

The release of the Australian Human Rights Commission's report on sexual assault and harassment in university communities is coming soon. Here's what your university should be doing *now* to prepare

Research and inquiries into sexual assault can be highly traumatic for people who have experienced sexual assault and key dates- such as the release of a major report- will likely unearth a lot of dormant trauma within the community. Anticipating and planning for the release of the report is an important part of impact-planning.

The Australian Human Rights Commission's 'University Sexual Assault and Sexual Harassment' project has asked students and other survivors of sexual assault to share their stories. For many, this process will have brought past trauma to the surface. The inquiry may also impact survivors who did not participate in the research, especially when the results are released in coming months and there is heightened media coverage of the issue.

The release of the AHRC report will also impact those who are in a position of support - for example, student representatives and Resident Advisors at colleges - who are likely to receive a spike in disclosures of sexual assault. Extensive media coverage may also impact members of the general community who may have experienced sexual assault during university, in previous years or decades.

As such, in recent weeks EROC Australia has called on Universities Australia to fully fund a national, 1800 support hotline to be run by Rape & Domestic Violence Services Australia, the nationally-recognised best-practice provider of sexual assault trauma counselling.

In anticipation of the trauma and distress that may be experienced around the release of the report, End Rape on Campus Australia believes that individual universities also need to start preparing for the release of the report in August by taking action to put supports in place for students and survivors of sexual assault.

In conjunction with high profile sexual assault advocates and other supporters, EROC Australia has developed five action points that should be implemented **now** to ensure that university communities are equipped to respond to the impact that this report may have on students survivors and student representatives.

EROC Australia recommends that universities should:

1. Increase student awareness of the on-campus counselling services that are available (or, implement the provision of on-campus counselling if none exists at your campus). For example, universities should post posters on the backs of toilet doors with information on where sexual assault survivors can get support both on campus and more broadly in the community. Information on where to get support should also be prominently displayed on university websites and in any relevant correspondence relating to the project and report.
2. Ensure that on-campus counselling staff are fully trained in trauma-specialist counselling, and provide refresher training sessions on sexual assault counselling prior to the release of the report (ideally to be run by a sexual

- assault service). Also ensure that sufficient numbers of counselling staff are rostered on, particularly surrounding the release of the report in August
3. Provide training prior to the release of the report (run by the nationally-recognised Full Stop Foundation) on how to respond to disclosures of sexual assault with compassion, and on managing vicarious trauma, for the following people:
 - Student representatives (including women's officers, queer officers, sexual harassment officers, and student union presidents)
 - Caseworkers or student advocacy officers working with students
 - Resident Advisors in residential accommodation
 - Heads of colleges and other residential accommodation services
 - Staff who manage complaints offices
 4. Publicly acknowledge (on university websites, in student mailouts, social media, advertising, and with posters) that this may be a difficult time for survivors of sexual assault, and make students aware of other support services available to them, including:
 - Academic support, e.g. accessing extensions and special considerations
 - Legal support
 - Financial support
 - Housing support
 - Emotional support and counselling
 - Information about how to report experiences of sexual violence to the university
 5. Contact student representative bodies (especially Women's and Queer Officers) and offer practical support and other encouragement to run public, moderated forums so that students have the opportunity to come together to process, respond to, and debrief around the report. These events should also include sexual assault services as a matter of priority.

We anticipate that this will be a very difficult time for many students and that there may be considerable fallout surrounding the report including on social media. We are especially concerned about the impact of the report on sexual assault survivors and students leaders who are likely to bear the brunt of disclosure and it is imperative that these individuals are appropriately resourced and supported.

We are eager to hear how your university is pre-empting the release of the results, and we can provide further consultation and advice about university policy and strategies to combat sexual violence in university communities. Our 2017 report, 'Connecting the Dots', includes a comprehensive suite of recommendations for change at both university and government policy levels. Access the report at <http://www.endrapeoncampusau.org/s/Connecting-the-dots.pdf>, and contact us here: <http://www.endrapeoncampusau.org/contact-us>