



A brief guide to the Final Report: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities

The Final Report contains information about child sexual abuse that may be distressing. We also advise Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander readers that information in the report may have been provided by, or refer to, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who are deceased.

About this guide

This guide explains how information is organised in the 17-volume Final Report of the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse. It is designed to help readers quickly find the information they need, highlighting sections appearing throughout the report that focus on issues of particular relevance to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

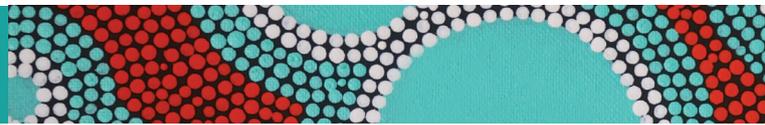
A complete list of volumes and related reports is on page 12 of this guide.

About Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in the Final Report

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities are the First Peoples of Australia, representing the oldest continuous cultures in the world with diverse languages, kinship structures and ways of life. Research for the Royal Commission found that being strong in culture is protective for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children's wellbeing, because it can support strong identity, high self esteem and strong attachments. However, the legacies of past social policies and practices, the Stolen Generations and the long-term intergenerational impacts of colonisation, all increase Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children's vulnerability to abuse in institutions.

Child sexual abuse in institutions is not only a thing of the past – it is still a problem today. While all children are vulnerable, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are significantly overrepresented in out-of-home care and youth detention, exposing them to environments with greater risk. Racism and lack of cultural safety can also increase Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children's vulnerability and prevent them from speaking out.

During our inquiry, we took care to learn about the unique context and experiences of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.



AT A GLANCE

Important information relating to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities is included in all volumes of the Final Report. Specific areas of interest include:

Historical context	Colonisation, assimilation, missions, and history of religious institutions in Australia.	Volume 2 Volume 11 Volume 16
Cultural impacts	Impact of institutional child sexual abuse on connection to culture and continuation of cultural practice.	Volume 3
Survivors' accounts	What we heard in private sessions from survivors who identified as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander.	Volume 5
Aboriginal healing	The need for Aboriginal healing approaches as part of the service system.	Volume 9
Out-of-home care	Kinship care and the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Placement Principle.	Volume 12
Youth detention	Improving the safety of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in youth detention.	Volume 15

About our inquiry

The Final Report brings together what we learned during our five-year inquiry. It sets out what we heard, our conclusions, and our recommendations to better prevent and respond to child sexual abuse in institutional contexts. For this inquiry, an institution means any organisation or entity that provides activities or services, through which it has contact with children – like schools, sports clubs, out-of-home care (including kinship care), youth detention and churches.

We gathered information through the three 'pillars' of our work: private sessions, public hearings, and our policy and research program. The role of our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff was crucial to our efforts to engage with communities and support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander survivors and their families to share their experiences with us.

Private sessions

In private sessions, survivors spoke confidentially to one or more Commissioners about their experience of child sexual abuse in an institution. Survivors were offered counselling and other forms of support before, during and after their private session.

Between May 2013 and May 2017, we heard in private sessions about the experiences of **6,875** survivors, including **985** people who identified as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander.



FURTHER DETAIL

Throughout the Final Report, we often use survivors' own words to give real-world examples of some of the concerns we have identified. We do not use survivors' real names or any information that could identify them.

Volume 5, *Private sessions* provides information about what we heard from survivors. Chapter 5 'Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander survivors' focuses on what we heard from survivors who identified as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander.

Public hearings

Our 57 public hearings examined particular institutions' responses to allegations of child sexual abuse. Case studies were carefully chosen for public hearings so that our work covered a variety of types of institutions, in cities and towns across Australia.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander academics, experts, service providers, community members and Elders came forward as witnesses, as well as survivors and their families. We examined issues relating to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander experiences in a large number of hearings. Those with extensive information about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander survivors included:

- Case study 17: Retta Dixon Home
- Case study 19: Bethcar Children's Home
- Case Study 24: Out-of-home care
- Case study 45: Harmful sexual behaviours of children in schools

Information about our public hearings is available online including lists of witnesses, the documents we examined as well as our case study reports. Visit www.childabuseroyalcommission.gov.au

Policy and research

The Royal Commission also gathered information through its policy and research program.

For our policy work, we consulted widely with survivors, governments, institutions, regulators, policy and other experts, academics and survivor advocacy and support groups. To do this we invited submissions to issues papers and consultation papers, and held roundtable discussions.

Many organisations representing and working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples gave us their views, including Aboriginal community controlled organisations and national bodies. In addition we held a range of gatherings and meetings to hear directly from communities across Australia. Our research program aimed to improve knowledge about the nature, extent and impacts



of child sexual abuse in institutions and ways to prevent and respond to the abuse. Our published research includes two studies with specific information about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children:

- *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and child sexual abuse in institutional contexts* conducted by the Telethon Kids Institute (overseen and co-authored by an Aboriginal academic advisory group)
- *Service and support needs of specific population groups that have experienced child sexual abuse* conducted by the Gendered Violence Research Network, University of New South Wales.

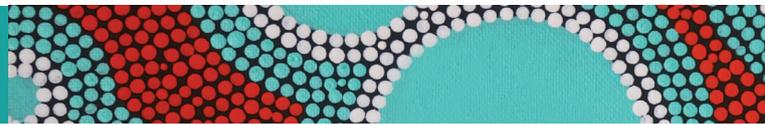
The Royal Commission's published research and policy papers are available online at www.childabuseroyalcommission.gov.au

FIND OUT MORE

Volume 1, *Our inquiry* features information about how we set up private sessions, public hearings, and our policy and research program.

Section 3.4 'Engaging with the community' in Volume 1 describes our strategy to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities to participate in our inquiry.

Section 4.5, 'Diversity and vulnerability' in the same volume, briefly outlines how we considered diverse circumstances and needs throughout our inquiry, including those of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander victims and survivors.



What we learned from survivors

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander survivors

Of the **6,875** survivors we heard from in private sessions up to 31 May 2017, **14.3** per cent identified as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander people.

Of these survivors:

- the average age at the time of their private session was **50.3** years – **52.7** for females and **48.2** for males
- **8.0** per cent were under the age of **30**
- almost half (**45.4** per cent) were female
- the majority (**79.8** per cent) said they were first sexually abused before 1990
- **4.8** per cent said they had disability at the time of the abuse.

Key themes

Experiences of abuse

In private sessions many survivors told us they had been forcibly removed from their families as children and then sexually abused in institutions that should have kept them safe. Of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander survivors we heard about in private sessions:

- most told us they were sexually abused on multiple occasions
- more than one-third said they were sexually abused for between one and five years
- three-quarters said they were sexually abused in out-of-home care, the majority of whom said they were abused in an historical residential institution (operating before 1990) such as a mission dormitory or children's home.

Like many others who attended private sessions, most Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander survivors told Commissioners they experienced other forms of abuse before, during and after being sexually abused, including physical and emotional abuse. In addition, they spoke about racism and cultural abuse.



In Volume 2, *Nature and cause* we look at how and why institutional child sexual abuse occurs. As part of this, we discuss specific issues relevant to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people including:

- **historical context** – the impacts of colonisation, past social policies and the legacy of Stolen Generations on children’s vulnerability to sexual abuse in institutions
- **additional risks factors** – including racism, lack of cultural safety and intergenerational trauma
- **protective factors** – the importance of strong cultural identity, positive community connections and connection to culture, as sources of resilience and healing.

FURTHER DETAIL

In Chapter 5 ‘How and why child sexual abuse occurs’ in Volume 2 we present more information on risk factors faced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children.

Chapter 6 ‘Historical developments for children in institutions’ explains how the treatment of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children under Australian law, policy and practice from the early years of colonisation to the present time, has increased their risk of child sexual abuse in institutional contexts.

Wellbeing

In private sessions with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, we heard the impact of institutional child sexual abuse was often compounded by the trauma of being forcibly removed from family, community, country and culture.

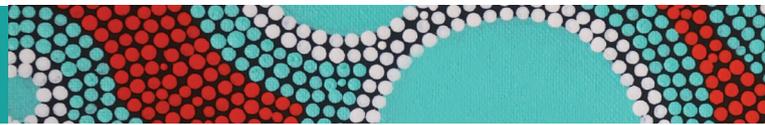
As with all survivors, many told us they experienced poor mental health at some time in their life, as well as relationship problems, and educational and economic disadvantage. Additional and compounding factors included:

- denigration of identity and culture, including destruction of language
- stigma of sexual abuse causing disconnection from family, community, cultural traditions and country
- widespread institutionalisation of children that fractured whole communities, disrupting relationships and traditional ways of healing.

Volume 3 *Impacts* describes what we learned about the impacts of child sexual abuse and institutional responses.

FURTHER DETAIL

Volume 3 includes information about cultural impacts of child sexual abuse (see Section 3.6.1) and the ripple effects on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities (see Section 5.3.1).



Disclosing the abuse

During our inquiry, the Royal Commission learned that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander victims and survivors face additional barriers that reduce their ability to disclose or report abuse and, in cases where they are able to do so, they have less chance of receiving an adequate response.

Survivors often said they tried to disclose during childhood, but were ignored, dismissed or punished. Others said they kept silent at the time and told their story later in life.

Almost one-fifth of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander survivors who talked about who they disclosed to, told us they disclosed for the first time to the Royal Commission.

It is likely that barriers to disclosure prevented others coming forward.

In Volume 4, *Identifying and disclosing child sexual abuse* we discuss ways to better identify abuse and support disclosures. We learned Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander victims and survivors face additional barriers, including:

- **racism and discrimination** – past and current experiences leading to distrust of police, government authorities and people in leadership positions
- **fear** – including the fear of being judged and re-traumatised by non-Indigenous workers who lack an understanding of the impacts of history, and the fear of children being removed
- **shame** – beyond the stigma of sexual abuse, survivors experienced shame related to cultural abuse and a sense of bringing shame to the whole community
- **lack of cultural safety** – in institutions where Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures are not recognised, respected or acknowledged
- **language barriers** – where language and cultural interpreters are not available.



FURTHER DETAIL

Section 2.5 'Factors that can influence disclosure' and Chapter 4 'Barriers to disclosure for the victim' in Volume 4 include information about disclosure and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander victims and survivors.

In Section 5.5 'Experiences of disclosure' of Volume 5 we describe what we heard in private sessions from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander survivors about their experiences of disclosure.

What we learned about making institutions safer

We discuss what we learned about how to make institutions safer for children in Volumes 6, 7 and 8. Together, these volumes explain how institutions could better prevent, identify, respond to and report institutional child sexual abuse. We recognise that protecting children is everyone's responsibility, and look at the role that communities, institutions, governments and individuals should play to create child safe institutions.

Volume 6, *Making institutions child safe* makes recommendations covering:

- **community prevention** – approaches to community-wide prevention, including the need for targeted information to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities
- **creating child safe institutions** – 10 Child Safe Standards to make institutions safer
- **online safety** – strengthening children's digital safety and improving the way institutions respond to online abuse
- **improved regulation and oversight** – a national approach to monitor and enforce child safe standards.

FURTHER DETAIL

Section 3.4 'Understanding Child Safe Standards' in Volume 6 describes how we developed each of the 10 Child Safe Standards. The discussion of Standard 4: 'Equity is upheld and diverse needs are taken into account', describes what we found about the importance of responding effectively to the needs of children with added vulnerability. Recommendation 6.6 states particular attention should be paid to the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children.

FURTHER DETAIL

Chapter 5, 'Preventing and responding to online child sexual abuse in institutions' in Volume 6 focuses on the more recent challenges to child safety posed by the online environment.

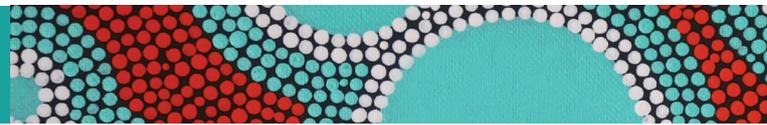
Volume 7, *Improving institutional responding and reporting* examines how children, families, staff and volunteers make child sexual abuse complaints to institutions and how institutions report these complaints to external government authorities. In this volume, we propose measures to improve institutional responses in relation to:

- **complaints policies and procedures** – to empower individuals to raise complaints and ensure these complaints are taken seriously
- **external reporting** – by increasing education and training on reporting requirements and introducing nationally consistent mandatory reporting schemes
- **complaint handling oversight** – introducing independent nationally consistent schemes to oversight institutional child sexual abuse complaint handling.

FURTHER DETAIL

Chapter 3 'Improving institutional responses to complaints of child sexual abuse' in Volume 7 outlines the need for accessible complaints information and processes and the importance of recognising, anticipating and responding appropriately to the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children.

Chapter 4 'Oversight of institutional complaint handling' discusses reportable conduct schemes, and recommends they should cover institutions that provide foster, kinship or relative care (Recommendation 7.12).



Volume 8, *Recordkeeping and information sharing* examines the recordkeeping and information sharing practices of institutions that care for or provide services to children. This volume includes recommendations for:

- **best practice records and recordkeeping** – to address the need to keep and maintain full and accurate records on matters relating to child safety and wellbeing
- **strengthening information sharing** – developing a national approach to help better identify, prevent and respond to incidents and risks of child sexual abuse across institutions and jurisdictions.



FURTHER DETAIL

Chapter 3 'Improving information sharing across sectors' in Volume 8 identifies ways to support information sharing between organisations, including discussion of support for Aboriginal community-controlled organisations involved in child protection.

Chapter 4, 'Improving information sharing in key sectors' discusses carers registers for out-of-home care, including kinship care.

What we learned about advocacy, support and therapeutic treatment

In Volume 9, *Advocacy, support and therapeutic treatment services* we look at how the service system responds to survivors' needs, and the barriers they may face when seeking help. The volume outlines the importance of providing culturally-safe service delivery, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander healing approaches.



FURTHER DETAIL

In Volume 9 we discuss the historical context of collective trauma and the need for culturally-informed ways of healing (see Section 2.5.4).

In the same volume, we discuss the barriers that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander survivors told us they face when seeking assistance from services (see Section 4.3.3).

What we learned about children's harmful sexual behaviours

Volume 10, *Children with harmful sexual behaviours* looks at a broad spectrum of behaviours, from those that are developmentally inappropriate to criminal behaviours such as sexual assault. This volume discusses:

- **best practice principles** – for therapeutic intervention for children with harmful sexual behaviours
- **culturally tailored therapeutic approaches** – for working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children with harmful sexual behaviours.



FURTHER DETAIL

In Chapter 5, 'Tertiary interventions for children's harmful sexual behaviours' in Volume 10 we discuss limitations in the responses to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children with harmful sexual behaviours.

What we learned about different types of institutions

In Volumes 11 to 16 we describe what we learned about child sexual abuse and responses to it, in six institutional settings. Each of these volumes contains information related to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children.



FURTHER DETAIL

Volume 11, *Historical residential institutions* details what we learned about the experiences of survivors in residential institutions pre-1990. This includes discussion of missions, reserves and related institutions. This volume considers the context of assimilation, Stolen Generations and the ongoing effects.

Volume 12, *Contemporary out-of-home care* examines what we learned about institutional responses to child sexual abuse in contemporary out-of-home care. It pays attention to the overrepresentation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in out-of-home care and risks of sexual abuse in this setting (see Sections 2.4.2, 3.5.3, 4.3.3 and 4.5.1).

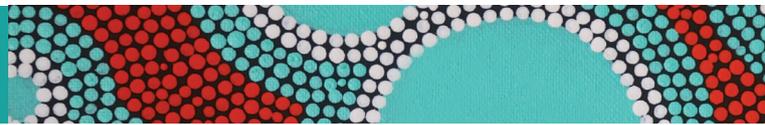
This volume discusses how to strengthen systems to protect Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in out-of-home care from sexual abuse, including the importance of connection to family and culture, and interrupting cycles of intergenerational trauma (see Section 5.5.1). The volume includes recommendations focusing on kinship care and the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Placement Principle.

Volume 13, *Schools* notes that almost one in three of all survivors we heard about in private sessions told us they were abused in a school setting and the particular risks in boarding environments. We discuss the need for greater cultural safety in boarding schools and hostels, and more effective support for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children transitioning to and from boarding schools.

Volume 14, *Sport, recreation, arts, culture, community and hobby groups* discusses the benefits of these activities for children's development and how targeted programs tailored to particular Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities can enhance connection to culture.

Volume 15, *Contemporary detention environments* includes consideration of historical factors, systemic racism, policing practices and a range of socioeconomic factors influencing the overrepresentation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in youth detention. It discusses risk and protective factors and makes recommendations to better support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in youth detention (see Chapter 3, 'Youth detention').

Volume 16, *Religious institutions* considers how religious organisations have impacted the lives of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in Australia. Chapter 2 discusses the historical development of Christian missions. Chapter 5 provides an overview of previous Australian inquiries that considered religious institutions, including relevant conclusions from the *Bringing them home* report. Chapters 7 and 8 discuss what we heard about the common religious contexts where sexual abuse occurred and the experiences of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander survivors.



Beyond the Royal Commission



Since we started our work, community awareness has grown about the failure of many trusted institutions to protect children from sexual abuse.

With the handover of the Final Report to government, our work is complete.

Governments and institutions are now responsible for responding to the Royal Commission's recommendations and delivering the changes that the community has come to expect.

We have asked the Australian Government and state and territory governments to respond to our Final Report within six months of its release. In their response, governments should tell the community which of our recommendations they plan to act on and which they do not.

As real change will take some time, we have also asked that every year for the next five years all Australian governments submit a report to their parliaments that shows their progress towards implementing our recommendations.



FIND OUT MORE

Volume 17, *Beyond the Royal Commission* describes the impact of the Royal Commission and processes required to implement our recommendations.

Recommendations

Our recommendations aim to help Australia prevent and respond better to child sexual abuse in institutions, for all children, victims and survivors. Many of them refer to accessibility and tailored approaches to respond better to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. While all 409 recommendations are potentially relevant to the safety of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, key areas include:

- Recommendation 9.2 – Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander healing approaches
- Recommendation 12.17 – Contemporary out-of-home care kinship/relative care placements
- Recommendation 12.20 – The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Placement Principle
- Recommendation 13.4 – Funding arrangements for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander boarding students
- Recommendation 15.5 – Cultural safety for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in youth detention

Reading the Final Report

How the Final Report is structured

The Final Report includes a preface and executive summary and 17 volumes. Each volume is designed to be read on its own. To help readers understand how each volume relates to the rest of the Final Report, every volume points to relevant information in other volumes.

Also in the Final Report

Terms of Reference

In our Terms of Reference, the Australian Government set out the Royal Commission's task. They are published in full in Volume 1, *Our inquiry* and are also available online at www.childabuseroyalcommission.gov.au

Preface and executive summary

The Preface and executive summary provides an outline of the Final Report and features a summary of the main themes of each volume. It also includes a complete list of the Royal Commission's 409 recommendations.

Survivors' accounts

With permission, we have published a selection of survivors' narratives as told to us in private sessions as an online appendix to Volume 5, *Private sessions*. These narratives do not contain information that could identify individual survivors.

Accessing the Final Report

The Final Report is available online at www.childabuseroyalcommission.gov.au. Printed copies of the report may be viewed in a number of libraries across Australia.

Our other final reports

Our *Working With Children Checks* report (2015) makes recommendations to strengthen the Working with Children Checks schemes in Australia.

Our *Redress and civil litigation* report (2015) makes recommendations about a national redress scheme. It considers how such a scheme should respond to the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander victims and survivors.

Our *Criminal justice* report (2017) examines criminal justice responses to child sexual abuse and recommends ways the criminal justice system can be more effective for survivors. This report includes what we learned about criminal justice responses to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander victims of child sexual abuse. It recommends improvements to criminal justice processes including ways police can encourage reporting and improve responses to reports of child sexual abuse made by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander victims.

Other guides in the series

This guide is one of four developed to meet the interests of different audiences. The other guides are:

- *A brief guide to the Final Report*
- *A brief guide to the Final Report: Disability*
- *A brief guide to the Final Report: Children and young people*

All guides are available online at www.childabuseroyalcommission.gov.au

ABOUT THE USE OF PRIVATE SESSIONS INFORMATION IN THIS GUIDE

When writing this guide, we used information from private sessions that were held between May 2013 and May 2017.

The Final Report has been published with a separate fact sheet with updated information from private sessions held between May 2013 and November 2017.

The fact sheet is available online at www.childabuseroyalcommission.gov.au

Complete volume list

	Preface and executive summary – includes a summary of each volume and a complete list of all recommendations.
Volume 1	Our inquiry – introduces the Final Report and describes the establishment, scope and operations of the Royal Commission.
Volume 2	Nature and cause – describes what the Royal Commission learned about the nature and cause of child sexual abuse in institutional contexts.
Volume 3	Impacts – explains the impacts of child sexual abuse in institutional contexts on survivors and often their family members, friends, and entire communities.
Volume 4	Identifying and disclosing child sexual abuse – describes what we learned about survivors’ experiences of disclosing child sexual abuse.
Volume 5	Private sessions – describes survivors’ experiences of child sexual abuse as told to Commissioners during private sessions.
Volume 6	Making institutions child safe – outlines a national strategy for child sexual abuse prevention and proposes child safe standards including how institutions may implement them.
Volume 7	Improving institutional responding and reporting – looks at institutions’ responses to complaints of child sexual abuse and how they report these matters to external government authorities.
Volume 8	Recordkeeping and information sharing – examines the records, recordkeeping and information sharing of institutions that care for or provide services to children.
Volume 9	Advocacy, support and therapeutic treatment services – looks at what we learned about survivors’ needs in terms of advocacy, support and treatment and offers recommendations for improving service systems to better respond to survivors’ needs.
Volume 10	Children with harmful sexual behaviours – examines what we learned about institutional responses to children with harmful sexual behaviours.
Volume 11	Historical residential institutions – describes what we learned about survivors’ experiences of, and institutional responses to child sexual abuse in residential institutions, pre-1990.
Volume 12	Contemporary out-of-home care – examines what we learned about institutional responses to child sexual abuse in contemporary out-of-home care.
Volume 13	Schools – describes what we learned about institutional responses to child sexual abuse in schools.
Volume 14	Sport, recreation, arts, culture, community and hobby groups – looks at what we learned about institutional responses to child sexual abuse in sport and recreation contexts.
Volume 15	Contemporary detention environments – reviews what we learned about institutional responses to child sexual abuse in contemporary detention environments.
Volume 16	Religious institutions – examines what we learned about institutional responses to child sexual abuse in religious institutions.
Volume 17	Beyond the Royal Commission – describes the impact and legacy of the Royal Commission and discusses monitoring and reporting on the implementation of our recommendations.
Other reports	<i>Working With Children Checks</i> <i>Redress and civil litigation</i> <i>Criminal justice</i>

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