



AUSTRALIAN CATHOLIC BISHOPS CONFERENCE

MEDIA RELEASE

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New guidelines will inform Church's response to abuse

The Catholic Church is developing new national policy guidelines to strengthen and standardise Church authorities' responses to historical and contemporary concerns and allegations of abuse of children and vulnerable adults.

Archbishop Mark Coleridge, president of the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference, said the development of the guidelines is a critical step forward in the Church's ongoing response to the recommendations of the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse.

"The bishops are following through on our commitments made last year, and having a consistent approach to the management of allegations of abuse of children and vulnerable people is central to our reforms," he explained.

The Implementation Advisory Group, set up in May 2018 to monitor and advise Catholic leaders on the Church's response to the Royal Commission's recommendations, is overseeing the development of the policy guidelines.

The guidelines will serve as a public commitment to integrity and accountability in responding to allegations of abuse. They will make clear the obligations of all Church authorities to respond with processes that are fair and effective, and which comply with all Australian laws.

The assessment and management of risk to children will remain paramount throughout the new national guidelines. Prioritising children's safety and wellbeing will ensure that Church authorities' responses to concerns or allegations effectively address existing risks and do not create further risk to children.

The guidelines will be considered in conjunction with the new National Catholic Safeguarding Standards, approved and launched by Catholic Professional Standards Ltd earlier this year.

"The national guidelines and the Safeguarding Standards will become two focal points for the Church's work in protecting children and vulnerable adults from abuse and ensuring survivors are at the centre of our response to allegations that arise," Archbishop Coleridge said.

The guidelines will address all forms of child abuse, including sexual, physical and psychological abuse, and neglect and maltreatment. The development of the guidelines will include extensive consultation, inviting abuse survivors and their supporters to participate.

"The lessons we have learned over more than 20 years and the best practice employed in other parts of the community will inform the new national guidelines," Archbishop Coleridge said.

"The development and implementation of these guidelines will help to embed a more transparent and accountable culture in the way the Church seeks to prevent abuse and responds appropriately to allegations of the abuse of children and vulnerable adults.

"They will be a blueprint for Church authorities to assist and guide them at a local level, seeking a consistent and just response across the country. They are about integrity and accountability."

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