



Media Release

World first research finds community attitudes towards child abuse remains unchanged for 20 years

Australian Childhood Foundation has released world first research that shows community attitudes towards child abuse have remained unchanged for the past 20 years, leaving thousands of children across Australia vulnerable as a result.

The Foundation's report, "*Still Unseen and Ignored*" is the only work of its kind that has continuously tracked community attitudes and awareness towards child abuse over two decades.

In the lead up to National Child Protection Week (5-11 September), the not-for-profit advocacy group is calling on the community to step up and keep children safe. Not only has there been a level of complacency in the community, but one in three people (33 per cent) do not believe children who report child abuse and one in five (22 per cent) are not confident in knowing the steps to take if they suspect a child is being abused or neglected.

Almost half a million reports of child abuse and neglect were made across the country in 2019-20, and in 2021, child abuse rates lower on the list of public concerns than public transport and road issues.

Australian Childhood Foundation is calling on the community to take action against child abuse

Psychologist, Social Worker and Australian Childhood Foundation CEO, Dr Joe Tucci, believes there to be real and ongoing consequences that flow on from child abuse being relegated away from the collective consciousness of the community.

Alarming, one in six people feel uncertain or would be reluctant to report a child being abused or neglected, even if they were sure of the facts and one in five (22 per cent) are not confident they could recognise a vulnerable child. This reluctance and lack of knowledge leaves children unprotected at a time they need it the most.

"The overwhelming majority of Australians understand the harmful implications of not believing a child's disclosure of abuse. Yet this survey confirmed previous findings, that two-thirds of the community

What to do if you suspect a child is being abused:

1. Believe a child if they confide in you. Take action to keep them safe
2. Know and watch out for signs of abuse such as unexplained bruises, children's behaviour changing without reason, running away, visible signs of distress, self-harm
3. Talk to a trusted professional like a doctor or teacher about your concerns
4. Report any suspicions to authorities

believe children make up stories or are uncertain whether they are telling the truth about what has happened to them.

“This remains a devastating result for children. It means that children only have a one in three chance of finding an adult who will be on their side. It is far more likely that children will be disregarded and seen to be lying,” explained Dr Tucci.

In more positive findings from the report, it’s clear that Australians would like to help, with half ready to take part in a community awareness program. In what hints to be a better future, 80% of respondents believe that if action is not taken now, there will be long-term consequences for the community.

The critical findings come at a time when many states across the country are facing strict lockdowns due to the pandemic, yet Dr Tucci says it’s now more important than ever to take action to protect children impacted by abuse as cases continue to rise.

Throughout the last two decades, Australia has battled fires, droughts, terrorism and now the COVID-19 pandemic. While these are significant events and societal issues, Dr Tucci believes children cannot afford for the community to be distracted from understanding more about child abuse.

“It is crucial for the community to recognise the danger that children are exposed to in their own families, in their community and online and to report suspected abuse if they see a child who may be at-risk.

“Children cannot afford competing demands for community attention to detract from their fundamental entitlements to safety, love and care. The reality of the other challenges confronting the community is not a reason to do nothing. The most vulnerable and at-risk children cannot be left to wait whilst larger problems are addressed. The problem does not go away if we choose to turn away from it,” explained Dr Tucci.

The full report is available for view and download via the Australian Childhood Foundation website: www.childhood.org.au/still-unseen-and-ignored

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Notes to the editor:

To view a snapshot of the findings from the Australian Childhood Foundation’s report, *Still Unseen and Ignored: Tracking Community Knowledge and Attitudes about Child Abuse and Child Protection in Australia*, please refer to the research highlights document attached in the email.