

MEDIA RELEASE



Truth Justice and Healing Council calls for national approach for better child protection in institutions

21 October 2013

Calls for a national mandatory accreditation and data collection system for all institutions working with children are part of the Catholic Church's submission to the Royal Commission on child safe institutions.

The CEO of the Catholic Church's Truth Justice and Healing Council, Francis Sullivan, said the core responsibility of religious and other organisational leaders is to ensure the safety of children entrusted to their care.

"There is no fail-safe method that can identify people who are unsuitable to work with children," Mr Sullivan said.

"Current screening includes an assessment of a range of information, but its focus is usually around criminal offences, drugs and violence. Organisations need to understand these limitations. They need to get as much information as possible about potential employees that will enable them to minimise risk.

"Unless we are doing all we can to make sure children are safe in our institutions then we are failing them, their parents and carers and the entire community," Mr Sullivan said.

In its submission, the TJHC has called for the establishment of a national mandatory accreditation scheme overseen by a national body with responsibility for auditing organisations against child safe standards and practices.

This would include random independent audits of organisations and the development of a national database to inform the continuous development of child safe practices.

This national approach would require Commonwealth and State Governments to work together to introduce a set of clear and consistent national child safe standards, supported by an accreditation scheme that included both self-assessment and external audit processes.

Mr Sullivan said the Catholic Church in Australia is committed to implementing child safe policies and practices across its archdioceses, dioceses, religious institutes and organisations.

"While some Church organisations are very advanced on this front, at present the uniform application of child safe policies and practices has not been achieved across all Church organisations. This needs to change as quickly as possible".

The TJHC submission to the Royal Commission's third issues paper dealing with Child Safe Institutions, lodged recently with the Commission, also identifies a number of essential elements to ensure the safety of children including:

- A protective, child-centred, organisational culture;
- Governance and leadership informed by an understanding of the developmental needs of children;
- Risk management process that identifies and develops responses to high risk issues;

Truth Justice and Healing Council

PO Box 4593 KINGSTON ACT 2604 | Tel: +61 2 6234 0900 | Fax: +61 2 6234 0999

- Implementation of a child protection policy;
- Human resource practices that promote the recruitment of suitable people to work with children, invest in their development, and monitor their performance;
- Effective investigation processes and external monitoring;
- Empowerment of children and victim support programs.

While contemporary research indicates there is no guarantee these elements will prevent child sexual abuse, they can minimise risk and ensure children receive effective protection and appropriate care.

Media contact: Michael Salmon 0417 495 018

For more information on the Truth Justice and Healing Council go to: www.tjhcouncil.org.au

For more information on the Royal Commission go to:

<http://www.childabuseroyalcommission.gov.au/Pages/default.aspx>

The TJHC submission on Child Safe Institutions can be found at: <http://www.tjhcouncil.org.au/media/40232/131011-Submission-RC-Issues-Paper-No-3-Child-Safe-Institutions.pdf>