The Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse

About the Royal Commission

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A Royal Commission is a public inquiry investigating a problem of public concern – like child sexual abuse within Australian institutions. It can use special powers to compel people and organisations to cooperate with its investigations, so that it can uncover the truth.

This factsheet helps you understand what the *Royal Commission into Institutional Reponses to Child Sexual Abuse* is looking into and what it can and can't do. If you want to know more about the Royal Commission, you can contact **knowmore**.

What is a Royal Commission?

A Royal Commission is a separate body, set up outside the government, which acts under its own laws.

The government tells the Royal Commission what it needs to look into - sometimes called the "Terms of Reference".

The Royal Commission then uses its special powers to investigate whatever it thinks should be investigated in order to fulfil the government's Terms of Reference.

What does a Royal Commission do?

It investigates, makes findings about what happened in particular cases and then reports back to the government about what has been discovered and what should be done to address the problem under inquiry.

Some parts of a Royal Commission's investigations, such as its hearings, are held in public. Sometimes hearings are held in private for special reasons, like to protect people's privacy.

Members of the public can participate in the inquiry by giving information and evidence.

Who runs the Royal Commission?

People called "Commissioners" run the Royal Commission. They are usually people from outside the government, like judges and other well-respected professionals.

What is the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse about?

This Royal Commission is looking into Australian institutions: how child sexual abuse happened 'on their watch' and whether they responded the best they could.

It will look at past and current child sexual abuse in institutions and will report on how institutions should improve the way they prevent, manage and respond to claims of sexual abuse in the future.

The Royal Commission will also identify what can be done to reduce the impact of child sexual abuse, like how to ensure justice for survivors.

What do the Terms of Reference say the Royal Commission can look into?

The Royal Commission is allowed to look into child sexual abuse that has occurred within Australian institutions.

What is an institution?

The Royal Commission can look into any public or private body, association, club or organisation, even if it no longer exists.

This includes:

- government agencies, like child welfare agencies and the police
- hospitals
- childcare centres
- public and private schools
- religious organisations, such as churches and mosques
- sporting and recreational clubs, such as scouts, dance, Little Athletics and swim and tennis schools
- out-of-home and foster care, like children's homes and orphanages
- juvenile justice centres.

The Royal Commission is not allowed to look into child sexual abuse that has happened within a family.

Who is a child?

A child is a person under age 18.

What is child sexual abuse?

Child sexual abuse is any sexual act or behaviour involving a child. It includes:

- watching children shower or getting dressed
- any sex crime, like rape, touching a child's genitals, asking a child to touch an adult's genitals or taking pictures of naked children
- using any means, including the internet or pornography, to develop trust with a child and prepare them for sexual acts.

If you're unsure about what is included, you can contact **knowmore**.

What will the Royal Commission do?

The Royal Commission will hear from people who experienced child sexual abuse in institutions. This could be in writing, over the phone or in private informal meetings.

It will call witnesses, like organisations and survivors, to give evidence in public hearings.

It will also compel organisations to hand over documents and information.

What can't the Royal Commission do?

It can't charge someone with, or find them guilty of, a criminal offence, although it can refer information to police. It also can't award compensation to people.

When is the first report due?

An interim report is due on 30 June 2014 and a final report is due on 30 December 2015. The reports will be available to the public.

What else can the Royal Commission do with information given to it?

This depends on how the information is given, and what it is about. If you're concerned about the use of your information, you should contact **knowmore**.

Want to know more?

We can give you legal help with accessing documents, options for compensation and writing a statement for the Royal Commission. Contact **knowmore**.

Contact knowmore

Free advice line **1800 605 762**

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