

Child Sexual Abuse Task Force, Western Australia

June 1986 – December 1987

Details

A Task Force on Child Sexual Abuse was established by the Premier of Western Australia in June 1986 and delivered its final report in December 1987. The Task Force was chaired by Dr Carmen Lawrence and membership included senior officers from relevant public agencies and a representative of the Incest Survivors Association. The Task Force made 64 recommendations relating to the extent of child sexual abuse in WA, the adequacy of existing laws, policies, procedures and programs to deal with reported cases, and strategies to both reduce the incidence of child abuse and more effectively deal with it when it did occur.

The terms of reference of the Task Force included investigating and reporting on the:

- Recorded incidence (number of new cases) and prevalence (proportion of cases in the population) of child sexual abuse
- Adequacy and accessibility of existing government and community-based programs and the capability of staff involved in those programs
- Adequacy of existing laws and investigative and prosecution procedures
- Existing and potential strategies to improve knowledge and prevention of child sexual abuse broadly throughout the general and professional communities
- Mechanisms that would effectively monitor the implementation of child sexual abuse policies and programs.

The Task Force was chaired by Dr Carmen Lawrence (who was later Premier) and included senior representatives from the Department for Community Services, Princess Margaret Hospital for Children, Law Reform Commission, Crown Law Department, Department of Premier and Cabinet (Women's Interests Division), Ministry of Education, Police Department, Health Department and the Incest Survivors Association Inc.

The Task Force called for public submissions. Four sub-committees were established to address the terms of reference and consult with the community on draft recommendations. These were:

- Law and Legal Procedures
- Services, which included 'investigation of notified cases, service provision for victims, families and offenders, and co-ordination and monitoring'
- Staff education, training and support
- Community education, which included 'preventive and protective' programs

The Task Force made 64 Recommendations, including:

- Retaining and adequately resourcing the Advisory and Co-ordinating Committee on Child Abuse (ACCCA)
- Retaining the statutory responsibility for child protection with the Department for Community Services (DCS) and the Police Department (whose Child Care Unit should be expanded), and requiring that the Police should consult with DCS before deciding whether to prosecute
- Changes to the Criminal Code and Evidence Act so that the requirements for corroboration were abolished, including 'offences against morality' in the Evidence Act, inserting new subsections in the Criminal Code to

recognise that a child under 13 years of age is 'incapable of giving consent', that sexual abuse by a person in authority is an aggravated offence, and that when these cases came to court details should be suppressed to protect the identity of victims under the age of 18

- Changes to the Child Welfare Act to define sexual abuse and the grounds for intervention more clearly, and clarify the fact that adult offenders should be dealt with by adult courts separately from the 'protective' role of the Children's Court
- Mechanisms to facilitate medical examinations of children who are suspected to have been victims of sexual abuse, and injunctions to remove offenders from their vicinity
- Changes to the Family Court Act to enable the court to obtain and consider expert evidence from external parties and that this should happen quickly so as not to unnecessarily delay proceedings
- A child about whom any court hears matters relating to sexual abuse should be 'separately represented by an adequately trained' legal officer at the State's expense
- Changes to the process of interviewing children so that the number and impact (on the child) of interviews was reduced and that the forensic effectiveness of the interviews was improved
- 'Mandatory' reporting to DCS and the Police if allegations of child sexual abuse were made against 'any employee in an organisation in a position of authority relative to the child, or when a caregiver licensed by the State or otherwise approved is the subject of such allegations'
- Extending the number and type of services available to prevent and deal with child sexual abuse, including government support and assistance for 'self-help and mutual support group activities'
- Making government funding dependent on program evaluation (ie programs that did not have an evaluation mechanism should not receive government funding)
- The DCS should ensure inter-agency participation in relevant case conferences and have a policy of 'openness with discretion' around family participation
- Screening people who work with children and development of support mechanisms for, and criteria to select, foster families to care for children who had experienced sexual abuse
- Adapting programs to the needs of diverse cultural groups or communities, including Aboriginal families, and ready access to interpreters
- Adapting programs to the specific needs of 'particularly vulnerable groups such as the physically or intellectually disabled, homeless youth, institutionalized children, children in residential care and children with emotional or psychological problems'
- State-wide, accessible and publicized programs, counselling and crisis-care services, with regional hubs
- Significant improvements to tertiary, on-the-job, specialised and general education, training and development activities for staff working with children across a broad spectrum of organisations, not just in child protection
- Strategies to ensure 'informed and sensitive media commentary'
- Development of 'preventive and protective' programs as part of K-12 school curricula
- Government support and funding for community education programs, developed in partnership with the community and private sector
- Comprehensive inter-agency cooperation and collaboration and identifiable budget items relating to child sexual abuse programs in the budgets of the Departments of Police, Health, Attorney General's, Education, Community Services and Corrective Services.

More info

Related Entries

Related Organisations

- [Education Department \[Western Australia\] \(13 October 1893 - 1 July 1988\)](#)
The Education Department (which was also known informally as the Ministry of Education at that time) was represented on the Child Sexual Abuse Task Force.
- [Princess Margaret Hospital for Children \(1909 - 10 June 2018\)](#)
PMH was represented on the Child Sexual Abuse Task Force.
- [Advisory and Co-ordinating Committee on Child Abuse \[ACCCA\] \(c. 1984 - c. 1994\)](#)
The Child Sexual Abuse Task Force recommended retaining and resourcing ACCCA.
- [Incest Survivors Association Inc \(1984 - current\)](#)
Incest is a form of sexual abuse that occurs within the family. Children who were sexually abused in their family were often placed in out of home care. The ISA sat on the Child Sexual Abuse Taskforce.

- [Department for Community Services, State of Western Australia \(1 January 1985 - 1 October 1992\)](#)
The Department for Community Services was represented on the Child Sexual Abuse Task Force.
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