

Forced Adoptions Implementation Working Group

Terms of Reference & Protocols

1. Background

In response to the recommendations in the Senate Community Affairs References Committee report, *Commonwealth Contribution to Former Forced Adoption Policies and Practices, February 2012*, (the Inquiry report), the Australian Government (the Government) has proposed a range of service responses for those affected by forced adoption policies and practices. This includes the establishment of a national consultation group involving people affected by forced adoption practices.

The Department of Social Services (DSS), the Department of Health, the Attorney-General's Department (AGD) and the National Archives of Australia each have responsibility for delivering key elements of the Government response as follows:

- DSS is the lead agency coordinating the Government response and improving access to specialist services, peer and professional counselling and supporting records tracing.
- Department of Health is providing support through the Access to Allied Psychological Services (ATAPS) program and will develop guidelines and training materials for mental health professionals.
- National Archives will deliver a website and an exhibition to increase awareness and understanding of the experiences of individuals affected by forced adoption practices.
- AGD will progress resolution of issues relating to integrated birth certificates and investigation of harmonisation and access to jurisdictional Births, Deaths and Marriage registers.

2. Purpose of the Forced Adoptions Implementation Working Group

The Forced Adoptions Implementation Working Group (the Implementation Working Group) will perform a key advisory role to the Government on services and projects related to the implementation of the Government's response to the recommendations of the Senate Inquiry into forced adoptions policies and practices.

The Implementation Working Group may not be the only forum for Government consultation and communication, and may be complemented by other stakeholder engagement processes.

3. Role of Implementation Working Group Members

The role of the Implementation Working Group members is to:

- Participate in meetings and preparation for meetings (reading papers);
- Participate in sub committees/working groups if appropriate;
- Provide input into the meeting agenda;
- Provide input in meeting discussions; and
- Contribute feedback on projects when requested.

As a guide, Implementation Working Group members are asked to:

- Attend meetings (either face-to-face or via tele/videoconference);
- Read and respond where necessary to minutes, information and other reports circulated by the Chair or Secretariat in a timely fashion;
- Respond to requests by the Chair or Secretariat for verbal or written input into discussion papers and reports;
- Represent the Implementation Working Group at other meetings if agreed; and
- Work in accordance with the Protocols described in 9 below.

4. Implementation Working Group Meeting frequency

It is anticipated there will be approximately three meetings a year, which may be face-to-face or via telephone or videoconference.

The National Archives and the Department of Health may arrange additional meetings with the Working Group to progress the website and exhibition and guidelines for professionals.

5. Term of appointment

Implementation Working Group members are appointed until 31 December 2014. The Implementation Working Group will not extend beyond the roll out of the Australian Government service system response.

6. Membership

- Professor The Honourable Nahum Mushin (Chair)
- Parliamentarians
- Representatives of mothers affected by forced adoption
- Representatives of fathers affected by forced adoption
- Representatives of adoptees

Note: Membership of the Implementation Working Group may be expanded to include other stakeholders as required.

7. Secretariat

Secretariat support for the Implementation Working Group is provided by the Family Support Program Branch, Department of Social Services.

8. Support for members

DSS will make all bookings and will meet all reasonable costs associated with transport and accommodation to facilitate participation in the DSS-organised Implementation Working Group meetings.

9. Protocols

Implementation Working Group members should:

- Work in the spirit of cooperation to provide advice on a way forward;
- Perform their role impartially;
- Not allow the pursuit of their private interests to interfere with the conduct of this group;
- Be frank and honest and deal with members in an appropriate manner;
- Not use information obtained in the course of Implementation Working Group membership to gain directly or indirectly, a pecuniary or other advantage for themselves or for any other person;
- Raise any conflict of interest at the beginning of each Implementation Working Group meeting;
- Adhere to the confidentiality guidelines outlined in 10 below, and
- Adhere to the media guidelines outlines in 12 below.

10. Confidentiality

Confidentiality covers all the work of the Implementation Working Group members and the Secretariat. Information which is deemed confidential, including minutes of the Implementation Working Group is to be kept within the realm of the Implementation Working Group. Members are encouraged to clearly indicate if any information they bring to the meetings is confidential. Information which is not confidential may be available to the wider community through communications which the Government may have.

11. Communiqué

A statement or communiqué will be prepared after each meeting of the Forced Adoptions Implementation Working Group. This will then be posted on the Forced Adoptions page of the DSS website.

12. Media

Media statements on behalf of the Implementation Working Group are to be communicated by the Chair only. Individual opinions are not to be attributed to the Implementation Working Group without the express permission of the Chair.