

AN APOLOGY TO PEOPLE AFFECTED BY FORMER FORCED ADOPTION PRACTICES

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

What is the apology about?

The apology is the acknowledgement by the ACT Government that the former forced adoption practices that happened in Australia between the late 1940s and the 1980s have significantly affected some people in our community.

This part of Australia's history is reflected in the pain and suffering experienced by mothers, fathers, people who were adopted and families as a consequence of the former forced adoption practices.

The practice of forced adoptions was the subject of a Senate Inquiry and in February 2012 the Senate Community Affairs References Committee's *Inquiry into Former Forced Adoption Policies and Practices* was released. The Inquiry provided an opportunity for people to talk about their personal experiences of forced adoption practices, many for the first time.

One of the main recommendations of the Report is that Commonwealth, State and Territory governments and non-government organisations issue formal statements of apology for the actions and policies around past forced adoptions.

To date, the Western Australian and South Australian governments have made formal apologies to their communities.

Forced adoption practices occurred before the ACT Government was established – why is the ACT Government making an apology?

While forced adoption practices happened before self-government in 1989, the ACT Government acknowledges that there are people in the ACT community who are affected by the past forced adoption practices, including young women who were sent from Canberra to other states to have their child. For many, their feelings of loss, grief, anger and pain remain.

The ACT Government recognises that a formal acknowledgement of the events that occurred, and of the ongoing pain and suffering of people who have been affected, is an important part of the healing process.

As part of the ACT Government's commitment to supporting children, young people and families, it is important to reflect on, and learn from, experiences that affect families to guard against policies or practices that may cause future harm.

Where can I get information about, and access to records?

Access to records of relinquishing mothers and people who were adopted is determined by where a child was born and where the consent or authorisation arose.

Each State or Territory has its own record keeping policies that cover access to records and the length of time that they are kept. Regrettably, in some cases, because of the length of time, there may be no records.

ACT residents who are seeking information about birth records or records of children relinquished by their mothers can contact the Family Information Services in the Community Services Directorate on **6207 1335** or adoptions@act.gov.au

Finding and identifying records may take some time but efforts will be made to assist individuals in locating available information.

Where can I go for support services in the ACT?

There is a range of support services and organisations provided by government and community groups.

Support for people who were adopted, for parents who were separated from their child or for family members seeking to contact an adopted relative may be arranged by the ACT Family Information Service in the Community Services Directorate on 6207 1335 or adoptions@act.gov.au

The ACT Family Information Service can also provide appropriate referrals to specific counselling services or longer term counselling, with the agreement of the person. If a person went through an adoption process interstate, the ACT Family Information Service may advise of the services available interstate.

People can also contact community adoption support and advocacy groups in the ACT:

Mosaic Adoption T: 0407 435 488

Adoptions Independent Voluntary Support Group T: 6258 4420

Adoptive Families Association T: 0487 518 607

A brochure providing relevant information to assist people seeking information or support is available at www.dhcs.act.gov.au.

What information may be accessed?

The information that may be accessed depends on who is applying, when the adoption took place and whether a Contact Veto is in place.

The ACT Family Information Service (formerly the Adoption Information Services) 6207 1335 or adoptions@act.gov.au) can assist with queries.

What are the rights of a person to privacy and if they do not want contact with their birth family?

The privacy of a person who may not want to be contacted about their involvement in a past adoption process may be protected through a Contact Veto. A veto in relation to adoption legislation is a means of ensuring that the privacy of a person is protected.

If a Contact Veto is in place, an applicant for information will be required to sign an undertaking that no contact will be attempted before they can receive the information. If an attempt to contact is made, Court action may arise.

More information about the Senate Inquiry

- [Report of the Senate's Community Affairs References Committee's Inquiry into Former Forced Adoption Policies and Practices](#)