

**The social and economical benefits of improving mental health and how we know that you can improve mental health**

**Submitted by**

**Fighters against child abuse Australia [FACAA] for the Australian Productivity commission**



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## **About the author:**

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Adam has a Diploma of Community services (Welfare) specializing in child trauma counselling and has worked in the field for the past 13 years since completing his degree. Adam is also a martial arts instructor and has been teaching children how to defend themselves for the past 18 years.

Adam has worked for various community centres, mental health facilities and martial arts schools but currently counsels for FACAA and teaches for KMA martial arts in Liverpool Sydney, one of Australia's premier martial arts schools.

This submission was prepared by Fighters against child abuse  
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## **About Fighters against child abuse Australia**

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Our mission is to end child abuse once and for all within Australia.

Our vision is to make Australia the only nation on the planet that does not suffer from the scourge of child abuse.

Our guiding principals are to remain completely non-denominational and non-political to achieve our mission of ending child abuse once and for all by whatever means are required (within the laws of the land). If a program does not exist to meet the needs of our clients, then we will make one to meet their needs.

FACAA has been working actively for the past 8 years to end child abuse within Australia. We are currently running a survivor's healing programs, educational and legal reform programs, domestic violence programs, anti bullying programs and a social media awareness campaign which regularly receives over 1.5 million unique views making it the single most successful social media campaign of its kind in Australia.

FACAA is a national organisation that has full deductible gift recipient status as a public benevolent society. We have volunteers working and clients from every part of Australia and we have members from all over the world.



## **Introduction**

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Australia is at a very dark crossroads as we are on the verge of a full-blown mental health crisis. We are seeing more and more the symptoms of this crisis all over the place.

Our police are dealing with a massive increase in domestic and family violence. We are seeing a big rise in extremist groups forming out of pure hatred and ignorance which in the information age is just insane.

More and more people are turning drugs and alcohol which is a way of self-medicating to deal with their trauma with a particularly big rise in the use of methamphetamines.

At FACAA we believe that if you can put a stop to the cause of a lot of people's mental health problems then you can help stop the mental health crisis in its tracks.

We believe that the cause of the mental health crisis is child abuse. It is our belief that if you look back into the early life of someone dealing with mental health issues you will more than likely find child abuse of some form being the root cause of that mental health problem.

FACAA believe so strongly that child abuse is behind the mental health crisis that we are as a society currently battling, that we would like to see child abuse itself, treated as a public health crisis. If we can get child abuse seen as a public health crisis rather than as a hidden crime whose victims are all too often too ashamed to come forward and seek justice for their ordeals, then maybe we can start to make some ground in the fight against the mental health crisis we are now facing.



## **Recommendations**

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1. Our first recommendation is to declare child abuse to be a public health crisis.
2. The next thing we need is more facilities to deal with those requiring moderate to severe mental health care. We need to re-open all the closed mental health hospitals and drop this foolish idea of integration because some people simply can not be a part of society.
3. FACA has an excellent program to help survivors of child abuse heal from their trauma. It is called the Phoenix program. The Phoenix program needs to get federal funding to help us break the cycle of child abuse one survivor at a time.
4. Drug addiction needs to be treated as a symptom of mental health and child abuse issues rather than a crime. It needs to be treated with compassion and trauma informed therapies if we are to get on top of the problem.
5. School curriculums need to include awareness programs to prevent child abuse. This needs to start at kindergarten and needs to be much more than a one of lesson taught by an outsider. We need to teach body safety and body awareness to young kids and internet safety and anti-domestic violence programs to the older children.



## **Explanation of each recommendations**

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*1. Our first recommendation is to declare child abuse to be a public health crisis.*

If we can get our health authorities to realize that child abuse and the trauma it causes to be a public health crisis we can unlock funds needed to help stamp child abuse out which will in turn help prevent the oncoming mental health crisis. Child abuse survivors have post traumatic stress disorder symptoms comparable to frontline soldiers (I).

There were 49,895 child abuse notifications in the 2016 financial year (II) According to studies 1 in 10 people who are abused as a child will report it. (III) so, with that we can safely say that there were 490,000 child abuse survivors in Australia in 2016. Now if we just take those 490,000 cases of child abuse and say that they are the only ones (this isn't true but for the sake of the article we will say it is) we can say that's 490,000 people with PTSD symptoms similar to front line soldiers. Those PTSD symptoms will lead them to self-medicate using drugs and alcohol to try and handle the daily symptoms of trauma. With that self-medication comes associated problems such as petty crime to pay for the drugs or alcohol, driving offences associated with alcohol abuse, more child abuse such as neglect, and other forms of abuse associated with the poor decision making of alcohol abusers. Then child abuse survivors have to battle through flash backs and being triggered by seemingly innocuous circumstances that send them back to the time of their trauma, all the while people are isolating them due to their seemingly strange behaviours and constant depression. The survivors find it hard to hold down a job due to depression and anger issues, not to mention their trust issues and inability to take being yelled at or told what to do in a harsh tone. Things you or I take for granted can be quite debilitating to a child abuse survivor battling PTSD.

All of these issues are symptoms of their mental health problems brought on entirely by their child abuse. If we can have child abuse classes as a public health crisis, we can get much needed funds released to help stop it once and for all. Kezelman, Hossack, Stavropoulos and Burley (2015) reported that a conservative estimate of the cost to Australian taxpayers of unresolved childhood trauma is at least \$6.8 billion per year (IV) for child sexual, emotional and physical abuse alone. So in order to save even half of that \$6.8 billion per year we at FACAA would like to see child abuse declared a public health crisis to get funds released and giving health authorities a much needed sense of urgency about stopping it. We believe this will lead to laws being written quickly and awareness being raised which will all help end child abuse and avert the oncoming mental health crisis.

*2. The next thing we need is more facilities to deal with those requiring moderate to severe mental health care. We need to re-open all the closed mental health hospitals and drop this foolish idea of integration because some people simply can not be a part of society.*

Why did we close the mental health hospitals under the guise of “re integrating” the patients into society ? Some people simply can not function as a normal part of society and we can give them all the out of care support we want but at the end of the day they are simply going to end up back in either hospital or prison. This is obviously not true for all people with mental health issues but for those with whom it is true, there is simply no other paths. A client of FACAA’s who has approved us to tell her story has literally gone up and slapped police officers because she could not handle her anxiety or depression or anger levels and knew the best place to get care was behind bars. Our local mental health facility is an annex of Liverpool hospital which simply does not have the beds available for everyone who needs it. Not by a long way and this leads to a huge problem in

the local community of people in the facility getting day release to literally wander the streets as they please. Some of these people are clinically diagnosed with horrific mental illnesses and they walk past kids swearing at them even attacking in some instances. This simply is not good enough and is a standard snapshot of Australia's mental health system.

We need to open up permanent housing facilities for those who simply can not function in everyday society. As good in theory, the idea of re integration into society is, it is simply not practical, and we believe is contributing to the degradation of the mental health of those it is trying to help. When they are walking the streets, our clients tell us they don't feel a part of society and the gap between them and society hurts them as they want to belong just like anyone else does but they simply cannot.

They are acutely aware of the fact they are not normal, and this adds to their paranoia, their anxieties. Even acts like taking their medications to help stabilize them they find to be incredibly confronting because normal people don't do it and why aren't they normal. Sadly this often leads to them not taking their medication and we don't need to highlight where that path leads.

FACAA believe we can bring the services to the patients at the facilities. We can take sporting activities to them at their facilities, we can take them dance and music lessons, art therapy classes and courses in internet safety so they can connect with people online hopefully behind the safety of the keyboard.

Our mental health system needs many more beds available at long term care facilities. We need to do a much better job for those who need long term mental health care than old age nursing homes or prison.

*3. FACA has an excellent program to help survivors of child abuse heal from their trauma. It is called the Phoenix program, the Phoenix program needs to get federal funding to help us break the cycle of child abuse one survivor at a time.*

The FACA Phoenix program is our child abuse survivors healing program designed to take victims and turn them into survivors and beyond. To do so we do not simply throw money at them but instead give them the skills they need to deal with their trauma and overcome their circumstances.

To do this we sponsor the client and their immediate non-offending family members to do various activities at pre-approved facilities and providers.

We use activities like martial arts, boxing, mixed martial arts, gymnastics and dance. Any activity that will have the client moving and working out in a positive manner in a nurturing environment to help them gain back their self-confidence, get back their inner strength, help them to find their self-belief, help them to realize that their abusers were wrong, that they are worthy of happiness, that they can overcome challenges, that they will achieve their goals.

In the case of martial arts for example the clients get goals set to achieve new ranks or belts, they must learn new moves which are self-defence based to get their new rank or belt. The client will be pushed to their physical limits and they will learn that they have no limits. Achieving these belts and learning these moves and pushing themselves to their new limits gives the clients a huge sense of confidence, self-achievement, self-belief. All of the things their abusers have stolen from them, the FACA Phoenix program gives them back.

Martial arts, boxing, dance all of these activities have been proven to help fight mental illnesses such as depression and anxiety. (V) We know our clients have these mental issues even if they are not diagnosed because to endure child abuse leaves you with some scars. So we use activities that we know will help them fight the associated mental issues that comes with surviving what they have endured.

*4. Drug addiction needs to be treated as a symptom of mental health and child abuse issues rather than a crime. It needs to be treated with compassion and trauma informed therapies if we are to get on top of the problem.*

As we have previously said one way that survivors of child abuse and anyone with mental health issues deals with the day to day life of someone dealing with mental health issues, is to self-medicate with drugs or alcohol. It is for this reason we believe it is unfair to call an addiction a choice as it is all too often not a choice but instead symptom of their mental health issues. We have several clients who have told us that when they were growing up, they never felt quite right, like they were never entirely whole until they found the correct drug that just clicked with them. Once they did, they just knew that this was what they needed in their lives.

This may sound illogical or wrong to someone who hasn't dealt with mental health issues however to them it is just like saying "I need to drink water" it's just part of who they are. There has been a lot of studies done to verify this theory of ours. One of these studies is "what came first the addiction or the mental illness" by a group called SANE Australia which says that drug addiction is clearly a symptom of mental illness and treating it as such is much more successful than seeing it as a crime and locking up the users. (VI)

There has also been a lot of studies done into treating drug addiction as a symptom of mental illness or as a disease in it's own right and how that is a much more effective way of treating the problem than treating the user as a criminal. One such study is Drug addiction is an illness not a crime by CRC Health an American health think tank that publishes papers on how to fight health problems. (VII) It discusses how treating the trauma that caused the mental health issues can significantly reduce the user's relapsing into drug addiction. There is an entire school of thought on treatment called "Dual diagnosis" that specializes in doing just that. Healing drug addicts by treating the mental health issues they have as opposed to calling them criminals and telling them their behaviour is wrong and they must stop it immediately.

FACAA believe that treating drug addiction correctly will significantly increase the number of child abuse cases and mental health cases being treated correctly rather than the addict being seen as a criminal. This will significantly reduce the number of people in our prison systems for drug addictions when they should have been treated as people with a disease. This will help stop the mental health crisis and significantly reduce the cost of housing them in prisons.

*5. School curriculums need to include awareness programs to prevent child abuse. This needs to start at kindergarten and needs to be much more than a one of lesson taught by an outsider. We need to teach body safety and body awareness to young kids and internet safety and anti-domestic violence programs to the older children.*

One of the other FACAA programs aimed at stopping child abuse is our educational reform program. Put simply we did not see that our children's school curriculum adequately addressed how to stop child abuse and domestic violence. As we have previously stated there is a direct link between child abuse and mental illness and if we can stop child abuse we can significantly reduce the instance of mental illness.

So with that in mind we believe that arming our children with the knowledge to stop child abuse will significantly reduce the instances of mental illness.

The knowledge we thought they needed varied depending upon age. For the younger kids we sent the schools a book package by Australian author Jayneen Sanders called "Body safety education" and "Some secrets should never be kept" (VII)

These books are a great way to teach children about body safety and to never keep secrets from mum and dad. Keeping secrets is one of the key tactics used by a child abuser to groom their victims and ensure they do not get caught. The book Body safety education is a great way to teach kids about using correct names of their body parts and always telling if adults are making them feel uncomfortable.

As children get older the concerning factor for them varies from being victims of child abusers and grooming to being in domestic violence situations. We at FACAA use domestic violence survivors to go into classrooms and talk directly to

older kids about domestic violence and how it has affected them as well as warning signs to look out for. The main message is that if their partner is violent with them even once then get out as the first time will not ever be the last time.

We use these methods to directly take aim at those who are vulnerable of being abused in various ways. The program is aimed at stopping abuse, which as we have previously established will also stop the impending mental health crisis. FACA believe that if this program was available in all schools we could significantly reduce the instances of abuse and therefore associated PTSD mental health issues. The program itself is very low cost as it uses volunteers to speak and school counsellors to read the books to entire classrooms.



## **Conclusion**

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The current mental health system is broken in the worst possible way. It is costing way more than it should because we are not taking it seriously. We at FACAA believe that by attacking one of the main sources of mental health problems in a pro-active and deliberate manner we will start to see some improved results in lowering the instances of and therefore the cost of the mental health system in Australia.

It is time we took a whole new approach to stopping the mental health crisis and that new approach involves seeing the root cause of the problems and treating that in new and unique ways. By using the FACAA Phoenix program to help stop child abuse you will be attacking the very core of the underlying problems that are causing mental health issues in Australia.



## **References**

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Direct interviews, emails and phone calls with FACAA members and clients who have endured court cases in the family court system recently. We spoke to over 25 clients and heard about their experiences with domestic violence, domestic homicide and seeking help in shelters.

(I) <https://kidshealth.org/en/parents/ptsd.html> “What is PTSD” by Shirin Hasan MD

(II) Australian institute of family studies – How many notifications of child abuse are made each year

<https://aifs.gov.au/cfca/publications/child-abuse-and-neglect-statistics>

(III) <https://aifs.gov.au/cfca/publications/prevalence-child-abuse-and-neglect> How many Australian children are being abused - CFCA Resource Sheet— April 2017 Australian institute of family studies.

(IV) <https://aifs.gov.au/cfca/publications/economic-costs-child-abuse-and-neglect> The economic costs of child abuse and neglect CFCA Resource Sheet— September 2018 Australian institute of family studies.

(V) <https://evolve-mma.com/blog/heres-how-martial-arts-cures-depression-and-anxiety/> , <https://www.psychologytoday.com/au/blog/creative-counseling/201601/should-everybody-be-kung-fu-fighting>  
The above are just 2 studies into how martial arts helps cure mental illness one by a martial arts gym and one by psychology today one of the largest psychology websites which has peer reviewed studies only.

(VI) <https://www.sane.org/mental-health-and-illness/facts-and-guides/drugs-and-mental-illness> - What came first the addiction or the mental illness by SANE Australia

(VII) [https://www.crchealth.com/addiction/drug-addiction-rehab/drug-addiction-rehab-2/home-2/addiction\\_is\\_illness/](https://www.crchealth.com/addiction/drug-addiction-rehab/drug-addiction-rehab-2/home-2/addiction_is_illness/)  
Drug addiction is an illness by CRC health an American health think tank.

(VIII) <https://www.amazon.com/Some-Secrets-Should-Never-Kept/dp/0987186019>

[https://www.amazon.com/Body-Safety-Education-parents-protecting/dp/0987186086/ref=sr\\_1\\_2?keywords=body+safety+jayneen+sanders&qid=1554384097&s=books&sr=1-2](https://www.amazon.com/Body-Safety-Education-parents-protecting/dp/0987186086/ref=sr_1_2?keywords=body+safety+jayneen+sanders&qid=1554384097&s=books&sr=1-2)

Amazon.com links to Jayneen Sanders books Some secrets should never be kept and Body Safety education.

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