

State and territory AGs want clarity from Federal Government on redress and so does everyone else

This week we have seen some very significant moves by governments around Australia to get some idea of how the federal government plans respond to the Royal Commission's proposal for a redress scheme for institutional child sexual abuse survivors.

Last Friday, state and territory attorneys-general [sent a joint letter to federal Attorney-General, George Brandis](#), asking for clarification of the Commonwealth's position on the proposed redress scheme.

In the letter the attorneys-general wrote:

“The Royal Commission’s recommendations have identified a clear role for the Commonwealth, including that the Commonwealth announce its willingness to establish a national scheme by the end of 2015.

The Commonwealth’s response will have significant ramifications for the States and Territories. Accordingly, we request the earliest possible indication from the Commonwealth as to whether it intends to establish and fund a national redress scheme.”

[I have also written to Prime Minister Turnbull](#) requesting a meeting to discuss the redress proposal and to get an indication of where the Commonwealth government is headed.

As I said on the [ABC's PM program this week](#), the Commonwealth has not been clear with the community. It has now become obvious that child sexual abuse is a huge social issue. It is a tragedy that can be found in many different institutions, government and non-government, across many decades.

And as a major national social issue our policy and law makers have a role to play, along with institutions such as the Catholic Church, in addressing it. The new Prime Minister now has the opportunity to demonstrate that as political leaders, he and his state and territory colleagues will respond proactively and positively.

Survivors and stakeholders have been waiting close to ten months for a considered response from the Commonwealth to the Royal Commission's preferred option for a redress scheme, which was outlined for the first time in its [redress consultation paper](#) released in January. The proposal was formally put as a recommendation to governments last month in the Royal Commission's [redress and civil litigation report](#).

All we have seen so far from the Commonwealth is a dismissive response to January's consultation paper and silence in response to the final redress report.

[The Commonwealth's official response to the Royal Commission's proposal](#) in January washed its hands of playing any part in a redress scheme for child sexual abuse survivors.

The three-page submission, which looked like it had been knocked together at short notice and with little thought by the Attorney-General's Department, was nothing short of a disgrace, an insult to abuse survivors who have waited decades to hear a considered position on redress from the Commonwealth.

What is pleasing is that the Commonwealth seems to have reconsidered its earlier position and is now, according to media reports, looking to discuss the redress proposal with state and territory governments at the next Council of Australian Governments meeting in November. This is great news.

The pressure on the federal government to play a role in establishing and operating a national redress scheme is mounting. We are hearing it from survivors and their supporters, from other governments, from institutions and from the general public.

The time has come for government action.

The Commonwealth government needs to lay out how it intends to respond to the Royal Commission's recommendations and confirm this important social issue will be part of November's COAG meeting.

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