

Australia and New Zealand
Policing Strategy to
Prevent and Respond
to the Abuse and Exploitation
of Children and Young People
2026

ANZPAA

Australia New Zealand
Policing Advisory Agency



Acknowledgments

ANZPAA acknowledges Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as Traditional Owners, Custodians and First Nations of Australia, and Māori as tangata whenua and Treaty of Waitangi partners in Aotearoa New Zealand.

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Foreword

The abuse and exploitation of children and young people represents some of the most serious and confronting harms faced by communities across Australia and New Zealand.

Abuse may encompass physical, sexual, and emotional abuse, neglect, as well as exposure to domestic and family violence¹. Police agencies across Australia and New Zealand acknowledge that the impact of these insidious crimes is profound – reverberating through families, communities, and the professionals who work tirelessly to protect and support those affected.

Many experiences of abuse remain unseen or unreported – noting that for victims and survivors, disclosure can take extraordinary courage. Available data indicates that nearly half of child sexual abuse victim-survivors never formally disclosed what happened to them².

Context

1 Complexity of the Crime Environment

This crime type is characterised by evolving offender methodologies and typologies, increasing victimisation, and, in some cases, a victim-to-offender trajectory. These risks are further compounded by rapid technological developments, such as artificial intelligence and enhanced encryption.

This increasing case volume risks surpassing current policing capabilities – requiring innovative approaches that are both responsive and attuned to emerging risks.

2 Resourcing and Volume Pressures

High case volumes, disparate resourcing internally and across agencies, and duplicate notifications generated by mandatory reporting often places significant demands on police. The time-intensive triage and administrative workload can force difficult prioritisation decisions – heightening the personal strain and sense of guilt experienced by staff, and risks leaving children and young people vulnerable.

Evidently, there is a need to strengthen resourcing and co-ordination and an appetite to explore opportunities for process efficiencies.

3 Co-ordination and Information Gaps

Siloed responses and varying thresholds for child safety agencies taking carriage of cases can hinder proactive collaboration, including the timely sharing of relevant information. Limited visibility and analytic capacity across agencies heightens the risk that offending patterns are not detected, resulting in failures to act before harm escalates, or overlooking opportunities for early intervention and diversion.

Addressing the evolving challenges of both contact and online offending requires strong partnerships, integration, shared responsibility and risk management across policing and other child safety agencies. Effective partnerships also require external agencies to be adequately equipped to meet their respective obligations.

¹ Nationally representative prevalence of different types of child abuse in Australia: findings from the [Australian Child Maltreatment Study](#) (2023)

² [Disclosure of child sexual abuse in Australia – The Australian Child Maltreatment Study](#) (ACMS)



Vision

Policing agencies across Australia and New Zealand work collaboratively to prevent the abuse and exploitation of children and young people, and to provide evidence-based and intelligence-informed, compassionate responses to victims.



Purpose

This Strategy strengthens and aligns efforts across Australia and New Zealand to prevent and respond to the abuse of children and young people, building on existing capabilities to enhance collective efficacy.

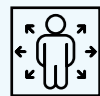
The Approach

It is evident that whilst police are uniquely positioned to lead and coordinate efforts, for reports that meet a criminal threshold, preventing and responding to the abuse and exploitation of children and young people cannot be achieved in isolation.

To achieve our objectives, a whole-of-community, whole-of-system approach³ is required to effectively protect vulnerable cohorts, safeguard against harm, hold perpetrators to account and to improve outcomes for children and young people. Policing agencies contribute to this shared effort across three focus areas – engage and prevent, disrupt and intervene early, and respond and investigate.

Key Principles

Underpinning our vision and purpose is a commitment to two key principles:



Victim-Centricity

Ensuring the safety, interests, and dignity of all victims (including those of historical sexual abuse) remain at the centre of every policing initiative, intervention, and response to the abuse and exploitation of children and young people.



A Supported Workforce

Sustaining a workforce that is equipped, protected, and valued – enabling police to respond with professionalism, empathy, and resilience to one of the most complex and confronting areas of crime.

Strategic Objectives

This Strategy intends to support and enable policing agencies to:



Promote and strengthen reporting:

supporting initiatives that encourage timely, safe, and accessible reporting of child abuse-related matters.



Implement proactive initiatives:

reducing abuse and exploitation by discouraging offending and preventing victimisation before it occurs.



Drive efficiencies:

managing high volumes of cases more effectively within existing resources and fiscal constraints.



Maintain agile responses:

sustaining the capacity and capability to respond to an increasingly complex and evolving crime type.



³ This strategy operates within the broader context of government initiatives, including the [Australian National Strategy to Prevent and Respond to Child Sexual Abuse \(2021–2030\)](#) & [National Plan to End Violence Against Women and Children \(2022–2032\)](#). As well as the New Zealand Te Aorerekura: [The National Strategy to Eliminate Family Violence and Sexual Violence, Oranga Tamariki Action Plan, and Child and Youth Strategy \(2024-2027\)](#)

Key Focus Area

Engage and Prevent

Police agencies across Australia and New Zealand can proactively prevent harm and victimisation by strengthening frontline policing responses, while also contributing to broader, system-wide prevention capacity. This includes working with and supporting those affected by crime, promoting protective practices to safeguard victims, and supporting staff wellbeing.

Collectively, the activities in this focus area intend to:

1

Reduce stigma, enhance understanding of child abuse and exploitation and strengthen trust in policing to support proactive engagement.

2

Empower stakeholders to recognise and respond to risks before harm occurs or escalates.

3

Protect and promote personnel wellbeing and resilience to sustain safeguarding efforts.

4

Further develop the evidence base to inform policy and practice.

Key Activities


People

Victims

- Continue to invest in effective engagement activities, with a particular focus on building and strengthening trust with vulnerable cohorts

Families and Communities

- Empower the community to actively collaborate and contribute to prevention efforts and child safety, by:
 - supporting consistent and proactive public messaging, including sharing information on emerging risks
 - continuing to contribute to public awareness and education initiatives.

Case Study

ThinkUKnow Program

ThinkUKnow is a law enforcement-led program delivered nationally to educate the community about preventing online child sexual exploitation. Delivered in partnership with the AFP, Microsoft Australia, Datacom, Commonwealth Bank, Neighbourhood Watch Australasia and all State and Territory police, ThinkUKnow provides age-appropriate presentations and resources for students, parents, carers and teachers at no cost, using intelligence and real case studies to build community awareness, promote help-seeking behaviours, and strengthen the capacity of trusted adults to recognise and respond to online risks.

A recent example of the resources developed includes Jack Changes the Game – a children’s picture book about staying safe online that is free to access on the ThinkUKnow website. State and Territory police deliver the student program which is curriculum aligned, message tested and updated regularly to reflect trends.

Police

Organisation:

- Promote shared responsibility for child safety, recognising that various policing roles can contribute to identifying and addressing opportunities to prevent harm.
- Recognise the importance of strengthening team cohesion and peer-to-peer support (through formal and informal initiatives).

Leadership:

- Champion a strategic focus on this crime type, which includes driving prioritisation and recognition of the specialist skills required in both prevention and response.
- Understand and reflect on the unique risks and complexities associated with this crime type, to proactively manage staff wellbeing.
- Engender a workplace culture where staff can proactively articulate wellbeing risks.
- Promote continuous learning and the dissemination of knowledge across agencies.

Individuals:

- Prioritise individual wellbeing by accessing available support, engaging with safe work practices, and using protective strategies.

Offenders

- Support the delivery of preventative messaging and information to potential offender cohorts (particularly youth) – emphasising early intervention and countering victim-blaming narratives.

Partners

Law Enforcement

- Actively participate in alliances and working groups to share intelligence and enhance the victim and/or offender identification process. This includes:
 - domestically, through national co-ordination forums such as Australia New Zealand Child Protection, Covert Online, and Victim Identification Working Groups.
 - internationally, through INTERPOL and EUROPOL, to share intelligence relating to child abuse material (CAM) and developments in technology.

Government

- Advocate for the development of a centralised system that enables a streamlined mandatory reporting process that supports a reduction in duplicate notifications.

Community Sector and Non-Government Organisations (NGOs)

- Partner with community organisations to strengthen communications and engagement, ensuring:
 - consistent and evidence-based public prevention messaging
 - messages are effectively reaching at-risk cohorts, parents, and caregivers.

Industry

- Collaborate with industry partners (such as social media, online gaming, and messaging platforms) to deliver targeted, platform-specific prevention messaging.
- Advocate for companies to embed safety-by-design in their products/platforms, reducing opportunities for harm (e.g. the distribution of CAM).

Academia

- Continue to collaborate with researchers to build evidence-based practice and evaluate prevention initiatives, in turn supporting continuous learning and improvement.
- Explore data-sharing agreements with academic partners, to enable the development of emerging research areas.

Capability

Infrastructure and Resources

- Develop and invest in secure systems and Information Technology infrastructure that enables multi-agency information sharing for early identification of victims, perpetrators and child exploitation networks.
- Maintain and adequately resource liaison models, such as school-based officers and proactive community engagement policing units.

Technology

- Invest in AI and technology solutions that:
 - streamline and reduce investigative workflows and triage
 - reduce staff exposure and re-exposure to CAM or related material, minimising vicarious trauma.

Governance

- Influence legislative reform to keep pace with increasingly sophisticated technologies and offender tactics, such as those that enable encryption and anonymity.
- Utilise internal police policies and procedures to embed child safeguarding into broader operational decision-making.

Key Focus Area

Disrupt and Intervene Early

Police agencies across Australia and New Zealand can identify and interrupt abuse before harm escalates, preventing further victimisation and safeguarding those at risk through the timely detection and mitigation of escalating and/or recurring harm.

Collectively, the activities in this focus area intend to:

1

Empower those affected by this crime type to disclose and seek support.

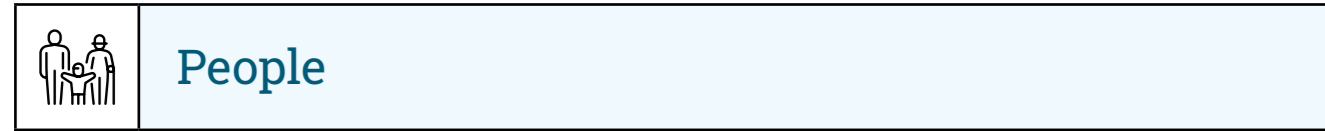
2

Facilitate the detection and assessment of child abuse and exploitation indicators and support proactive, targeted action to disrupt abuse and limit escalation.

3

Promote evidence and intelligence-led practice, enabling agile and responsive approaches to emerging threats and changing needs.

Key Activities



Victims

- Provide accessible alternative reporting options that reduce stigma and encourage both early disclosures and disclosures of historic incidents.
- Facilitate immediate referral pathways to medical, forensic and therapeutic support services following a disclosure.

Families and Communities

- Encourage early reporting of abuse and suspected abuse through awareness and education initiatives, acknowledging they can often elicit disclosures that might otherwise go unreported.

Police

Organisation:

- Implement evidence-based, organisation-wide initiatives to identify and manage psychosocial risks to staff.

Leadership:

- Regularly engage in check-ins and debriefs with individuals and teams to identify early signs of stress and burnout and facilitate interventions to mitigate further harm.

Offenders

- Implement structured management of reportable and registered offenders, in line with jurisdictional requirements, to enable routine engagement and assessment of the risk of recidivism.
- Respond to harmful sexual behaviours exhibited by children and young people, through referral to appropriate multi-agency support services.

See **Case Study: Queensland Police Service Forensic Behavioural Services Unit.**

Case Study

Safe2Say

Recognising the sensitivity/difficulty of reporting abuse (sexual, physical and neglect), Western Australia Police Force leverages Safe2Say (a guaranteed anonymity reporting platform), to provide victims and witnesses with the option to report current or historical abuse anonymously and securely.

The platform is designed to be victim-centric, providing individuals with control over the information they disclose and the ability to pause or reopen reports using a confidential Report ID and PIN – enabling them to manage the process at their own pace. The chat function also allows experienced investigators to provide guidance on reporting options and timelines, supporting the development of trust and rapport with the individual who is reporting.

Case Study

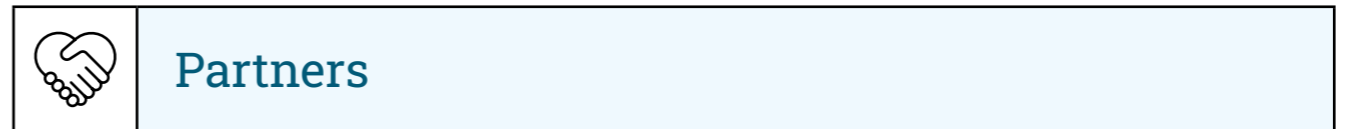
Queensland Police Service Forensic Behavioural Services Unit

The Forensic Behavioural Services Unit (FBSU) is based within the Queensland Police Services (QPS) Child Protection Offender Registry (CPOR). FBSU adhere to the science-practitioner model across operational policing and academic research while constantly evaluating and evolving the use of forensic behavioural science within policing.

Working directly alongside investigators in the field, FBSU officers undertake real-time defensible forensic risk assessments of reportable child sex offenders (ROs) and high risk/harm offending

cohorts and provide specialised forensic advice related to an ROs sexual and violent offending risk, their offending pathways, and offending imminence (e.g. prioritisation).

Where appropriate, FBSU help inform investigative and interviewing strategies across sexual crimes, homicide, covert operations, and high risk DFV offending cohorts. FBSU also provides specialist sexual offending, interdiction, and offender typology training to police locally, nationally, and internationally.



Law Enforcement

- Share best practice frameworks for offender management, reporting, and intervention strategies.

Government

- Collaborate with relevant government stakeholders, including public transport providers, schools and childcare and local councils, to support contextual safeguarding initiatives.
- Work with justice partners to expand and use diversionary options for young offenders, where available.

Community Sector and NGOs

- Engage with community partners to support early identification, reporting, and support for at-risk children and potential offenders.

Industry

- Strengthen partnerships with the private sector to detect early indicators of exploitation and disrupt the hosting of harmful platforms. These partners include:
 - financial institutions, telecommunications providers, technology companies, social media and gaming platforms.

Academia

- Collaborate with academics on initiatives that disrupt offending (both escalation and recidivism), such as piloting and evaluating diversionary programs for young offenders.



Capability

Skillsets and Training

- Deliver training that enables frontline and non-specialist units to detect indicators and patterns of offending to:
 - identify persons of interest earlier in the harm trajectory
 - facilitate the safe disruption of child abuse, abduction and exploitation, through routine operational encounters.

Infrastructure and Resources

- Enhance integrated, interoperable systems to support information sharing and data linkages with child safety agencies. This includes:
 - strengthening information sharing of Person of Interest (POI) intelligence to support proactive offender management.
- Develop data architecture, such as integrated data lakes linking multiple internal sources, to enhance analytical visibility of the behavioural patterns of offenders.

Governance

- Standardise the sharing of criminal history information across jurisdictions, to support processes such as Working with Children Check (WWCC) assessments.
- Influence and drive policy and legislative reform to ensure contemporaneous and effective frameworks that support the active disruption and reduction of abuse. Focus areas may include:
 - acceleration of warrant authorisations
 - greater police powers for controlled operations targeting darknet forums and offender networks.
- Continually improve policies and processes based on emerging evidence, intelligence, and lessons learned from practice.

Case Study

Interdiction for the Protection of Children (IPC) Program

The IPC program (developed by the Texas Department of Public Safety and adopted by Queensland Police Service) equips frontline officers with the skills and confidence to recognise indicators of child exploitation, abuse, abduction, trafficking and high-risk threats to children during routine encounters.

It enables officers to proactively intervene to rescue children and disrupt offending during everyday interactions, such as roadside stops, – extending the reach beyond specialist child protection teams, allowing more officers to contribute to safeguarding outcomes (i.e. a force multiplier).



Key Focus Area

Respond and Investigate

Police agencies across Australia and New Zealand can provide timely, coordinated, and victim-centred responses to reports of child abuse and exploitation, guided by evidence-based, trauma-informed practices.

Collectively, the activities in this focus area intend to:

- 1 Enhance the experience of victims and their families, both during their interactions with police and by supporting their recovery and healing.
- 2 Ensure consistent, evidence-based investigative practice across jurisdictions, to support disclosures and effective evidence gathering.
- 3 Leverage the capabilities of partner agencies and industry to strengthen and extend investigative reach.
- 4 Allow police to prioritise offender accountability and risk management, ensuring perpetrators are detected, apprehended, and managed through appropriate justice pathways.

Key Activities



Victims

- Provide responses that account for individual victim needs and vulnerabilities. This includes:
 - supporting informed choice and autonomy, by clearly communicating alternative justice options, available support services, and updates on investigation progress
 - improving remote area response by expanding supply and access to Early Evidence Kits (EEKS), where not currently available
 - continuing to utilise and advocate for co-located, multi-disciplinary service centres.

Case Study

Arch Centres

Arch provides a victim-centric police response by co-locating services under one roof, enabling Tasmania Police to work alongside specialist counsellors, family violence workers, and child safety officers. The co-location of services facilitates co-ordinated, trauma-informed approaches, ensuring children, young people, and adults affected by sexual harm receive sensitive and collaborative support. Police involvement is integrated in a non-uniform, supportive capacity, enabling victims to access information, guidance, and investigative support in a safe environment.

- Initiate recovery and healing, through timely referrals to relevant and sustained support services. These may include:
 - the National Redress Scheme
 - Victims of Crime Commissions
 - Victims Legal Service programs.

Families and Communities

- Provide families and carers with clear information on response options and facilitate referrals for legal and support services.
- Draw on the knowledge, experiences, and local understanding of communities to uncover information critical to child protection.

Case Studies

PartnerSPEAK!

Provides advocacy and support for non-offending partners, family members, and others affected by a person's involvement in child sexual abuse or child exploitation material. Police actively refer family members to this service, ensuring they have access to trauma-informed guidance, peer support, and advocacy during an inherently distressing and disruptive process. The service helps families navigate the immediate impact of police intervention while addressing emotional, practical, and long-term needs in a safe and confidential environment.

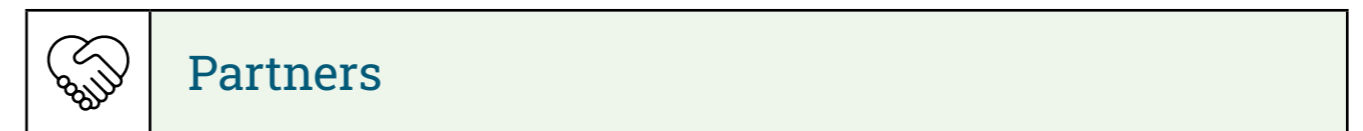
Stop Child Abuse – Trace an Object

Based on a Europol program, Trace an Object is led by the Australian Centre to Counter Child Exploitation (ACCCE) - part of the Australian Federal Police. The initiative involves sharing sanitised images (showing only innocuous objects, such as clothing and furniture), allowing members of the community to recognise them and provide information anonymously. Public tips are used to generate investigative leads, helping law enforcement determine where abuse occurred and identify victims and offenders.

Police

Organisation

- Ensure psychosocial risks associated with exposure to harmful material are managed. This may include:
 - supporting staff in disconnecting after exposure to harmful content by ensuring they have dedicated space and time to decompress before the end of a shift.
- Define thresholds for acceptable levels of risk
 - acknowledging that the scope and capacity of police responses are influenced by volume, available resources, and operational limitations and priorities.



Law Enforcement

- Share information, intelligence and learnings within and between jurisdictions (domestically and internationally). This includes:
 - drawing on and contributing to specialist cross-jurisdictional capabilities, such as Victim Identification, Online Covert Units, multi-agency and Virtual Global Taskforces.

Government

- Share knowledge around best practice to uplift and support other government stakeholders. This includes:
 - collaborating with prosecutors, to support judicial education around digital evidence and online environments
 - informing the training of other statutory bodies to assist with the identification of current and emerging indicators of child abuse and exploitation.
- Work with justice partners to streamline processes and reduce delays between reporting and prosecution hearings, in turn minimising harm to victims.

Community Sector and NGOs

- Support options to refer parents and affected caregivers to local peer support networks, connecting families with shared experiences.

Industry

- Actively communicate specific law enforcement needs to technology providers and industry partners, to support the development of innovative and fit for purpose policing tools.

Capability

Skillsets and Training

- Upskill staff in digital evidence preservation and triage.
- Continue to strengthen developmentally appropriate victim interviewing through nationally consistent training.

Infrastructure and Resources

- Sustain investment in the technical expertise and operational readiness of covert capabilities.
- Establish a secure information-sharing platform to enable Australia and New Zealand police to share innovations, insights, case studies, best practice, and technology pilot outcomes – allowing jurisdictions to leverage lessons learned.

Technology

- Complement workforce training in digital evidence preservation and triage, by expanding access to Mobile Digital Forensics devices for use during search warrants.

Governance

- Establish clear guidance to promote consistent and timely information sharing and a mutual understanding of the thresholds for criminal investigations.
- Enhance consistency of practice across jurisdictions, such as:
 - ensuring judicial briefs exclude internal CAM categorisations, reinforcing that such classifications are not a measure of severity
 - adopting a consistent CAM viewing threshold (e.g. 100–150 files) to limit personnel exposure
 - using Evidence Act concessions to admit video and audio interviews/statements as evidence in chief, where available.

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