



ACT  
Mental Health  
Consumer Network

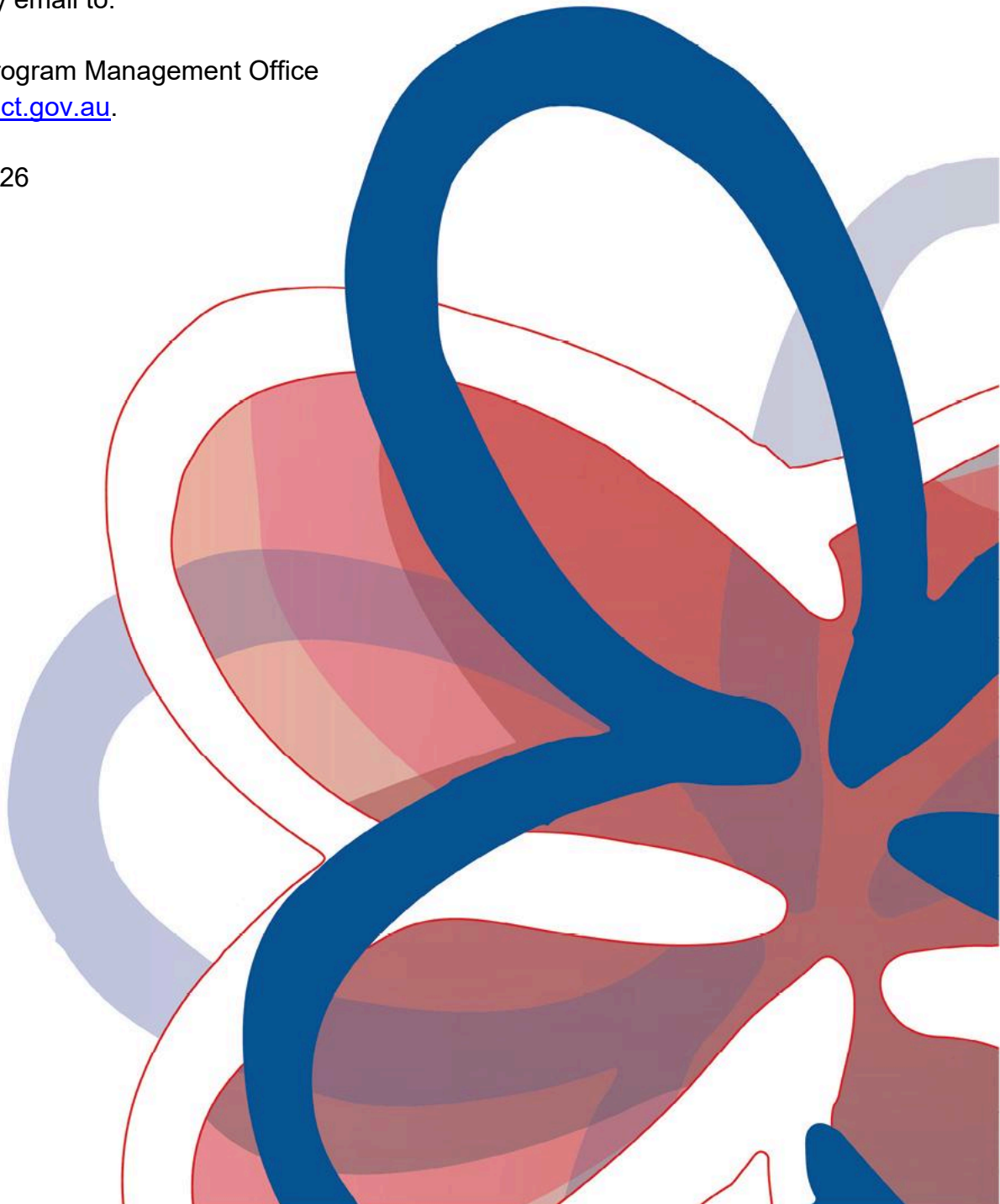
ACT Mental Health Consumer Network Inc.  
The Griffin Centre, Level 2, Room 11  
20 Genge Street, Canberra City, 2601  
G.P.O Box 836, Canberra, ACT, 2601  
Phone: 02 6230 5796  
Email: [research@actmhc.org.au](mailto:research@actmhc.org.au)  
Website: [www.actmhc.org.au](http://www.actmhc.org.au)

**Submission: Review of Discussion paper: Reforms to support the operation of the National Firearms Register and related matters**

Submitted by email to:

ACT NFR Program Management Office  
[ACTNFR@act.gov.au](mailto:ACTNFR@act.gov.au).

20 March 2026



## **Submission: Review of Discussion paper: Reforms to support the operation of the National Firearms Register and related matters**

This submission has been prepared by the ACT Mental Health Consumer Network (the Network) in response to the invitation from the Justice and Community Safety Directorate (JACS).

### **Acknowledgment of Country**

We wish to acknowledge the Ngunnawal people as traditional custodians of the land upon which we sit and recognise any other people or families with connection to the lands of the ACT and region. We wish to acknowledge and respect their continuing culture and the contribution they make to the life of this city and this region. We would also like to acknowledge and welcome other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people may be reading this submission, and we recognise the ongoing contributions of all Indigenous peoples to ACT society and Australia more broadly.

### **Recognition of lived experience**

We wish to recognise people with mental health illness whose resilience and work contributes to creating a better mental health system for the Australian Capital Territory (ACT) and a more compassionate society for all.

### **The ACT Mental Health Consumer Network**

The Network is a consumer-led peak organisation representing the interests of mental health consumers in the ACT in policy and decision-making forums. The Network is committed to social justice and the inclusion of people with experience of mental illness. Run by consumers for consumers, our aim is to advocate for services and supports for mental health consumers which better enable them to live fuller, healthier and more valued lives in the community.

A meeting of the Policy Reference Group was held in relation to the Discussion Paper: Reforms to support the operation of the National Firearms Register and related matters (the Discussion Paper). This submission incorporates both verbal and written feedback from consumers.

### **General comments.**

The Network welcomes this opportunity to contribute to the Discussion Paper. Upon review, consumers highlighted the following issues regarding different areas. This submission provides feedback relevant to mental health consumers' concerns that might not all be direct answers to the consultation questions outlined in the Discussion Paper.

Consumers outlined concerns in relation to the following areas:

- Privacy, data security and information use;
- Mental health declarations and transparency of decision making;
- Accessibility, communication and equity;
- Exclusion, disqualification and proportionality; and
- Self surrender, help seeking behaviour and engagement pathways.

Each of these matters is discussed below, followed by a list of recommendations provided by consumers.

### *Privacy, data security and information use*

This response summarises general consumer feedback that applies across several processes, including firearm licence applications, surrender and reapplication. Consumers noted that the move to a National Firearms Register (NFR) will broaden access to personal information across multiple users, such as law enforcement, licensed dealers, and potentially clubs and ranges. They highlighted a lack of clarity about the different levels of access for each user group and how these will be monitored and controlled. Consumers also raised concerns about data breaches or hacking within a digital system and reported insufficient information about how sensitive data, including mental health related information, will be stored and protected. They further noted that increased information sharing, particularly where third-party input from health professionals or trusted persons may be involved, raises additional uncertainties about how personal information is handled.

Consumers suggested clearly defining and communicating access levels for all NFR users, ensuring that access protocols are well defined, monitored and managed, and providing transparent information on how personal data is managed. They also recommended explaining whether and how third-party information may be used and ensuring that appropriate safeguards are in place.

### *Mental health declarations and transparency of decision making*

Consumers raised general concerns relating to firearm licence applications, surrender and reapplication processes. They expressed that their safety, autonomy and privacy could be negatively affected under current arrangements. Application processes are unclear about the consequences of indicating mental health related concerns, and there is limited transparency regarding how mental health disclosures are assessed, what criteria are used to determine suitability, and how third-party information is considered. It is also unclear who informs the registrar about a

person's suitability and what evidence is required. Uncertainty remains about whether, and under what circumstances, health professionals such as GPs or psychiatrists may contribute information to decision making processes.

Consumers suggested providing clear and accessible information on the implications of mental health disclosures and how decisions are made, as well as clarifying what evidence is required in suitability assessments. They also recommended improving transparency in decision making processes and clarifying the role, if any, of health professionals and third parties in providing information, including the limits of their involvement.

#### *Accessibility, communication and equity*

Consumers highlighted general concerns across firearm licence applications, surrender and reapplication processes. They noted limited availability of plain language information explaining rights, obligations and processes, and that existing information is not easily accessible or user friendly. They also identified a lack of translated materials for culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) communities and noted that self declaration processes may not be clearly understood as voluntary. As a result, consumers may misunderstand their rights and obligations, CALD consumers may feel pressured to disclose information due to perceived authority dynamics, and limited accessible information may increase anxiety and reduce confidence when navigating the system.

Consumers suggested creating plain language resources and providing translated materials for key community languages. They also recommended clearly communicating when disclosure is voluntary and improving accessibility through user friendly formats.

#### *Exclusion, disqualification and proportionality*

This response addresses the third question on page 14 of the Discussion Paper and related considerations. Consumers felt that a 10 year exclusion period is too long. They observed that current approaches do not sufficiently differentiate between types of prior offences and do not adequately recognise rehabilitation or behavioural change over time. Fixed exclusion periods may also fail to account for the episodic nature of some mental health conditions and may not reflect an individual's current circumstances or recovery. Consumers noted that people with past mental health issues may be disproportionately affected by extended exclusion, and that rigid exclusion policies may discourage engagement with the system or help seeking behaviour. Individuals who experience temporary periods of mental health

difficulties may face prolonged consequences despite recovery.

Consumers suggested introducing more flexible and proportionate exclusion periods that consider the nature of prior offences and evidence of behavioural change. They recommended reviewing approaches used in other jurisdictions to inform balanced policy settings. They emphasised the need for policies to recognise the intermittent nature of some mental health conditions and avoid long term penalties where individuals have recovered.

### *Self surrender, help seeking behaviour and engagement pathways*

This response addresses the questions on page 15 of the Discussion Paper. Consumers supported amending the ACT firearms legislation to allow temporary surrender of licences or firearms. However, they expressed concern that surrendering firearms may lead to perceived or actual long term negative consequences, such as difficulty regaining a licence. They noted that people may be required to disclose reasons for surrender, which can be sensitive, and that current processes may rely heavily on police involvement. People from marginalised groups, including people with lived experience of mental health difficulties, may not feel safe or comfortable engaging with police. While licensed dealers may provide an alternative pathway, this option may create additional burden or unclear responsibilities. Consumers also highlighted that individuals may not always recognise when they are no longer capable of safely possessing firearms, particularly during periods of mental health difficulties, and that there is limited clarity about whether trusted persons, such as family members or health professionals, can play a role in initiating temporary surrender. They also recognised competing considerations, including whether using dealers may reduce stigma versus the potential benefits of police awareness for future risk management.

Consumers suggested allowing voluntary, temporary surrender of firearms without negative effects on licence renewal where no additional concerns are present, and minimising or reconsidering requirements to disclose reasons for surrender. They recommended providing multiple surrender pathways, including police and licensed dealers, with reinstatement processes aligned with initial application criteria. Consumers also suggested adding informal or advance safety planning approaches, enabling individuals to identify early warning signs and involve trusted persons in decision making where appropriate. They further suggested considering whether health professionals may have a role in raising concerns about a person's capacity, with appropriate safeguards. They also emphasised that the return of firearms should be based on reassessment, such as by a mental health professional where

appropriate, and should not be punitive when the individual has recovered.

## **Recommendations**

### Recommendation 1:

Clearly define and communicate access levels for all users of the National Firearms Register, including monitoring and management of access.

### Recommendation 2:

Provide transparent information on how personal data, including mental health information, will be stored, protected and managed.

### Recommendation 3:

Explain whether and how third party information (e.g. from health professionals or trusted persons) may be used and ensure appropriate safeguards are in place.

### Recommendation 4:

Provide clear and accessible guidance on the implications of mental health disclosures, including how decisions about suitability are made.

### Recommendation 5:

Clarify what evidence is required in suitability assessments and how it is considered in decision making.

### Recommendation 6:

Clarify the role, if any, of health professionals and third parties in providing information, including limits on their involvement.

### Recommendation 7:

Develop plain language resources that clearly explain processes, rights and obligations.

### Recommendation 8:

Provide translated materials in key community languages and clearly communicate when disclosure is voluntary.

### Recommendation 9:

Introduce flexible and proportionate exclusion periods that consider the nature of prior offences and evidence of behavioural change.

### Recommendation 10:

Ensure policies recognise the episodic nature of some mental health conditions and

avoid long term penalties where individuals have recovered.

Recommendation 11:

Allow voluntary, temporary surrender of firearms without negative effects on licence renewal where no additional concerns are present.

Recommendation 12:

Minimise or reconsider requirements for people to disclose reasons for surrender recognising that this information may be sensitive.

Recommendation 13:

Provide multiple surrender pathways, including police and licensed dealers, with reinstatement processes aligned with initial application criteria.

Recommendation 14:

Add informal or advance safety planning approaches, enabling people to identify early warning signs and involve trusted persons in decision making where appropriate.

Recommendation 15:

Consider whether health professionals may have a role in raising concerns about an individual's capacity, with appropriate safeguards.

Recommendation 16:

Ensure that the return of firearms is based on reassessment, such as by a mental health professional where appropriate, and is not punitive when the individual has recovered.

**Conclusion**

Consumers welcomed the opportunity to provide feedback on this Discussion Paper. The recommendations aim to strengthen the proposed reforms by improving clarity, transparency, accessibility and proportionality, while ensuring that the system supports both public safety and the wellbeing of individuals experiencing mental health difficulties. Consumers emphasised the importance of a balanced approach that encourages early help seeking, protects privacy, and avoids unintended or disproportionate consequences. The Network looks forward to continued engagement in the development of firearms legislation reform that is both effective and responsive to consumer needs.