

Call for national redress getting stronger and louder

Francis Sullivan 13 October 2016

Earlier this week *The Australian* reported on a letter written to Prime Minister Turnbull signed by a coalition of medical experts and religious, business and charity leaders calling on him to take action on establishing a national redress scheme for child sexual abuse victims.

Also this week the Ballarat Courier has reported on a leading Victorian judge, Felicity Hampel, calling for the urgent roll-out of a national redress scheme for victims of childhood sexual abuse.

And in Parliamentary question time last month Labor MP, Tanya Plibersek, pressed the Prime Minister on a national redress scheme.

There is clearly a growing call for a national scheme to provide redress for child abuse survivors which we all need to get behind.

In the covering letter to the PM which was coordinated by Dr Cathy Kezelman, President/Director of Blue Knot, the 70 signatories say 'the Royal Commission has exposed a terrible wound in the country's treatment of so many children. In our view, following on from the work of the Royal Commission, a national redress scheme will deliver another means by which victims, whose lives have been shattered, can finally begin to heal.'

The letter and the attached document lay out a clear argument for a national scheme that would provide consistent and fair redress. It argues the need for a national scheme not just a 'framework' which the Commission considers a second best option.

The letter urges the Prime Minister to seize this "moment in the life of a nation" and that failing to do so would represent a betrayal of the trust these victims have placed in the Commission.

Its signatories include the president of the Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Psychiatrists, Malcolm Hopwood, as well as senior Jewish leaders and those from the Catholic, Anglican, Baptist and Uniting churches. The Council signed the letter on behalf of the Catholic Church in Australia.

Other signatories include internationally respected trauma expert Warwick Middleton and the chief executives of Families Australia, Childwise, the Australian Council of Social Service and the Australian College of Mental Health Nurses.

"There are moments in the life of a nation when there is a once-only opportunity to advance its people, regardless of their social or economic status," the petition reads. "If this opportunity is squandered, the nation and its people are diminished and such progress may never be achieved."

Interestingly, the Ballarat Courier this week reports a leading Victorian judge has also called for the urgent roll-out of a national redress scheme for victims of childhood sexual abuse.

In the sentencing of disgraced paedophile priest 73-year-old Robert Claffey, at the Geelong County Court last week, Judge Felicity Hampel called for the establishment of a redress scheme.

She also commented on the need for the Church to cooperate with the Commission and the Victorian Parliamentary Inquiry “I can only hope, that amongst the outcomes of the Victorian Parliamentary Inquiry and the Royal Commission is the significant moral change necessary for the church to put the interests of victims before the institution... to actively cooperate with independent and transparent enquires into allegations of clerical sexual abuse in the future.”

Labor MP Tanya Plibersek during [parliamentary Question Time late last month](#), asked the PM about a national redress scheme. He remained noncommittal on a single national approach coordinated by the Commonwealth.

It is expected the federal government will receive advice from its redress taskforce by the end of the year.

For more than a year the Royal Commission’s recommendations around redress for child sexual abuse have sat on the desk of the Prime Minister, state premiers, their attorneys general, treasurers and public servants. The delay is an indictment on our political leadership.

As I’ve said many times, now is the time for our political leaders to face the challenge, to honour the suffering of tens of thousands of children and young people and to get on with the job of delivering a world-first, national redress scheme which will deliver, after many decades, the justice abuse survivors require and deserve.