



FACT SHEET: National Response Protocol

On 1 February 2021 the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference (ACBC) implemented the National Response Protocol. The National Response Protocol provides a national framework for Catholic entities to be able to respond in a consistent manner to people who bring forward concerns or allegations of abuse against Children. In May 2022 the National Response Protocol was updated and adopted to include Adults at Risk (vulnerable people).

What is the National Response Protocol?

The National Response Protocol (Protocol) has been implemented by the ACBC to replace the former *Towards Healing* process and the *Melbourne Response*.

Australian Catholic Standards Ltd (ACSL) which was established by the ACBC, has the responsibility of governing and overseeing the implementation of the Protocol throughout the nation. The Protocol strives to achieve a consistent response to children and adults that have experienced child abuse by Church personnel. To achieve this, the Protocol provides a framework for Church entities throughout Australia to implement. This framework forms a national benchmark that establishes the basis for which local/diocesan Church entities are to align their policies and procedures.

The protocol itself is comprised of four main sections:

1. The principles for response
2. Procedures for responding to concerns and allegations of historical and contemporary and abuse of children and adults at risk.
3. Guidance on engaging with those affected by contemporary and historical child abuse.
4. Guidance on response to concerns and allegations of child abuse with regard to relevant aspects of canon law

What types of abuse does the Protocol cover?

The protocol covers the following types of abuse:

- The abuse of children: neglect, maltreatment, physical, psychological and sexual abuse. This includes grooming, abuse facilitated through online platforms,

and distribution and/or access of child abuse exploitation material.

- Abuse of children also includes adults who have been subjected to childhood abuse.

What doesn't the Protocol cover?

It is important to note that the Protocol does not override statutory obligations in force in the relevant state or territory.

Any unprofessional behaviour or professional misconduct that is not within the scope of child abuse does not fall under the Protocol. These matters are covered by the Diocese's internal Policy and Protocols or national protocol such as *Integrity in Ministry* and *Integrity in the Service of the Church*.

What happens to the current Towards Healing matters?

Matters that are proceeding under *Towards Healing*, will continue to be governed by the *Towards Healing* protocol. However, those that are currently progressing through the *Towards Healing* process, have the ability to transition to the National Response Protocol provisions. This transition is to take place in a trauma-informed manner.

Does the Protocol replace the National Catholic Safeguarding Standards?

The Protocol has been developed to sit with and reflect the 10 National Catholic Safeguarding Standards (NCSS). The NCSS are based on the Australian Government's National Principles for Child Safe Organisations, as well as the 10 standards which were enumerated in the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse.

The Diocese aligns its Policy and protocols with the National Response Protocol. Further information about the National Response Protocol can be found on the Australian Catholic Bishops

Conference website:

www.catholic.org.au/nationalresponseprotocol