



**Jesuit**  
**Social Services**  
Building a Just Society

# **System Responses to Child Sexual Abuse**

Submission to the Queensland Child Death Review Board

July 2025

*We acknowledge the Traditional Custodians of all the lands on which Jesuit Social Services operates and pay respect to their Elders past and present. We express our gratitude for their love and care of people, community, land and all life.*

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# Jesuit Social Services: Who we are and what we do

Jesuit Social Services is a social change organisation. For almost 50 years we have been delivering support services and advocating for improved policies, legislation and resources to achieve a just society where all people can thrive. We are a national organisation with a significant footprint in Victoria, New South Wales and the Northern Territory, where we work with some of the most marginalised individuals and communities.

We work with people who use violence, including perpetrators of gender-based violence and child sexual abuse, and deliver a range of programs for people who are justice-involved, including diversion, restorative group conferencing, transitional support and a school for justice-involved adolescent boys (the Ignatius Learning Centre<sup>1</sup>). We also deliver programs in areas like housing, mental health, employment and training.

We work with people across the life course and age spectrum. This includes programs which work with children and young people who have experienced harm or trauma, and with adults and communities experiencing complex and chronic disadvantage. Many of our participants have been impacted by the widespread and intergenerational impacts of systems that fail to protect children's rights, meet their needs and foster their potential.

In addition to our program delivery, through primary research and a range of partnerships with universities, we seek to contribute to the evidence base to inform prevention and early intervention, including in relation to child sexual abuse perpetration. In 2023, in collaboration with the University of New South Wales (UNSW), Jesuit Social Services published the world's largest child sexual abuse perpetration prevalence study, and the first of its kind in Australia.<sup>2</sup> The study measured the prevalence of offending and risk behaviours and attitudes amongst a weighted sample of 1,945 Australian men over 18 years of age. Through analysis of the prevalence and attitudinal, behavioural and demographic correlates of sexual feelings and/or offending against children, the study aimed to inform efforts to better detect and prevent child sexual abuse.

Drawing on our research and the initiatives we deliver, we also seek to make a contribution through our advocacy. This has included making submissions to consultations on the National Strategy to Prevent and Respond to Child Sexual Abuse;<sup>3</sup> the eSafety Commissioner's Industry Standards;<sup>4</sup> the NSW inquiry into the impacts of harmful pornography on mental, emotional and physical health;<sup>5</sup> and the Child Safety Annual Reporting Framework.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The [Ignatius Learning Centre](#) is a Catholic Specialist Secondary School in Melbourne for boys aged 15–17 who are involved with the youth justice system.

<sup>2</sup> Salter et al. (2023). *Identifying and understanding child sexual offending behaviours and attitudes among Australian men*. Jesuit Social Services & University of New South Wales. ([Weblink](#))

<sup>3</sup> Submission available via [weblink](#).

<sup>4</sup> Submission available via [weblink](#).

<sup>5</sup> Submission available via [weblink](#).

<sup>6</sup> Submission available via [weblink](#).

## The Men's Project

Jesuit Social Services established The Men's Project in 2017 to provide leadership and develop new approaches to reducing violence and other harmful behaviours prevalent among boys and men, to keep families and communities safe and to improve the wellbeing of men and boys themselves. The Men's Project enables adults of all genders to take action that makes our community safer including by promoting positive change related to what it means to be a man in the 21st century; delivering a range of initiatives that prevent child sexual abuse; engaging adults and young people at-risk of harming others; and is learning from and expanding programs that build positive relationship skills and improve the wellbeing of boys and men, with a focus on young people who have experienced harm themselves.

Current priorities for The Men's Project include:

- building a greater understanding of perpetration of men's violence through our research and identifying opportunities for prevention and early intervention
- supporting people who work with men and boys every day (e.g. teachers, coaches, social workers) to prevent violence and improve the wellbeing of men and boys
- developing new early intervention approaches with adolescents at risk of using violence
- designing, delivering and evaluating early intervention responses for adults and young people to prevent child sexual abuse (including Stop It Now! Australia)
- advocating for systemic changes that seek to prevent violence and child sexual abuse

## Stop It Now! Australia

After several years of program design and consultation, in 2022 Jesuit Social Services launched Stop It Now! Australia, a child sexual abuse prevention program for adults concerned about their own or someone else's sexual thoughts or behaviours towards children. The service is based on the international Stop It Now! model, first established in the USA over 30 years ago and now operating in the UK, the Netherlands and Belgium. Key features are an anonymous helpline, online chat service, and online resources. The helpline is staffed by highly skilled practitioners and provides an anonymous space for people to talk about their concerns and get the help needed to prevent child sexual abuse. We work closely with professionals and victim-survivors of child sexual abuse to ensure their knowledge and voices help shape the service and the response.

Building on our experience delivering Stop It Now!, and in response to an absence of secondary prevention services for children and young people, we have also established the Worried About Sex and Pornography Project (WASAPP) in collaboration with the University of Melbourne. This Project will co-design an online early intervention for children and young people worried about their sexual thoughts and behaviours, including questions and concerns regarding pornography and child sexual abuse material. We are also collaborating with the University of Tasmania on an initiative to better utilise technology to disrupt and deter people from accessing child sexual abuse material and other forms of online child sexual exploitation, and encourage help-seeking.

Further information on Stop It Now!, WASAPP and our child sexual abuse material deterrence work is included in the body of our submission.

# Recommendations

1. We recommend a concerted state-led effort to build child safe institutions, with the Queensland Government to:
  - a. ensure sufficient funding is provided to enable organisations to meet their obligations under the *Child Safe Organisations Act 2024* (the Act); and
  - b. periodically review the Queensland Family and Child Commission's (QFCC) powers and resourcing, to ensure it can effectively oversight and enforce the Act.
2. Building on current workforce capacity building efforts delivered through the QFCC, we recommend the Queensland Government fund comprehensive and ongoing education and training for all prescribed workforces and organisations under the new Reportable Conduct Scheme, to ensure understanding of:
  - a. warning signs that there is a risk of child sexual abuse or that abuse has occurred;
  - b. the responsibilities of adults and institutions to keep children safe from abuse under state law;
  - c. actions required to respond in a trauma-informed way; and
  - d. how to respond to a disclosure that someone is concerned about their sexual thoughts or behaviour towards children, including appropriate referral pathways.
3. We recommend the QFCC work with relevant professional bodies to embed training on child sexual abuse prevention – including responding to disclosures – into vocational and university curricula. This should include qualifications for:
  - a. sectors that work with children; and
  - b. professionals who may receive a disclosure that someone has or is concerned they might sexually offend against children, including psychology and social work.
4. We recommend the Queensland Government examine opportunities to deliver awareness campaigns, public messaging and education programs to complement the Commonwealth Government's *One Talk at a Time* campaign. Efforts should:
  - a. aim to de-stigmatise conversations about child sexual abuse;
  - b. equip parents, carers and other adults with the tools to identify and respond to concerns around child sexual abuse; and
  - c. be tailored to the specific needs and context in Queensland.
5. We recommend the Queensland Government provide additional funding for the development and implementation of evidence-based, therapeutic interventions and services to support:
  - a. victim-survivors of child sexual abuse; and
  - b. children who display harmful sexual behaviours.

6. We recommend the Queensland Government support – via direct funding or advocating to the Commonwealth Government – the development and implementation of early intervention services for people, including children and adolescents, concerned about their use of pornography and/or sexual thoughts and behaviours towards children, such as Jesuit Social Services’ Worried About Sex and Pornography Project (WASAPP).
7. We recommend the Queensland Government support – via direct funding or in collaboration with the Commonwealth Government – the development and implementation of online deterrence initiatives that seek to prevent child sexual abuse.
  - a. Interventions could include pop-up warnings in online spaces where people may seek out child sexual abuse material or pornography that promotes and normalises child sexual abuse and sexual violence.
8. We recommend the Queensland Government advocate for federally legislated requirements for technology companies to ensure children’s safety online, including:
  - a. requirements to prevent and disrupt child sexual abuse on their platforms;
  - b. enforcement of age limits on pornography websites; and
  - c. mandating Safety by Design principles for digital platforms;and that the Commonwealth Government legislate the already announced ‘digital duty of care’ as a matter of priority.
9. We recommend that Queensland child protection and law enforcement agencies draw on findings from our research with UNSW (*Identifying and understanding child sexual offending behaviours and attitudes among Australian men*) to strengthen approaches to detection and investigation of child sexual abuse, including to inform risk assessments and build offender profiles.
10. We recommend further investment by governments in large-scale research to inform targeted prevention strategies and early intervention efforts, with the research to examine:
  - a. the behaviours and attitudes of perpetrators of child sexual abuse;
  - b. the prevalence, dynamics and drivers of child sexual offending; and
  - c. risk and protective factors across different population groups, places and settings.

# Submission

Jesuit Social Services welcomes the invitation to make a submission to the Queensland Child Death Review Board's review of System Responses to Child Sexual Abuse (the review).

Dr Hans Zollner, Director of the Institute of Anthropology, Interdisciplinary Studies on Human Dignity and Care (IADC) and a leading expert on safeguarding and prevention of sexual abuse, advocates for learning from past failures in safeguarding to prevent future abuse.<sup>7</sup> In this context, Jesuit Social Services welcomes the work of the Child Death Review Board in examining the offending of Ashley Paul Griffith as a case study. It is critical that the learnings from this inquiry are used to strengthen child safety practices across all organisations that work with children, across Queensland and nationally.

We acknowledge that Griffith's offending was extensive and severe, and enabled by multiple failings across a range of institutions and over many years. In preparing this submission, we have considered these circumstances, including the settings in which these crimes occurred. As our service delivery footprint in Queensland is limited, our recommendations are not specific to the state's early childhood education and care, police and blue card systems. Local stakeholders with direct experience of these systems are better placed to advise on these factors.

Instead, our submission primarily responds to item four in the review's terms of reference: *Identify best practice across Australia and internationally for protecting children from sexual abuse; identifying perpetrators and children at risk; and responding to allegations.* Our submission also addresses a number of the categories outlined in the call for public submissions: government roles and responsibilities; safer organisations and institutions; primary prevention strategies; and identifying and disrupting offending.

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<sup>7</sup> Zollner (2025). Interview by K. Allen, Jesuit Social Services. 14 April.

## Our research into child sexual offending behaviour and attitudes

In 2023, Jesuit Social Services, in partnership with UNSW, published the first nationally representative research into the prevalence of child sexual offending behaviours and attitudes. This research shed unprecedented light on sexually abusive behaviours and feelings among Australian men and is the largest study of its kind globally.

*Identifying and understanding child sexual offending behaviours and attitudes among Australian men*<sup>8</sup> aimed to inform efforts to better detect and prevent child sexual abuse through an analysis of the prevalence and attitudinal, behavioural and demographic correlates of sexual feelings and/or offending against children. The research measured the prevalence of offending and risk behaviours and attitudes amongst a weighted sample of 1,945 Australian men over 18 years of age.

While previous studies examining child sexual abuse perpetration have focused on psychological correlates and risk factors, our survey gathered data on demographics, health status, social support, childhood exposure to adversity, and technology and internet habits, as well as attitudes and behaviours relating to online and offline child sexual offending. The project focused on men because the majority of those who perpetrate sexual offences against children are men.

The study found:

- around one in six (15.1%) Australian men reports sexual feelings towards children, and approximately one third of this group reports sexually offending against children
- around one in 10 (9.4%) Australian men has sexually offended against children (including technologically facilitated abuse and contact offending), with approximately half of this group (4.9% of Australian men) reporting sexual feelings towards children
- the 4.9% of men with sexual feelings who had offended against children were more likely than men with no sexual feelings or offending against children to:
  - be working with children (2.73 times more likely)
  - be married (1.63)
  - be earning higher incomes (2)
  - binge drink weekly or more (4.28)
  - have been sexually abused as a child (6.26) or had adverse experiences in childhood (1.95)
  - be active online, including on social media (1.28), use cryptocurrency to purchase goods online (5.48) and use dating/romance websites (4)
  - consume pornography that involves violence (11) or bestiality (26.66), and purchase online sexual content (16.82)

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<sup>8</sup> Salter et al. (2023). *Identifying and understanding child sexual offending behaviours and attitudes among Australian men*. Jesuit Social Services & University of New South Wales. ([Weblink](#))

- the majority of Australian men who have viewed child sexual abuse material first accessed it when they were children (noting the survey does not capture whether those who first viewed this material while under 18 continued to do so as adults)

These findings align with emerging research into undetected offenders or those who have offended over a prolonged period of time without coming to the attention of authorities. This group has been theorised as “specialist” offenders since they are ostensibly pro-social, and are well liked and trusted.<sup>9</sup>

Understanding the prevalence and dynamics of child sexual abuse is vital in efforts by authorities to prevent and deter offending. We draw on these insights throughout our submission.

## Government-led safeguarding

Efforts by individual organisations and institutions to keep children safe cannot be disconnected from a broader societal context. A systemic, government-led effort is required, focussed on the positive and tangible actions that can be taken by individuals, groups and organisations to create communities that are safe for all children.

The Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse (the Royal Commission) presented its final report in December 2017. Despite over seven years having passed, key recommendations are yet to be implemented by governments. For example, the Royal Commission recommended a set of Child Safe Standards, which formed the basis for the [National Principles for Child Safe Organisations](#) (the Child Safe Principles). The Child Safe Principles were endorsed by all governments in 2019, but implementation has not been timely and consistent across the country.

We note that in Queensland, the Child Safe Principles will become mandatory with the commencement of new obligations under Queensland’s *Child Safe Organisations Act 2024* (the Act). Implementation will include a set of Child Safe Standards and a new Reportable Conduct Scheme. The Act will be phased in from 1 October 2025, more than five years after the Queensland Government endorsed the Child Safety Principles and almost eight years since the Royal Commission handed down its final report.

As part of implementation of the Act, it is critical that the Queensland Government provide adequate support, including guidance and funding, for organisations to meet the Child Safe Standards and ensure workers understand their obligations. Training for key workforces to promote and maintain child safety, and recognise and respond to child sexual abuse, is essential.

The Queensland Government must also commit adequate resources to oversight and enforcement of the new framework and obligations. The Queensland Family and Child Commission’s (QFCC) role in monitoring and reporting on the operation of the new framework is critical to build public trust, ensure accountability, and enable continuous improvement in child protection practices. The Queensland Government should periodically review the QFCC’s powers and assess whether its resourcing enables it to effectively

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<sup>9</sup> Ž Nicol et al. (2022). *Evading detection: what do we know about men charged with extrafamilial child sexual abuse following delayed detection?* Journal of Child Sexual Abuse; Ž Nicol et al. (2022). *Evading detection: characteristics of individuals with extrafamilial child sexual offences and long detection lags.* International Journal of Offender Therapy and Comparative Criminology.

monitor compliance, investigate breaches, and respond swiftly to identified risks within institutions and services that care for children. Consistent and rigorous enforcement acts as a deterrent to negligence and abuse, ultimately creating safer environments where children can thrive.

In introducing the new Reportable Conduct Scheme, we caution that it is not seen as a fail-safe way to prevent child sexual abuse in childcare settings. The recent charges against childcare worker Joshua Brown in Victoria demonstrate that reportable conduct schemes can be insufficient, reflecting the fact that a large proportion of child sexual victimisation goes unreported. This was noted in Progress Report 2, which highlighted Australian Bureau of Statistics data that 84% of women and 99% of men surveyed never made a report to the police about their first experiences of sexual abuse as children.<sup>10</sup>

While an important tool, organisations cannot rely solely on reportable conduct schemes to determine an individual's suitability to work with children. They must form part of a broader range of organisational strategies and policies to keep children safe, in line with the Child Safe Standards.

### Recommendation 1

- We recommend a concerted state-led effort to build child safe institutions, with the Queensland Government to:
  - ensure sufficient funding is provided to enable organisations to meet their obligations under the *Child Safe Organisations Act 2024* (the Act); and
  - periodically review the QFCC's powers and resourcing, to ensure it can effectively oversight and enforce the Act.

## Creating a culture of safety

Our research shows that men who have sexual feelings towards and have offended against children are more likely to work with children compared to other men.<sup>11</sup> As such, there must be a concerted effort to safeguard children from abuse and exploitation in schools, childcare, social groups, clubs and any other activity in which children are present. Creating a culture of safety in institutions requires more than just guidelines, but involves fostering safe spaces, safe relationships and safe processes.

Dr Zollner, Director of the IADC, identifies a number of key strategies to strengthen child safety within organisations. This includes:

- integrating safeguarding principles into recruitment, induction and supervision processes, including rigorous screening processes for new staff to identify and prevent at-risk individuals from working with children.
- comprehensive education and ongoing training for staff and volunteers.
- promoting a culture of openness where individuals, especially children, feel it is safe to speak up if they sense something is wrong.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics (2021–22). *Childhood abuse*. ([Weblink](#))

<sup>11</sup> Salter et al. (2023). *Identifying and understanding child sexual offending behaviours and attitudes among Australian men*. Jesuit Social Services & University of New South Wales. ([Weblink](#))

<sup>12</sup> Zollner (2025). Interview by K. Allen, Jesuit Social Services. 14 April; Zollner (2022). *The Catholic Church's Responsibility in Creating a Safeguarding Culture*. *The Person and the Challenges*, 12(1).

Dr Zollner also advocates for a targeted approach to safeguarding, emphasising the importance of identifying and addressing the specific vulnerabilities present in different communities and settings, rather than applying a uniform strategy everywhere.

Organisations must implement policies appropriate to their setting and risk levels, to support situational crime prevention and prevent opportunistic offending. In childcare centres, this might include reconfiguring the physical layout of the space to remove areas that could be used to hide child sexual abuse; child–staff ratios that enable adequate supervision of staff; mandating that no staff member is to be alone with a child (the “four eyes” requirement); and banning professionals from using personal phones in childcare settings.

## Building a child safe workforce

Comprehensive education and ongoing training for staff and volunteers is a critical component of building child safe organisations. The Queensland Government must ensure comprehensive education and training is available for all prescribed workforces and organisations captured under the Act.

These education efforts should aim to ensure every individual:

- has an awareness of risk factors for and signs of child sexual abuse.
- understands their role in safeguarding children, including their responsibilities under legislation (e.g. the new Reportable Conduct Scheme).
- knows how to respond in a trauma-informed, child-centric way.

Through Stop it Now!, we hear from professionals in psychology and related fields who have received a disclosure that a person is concerned about their sexual thoughts towards children, but are unequipped to offer support. We also hear from offenders who have previously disclosed such concerns to psychologists or therapists, but were not provided any support to address their behaviour. These are missed opportunities to prevent harm before it occurs.

Jesuit Social Services recommends child sexual abuse prevention training be mandated both for professionals in sectors that work with children, and those that may receive a disclosure that someone has or is at risk of sexually offending against children. This includes childcare, psychology, law enforcement and social work.

This training must equip professionals not only to detect and intervene in suspected cases of abuse, but also to appropriately respond to disclosures from individuals who have committed, or are concerned they may commit, child sexual abuse. This includes having knowledge of appropriate reporting and referral pathways.

Child sexual abuse prevention training should be integrated at the qualification stage (i.e. in vocational or university courses) as well as through ongoing professional development. In its role as oversight body for the Act, the QFCC should work with relevant professional bodies – such as the Psychology Board of Australia, and the Australian Association of Social Workers – to ensure this content is standardised and embedded across all relevant curricula.

Equipping professionals across disciplines with the skills to understand and respond to child sexual abuse is essential to building a workforce capable of preventing harm before it occurs and supporting safe, child-centred responses to abuse.

## Recommendations 2 & 3

- Building on current workforce capacity building efforts delivered through the QFCC, we recommend the Queensland Government fund comprehensive and ongoing education and training for all prescribed workforces and organisations under the new Reportable Conduct Scheme, to ensure understanding of:
  - warning signs that there is a risk of child sexual abuse or that abuse has occurred;
  - the responsibilities of adults and institutions to keep children safe from abuse under state law;
  - actions required to respond in a trauma-informed way; and
  - how to respond to a disclosure that someone is concerned about their sexual thoughts or behaviour towards children, including appropriate referral pathways.
- We recommend the QFCC work with relevant professional bodies to embed training on child sexual abuse prevention – including responding to disclosures – into vocational and university curricula. This should include qualifications for:
  - sectors that work with children; and
  - professionals who may receive a disclosure that someone has or is concerned they might sexually offend against children, including psychology and social work.

## De-stigmatising conversations about child sexual abuse and supporting bystander action

De-stigmatising conversations about child sexual abuse plays a crucial role in encouraging help-seeking among victims and enabling parents as well as carers to engage in meaningful conversations with children and young people about sexual abuse.

Our research with UNSW found that offenders were more likely to believe that child sexual abuse is not harmful and that children are to blame for sexual abuse<sup>13</sup>. Sexual abuse myths can play a part in how the victim understands their abuse and the support they receive from the community. Stigma and shame can prevent victims from speaking out or seeking help, and discourage parents and carers from speaking to children about abuse<sup>14</sup>.

The high proportion of child sexual offending that goes undetected and unreported emphasises the importance of strengthening the ability of parents, carers and other community members to detect and act on suspicions of child sexual abuse, as a way to prevent future offending. Yet parents and carers may feel unprepared for, or uncomfortable initiating, conversations about child sexual abuse.

Awareness campaigns and education programs may have a role to play in normalising conversations and addressing stereotypes about child sexual abuse, and building the

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<sup>13</sup> Salter et al. (2023). *Identifying and understanding child sexual offending behaviours and attitudes among Australian men*. Jesuit Social Services & University of New South Wales. ([Weblink](#))

<sup>14</sup> Latiff et al. (2023). *A systematic review of factors associated with disclosure of child sexual abuse*. ([Weblink](#))

confidence of parents, carers, and other adults to identify potential signs of abuse. The Commonwealth Government, as part of the *National Strategy to Prevent and Respond to Child Sexual Abuse*, has launched the *One Talk at a Time* campaign.<sup>15</sup> This campaign seeks to encourage adults to learn about the issue and have ongoing, proactive, preventative conversations with children, young people and other adults.

Recognising the Commonwealth's role in coordinating a national approach, the Queensland Government could explore opportunities to build on this national campaign by identifying where more tailored or targeted messaging is required for the Queensland context. State-specific messaging could seek to further de-stigmatise conversations about child sexual abuse by addressing cultural or community myths or norms specific to Queensland. State-led awareness and education efforts can also help communities and individuals understand local reporting and investigation processes, and where to go to seek help. This approach aligns with Dr Zollner's advice around the need to identify and address the specific vulnerabilities present in different communities and settings, rather than applying a uniform strategy to safeguarding.

In designing and implementing awareness campaigns, governments must be mindful that not all awareness campaigns lead to positive outcomes. Broad, untargeted campaigns risk having little impact, or even cause harm, if they are not grounded in evidence.

To be effective, community education efforts must be grounded in rigorous evidence, include clear calls to action, and provide accessible pathways to support. Targeted, research-informed education programs such as *Prevent It!* have shown positive impacts. An evaluation of *Prevent It!* in Canada found statistically significant improvements in participants' knowledge, attitudes, and behaviours regarding child sexual abuse. Notably, the proportion of participants who took proactive steps to protect children increased from 25% at baseline to 48% at follow-up.<sup>16</sup>

Crucially, any awareness campaigns or education and training programs must undergo rigorous evaluation—not just in terms of raising levels of awareness, but in assessing their real-world impact on behaviour, help-seeking, and reporting outcomes.

All levels of government have a role to play in reducing the stigma around child sexual abuse and equipping communities – particularly parents, carers, and professionals who work with children – to act when they suspect a child or young person may be being abused.

#### Recommendation 4

- We recommend the Queensland Government examine opportunities to deliver awareness campaigns, public messaging and education programs to complement the Commonwealth Government's *One Talk at a Time* campaign. Efforts should:
  - aim to de-stigmatise conversations about child sexual abuse;
  - equip parents, carers and other adults with the tools to identify and respond to concerns around child sexual abuse; and
  - be tailored to the specific needs and context in Queensland.

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<sup>15</sup> Available via [weblink](#).

<sup>16</sup> Martin et al. (2016) *An Evidence-Based Education Program for Adults about Child Sexual Abuse ("Prevent It!") That Significantly Improves Attitudes, Knowledge, and Behavior*. *Front. Psych.*, 7.

## Approaches to early intervention and prevention

Our research with UNSW found that one in five Australian men have sexual feelings towards children and/or have committed child sexual abuse offences. Importantly, of the men who have sexual feelings towards children, 29.6% want help with these feelings. This equates to 4.5% of all Australian men. These findings emphasise the importance of preventative interventions and support for those who are concerned about their thoughts or feelings as a way to prevent future offending. Services that work to prevent future offending by undetected/unarrested child sexual abuse perpetrators are particularly critical given only a small number of offenders are ever arrested or charged.<sup>17</sup>

Further, our research indicates that there is a key prevention window prior to the onset of offending. On average, men with sexual feelings towards children, but who have not yet offended, were younger than men with sexual feelings who had offended.<sup>18</sup> Other research has found that the average time between sexual thoughts first emerging (often during adolescence) and first arrest for a sex crime is almost ten years.<sup>19</sup> This points to a critical window for prevention engaging with younger men and boys across a range of settings where they work and socialise, including online, schools, workplaces and sporting clubs. Interventions should raise awareness of child sexual abuse risk factors (including sexual feelings and thoughts towards children), address attitudes that excuse offending, destigmatise help-seeking behaviour and provide pathways to support.

Jesuit Social Services has begun actioning these research insights through the development of programs which we highlight below. The insights should be further harnessed and built upon with government support to design and target prevention and early intervention programs across key settings and cohorts, including in the online environment.

### Stop It Now!

Jesuit Social Services' Stop It Now! is a child sexual abuse prevention program for adults concerned about their own or someone else's sexual thoughts or behaviours towards children. The service is based on the Stop It Now! model established internationally, which the Royal Commission recommended inform the design of information and help-seeking services in Australia to support people who are concerned they may be at risk of sexually abusing children.

The key features of the service are an anonymous telephone helpline, online chat service, and online resources. The helpline is staffed by highly skilled practitioners and provides an anonymous space for people to talk about their concerns and get the help needed to prevent child sexual abuse. We work closely with professionals and victim-survivors of child sexual abuse to ensure their knowledge and voices help shape the service and the response.

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<sup>17</sup> Seto, M. C. (2008). *Pedophilia and sexual offending against children*. American Psychological Association (APA). ([Weblink](#))

<sup>18</sup> Salter et al. (2023). *Identifying and understanding child sexual offending behaviours and attitudes among Australian men*. Jesuit Social Services & University of New South Wales. ([Weblink](#))

<sup>19</sup> Piche et al. (2018). *Preventative services for sexual offenders*. *Sexual Abuse*, 30(1), 63–81. ([Weblink](#))

An evaluation of Stop It Now! was conducted by the University of Melbourne and has found that the program is having its intended effect. People concerned about themselves or others, as well as practitioners, reported planning and executing actions which are associated with reduced risk and increased protective factors in relation to child sexual abuse perpetration.

According to the recent Australian Child Maltreatment Study (ACMS), in contemporary Australian society, more children (defined in the ACMS as people under the age of 18) experience sexual abuse by an adolescent perpetrator than by an adult perpetrator; an inversion of the historical trend.<sup>20</sup> An increasing body of evidence links early exposure to pornography with harmful sexual behaviour displayed by young people. Professionals in this field are observing that children and young people who do not appear to have high levels of childhood trauma or adversity are displaying harmful sexual behaviours due to viewing pornography.<sup>21</sup>

One study found that 94% of children and young people first access, or are exposed to, pornography before the age of 14 years.<sup>22</sup> Early exposure to pornography can impact young people's development, their understanding of healthy relationships, and their attitudes and behaviours,<sup>23</sup> and for some young people plays a role in the pathway to harmful sexual behaviour.<sup>24</sup>

Jesuit Social Services is collaborating with academics and practitioners to develop new early intervention models that will support young people at risk of engaging in harmful sexual behaviours.

### **Worried About Sex and Pornography Project**

The Worried About Sex and Pornography Project (WASAPP) commenced in 2019, in collaboration with the University of Melbourne. WASAPP arose from Jesuit Social Services' work delivering Stop It Now! and findings from the Royal Commission, which identified a gap in secondary prevention services in Australia that work with children and young people who are worried about their sexual thoughts or behaviours.

Through WASAPP, we are codesigning a new online early intervention service for children and young people at risk of engaging in harmful sexual behaviours, drawing on current evidence and generating new evidence about intervening early in problematic or harmful sexual behaviour. The service will be launched late 2025/early 2026 with a new website providing resources for young people.

WASAPP is currently solely funded through philanthropic support. Additional funding will be required to engage specialist practitioners and support the roll out of the anonymous helpline and chat service.

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<sup>20</sup> Haslam et al. (2023). *The prevalence and impact of child maltreatment in Australia: Findings from the Australian Child Maltreatment Study: Brief Report*. Australian Child Maltreatment Study, QUT.

<sup>21</sup> McKibbin et al. (2022). *Clusters of risk associated with harmful sexual behaviour onset for children and young people: Opportunities for early intervention*. *Journal of Sexual Aggression*, 30(2).

<sup>22</sup> Martellozzo et al. (2016). *"I wasn't sure it was normal to watch it...": A quantitative and qualitative examination of the impact of online pornography on the values, attitudes, beliefs and behaviours of children and young people*. Middlesex University, NSPCC, OCC.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> McKibbin et al. (2023). *Pathways to Onset of Harmful Sexual Behavior*. *Victims & Offenders*, 19(5).

Sexual abuse victimisation is not deterministic of future offending, however there are correlations between childhood adversities and harmful or concerning behaviours, including towards children. Our research with UNSW found that men with sexual feelings who had offended against children were more than six times as likely to have been sexually abused as a child, compared to men with no sexual feelings or offending against children.<sup>25</sup> Providing adequate supports to children who experience sexual abuse is itself a critical prevention and early intervention strategy.

Trauma-informed and developmentally appropriate support enables victim-survivors of child sexual abuse to recover from the immediate and longer-term impacts of abuse. Therapeutic interventions can help prevent adverse outcomes, including mental health conditions such as depression and anxiety, interrupt cycles of harm, and reduce the risk of future offending.

Early intervention can prevent child sexual abuse. Initiatives such as Stop It Now!, WASAPP and other evidence-based early intervention services have an important role to play in supporting boys and men with sexual feelings towards children who have not offended, and undetected offenders who want help to stop harming children.

### Recommendation 5 & 6

- We recommend the Queensland Government provide additional funding for the development and implementation of evidence-based, therapeutic interventions and services to support:
  - victim-survivors of child sexual abuse; and
  - children who display harmful sexual behaviours.
- We recommend the Queensland Government support – via direct funding or advocating to the Commonwealth Government – the development and implementation of early intervention services for people, including children and adolescents, concerned about their use of pornography and/or sexual thoughts and behaviours towards children – such as Jesuit Social Services' Worried About Sex and Pornography Project (WASAPP).

## Technological interventions to disrupt and deter child sexual abuse

Online platforms offer crucial opportunities to disrupt and deter offending on a large scale. Our research with UNSW found that men with sexual feelings towards children are consuming more pornography, and more violent and deviant pornography (including bestiality content). They also use the internet more intensively and frequently, are more active on social media, and are more likely to use encrypted apps and privacy services.<sup>26</sup>

Technology platforms and providers are well-positioned to play a role in deterring individuals who are seeking out child-related sexual content and directing them to intervention services. For example, some pornography sites are already directing men who search for child related sexual content to early intervention services, such as Stop It Now!.

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<sup>25</sup> Salter et al. (2023). *Identifying and understanding child sexual offending behaviours and attitudes among Australian men*. Jesuit Social Services & University of New South Wales. ([Weblink](#))

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

Drawing on our experience delivering Stop It Now! and our research with UNSW, Jesuit Social Services has partnered with the University of Tasmania on an initiative to improve the use of technology to disrupt and deter access to child sexual abuse material (CSAM). As part of this work, we are seeking to collaborate with tech platforms to strengthen efforts to use technology to prevent offending before it starts, deter those who are currently offending, and encourage help-seeking behaviours that support long-term behavioural change.

### **CSAM deterrence initiative**

Jesuit Social Services is collaborating with the University of Tasmania on an initiative to deter people from accessing child sexual abuse material (CSAM) and other forms of online child sexual exploitation. We are seeking to achieve this by working with technology companies to implement messaging to disrupt and deter offending and facilitate help-seeking.

A trial in the UK of the 'reThink' chatbot and warning message was found to result in a decrease in the number of searches for sexual images of children on Pornhub during the time the chatbot was deployed.<sup>27</sup> The trial involved a chatbot engaging in conversation with users attempting to search on Pornhub for sexual images of children, telling users these images are illegal and signposting them to Stop It Now! where they could receive help and support to stop their behaviour. Hundreds of people clicked through to the Stop It Now! website or called the helpline during the trial. This initiative will work to increase adoption of these kinds of evidence- and technology-based interventions in the Australian context.

Through government advocacy, partnerships, public awareness, and workforce development, our CSAM deterrence initiative seeks to shift deterrence messages to business-as-usual practice among technology companies, foster a safer digital environment and drive sustained, effective action against online child sexual abuse and exploitation.

Technology platforms and pornography providers should do more to disrupt the availability of illegal and seriously harmful content, including child sexual abuse material, and prevent children's access to pornographic content altogether. While these platforms are governed by federal legislation, state and territory governments have a role to play in advocating for changes that will make the online environment safer for children and young people, and prevent and deter online child sexual abuse.

Mainstream pornography websites are largely unregulated, and contain a significant quantity of material that includes themes of child sexual abuse, incest and other harmful and illegal content that would be refused classification under Australia's National Classification Scheme. Such content plays a role in normalising the abuse of children and may lead consumers to seek out child sexual abuse material on other platforms. Finnish child protection organisation Suojellaan Lapsia has found "clear patterns of pornography escalation" as a driver of child sexual abuse offending.<sup>28</sup> Jesuit Social Services is advocating for the Commonwealth Government to strengthen obligations on technology companies to prevent child sexual abuse on their platforms, including through detection, removal and

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<sup>27</sup> Scanlan et al. (2024), *reThink Chatbot Evaluation*, University of Tasmania. ([Weblink](#))

<sup>28</sup> Nurmi et al. (2024). *Investigating child sexual abuse material availability, searches, and users on the anonymous Tor network for a public health intervention strategy*. *Scientific Reports*, 14(1).

reporting of child exploitation material, and stronger regulation of child sexual abuse themes on mainstream pornography websites.

The Commonwealth should also require technology companies to enforce age limits on pornographic content, to limit exposure by children to content that may shape offence-facilitating attitudes and behaviours. The Commonwealth is conducting a trial of age assurance technology, which is examining the readiness of various age assurance technologies in the Australian context. This is an important step, but the Commonwealth has not yet committed to mandate age verification or age assurance for pornography websites following the trial's conclusion.<sup>29</sup>

Jesuit Social Services welcomed the Commonwealth's announcement in November 2024 that it would legislate a duty of care for digital platforms. However, we are concerned that the Commonwealth has yet to provide a timeframe for introducing this duty of care. This reform must be introduced as a matter of priority, to provide a flexible approach to online safety that will require digital platforms to do more to keep children safe online – including in relation to child sexual abuse material and online sexual exploitation of children. To further strengthen protection for children in the online environment, the Commonwealth should mandate that digital platforms adhere to Safety by Design principles,<sup>30</sup> to require technology companies to have a stronger focus on anticipating, detecting and eliminating online harms before they occur.

### Recommendations 7 & 8

- We recommend the Queensland Government support – via direct funding or in collaboration with the Commonwealth Government – the development and implementation of online deterrence initiatives that seek to prevent child sexual abuse.
  - Interventions could include pop-up warnings in online spaces where people may seek out child sexual abuse material or pornography that promotes and normalises child sexual abuse and sexual violence.
- We recommend the Queensland Government advocate for federally legislated requirements for technology companies to ensure children's safety online, including:
  - requirements to prevent and disrupt child sexual abuse on their platforms;
  - enforcement of age limits on pornography websites; and
  - mandating and enforcing Safety by Design principles;

and that the Commonwealth Government legislate the already announced 'digital duty of care' as a matter of priority.

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<sup>29</sup> Available via [weblink](#).

<sup>30</sup> The eSafety Commissioner describes [Safety by Design](#) as putting user safety and rights at the centre of the design and development of online products and services. Rather than retrofitting safeguards after an issue has occurred, Safety by Design focuses on the ways technology companies can minimise online threats by anticipating, detecting and eliminating online harms before they occur. The Safety by Design principles are: 1. Service provider responsibility; 2. User empowerment and autonomy; 3. Transparency and accountability.

## Using research insights to improve prevention, detection and deterrence of child sexual abuse

High quality research into child sexual abuse perpetration, particularly by undetected, specialist offenders, is crucial to prevent, detect and deter child sexual abuse. To provide targeted prevention and intervention programs, and continue building child-safe organisations, institutions and communities, we must understand more about the extent of child sexual offending, pathways into perpetration, and characteristics of those who commit child sexual abuse.

Our research with UNSW into child sexual offending behaviours and attitudes found that men with sexual feelings who had sexually offended against children were more likely to be older, wealthier and married, with good social supports. These men have the skills, networks and resources to avoid suspicion and evade detection. These findings offer state child protection and law enforcement agencies important insights to debunk offender stereotypes, inform risk assessments, and support investigations into child sexual abuse allegations – for example to build offender profiles. However, this research is just the start and more investment is required to build our understanding of child sexual abuse perpetration.

Building on our research with UNSW, future studies into perpetration of child sexual offending would benefit from larger surveys of representative community samples (which would include undetected offenders), expanding question sets (for example regarding motivation of offending, and facilitators and barriers to help-seeking), regular survey data collection to track changes over time, and further strengthening the methodology (including completing cognitive testing of questions).

Future studies should also explore factors that would enable child protection, law enforcement and the criminal justice system to better target the cohort of men who are at chronic risk of harming children but adapt their efforts to avoid detection and prosecution. Agencies should identify what further data and insights would support their investigative efforts, in order to guide future research priorities.

### Recommendations 9 & 10

- We recommend that Queensland child protection and law enforcement agencies draw on findings from our research with UNSW (*Identifying and understanding child sexual offending behaviours and attitudes among Australian men*) to strengthen approaches to detection and investigation of child sexual abuse, including to inform risk assessments and build offender profiles.
- We recommend further investment by governments in large-scale research to inform targeted prevention strategies and early intervention efforts, with the research to examine:
  - the behaviours and attitudes of perpetrators of child sexual abuse;
  - the prevalence, dynamics and drivers of child sexual offending; and
  - risk and protective factors across different population groups, places and settings.