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Inquiry into responses to historical forced adoptions in Victoria

I am writing this Submission from lived experience as an adoptee, and also as a mother who has lost children to adoption. As a mother in reunion (in some cases) and not in reunion (in others) with my children, my mother and father, siblings, aunts, uncles and cousins. My brother was adopted before me by a different adopter; he did not know that he was adopted until I found him after the department sent me his adoption papers.

I write to you as an advocate for mothers/fathers and adoptees who have been affected by Forced Adoption. I have witnessed how undue influence can control a mother's decision to allow her baby to be adopted.

Every aspect of my personal life is connected to adoption. From 6 weeks of age my name and birth certificate were changed, and I am known as an Adoptee, under the Adoption Act life-long, without my consent.

Mothers/fathers and adoptees have been denied a fundamental human right to be autonomous decision-makers. Adoptees cannot self-determine whether they want to keep their status as adopted people under the Adoption Act, or regain the substantive family identity that every other Australian Citizen was given at birth.

Persons who have experienced double adoption (as an adoptee and mother) can align with both mothers/fathers and adoptees, but they are not researched, identified or seen a valuable resource. Having these two lived experiences can be useful.

I would like to see:

- That every State in Australia have an Inquiry into responses to historical forced adoptions.
- That every Australian State have an adoption community peak advisory body made up of mothers/fathers and adoptees who have had personal experience of separation from family, adoption and reunion. Recognition of mothers/fathers and adoptees in the role of providing adoption awareness and training for Health Services.
- That the adoption community committees serve as an independent voice, providing systemic advocacy and input into local, state, national and international policy. Currently most providers delivering Forced Adoption services are also providing adoption services. Pro-adoption services have been put into powerful positions of authority and have influenced adoption policy in some States at the risk of creating a distorted view of the effects of permanent adoption. As a result, the victims of this practice are losing their voice.
- Online support groups for adopted persons, promoting education and awareness raising and promoting the rights and needs of those affected by Forced Adoption.

- Encouragement for participation in creative endeavours to understand the impact of disenfranchised grief, loss of family and forced identity change. For example, art, poems and plays by mothers/fathers and adoptees such as “You” (the London play written and directed by adoptees) or Eric Sharp’s “Middle Brother” a comedy play about reunion with his Korean parents.
- Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) data be collected on the number of mothers/fathers who have lost children to adoption and on the number of adoptees.

It is acknowledged that people identifying as being in this diverse forced adoption group are living with the long-term effect of past experiences of trauma and that the numbers of parents separated from their children by forced adoption is still unknown.

People affected by Forced Adoption are identified under the Aged Care Act 1997 11-3
 Meaning of *people with special needs*

For the purposes of this Act, the following people are *people with special needs*:

- (a) people from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities;
- (b) people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds;
- (c) people who live in rural or remote areas;
- (d) people who are financially or socially disadvantaged;
- (e) veterans;
- (f) people who are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless;
- (g) care-leavers;
- (ga) parents separated from their children by forced adoption or removal;

The Aged Care Diversity framework recognises persons separated from their children by forced adoption or removal and encourages consumers to be partners in the design of aged care and end of life care (ELDAC).

I would like to see the same community representation given to the adoption community as the other diverse groups identified above.