

Dear members, colleagues and friends,

I hope you are well and coping with the high temperatures this late summer has brought. In our last VOICE newsletter we promised to send an update when the redress scheme opened for applications which has now happened. Details are on page 2. We also have an update on some of the other inquiry recommendations and an invitation to the 11th anniversary of the National Apology for Forced Adoptions. It would be lovely to see you there if you can attend.

I had planned to write a farewell message in this bulletin but time is of the essence in getting this news to you and we are planning another newsletter to go out soon so I will include it then.

Please remember we welcome your articles, poems, or any other contributions to the newsletter. You are also welcome to contact us if you have any questions or feedback.

Warm regards,
Charlotte Smith, CEO

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Victorian Parliamentary Apology to Care Leavers

On 8 February the Victorian Premier Jacinta Allan delivered a Parliamentary Apology to Victorians who experienced historical abuse and neglect as children in institutional care between 1928-1990.

"To those children who were abused and neglected during their time in care – we humbly, unreservedly apologise that you were needlessly separated from your brothers and sisters.

Sometimes growing up in the same four walls, but never being allowed to know each other. The grief of being removed from your parents, often without explanation and the years spent fighting to find your family sometimes in vain.

To those who died without getting the respect or recognition they deserved. To the children who lost their lives while in the guardianship of the state, whose voices were silenced forever and to the families who were broken permanently. We failed you with this. We are deeply sorry."

<https://bit.ly/VicParliamentDeliversApologyToCareLeavers>

LiSTNR Podcasts – Secrets We Keep

Media coverage of past and forced adoption practices and adoption reunions always generate a lot of feedback. Amelia Oberhardt's podcast series Secrets We Keep aired last year on LiSTNR was no exception with Amelia saying they had been inundated with responses and questions and with stories from the forced adoption era.

One of the episodes aired in October focused on family tracing and featured an interview with Charlotte Smith in which she talked about how VANISH assists individuals to search for family and also shared some of her personal experience.

To listen, please follow this link:

<https://play.listnr.com/podcast/secrets-we-keep>

Forced Adoptions Redress Scheme for Mothers



Historical Forced Adoptions Redress Scheme

The Victorian Government's Historical Forced Adoption Redress Scheme opened for applications on 1st February 2024. The scheme is administered by the Department of Justice and Community Safety (DJCS) and includes a monetary payment of \$30,000, access to therapeutic services and a personal apology.

Applicants are encouraged to contact the Redress Scheme Support Team to discuss their application and any information that may be required and be assisted through the process. Any information provided to the scheme will be protected in line with the [Privacy and Data Protection Act 2014 \(Vic\)](#).

Eligibility for the scheme:

- Mothers who gave birth in Victoria or were a Victorian resident but gave birth interstate, and were forcibly separated from their baby prior to 1990.
- Mothers who received funding through the Forced Adoption Exceptional Circumstances Fund (ECF) can apply to the scheme.
- the scheme will not accept applications on behalf of mothers who have already passed away.

The scheme will be open for four years which means you can start your application when you feel ready and take your time in completing it, especially if you find answering the questions difficult or distressing.

To access the application form please go to:
<https://www.vic.gov.au/redress-forced-adoptions>

Contact details for the redress team are:

Ph: 1300 217 425 9am-4pm Monday-Friday
E: forcedadoptions.redress@justice.vic.gov.au
Post: Historical Forced Adoptions Redress Scheme,
Department of Justice and Community Safety,
PO Box 18217, Collins Street East, VIC 8003

To read the Victorian Government's release go to
<https://www.premier.vic.gov.au/applications-open-forced-adoption-redress-scheme>

VANISH congratulates everyone involved in bringing the redress scheme to reality. It is the result of tireless efforts by individuals and groups who have lobbied (some for decades), shared their lived experience through inquiries and the media, or provided encouragement and support from behind the scenes.

We know the redress payment is lower than many had hoped and VANISH did strongly advocate that it be more. We also know some are happy with the amount and relieved the scheme is finally open.

We know that many adoptees are disappointed to have been left out of the scheme. VANISH will continue to advocate that they be included, or that a scheme be established for them.

If you wish to advocate on this or any of the other inquiry recommendations (see page 3), we encourage you to share your views with your MP and/or the Attorney General. Please send VANISH a copy of any letters you send, to inform our position and further advocacy. Our contact details are on the back page.

The ABC wrote an article about the redress scheme opening in which Jude Hudson shared her experience of being hidden away for months at Kedesh Maternity Home for Unmarried Mothers at just 16 years of age. To read the article, follow this link:

<https://bit.ly/ForcedAdoptionRedressSchemeOpens>

Inquiry Recommendations Implementation update

Below is a progress update on implementation of some of the inquiry recommendations:

Hospital records

Inquiry Recommendations 3, 4 and 6 were that hospitals: develop a specific form to request records which they clearly publicise; waive the fee for applications; and provide an explanation of how and when records were lost or destroyed.

CEOs of all public and private hospitals have received guidance from government recommending a waiver of all fees for mothers and adoptees requesting their records and the section below has been included in the Victoria Department of Health Policy and Funding Guidelines 2023–2024: “The 2021 Inquiry into Responses to Historical Forced Adoption in Victoria requires all public hospitals directly involved in historical forced adoptions to develop a specific application form for mothers and people who are adopted to request their hospital records.

If a hospital record cannot be located or is unavailable, public hospitals must make every effort to explain to information applicants why a hospital record cannot be located, including details of when and how records were destroyed, if possible. A template application form will be shared with public hospitals directly involved in historical forced adoptions.”

Adoption records

Recommendation 31 was that the Victorian Government cease the operation of adoption information services within approved agencies and centralise Victoria’s Adoption Information Service. This has been implemented to a large extent in that while many records are still held by former adoption agencies, any release of those records must be reviewed and authorised by Adoption Services in DJCS.

Adoption Discharges

Recommendations 16 and 17 were about introducing a no-fee, no-fault procedure for discharging an adoption, and publishing a step-by-step guide on the websites of DJCS, the

Supreme Court and the County Court of Victoria. A guide has been produced by the County Court and outlined on the DJCS website here <https://www.vic.gov.au/discharge-adoption>

These show that the recommendation has not been taken up. Adoption orders may still only be discharged “if the Court finds that the adoption order was obtained by fraud, duress, other improper means, or where special circumstances exist. The irretrievable breakdown of the relationship between the adoptive parents, and the adopted person is an example of special circumstances.

The only waiver available is on the grounds of hardship which requires details of the applicant’s occupation, income, dependents, property, borrowing capacity etc and evidence including bank statements, pay slips and council rates. VANISH will continue to advocate on this matter.

Adoption data

Recommendations 46 and 47 involved requiring adoption agencies to publicly report on the number of adoption referrals and options counselling provided, and DJCS publishing numbers of adoption referrals, applications and children placed and other statistics such as age and cultural background of the child and parents.

This data is now available on the DJCS website: <https://www.vic.gov.au/annual-adoption-data>

Other

The following recommendations are still under consideration (among others):

Recommendation 23 that the Victorian Government immediately seek to amend the Limitations Act 1958 (Vic).

Recommendation 15 that the Victorian Government undertake an inquiry into the experiences and the effects of adoption on adopted people.

For the source documents and to read the update from DJCS please see <https://www.vic.gov.au/forced-adoption-inquiry-background-and-implementation>

Invitation to Participate in Research

International research suggests intercountry adoptees are four to five times more likely to die by suicide than the general population, yet we know very little about the suicidal experiences of intercountry adoptees in Australia.

I am seeking the following participants:

1. An Australian intercountry adoptee who has personal experience of non-fatal suicide or suicide ideation.
2. Families or significant others, who have known and lost an Australian intercountry adoptee to suicide or experienced a non-fatal suicide attempt.
3. Peer support networks or Australian adoptee organisations who work in the field of intercountry adoption who have known or become aware of Australian intercountry adoptees who have died by suicide or had a non-fatal suicide attempt.

Please feel free to contact Gemma Chudzinski (Australian intercountry adoptee) if you have any questions gemma.chudzinski@griffithuni.edu.au

Invitation



11th anniversary

of the National Apology for Forced Adoptions
Saturday 23rd March at 2pm

At St Andrew's Reserve,
Cnr Landsdowne St & St Andrew's Pl, Melbourne

RSVP Mon 18th March 2024
ARMS: arms@armsvic or 0400 701 621
VANISH: info@vanish.org.au or 9328 8611

Evaluation of VANISH Counselling

Since May 2021 VANISH has been funded by the Victorian Government to offer counselling services through a brokerage scheme and has arranged counselling for over 100 mothers and adopted people.

To measure the effectiveness of this service, VANISH has engaged Professor Margarita Frederico and Dr Maureen Long of La Trobe University to conduct a survey and semi structured interviews which counsellors and counselling recipients will be invited to participate in.

If you have had counselling through the program, we will be in touch soon to invite you to participate. There is no obligation to do so and any information you provide will be treated as confidential. This research holds significant promise in contributing valuable insights into the effectiveness of the counselling service and how it might be improved upon.

If you have any questions about the research, please contact gail@vanish.org.au

VARTA to be replaced by Health Regulator

On 13 December 2023, Minister for Health Mary-Anne Thomas announced major reforms to the regulation of assisted reproductive treatment in Victoria which will transfer responsibility from the Victorian Assisted Reproductive Treatment Authority (VARTA) to the new Health Regulator.

Pending legislation passing in Parliament, the new Health Regulator will be responsible for regulating IVF, pest control, vaping, drinking water and radiation with the intention of ensuring better consistency across the health system. It will have greater enforcement powers over assisted reproduction treatments.

The unexpected announcement received mixed reactions from the community, with particular concerns around who will manage the central register and support people affected by donor conception to access information on the register and seek contact if they wish to.

To access updates:

<https://www.health.vic.gov.au/patient-care/assisted-reproductive-treatment-reform>

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