

Submission to the Second Action Plan under the National Strategy to Prevent and Respond to Child Sexual Abuse 2021–2030

Childlight East Asia and Pacific Hub School of Social Sciences

The Childlight East Asia and Pacific Hub is a partnership between the University of New South Wales, the University of Edinburgh and the Human Dignity Foundation. Childlight is a world-leading independent data institute founded at the University of Edinburgh to build evidence and drive coordinated action to protect children from sexual exploitation and abuse, funded by the Human Dignity Foundation. The Hub was established in 2024 in the School of Social Sciences at the University of New South Wales to drive research for impact on child sexual exploitation and abuse in Australia and the region. Childlight has created the first global index on child sexual exploitation and abuse, [Into The Light](#), and produces the data dashboard [Searchlight](#) to make research evidence widely available to policy-makers and the public.

The central proposition of this submission is that Australia needs a child protection system fit for the twenty-first century. The Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse established the foundations for national reform with its final report in 2017. The Second Action Plan can build on those foundations while responding to the changing nature of child sexual abuse: its technological mediation, commercialisation and financialisation; the targeting of vulnerable children across familial, institutional and online settings; and the need for sufficiently coordinated prevention, survivor support and implementation infrastructure.

Our submission to the National Strategy is informed by five principles:

1. **Children's rights and participation.** Children and young people should have safe, ethical and developmentally appropriate opportunities to shape the services, systems and interventions that impact them.
2. **Survivor leadership.** Lived-experience participation should be properly resourced, diverse, trauma-informed and embedded in governance, design, implementation and evaluation, guided by the development of good practice standards.

3. **First Nations self-determination.** Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, organisations and knowledges should lead First Nations prevention, healing, data governance and service responses.
4. **Gendered but inclusive analysis.** Child sexual abuse should be recognised as a form of gender-based violence while retaining its specificity as a distinct form of child abuse, and recognising the diversity of child sexual abuse victimisation, perpetration and impacts on a range of communities.
5. **Accessibility and cultural safety.** Prevention, disclosure, investigation, justice and recovery pathways must be accessible, responsive and safe.

The nine commitments below connect the work of institutional reform with a forward-looking response to technology, commercial systems, contemporary exploitation and offending prevention. Together, they address three related domains of national activity: preventing abuse and reducing opportunities to offend; identifying, protecting and supporting children who experience abuse or exploitation; and supporting the recovery, rights and justice needs of victims and survivors across the life course.

Nine key recommendations

1. **Invest in national leadership, strengthened governance and establishment of a dedicated national child sexual abuse prevention and recovery fund.** Create a senior national coordination mechanism with authority to drive reform across portfolios and jurisdictions, supported by renewed implementation infrastructure and additional revenue streams from entities and individuals that cause, facilitate or profit from child sexual abuse.
2. **Develop a national prevention framework and theory of change.** Establish an agreed account of the drivers, enabling conditions and prevention levers for child sexual abuse and exploitation integrated with all forms of child maltreatment.
3. **Develop a national grooming prevention and literacy strategy.** Equip children, families, communities, institutions and digital services to identify and interrupt grooming before abuse occurs or escalates.
4. **Commit to eradicating child sexual exploitation and protecting vulnerable children.** Begin with a coordinated, specialist and adequately resourced response to addressing the targeted sexual abuse and exploitation of children in out-of-home care.
5. **Establish nationally consistent survivor pathways, including for survivors of child sexual abuse material.** Provide crisis support, long-term therapy, peer support, legal assistance, compensation support, system navigation, family advocacy and culturally safe healing.
6. **Address the commercial and financial determinants of abuse.** Require technology and financial entities to identify, assess and mitigate child sexual abuse risks and strengthen financial detection and disruption.
7. **Uplift national workforce capability.** Define core and specialist capabilities across policing, child protection, health, education, justice, specialist services and relevant private-sector workforces.
8. **Establish integrated national evidence and data infrastructure to determine whether systems are improving people's lives.** Create a research agenda, administrative data audit, national data dictionary, minimum standards, shared outcome measures and a national data observatory.
9. **Build future-facing and regional capability responding to risks that emerge faster than policy cycles.** Establish horizon-scanning and rapid-response mechanisms for emerging technologies and align Australia's domestic strategy with its Asia-Pacific investments.

1. Invest in national leadership, strengthened governance and establishment of a dedicated national child sexual abuse prevention and recovery fund.

The Second Action Plan should establish stronger national coordination and implementation infrastructure for child sexual abuse reform.

A key challenge in the current national response is that responsibility for child sexual abuse is dispersed across multiple portfolios and levels of government. This creates gaps in leadership, uneven implementation, duplication of effort and uncertainty about who is responsible for driving reform. Consideration should be given to creating dedicated ministerial responsibility for children or child safety, supported by clear cross-portfolio governance arrangements.

The governance arrangements for the Second Action Plan should recognise that different forms of expertise require distinct and appropriately supported avenues of participation. The Second Action Plan should establish a transparent governance architecture with connected mechanisms for ministerial leadership, intergovernmental coordination, implementation oversight, specialist and technical advice, sector engagement, First Nations leadership, lived-experience participation, and the participation of children and young people. The responsibilities, decision-making authority and relationships between these bodies should be clearly defined.

It is essential that responses to child sexual abuse are adequately and sustainably resourced. The Australian Government should develop a long-term revenue model through which entities and individuals that cause, facilitate or profit from child sexual abuse contribute to the costs of prevention, disruption, victim support and recovery. Options should include allocating a proportion of civil and regulatory penalties imposed on technology and financial entities for non-compliance with child protection obligations; offender restitution and proceeds-of-crime mechanisms; industry and institutional levies or contributions; and other appropriate revenue sources. Any such model should supplement - not replace - core government funding or restitution with compensation payable directly to victims and survivors.

Recommended actions:

- Appoint a Commonwealth Minister for Children, with responsibility for leading and coordinating national child sexual abuse reform.
- Establish a clearly articulated governance structure for the Second Action Plan, with defined responsibility for national leadership, intergovernmental coordination, implementation and public accountability.
- Establish a dedicated national child sexual abuse prevention and recovery fund, supported by ongoing government investment and revenue derived where appropriate from private-sector penalties, industry and institutional contributions, offender assets and other accountability mechanisms.



2. Develop a national prevention framework and theory of change

There is broad agreement that child sexual abuse is a profound national problem, but less agreement on its drivers, enabling conditions and prevention levers. The Second Action Plan should fund a structured national process to develop a primary prevention framework and theory of change, with participation by victims and survivors, children and young people, First Nations leaders, public-health and child-protection experts, practitioners and researchers.

A genuine public health approach must reduce the likelihood that people offend, interrupt offending pathways earlier and disrupt the environments that enable abuse. Our Australian perpetration prevalence research found that 15.1% of men reported sexual feelings towards children, 9.4% reported sexual offending against children, and 19.6% reported sexual feelings and/or offending (Salter et al., 2023; Whitten et al., 2026). These findings underscore the need for prevention measures directed not only towards children, communities and institutions, but also towards people at risk of offending.

Given the high co-occurrence of different forms of child maltreatment, the prevention framework should include holistic consideration of all forms of child maltreatment. For instance, the Australian Child Maltreatment Study found 39.4% of Australian children had experienced two or more forms of child maltreatment (Higgins et al., 2023). An integrated approach will result in a prevention framework that captures both distinct and overlapping drivers of child maltreatment thereby engendering a holistic policy and service response which can properly consider the impacts of cumulative harm.

A national prevention strategy should operate at three levels:

- Primary prevention addressing the social, cultural, technological and commercial determinants of perpetration and victimisation.
- Secondary prevention providing evidence-based pathways for people at risk of offending, as well as focused safeguarding efforts on cohorts of children at heightened risk of abuse.
- Tertiary prevention strengthening detection, deterrence, investigation, prosecution, treatment and monitoring, including for undetected online offenders and people in child-contact roles, as well as enhanced therapeutic and justice outcomes for victims and survivors.

Child sexual abuse is simultaneously a form of child maltreatment, a form of gender-based violence and an upstream contributor to a range of social and policy challenges, including mental illness, suicide and substance misuse. It should therefore be explicitly addressed across relevant national prevention frameworks. The National Strategy should also clearly articulate how it relates to, and is implemented alongside, other national plans concerning children, gender-based violence, suicide, mental health, disability and online safety.

Recommended actions:

- Undertake a structured national consultation and evidence review to identify the drivers, enabling conditions and prevention levers for child sexual abuse and other types of child maltreatment.
- Develop, publish and fund a national prevention framework for child sexual abuse and other types of child maltreatment, supported by an explicit theory of change and measurable outcomes.
- Articulate and resource coordinated interventions across the primary, secondary and tertiary levels of prevention.
- Fund longitudinal evaluation of prevention initiatives, including their effects on behaviour, institutional practice, children's safety and the incidence of abuse.
- Embed child sexual abuse prevention within relevant national policy frameworks and clearly define the relationship between the National Strategy and other national plans.



3. Develop a national grooming prevention and literacy strategy

A major shift is needed in public education from general awareness of child sexual abuse towards practical grooming prevention and literacy. Passive and reactive child protection measures are easily circumvented by motivated offenders who anticipate protective responses, cultivate the trust of children and adults, and seek to neutralise barriers to abuse. Effective prevention requires families, communities and institutions to recognise and respond to concerning patterns before abuse occurs or escalates.

There is a useful parallel with the shift in domestic and family violence policy from viewing physical and sexual assaults as isolated incidents towards understanding coercive control as a pattern of behaviour. Similarly, grooming should be understood as a relational and cumulative process that can occur within families, institutions, communities and online services. It may involve not only the grooming of a child, but also the manipulation of parents, colleagues, organisations and other protective adults.

Grooming prevention must not make children or families responsible for preventing abuse. It should instead build the capability and reinforce the responsibilities of adults, institutions and online services to recognise concerning patterns, respond to early warning signs, share information appropriately and interrupt access to children.

Child-safe cultures also require more than compliance with policies, training modules, or reporting obligations. Our work emphasises that institutions need the willingness and capability to hear uncomfortable information, respond to early warning signs, protect whistleblowers, and place children's safety above institutional reputation (Woodlock et al., 2025). The concept of "institutional courage" (Freyd & Becker-Blease, 2024) is useful here: child-safe organisations should be expected to foster accountability, transparency, truth-seeking, and support for victims, survivors, and whistleblowers.

Recommended actions:

- Develop and fund a national grooming prevention and literacy strategy addressing familial, institutional and online environments.
- Develop audience-specific resources for children and young people, parents and caregivers, professionals and institutions, with safeguards against shifting responsibility for prevention onto children.
- Embed measurable indicators of institutional courage within child-safe standards, including transparent complaints processes, protection for whistleblowers, escalation of unresolved concerns and accountability for organisational leaders.
- Build grooming recognition and response into workforce capability frameworks, institutional safeguarding requirements and relevant regulatory regimes.
- Fund independent evaluation of grooming prevention, public education and organisational culture interventions.

4. Commit to eradicating child sexual exploitation and protecting vulnerable children

Australia should commit to eradicating child sexual exploitation, beginning with addressing the targeted sexual exploitation of children in out-of-home care. The organised exploitation of children in Australia has been documented for decades in inquiries, reviews and research. The United Nations Special Rapporteur has most recently raised concern about organised offenders targeting young people in residential care and children missing from care in Australia (Singhateh, 2025). First Nations children are disproportionately exposed to these risks due to their overrepresentation in out-of-home care and the continuing realities of colonisation, racism and institutional harm.

Unlike comparable jurisdictions, Australia lacks a coordinated specialist response, nationally consistent definitions and robust data on multi-perpetrator and organised exploitation. Existing Commonwealth offences for child sexual exploitation, trafficking and modern slavery often fail to capture cases involving domestic child sexual exploitation. The exploitation of children in out-of-home care continues to be obscured by victim-blaming, adultification (where children are treated as capable of consenting to acts of abuse) and criminalisation.

Children subjected to exploitation must be recognised and treated as victims of abuse, irrespective of apparent compliance with offenders, receipt of money or goods, involvement in offending, or reluctance to engage with authorities.

Recommended actions:

- Convene a national taskforce to develop nationally consistent definitions, a national policy framework and a coordinated operational response to child sexual exploitation, with an initial focus on safeguarding children in out-of-home care.
- Establish specialist multi-agency mechanisms to identify and protect exploited children, investigate offender networks and coordinate intelligence across child protection, police, residential-care providers and relevant community organisations.
- Develop nationally consistent protocols for responding when children are missing from care, including rapid risk assessment, intelligence-sharing, return interviews and ongoing therapeutic support.
- Establish a clear national principle that children subjected to sexual exploitation will be treated as victims of abuse and will not be criminalised for conduct arising from their exploitation.
- Commission a national study examining the prevalence and characteristics of child sexual exploitation, survivor experiences, frontline responses and system outcomes.
- Provide long-term funding to Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations to lead prevention, healing, family support, advocacy and workforce development for First Nations children and communities.
- Establish independent advocacy and accessible complaints mechanisms for children in care, detention, disability settings and other closed or institutional environments.
- Review relevant offences, investigative practices and charging frameworks to ensure they adequately address organised, multi-perpetrator and domestic child sexual exploitation.



A national commitment to eradicate child sexual exploitation must be connected to the broader protection of children whose dependency, family circumstances, disability or institutional placement creates heightened vulnerability. The following areas require coordinated attention within the same child-centred protection architecture.

4.1 Intrafamilial abuse

Intrafamilial abuse remains a central but frequently obscured form of child sexual abuse. In Australia, a caregiver in the home is the largest category of adult perpetrator of child sexual abuse (Mathews et al., 2024) and parental figures produce the most highly traded child sexual abuse material (CSAM) online (Salter & Wong, 2024). However, child sexual abuse in the family is largely neglected in Australian public policy. Recognition and disclosure is constrained by children's dependency, coercive control, family loyalty and fear of family breakdown. Non-offending parents may be required to navigate police, child protection, family law, schools and therapeutic services simultaneously, sometimes while also experiencing domestic violence (Olejníková et al., 2025; Salter, Woodlock, et al., 2026; Salter et al., 2022).

Recommended actions

- Develop specialist prevention, identification and early intervention measures addressing intrafamilial child sexual abuse, including abuse involving coercive control and the production of CSAM.
- Fund independent advocacy, therapeutic assistance and practical support for children and non-offending parents navigating multiple systems.
- Develop nationally consistent guidance for assessing and responding to cases in which child sexual abuse and domestic and family violence co-occur.

4.2 Children who display harmful sexual behaviours

The Australian Child Maltreatment Study provides evidence that harmful sexual behaviour by children, particularly adolescent boys, has increased dramatically over the last generation (Mathews et al., 2024). However, adolescent sexual violence is currently a key target of gendered violence primary prevention education efforts, under the assumption that sexual violence by boys is driven by social norms and attitudes. This is at odds with proven and effective interventions for children displaying harmful sexual behaviour, which are generally therapeutic and clinical in nature (Cale et al., 2025).

The next Action Plan should identify and address multiple intersecting drivers rather than maintaining a binary between welfare responses and gender-based violence prevention. Relevant drivers include exposure to domestic violence, pornography and other harmful sexual content; trauma and adversity, including child sexual abuse; peer cultures and gendered norms; and participation in online communities that normalise abuse (McKibbin, Green, et al., 2024; McKibbin, Humphreys, et al., 2024).

Emerging concerns include the commercial production and exchange of sexual content involving children, including circumstances in which children appear to sell or monetise their own content (Thiel et al., 2023). Our research has found that children are emulating the behaviour of adult pornography creators by producing and trying to sell their own sexual content online for money.

More recently, the emergence of so-called “com” networks, in which adolescents and young adults collaborate in sexual abuse, self-harm promotion, extortion and serious violence, necessitates a rapid and strategic response.

Recommended actions:

- Strengthen efforts to prevent children’s access to harmful pornography through proportionate age-assurance measures.
- Fund research into the prevalence and characteristics of children who appear to be engaged in the sale of sexual content online.
- Develop rapid research and disruption responses to organised sadistic abuse networks.

4.3 Disrupt offender networks targeting children in childcare

Our research underscores that the childcare sector is being targeted by offender networks in the production of CSAM (Woodlock et al., 2025). To date, safeguarding frameworks have not adequately addressed the challenges posed by highly motivated and premeditated offending networks targeting pre-verbal children in institutional settings. A coordinated and strategic approach to the protection of children in childcare is a vital dimension in the pathway to universal early childhood education and care.

Recommended actions

- Ensure that national regulatory and quality-assurance arrangements for early childhood education include a proactive remit for preventing and detecting child sexual abuse, including physical and operational safeguards, workforce screening, grooming prevention, complaints handling and institutional accountability.
- Review child protection policy and investigation practices in cases involving pre-verbal children to ensure that the child’s inability to disclose does not impede detection, prosecution or recognition of the gravity of the offending.

5. Establish nationally consistent survivor pathways, including for survivors of child sexual abuse material

The effects of child sexual abuse can accumulate across the life course, shaping mental health, relationships, parenting, education, employment, physical safety and trust in institutions. Harm can also extend across families and generations, particularly where victims and survivors, non-offending parents and other family members lack timely therapeutic, legal and practical support (Salter, Woodlock, et al., 2025).

The Second Action Plan should establish nationally consistent pathways spanning crisis response, long-term therapeutic care, peer support, legal assistance, compensation and redress, system navigation, family advocacy and culturally safe healing. Support should be available regardless of when or where abuse occurred, whether it was reported to police or substantiated by an institution, and whether the person seeking assistance identifies as a victim or survivor.

Recommended actions:

- Establish nationally consistent standards for a “no wrong door” approach, including supported referrals, designated system navigators and clear responsibility for ensuring that victims and survivors are not repeatedly required to retell their experiences.
- Provide sustainable funding for specialist, long term therapeutic and mental-health care for children and adults affected by child sexual abuse, including non-offending parents and affected family members.
- Ensure equitable access to specialist support for First Nations people, people with disability, culturally and linguistically diverse communities, LGBTIQ+ people, and people living in regional and remote areas.
- Provide sustainable funding for lived-experience organisations and collectives to deliver peer support, contribute to policy and service design, and represent the diverse interests of victims and survivors.
- Develop nationally consistent outcome measures covering safety, recovery, wellbeing, justice, service experience and quality of life.
- Responses to gender-based violence should be informed by a lifespan approach, recognising the central role that early life experiences (including child sexual abuse) play in life outcomes.

5.1 A national CSAM survivor pathway

A nationally consistent pathway is particularly urgent for victims and survivors whose sexual abuse was recorded, distributed or traded online. Our research examining the online distribution of material depicting three highly-traded Australian survivors found continuing offender interest in identifying and locating victims. Offenders sought information about victims’ identities, backgrounds, locations and current circumstances, and highly identifying information about one survivor was shared online, exposing both the survivor and people close to her (Salter, 2023).

Australia currently lacks an integrated survivor-focused response to the continuing circulation of CSAM. Detection and removal remain fragmented and reactive, while survivors have limited access to information, safety planning, legal assistance, compensation and measures to suppress further distribution. A national pathway should recognise continuing circulation as an ongoing form of harm requiring a sustained response.

Our research also shows that Australian counsellors and social workers are already supporting victims and survivors of technology-facilitated child sexual abuse but often lack specialist training, practice guidance and referral options (Woodlock et al., 2026).

Recommended actions:

- Establish and resource an integrated national CSAM survivor pathway combining victim identification and confirmation; survivor-controlled notification; proactive detection, removal and suppression; risk assessment and safety planning; therapeutic and legal support; assistance with victim impact statements; and access to compensation and restitution.
- Provide each participating survivor with a consistent point of contact and a personalised information and notification plan, including the ability to choose whether, when and how they receive information about the continuing circulation or recovery of their material.
- Establish clear responsibilities and information-sharing arrangements between law enforcement, online-safety agencies, technology services, removal organisations, victim-support services and legal assistance providers.
- Fund the development, national rollout and evaluation of specialist therapeutic interventions and practice resources for victims and survivors of technology-facilitated child sexual abuse.

5.2 Multidisciplinary child and family advocacy

Current systems frequently require children and families to navigate fragmented forensic, medical, therapeutic, legal and child-protection processes, resulting in repeated retelling, delays and inconsistent support. Barnahus and Child Advocacy Centre models provide useful foundations for developing coordinated, child-centred responses suited to Australian legal, cultural and service context (Salter, Woodlock, et al., 2026).

Recommended actions:

- Develop, fund and independently evaluate multidisciplinary child- and family-advocacy models integrating forensic interviewing, medical care, therapeutic support, policing, child protection, legal advocacy and practical family support.
- Establish national principles for multidisciplinary responses, including timely access, culturally safe and accessible practice, information-sharing, continuity of care and minimisation of repeated interviewing.
- Prioritise Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations in the design and delivery of models serving First Nations children and families.



5.3 Family law reform

The Federal Circuit and Family Court of Australia frequently adjudicates complex parenting matters involving allegations of child sexual abuse, including cases in which the available evidence is incomplete, contested or inconclusive (Salter, Woodlock, et al., 2026). The Court necessarily relies on information gathered by police, child protection authorities, family consultants and other external professionals. Variability in the quality, scope and coordination of these processes can leave significant evidentiary gaps and make it more difficult to determine arrangements that protect children's safety and best interests.

Children and non-offending parents may also be required to navigate family-law proceedings without access to coordinated assessment, therapeutic care, legal advocacy or practical support. The FCFCOA should therefore be connected to a broader specialist service response capable of supporting children and families throughout and following proceedings.

Recommended actions:

- Fund comprehensive child-focused support services providing specialist assessment, therapeutic care, system navigation and practical assistance during and following family-law proceedings involving child sexual abuse allegations.
- Review options for ensuring that the FCFCOA has timely access to specialist, independent and child-focused assessment and evidence-gathering capability where allegations of child sexual abuse remain unresolved.
- Develop national practice guidance and specialist training for professionals undertaking assessments or providing evidence in family-law matters involving child sexual abuse.
- Commission research using de-identified FCFCOA files to examine decision-making, evidentiary processes and outcomes in matters involving child sexual abuse allegations.



6. Address the commercial and financial determinants of abuse

Unsafe products, services and business practices should be recognised as commercial determinants of child sexual abuse. Offenders use social media, dating services, livestreaming platforms, online games, private messaging and encrypted services to identify, access, groom and exploit children. Safety obligations should extend to adult-facing services where product design or user practices create foreseeable risks to children, including dating applications used by offenders to target single parents and gain access to their children (Salter, Whitten & Woodlock, 2025; Whitten et al., 2026).

Child sexual abuse can also be facilitated and incentivised through payment systems, digital transactions and commercialised online environments. This includes financially motivated abuse, sexual extortion, the sale and exchange of CSAM, paid livestreaming of abuse, and the use of money, gifts or digital currencies to coerce children into sexual activity or the production of sexual content (International Justice Mission & Childlight East Asia and Pacific Hub, 2025; Salter & Richardson, 2021).

Financial institutions, payment providers, cryptocurrency exchanges and platforms may hold indicators capable of identifying and disrupting abuse (Salter, Whitten, et al., 2026). However, maximising the potential guardianship role of the financial sector requires clear regulatory responsibilities, agreed financial indicators, lawful information-sharing arrangements and effective reporting and escalation pathways.

Our perpetrator research has identified an important relationship between pornography use and men's sexual offending against children (Salter et al., 2023). We found that, as the frequency of pornography viewership increases, so too does the proportion of men who sexually abuse children. Specific types of pornography are strongly associated with an increased risk of child sexual abuse offending, including violent pornography and bestiality pornography. Our data indicates that the regulation and reduction of the availability of high-risk categories of harmful pornography would result in measurable reductions in offending against children (Salter & Woodlock, 2025).

These categories of harmful pornography include genres in which adult performers pretend to be children and promote child sexual abuse. A recent analysis of over 150,000 pornography videos from the three most popular pornography websites found that child sexual abuse is the most depicted form of sexual violence (Vera-Gray et al., 2021). The study found that 7% of online pornography videos explicitly referred to "teen" and emphasised the young age of those depicted in the videos, while 6.4% of all online pornography videos referred to incest and sexual activity between family members (Vera-Gray et al., 2021). Some such material may meet the Commonwealth definition of child sexual abuse material where it depicts a person who is, or appears to be, under 18 engaged in sexual activity or a sexual pose, and does so in circumstances that reasonable persons would regard as offensive. However this content remains widely available across Australia.

Recommended actions:

- Review and strengthen enforceable duties requiring relevant technology and financial entities to identify, assess, mitigate and report on child sexual abuse risks arising from their products, services and business models.
- Continue to review and strengthen age-assurance requirements across services that expose children to sexual content, adult contact or other foreseeable risks, including social media, pornography, gaming and dating services.
- Develop escalation and enforcement pathways for hosting, infrastructure and other service providers that repeatedly fail to act on identified CSAM or facilitate services dedicated to its distribution.
- Integrate financial institutions, payment providers and cryptocurrency services into national child sexual abuse prevention and disruption arrangements, including through agreed financial indicators, referral pathways and information-sharing mechanisms.
- Strengthen collaboration between AUSTRAC, law enforcement, online-safety regulators, financial institutions, technology services and specialist child-protection organisations to identify and disrupt financially facilitated child sexual abuse.
- Consider regulatory, criminal, civil and other powers available to the Australian government to remove or block pornographic material that promotes incest and child sexual abuse themes.
- Ensure that serious or repeated private-sector non-compliance attracts effective penalties, remediation requirements and, where appropriate, contributions to the proposed national child sexual abuse prevention and recovery fund.



7. Uplift national workforce capability

Children, families and adult survivors disclose abuse, seek assistance or come to the attention of services across schools, early childhood education and care, health and mental-health services, domestic and family violence services, disability and youth services, policing, courts, legal assistance, child protection and online-safety services. Technology and financial-sector workforces also hold important responsibilities for preventing, detecting and disrupting abuse.

The Second Action Plan should establish a national workforce capability and sustainability framework defining core capabilities for all relevant workforces and advanced capabilities for specialist, high-risk and high-contact roles. Core capabilities should include recognising and responding to indicators of abuse and grooming; responding appropriately to disclosures; understanding technology-facilitated abuse; making supported referrals; working safely with victims, survivors and non-offending family members; and providing culturally safe and accessible responses.

Implementation should include nationally consistent practice guidance, supervision, specialist consultation, referral pathways, accreditation, communities of practice and evaluation—not only one-off training. The framework should also address workforce planning, recruitment, retention, specialist career pathways, vicarious trauma and burnout, and appropriate support for practitioners with lived experience.

Law enforcement requires focused attention within this broader framework. Victims and survivors report inconsistent responses to disclosures, particularly in cases involving technology-facilitated abuse. Frontline officers require the capability to recognise these offences, preserve relevant evidence, respond appropriately to victims and make timely referrals. Specialist units also require sustained investment in victim identification, digital investigation, financial investigation and the disruption of organised offender networks.

Technological tools, including artificial intelligence, may strengthen investigative and victim-identification capability. Their use should be evidence-informed and subject to appropriate validation, human oversight, privacy protections, procurement standards and accountability.

Recommended actions:

- Develop and fund a national workforce capability and sustainability framework covering all relevant public, community and private-sector workforces.
- Define nationally consistent core capabilities and specialist competencies, supported by practice standards, accreditation, supervision, specialist consultation and referral pathways.
- Undertake national workforce mapping to identify capability gaps, workforce shortages and priority areas for recruitment, retention and specialist development.
- Invest in the development and sustainability of specialist Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander workforces and Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations.
- Develop nationally consistent law-enforcement training and practice guidance, with particular attention to technology-facilitated abuse, victim-centred responses, digital evidence and appropriate referral pathways.
- Expand and coordinate specialist law-enforcement capability in victim identification, digital and financial investigation, and organised network disruption across Commonwealth, state and territory agencies.
- Provide specialist investigators with access to validated investigative and victim-identification technologies, including appropriate artificial-intelligence tools.
- Establish workforce wellbeing standards addressing vicarious trauma, burnout, supervision, manageable workloads and access to specialist psychological support.
- Evaluate workforce initiatives according to demonstrated changes in professional practice, service coordination and outcomes for children, families and survivors.



8. Establish integrated national evidence and data infrastructure to determine whether systems are improving people's lives

Australia has important research projects and datasets on child sexual abuse, but no coherent national mechanism for setting research priorities, aligning terminology, producing comparable data or translating evidence into policy and practice. Administrative categories are often broad or inconsistent across policing, child protection, courts, health, education, specialist services and online-safety systems.

The Second Action Plan should establish an integrated national evidence and data framework comprising a national research agenda; an audit of administrative data; consistent definitions and a national data dictionary; minimum data standards; shared outcome measures; secure data-linkage and access arrangements; and a national child sexual abuse data observatory. This infrastructure should build on existing datasets and expertise while addressing duplication, fragmentation and critical evidence gaps.

First Nations data governance and sovereignty must be embedded from the outset. Victims and survivors, children and young people, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations, specialist services and relevant communities should also participate in determining research priorities, outcome measures, access arrangements and ethical safeguards.

National data systems should measure what happens after disclosure, reporting and service contact - including safety, recovery, mental health, education, family relationships, access to justice, removal and suppression of circulating CSAM, compensation, cultural safety, service experience and long-term wellbeing. Measures of prevalence and service activity are important, but they are not sufficient to determine whether systems are improving people's lives.

Recommended actions:

- Develop and fund a national child sexual abuse research agenda, informed by victims and survivors, children and young people, First Nations organisations, practitioners, researchers and policy-makers.
- Conduct a national audit of administrative data held across policing, child protection, courts, health, education, specialist services and online-safety systems.
- Develop nationally consistent definitions, a child sexual abuse data dictionary, minimum data standards and shared outcome measures across jurisdictions and service systems.
- Embed First Nations data sovereignty and governance in the design, collection, interpretation, ownership and use of relevant data.
- Establish and sustainably fund a national child sexual abuse data observatory to integrate and analyse data, identify emerging trends, monitor outcomes and make evidence accessible to governments, services, researchers and the public.
- Fund national evidence-translation and implementation infrastructure to convert research findings into practical guidance, workforce development, service improvement and policy reform.
- Support regular, methodologically comparable population studies of child sexual abuse victimisation, perpetration, service access and long-term outcomes.



9. Build future-facing and regional capability responding to risks that emerge faster than policy cycles.

The Second Action Plan must be capable of responding to risks that emerge and develop faster than conventional policy cycles. These include generative AI and synthetic CSAM; automated grooming and sexual extortion; new forms of payment and monetisation; and the emergence of organised networks involving sexual abuse, self-harm promotion, extortion and serious violence.

Future-facing capability must also address the continued adaptation of established offender communities and infrastructures. Of particular concern is the “paedosphere”: interconnected online communities operating through Tor hidden services and other encrypted or anonymised environments that normalise child sexual abuse, facilitate the exchange of CSAM and enable offenders to develop and maintain abusive networks (Salter, Richardson, et al., 2025). These communities are transnational, technologically adaptive and resistant to conventional investigative and regulatory approaches.

Responses should distinguish between the legitimate uses of privacy-enhancing technologies and services or communities dedicated to child sexual abuse. Australia requires sustained capability to identify, investigate and disrupt the latter through targeted legal measures, specialist technical expertise, international cooperation and proportionate obligations on relevant service providers.

Recommended action:

- Establish a standing horizon-scanning and rapid-response mechanism bringing together regulators, law enforcement, victims and survivors, researchers, children’s-rights and privacy experts, specialist services and relevant industries.
- Create a rapid commissioning and policy-response capability to investigate emerging threats, develop interim guidance and coordinate regulatory or operational action outside conventional policy cycles.
- Strengthen the technical, investigative and legal capability of Australian agencies to identify and disrupt CSAM services, offender communities and organised abuse networks operating through Tor and other encrypted or anonymised environments.
- Strengthen international intelligence-sharing, joint investigations and operational partnerships targeting transnational CSAM services and offender networks.
- Publish regular assessments of emerging child sexual abuse threats and the adequacy of Australia’s policy, legislative and operational responses.

9.1 Australia's regional responsibilities

Child sexual abuse and exploitation are transnational challenges requiring sustained regional cooperation. Australia has particular responsibilities as a funder, development partner and regional actor in preventing and responding to sexual violence against children across the Asia-Pacific. Australian offenders, technology services, financial systems and patterns of demand can contribute to harms experienced beyond Australia's borders, while online offending and exploitation networks operate across national jurisdictions.

Children who have experienced sexual abuse and adults disclosing childhood abuse are already significant cohorts within Australian-funded gender-based violence, health and protection programs in the region, even where child sexual abuse is not identified as a distinct priority. Explicitly addressing child sexual abuse within these investments would strengthen, rather than displace, existing locally led responses.

Australia's regional engagement should be grounded in sustained partnership, local leadership and cultural context. It should strengthen regional capability across prevention, survivor support, research and data, workforce development, investigation, financial disruption and cross-border cooperation.

Recommended actions:

- Embed child sexual abuse prevention and response within relevant DFAT-funded gender-based violence, child-protection, health, education and online-safety programs.
- Strengthen regional research and data capability, with appropriate attention to local ownership, ethical governance and data sovereignty.
- Support regional governments and civil-society organisations to develop effective responses to child sexual abuse and exploitation.

Conclusion

The Second Action Plan is an opportunity to build a national response to child sexual abuse that is coordinated, adequately resourced and fit for the twenty-first century. Australia must complete the unfinished work of institutional reform while responding to emerging forms of exploitation, technological and commercial risks, and the continuing targeting of vulnerable children. Success will require clear national leadership, sustained investment and public accountability, alongside meaningful participation by children, victims and survivors, First Nations communities and specialist services. These nine commitments provide a practical framework for preventing abuse, protecting children and securing recovery, justice and remedy for victims and survivors.

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