

Advocates say today's anniversary marks 6 years of failures: Universities must be held to account for rape on campus.

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6 years on from the launch of the landmark *Change the Course* report into sexual violence in university contexts, advocates say the government must step in for student safety.

End Rape on Campus Australia and Fair Agenda denounced universities' delivery of six years of press releases and lip-service; without matching them with the meaningful change students need.

"Just last week a Senate Inquiry highlighted disturbing university decisions and actions that are putting students at risk, and compounding the trauma of students who have been raped." said Renee Carr, Executive Director of Fair Agenda.

"If only the sentiments universities tout in their press releases were actually reflected in their actions, we might see some improvements to student safety and wellbeing." said Sharna Bremner, Director of End Rape on Campus Australia. "But it seems like their commitment to students isn't nearly as strong as their commitment to their reputation."

6 years ago the Sex Discrimination Commissioner Kate Jenkins [launched](#) the *Change the Course* report. At the launch, she called for universities to 'do more to ensure everyone has access to a safe university education', stating that "students have done their part, and universities now owe them swift action to address these issues. It cannot wait." The Report laid out 9 recommendations for change.

In response, Universities Australia [told media](#): "We have listened - and we will act" and noted their 'resolve to ensure our students study and live in a safe and respectful culture, and to ensure that students who experience and report unacceptable behaviour receive the right response of compassion, care and support.'

Safety advocates say the blatant inadequacy of university actions is reflected in the fact that 275 students are sexually assaulted in university contexts every week.

They also called out universities' failure to even deliver on the 9 basic [recommendations](#) made by the AHRC six years ago in the *Change the Course* report, including:

- Developing a plan for addressing the drivers of sexual violence that provides students and staff with education.
 - Just last week, it was revealed that Universities Australia had accepted \$1.5 million in tax-payer money for an anti-sexual violence campaign they then decided not to deliver.
- Ensuring staff and students know about support services and reporting processes.
 - The National Student Safety Survey data from 2021 showed that 19.6% of students who had been assaulted did not know who to formally report or complain to; 17.3% who did not know where to go to file a report.

- Student safety data showed that in the 2015/16 period of Change the Course Report, 15% of students who had been sexually assaulted reported to their university. Whereas the latest NSSS data showed that this number had actually gotten *worse*, at just 5.6% during 2021.
- That universities ensure the student representatives most likely to receive disclosures receive training from experts in responding to those disclosures
 - Reports from student representatives suggest that at some universities, this training has been organised by the student representatives themselves, not the university.
- That universities engage an independent body to conduct a national student safety survey at three year intervals (which would mean a third survey due next year).
 - Despite UA's commitment to action these recommendations back in 2017, last week when questioned by a Senate Inquiry as to their commitment in the area, Universities Australia said they had not yet decided.
- What's more, advocates are unable to see whether other recommendations have been properly implemented - because multiple universities have failed to follow through on the recommendation to publicly report on their progress.

"The Government provides the university industry with *billions* of dollars every year. We need them to be held to account - not be left to their own devices to actively compound the trauma of students who have been subjected to rape in their community, sometimes even by their staff." added Ms Carr.

"Based on the latest data; 85,800 students have been sexually assaulted in the six years since universities claimed they would take 'strong and swift action'." added Ms Bremner.

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Further info: taskforce

Fair Agenda & End Rape on Campus Australia are calling for the Albanese government to urgently intervene and implement an independent oversight and accountability mechanism with a mandate to address sexual violence at universities that:

- Is independent of universities and residences;
- Is led by experts in sexual violence who can assess the quality of university responses and prevention programs;
- Has the authority to compel institutional transparency around incidents and responses; and
- Is able to implement sanctions when universities and residences fail to meet basic standards.

Further info: Key student safety data since 2017

The 2017 Change the Course report detailing the 2016 survey data revealed:

- 1.6% of students were sexually assaulted in a university setting on at least one occasion in 2015 or 2016 (2.4% of women). There were approximately 1.4 million students on Australian university campuses in 2015/16, which means there were 22,400 sexual assaults in university settings in that period, which equates to 215 per week.
- Of students sexually assaulted in a university setting, 87% did not make a formal report or complaint, and 79% did not seek support or assistance from their university in following the most recent incident.
- 62% of students did not know where they could go to formally report or make a complaint about sexual assault.

The 2021 National Student Safety Survey results showed that:

- 1.1% of the 1.3 million students studying at Australian universities had been sexually assaulted within a university context within the previous 12 months. This equates to 14,300 sexual assaults per year, or 275 sexual assaults each week, every week.
 - One in twenty students had been sexually assaulted in an Australian university context since starting university.
 - 16% of students living in student accommodation or residences had experienced sexual assault in a university context in the previous 12 months.
- Students are not aware of, or do not have confidence in, university reporting processes and support services
 - More than half of all students know little or nothing about how to report an incident of sexual harassment (51%) or sexual assault (53%) to their university.
 - 74.5% of students who were sexually assaulted did not seek support or assistance from their university.
 - Only 5.6% of students who were sexually assaulted made a formal complaint to their university.
 - Of those who reported sexual assault in 2021, only 29.7% were satisfied with the university's process. For those reporting sexual harassment, this went up to 41.3%.

At the time the 2021 survey was conducted, 58.5% of students who participated were taking all of their classes online, with just one in three taking some or all of their classes on campus. It is therefore likely that the prevalence rates of sexual assault in a university context in the previous 12 months were significantly impacted and would likely be much higher when students returned to campus full-time.