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Charity sector moves to improve complaint handling

Eleven leading national peak bodies working in the charity sector - across the arts, emergency relief, fundraising, community organisations, volunteering, philanthropy and governance – have today launched a policy to significantly improve how charities handle complaints.

The new policy will ensure that complaints are handled confidentially and safely, enhancing community trust and confidence in the work of charities. In this regard, the sector will also have access to complaint data which will ensure lessons learnt can be applied to their charitable activities.

This initiative has been welcomed by the Australian Charities and Not-for-profits Commission's Commissioner the Hon. Dr Gary Johns who said 'Improving the governance of charities and how charity boards manage risk and enhance accountability are key concerns of the ACNC. We encourage charities of all sizes to review their procedures and consider adopting these and other like tools to assist them to manage community expectations of charitable activities.'

The initiative has been driven by Sue-Anne Wallace AM, the former chair of the Australian Council for International Development Code of Conduct Committee. She began researching this area of charity activity in 2014 and is currently Chair of the Customer Owned Banking Code Compliance Committee, Deputy Chair of the Code Authority of the Fundraising Institute Australia and Vice-President of the Humanitarian Quality Assurance Initiative (Geneva).

'Even before the Royal Commission into Institutional Response to Child Sexual Abuse, it was clear that many charities were not meeting community expectations in dealing appropriately with complaints. This work provides policy templates which charity boards can adapt and use to manage risk and improve service delivery' Dr Wallace said.

'Ensuring people in need – particularly those in vulnerable circumstances – have a safe and confidential avenue to raise complaints, is critical to good governance of the sector and minimisation of harm to the beneficiaries of charitable services and others engaged with charities' she added.

'Furthermore, this initiative creates accountabilities that exist in the public and private sectors and which should be standard business practice in the charity sector.'

Charities deliver broad social benefits to Australian society across education, health care, social services, religious services, and internationally through emergency relief and development. The total revenue of the sector is \$142.8 billion of which \$10.5 billion is raised through charitable fundraising and bequests. Around 1 million Australians volunteers to support the work of charities in Australia.

The 11 peak national bodies behind this policy launch are The Australia Council for the Arts, Australian Council for International Development, Community Council Australia, Public Fundraising Regulatory Authority, Governance Institute of Australia, Fundraising Institute Australia, Our Community, Volunteering Australia, Philanthropy Australia, National Roundtable of Nonprofit Organisations and Justice Connect.

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