, by actors whose fees will be met from payments intended as redress. We note recent moves in some jurisdictions to prohibit claim farming and **recommend** that the Australian Government, working with state and territory governments, examine mechanisms to address claim farming directed at redress applicants specifically. (**Recommendation 7**)

3.8: Survivor-focused communication and nominee processes

Predictable communication.

Our members report that survivors often receive limited or confusing updates on the progress of their applications, over waiting periods now measured in years. Members also observe that outcomes are released in “waves” which concentrates intense demand on support services. Communication of realistic timeframes, drawn from the Scheme's actual processing data, and a steadier release of outcomes would cost little and materially reduce distress.

Timely, accurate information is critical, both to the delivery of services and for survivors navigating the Scheme. We therefore **recommend** that the Scheme provide survivors with realistic, regularly updated timeframe information based on actual processing data, and manage the release of outcomes to avoid concentrated surges. (**Recommendation 8**)

Nominee arrangements.

The Assistance Nominee mechanism exists so that survivors who want support receive it at every point of contact. Yet members report survivors being contacted directly, including by phone, mail or myGov, even where a service has been formally nominated as first point of contact. This can mean that outcomes and requests arrive without support present. In the most serious case reported to us, a member service unable to locate a transient client sought the Scheme's assistance, only to be advised that the client had died nine months earlier. It is essential that throughout processing, the Scheme honour Assistance Nominee arrangements in every survivor contact and maintain direct and timely communications with services who have been nominated.

Section 4: A safe and orderly conclusion: what the final years require

Relationships Australia's position on the Scheme's timeline is a matter of record. We have recommended that its operational timeline be extended indefinitely, because a mechanism for redress should remain available for as long as survivors need it (Recommendation 1, [2026]). We maintain that position.

This Review, however, proceeds on the basis that the legislated dates stand and asks how the Scheme can be brought to a safe, orderly and timely conclusion. Whatever view is taken of the end date, the closing period must be planned now, and planned well.

Across our members' services, the current average time from application to outcome ranges from approximately two to three years, with the longest open applications now approaching four. On those timeframes, an application lodged in the Scheme's final months cannot receive a properly considered outcome before processing is legislated to cease. Of further concern, it is reasonable to expect that the volume of applications will be at its peak, as awareness surges and the survivors who have waited longest finally come forward. A conclusion that is "safe and orderly" for the Scheme but not for those survivors would mark a sorry conclusion to this vitally important Scheme.

4.1: Extending processing to honour every application lodged

The commitment implicit in the application deadline is that any application lodged before 30 June 2027 will be processed fairly and fully. On current processing times, that commitment cannot be met by 30 June 2028.

Our members' data is consistent on this point. Applications currently average two to three years from submission to outcome. Our members currently hold applications lodged in 2022 that remain undetermined four years later. One member reports an application from a survivor in custody, submitted in March 2022, that the Scheme did not begin processing for more than

two years. Another reports an application lodged in July 2025 that after twelve months has yet to receive an acknowledgement. Dedicated processing teams, including for terminal illness, have not consistently translated into faster outcomes. Further compounding this, review processes add significant time, with one member's longest-running matter relating to an application originally submitted in October 2018, the review of which remains unresolved.

As discussed in section 4.2, below, application volumes are rising across all our members' services as the conclusion draws closer, and the queue, as a result, is only worsening.

As a result, we **recommend** that the processing cut-off of 30 June 2028 be extended, or that the Act be amended to provide that every application lodged by the application deadline will be processed to completion, however long that properly takes. (**Recommendation 9**)

We urge that this commitment is made early and communicated clearly. Survivors deciding now whether to come forward are weighing whether the Scheme will still be there for them, and our members report that uncertainty about post-2028 processing is already present in their conversations with clients. Certainty is a critical element of safety.

4.2: The final-year surge and the survivors still beyond reach

Every one of our members reports the same trajectory: demand is rising, and the final year will further drive numbers up. One member describes “no slowing down” of inbound referrals; another has seen annual caseloads nearly triple over five years. Others report previous welcome declines in their waitlist reversing as enquiries climb. Members attribute the rise to peaking public awareness (arising from media coverage, community word-of-mouth, etc) and expect it to intensify as the deadline approaches. Understandably, this growing urgency, brings with it heightened anxiety, distress, and demand for immediate appointments.

The Royal Commission's experience is likely to be replicated within the Scheme: the survivors who carry the greatest vulnerability and complexity are those who come forward last. Our members already see this pattern, with clients who connect, begin, withdraw, and circle back as they build readiness. A closing period planned only for average applicants will fail the survivors most in need.

We have previously raised concerns about cohorts who have had limited engagement with the Scheme to date, and Members continue to identify survivors with little or impeded access:

- people in remote communities, particularly Aboriginal communities, where trusted face-to-face engagement is what enables disclosure, and where fly-in-fly-out outreach has sometimes left communities to manage the aftermath alone;
- people in custody, where corrections priorities and post-release dislocation break continuity of support;
- residents of aged care;
- people with disability in supported accommodation;
- young people now leaving care; and

- culturally and linguistically diverse communities, where a responsible institution may be deeply embedded in community life and pursuing redress risks family, community and identity. One Member records effectively no CALD clients across five years of service, which we read as a measure of barriers, not an indication of the absence of need.

Members also report survivors in regional communities for whom the responsible institution is a current employer, and for whom promised anonymity protections are not trusted. Finally, members report survivors choosing not to apply at all out of fear about how their information may be shared, including fear that details could reach a perpetrator known to them or their family.

In order to conclude successfully, supported access to the Scheme must be achieved for all survivors who need it. We therefore **recommend** that the Scheme's final-year planning provide for:

- a) surge funding for Redress Support Services scaled to rising demand; and
- b) intensified, funded, face-to-face outreach to identified underserved cohorts.

(Recommendation 10)

4.3: Safeguarding decision quality under closure pressure

The pressure to clear the backlog before the Scheme's conclusion is real, and our members share the objective to resolve applications as quickly as possible. Survivors have waited too long already. But members are equally clear about the risk that accompanies acceleration. Clearing applications faster is only safe if the outcomes remain properly considered.

We understand that the Scheme is recruiting additional Independent Decision Makers at a previously unseen pace. We urge the Government to ensure that new decision makers are upskilled with a deep understanding of institutional child sexual abuse, of the institutions concerned, and of trauma-informed assessment before they begin deciding cases.

Members already observe quality variation and outcomes difficult to reconcile with the Scheme's founding standard. Expanding the cohort quickly, without visible quality assurance, can only widen that variation.

In order to preserve the vision and commitment of the Scheme in this accelerated period, we **recommend** mandatory quality safeguards, including trauma-informed induction and training for all Independent Decision Makers, quality review of Statements of Reasons, and public reporting on decision consistency through to the conclusion of processing.

(Recommendation 11)

A guarantee that every application will be processed must carry within it a guarantee about the standard to which it is processed.

4.4: What a genuinely safe and orderly wind-down requires

Our members support a well-planned conclusion, and we note that for this to occur, several preconditions must be in place.

The first is honest sequencing. A wind-down can only safely be communicated when the Scheme is genuinely within reach of completing its work. The Scheme should be able to say to survivors, credibly, that it has the capacity to process every application before it closes. Until that is true, closure communication must be handled with great care, paired always with the guarantee that lodged applications will be honoured.

The second is early, consistent communication. To ensure an orderly closure, the Scheme must proactively engage with survivors, maintain clear public guidance on dates and what they mean and share realistic timeframes drawn from actual processing data.

The third is continuity of support. If contracts for Redress Support Services end on 30 June 2027, the application deadline, service providers face the loss of a highly skilled and trusted workforce at a moment of critical need. These practitioners are difficult to replace. Survivors' relationships with them are often the product of years of careful engagement. A wind-down that stands down the support workforce twelve months before processing completes is not orderly. We therefore **recommend** that funding for Redress Support Services must extend, at minimum, to the conclusion of processing, and be confirmed early enough to retain the workforce through the transition. (**Recommendation 12**)

Our earlier recommendation for a formal, early-communicated RSS transition plan (Recommendation 3, [2026]) would further assist in ensuring support services continue and that the ongoing needs of survivors are met as outlined in this section.

5. What should endure: arrangements beyond the Scheme

The need for enduring arrangements is not an argument that the Scheme has failed. It follows from the nature of the Scheme's own work. Redress does not conclude when an application is determined. Outcomes generate Direct Personal Responses that survivors may take years to feel ready for; payments generate needs for financial counselling and protection; determinations generate reviews; and the act of disclosure itself (often the first in a survivor's life) gives rise to needs for counselling, advocacy and practical support that continue long after the Scheme's administrative processes end.

Eight years of the Scheme have built a specialist workforce, trusted relationships with survivors and communities that took years of careful engagement to establish, and a tested model of trauma-informed, wrap-around support. It would be an egregious failure to let that end with the Scheme.

5.1: A continuing redress support function

Our members' data indicates that a substantial majority of their current clients will still have live applications, reviews, Direct Personal Responses or counselling arrangements at the Scheme's legislated milestones.

Redress Support Services provide trauma-informed support, advocacy and case coordination across every stage of a survivor's engagement with the Scheme. When applications close on 30 June 2027, that work will continue. We therefore **recommend** a continuing redress support function well beyond 30 June 2027. (**Recommendation 13**) While assistance with new applications will no longer be required, all other elements of the existing RSS model must be funded for as long as Scheme processes remain live.

5.2: An enduring specialist service: the Scheme's lasting legacy

Beyond the completion of Scheme lies the deeper question: what does Australia permanently owe survivors of institutional child sexual abuse? The Scheme will end; the trauma it responded to will not. Survivors' needs for specialist, trauma-informed support, ranging from counselling, case management and advocacy through to practical assistance with housing, health, disability and aged care systems, continue across the life course, and often intensify with age.

We **recommend** that the Scheme's lasting legacy be a permanent, funded specialist service for survivors of institutional child sexual abuse. (**Recommendation 14**)

Such a service is already in place for other key cohorts in Australia. Care leavers and Forgotten Australians, among others, can access enduring, wrap-around services staffed by practitioners who understand institutional trauma. Our members deliver several of these services, and see daily the impact they have. Every survivor of institutional child sexual abuse should have access to such services.

The service must be national in reach but shaped by community. It must also answer the needs of an ageing survivor population, whose case-management needs grow, and remain open to those the Scheme never reached. For Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander survivors, healing must be culturally safe, responsive to the layered traumas of colonisation and institutionalisation, and designed and delivered under Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leadership, in partnership between community-controlled and mainstream organisations.

5.3 Including families in enduring support

The harm done by institutional child sexual abuse is never contained to one person. It impacts not only survivors, but their families and broader communities as well. Our members, whose organisations exist to understand relationships and family systems, see these impacts daily. Family members are often the first responders to disclosure and the ongoing support systems for survivors, yet they stand outside the formal boundaries of the Scheme.

The moment of redress itself can be a family moment. One member reports a Direct Personal Response at which a survivor chose to be supported not by their practitioner but by their adult

child, for whom seeing their parent's history acknowledged transformed their understanding of who that parent had been, and laid the foundation for repair of a relationship that trauma had poisoned. Support that includes family does not dilute the survivor's place at the centre, it multiplies what redress can heal.

We therefore **recommend** that an enduring specialist support service be accessible not only to survivors but also to family members affected by a survivor's experience.

(Recommendation 14)

5.4: Co-design with survivors

Nothing proposed in this section should be designed without the people it exists for. Where survivors and support services shaped Scheme processes previously, the improvements recorded above in Section 2 followed. Relationships Australia has recommended genuine co-design throughout the Scheme's life, and that obligation is no less important now, as Government considers what takes the place of the Scheme into the future. Co-design conducted after decisions are made is consultation wearing a costume.

Relationships Australia therefore **recommends** that the design of all post-Scheme arrangements be undertaken through funded co-design with survivors, commencing before the application closure date. **(Recommendation 15)** Co-design must include survivors of institutional child sexual abuse, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander survivors under their own leadership, participating in the design of the continuing support function, the enduring specialist service, and closure arrangements themselves.

5.5: Building the capability of mainstream systems

However well designed, specialist services will never be the only places where survivors seek support. Survivors of institutional child sexual abuse are, and will remain, patients in health services, clients of mental health systems, people in custody, residents of aged care, and users of housing and disability supports. These mainstream systems must be fit for purpose and able to support a population whose trauma will shape every subsequent encounter with institutions of any kind.

We **recommend** that the Government invest in targeted, practical capability-building for the systems survivors most use, rather than a simple awareness campaign **(Recommendation 16)**.

This includes:

- a) training frontline staff to recognise institutional trauma and redress-related distress;
- b) referral protocols connecting mainstream services to specialist services; and
- c) priority pathways so that a survivor in crisis is not simply added to a general waiting list.

Conclusion

For the reasons outlined in our 2026 submission to the Joint Standing Committee, Relationships Australia holds grave concerns about the impending cessation of the National Redress Scheme.

Notwithstanding those concerns, we have welcomed the opportunity to engage with this Review to identify opportunities for ensuring the final years of the Scheme, and its enduring legacy, are trauma-informed and safe for survivors.

Thank you again for the opportunity to make this submission. Should you require any clarification of any aspect of this submission please contact me (at ntebbey@relationships.org.au) or Dr Susan Cochrane, National Policy Manager, Relationships Australia (scochrane@relationships.org.au).

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'N Tebbey', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Nick Tebbey
National Executive Officer