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Redress scheme will not clear backlog before closure at current processing rate

Exclusive by political reporter [Claudia Long](#)

Federal Government

Thu 2 Jul 2026 at 5:20am



Chris Coombes is calling on the federal government to urgently extend the National Redress Scheme. (ABC News: Lucas Hill)

In short:

The National Redress Scheme will not be able to clear its 30,000-case backlog before closing at its current processing rate.

Survivors, experts and politicians are calling for the scheme to be urgently extended.

What's next?

A legislated eight-year review into the scheme is underway.

Thousands of child sexual abuse survivors risk missing out on compensation and acknowledgement via the National Redress Scheme (NRS) if it cannot process a backlog of applications before its slated closure in 2028.

Victim-survivors, experts and politicians are calling for an urgent extension to the application deadline and the scheme itself to ensure survivors are not left behind.

The scheme was set up in response to the Royal Commission into Institutional Child Sexual Abuse for victims to apply for financial compensation and an acknowledgement from institutions of what they suffered as children.

Applications will close on July 1, 2027. The scheme is scheduled to wind up on July 1, 2028.

The Department of Social Services has insisted it will process all claims prior to the sunset date, but with a backlog of 30,000 applications — and more than 1,500 each month expected to roll in over the next year — experts and support services are not convinced.

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The federal government would not confirm whether or not it planned to extend the operation of the NRS but Social Services Minister Tanya Plibersek said: "We're not going to let victim-survivors down."

"The National Redress Scheme is an important way to support survivors to heal, and I am committed to ensuring it delivers outcomes in a timely, trauma-informed and effective way," she said.



Chris Coombes wants other survivors to be able to access redress. (*ABC News: Lucas Hill*)

Scheme backlog already outpacing processing

When Chris Coombes got an acknowledgement and redress payment for the abuse he suffered in a religious institution, it left him in tears at the shops.

It was the end point of a gruelling two-year-long process.

"I got a call and I was informed about the successful outcome and I just wept," he said.

He used the money to go to law school and now works as a lived experience advocate with Knowmore, a legal firm and support service working with survivors negotiating the scheme.

He describes the redress application investigation process as some of his darkest days.



The redress application process is a lengthy and arduous one for survivors. *(Image: Lucas Hill/ABC News)*

It's also something he is desperate for other survivors to have the chance to do.

"To finally share my truth, have it believed, have it recognised and then to no longer have to pay for my own therapy felt like a really important opportunity for healing," he said.

Knowmore CEO Jackie Mead said she could not see any way the scheme could process all the applications it already had without an extension.

"I've got to say, it's pretty scary," she said.



Jackie Mead says Knowmore has experienced a rise in calls for support. (ABC News: Simon Tucci)

"We're already seeing an uptick in demand ... survivors tell us that being believed and acknowledged is just as important as the money, and therefore it's critical that people have that opportunity, because how else do you heal from one of the worst things that could ever have happened in your life?"

Support for abuse survivors and families

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- [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

Clearing the backlog

The federal government told the ABC it had made "significant improvements" that had more than doubled the number of applications resolved each month.

So far this year, the scheme has processed an average 993 applications a month, a significant uptick from the previous five months which was an average of 643.

But even with the changes, the backlog is so significant that at the department's current rate it would not be able to clear it by the set closure date.

In a submission to a senate inquiry into the operation of the scheme, the Department of Social Services (DSS) said it expected to process 789 a month on average over the next year but at a later hearing said it hoped to maintain or increase its current, higher rate.

If the scheme processes applications at the higher rate, it would not be due to clear its backlog until six months after it closes.

That's before taking into account the additional 1,500 monthly applications expected over the next year, which would blow out the timeframe to two years after it is scheduled to wind up.

The numbers do not take into account the 9,726 claims which are unable to be actioned as the National Redress Scheme awaits further information from applicants or a special assessment for a serious criminal conviction.

Crunching the numbers

- The scheme has 24 months until it closes.
- If the department maintains its current rate of processing an average of 993 applications per month, it would not clear its existing backlog for another 30 months.
- At its expected processing rate of 789 applications a month, that stretches to 38 months.

- That is before the 1,526 new applications the department says it is expecting to come in every month for the next year are taken into account.
 - When adding those extra 18,312 cases, at its current processing rate, it would not process all claims until about two years after the scheme is scheduled to close.
 - At its anticipated processing rate, it would take 61 months to do so.
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'One year ... is ludicrous'

Griffith University criminologist and former member of the Commonwealth Independent Advisory Council on Redress, Kathleen Daly, has studied redress schemes since 2012.

She is examining 66 of them from around the world as part of the International Redress Project and disputes the Department of Social Services' claim it could process all cases before the sunset date.

"One year to close the redress scheme after the close of applications is ludicrous," she said.



Knowmore is supporting people applying to the National Redress Scheme. (Image: Simon Tucci/ABC News)

"All redress schemes except very small ones take more than a year to finalise applications."

Professor Daly said Australia's National Redress Scheme was uniquely complex compared to its international counterparts in places like Canada and Ireland, in part due to a particularly high volume of applications.

She is also worried the department is underestimating the number of cases that will come in before the application deadline on July 1, 2027.

"In the last anywhere from three to six months or in the last month of a scheme, there is a huge surge of applications," she said.

Professor Daly has done her own modelling — anticipating a surge in applications comparable to those faced by similar redress schemes internationally — which found even in the most optimistic scenario the NRS would struggle to process all claims before 2032.

"This just sounds like numbers [but] it has enormous implications for those waiting to get an answer," she said.

Senators call on government to extend scheme

Greens Senator David Shoebridge sits on the committee inquiring into the future of the National Redress Scheme.

"All the experts that I talked to, all those engaged stakeholders say that those application numbers are likely to just keep rising over the next 12 months," he said.

He said unless the application deadline was pushed back and the scheme extended, the result would be a "social disaster".



Greens senator David Shoebridge says the federal government must extend the National Redress Scheme. (Image: Thorsten Joses / ABC News)

"What that will mean is tens and tens of thousands of claims that won't have been resolved," he said.

Senator Shoebridge said attempts to speed up processing must not come at the expense of in-depth investigation of cases before the scheme.

"Survivors and institutions deserve a scheme that is going to be looking at the merits of the claims and responding to the merits, not doing a tick and flick because the deadlines are looming."

The senator said he had been frustrated with responses from government officials during their appearances at the inquiry.

"There's no indication from the government that they've got a solution," he said.

It was a frustration that appeared to be shared by West Australian Liberal Senator Dean Smith at an inquiry hearing last week, who implied the department had not adequately revealed the extent of the issues facing the scheme.



Senator Shoebridge is part of a parliamentary inquiry examining the scheme (Image: Thorsten Joses / ABC News)

"The error of judgement this committee made is it trusted the advice the department was giving it too much," he said.

"Outrageous is how I would describe that."

Representatives from DSS at the hearing said they accepted why the senator was concerned and said fundamentally the scheme had been dramatically oversubscribed compared to what was originally envisaged.

Department of Social Services Secretary Michael Lye said new processes had been put in place to improve processing times.

"We've got processes now where I feel much more confident that we're getting that right and that we are also this critical thing about getting applications considered in a timely way," he said.

The scheme is bringing on more independent decision makers to help ease wait times, with recruitment underway since May to hire 15 of them.

In a written statement provided to the ABC, the department said it was committed to ensuring redress was provided to survivors of institutional child sexual abuse as quickly as possible, while delivering decisions that were fair, lawful and carefully reasoned.

"The scheme is making sustained continual improvements to ensure applications are received and processed with care, clarity and respect, before the legislated closing date for applications on 30 June 2027," a spokesperson said.

Last year's federal budget included \$11.5 million for Knowmore and \$15.7 million for other redress support services, bringing the total funding for the services from the government to \$232.9 million since 2023.

Ms Plibersek said the federal government was focused on improving how the scheme operated so survivors received outcomes sooner and with better support throughout the process.

"But we know there is more to do," she said.

"The government is committed to considering all applications lodged in time.

"The legislated eight-year review of the scheme, announced last week, will provide advice to government on how to ensure valid applications can be processed."

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