

Main Submission

Naomi Karvinen 03.02.2024 (revised)

This personal submission is in relation to the draft report entitled Future Foundations for Giving, whereby the Australian Productivity Commission (APC) has provided research and advice to the Government.

I work as a psychologist in clinical practice in WA and I see the beneficial aspects of faith and religion (including Christianity and private Christian schooling) on a day-to-day basis in regard to my clients and in the way they cope and live their lives.

Faith / religiosity are well known in the literature to be a significant protective factor for suicide attempts (Burshtein S, et al., 2016 & Lawrence et al., 2016), which is what I have observed in my clinical experience as a private practice psychologist over the past 13 years.

Clients with religious beliefs, although depressed at times and experiencing suicidal thoughts and feelings, often report that they would not consider harming themselves due to their faith and religious convictions. Faith / Religiosity are known to enhance people's sense of hope, belongingness, social reciprocity, and resilience, among other things.

Thus, it is very disturbing to hear that the APC does not see a case for additional government support for the practice of religion through the DGR system, based on the first principle, that there must be community-wide benefits. This reflects a bias against religious institutions (it ignores the benefits of faith) and partly adopts the views of anti-religious groups.

It is very troubling that Christian institutions are being subject to such blatant prejudice and discrimination and that the benefits of faith and Christianity are being totally ignored.

The removal of the advancement of education and school building funds is a direct attack on Christian and faith-based education. The APC Overview says: "The Commission's view is that converting a tax-deductible donation into a private benefit is, in principle, a substantial risk for primary and secondary education, religious education, and other forms of informal education, including school building funds". The target is private Christian and faith-based education. The removal of school building funds from DGR status will significantly affect school building programs.

The changes will also expose small religious charities to more paperwork which may cause some to close. It will expose all such bodies to the ACNC removing their governing bodies and replacing them with its own choice of board members. This, of course, enables the government to take control of small charities to the deepest level, opening the way for the State to control religious charities.

I sincerely hope that the recommendations of the APC will not be heeded and that the benefits of faith and religion (including Christianity) are duly recognised and respected. It is disturbing to see the encroachment of governments on religious freedom.

References

Burshtein, S., Dohrenwend, B. P., Levav, I., Werbeloff, N., Davidson, M., & Weiser, M. (2016). Religiosity as a protective factor against suicidal behaviour. *Acta psychiatrica Scandinavica*, *133*(6), 481–488. <https://doi.org/10.1111/acps.12555>

Lawrence, R. E., Oquendo, M. A., & Stanley, B. (2016). Religion and Suicide Risk: A Systematic Review. *Archives of suicide research : official journal of the International Academy for Suicide Research*, *20*(1), 1–21. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13811118.2015.1004494>