

From: [Inquiry into responses to historical forced adoptions in Victoria](#)
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Subject: New Submission to Inquiry into responses to historical forced adoptions in Victoria
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Inquiry Name: Inquiry into responses to historical forced adoptions in Victoria

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SUBMISSION CONTENT:

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This submission draws on the findings of the ARC-funded History of Adoption project undertaken in collaboration with Professor Marian Quartly (Monash University) and Professor Denise Cuthbert (RMIT University). The findings of this research are reported in the jointly authored monograph, *The Market in Babies: Stories of Australian Adoption* (Monash University Publishing, 2013) and in a series of associated publications in academic outlets. It also draws upon my continuing role as historian chief investigator on the Find & Connect web resource (<https://www.findandconnect.gov.au/>) and ongoing contact with various support groups for people impacted by adoption. In relation to the ToR for this inquiry I wish to address four key points.

1. History

Ongoing disclosures in the period following the Federal Government apology have only complicated the history of forced adoption in Victoria. These disclosures make it clear that the pain caused by the practice does not go away in the wake of inquiry, apology and memorialisation. Rather the validation provided by such processes has allowed more of those impacted to reflect on their experiences in the light of the discussions that these processes evoked. These reflections give rise to a continuing demand for services, redress and research.

2. Counselling and Redress

While the redress measures offered to survivors of the various classes of historical abuse in Australia share broad characteristics - apology and memorialisation, improved records access and funded support services - the differences in relation to the resourcing of such services, and, most importantly, access to financial redress continue to cause distress both within and particularly between groups. The limits as to eligibility for financial redress are particularly unjust, but the issues around access to counselling are also ongoing. While, for reasons of bureaucratic efficiency, government may prefer to favour a single provider, survivors have differing needs and need to be able to exercise choice as to where they seek such support. For some, the professionalism of Relationships Australia best serves their needs, but others find greater affirmation from the mutuality and lived experience that is evident in survivor-based services. It is important that ongoing funding supports this right to access ongoing counselling on the same basis as other survivor groups and to choose the

source from which it comes.

3. Records access

Survivor groups also vary in relation to what records they are able to access and the means, and costs, of such access. Harmonisation of such access is urgently needed. The situation in Victoria is complicated by the multiplicity of agencies (and individuals) who had the right to arrange adoptions in the past, not all of which will have maintained adequate records. Where adoptions were arranged through organisations that also offered out-of-home care, details of their records holdings and access provisions are available through the Find & Connect web resource. However, as the web resource is not funded to cover forced adoption, information about other organisations is not always covered. The National Archives site that was funded to provide similar information for survivors of forced adoption does not appear to have the capacity to have the regular updates that Find & Connect is able to provide. While the State Government does not have control over these services, it does have responsibility for the Freedom of Information, Privacy and Adoption legislation that impacts on the ways in which survivors can access their records and is in a position to make this as uncomplicated and less costly as possible. It is also in a position to facilitate the means by which survivors can annotate their records to more accurately reflect their understanding of the circumstances of the adoption.

4. Contemporary adoption

It is important that the committee does not succumb to the temptation to confine the problems associated with forced adoption to the past given the pressure on state governments to return to adoption as a child protection measure. As was the case in the past, adoption's greatest advantages are also the source of its identified risks. Early advocates of legal adoption argued that they needed to have secure possession of the child, and to be free from ongoing intrusion into their family life. The promise of a clean break encourages the 'happy ever after' narrative that has proved so persuasive when contrasted with images of children 'languishing' in institutions or in abusive homes. However, as the many stories heard during the Senate inquiry into former forced adoptions showed, this very certainty provides no protection for children whose adoption did not match this optimistic narrative, nor to the parents whose children have been removed. Whenever adoption has been promoted in the past, the demand from people seeking children has always led to those charged with satisfying this pressure to remove children from their parents using increasingly questionable justifications, including pre-emptive removals from young mothers, rather than resourcing programs designed to enable children to remain with their families. Yet there is little evidence to suggest that such authorities are any better now than they were in the past of evaluating the relative parenting skills of the two parties involved.

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File1:

File2:

File3: