

New Commission research paper highlights government inconsistencies

Francis Sullivan 13 April 2017

Another week and another research project released from the Royal Commission. This time, Queensland academic, Professor Ben Mathews, has produced a report for the Commission entitled, 'Oversight and regulatory mechanisms aimed at protecting children from sexual abuse' Understanding current evidence of efficacy.'

Professor Mathews examined oversight bodies such as ombudsman's offices, reportable conduct schemes, children's commissions, community visitor schemes, child advocates and children's guardians and crime and misconduct commissions.

His report also included the non-government schools, early childhood and care sectors amongst others.

Unsurprisingly the report found that oversight bodies had inconsistent scope and powers in protecting children from sexual abuse in institutions across Australia. Whether this was due to the specific state based legislation or whether it was the result of inadequate resources, the upshot is a national landscape of less than best practice child protection.

Over the nearly five years of work in the Royal Commission, the glaring differences between state governments in how they go about protecting children have been laid bare.

For policy makers and even legislators this is not new. Commonwealth, state and territory governments have made an art form out of shifting blame and even responsibility for failures in child protection.

One day it is a lack of resources, another it is because 'reforms are underway'! Whether any government pays heed to this latest example of inconsistency and lack of efficacy it remains to be seen.

However, in the meantime, the Royal Commission needs to ascertain what can be achievable and from within what realistic timeframe. Otherwise I fear that governments will simply plead a lack of resources and the need to address their own patch rather than be subject to the needs beyond their borders.

This makes it even more crucial that the Prime Minister and other heads of government commit COAG to establishing an implementation council that will receive the recommendations from this Royal Commission and get down to the urgent task of making them happen.