



Board of Inquiry into historical child sexual abuse in Beaumaris Primary School and certain other government schools

WITNESS STATEMENT OF PROFESSOR LEAH BROMFIELD

I, Professor Leah Maree Bromfield of [REDACTED]
[REDACTED] Director of the Australian Centre for Child Protection and Chair of Child Protection at the University of South Australia say as follows:

1. I make this statement on the basis of my own knowledge, save where otherwise stated. Where I make statements based on information provided by others, I believe such information to be true.

Acknowledgement

2. I acknowledge victim-survivors of child sexual abuse—those living and those past. I acknowledge the ongoing impacts of child sexual abuse, and the tenacity and generosity of victim-survivors in coming forward to prevent child sexual abuse and to seek justice for themselves and others. I acknowledge the lived expertise of victim-survivors and that expertise I have in this field has been achieved significantly through the privilege of learning through hearing directly from victim-survivors and through research to which victim-survivors have generously contributed.

Qualifications and experience

3. I am a practicing academic with 20 years' experience in the field of child protection, abuse and neglect. I have the following qualifications:
 - (a) Bachelor of Applied Science (Psychology) (Honours) from Deakin University (1999); and
 - (b) PhD in Psychology from Deakin University (2006).
4. Since August 2010, I have been a Professor at the Australian Centre for Child Protection. I held the positions of Deputy Director at the Australian Centre for Child Protection from 2015 until 2017 and Co-Director from July 2017 to August 2021. In August 2021, I was appointed to the position of Director and Chair of the Australian Centre for Child Protection.
5. Through my positions at the Australian Centre for Child Protection, I have worked nationally and internationally with government and non-government organisations to establish and implement child protection reforms.

6. Recent advisory committee appointments I have held include:
- (a) Since 2010, I have been a committee member of the Council of Australian Governments' National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children Governance group.
 - (b) In 2021, I was appointed as a member of the Scottish Children's Services Research Advisory Committee.
 - (c) In 2022, I was appointed to the National Strategy Advisory Group for the National Strategy to Prevent and Respond to Child Sexual Abuse.
 - (d) In January 2023, I was appointed as Chair of the inaugural South Australian Child Protection Expert Group advising the South Australian Government.
7. Other roles I have held include:
- (a) Commissioner, Commission of Inquiry into the Tasmanian Government's Responses to Child Sexual Abuse in Institutional Settings (**Commission of Inquiry**) from March 2021 to August 2023;
 - (b) Professorial Fellow, Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse (**Royal Commission**) from October 2013 to June 2017; and
 - (c) Senior Research Fellow and Manager, National Child Protection Clearinghouse at the Australian Institute of Family Studies from September 2004 to June 2010.
8. A copy of my most recent curriculum vitae is attached to this statement and marked **LB-1**.

Research

9. My research is broadly concerned with child abuse and neglect, with a particular focus on issues affecting child protection systems, child sexual abuse and the translation of research to practice. I have authored over 200 commissioned reports, policy and practice papers in relation to topics such as the causes and impacts of child sexual abuse, child safe organisations, mandatory reporting, best practice responses to children interviewed by police, children displaying harmful sexual behaviours, therapeutic treatment and responses to child sexual abuse, child protection and out of home care.

10. A particular area of interest of mine is the establishment and implementation of child protection and child welfare system reforms. This has formed the basis of much of my research and my roles with the Royal Commission and the Commission of Inquiry.
11. I have recently commenced a project about experiences and patterns of disclosure of child sexual abuse and responses to such disclosures since the Royal Commission. This research emerged from my critical analysis of the existing disclosure literature, specifically that it lacked consideration of the time period in which the abuse occurred and how changes over time impacted disclosure. In addition, this literature has lacked conceptual clarity in relation to what constitutes a disclosure, and has potentially obscured attempted disclosures during childhood. We will be investigating contemporary experiences of child sexual abuse disclosure, including whether disclosure experiences are improving, whether victim-survivors feel more able to disclose, and if, when they disclose, they are more likely to receive an empathic response. The project will include analysis of literature, documents and data and qualitative research with victim-survivors of child sexual abuse. The project is funded by the National Centre for Action on Child Sexual Abuse and has just commenced with a projected timeline for completion of two years.

Contextualising abuse in government schools in the 1960s and 1970s

12. In my view, the context of child sexual abuse in government schools in the 1960s and 1970s is coloured by the following themes, which intersect in important ways to increase the likelihood of child sexual abuse occurring:
 - (a) prevailing sociocultural characteristics of the period;
 - (b) the irrelevance of child sexual abuse as a feature of child protection for much of the 20th century;
 - (c) the nature of institutional responses or inquiries into child sexual abuse;
 - (d) the gendered nature of the criminal law; and
 - (e) public discourse around child sexual abuse and the role of feminism.
13. I make the following observations about these themes below.

Sociocultural context of the 1960s and 1970s

14. The dominant culture of the 1960s and 1970s in Australia was patriarchal and informed by traditional family values and trust in institutions and authority. In that culture, the most entitled and most empowered group were white Christian men.

15. During this period, children were 'seen, not heard'. They were expected to respect their elders unquestioningly—particularly people in positions of authority and especially men in authority. Violence against children was normal and viewed positively, including the use of corporal punishment both inside and outside the home. This is particularly relevant to the school context, where teachers held positions of authority over children and often adopted corporal punishment as a means of discipline and control.
16. Patriarchal values, including traditional understandings of gender roles, contributed to cultural understandings of sexual violence and sexual relationships. Importantly, concepts of sexual violence and consent were underpinned by a sense of men's entitlement to women and children. Arguably, what we would now consider to be examples of sexual harassment and sexual violence towards women were socially normative during this period. For example, 'token resistance' was considered to be a highly prevalent behaviour of women in response to men's approaches to sex. Rape within marriage was not criminalised in Victoria until 1981, and in rape cases before a court there was a focus upon whether a person had physically fought against the sex act in determining whether sex was consensual.
17. Victim-blaming or the perceived culpability of a child or young person in sexual abuse perpetrated against them is a theme that can be seen in literature, films and popular culture of the period. For example, the 1955 novel and 1962 film *Lolita* focussed upon sexual abuse of a girl by her stepfather, framing this as a sexual relationship and promoting notions of the child as seductress. *Lolita* was popularised to the extent that the term 'Lolita' became recognised in the English language as referring to a young girl who was 'precociously seductive'. Other terms for girls and women such as 'jail bait' also imply entrapment by children and shift responsibility for child sexual abuse from perpetrators to victims.

History of child protection in Victoria relevant to child sexual abuse

18. Alongside the above sociocultural context of the 1960s and 1970s, it is clear that child sexual abuse was not a concern associated with child welfare or protection during this period.
19. Until the late 20th century, concerns for child protection were largely focussed on the effects of physical abuse and criminal neglect as opposed to child sexual abuse. Child welfare responses were largely the responsibility of voluntary or charitable organisations, predominantly through the provision of institutional 'care' such as orphanages.

20. In Victoria, the Victorian Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (now the Children's Protection Society) was founded in the late 1800s as a voluntary independent organisation providing services for the protection of children from forms of cruelty, physical abuse and neglect. It was the fourth institution of its kind established worldwide and formed part of a rising international movement concerned for child welfare.
21. The early child welfare movement was focussed on institutional 'care' such as orphanages. I acknowledge that many survivors of institutions reject the term 'care' being applied to these institutions and the extensive evidence we have of abuse and harms, which occurred in these institutions. There were inquiries into cruelty and abuse in these institutions from the 1800s, although these early inquiries did not hear directly from victim-survivors and focussed on improving organisational administration, not care.
22. Informed by a report by historian Shurlee Swain titled 'History of Australian inquiries reviewing institutions providing care for children', published in October 2014, it is my understanding that there have been few government inquiries into institutional child sexual abuse in Victoria. The first was a Special Inquiry in 1865 and 1866 into conduct at the Sunbury Industrial School, a youth training school (similar to a youth detention centre). That inquiry considered child sexual abuse perpetrated by a staff member against girls at the school. The outcome of the Special Inquiry was that the perpetrator resigned from his position but remained on site with his wife and children.
23. There are commonalities between the Special Inquiry and other inquiries examined by Professor Swain and held in other States and Territories through the 20th century, in terms of how they perceived and responded to child sexual abuse. Inquiries were often characterised by an attitude of dismissal, character assassination of children and victim-blaming. Inquiries rarely listened to the evidence of children or young people, instead favouring the accounts of adults. Furthermore, those inquiries rarely resulted in substantial consequences for perpetrators of child sexual abuse, even where it was established that child sexual abuse had occurred.
24. From the late 1960s, there was substantial change in the understanding of child abuse, responses to that abuse and government intervention and regulation, including in the establishment of statutory authorities responsible for receiving reports of suspected abuse or neglect. In Victoria, this was the Children's Protection Society. In some States, laws were introduced to mandate reporting of some forms of child abuse. However, initial mandatory reporting laws did not include child sexual abuse. For example, Australia's first mandatory reporting scheme was introduced into law in 1969

in South Australia. In Victoria, the Children's Protection Society first published data on child sexual abuse in 1975, demonstrating that public discourse was beginning to acknowledge child sexual abuse as an area of concern which required public attention. It was not until the 1980s that mandatory reporting laws concerning child sexual abuse were introduced in any Australian state (commencing in 1988 in South Australia and New South Wales).

25. This history demonstrates that child welfare institutions during the period covered by this Board of Inquiry into historical child sexual abuse in Beaumaris Primary School and certain other government schools (**Board of Inquiry**) were largely not focussed upon protection of children from child sexual abuse.
26. In 1985, the Victorian government took over the child protection functions of the Children's Protection Society. Around this period, the *United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child* opened for signature, with Australia becoming a signatory in 1990. Over time, the Convention has influenced child protection law and practice. Victorian laws imposing mandatory reporting obligations in relation to suspected abuse of children were introduced in the 1990s, in response to a public campaign following the death of a young child as a result of physical abuse. Victorian mandatory reporting law included child sexual abuse from commencement in 1993. The *Children, Youth and Families Act 2005 (Vic)* replaced the *Children and Young Persons Act 1993 (Vic)* and is the current legislation for child protection in Victoria.
27. The next inquiry specifically into institutional child sexual abuse in Victoria of which I am aware was not held until 2013. That inquiry, the Parliamentary Inquiry into the Handling of Child Abuse by Religious and Other Non-Government Organisations, focussed on abuse within religious settings.
28. Accordingly, there has not, to the best of my knowledge, been a significant independent inquiry into institutional child sexual abuse in Victorian government institutions prior to this Board of Inquiry, other than the Victorian government's participation in the Royal Commission and the Case Study 30 into youth detention centres in Victoria. In comparison, most other States and Territories held inquiries into child sexual abuse in institutions from the 1980s to the early 2000s.

Criminal law

29. Features of the criminal law in the 1960s and 1970s are also relevant to understanding how child sexual abuse was understood, disclosed and responded to at this time.

30. Criminal laws relevant to child sexual abuse passed in the 1950s continued to apply throughout the 1960s and 1970s in Victoria. These laws were incredibly gendered, providing for some offences as they related to women and girls, but fewer offences in respect of boys. For example:
- (a) Rape was gendered and narrowly defined as sexual intercourse (i.e. penetration by a penis) by a male with a female.
 - (b) There was a crime of sexual abuse of a girl under the age of 10, but not a corresponding crime relating to a boy of that age.
 - (c) There was a crime of sexual abuse of a girl aged between 10 and 16, but not a corresponding crime relating to a boy of that age. Being a teacher or schoolmaster was an aggravating factor for such an offence.
 - (d) The highest maximum penalty of 20 years imprisonment applied to the crimes of rape and sexual abuse of a child under 10 years. In comparison, the penalty for sexual abuse of a child 10 to 16 years was a maximum of 10 years.
 - (e) The legislation included 'infamous crimes (buggery)' with the maximum penalty of 20 years applying if the victim were under 14 years of age or the incident involved the use of violence or was non-consensual.
31. Understandings of consent were very relevant to sex crimes. Analysis of case law used in the calls for law reform highlighted that there was a need to show that victims had 'resisted' (i.e. physically tried to fight off the attack) and/or were injured in the course of the assault to demonstrate a lack of consent. Submission even in the face of threats of violence was used as the basis to argue a victim was consenting.
32. In the event charges were laid, there were significant additional difficulties associated with establishing a conviction for child victims of sexual abuse. These included the fact that children were not seen as reliable witnesses and were even believed to have imagined or even fantasised sexual abuse, the privileging of corroboration evidence (i.e. having a witness), and restrictions on tendency and coincidence evidence (i.e. being able to present evidence showing a pattern of offending behaviours).
33. There was also a great deal of stigma linked to being a victim of sexual offences, including for child victims.
34. Calls for law reform in the 1980s highlighted the harmful impacts of sexual offence laws for women and female victim survivors (and men engaging in consensual sex with other men). More contemporary news accounts in relation to changes to the law to expunge

or pardon men with historical charges of 'buggery' include accounts of men who had been charged with buggery when they had been a victim of child sexual abuse. This showed that the sexual offence laws of the time worked against male and female victim-survivors of child sexual abuse.

35. Taken as a whole, charges for child sexual abuse were difficult. The prospect of prosecution was poor, and the social consequences of coming forward were significant. The criminal justice system was unfairly weighted in favour of perpetrators and against victim-survivors. This may have impacted the extent to which perpetrators considered that they could abuse children without fear of consequence and contributed to victim-survivors maintaining their silence.
36. There were no substantive changes to these laws until the 1980s.

Recognition in academia and in public discourse

37. Broadly speaking, child sexual abuse was not on the public agenda in the 1960s and 1970s.
38. Interest in the perpetration and effects of child sexual abuse began to emerge within what was considered the counterculture. As a result of the feminist movement in the late 1960s and early 1970s, we began to see increased attention to sexual assault and rape including child sexual abuse.
39. Feminist discourse around child sexual abuse focussed on the perpetration of sexual violence against women and girls, framing that violence as endemic to patriarchal entitlement.
40. Interest in child sexual abuse as a topic of academic study also began to emerge in the 1970s and 1980s, for example, the work of US Professor David Finkelhor.

Prevalence of child sexual abuse in Australia

41. The Australian Child Maltreatment Study, published in April 2023, reported on the prevalence of experiences of child sexual abuse by age group and gender. Child sexual abuse has been and continues to be a significant issue in Australia, affecting large proportions of the Australian community.
42. Women are disproportionately more likely than men to have experienced child sexual abuse, with rates remaining high over time. The study found that 40.2% of women currently between the ages of 55 and 64 had experienced child sexual abuse compared with 35.2% of 16- to 24- year-olds.

43. A significant proportion of men also reported experiencing child sexual abuse, with 19.8% of men currently aged between 55 and 64 in a representative sample reporting having experienced child sexual abuse, compared with 14.5% of males aged 16 to 24 years.
44. The findings of the Australian Child Maltreatment Study are available on the website dedicated to the study: <https://www.acms.au>.
45. The majority of victim-survivors of child sexual abuse who participated in a private session with a Commissioner from the Royal Commission were male (64.3%) and aged over 50 (57.4%). This may indicate that historically, boys (including school aged boys in the 1960s and 1970s) were at particular risk of child sexual abuse in institutional contexts.

Perpetrators of child sexual abuse

46. Research consistently shows that the vast majority of perpetrators of all child sexual abuse are male.
47. There is no typical profile of a perpetrator of child sexual abuse.
48. Perpetrators of child sexual abuse have diverse characteristics, backgrounds and motivations that can change over time.
49. Perpetrators of child sexual abuse, including perpetrators of sexual abuse of boys, may identify as heterosexual and may be married or in a heterosexual relationship, and may have children.
50. Some perpetrators of child sexual abuse offend exclusively against boys, others offend exclusively against girls. Some perpetrate against boys and girls. Some perpetrators may predominantly perpetrate against children of a particular age range, or children with specific physical characteristics or appearances.
51. Research suggests that four pre-conditions must be met for an adult to sexually abuse a child:
 - (a) that the adult is motivated to sexually abuse (typically they are motivated for sexual gratification);
 - (b) that the adult is able to overcome internal inhibitions that might stop them sexually abusing a child (such as the fear of getting caught);
 - (c) that the adult is able to gain access to a child; and

- (d) that the adult is able to overcome any resistance from the child (e.g. physically, through threats or through grooming the child into submission and/or silence).
52. The term 'paedophile' is commonly used to describe perpetrators of child sexual abuse. Paedophilia is a clinical diagnosis. A person who is preferentially attracted to pre-pubescent children (e.g., most primary school aged children) can be diagnosed as a paedophile. Technically speaking, a person may be diagnosed with paedophilia without having offended against a child. The condition refers to the preferential sexual attraction to children. Researchers also use the term 'fixated, persistent perpetrator' to describe perpetrators who appear to have a fixed pattern of sexual abuse of children, which may include a preference for children of a specific gender or age. Fixated perpetrators are more likely to act in deliberate predatory ways to gain access to children, such as entering child-related employment or forming a relationship with a parent to gain access to children.
53. However, research suggests that there are also situational or opportunistic perpetrators of child sexual abuse. These perpetrators are not preferentially attracted to children, but may sexually abuse in the context of a specific situation or if the opportunity arises. Research suggests that most perpetrators of child sexual abuse are opportunistic rather than fixated. However, there is also evidence to suggest that opportunistic perpetrators are more likely to abuse older children and adolescents who are pubescent (i.e. sexually mature/maturing).
54. Perpetrators of institutional child sexual abuse have in many cases been respected and well-liked members of the institution or the broader community in which the institution is based. Their role in the institution is likely to give them power over children, and may have also afforded them particular power, status or influence within the community. Many institutional perpetrators of child sexual abuse have shown themselves to have been highly skilled in grooming their colleagues, children's parents and community members to enable them to access children and to be considered above reproach.
55. Victim-survivor accounts show there are some examples of historical institutions in which perpetrators made little to no attempt to conceal their perpetration of child sexual abuse within the institution, particularly from other children or where there were multiple perpetrators within the institution.
56. However, most perpetrators in institutional settings took steps to conceal their abuse, perpetrating the abuse in isolated contexts within the institution or using their institutional relationship to create an opportunity to access and abuse the child off-site.

Perpetrators have been known to abuse multiple children within the same setting with each child isolated and believing they were the only one.

57. In my observation of historical institutional settings, there were perpetrators who used grooming tactics to gain the submission or silence of their victim/s. Grooming of a child is insidious and typically involves: creating a trusted relationship with the child (and sometimes the child's parents or the perpetrator's co-workers) incremental breaches of the child's boundaries (e.g. non sexual touching, progressing to increasingly intrusive sexual touching). Grooming can also include introducing the child to sexual content such as talk about sex or pornography and diminishing a child's boundaries through the provision of alcohol or drugs. Perpetrators may involve the child in rule breaking of some kind (such as drinking alcohol) and use this to subsequently help maintain their silence. Grooming often also involves specific strategies to ensure a child maintains their silence about the abuse. This may be through convincing the child they are in a special, loving relationship that others won't understand, through creating a fear in the child that their or the perpetrator's life would be ruined if the abuse were known, or through threats to the child or their loved ones.
58. Other historical perpetrators exploited a time and context in which:
- (a) they had access to and control over a child;
 - (b) there was a low likelihood of a child disclosing; and
 - (c) there was a low likelihood of children being believed if they disclosed.
59. In this context, perpetrators did not groom children prior to or after the sexual abuse, relying on these factors to avoid consequence. Sexual abuse may have included the use of violence or force to overcome the child.
60. Survivors of child sexual abuse in historical institutions often also speak of contexts in which they experienced violence, neglect, denigration and humiliation, either as part of, or separate to the sexual abuse. These contexts appear to have fed into children's perceptions that they were unvalued and that no one cared for them, and into perpetrators' perceptions that children lacked rights or values and were a viable means to adult gratification.
61. Perpetrators of institutional child sexual abuse often appeared very strategic in their targeting of a child, selecting children who may have been particularly vulnerable to grooming due to isolation from peers, or troubles at home, or exploiting a child's talents or interest such as music or sport to create opportunities to create a special relationship

with the child and get them alone. Predatory perpetrators have repeatedly demonstrated their adeptness at seeing and exploiting vulnerabilities to enable them to access and abuse a child, and to avoid detection.

62. During my career, I observed some institutions in which there was more than one perpetrator of child sexual abuse offending within the institutional context within the same time period. Sometimes this appeared to have features of organised abuse (where perpetrators work together to obtain and abuse a child or children, sometimes procuring or exchanging children within the network of abusers or abusing children together).
63. In other examples of multiple perpetrators of abuse within the one institution, there was no evidence that the perpetrators were known to each other. In order to understand how this might eventuate, I consider that the research by Professor Donald Palmer into organisational culture may be helpful in understanding this context. Professor Palmer's research shows that there are some organisational cultures in which the risk of child sexual abuse is heightened, such as institutions with a closed organisational culture, hierarchical (particularly patriarchal) institutional cultures, and cultures of toxic masculinity. I am also of the view that where one individual is perpetrating child sexual abuse without consequence, this may create a culture or situation which assists others to overcome internal inhibitions they may have to sexually abusing a child (such as normalising abuse and eroding fear of consequences) and motivate them to take advantage of the opportunity presented to gain sexual gratification.

The long-term effects of child sexual abuse

64. Before talking about the impacts of child sexual abuse, I want to recognise and acknowledge that there are many victim-survivors of child sexual abuse who are living happy and fulfilling lives. They may continue to live and struggle with the impacts of child sexual abuse, which may or may not be visible to others around them.
65. The impacts of child sexual abuse can be profound and lifelong. Child sexual abuse has been shown to have the potential to impact adversely on every aspect of a person's life, including mental health, physical health, positive self-identity, educational and career outcomes, social relationships, romantic relationships and parenting. Many victim-survivors, including those who might appear from an outside perspective to be 'doing well', speak about the opportunities they have lost as a consequence of child sexual abuse and grieve the life they didn't have, such as the career they imagined, the special talent they had such as sporting prowess that they were unable to pursue, or the spouse or parent they could have been. Victim-survivors of child sexual abuse may

also experience a range of impacts and unhealthy coping strategies that further adversely affect their life and wellbeing such as substance misuse, self-harm and suicidal ideation. We know that some victims of child sexual abuse have not survived the impacts of the abuse, and have died from a range of causes including suicide and substance misuse. Some victim-survivors of child sexual abuse can fear being under the control of an institution and may avoid seeking health care or fear entering aged care. Some victim-survivors with dementia can begin to vividly recall their childhood abuse as their disease progresses.

66. There is no one profile for what the impacts of child sexual abuse look like, how they emerge, what impacts are experienced, or at what time in a victim-survivor's life impacts may emerge or worsen.
67. One research study characterised victim-survivors as experiencing different pathways or life journeys for the onset of the impacts of child sexual abuse, including, for example, victim-survivors who experienced rapid onset of symptoms in childhood, and others whose symptoms did not emerge until later in life often triggered by life events such as onset of puberty, relationship formation, having children or their children reaching the age at which they were abused. Some victim-survivors experience the impacts later in childhood or adulthood when they come to recognise what they experienced as child sexual abuse or post-retirement when they slow down and begin to reflect on their past. Some survivors reported that their impacts were persistent and long term; others had been able to heal to a point that they were experiencing happy and fulfilling lives; and still others reported no significant impacts.
68. Impacts can be different for male and female victim-survivors. For example, male victim-survivors have reported gender-specific fear and stigma associated with disclosure of child sexual abuse. The features that have historically made it more difficult for men to report child sexual abuse include:
- (a) historical attitudes towards homosexuality deterring men and boys from disclosing male-perpetrated child sexual abuse;
 - (b) the fear that being seen as a victim of child sexual abuse will impact other people's perception of male victim-survivors masculinity or sexuality; and
 - (c) the pervasive belief in the victim-to-offender theory, being that men who are the victims of child sexual abuse are at risk of becoming perpetrators of child sexual abuse. This theory has been very unhelpful, as the majority of male victims of child sexual abuse do not become sexual abuse perpetrators.

69. I am hopeful that many of the historical barriers to reporting of child sexual abuse by men and women are decreasing. There is some hopeful data, particularly that we have made some progress in overcoming the stigma of disclosing abuse for boys, with more male than female survivors participating in private sessions with the Royal Commission and a study I was involved in with Professor Ben Mathews which analysed longitudinal trends in child protection reporting data suggesting an increase in reporting of child sexual abuse of boys in Victoria from 1993 to 2012.
70. While many of the impacts of child sexual abuse are common to victim-survivors of any form of child sexual abuse, victim-survivors of child sexual abuse in institutions may experience additional unique impacts, including trauma and re-traumatisation as a consequence of the institution's response to their abuse and feelings of institutional betrayal.
71. In addition to the direct impacts of child sexual abuse on victim-survivors, the ripple effects of institutional child sexual abuse can also impact parents, spouses and children of victim-survivors. Fear of the impacts of child sexual abuse on their loved ones can be used by perpetrators to help maintain the silence of victim-survivors. Wanting to avoid adversely impacting their loved ones can also be a factor considered by victim-survivors in deciding whether to disclose their abuse or seek help, including into adulthood.
72. Where a large number of children are discovered to have been affected by child sexual abuse in important public institutions this can also impact the broader community. For example, it can erode public trust in institutions and affect parents' sense of safety in entrusting their children to the care of institutions. There are also examples where the impacts on the local community have created a sense of collective trauma, comparable to that which might occur in the context of a human caused or natural disaster.
73. I discuss the impacts of child sexual abuse, including impacts unique to victim-survivors of institutional child sexual abuse in a book chapter titled 'Impacts of institutional child sexual abuse: What we have learned from research and the Royal Commission into Institutional Response to Child Sexual Abuse private sessions' co-authored with Drs Herbert, Arney and Blakemore. A copy of that chapter is attached to this statement and marked **LB-2**.

Approaches to healing and support

Apologies

74. In my view, apologies by governments or institutions to victim-survivors of child sexual abuse can be a meaningful and significant way to acknowledge abuse and take steps towards addressing trauma.
75. Apologies, however, can be a source of institutional harm if they are not genuine and backed by action that is consistent with that apology. For example, if an organisation issues an apology for historic sexual abuse against children within the organisation but promptly 'moves on' and fails to continue to acknowledge the history of child sexual abuse within that institution, victim-survivors may not consider the apology to be genuine. It is also relevant to how an organisation continues to engage with victim-survivors, including in relation to ongoing litigation. If an organisation apologises but then repeats the organisation's historic responses to victim-survivors (such as dismissing their allegations or being insensitive or unresponsive to reports of abuse), this risks retraumatising victim-survivors or otherwise compounding their trauma, and can leave victim-survivors feeling betrayed again by what they see as a false apology.
76. For this reason, an apology issued by a government or institution should be coupled with a course of action that is consistent with reconciliation and the restoration of trust.

Support services

77. In my view, there is enormous unmet need for tailored support for victim-survivors of child sexual abuse.
78. As described from paragraph 41 above, the recent report of the 2023 Australian Child Maltreatment Study shows that approximately 40% of women and 20% of men aged 55 to 64 experienced sexual abuse in childhood. This is a significant portion of the population. Australia does not have a service system equipped to meet the demand for supports for this cohort.
79. I consider that the Victorian child sexual abuse support system is one of the more developed systems nationwide. It is accessible state-wide, has access to considerable resources and offers mature services. However, even in this context, the demand outstrips capacity consistently and victim-survivors, particularly survivors of historical child sexual abuse, can face long waitlists to access specialist services.
80. We also know that there are some groups of victim-survivors who may not feel comfortable accessing existing services or feel that those services are not suited to their

needs, such as male victim-survivors, those who identify as LGBTQIA+, victim-survivors with a disability or those in prison.

81. In a populous state like Victoria, specialist services for these cohorts may be worth considering. For example, the Survivors and Mates Support Service, which provides services and supports specifically for male victim-survivors, is funded by government in New South Wales.
82. It is also important to understand that simply increasing the funding for counselling or other psychological services is not enough. As described above, the traumatic effects of child sexual abuse can manifest in different ways and over different periods of a victim-survivor's life. For example, victim-survivors often experience financial distress, housing instability, homelessness, poor education outcomes, alcohol and substance abuse or social isolation as a direct impact of child sexual abuse, often for many years after the child sexual abuse occurred.
83. In this way, the response to the trauma of child sexual abuse could be seen as analogous to the support provided under the National Disability Insurance Scheme, which recognises that different people have different support needs and that these can change over time.
84. Recognising that victim-survivors of child sexual abuse may access a range of services, in addition to specialist sexual abuse services, it is also critical that non-specialist services that are routinely accessed by victim-survivors of child sexual abuse recognise and meet the needs of victim-survivors.
85. I commend to the Board of Inquiry the recently launched National Minimum Practice Standards for specialist and community support services responding to child sexual abuse developed by the Australian Centre for Child Protection for the National Office for Child Safety. A copy of those standards is attached to this statement and marked **LB-3**.

Signed:



Name: Professor Leah Bromfield

Date: 23 October 2023