



**yourtown**  
POWERING kids helpline

## **National Strategy Monitoring & Evaluation Framework**

National Strategy to Prevent and  
Respond to Child Sexual Abuse

A submission to: The National Office  
for Child Safety

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**yourtown** is a trusted provider of services for young people, with a focus on mental health and wellbeing, long-term unemployment, prevention of youth suicide, child protection, as well as support for those experiencing domestic and family violence. **yourtown** has evolved to helping hundreds of thousands of young people each year by powering a range of service offerings that support them through difficult challenges.

## Our services

- Kids Helpline, providing counselling and support services to 5–25-year-olds across Australia since 1991,
- Kids Helpline @ school and Kids Helpline @ High School, which delivers early intervention and prevention programs through primary and secondary schools
- My Circle, a confidential, private, online peer support network for 13–25-year-olds to share information and build coping skills
- Mental health service/s for children aged 0-11 years old and their families, with moderate mental health needs
- Domestic and family violence refuge, accommodation, and therapeutic support for young parents with children, including post-refuge support
- Parentline, a telephone and online counselling and support service for parents and carers in the Northern Territory and Queensland
- Expressive Therapy interventions for young children and infants who have experienced trauma and abuse, or been exposed to violence
- Young Parents Program providing parenting support to help with child development, life skills and health and wellbeing activities in safe, supportive environments, and
- Employment, education, and social enterprise programs to help long term unemployed young people re-engage with education and/or employment.

## Kids Helpline

Kids Helpline is Australia's only free and confidential 24/7 phone and online free counselling service for young people aged 5 to 25. It offers children and young people a range of care options that are right for them given their needs and circumstances.

For more than 30 years, Kids Helpline has responded to over 8.5 million contacts from children and young people seeking support.

In 2021, children and young people across Australia attempted to contact Kids Helpline almost 460,000 times – approximately 1,260 contacts per day, one contact every 69 seconds. Our counsellors provided almost 100,00 counselling sessions. The top issues children and young people contacted us about were mental health and emotional wellbeing (one in two), suicide-related concerns (one in six) and family relationships (one in six).

There was a 109% increase in children and young people requiring an immediate emergency response including the assistance of ambulance, police or child protection compared to 2020; 37% were related to child abuse, 35% to suicide attempts and 10% to sexual assault.

**yourtown** welcomes the opportunity to provide feedback on the Monitoring and Evaluation Framework (the Framework) for the National Strategy to Prevent and Respond to Child Sexual Abuse (National Strategy). We support the adoption of a co-design process with people who have lived experience of child sexual abuse or exploitation.

**yourtown** strongly supports the generation and collection of quality data, and robust evidence through the lifetime of the Strategy to drive continuous improvement. One of the challenges in the current Framework is the lack of a clear commitment to what 'success' will look like in addressing the 62 measures. Without clear indicators of performance and success and articulation of accompanying data sources, it will be difficult to measure, monitor and secure lasting change, or identify what has or has not, worked and the extent of any impact. Data collection and provision would need to be negotiated and provided by a range of agencies, particularly at state and territory levels, including: police, health, justice, child protection and education. If broader system reform is to be achieved for victims and survivors, the National Strategy, needs data that can assist in understanding the victim/survivor journey and any obstacles that impact on their wellbeing or achievement of justice. The following sets out **yourtown's** responses to the discussion questions.

### **Do the outcomes in the proposed Monitoring and Evaluation Framework support evaluation of progress toward the objective and vision of the National Strategy?**

**yourtown** proposes the following amendments to ensure the outcomes in the Framework support progress towards the objective and mission of the National Strategy:

- **Stronger focus on empowering and engaging all children and young people through a child rights approach:** While a longer-term outcome is that 'everyone' recognises and is empowered to act on systemic or direct risks to safety, there should be a specific medium-term outcome focused upon children and young people specifically being empowered both to 'be' safe; and that they 'feel' safe.
- **Need for greater specificity regarding target cohorts to be measured:** the broad term "everyone" is used throughout the Framework; however, this lacks specificity. There should be clear target audiences to be measured, with differentiation between cohort groups (e.g., professionals with service providers/responders; government agencies; children and young people; victims and survivors; supporters; community) who will have lower or higher measure levels against most of 18 indicators. Without this specificity the quality, accuracy and usefulness of the measures may ultimately be compromised because of masking, non-representative data, and the potential for data bias.
- **Greater prominence for victims and survivors:** while some of the outcomes (e.g., medium term 7 and 8) have been framed to support the victim/survivors' journey (including the provision of treatment/support) and allow for their voices to be heard, **yourtown** recommends all outcomes be drafted in a manner which allows victim/survivors a greater voice and role, should they wish to have one.
- **Re-framing of language:** the language of the outcomes adopts a passive, and in places, deficits-based approach. It is recommended that outcomes be re-framed from a strengths-based, and trauma-informed approach.
- **Measuring systemic change:** the medium and long-term outcomes across Theme one (Awareness raising, education and building child safe cultures) must include an outcome to measure systemic change to determine whether the Strategy has led to a more integrated, accountable, efficient, and effective response to preventing child sexual abuse.

- **Impact of incidence on reporting:** some indicators are pervasive and may have a perceived counter-productive effect in the short-term (e.g., an increase in reporting (IND 4) this is likely to result in an increase in known incidence (IND 3). The framework should recognise and articulate this as a potential short-term outcome
- **Clarification on SMART measures and outcomes:** the Framework should articulate how qualitative data is to be used to within the context of the SMART (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant and Time-bound) measures, indicators, and outcomes
- **Rectify inconsistency between the High level and detailed versions of the Framework:** Figure 1 and Figure 2 should consistently represent the order of short-term outcomes and activities (62 measures from the First Action Plans), and
- **Rephrase key evaluation questions as open questions:** The outcomes and impact key evaluation questions on page 17 are primarily closed questions (e.g., Are Australians better able to understand and recognise child sexual abuse?) leading to a 'yes' or 'no' answer. Use of open questions would facilitate deeper insights and enable additional consideration of what is working well, where, and why. In so doing, lived experiences and lessons learnt could then be shared in a more contextualised manner.

### **Do the proposed principles for measures capture the necessary considerations for collecting sufficient and appropriate data about initiatives under the National Strategy?**

**yourtown** recommends the following considerations be included to ensure the principles for measures capture sufficient and appropriate data. Quality data should be:

- representative of the population
- derived from a sufficient sample size
- valid and appropriate to measure the relevant indicator
- defined and reported consistently to ensure comparability with other reports
- ethically obtained, stored, and utilised, with specific regard given to issues of privacy, confidentiality, and consent, and
- benchmarked, baselined, and targets established.

In addition to this, data collection processes should be co-designed, reviewed and agreed to by victims/survivors.

In particular, it is recommended that the National Maltreatment Study be used to inform Theme 5 and be specifically mentioned noting that this evidence source will have some limitations for performance reporting (i.e., the age of people participating in the sample being aged 16 years plus) or require additional consideration when reporting (e.g., where a 16-year-old may report they were sexually abused when they were 8 years old).

### **Do the proposed principles for public reporting capture the major considerations for a fit-for-purpose reporting process?**

**yourtown** recommends the following amendments to ensure the proposed principles for public reporting capture the major considerations for a fit-for-purpose reporting process.

It is critical that accessible versions of the report be made available for children and young people as a mandatory principle, rather than a 'considered' principle. Versions of the report should also be accessible for people with visual and auditory impairments and be available across multiple media channels.

Annual reporting processes should:

- utilise case studies, vignettes, and qualitative statements from the voices of victim/survivors, and supporters
- be co-designed, reviewed and agreed to by victims/survivors
- provide objective and evaluative judgements on progress and performance of programs and strategies, and not be limited to documenting recommendations for improvements and,
- include relevant financial information and a cost benefit analysis.

We would welcome the opportunity to explore these ideas with you in further detail. Should you require any further information, please do not hesitate to contact Kathryn Mandla, Head of Advocacy and Research at **yourtown** via email at [kmandla@yourtown.com.au](mailto:kmandla@yourtown.com.au).