

## **That was then, but the suffering is still now**

The success of the Royal Commission will be measured by the personal and real outcomes for victims and their families, and the improvements and progress of safeguarding practices by organisations and institutions.

Last week I spoke at the Catholic Church Insurance (CCI) board meeting in Sydney. It was a great opportunity to speak openly and candidly about what I consider two important aspects of the Royal Commission – victims and governance.

CCI is one of the oldest insurance companies in Australia, starting out in 1911 providing fire insurance for Church properties. Now, it is a diversified insurer working with Catholic Institutions throughout Australia. CCI says its mission is to support the Catholic Church, not to make a profit.

I told the board meeting that the Royal Commission is a chance for victims, damaged by clerical sex abuse, to tell their story. It is the time for the community to hear, and really listen and appreciate the full and long term impacts of child sex abuse.

We must remember that for many victims the impact of their tragic abuse is experienced and relived every single day. When organisations, including the Church, infer that the abuse was all in the past, this demeans and lessens the experiences of people who were abused.

Associate Professor Judy Cashmore and Dr Rita Shackel (Sydney University) explain this enduring pain all too well in their recent study - [The long-term effects of child sexual abuse](#).

The study concludes that – *“a robust body of research evidence now clearly demonstrates the link between child sexual abuse and a spectrum of adverse mental health, social, sexual, interpersonal and behavioural as well as physical health consequences. To date, the strongest links have been found between child sexual abuse and the presence of depression, alcohol and substance abuse, eating disorders for women survivors, and anxiety-related disorders for male survivors.”*

We know the Royal Commission is a time for people to tell their story. It is equally important for us to listen and truly hear victims’ stories; to acknowledge what happened and the pain and suffering that continues to this very day. We also need to be mindful that often it is not just the victim living with the pain of sexual abuse, but their family and friends are also suffering.

Victims and their welfare are the highest priority, but for organisations and institutions, the Royal Commission is also about governance, and what is required and necessary to ensure children are safe and well cared for. Organisational measures are required that move beyond informal checks and balances to recognize institutionalized checks and balances.

# Blog

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In the past, boards and authorities could rightly be criticized for being too lax and distant from their safeguarding and security responsibilities. As the Royal Commission begins to navigate the various case studies, including our own from December 9, organisations like the Church should not be waiting for directives. We should, and we are, using this time to implement better checks and balances, oversight, accountability, transparency and independent analysis.

In our [Towards Healing submission](#), there is no doubt that our recommendations require organizational and cultural change in the Church. This is for good reason, good intent, and I am confident for good ends.

It is my sincere hope that the courage of victims to come forward and tell their stories will be rewarded in some small way as institutions improve their safeguarding practices.

Improved safeguarding governance will be a major positive of the Royal Commission, but true success will be measured by the tangible, personal outcomes for victims and their families.

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