

# CYDA's response to the National Strategy to Prevent Child Sexual Abuse Final Development Consultation Paper

## April 2021

### Vision, objective and values

CYDA agrees with the proposed vision and objective for the Strategy. We recommend the addition of the word 'all' to the vision, so that it reads:

*Australia is committed to a future where all children and young people are protected and safe from sexual abuse.*

CYDA recommends that the National Strategy could be strengthened by a more explicit focus on a human rights-based approach. This could be best covered by the addition of another value that references Australia's human rights commitments. For example, the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (which Australia has ratified) obligates State parties to protect a child from sexual abuse, and gives children the right to participate.

CYDA supports the inclusion of Value Two and Three, specifically that engagement is tailored to children's diverse needs and circumstances. For the voice of children and young people with disability to be listened to and used effectively to shape the design and implementation of the Strategy, an inclusive approach must be adopted which identifies and addresses any barriers to their communication or participation.

CYDA also supports the inclusion of Value Five, that all initiatives are evidenced-based. CYDA recommends that the National Strategy draw on evidence of what has worked in programs implemented in other sectors such as the prevention of violence against women. CYDA supports the adoption of a public health approach that encompasses primary prevention, secondary prevention/early intervention and tertiary prevention/response.<sup>1</sup>

### Strategic priority themes

CYDA strongly supports the priority theme: 'Education and building child safe cultures'. Negative community attitudes, stigma, discrimination and myths about children and young people with disability can further exacerbate the harms caused by sexual abuse. The Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse found that these negative attitudes can result in dismissive and inadequate responses to the sexual abuse of children with disability.<sup>2</sup> We must address and correct these community attitudes if the National Strategy is to truly meet its objective to 'reduce the risk, extent and impact of child sexual abuse and related harms' for children and young people with disability.

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<sup>1</sup> Our Watch, Australia's National Research Organisation for Women's Safety (ANROWS) and VicHealth (2015) *Change the story: A shared framework for the primary prevention of violence against women and their children in Australia*, Our Watch, Melbourne, Australia.

<sup>2</sup> Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse 2017, Final Report, Vol. 3, p.49.

CYDA would also call on the priority theme of ‘Education and building child safe cultures’ to include actions to develop tailored and evidenced-based education programs and information for children and young people with disability. Children and young people with disability are often unjustly excluded from prevention programs that their peers participate in because it is assumed the programs are not relevant for the group, that they won’t understand the content, or because of the misinformed and dangerous belief that children with disability are unlikely to be abused.<sup>3</sup>

An example of this is people with disability’s routine exclusion from sexual education and relationships programs – an important mechanism for young people to protect themselves from sexual exploitation and help them better recognise healthy and unhealthy patterns in relationships.<sup>4</sup> This is built on harmful historic assumptions and public narratives that people with disability are either asexual/non-sexual or hypersexual.<sup>5</sup>

This systemic failing was amplified for CYDA during the 2020 National Youth Disability Summit (see response to question 4 below for more background), where many young people noted this was the first time they had access to sexuality education that was inclusive of intersectionality such as disability, gender and sexuality; and some noted this was the first time they had access to any sexuality education at all.

## Working in partnership

### What young people with disability say about engagement

In September 2020, CYDA convened the inaugural National Youth Disability Summit. The Summit was established with the vision to create an inclusive environment where young people with disability from across Australia could come together as a community and use their voices to shape the future. The Summit was designed by and for young people with lived experience of disability.

A major theme that emerged across entire Summit was the opportunity to better listen to young people with disability. Creating space for young people with disability was highlighted as a pathway toward a more inclusive society. Participants at the Summit emphasise that no one knows what young people need better than they do, so they must be supported to be at the centre of solutions for change to be effective.

*“I believe that young people’s voices need to be heard. ... [W]e have the future ahead of us and we see the changes that need to happen. It will be silly not to give young people a voice and input in the matters that affect them.”*

*“Listen to young people. Because there is not a decision that is not with us at the end of the day. The mistakes made today will haunt us in the future.”*

### Considerations for engagement / partnership

CYDA recommends the inclusion of families and caregivers as an explicit group for engagement through the life of the National Strategy, supporting the important points made by the Raising Children Network at the consultation session. Although the stakeholder list has identified ‘children

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<sup>3</sup> Wayland, S & Hindmarsh, G. (2017). Understanding safeguarding practices for children with disability when engaging with organisations. Available at [Understanding safeguarding practices for children with disability when engaging with organisations | Child Family Community Australia \(aifs.gov.au\)](https://www.aifs.gov.au/child-family-community-australia/understanding-safeguarding-practices-for-children-with-disability-when-engaging-with-organisations)

<sup>4</sup> Robinson, S., Graham, A., Fisher, K., Meltzer, A., Blaxland, M., & Johnson, K. (2017). *Preventing abuse and promoting personal safety in young people with disability: Final report*. Available at [Preventing Abuse and Promoting Personal Safety in Young People with Disability \(rcypd.edu.au\)](https://www.rcypd.edu.au/preventing-abuse-and-promoting-personal-safety-in-young-people-with-disability)

<sup>5</sup> Women with Disabilities Australia (WWDA). (2015). *Submission to the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child (CRC): Development of the General Comment on the Rights of Adolescents*. Available at [https://wwda.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2013/12/WWDA\\_Sub\\_CRC\\_GC\\_Adolescents.pdf](https://wwda.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2013/12/WWDA_Sub_CRC_GC_Adolescents.pdf).

and young people *and their support networks*, we believe that the identification of families and caregivers is needed to support an explicit focus on this group.

It is critical that in developing the National Strategy all children and young people are listened to, no matter where they live. Although the stakeholder list has considered geographic diversity by identifying regional and remote communities, it doesn't take into account the variety of other settings where children and young people may live, including within youth justice facilities or out of home care. This is particularly important because as the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse reported, these 'closed' institutional environments carry more risk of child sexual abuse.<sup>6</sup>

It is also critical that intersectionality amongst the diverse groups of people identified is recognised and appropriately supported in engagement and collaboration.

## Best practice approaches

There are a range of existing resources about best practice engagement and participatory approaches for working with children and young people, including specifically those with disability and CYDA is happy to work with the National Office for Child Safety further to explore and adapt relevant approaches to this context and to facilitate the direct involvement of children and young people with disability, and their families and caregivers in this work.

The Youth Affairs Council Victoria (YACVic) has developed an online toolkit called Yerp,<sup>7</sup> which provides information for young people who want to create change in their community, and for anyone who wants to involve young people in their work. It provides information on a range of topics including guiding principles, communicating with young people and way to involve young people.

Haley Tancredi from the Centre for Inclusive Education at Queensland University of Technology has published a guide *'Consulting students with disability: A practice guide for educators and other professionals'*.<sup>8</sup> Although the guide has been produced specifically for educators and other professionals working in schools, the guide contains information transferrable to other contexts including understanding barriers that children and young people may experience and practical tips for making consultation accessible.

The NSW Office of the Children's Guardian has recently released *'Empowerment and Participation: a guide for organisations working with children and young people'*.<sup>9</sup> The guide uses Laura Lundy's model for the participation of children which has four elements: Space, Voice, Influence and Audience. The Lundy model also informs the Irish Government's National Framework for Children and Young People's Participation in Decision-Making.<sup>10</sup>

CYDA also recommends the National Office for Child Safety consult with Child and Youth Commissioners in each State and Territory on best practice approaches and learnings from previous consultations and engagement with children and young people.

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<sup>6</sup> Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse. *Final Report: Volume 2, Nature and cause*. Commonwealth of Australia, Canberra, ACT

<sup>7</sup> Youth Affairs Council Victoria 2013, *Yerp*, viewed 22 April 2021, <https://yerp.yacvic.org.au/>

<sup>8</sup> H Tancredi 2020, *Consulting students with disability: A practice guide for educators and other professionals*, Centre for Inclusive Education QUT, <https://research.qut.edu.au/c4ie/wp-content/uploads/sites/281/2020/08/Practice-Guide-Student-Consultation.pdf>

<sup>9</sup> Office of the Children's Guardian NSW, *Empowerment and Participation: a guide for organisations working with children and young people*, viewed 22 April 2021, <https://www.kidsguardian.nsw.gov.au/ArticleDocuments/838/Empowerment-and-ParticipationChildSafeStandards.pdf.aspx?Embed=Y>

<sup>10</sup> Available here: [Participation Framework - HUB na nÓg \(hubnagog.ie\)](https://www.hubnagog.ie/)