

Safeguarding People Australia (SPA)

Child and Family Advocacy Centre (CFAC) and information sharing

Overview – Hetty Johnston AM GAICD

I have been advocating for the introduction of CFAC -Child and Family Advocacy Centres – into Australia since 2016 in a campaign that I started whilst at Bravehearts and continue with today.

We simply must respond appropriately to the increasing prevalence of child abuse and harm.

Prevalence of child abuse

- ▶ The Australian Child Maltreatment Study (ACMS 2023), has found child Maltreatment is widespread among Australians. 32% experienced Physical Abuse, over 1 in 4 children (28.5%) experienced sexual abuse, 30.9% emotional abuse, 8.9% neglect and 39.6% experienced exposure to domestic violence. <https://www.acms.au/>
- ▶ Almost 1 in 10 Australians experienced forced sex in childhood (8.7%); Mathews, Pacella, Scott, et al., 2023).

The Offenders

- ▶ Around one in six (15.1%) Australian men reports sexual feelings towards children. Around one in ten (9.4%) Australian men HAS sexually offended against children. [Identifying and understanding child sexual offending behaviour and attitudes among Australian men.pdf](#) (Salter etal 2023)
- ▶ A study of child sexual abuse material survivors found 42 per cent were abused by their father or stepfather, meaning abuse prevention and education services can't assume all parents protect children in their care. (Salter, Woodlock, Whitten, et al., 2023).

False Allegations

- ▶ Academic findings pinpoint false allegations of sexual abuse from children at just 2.5% to 5%. In children under 6 years of age, this falls to 2% (Oates et al. 2000; Everson & Boat 1989).

These research findings are some of the realities that drive my ongoing passion to address what I believe are the most pressing issues in Australia - being the failure of the current Federal and State statutory, regulatory and judicial systems to effectively unite in response to the sexual, physical, and psychological abuse of Australian children, their protective parents, vulnerable adults as well as woman and children experiencing domestic violence, including murder and filicide.

Note: Whilst child sexual abuse is the focus of this paper, it is worth noting that proposals and assessments raised in this paper equally apply to current response to domestic violence and to other vulnerable cohorts such as the elderly and other adults with communicative and cognitive disabilities.

The systemic failure in 'preventive safeguarding' begins the moment the child or vulnerable adult becomes reliant on government regulated services, systems, organisations, legislations and regulations to keep them safe.

The systemic 'response' failures become more apparent the moment the child or protective parent (or other vulnerable adult) finds the courage to disclose and seek help. It is at this point State Police or regulatory bodies are contacted and, it is at this point that the looming catastrophic systemic failures are at its most avoidable and most repairable.

The two legitimate legal tests used by Courts to determine guilt / responsibility / liability are:

1. 'Beyond Reasonable Doubt' in the criminal systems, and
2. 'Balance of Probabilities' in the civil systems - including the Family Courts.

Beyond Reasonable Doubt is the highest legal test. It means that the evidence presented in court must be so strong and convincing that there is no other logical explanation for the events in question.

Balance of Probabilities is the lesser test and is used in civil Courts including the Family Courts. This purports to mean that in a civil trial, the plaintiff only needs to prove that it is more likely than not (51%) that the defendant is liable for the claim made against them.

Recognition of harm There is another test applied outside courts in matters of Redress Schemes which does not seek to find guilt on the part of the nominated alleged perpetrators but rather sufficient evidence that abuse occurred. The primary aim being to provide compensation for the victim. This forms the legal framework for redress schemes, ensuring that those affected receive recognition and compensation for their experiences.

The current system of determination for criminal matters totally disregards any *Balance of Probabilities* evidence that does not form part of the factual evidence required to achieve a criminal conviction.

Other intelligence gathering such as witnesses, disclosures of children to third parties, disclosures to redress schemes, disciplinary action by regulatory authorities etc are routinely not sufficient for police to use in pursuit of a criminal conviction.

Police must only focus on achieving evidence to support a determination of *Beyond Reasonable Doubt*. Police interviewing processes reflect that goal and do not deliberately seek out the wider *Balance of Probabilities* collective environmental evidence. Environment evidence, meaning other forms of intelligence gathering or the use of other information gathered by regulatory bodies etc, that fail to assist police to reach the criminal threshold of *Beyond Reasonable Doubt*. This form of information will likely not be shared and may not even be retained.

Too, the decision to proceed in a matter for Department of Prosecutions (DPP) is independent of Police achieving their designated goal of *Beyond Reasonable Doubt* and is based on two questions:

As such, complainants of criminality, such as sexual abuse, domestic violence etc must seek 'justice' by contacting Police and making a complaint. Investigations must result in sufficient evidence to support

Beyond Reasonable Doubt. Failure to achieve this results in discontinuance by police, DPP and the Courts. However we know that:

- ▶ Only one in five (21.6%) of matters brought to police proceeded beyond the investigation stage. The overall estimate is that only 12% of offences reported to police resulted in a conviction, at a relatively stable rate over 14 years. These findings are consistent with those of comparable studies. [Fourteen-Year Trends in the Criminal Justice Response to Child Sexual Abuse Reports in New South Wales - Judith Cashmore, Alan Taylor, Patrick Parkinson, 2020](#)

Any evidence or testimony which might support a finding of *Balance of Probabilities* is siloed or discarded once a matter is discontinued by Police or unsuccessful (88% of complaints). This is because recording, managing or reporting this information, and any Balance of Probabilities assessment by Police or DPP, is outside of their roles.

There is currently no systemic process to capture and use this information to inform a potential Civil Court *Balance of Probabilities* finding. The current criminal system discards, silo's or ignores opportunities for contributing to profile building intelligence that would, over time, identify repeat offenders and be used by other systemic processes such as family courts, working with children checks, reportable conduct schemes etc.

In the current system, at the very same time a matter is discontinued the Balance of Probabilities evidence is siloed or disregarded, and any hope for justice and protection for the victim and those who protect them is likewise disregarded.

The current system of determination for Family Law matters

Civil Law in Australia governs Family law issues, including divorce, child custody, and spousal support.

Criminal convictions of abuse in States and Territories will factor heavily in the Family Courts decisions around child custody. However, unless the criminal legal system has achieved a guilty verdict the matter is treated as 'unsubstantiated' by the child protection and family court systems, regardless of the veracity of the *Beyond Reasonable Doubt* evidence. This is the most common scenario. Without access to independent, reliable systemic evidence, allegations of child sexual assault/abuse will be difficult, if not impossible, to be taken seriously in the Family Court.

This is largely because the current system of reporting crimes to Police provides no systemic process to assess the civil court evidentiary test- *the Balance of Probabilities* evidence - at the time of the disclosure, that is, when the incident/s occurred or when it was reported. This is the optimum time to conduct both *Beyond Reasonable Doubt* and *Balance of Probabilities* assessments. As a result, independent and time sensitive *Balance of Probabilities* evidence and assessment is not presented to the Family Court in a timely or meaningful way because the collation of such is not part of any existing expert independent investigatory process from the outset.

There are numerous tools available within the Family Law Rules to assist in the gathering of evidence in preparation for family law proceedings but these are all conducted well into the timeline of the matter, sometimes years. They are not independent, potentially biased and usually prepared for the benefit of one party or the other. They are expensive and time consuming to gather and present to the court, they lack independence and they rarely tell the whole story.

Much of the opportunity to conduct an 'environmental scan' of the family history, to consider the police child interviews, as well as the witness testimonies and other evidence is lost, damaged or unattainable over the intervening time between initial disclosure, police intervention and family court proceedings.

Too often, the children involved, and their protective parents, have become increasingly traumatised and financially bereft by the time the matter is heard in the family court. By the time that happens, what is true, and what is not, becomes heavily clouded in a myriad of trauma, deception, fear, untruths and missed opportunities.

The opportunity to conduct a real time thorough independent, expert multi-disciplinary family report has passed.

The family court is left to make life changing decisions largely based on 'he said', 'she said' evidence coupled with the limited input of expensive, potentially biased 'experts', lawyers and Court appointed Child Representatives.

By the time this situation occurs, the children have told their story on multiple occasions to no avail. They have now learnt to stay silent. They understand that speaking the truth just brings more disruption and pain to them and to their protective parent - that no one believes them – that their situation is hopeless and that they just have to give in to that reality.

Any chance to establish the probability of what actually happened was lost long before the matter came to the Family Court, as is any chance to divert the probable lifelong trauma to the child and the protective parent.

This failure results in huge costs to both the State and Federal social welfare and legal systems.

IMPACT ON FAILURE TO COLLECT & SHARE INTELLIGENCE DATA – ENVIRONMENTAL SCREENING

Potential intelligence on the alleged offender, their family, and their work history is siloed and disconnected rendering it almost useless in the identification of repeated concerning behaviours, dismissals, reports, warnings and all other *WWC Balance of Probability* suitability assessment.

This information will generally show that seemingly isolated incidents, if collated could be utilised to reveal a pattern of behaviour, a dangerous character profile. Almost always, once an offender is caught an investigation of their past will reveal previous known, recognised or even documented patterns of previous behaviour that, if collated, could have been utilised as a warning. In the current system this critical information is lost, hidden from view while the predator continues to play the system underterred in their desire to sexual harm children.

Valuable information is currently contained in privacy protected silos including Mandatory Reporting, Reportable Conduct, Police investigations & charges, redress schemes, education, health, justice, child safety employment and complaint records, aged care and disability regulatory and compliant systems, WWCC, sector disciplinary and dismissal notifications and actions, professional bodies disciplinary records. The list is long.

We simply must pull this information together to protect our children and vulnerable adults.

We must elevate the rights of children to be safe over that of those who would harm them.

FAMILY COURT

This failure to gather the pertinent evidence, criminal and civil, is why I believe the Family Court system consistently fails, not only in its inadequate assessment of critical facts but also in relying on Judges to undertake their own, potentially biased, self assessment of probabilities based on unreliable, incomplete and tainted evidence.

In the current system there is no arms length, consistent or reliable capacity for Judges to make informed decisions based on a time sensitive, comprehensive, expert multi-disciplinary and independent *Balance of Probabilities* assessment relating to family. And with that lost opportunity goes any likelihood of establishing an assessment of the probable likelihood of ongoing danger or risk to the child and their protective parent.

These are huge risks to take with peoples lives and yet the Court does it every day – with impunity.

A combined *Beyond Reasonable Doubt* and *Balance of Probability* assessment, conducted at the same time of the initial interview, in a child focused environment, by a fully trained specialist forensic interviewer supported by independent, specialist, multi-disciplinary team with access to the information held in the various silos, will lead to hugely improved protections for children, protective parents and other vulnerable people across all systems of government.

The assessment and collation of data related to that investigation will also serve to inform the identify of repeat offenders, such as has recently occurred in the Ashley Griffith child care matter currently before the criminal courts in Queensland.

Australia's Family Law system is currently not fit for purpose in dealing with domestic violence in all its forms. It is causing avoidable and catastrophic harm to thousands of children, protective parents and women suffering domestic violence. And I believe this is the reason. Lack of evidence and lack of capacity to find it when needed.

I am not alone in believing this. Even the previous Chief Justice of Family Court, John Pascoe, joined me in calling for a Royal Commission into the Family Court. <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2018-10-03/family-law-court-may-need-royal-commission-justice-pascoe-says/10332588#:~:text=John%20Pascoe%20says-.Family%20law%20system%20may%20need%20royal%20commission,Chief%20Justice%20John%20Pascoe%20says&text=A%20royal%20commission%20into%20family,Justice%20of%20the%20Family%20Court>

Unleash the Sleeping Giant that is *Balance of Probabilities*

The Child and Family Advocacy Centre Model

Recent revelations of the catastrophic failure of our child protection systems paints a grim picture.

[Thousands of reports of abuse have been made in Australian childcare centres. Most alleged perpetrators were allowed to keep working | Childcare Australia | The Guardian](#)

I believe the failure to immediately and expertly assess the veracity and strength of abuse disclosures from children and parents, based on 'Beyond Reasonable Doubt' and 'Balance of Probabilities' is our most critical missed opportunity to protect children and women suffering domestic violence. An accompanying sector and jurisdictional wide environmental and evidentiary scan would accompany this process and should be conducted by:

- ✓ One stop CFAC response to child sexual abuse and family violence including
- ✓ utilising Qualified Child Forensic Interview specialists working in collaboration with Police to interview children in purpose built interactive interview and observation rooms and where the full interview is recorded and reference tagged for later use by police and courts, and
- ✓ where evidence is gathered for both criminal and civil applications and a CFAC report prepared expediently and shared with authorities who need to make timely decisions.
- ✓ Independent expert multi-disciplinary team including Police, forensic interviewers, Child Protection, DPP, therapist, social workers, case managers
- ✓ supported by domestic violence experts, culturally informed experts, case managers all operating from a child focussed centre called a Child and Family Advocacy Centre
- ✓ utilising access to cross jurisdictional and sector information sharing from Health, Education, Child Protection, Justice - Federal and State.
- ✓ case managers conducting social environmental scans of the family, linking families with support services and then tracking engagement and outcomes
- ✓ Funded equally by State and Federal
- ✓ Service the evidentiary needs of Police and the State/Federal civil and criminal courts as well as systemic data monitoring systems such as working with children checks.

I believe a system that focuses on 'gathering evidentiary truth' – both for criminal and civil use will save governments billions of dollars in court time and social services. Importantly, it will prioritise the protection of woman, children and vulnerable adults bringing transparency and integrity to legal decisions.

We need to provide a 'one door' entry point for protective parents and children, where the system comes to them at one place and at one time, in a place purpose built for them, where the child's best evidence is heard at the earliest opportunity, fully recorded, all family information gathered from the various statutory departments, where experts are available to offer assistance, where a risk assessment is conducted, where the family risk report is shared with all jurisdictions and courts and where all safety

concerns responded to adequately. All of this is possible in a jointly funded State/Federal/User CFAC (Child and Family Advocacy Centre) model.

A CFAC, jointly funded by State and Federal governments and user pays contributions could close this gap and protect woman and children across the nation.

The History of Children’s Advocacy Centres (CAC’s)

The CAC model was first developed in US in 1985 to reduce the trauma for harmed children, coordinate the efforts of all parties involved with the investigation of the allegation, ensure that the child/family has access to ongoing medical and mental health care and provide the best outcome in a criminal case.

On one of my visits to USA I visited the NCA HQ and was advised that if they had their time over again they would call them Child and Family Advocacy Centres. Hence why I call them CFAC’s.

The USA now has over 900 CACs (Child Advocacy Centres) in operation due to the success they are having in achieving those objectives. Europe has a similar model in their Barnahus model. Australia has begun to implement versions SA, Vic and WA. All have experienced similar success but none have achieved the ultimate desired outcomes.

My proposed model builds on these but with the critically needed introduction of cross jurisdictional links to also meet the needs of the Family Court and those families who are hoping for justice and protection.

Even though the system with which the US works differs from that of Australia, the fact that bringing all services to the child, ensuring integrity of interview provides best possible evidence for further action and wrapping advocacy and counselling services around the affected family can only lead to better outcomes for the child and their protective family.

The Australian Law Reform Commission in its 1997 report (*ALRC REPORT 84 (1997) Recommendation 92*), endorsed the crucial need to create Children’s Advocacy Centre’s based on the US model when dealing with incidences of child harm. However, 28 years later, children remain at risk of harm due to a system unwilling to implement its own recommendations. We cannot afford to wait any longer. Our children are continuing to suffer preventable trauma.

USA – National Children’s Alliance (NCA)

The National Children’s Alliance (NCA) was established in the US to provide governance over the many CACs established in the US. Each CAC is developed to meet the particular needs of the community within which it is set up. The NCA National Statistics 2017 offers invaluable information into the CAC effectiveness in the USA. In 2017 alone 334 626 children were supported nationally through a CAC (<http://www.nationalchildrensalliance.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/2017NationalAnnual.pdf>). From these children there was 263,985 identified alleged offenders after conducting 236,589 on site Forensic Interviews (<http://www.nationalchildrensalliance.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/2017NationalAnnual.pdf>).

Further research from the NCA demonstrated the following;

- Proven cost effective, efficient child abuse response reducing the time to dispose of cases (Saves \$1,000/case and 81% of cases are jointly investigated compared to 52% where a CAC is not available).
- Increases the rate of prosecution (94% conviction rate with longer prison terms)
- Increases the likelihood that harmed children will get medical and mental health care (4x's more likely).

Increases the parents' satisfaction with the investigation and prosecution of the case involving their child(ren) 97% of parents would tell others to seek help at a CAC.

What is a CAC?

Simply put, a Children's Advocacy Centre is a community-based collaboration across agencies, utilising child friendly practices in a purpose utilised space to enhance the expert investigation, treatment, management and prosecution of child sexual assault.

A Children's Advocacy Centre model is a holistic approach with the child at the centre. Its aim is to improve outcomes for children and families particularly in terms of:

- easier disclosure in a child friendly environment where the child tells their story once to a specialised, forensic interviewer who knows the right questions to ask in a way that does not re-traumatise the child; this interview is videoed through discreet cameras and can be utilised as evidence;
- an expert multi-disciplined and coordinated team, including law enforcement, child protection, prosecution, advocacy, social workers, forensic interviewers, and medical professionals working together to help the child based on the 'one' interview;
- more comprehensive evidence collaboratively produced by experts, so the family has better evidence with which to appear before the Court;
- Independent accurate information available to courts, Family, Criminal and Civil.
- increased prosecution rates; and
- over-all reduced trauma and improved wellbeing including healing for the child and protective parent.

How does it work?

Child welfare is central in the CAC model. Their wellbeing is the most important consideration. It is children who are most often the only source of information about what has happened to them, especially in child sexual assault cases where there is rarely any physical evidence or witnesses, but also in physical abuse, DV and other serious crimes.

Through a child centred approach, the CAC model provides support to the child and their protective family members to ensure the best possible outcome for each and every child, irrespective of the threshold of evidence obtained through the interview process. It also captures the child's evidence in perpetuity in the event it is needed in the years ahead.

A key enabler in achieving this is the 'single' forensic interview, where the forensic interviewers have contact with the child in a child friendly interviewing room. Relevant child protection professionals and law enforcement personnel observe from another room via closed circuit cameras and audio equipment, reducing the trauma for the child.

Police, DPP, child protection, relevant experts, child advocates and/or other potential stakeholders monitor the disclosure, assess the available information from each's Departments respective database and make a collective and early risk assessment of the matter. All parties of the MDT work together to create a case plan reflective of the assessed outcomes and that plan is case managed by the Child Advocate.

Further, it also allows for all questions to be answered, reducing the need for multiple interviews and in many cases will successfully negate the need for a child or young person to give evidence in a Courtroom.

In the CFAC model, an unbiased, multi-agency, expert recommendation report is made available to the Courts on which to base their findings including custody decisions, civil or criminal charges and determinations - using both *BALANCE OF PROBABILITIES* and *BEYOND REASONABLE DOUBT* legal tests.

One set of Safeguarding Standards, One National Safeguarding Commission, Equal protection for every child and vulnerable person.

The childcare Industry is in the headlines this month. Next month it will almost certainly be schools, hospitals, aged care and/or disability.

The modus operandi of offenders are often the same across the sectors but so too the opportunities to prevent them.

However, the federal government, States and Territories - and their respective 'protective systems' are not responsive nor compliant with what community and the Royal Commissions expects of them in terms of prioritising the safety and wellbeing of the nations children over the civil rights of adults who have demonstrated behaviours that would make them unsuitable to work with children.

[Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse](#)

FINAL REPORT Volume 6 Making institutions child safe

National leadership, coordination and continuous improvement

The need for a nationally consistent approach to children's safety in institutions across Australia is clear.

Only national leadership, coordination and continuous improvement can drive the effective implementation of interventions to better protect children, and maximise collaboration and the efficient use of resources across jurisdictions.

A national approach would also facilitate the integration of child safe initiatives with other national strategies aimed at protecting children, including the National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children 2010–2022 and the National Disability Strategy 2010–2020.

The National Framework for Protecting Australia’s Children 2009–2020 has promoted the national importance of child safety, and fostered collaboration and cooperation across governments and non-government organisations.

There appear to be limitations in the current arrangements under the National Framework for Protecting Australia’s Children, for example the Framework’s governance, funding, focus on child protection stakeholders, research agenda and transparency.

We believe:

- the Australian Government is best placed to drive national consistency, collaboration and continuous improvement (see Recommendation 6.14)
- evaluation and review of implementation and outcomes are necessary to improve child safe strategies
- there should be a national role to evaluate, review and publicly report on the implementation of the Child Safe Standards and recommend improvements.

The Australian Government should develop a National Framework for Child Safety that is endorsed and governed by the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) to supersede the existing National Framework for Protecting Australia’s Children, which expires in 2020 (see Recommendation 6.15).

The National Framework for Child Safety should commit governments to implementing long term child safety initiatives and hold them to account. It should specifically include institutional child sexual abuse as well as broader child safety issues, and include links to other related policy frameworks.

The government should commit adequate long-term funding to initiatives in the National Framework for Child Safety.

The Australian Government should establish a National Office for Child Safety in the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, to provide a response to the implementation of the Child Safe Standards nationally, and to develop and lead the proposed National Framework for Child Safety (see Recommendations 6.16 and 6.17).

The Australian Government should transition the National Office for Child Safety into an Australian Government statutory body within 18 months of this Royal Commission’s Final Report being tabled in the Australian Parliament. Establishment by legislation would give the office longevity, accountability, appropriate governance arrangements, and sufficient powers and resources to perform its functions.

An Australian Government minister should be given portfolio responsibility for national leadership of children's policy issues, including child safety (see Recommendation 6.18). Creation of a ministerial portfolio would cement child safety as a national priority. The portfolio should include responsibility for the implementation and effectiveness of the National Framework for Child Safety and its associated initiatives.

A phased approach going forward

The implementation of our recommendations for improving child safe approaches should be a priority for governments. Our recommended changes are significant and will affect a large number of institutions. Implementation should begin immediately, with a phased approach.

Phased implementation is preferred to:

- emphasise the long-term cultural change needed
- allow time for institutions to build their capacity to comply with the Child Safe Standards, recognising that sectors vary in readiness to comply
- allow time for regulatory bodies and governments to build their own capacity to implement the changes and carry out new functions, as jurisdictions vary in readiness to implement

A National Safeguarding Commission

I believe there is a clear and common sense need to establish an independent statutory authority – the National Safeguarding Commission that would oversee nationally consistent Safeguarding governance regulations, compliance and competency across the community.

It's roles could include:

- Deliver cross sector Standards, training and other guidance: children, aged care, disability, health, justice, education, sport, child safety
- Manage, utilise and protect the National 'data portal' containing environment data submitted through the various organisations, statutory bodies and government bodies who contribute.
- Set the National Compliance Standard which is consistent for all organisations and entities models who are providing services or spaces for children and/or vulnerable adults regardless of their financial/management model
- Setting National Competency audits regulations
- Providing national oversight & continuous improvement
- Setting comprehensive mandatory training to regulated entities,
- Complaint management oversight and Investigations of serious incidents
- Licencing
- Improved whistleblower protections
- Privacy Laws (Gov ID Gov legislative Privacy info sharing blockades and remove). Work to prioritise the safety of children and vulnerable adults over those whose behaviours indicate they are not suitable to work with vulnerable populations

- Legislative and Regulatory Reviews
- Employment laws (interviewing – reference checks – unfair dismissals)
- Whistleblowing
- Failure to Report/Protect - applicable to labour hire firms too
- Privacy laws – where conflict best interests of children must prevail. Legislative review to prioritise Best interests of the child over Privacy where there is conflict.
- Ensure touch meaningful penalties for non-compliance.
- Monitor Staffing ratios
- Work with Centres / Orgs where issues have been identified to ‘yellow flag’ themselves in order to allow time to investigate, respond and to warn parents, guardians / carers.
- Mandate the delivery of effective, age appropriate personal safety programs to all children and for vulnerable adults in residential facilities.
- Regulate CCTV, mobile phone regulations
- Work with ASIC and ACNC to share information and enforce compliance.

Child maltreatment and abuse among vulnerable populations, including children, the elderly, and disabled individuals, is a critical issue globally, with troubling prevalence rates necessitating a proactive response.

In Australia, child maltreatment statistics reveal that 32% of children have experienced physical abuse, 28.5% sexual abuse, and nearly 31% emotional abuse (Mathews et al., 2023; Australian Institute of Health and Welfare [AIHW], 2021; Mathews & Collin-Vézina, 2019).

The landmark Childhood Maltreatment study found 1 in 4 children will be sexually harmed in some way before their 18th birthday (Mathews, 2023)

Overall, nearly 10% of males and 4% of females reported some likelihood of having sex with children or viewing child pornography.” (Wurtele, et al., 2014)

False allegations of child sexual assault usually fall in the range of 2-5% (O’Donohue et al., 2018)

Offenders are attracted to organisations who work with, or interact with, vulnerable people.

Fifty people in residential aged care across the country are sexually assaulted each week (Aged Care Royal Commission, 2018)

Nine in ten women with intellectual disabilities have been sexually assaulted (Australian Human Rights Commission 2014, *Face the facts: disability rights*)

A recent study into disability identified three key themes or leverage points for intervention in reducing work place violence and included staff capabilities, safety culture and leadership. These are reflective the Aged Care Royal Commission findings as well as the Child sexual Abuse Royal Commission. The problems and the solutions are the same across sectors.

https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0925753525001596?ref=pdf_download&fr=RR-2&rr=96281ef699f85c0d

These figures underline the importance of creating consistent trauma-informed organizational cultures to protect and support vulnerable populations effectively. Each group of vulnerable people deserve the same consideration, respect and protection.

Across all three recent Royal Commissions into Children, Aged Care and Disability, safeguarding has emerged as the lead action we must take to strengthen the care communities core knowledge, skills and capacity to help protect vulnerable people. This is true across all entities that work with, or interact with, vulnerable children and adults, and across all levels of their seniority, from the Board Room to the individual carer.

The recommendations of all three Royal commissions are in lock step in terms of what is required to install administrative governance procedures despite their different client bases.

This proposal to consider a National Safeguarding Commission aims to deliver one set of safeguarding governance standards that can be applied equally across the care and business community to provide transferable skillsets and different Certificate levels of achievement, no matter the sector, no matter their role. It seeks to address the critical global issues of sexual assault, maltreatment and abuse among vulnerable populations, including children, elderly individuals, and people with disabilities.

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