

Closed Adoption

Details

Closed adoption refers to the practice of sealing an adopted child's original birth certificate and issuing a new birth certificate when the child was adopted. This new certificate included the name of the child and their adoptive parents. The identity of the adopted child's original parents was hidden. This practice meant that many people didn't even know they had been adopted as children. The intention was to help the child settle into the adoptive family. This practice changed gradually across Australia through the late 1970s, 1980s and 1990s.

The Senate report from the 'Commonwealth Contribution to Former Forced Adoption Policies and Practices' inquiry investigated policies and practices during the era of closed adoptions. The report related closed adoption to the 'clean break theory' which was prominent in child welfare. The clean break theory held that it was best for the mother and adopted child to be separated as early and completely as possible.

A document from Tasmania from 1961 demonstrates how closed adoption was applied and enacted into laws:

There should be adequate provision to preserve secrecy, if the adopters so desire. This protection should cover all stages of the process, including the taking of consents; the placement of the child; the application for an order of adoption, and investigations made by any person in respect of the application; the hearing of the application; and the recording of the order by the Registrar-General, including the availability of his records to the public (Senate Community Affairs Reference Committee, 2012, p.151).

In past closed adoptions, adopted people were unable to see their original birth certificates. In the late 1980s, all states and territories opened their adoption registers. The adopted person's first birth certificate is preserved but is no longer a valid form of identification.

From the mid-1980s onwards, Australian legislation marked the trend towards 'open adoption', and an acknowledgement of the harmful consequences of secrecy.

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Related Entries

Related Events

- [Apology for the Removal of Children from Unmarried Mothers, Parliament of Western Australia \(19 October 2010\)](#)

Related Glossary Terms

- [Forced Adoption \(c. 1940 - c. 1970\)](#)
- [Open Adoption \(c. 1984 - current\)](#)

Related Legislation

- [Adoption of Children Act Amendment Act 1921, Western Australia \(1921 - 1995\)](#)
Closed adoption in Western Australia became legally possible with the Adoption of Children Act Amendment Act 1921.
- [Adoption of Children Act Amendment Act 1949, Western Australia \(1949 - 1995\)](#)
- [Adoption of Children Act Amendment Act \(No. 2\) 1953, Western Australia \(1954 - 1995\)](#)
- [Adoption of Children Act Amendment Act 1964, Western Australia \(1970 - 1995\)](#)
The Adoption of Children Act Amendment Act 1964 in Western Australia further tightened the secrecy provisions around closed adoption.
- [Adoption Act 1994, Western Australia \(1994 - current\)](#)

Related Concepts

- [Adoption in Western Australia \(c. 1896 - current\)](#)

Resources

- Elphick, Ron J and Dees, Glennis, *The adoption jigsaw : an account of the compassionate understanding and support given to those whose lives were affected by past adoption practices and of the 20 year struggle in Western Australia to break the conspiracy of silence surrounding adoption by changing attitudes, customs, laws and practices, 1978-1998.*, 2000
- [Foiling the Blackmailer](#), The West Australian, 19 January 1950
- Kenny, P., Higgins, D., Soloff, C., & Sweid, R., [Past adoption experiences: National Research Study on the Service Response to Past Adoption Practices \(Research Report No. 21\)](#), 2012

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