



everyone's family

The Smith Family

Response to Request for submissions - Advisory Group for National Strategy to Prevent and Respond to Child Sexual Abuse

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INTRODUCTION

The Smith Family welcomes the opportunity to provide input into the consultations on a proposed model for a non-government advisory group and alternative consultation mechanisms to support implementation of the National Strategy to prevent and respond to Child Sexual Abuse 2021-2030. Our input is based around our experience of working in communities and with families who experience disadvantage and whose lives are challenging and complex.

As Australia's largest national education-oriented charity, The Smith Family supports disadvantaged Australian children to participate fully in their education, giving them the best chance at breaking the cycle of disadvantage. Our work focuses on Australian children in families and communities where we know it's harder for them to fully participate in their education without some help. Our programs intersect with the wider service system and the National Plan will influence the support for families available in the 91 communities Across Australia in which we work.

KEY POINTS

- We understand that the establishment of the Advisory Group will encompass the provision of regular advice and input on the implementation of the National Strategy's First National Action Plan and Commonwealth Action Plan, i.e., national coordination of activities and advising Australian Government priorities.
- We strongly support the intent to establish an Advisory Group for the sector and an open, inclusive, and flexible stakeholder list and consultation process.
- We also support the co-design/co-creation approach to engage with victims and survivors of child sexual abuse of all ages and the intent to be guided by individuals and groups about how they can safely and comfortably participate and influence the work.
- It would be valuable to include the work of the advisory group, and consultation processes, in the evaluation; that is evaluate how effective the structures and processes were with a view to informing other government, non-government or community partnerships.

PROPOSED MODEL FOR THE ADVISORY GROUP

For ease and clarity of governance we would recommend the creation of a single advisory group, with the capacity to work with time- and task-limited working groups whose members include some Advisory Group members and others with relevant life and service delivery experience and technical expertise.

Serious consideration should be given to the engagement of young people in every aspect of project governance. Not just via one or two members of the Advisory Group. Realistically this could be a work in progress, *for example* Advisory Group Members could identify one or more young people with whom they would buddy in undertaking the work of the group and who could become active to varying degrees in group – and working group – tasks.

We recommend that participation opportunities are provided on a rotating basis for young people rather than a static group across the whole four years. The process should seek to integrate targeted young people's perspectives and grow their power and influence in all through their participation in the process.

Responses to the specific questions in the consultation paper are set out below:

Membership

- We recommend maximum 12 -15 members of the advisory group and as noted above, a dynamic working group model.
- We note the challenge of members seeking to 'represent' priority groups, given the diversity of individual experiences even within priority groups. We content that members could have a valid constituency that encompasses priority groups – a constituency with whom they undertake to communicate and consult and share opportunities to participate and that this should be a specific requirement of members.
- Representation could include perspectives from services/sectors that work with a wide range of young people, including those from priority groups. For example, The Smith Family TSF could bring an education sector perspective; others could steward mental health and wellbeing and justice. Thus, representation should include organisations that know about what's happening and what's possible from a child/young person's perspective – and the adults who are responsible for, and who want to, safeguard and support them.

- There could be value in thinking about membership in terms of advising governance of the advice and consultation processes rather than representation. This would largely be an outward facing rather than an inward, expert model
- We strongly encourage appointment of an independent chair – someone with the capacity to influence such as the National Commissioner for Children and Young People or an esteemed person in the field. This should be someone people can engage with and trust, and who can conduct an efficient meeting.

Role

- The strategy is about prevention and response. Therefore, it must engage victims, survivors, children, young people, families, and communities more broadly. If it is to be successful, the strategy must generate whole of community commitment and mobilisation. A transparent, inclusive, and flexible consultation structure and process with reference to the people who must be safeguarded by the work and have to do the work is vital.
- Engagement of key community and cultural leaders is vital in this effort.

Working groups

- As noted above, The Smith Family advocates for time-limited, task-specific working groups that include members from outside the Advisory Group. To appropriately recognise the value of this input, there should be the provision to reimburse (not necessarily remunerate) working group members.
- From a governance perspective, we recommend that working groups should report directly to the National Office for Child Safety who should also provide executive support for this work. Advisory Group member/s could chair/participate in working groups as required.

Meetings

The Smith Family supports the suggested approach set out in your consultation paper. In addition, the group should be open to the inclusion of guests, presenters and observers as relevant to the work of the group. It is an Advisory Group that is part of the governance structure for the consultation undertaken by the Office.

Term

We support the intent for the group to exist for four years to enable continuity and potential completion of some areas of work. However we recommend that the membership should be reviewed at least mid-term in order to accommodate the potential need to add another/different perspective/skill set. We support the intent of the Office and the Group continually monitoring if they are fit for purpose as the work progresses.

EOI

Please see below:

Terms of reference

We understand the limitations of the group, its role in governance within the larger operating structure of the National Office for Child Safety and the need to be clear about the scope and limits of what it can achieve. For example

- Advisory, not decision-making
- Strategic guidance, review, and comment
- Scope is implementation of the two action plans
- Must be guided/strongly influenced by lived experience perspectives
- Must be informed by the services and sectors work with children and young people and their families

- The group will need a degree of agility and flexibility to ensure that they are well placed to respond to and reflect what is learned along the way. Ideally this would include iterative feedback from the evaluators.

It could be helpful to include a statement about the role/expectations of individual members in addition to attendance at meetings. Terms of reference could include mention of:

- Member capacity & commitment to communication and consultation with member organisation/community/constituency inform to inform their participation in the business of the group
- Preparedness to share (publicly available) information, research and evidence to inform the work of the group
- Openness to engage with victims, survivors, children, young people, and the wider community as agreed
- Readiness to inform and be informed by consultation processes conducted by the office
- Accept required privacy and confidentiality of group's work – and inform public reporting of the group's work

Engaging with victims and survivors

Given the sensitivity of this work, there needs to be clarity about the purpose and nature of engagement with victims and survivors and consideration of and the impact it would be likely to have (or not have). It is recommended that this work is co-designed and co-created with victims and survivors and that the Office is open to offering a range of options, allowing contributors to move in and out of engaging in the process. Resources should be budgeted to enable creative, safe engagement strategies e.g., visual/performing arts, online world cafes etc. It is noted that co-designing and facilitating this engagement would be a role in itself and participants could decide how they want to connect with the Advisory Group

Other priority groups

As a key principle, processes should defer to people experiencing these life circumstances to indicate how they would best want to be engaged.

It is important too to recognise these perspectives do not come in isolation: people's lives are complex and vulnerability in terms of exploitation compounds, so support consideration for how we have conversations about safeguarding children and young people who might feel alone/powerless – and therefore vulnerable

Stakeholder consultation list

We strongly support the intent that the proposed advisory group would not be the only means through which stakeholders can be involved in the National Strategy's design, implementation and evaluation. As has been the practice for the National Office to date, we believe that the list should be open-ended and allow for individuals, groups, and organisations to be included. Consultation processes can be based online, and trusted organisations asked to enable access with people who might not be able to use these media.