



Submission by the Alliance for Forgotten Australians

Inquiry into the continuing operations of the National Redress Scheme

20th May 2026

The Alliance acknowledges all people of lived experience of institutional child abuse. We acknowledge all that came before and led to where we are now. May we be seen, heard and our stories remembered, so that children today and in the future do not suffer as we have.

We would like to acknowledge people who have experienced childhood institutional abuse who shared their stories and experiences in order to produce this submission.

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Introduction

The Alliance for Forgotten Australians (AFA) is a national group of Forgotten Australians and supporters who work in partnership to advocate for and promote national policies and services to meet the needs and interests of Forgotten Australians. There are estimated to be 500,000 Forgotten Australians who spent time as a child in a children's home, orphanage, asylum, foster placement, training school and other forms of residential out-of-home facilities in Australia before the end of 1989.

The Alliance is committed to recognition and healing for Forgotten Australians and encourages their active engagement in the development of policy and services which are person centered and strengths-based and which create opportunities and pathways that improve the lives of Forgotten Australians.

AFA's mission is to support Forgotten Australians to amplify their collective voice and ensure active participation nationally, drawing on lived experience by:

- Advocating for appropriate past, present and future policies, programs and services that impact the lives of Forgotten Australians and children in the system since 1989.
- Educating elected representatives, policy makers, professionals, academics and the general community on the lived experience, past and present, of Forgotten Australians;
- Promoting recognition and inclusion of the past experiences, injustices and impact of legislation, policies and practices on the lives of Forgotten Australians as children and adults.

Forgotten Australians hold the majority of positions on the AFA Board, which strengthens the voices of Forgotten Australians in our work, advocacy and communication. All AFA Board members are volunteers and dedicate their time and energy, supporting AFA by drawing on their own lived experience and engaging with other Forgotten Australians in their local communities across Australia.

AFA has always had a strong relationship with state-based support services for Forgotten Australians. This continues with the Affiliate Membership of AFA, the Find & Connect Services across Australia.

Since AFA began, we have lobbied for a national redress scheme. Despite our efforts, the scheme announced in 2018 remains limited to those who experienced sexual abuse. We continue to advocate for expanded eligibility.

Since its inception, AFA's priority has been to lobby for a National Redress Scheme. We had many internal debates about whether to support a Scheme that covered only sexual abuse. Overwhelmingly, our members agreed that the Scheme was a good start. We put faith in politicians and policy makers, hoping that the Scheme would evolve over time. We acknowledge that significant improvements have been made.

Forgotten Australians have told us that Redress payments and direct personal responses have been important for justice and healing and have made a difference in their lives.

We also acknowledge that the challenges with the Scheme have retraumatised many Forgotten Australians.

As the Scheme approaches its scheduled conclusion, it is increasingly clear that, without urgent reform, many Forgotten Australians will be left without access to justice.

1. Should the NRS operation timeline be extended, and why?

There is a real risk that some applicants will not receive outcomes before 2028. Without changes such as extending the timeline, Forgotten Australians may be left without resolution.

The emotional impact remains significant. Ongoing delays and uncertainty continue to cause distress, so closure planning must address these harms carefully.

There is a serious risk of rushed processing as the Scheme approaches its end. The audit warned that processing must speed up if the NRS is to meet its legislated closure in 2028.

If this does not happen, Forgotten Australians may face:

- A rush of late-stage processing
- Potential inconsistencies in decision-making
- Confusion about what happens to unresolved cases after June 2028

Many Forgotten Australians fear they will be left without closure if the deadlines remain unchanged.

I am still waiting for redress. It's been 20 months since I put my claim in. I am not surprised. The money would make a difference but do Governments really care? The mean way the redress scheme works (or doesn't!) suggests that they don't care at all. And the delay is a joke. How much more does the Government need to find out about and.....? There have been so many inquiries... They are just waiting for us to die..

I got fed up with waiting, not hearing anything, it's taking too long

It can take 3 attempts over many years to get an application lodged; Forgotten Australians find the process re-traumatises them and becomes too disruptive to their everyday lives. They want a break/pause before the next attempt.

It is therefore essential to provide emotional support during the application process, while applicants wait for an outcome, and after a decision is received.

The Alliance supports keeping the Scheme open to new applications for at least another two to three years for the following reasons:

- Delays caused by COVID-19
- Challenges during the Scheme's first two years of implementation
- Delays caused by institutions joining the Scheme too slowly
- Ongoing demand, as shown by the continued high number of applications
- Some Australian communities remain unaware of the Scheme and their eligibility
- Limited resources to reach remote communities, along with inadequate digital access in those areas

2. Is the NRS accessible to Forgotten Australians

The NRS application process can be difficult to navigate without adequate support, especially for people with trauma histories, limited literacy, disability, or restricted digital access. The need for specialised and ongoing assistance highlights significant accessibility barriers in the Scheme.

The Scheme should be fair, accessible, and equitable for eligible applicants. However, Forgotten Australians continue to report the following barriers:

- People in remote communities often struggle to access services, and many communities lack the digital infrastructure needed to support the application process.
- Many people are unaware that the Scheme exists, and the government has not taken proactive steps to promote it to the general public.

Many Forgotten Australians have limited digital capability. As many are now in their 70s and 80s, navigating online application processes, myGov, and My Aged Care can be difficult. Increased funding for support services is critical to help remove this barrier.

3. Are there sufficient support services for Forgotten Australians to assist them with an application for the NRS?

As noted above, resources remain insufficient to reach remote areas, particularly the remote areas in Queensland, Northern Territory and Western Australia.

Find & Connect providers report growing demand for redress support and increasing waitlists. Although the recent increase in Redress Support funding will help meet some of this demand, providers remain concerned about a further surge in the Scheme's final year.

Addressing the digital divide for older Forgotten Australians is essential to ensure they can access the Scheme.

Many Forgotten Australians will continue to experience, poor communication about the status of their application and Inconsistent updates.

These communication gaps affect the emotional wellbeing of Forgotten Australians and their ability to stay engaged with the process. It is therefore essential to provide emotional support during the application process, while applicants wait for an outcome, and after a decision is received.

The specialised support needed to help Forgotten Australians apply to the NRS must be recognised. Inexperienced counsellors or support workers who lack clinical skills or adequate support can harm both the applicant and the worker. This is not simply an administrative process.

Forgotten Australians report not feeling believed and sometimes withholding details of their abuse to avoid distressing support staff... *I can't tell them how I feel about what happened... I put a lid on the trauma.*

4. What supports will Forgotten Australians need once the NRS has concluded? What functions should continue beyond the life of the Scheme. What forms of support will be most effective?

Forgotten Australians already experience:

- Heightened anxiety while waiting for outcomes
- Re-triggered trauma caused by delays
- Feeling dismissed or ignored when communication is poor

If the Scheme closes without resolving applications or providing appropriate aftercare, these harms may worsen. Expanded counselling services are needed to address the psychological impacts of delays and the Scheme's potential closure.

The conclusion of the NRS also coincides with the ending of the Find and Connect program funding ending on 30th June 2028. Which will see the ceasing of all specialist counselling, referral services, peer and social support programs and assistance to locate and access records and reconnect with family members for Forgotten Australians and Former Child Migrants.

This will once again leave a highly vulnerable and disadvantaged group without the necessary supports to heal and seek justice for the abuse inflicted upon them as children.

It is therefore critical that alongside considering supports post NRS that the Government puts in place plans to ensure continuing funding for these essential services to Forgotten Australians

AFA encourages the integration of the current NRS-funded supports into the future core funding of Find & Connect Services to strengthen its case management and service navigation response for Forgotten Australians.

Forgotten Australians increasingly need holistic, person-centred, trauma-aware services that go well beyond records access and redress. Key priorities include:

- **Holistic, Person-Centred Support** – Many Forgotten Australians need long-term, trauma-aware support beyond redress and records access.
- **Case Management & Systems Navigation** – Ageing Forgotten Australians need clear pathways into aged care, health, mental health, disability, housing, and social care systems.
- **Ongoing Access to Records & Family Reconnection** – Thousands of Forgotten Australians have never accessed their records and need ongoing outreach and therapeutic support.
- **Intergenerational Trauma** – Services must address impacts on children and grandchildren, including access to therapeutic support.
- **Brokerage & Practical Supports** – Funding must include flexible support for transport, crisis needs, technology, clinical services, and accessibility.
- **National Consistency with Local Flexibility** – A national framework should support local delivery tailored to regional, rural, and community needs.
- **Resource Centres & Therapeutic Services** – Continued funding for resource centres, including expansion into regional areas, is essential.
- **Outreach** – Outreach must be a core, funded part of the service model.

The Alliance seeks clarification on the status of the Counselling and Psychological Care (CPC) funds held in Western Australia by the Restorative Justice Unit and in South Australia by Victims of Crime South Australia. To access these funds, an NRS applicant who has accepted an offer of redress must apply to the relevant state government department. Local Find & Connect providers understand that these funds are significantly underused, with substantial amounts remaining unspent and at risk of being absorbed into state revenue as the NRS concludes.

These funds should be allocated to applicants rather than retained by state governments.

5. What is the impact on Forgotten Australians in making an application and waiting for an outcome.

We just want to convey to those in power how difficult the filling out of the redress form has become for the average former wards of the state. To constantly relive or review the traumatic situations we were subjected to have no value for the victim. Redress needs to be simplified for those that find it difficult to even read or write. We need the resolution quickly so it can be left in the background of our lives. Make it happen but make it fair.

Unless processing improves, longer wait times are likely as the Scheme approaches its 2028 end date, increasing emotional distress and re-traumatisation for Forgotten Australians, especially those seeking acknowledgement rather than compensation.

Applying for redress often requires Forgotten Australians to revisit traumatic childhood experiences, including abuse, neglect, and institutional care. Find and Connect providers report that many applicants experience:

- Heightened distress when recalling and documenting abuse
- Anxiety about not being believed or lacking sufficient records
- Emotional exhaustion during long or complex application processes

These impacts underline the need for free emotional and practical support throughout and after the application process.

For many Forgotten Australians, applying can be complicated by:

- Missing or incomplete care records
- Difficulties proving identity or institutional placement
- Challenges with forms, documentation, and deadlines

Official guidance requires applications to be lodged in an approved form and include specified information before they can be assessed. This can be especially confronting for people with limited literacy, disability, or long-standing mistrust of institutions arising from their care experiences.

6. Are Forgotten Australians opting to not apply to NRS and why

Many Forgotten Australians describe the Scheme as complicated and frustrating, and some eligible people choose not to apply.

Fewer applications from Care Leavers have been made than expected, given the size of this population and the prevalence of abuse in institutional care.

The Alliance expected a higher number of applications from Forgotten Australians.

A major reason many Forgotten Australians do not apply is that the NRS is limited to institutional child sexual abuse, excluding many care leavers whose primary experiences were severe physical abuse, emotional abuse, or neglect.

This exclusion:

- Discourages people who believe they are unlikely to qualify
- Re-harms people by suggesting their abuse is less serious
- Can lead to anger, shame, and withdrawal from the process

Some Forgotten Australians avoid applying because they fear rejection, especially when records are missing or institutions no longer exist.

Past experiences of not being believed by authorities mean some Forgotten Australians will not risk another formal rejection, even when support is available.

Forgotten Australians are now predominantly older adults, and some are too unwell, fatigued, or worn down by earlier processes, including royal commissions, inquiries, and complaints, to engage with another bureaucratic system.

Redress keeps touching on our ego and the image we have of ourselves... it's like touching on our soul, it can destroy rather than repair. The rest of our life started in childhood! Sometimes it feels like it would just be safer to withdraw from the whole process of redress.

7. Do you think there are Forgotten Australians who don't know about the NRS and Find and Connect Services

In 2004, it was estimated that more than 500,000 Forgotten Australians had experienced institutional care before the 1990s.

Around one-third of National Redress Scheme applicants are Care Leavers. Although not all were in historical institutional care, this still represents more than 23,200 applicants—only 4% of the estimated Forgotten Australian population.

The Alliance considers government promotion of the Scheme inadequate, leaving much of its public visibility to private legal firms promoting their own services.

There is no evidence that the Australian Government has run national advertising campaigns—such as television, radio, or broad print advertising—to promote the National Redress Scheme since it began in 2018. As a result, the Scheme has had low or no public visibility.

I recently ran into an old colleague, when I told him what I was doing with AFA being on the Board, he contacted me a few days later to ask for more information about Forgotten Australians and redress, turns out he had been in Institutional care as well, he didn't know about services, and he lives in a metro area.

8. Should access to Justice be continuing and ongoing,

Redress isn't a windfall and neither is it compensation. Redress for survivors is a moral issue. It's about righting injustices perpetrated under the watch of those who were supposed to be our guardians. You took away our childhoods.

Continued access to justice through national redress is essential because alternative pathways are inaccessible, harmful, or ineffective for many Forgotten Australians.

However, any continuation must include reform and expansion of the current Scheme.

The Alliance strongly urges the Government to extend the Scheme beyond its scheduled end date and, preserve access to counselling and direct personal responses even if a full extension is not adopted.

It is concerning that so few Forgotten Australians seek a direct personal response, with some reporting that:

- Their experience was negative and distressing
- Reaching an NRS outcome is so burdensome that some people take a break from the process and do not return

Why would we do it when we are still treated with disrespect, not believed, and told to just get over it? Word spreads.

This is critical to ensure Forgotten Australians do not miss out on justice because of age, disability, trauma, or late awareness of the Scheme.

Many Forgotten Australians do not feel safe seeking justice until decades later. Because delayed disclosure is common, fixed closing dates are inconsistent with meaningful access to justice.

9. Is the NRS meeting the expectation of Forgotten Australians?

You (the administrators of the scheme) are it seems the closest we are going to get to the persons placing a monetary value on our lives! We want you to see who we are. We are here seeking maximum redress for lives ruined. Somebody is going to look at our lives for a moment then put a monetary value on it. That is not good enough!

Although the Scheme has provided recognition and redress for some, it still falls well short of what many Forgotten Australians expected.

The Alliance and Forgotten Australians expected a redress system that would:

- Recognise all forms of abuse and neglect experienced in institutional care
- Provide a non-adversarial path to justice, unlike civil litigation
- Deliver fair, consistent, and transparent outcomes
- Be accessible and flexible, taking account of age, disability, trauma, and missing records
- Provide justice without strict time limits, given the lifelong impacts of institutional care

These expectations were established well before the NRS and were repeated during the Royal Commission and later inquiries. The Scheme's narrow eligibility continues to fail many Forgotten Australian.

The Alliance maintains that the Scheme remains too limited and continues to advocate for expanded eligibility because expectations of recognition and justice remain unmet.

While the Scheme has provided recognition and redress for thousands of survivors, as well as access to counselling, apologies, and a national framework where none previously existed, it has still fallen short of many Forgotten Australians expectations by:

- Excluding many people from eligibility
- Creating perceptions of injustice and inequity
- Maintaining administrative and emotional barriers
- Leaving people fearful of missing out before the Scheme closes

10. What mechanisms should be implemented to ensure an efficient and fair closure of the NRS

The closure process should clearly set out how unresolved applications will be managed after June 2028 and what accountability mechanisms will apply to DSS.

- **Planning:** strengthen closure planning and implementation.
- **Governance and oversight:** strengthen governance, oversight, and decision-making accountability.
- **Transparency and reporting:** improve transparency and public reporting on progress, risks, and unresolved cases.
- **Resourcing and timeliness:** accelerate processing through adequate staffing and resourcing.
- **Communication with survivors:** provide clear, timely, and trauma-informed communication throughout closure.

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