

TasCOSS Consultation recommendations

for strengthening engagement between Government and Tasmanian communities and community organisations

The COI Implementation Project

The Tasmanian Government has committed to fully implementing all recommendations from the Commission of Inquiry into the Tasmanian Government's Responses to Child Sexual Abuse in Institutional Settings ('the Commission of Inquiry'). As part of its project to implement the recommendations ('the COI Implementation Project'), the Government is engaged in a comprehensive program of system-wide reform to improve the way agencies respond to and protect Tasmanian children and young people from child sexual abuse.

TasCOSS is a partner for the COI Implementation Project. The intended purpose of TasCOSS' involvement includes:

- Fostering culture and system change across institutions, organisations, community and society;
- Enhanced engagement between Government and the community sector to inform the COI Implementation Project;
- Increased opportunities for ongoing education, engagement and systems and culture change across the community sector;
- Working collaboratively with Government and community to advance the rights, safety and wellbeing of Tasmanian children, young people and adults in vulnerable situations.

The Tasmanian Government is currently considering the implementation of Recommendation 19.1 of the Commission of Inquiry:

1. The Tasmanian Government should develop a whole of government child sexual abuse reform strategy for preventing, identifying and responding to child sexual abuse, including child sexual abuse in institutions and harmful sexual behaviours. The strategy should:
 - a. describe the system that Tasmania seeks to achieve, including the component parts of that system, how Tasmanians will know it is working, and the role of key initiatives, reforms and recommendations in achieving the intended outcomes
 - b. be separate from, but complement, the Government's Family and Sexual Violence Action Plan
 - c. be informed by the voices of children and young people and adult victim survivors of child sexual abuse (Recommendation 19.5)
 - d. include agreed definitions of child sexual abuse, institutional child sexual abuse and harmful sexual behaviours
 - e. set out guiding principles and objectives to inform preventing, identifying and responding to child sexual abuse
 - f. identify the agencies, including statutory bodies and non-government organisations, involved in preventing, identifying and responding to child sexual abuse
 - g. set out processes through which government agencies, statutory bodies and non-government organisations can consult on child sexual abuse reform

- h. set out considerations relevant to particular cohorts of children and young people, including Aboriginal children, children with disability, children with mental illness, children who identify as LGBTQIA+ and children from culturally and linguistically diverse communities
 - i. outline the sources of funding for key initiatives and reforms set out in the strategy
 - j. outline the governance, monitoring, review and evaluation arrangements for child sexual abuse reform, including that the Secretary of the Department of Premier and Cabinet, as Chair of the Secretaries Board, is responsible for endorsing, overseeing, coordinating and reporting on the strategy and action plan (Recommendation 19.3).
2. The Tasmanian Government should develop an action plan for the implementation of the child sexual abuse reform strategy. The action plan should:
 - a. prioritise all recommendations and reforms for implementation over the short, medium and long term and include expected timeframes for implementing each recommendation
 - b. identify the role holders and agencies that have responsibility for implementation of each recommendation and reform
 - c. describe the actions to be taken to implement the recommendations and reforms, including any milestones, sequencing and dependencies
 - d. identify the status of each recommendation and reform (that is, complete, under way or not commenced) and whether it is progressing on time
 - e. be endorsed and overseen by the governance structure identified in the strategy.
 3. The child sexual abuse reform strategy and action plan should be:
 - a. tabled in each House of Parliament
 - b. published on a dedicated website
 - c. supported by a communication plan that seeks to inform and provide visibility of reform work to stakeholders and the community
 - d. periodically reviewed and updated by the Secretaries Board through the Department of Premier and Cabinet.

As part of our work as a project partner, we have been asked to consider how the Government can improve its engagement with non-government organisations (including the community sector and the community more broadly) on child sexual abuse reform.

TasCOSS is proposing a series of recommendations to Government. Our recommendations will be based on research into effective community consultation, input from community organisations and stakeholders, and consideration of our internal policies and frameworks on engagement (for example, the TasCOSS Engagement Framework and our review of TasCOSS' engagement processes, which involved feedback from a number of member organisations).

Consultation principles

Our recommendations will be based on the following principles:

A whole-of-community issue

Child sexual abuse is a whole-of-community issue. Consultation must be broad enough to encompass a broad range of views, experience and expertise of organisations and individuals.

A proactive Government response

Community members and organisations have already given a wealth of information to Government and to the Commission of Inquiry. Consultation should involve a proactive role for Government to review and analyse existing information, responses and feedback, rather than requiring community organisations to reproduce or reiterate material from previous consultations.

Information sharing

Information must be shared between Government agencies and community to facilitate meaningful engagement. Government must take a proactive role in providing relevant information to enable informed public debate and promote greater understanding of Government processes.

Transparency

Consultations must include transparency around why the Government is seeking information, how information will be used, and who will be accessing and using information.

Accessible information and flexible processes

All consultations must include the provision of accessible and easy to understand information, and opportunities for consultation in various formats (such as written responses, surveys and forums). The Government should invite and consider ongoing feedback on how consultation processes are working to identify and address participation challenges and gaps.

Closing the loop

Stakeholders are rarely given information about how their feedback has been used and considered when decisions have been made. All Government consultations should include a publicly available follow-up response from the Government outlining how information or expertise has been weighed in the decision-making process.

Recognition and support

Consultation is onerous for community organisations and community members. Whilst community members and organisations want to be consulted, they also need recognition of the difficulties involved in consultation processes, and more support from Government to support sustainable and meaningful involvement.

Overarching consultation recommendations

Alongside our recommendations for models of consultation (explored further below), TasCOSS strongly supports the implementation of two key changes to current consultation methodology. We believe the implementation of these changes will have significant and positive impacts:

- Increased public understanding of the COI Implementation Project
- Increased public engagement
- A greater level of accountability in relation to Government decision-making to community members and organisations
- Enhanced trust and collaboration between Government and the community sector
- The promotion of proactive engagement in consultation.

The following two changes should be implemented alongside any other proposed consultation reforms:

1) The development of a web portal with regularly updated information on the COI Implementation Project

We strongly recommend the development of an online portal where community organisations (and individuals) can access up-to-date information about the COI Implementation Project.

The portal should include the following:

- A document library (including, for example, literature reviews of existing State and National policies, frameworks and recommendations from inquiries, any research used in the development of policy initiatives or legislative reform, and any documents mapping the child safety and family wellbeing service sector)
- A timeline of proposed reforms and public consultations
- Information about community consultation opportunities across Departments, presented in formats that are accessible and encourage engagement from a broad range of stakeholders
- Clear information about how to contact Department representatives.

Examples of websites which could be considered in the development of the web portal include:

- The ACT Government [Open Government website](#), designed to promote transparency and civic engagement, which includes a range of resources including Government reports, Cabinet decisions and links to engagement programs for members of the public
- The South Australian [YourSAY website](#), an online platform for public engagement on specific issues, which lists current consultation projects with links for the public to access information about proposed reforms (including documents such as issues papers, key dates and timeframes for the project, and frequently asked questions).

2) Practical changes to current consultation practices

More information

Many community organisations currently lack the time and resources to engage in community consultation opportunities offered by Government. There is a lack of information provided by Departments when consulting on reform – for example, explanatory memoranda or fact sheets to explain the potential impact of proposed legislative amendments. There is often a lack of accessible documentation accompanying community consultation (whereas other jurisdictions include ‘Easy Read’ or accessible versions of documents, and videos).

We believe all community consultations relating to child sexual abuse should include provision of:

- A detailed fact sheet/explanatory memorandum explaining the proposed change and how it relates to the Commission of Inquiry recommendation/s
- Accessible and ‘easy-read’ documents (including Plain English and child-friendly materials)
- A list of any resources (including reports and academic articles) used to develop the proposed reform.

Greater engagement opportunities

More flexible options for community consultation are needed to accommodate the different needs and preferences of individuals and communities. Whilst many community organisations may struggle to provide a written policy submission in relation to proposed reform, they may be able to participate in online or in-person forums to provide feedback directly to Government, or complete an online survey.

More time to consider materials and provide a response

All community consultations should provide community members and organisations a minimum of 4-6 weeks for feedback to be provided.

Promote community involvement

TasCOSS believes there should be more opportunities for community members to be involved in developing, implementing and reviewing Government responses. Alongside the involvement of specialist and community organisations, the involvement of member of the public could promote understanding of issues relating to child sexual abuse, raise awareness of the Government's reform agenda, and increase community confidence in the COI Implementation Plan.

We recommend the Government facilitate a community panel to enable community members to provide direct input into the reform process. Examples of such panels can be found in other Australian jurisdictions – see for example South Australia's [Community Panel](#) or the Australian Capital Territory's [YourSay Panel](#). A community panel could be informed by Tasmanian community organisations who already work extensively with community members with lived experience of particular. Feedback from and engagement with the community panel and how it is considered in Government decision-making should be made publicly available.

Consultation Models

We are proposing a series of consultation models (alongside the two overarching changes outlined above) for the Government to consider.

A) 'Business as usual' (incorporating the changes listed above)

- This is the methodology which most closely resembles current consultation practices.
- Community organisations and individuals would be invited to respond to drafts of strategies/Bills/action plans.

Example: current community consultation, but with information provided about the consultation on the website (described above) in a variety of accessible formats, and offering more opportunities for different types of engagement.

B) Establishing a regular consultation and feedback network

- This model would give community organisations the opportunity to provide feedback and information to the Government in ‘real-time’ on an ongoing basis through participation in regular online network meetings attended by representatives of community organisations, other stakeholders and staff from Government agencies.

Example: the statewide Covid Recovery meetings held online (coordinated by TasCOSS) during 2021-2022, which provided participants the opportunity to receive information directly from Government representatives, provide real-time feedback on proposed responses and updates on service delivery, and ask questions of Government agencies.

C) Establish advisory committee/s

- This model would involve establishing an advisory committee – or a series of reference groups relating to designated policy and/or reform areas – with whom the Government could consult on reforms.
- Feedback from the advisory group(s), as well as how the Government has considered and used their feedback in decision-making should be publicly available.

Example: the National Strategy to Prevent and Respond to Child Sexual Abuse has a National Strategy Advisory Group (which includes representatives from identified priority groups, non-government organisations, academics and others) to contribute to the design, implementation and evaluation of the National Strategy.

D) Targeted engagement with established (or soon to be established) groups

- The Government would engage in targeted consultation with existing groups and/or networks.
- Drafts of documents (including strategies, Bills and action plans) would be sent to existing networks for feedback, or meetings could be arranged to elicit in-person feedback.
- As a first step, the Government may have to identify any gaps in the service network where relevant providers/agencies are not included in existing networks.

Examples of groups that could be included include the Family and Sexual Violence Alliance, the Coalition of Peaks, existing Government advisory councils (such as the Premier’s Health and Wellbeing Advisory Council and the Premier’s Disability Advisory Council) or specialist groups convened by agencies such as the Commissioner for Children and Young People.

E) Co-Designed Community Engagement

- This model would involve the community-led design and implementation of a dedicated community engagement strategy.
- In each region across the State, the Government would meet several times with a group of representatives including staff from local community organisations and other stakeholders (such as community members who have lived experience) to discuss and design localised action plans for the implementation of recommendations – this would mean that engagement strategies may differ according to the needs, preferences and experiences of particular communities.

Example: a recent co-design project between the Australian Government Department of Human Services and the Municipal Association of Victoria called the ‘Co-Design Community Engagement

Prototype'. Engagement sessions were held in different sites across Victoria, in which up to 30 participants (including residents, community organisations, local, state and federal government representatives) met four times to discuss a specific issue and develop action plans to address the issue.

F) Over to you

We would love to hear from you with any ideas. What consultation model would work best for you, your organisation or the community you work in? How do you think the Government should consult on child sexual abuse reform?

Let us know via our [survey](#), call us or email us:

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