



Advocacy for lasting change

ACRATH took its advocacy priorities to the nation's capital during its annual advocacy trip to Canberra the week of 15 August 2026, the second House sitting week of Parliament's Spring 2026 session. It was a fast-paced week of meetings and conversations, as ACRATH members and staff brought the organisation's priorities and insights directly to decision-makers' offices. All meetings were valuable, including time with Julie-Ann Campbell MP, Ged Kearney MP, Mark Dreyfus MP, Assistant Minister Peter Khalil, and Senator Paul Scarr.

The team headed to Canberra with the words of encouragement from Australian Anti-Slavery Commissioner Chris Evans fresh in their minds. Speaking at the ACRATH Gathering earlier in the year, Commissioner Evans reminded members: "Your presence and advocacy are keenly felt in Canberra." With a strong cross-section of ACRATH members and staff, new and experienced, representing communities from around Australia, the delegation brought a balanced and united voice.

Among those taking part were ACRATH President Sr Annette Arnold RSJ, Executive Officer Sr Sarah Puls SGS, Community Development Worker Carmel Shaw, SA member Ange Hart, Victorian member Marg Leahy, ACU placement student Trinity Jones, and Western Australian Regional Coordinator Theresa Hussey. Seasoned ACRATH representative Sr. Noelene Simmons, SM, also joined the delegation, reflecting on her 14th advocacy visit (noting that two visits were held online during COVID). "ACRATH is always well received by the members of Parliament. This year, there were positive reactions to most of the points we raised. We were also given helpful suggestions on how to progress some of our issues. The 2026 advocacy team comprised members from each of the Regional ACRATH groups. This added strength to our advocacy and highlighted ACRATH's awareness of and response to modern slavery nationally." Sr Noelene Simmons SM

ACRATH's advocacy priorities for the Canberra visit were developed through a collaborative effort involving members and staff reflecting on what we are seeing through our work and the priorities of our civil society partners.



Pictured: ACRATH advocacy arriving inside Parliament House Canberra on Day One. L - R: Sr Noelene Simmons SM, Marg Leahy, Sr Sarah Puls SGS, Carmel Shaw, Therese Hussey, Ange Hart and Trinity Jones.

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“Some of these priorities are issues we have visited before, such as establishing a National Compensation Scheme for victims and survivors of human trafficking, a cause ACRATH has championed for more than a decade alongside Anti-Slavery Australia and other civil society organisations,” Carmel Shaw said.

“Others are newer priorities, including securing access to Medicare for migrant workers participating in the Pacific Australia Labour Mobility (PALM) scheme. This has emerged from the experiences and feedback gathered by our migrant support worker, Carla Chung.”

The five priorities presented:

1. **Securing Commonwealth support for comprehensive training and screening tools** to help frontline healthcare workers identify and assist victims and survivors of modern slavery and human trafficking.
2. **Ensuring ongoing engagement and strong collaboration with civil society** to strengthen efforts to end modern slavery.
3. **Strengthening the Modern Slavery Act** by introducing targeted import bans on goods produced with forced labour, with a focus on high-risk products and supply chains.
4. **Establishing a National Compensation Scheme for victims and survivors of human trafficking**—a cause ACRATH has championed for more than a decade alongside Anti-Slavery Australia and other civil society groups.
5. **Securing access to Medicare for migrant workers participating in the Pacific Australia Labour Mobility (PALM) scheme.**

More detail here: [Advocacy 2026](#)

Progress in improving support, protection and access to justice for victims and survivors of human trafficking is the result of many years of persistent advocacy and collaboration. ACRATH remains committed to continuing this work.

The Canberra advocacy trip is an important opportunity for ACRATH to ensure those voices are heard where decisions are made and to continue building the relationships and momentum needed to create meaningful change for people vulnerable to, or experiencing, modern slavery and human trafficking.



*Pictured: Parliament House
Canberra L - R: Advocacy
Group Marg Leahy, Therese
Hussey, Trinity Jones, Sr
Annette Arnold RSJ, Sr Noelene
Simmons SM, Sr Sarah Puls
SGS and Ange Hart*

Unis embrace modern slavery education

Universities across Australia are playing their part in preventing modern slavery by participating in an innovative online training program. Educating for Change is a collaboration between ACRATH, Flinders University and Adelaide University with funding from the Australian Government.

The project consists of free learning modules covering an introduction to modern slavery, as well as specific modules for university, school, healthcare, legal and criminal justice systems, and social and community work settings.

A seventh module, Modern Slavery and Ethical Sustainability, [has recently been added](#), and all modules will remain available for the next two years.

ACRATH Community Development Project Coordinator Melissa Halliday, who is a member of the Educating for Change steering committee, said since commencing three years ago, the project had engaged with 194 staff across 34 universities.

In addition to participation from students and staff in the targeted disciplines, there has been direct engagement with international students and student-led wellbeing groups.

“Interestingly, the material was also embraced by university professional staff in non-student-facing roles,” Ms Halliday said.

“For example, procurement teams identified the relevance of modern slavery education to their work, while sustainability teams saw opportunities to connect modern slavery with broader sustainability priorities.”

The role of ethical decision-making in eliminating modern slavery was a key factor in the introduction of the seventh module, according to Flinders University academic Professor Marinella Marmo, who has published extensively on border criminology and human rights.

Also a member of the Educating for Change steering committee, Professor Marmo said modern slavery risks were embedded in many everyday goods and services including clothing, electronics, vehicles and renewable-energy technologies.

“This is our most ambitious and distinctive module to date,” she said.

“It offers a uniquely comprehensive approach, making clear connections between modern slavery, ethical sustainability and all United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, something rarely seen in existing educational resources.

“By adopting this inclusive approach, the module demonstrates that modern slavery is not an isolated issue, but an all-encompassing challenge requiring coordinated social, economic, environmental and organisational responses.”

“Understanding these connections equips students and professionals to recognise how their decisions can either perpetuate exploitation or contribute to more ethical, sustainable and socially responsible organisations,” Professor Marmo said.

“These learnings can translate into stronger procurement policies, better supplier scrutiny, meaningful human rights due diligence and purchasing decisions that consider people as well as price.

“Over time, this can help businesses and organisations prevent exploitation across their operations and supply chains.”

Dr Nerida Chazal, a Senior Lecturer in Criminology and Criminal Justice at Adelaide University, said most people she speaks to are shocked to learn that modern slavery still happens, and that it happens in Australia.

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Also a member of the steering committee, Dr Chazal said the increasing complexity of global supply chains meant that many of the products purchased and used by Australians carry the risk of modern slavery and brought the problem “right into our homes”.

As for the occurrence of modern slavery in Australia, she said it was “a very hidden crime”.

“The Australian Institute of Criminology has found that only one in five victims of modern slavery in Australia are identified,” Dr Chazal said.

“This shows that modern slavery is happening in Australia, but that it’s often hidden in plain sight.”

Dr Chazal said university students, both domestic and international, were at heightened risk of modern slavery, hence the importance of training them to recognise exploitation and help protect vulnerable students. The other benefit was preparing them to identify modern slavery when they enter frontline services after graduating.

“Medical and healthcare professionals, law and criminal justice workers, social workers, and educators often encounter modern slavery survivors or those at risk of modern slavery, yet they are often unaware of what modern slavery looks like and how to appropriately respond,” she said.

“Educating students to recognise modern slavery before they enter these workplaces amplifies the impact of training by reaching more people at an early stage of their career, meaning training will have a huge impact on improving responses to modern slavery in the future as thousands of trained students enter the workforce.”

Feedback from university staff and students has been positive. Lin Stevenson, Senior Manager, Sustainability at RMIT, described the “high quality, relevant learning resources” as “an amazing asset” and said they provided consistency across the sector. Alison Smith, Team Leader, International Student Advice, Student Academic Success University of Tasmania, said identifying and responding to modern slavery was particularly important in the international student context.

“We have a duty of care to our students, and all student-facing staff should be equipped with the knowledge on how to tackle this issue,” she said.

“As a community we have the power to make change, and these modules are a great step in the right direction.”

A current student with frontline experience as a law enforcement professional said the course expanded his knowledge and offered valuable insights and practical information.

“Before this course, I was unaware modern slavery existed in Australia,” he said.

While originally aimed at university staff and students, the modules are accessible to anyone who wants to upskill and are available on the ACRATH website: <https://acrath.org.au/resources/educating-for-change/>

By [Jenny Brinkworth](#)
Guest Contributor

Pictured L - R: Professor Marinella Marmo: Academic - Flinders University, Dr Nerida Chazal: Senior Lecturer in Criminology and Criminal Justice - Adelaide University, Melissa Halliday: ACRATH Community Development Project Coordinator and Christine Carolan: Senior Project Fellow - Flinders University



Empowering Communities to Tackle Forced Marriage



In 2013, after years of advocacy by ACRATH and others, legislation criminalising forced marriage was introduced in Australia, a significant milestone within modern slavery prevention in Australia. Despite this progress, forced marriage remains one of the fastest-growing forms of modern slavery in the country. Recent data from the Australian Federal Police (AFP) and the Australian Centre to Counter Child Exploitation (ACCCE) highlights a concerning trend: referrals related to forced marriage rose by almost 30%.

ACRATH has been at the forefront of efforts to address and prevent forced marriage as part of its broader mission to eliminate modern slavery by educating frontline workers and raising awareness for schools, the community, churches and universities. Also, through continued government advocacy and programs led by individuals with lived experience, such as the victim/survivors in the ACRATH Companionship Program.

Understanding forced marriage in Australia, its definition, why it happens, the impacts, and the surrounding legal and cultural dimensions requires ongoing education and training for communities and professionals.

ACRATH has recently partnered with *Speak Now*, a national initiative by Anti-Slavery Australia (ASA) and *My Blue Sky* (University of Technology Sydney), through the Learning Partner Program, to continue its commitment to raising awareness of forced marriage by training its presenters.

"This Program collaborates with frontline workers, aiming to support them to start conversations with their communities and clients based on forced marriage. We customise our approach to each Partner organisation and to the communities that they serve. Our workshops are grounded in research and led by the voices of lived experience." Emma Burn - Anti Slavery Australia

Through this partnership, ACRATH now has trained volunteer presenters to deliver forced marriage presentations and workshops across Australia. These sessions are tailored for school staff and teachers, parish and community leaders and groups, clergy, and tertiary education staff and unpack the definition, causes, impacts, and legal and cultural aspects of forced marriage in Australia. Participants are equipped to recognise indicators and promote human rights within their communities. The workshops foster open, non-judgmental, and safe dialogue within local communities. "Ongoing education for our own ACRATH members is essential. It empowers facilitators to address sensitive topics and deliver culturally relevant human rights education to the communities that reach out for support" Melissa Halliday, ACRATH Project Coordinator.

NSW Anti-Slavery Commissioner James Cockayne and the Australian Federal Police's Helen Schneider have both called for mandated education recently and improved training for frontline workers to help identify the signs of forced marriage early.

"We know that community engagement is a key pathway to preventing forced marriages, which remain the most reported form of modern slavery in Australia. Through helping people to understand what rights-based decision-making around marriage looks like, and where they can seek support if needed, people's lives can change for the better." Emma Burn, Anti-Slavery Australia.

Emma shared that in a community workshop for parents, all participants who were surveyed anonymously after the event responded positively. One participant shared: "...both (my) daughter and son 'never had a say' in their marriages. If I could go back, I would give my children autonomy".

To book a presentation, contact awareness@acrath.org.au and/or learn more.

Support Services: Anyone in or at risk of forced marriage can access free, confidential legal and support services through Anti-Slavery Australia's *My Blue Sky* initiative.

Agriculture & Food: Show of Support

After attending the Western Australia (WA) Modern Slavery Network's High Tea in April 2026, Mr Lachlan Hunter MLA, Shadow Minister for Agriculture and Food, invited ACRATH Western Australia Regional Coordinator Therse Hussey and ACRATH member Heather McNaught to visit Parliament House in WA to discuss how he could support advocacy and raise awareness among fellow parliamentarians in Western Australia.

Representing the Central Wheatbelt, Mr Hunter was particularly interested in the challenges faced by visiting migrant workers in regional areas, with discussion highlighting the urgent need for an independent, licensed labour hire service in WA, as well as the vulnerabilities in accommodation and healthcare that seasonal workers regularly encounter, issues ACRATH took to Parliament House in Canberra during this year's advocacy week. Mr Hunter also supported strengthening the Modern Slavery Act to require due diligence and introduce penalties for non-compliance. He offered to connect ACRATH with the WA Parliament's procurement team to help ensure parliamentary supplies are free from slave labour and modern slavery practices.

Mr Hunter's genuine concern and proactive offers to connect ACRATH with other Members of Parliament committed to real change were greatly appreciated. ACRATH looks forward to working together to address these crucial issues and create a positive impact.



Pictured L - R: ACRATH Regional Coordinator Therse Hussey, Mr Lachlan Hunter MLA: Shadow Minister for

Training Opportunity April 2027



The Pacific Connections Training Workshop will provide an opportunity to learn how to identify and respond to human trafficking and modern slavery in the Pacific region, to connect with others, and to share insights, challenges, and ideas.

Dates: 11-19 April 2027

Location: Mission Bay, Auckland, Aotearoa New Zealand.

Participants from Pacific Island Nations and Timor-Leste are invited to **apply** if you are interested in learning more and can commit to ongoing involvement and networking. Download the flyer **here**.

Please note: Participants from Australia and New Zealand will soon be invited to apply for the Talitha Kum Oceania Gathering 15-19 April.

"ACRATH is always well received by the members of Parliament. This year, there were positive reactions to most of the points we raised. We were also given helpful suggestions on how to progress some of our issues."

**Sr Noelene Simmons SM - Reflecting on her 14th advocacy visit
ACRATH COMMUNICATIONS & ADVOCACY**

- Companionship to victim/survivors of human trafficking and modern slavery,
- Programs to train and assist frontline workers to recognise the signs of modern slavery.
- Assisting migrant workers to understand their rights and protect themselves from exploitation,
- Advocacy efforts focused on achieving stronger legislation, and
- Awareness and community engagement fostered across Australia and the Pacific.

This year marked the third year of the fundraising pilot of teams recruited for Run Melbourne, resulting in \$12,500 raised through the coordination of members, schools, and friends who participated under the ACRATH banner. Additional donations included \$3,000 from [Genezzano FJ](#) through a benefit concert, and \$13,500 from Newman College, raised during a recent community service dinner. The efforts of communities in raising awareness and funds for the cause have been highly valued.

The Archbishop's Charitable Fund enabled the relocation of the national office. The Sisters of the Good Samaritan have made significant contributions by funding support for migrant workers. With a dedicated membership of 123 individuals across Australia, modern slavery prevention and awareness-raising remain at the forefront in schools, community groups, and parliamentary discussions.

Modern Slavery in the News

Trump tariffs expose a gap in Australian modern slavery laws

<https://www.theage.com.au/interactive/2026/palmone/>

[Every morning, a grandmother wakes 11 children. Their parents are thousands of kilometres away
https://theconversation.com/we-are-not-in-a-safe-place-women-reveal-being-abused-while-producing-the-food-australians-eat-289617](https://theconversation.com/we-are-not-in-a-safe-place-women-reveal-being-abused-while-producing-the-food-australians-eat-289617)

Vulnerable workers bearing the cost of providing Australia with cheap food - ABC News

Talitha Kum Annual Report: <https://www.talithakum.info/en/report2025/>

Teams Run to Stop Modern Slavery



On Sunday, July 19th, Melbourne turned on the sunshine for teams of enthusiastic runners and walkers who came together to champion ACRATH's mission to eliminate human trafficking and modern slavery. Their energy and dedication were on full display at the ASICS Run Melbourne 2026 Charity Fundraiser conducted through the streets and parks of the City of Melbourne.

Thousands of runners participated to raise money for 417 different charities. This year ACRATH fielded five teams: ACRATH-Members and Friends, ACRATH-Padua College (Mornington), ACRATH-Catholic Ladies College (Eltham), ACRATH-Sacred Heart Girls College (Oakleigh) and ACRATH-Ave Maria College (Aberfeldie).

Thanks to the generosity of everyone involved and their supporters, the event has raised \$12,500 to date, an amazing effort! Special mentions go to ACRATH members Claire Griffin CSB and Christine Carolan, who completed the 5.5km walk and together raised over \$5,000 for ACRATH and to members Erin and Janet, who coordinated the teams.

A highlight on the day was Charlee, School Captain from Padua College, who took part for the third consecutive year. She reflected, "Learning about the exploitation of children and the prevalence of human trafficking and modern slavery in Australia was confronting. I was shocked by how many people still live in these conditions and how vulnerable workers and families are to exploitation." Also noteworthy was the impressive performance of Rose Jarvis from CLC, who won the women's 5.5 km event.

There's still time to contribute; ACRATH's fundraising page will remain open for the next month at <https://runmelbourne26.grassrootz.com/acrath>.

Thank you to every runner, supporter, and volunteer who made this year's event such a success.

Your generosity is making a real difference in the fight against human trafficking.

ACRATH needs core business funding and additional funding for special projects.

Please consider a regular donation to ACRATH so that we can plan ahead. Thanks.

<https://www.trybooking.com/au/donate/acrath>
or <https://acrath.org.au/donate>

Donations of \$2 or more are tax deductible

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