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Survivors of child sexual abuse face growing National Redress Scheme wait times

By political reporter [Claudia Long](#)

[Child Abuse](#)

Thu 4 Dec 2025 at 5:45am



Survivors of child sexual abuse say long wait times and limited communication from the National Redress Scheme are causing them further pain. (ABC News/Canva)

In short:

Survivors of child sexual abuse say long wait times in the National Redress Scheme are causing them distress.

An independent audit of the scheme found waiting times are growing.

What's next?

The scheme is due to end in 2028, but survivor support organisations say it should be extended.

David's* family does not know he has applied to the National Redress Scheme to try to get an apology for the sexual abuse he was subjected to as a child.

"You try and blank it out," he said.

It is a lonely wait.

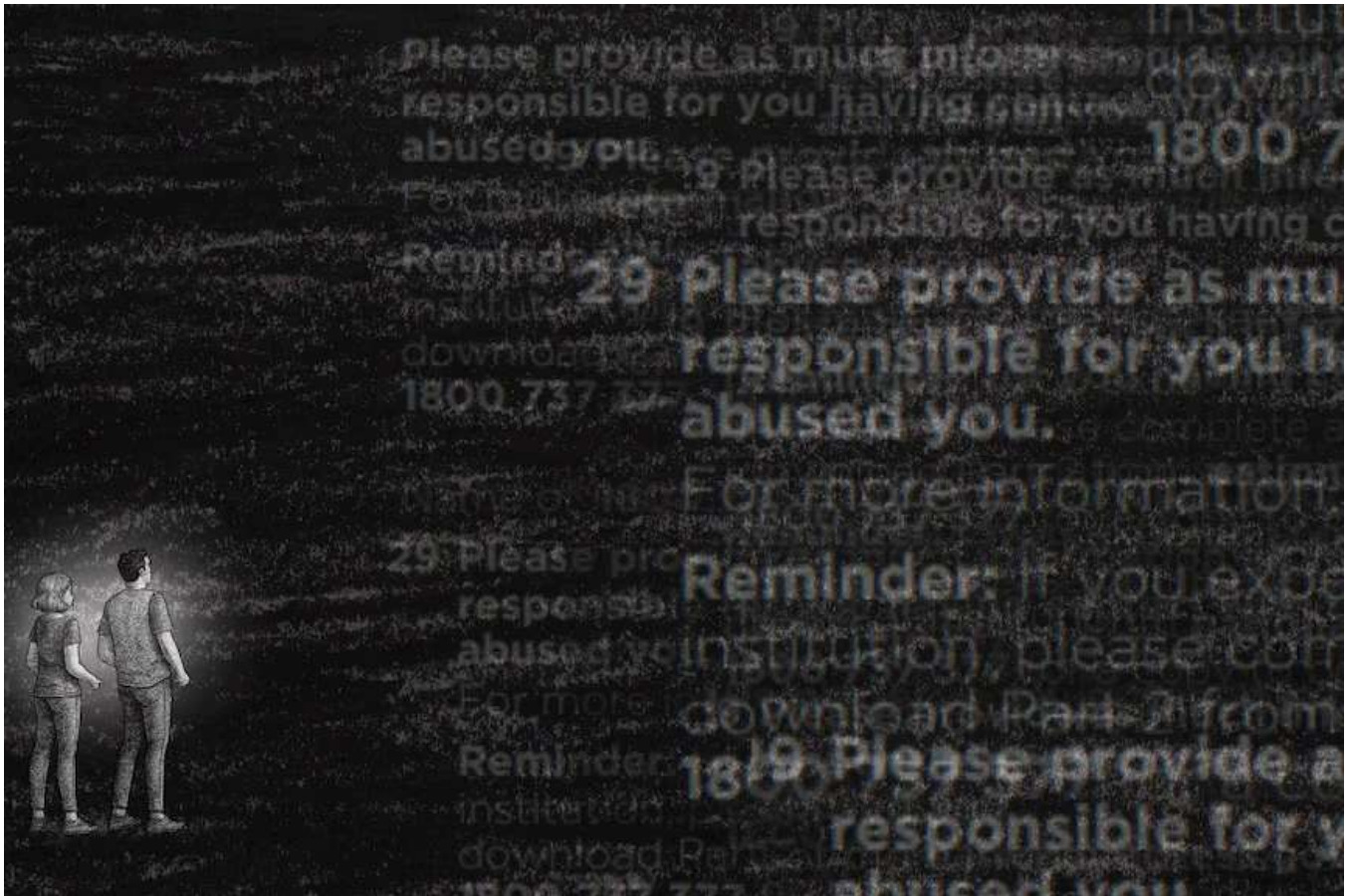
"You get anxiety to get news. It does bring the memories back," David said.

The scheme is designed to give people who survived child sexual abuse access to counselling, compensation, or a personal response from an institution.

David's only confidante through the process has been his counsellor from the survivor support service Beyond Brave, part of Bravehearts.

Initially he was told his application would be resolved in about a year.

That was 18 months ago.



David says his counsellor has been invaluable during the redress process, helping him navigate the scheme. (ABC News/Canva)

"When you've got waiting times on these sorts of procedures or processes, it lingers and lingers and lingers, which makes it even worse and worse," he said.

He has since been told he will have to wait at least a further three to five months for a decision on his application, but has not been told why it is taking this long to resolve.

"It does create a bit of mental damage," David said.

He is not seeking money, just an apology.

"It's not about the money or any of that sort of s***. I'm not into that stuff," he said.

"It's just saying, 'Yep, somebody's finally, officially, realised that it did happen,' ... and they take responsibility for it, and accountability."

Applicants waiting longer every year

The latest audit of the scheme found people applying for compensation after being sexually abused as children were waiting an average of 16 months for a decision.

The Australian National Audit Office (ANAO) said administration of the scheme by the government was only "partly effective".

About 60 per cent of applicants are still awaiting an outcome, and wait times are increasing as the number of people applying to the scheme continues to grow.

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According to its own report published last June, in 2021 almost 80 per cent of cases were finalised within six months of them being opened.

By 2023 that had fallen to 52 per cent and last year dropped to just 27 per cent.

Two parents, who wished to remain anonymous, applied over two years ago on behalf of their severely disabled adult child who was sexually abused as a minor in care.

Their child suffered significant medical complications as a result of their abuse, but the long process to get redress has worn the family down.

"We often wonder why the determination is taking so long," they

**Support for abuse survivors
and families**

said.

"Quite frankly, we wonder whether we should have even bothered to apply."

The family has been working with legal service Knowmore which assists survivors of child sexual abuse and the Stolen Generations.

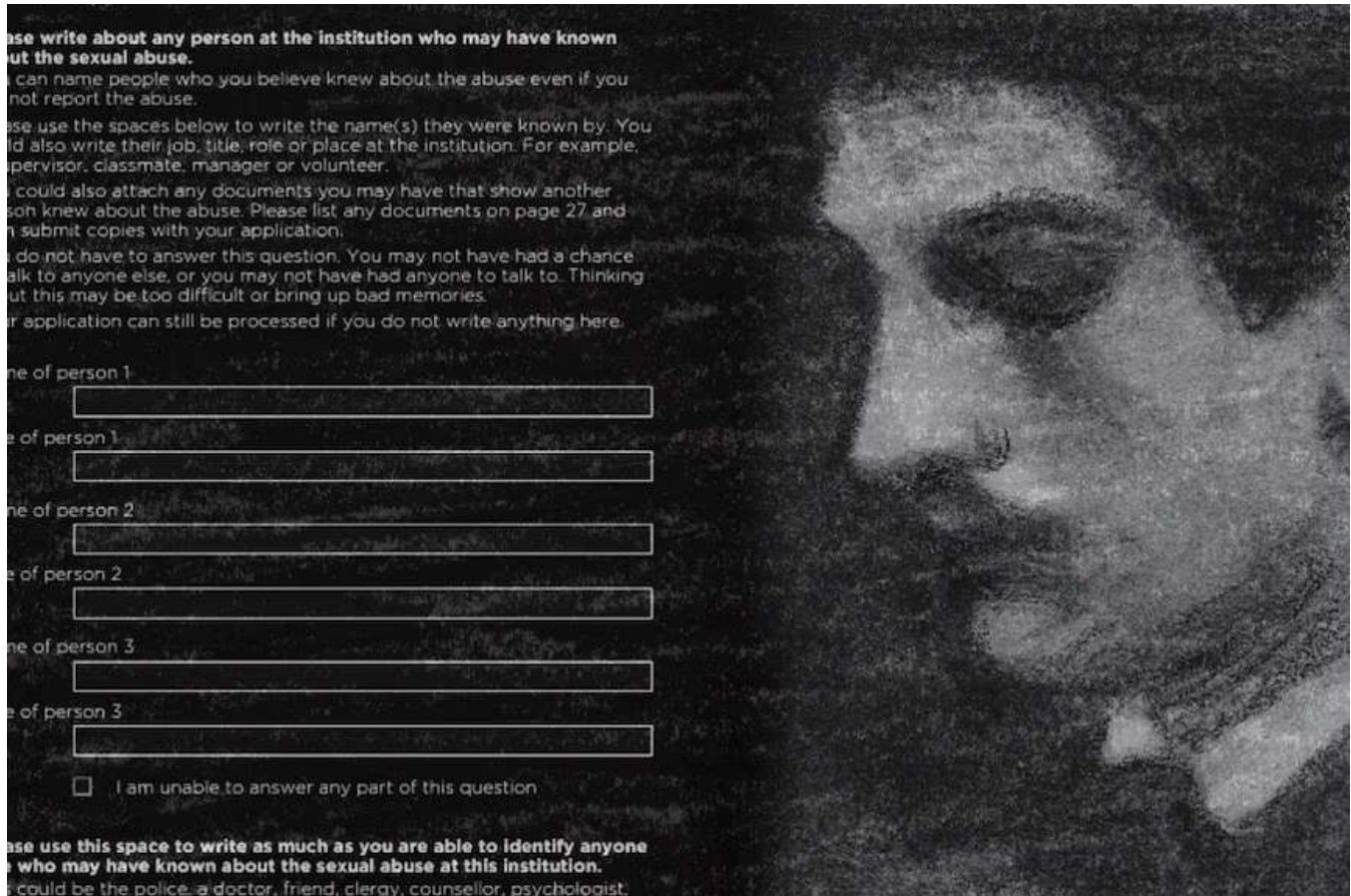
- [Bravehearts](#) 1800 272 831
 - [Blue Knot](#) 1300 657 380
 - [Lifeline](#) on 13 11 14
 - [13YARN](#) on 13 92 76
 - [Beyond Blue](#) on 1300 224 636
 - [1800 Respect National Helpline](#): 1800 737 732
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The service's manager of advocacy

Sean Bowes has seen how life-changing the redress scheme can be, but also how it has compounded the trauma of some applicants.

"For many, many people it is re-traumatising and triggering, and some people do walk away with the experience of further harm rather than healing," he said.

"The report from the audit office said that this scheme was partly effective, and from our point of view partly effective is not good enough."



Please write about any person at the institution who may have known about the sexual abuse.

You can name people who you believe knew about the abuse even if you did not report the abuse.

Please use the spaces below to write the name(s) they were known by. You should also write their job, title, role or place at the institution. For example, supervisor, classmate, manager or volunteer.

You could also attach any documents you may have that show another person knew about the abuse. Please list any documents on page 27 and submit copies with your application.

You do not have to answer this question. You may not have had a chance to talk to anyone else, or you may not have had anyone to talk to. Thinking about this may be too difficult or bring up bad memories.

Your application can still be processed if you do not write anything here.

Name of person 1

Name of person 1

Name of person 2

Name of person 2

Name of person 3

Name of person 3

☐ I am unable to answer any part of this question

Please use this space to write as much as you are able to identify anyone who may have known about the sexual abuse at this institution.

This could be the police, a doctor, friend, clergy, counsellor, psychologist.

Support services say a drawn-out wait for redress can bring up feelings of shame for victims. (ABC News/Canva/[NGA](#))

Abuse survivor support service Blue Knot runs a helpline specifically for those engaging with the redress scheme.

Executive manager Tamara O'Sullivan said many of those applying are living with complex trauma that comes with strong feelings of shame.

"After people have shared a great deal of information about their trauma they're then left with those feelings," she said.

"When an outcome becomes elongated it's really important for support services to offer ongoing support so that people can still feel hopeful, can feel like there's somebody that's walking alongside them."

The scheme's latest survey report, which applicants could opt-in to, found most were satisfied with the process but noted application processing times had increased.

Deadline looms with scheme facing backlog

The scheme is due to end in 2028, but with the program facing a substantial backlog of applications both Blue Knot and Knowmore want it extended.

Mr Bowes said the scheme — as well as organisations providing support to survivors — need increased funding and resources to make sure applicants can access redress without being re-traumatised in the process.

"There's the opportunity to get the national redress scheme back on track and ensure it does deliver on its promise," he said.

A 2024 parliamentary inquiry also recommended that the scheme's timeline be extended to deal with the significant backlog facing the program.

The ANAO report found that while planning for the scheme's closure had commenced in mid-2025, there had been no detailed communication planning for the end of the scheme.

It also found that service delivery, communication and processing efficiency must improve if the scheme is to manage its legislated end date in 2028.

"A high-rated risk of not finalising applications by 30 June 2028 was not reported to the secretary," it said.

The Department of Social Services (DSS) has accepted all of the recommendations made by the ANAO in its report.

In response to the audit, DSS said work to improve communication and application processing times had already begun, with new governance arrangements adopted in August 2025.

"The department is focussed on improving timeliness to ensure survivors receive redress in a timely, fair, and compassionate manner," it said in a statement to the ABC.

"To address delays, the department has appointed additional Independent Decision Makers to increase consistency and speed of redress for survivors.

"As a result, the Scheme has seen an uptick in application processing with a 63 per cent increase in applications resolved in September compared to the previous month."

**Names have been changed*

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Counselling and support services

- [1800 Respect](#), National counselling helpline: 1800 737 732
- [Bravehearts](#), counselling and support for survivors of child sexual abuse: 1800 272 831
- [Lifeline](#), 24-hour crisis support and suicide prevention: 13 11 14
- [Kids Helpline](#) on 1800 551 800
- [Headspace](#) on 1800 650 890 (children and young people)
- [ReachOut](#) at au.reachout.com (children and young people)

[Find support services in your state or territory.](#)