



Dr Sean Turner  
Acting Committee Secretary  
Inquiry into the oversight of the implementation of  
redress related recommendations of the  
Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse  
Department of the Senate  
PO Box 6100  
Canberra ACT 2600

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Dear Dr Turner

Thank you for the opportunity to give evidence to this important Inquiry. At the hearing on 8 October 2018, the Committee's Chair, Senator Derryn Hinch, asked for our views about what constituted genuine consultation. I am writing to outline the Alliance for Forgotten Australians' response.

The Australian Government is to be congratulated on establishing the Independent Advisory Group on Redress, of which I was honoured to be a member. Such consultative mechanisms are important for governments in developing survivor-informed policy. By their nature, they have limitations. Where committee members sign confidentiality agreements, they cannot in turn consult with their constituents, and they cannot share information, even with their executive or board. This may be understandable in light of the sensitivity and confidentiality of the matters being discussed, but it is not ideal.

Such consultative mechanisms best work for governments, who can publicise that they are taking advice. But due to the secrecy associated with them, such mechanisms risk alienating our constituents. These mechanisms are less successful for advocates. If the policy or implementation is flawed, the public will question not only the government, but the capability of advisory groups. As members of these groups, we are unable to share the nature of our advice, explain whether there has been consensus, or indicate the degree to which governments have accepted our advice and what factors led to a particular view being endorsed by a committee. Our credibility with our constituents is always fragile – we have been dealing with highly visible policies in which people have a strong stake and in which there is a huge capacity for individuals to be re-traumatised.

The nature of true consultation is based on a collaborative model, not a hierarchical, bureaucratic model. We believe that vital elements of consultation include:

- Before the consultation even begins, an understanding of who is being consulted, how and when.
- Consultation must be with lived experience practitioners, not just other bureaucrats and academics.
- Make clear the parameters for consultation, explain what is negotiable and what is already agreed.
- Many people don't understand how governments work and how governments make decisions. If we can explain this during the consultation process, we may achieve a greater level of acceptance.
- True consultation takes place where there is honesty about the context within which the policy is being developed and the consultation is undertaken – e.g., what the Commonwealth needs to do to get the states on board.
- We need to know who the decision maker is, and what opportunity there is to influence the actual decision maker, or appeal or respond to a decision.
- Unrealistic timeframes may be a reality. But we all pay a price for rushed, poorly informed policy implementation.
- We need meaningful plain English communication strategies about the consultation process, the main issues considered, and what was taken into account and by whom in reaching a decision.

We have previously acknowledged that the timeframes for the development and introduction of the redress scheme were tight. We appreciate that this has been extremely difficult for all concerned. Feedback from Forgotten Australians and other survivors strongly suggests that there are flaws in the scheme which urgently need to be fixed. It is possible that had there been a different type of consultation, we may not have ended up with some of the concerns being expressed about aspects of the redress scheme, for example about the application form, or the rigidity of the assessment framework and its failure to acknowledge the impact of abuse.

We have previously written to Ministers and the Department of Social Services to offer the engagement of our lived experience practitioners. We continue to make this offer to your committee. Thank you again for the opportunity to provide input. I am happy to provide any additional information that would assist you.

Yours sincerely



Caroline Carroll OAM  
Chair