

Commonwealth redress plan great start but everyone needs to be on-board

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The announcement late last week by the Turnbull Government that it will establish and run a national redress scheme for the survivors of institutional child sexual abuse is a great decision that has the potential to be among the significant social policy reforms in recent history.

Friday's announcement has the potential to benefit tens of thousands of people now and into the future who have suffered the most damaging and tragic abuse – institutional child sexual abuse.

The estimates are jaw dropping, more than 60,000 children abused in hundreds of different institutions across Australia for many decades.

But the new scheme will only be truly effective if all institutions and all governments accept their responsibilities and commit to participating.

The Catholic Church has a lot to answer for. For decades up to the 1990's and in some cases beyond, we systematically covered up child sex abuse by members of our clergy.

We consistently put the interests of the church as an institution ahead of the welfare and safety of children. Their suffering has been compounded and for many, their lives shattered.

This did not just happen in the Catholic Church. We now know, thanks to the Royal Commission it was tragically common place across many other churches, schools, government institutions, sporting and cultural institutions.

And now the Federal Government will provide a redress platform that all organisations responsible for the appalling abuse can use and, in a way, acknowledge and make some amends for the past.

But this will require one last great push from the Federal Government and continuing pressure from the community to ensure, regardless of where or when someone was abused, they will be able to seek justice through the Commonwealth scheme.

With all institutions taking part this scheme will succeed and it will deliver fair, consistent and generous redress for survivors.

If some institutions don't take part it will be yet another blow to abuse survivors with some reaping the scheme's benefits while others are left to suffer further defeats and humiliations.

A case in point is the South Australian Government. Before the ink was dry on the announcement, the South Australian Government has already indicated it will not take part.

This is appalling, whatever the justification.

If SA Premier, Jay Weatherill, is so convinced his state has fairly and comprehensively responded to adults abused as children in that state's schools and other government-run facilities then well done.

But if, as is more likely the case, there are hundreds of survivors of abuse in SA government-run institutions who have received inadequate or no compensation, then he should be ashamed for so readily dismissing this proposal.

He, along with his attorney general and other senior government ministers need to put their principles and convictions before the advice of their bureaucrats and bean counters and become part of the scheme.

It is now vitally important that all institutions in which abuse occurred, as well as all the State and Territory governments, get on board.

This is by far the best chance we, as a community, and particularly the institutions responsible for the abuse will have to do the right thing to give abuse survivors the financial support they need to have a crack at a half decent life.

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