

MEDIA RELEASE

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Courage to Care tells Royal Commission: education must be the foundation of Australia's response to antisemitism

For the past three years, as incidents of antisemitism have skyrocketed, Courage to Care volunteers have continued walking into classrooms across Australia to deliver a message of tolerance, respect and the courage to stand up against hatred.

For more than 30 years, volunteers, many of them Holocaust Survivors or their descendants, have delivered anti-discrimination Upstander education to young people. But the past three years have tested that commitment like never before, with volunteers continuing to show up despite the mounting personal toll of a sustained rise in antisemitism.

Courage to Care Victoria CEO Mike Zervos OAM told the Royal Commission into Antisemitism and Social Cohesion today that, despite the fear, anxiety and hate that volunteers have had to face personally, this sustained commitment sits at the heart of the case for placing education at the foundation of Australia's response to antisemitism.

More than 180 volunteers, the majority from the Jewish community, visit primary and secondary schools each week to educate students on the Pyramid of Hate, which shows how hatred escalates from stereotyping to violence. On 14 December 2025, that escalation reached its most extreme point in Australia's recorded history, when 15 people were murdered in a terrorist attack on a Hanukkah celebration at Bondi Beach.

Mr Zervos's evidence points to Australia having now reached the violence tier of that pyramid and argues that action is required to interrupt the trajectory before it advances further. It supports a submission lodged by Courage to Care Australia Ltd, pointing to a marked decline in social cohesion across Australia over the same period, and calling for sustained federal investment in anti-discrimination education.

Courage to Care is an independent not-for-profit organisation that has reached more than 500,000 students with its free antidiscrimination Upstander Programs for primary and secondary schools.

Grounded in universal values of respect, empathy, fairness and active citizenship, its curriculum-aligned Upstander Programs are designed to build resilience against all forms of racism and discrimination across school communities.

At the same time, they directly and explicitly address antisemitism through the lived testimony of Holocaust Survivor Speakers, whose personal accounts bring history into the present and give students a human face for the consequences of hatred and indifference.

Mr Zervos said:

"This is the reason Upstander Programs work. When a student sits with a Holocaust Survivor, not a historical figure but a person in the room who has a name and a story and grandchildren, the

antisemitic attitudes formed in ignorance and isolation meet something they cannot easily survive: a human being."

Evaluations show more than 90 per cent of students demonstrate increased knowledge of bystander and Upstander concepts, and 93 per cent of teachers say they would recommend the program to a peer.

Demand to reach younger students is growing rapidly, as schools seek earlier intervention to prevent prejudiced attitudes becoming entrenched, with bookings increasing by more than 200 per cent since 2023.

Digital lesson plans, launched in 2024, have reached more than 100,000 students across 303 schools in under two years, taking steps to close the equity gap for regional, rural and CALD communities that face-to-face programs cannot reach.

Courage to Care's aim is to *create a generation of Upstanders*, and the vision is simple: every teacher, school and student in Australia should have access to antidiscrimination Upstander education, and their submission set out three recommendations for the Commission's consideration:

1. Sustained federal funding for evidence-based anti-discrimination education, framed as social cohesion infrastructure rather than short-term project grants;
2. Structured, accredited professional development to build teacher capability across the system; and
3. Recognition of community organisations such as Courage to Care as long-term delivery partners, with multi-year funding and capacity-building support.

Mr Zervos said the case for investment was as much about prevention as it was about response.

"Antisemitism is not a Jewish problem. The fear experienced by Jewish families, and the growing normalisation of antisemitism, are symptoms of a broader challenge to Australia's social cohesion and values. Antidiscrimination education is not a niche response to one community's concerns; it is a preventative social cohesion strategy that benefits all Australians."

Mr Zervos, who is not Jewish himself, said his own family's history shaped his commitment to the cause:

"I am not Jewish. I am a Greek Orthodox Christian, and I am CEO of an organisation with deep roots in the Jewish community. My own grandfather had to flee Kalgoorlie in 1915 because of who he was. Prejudice is not an abstract concept to me. It affects real people and real families, and it can leave scars that last for generations."

Mr Zervos said record levels of antisemitism have persisted in Australia despite significant government investment in security and incident response. The architecture of a national response is being built, he said, but what it needs now is the foundation, and that foundation is education.

The full submission was lodged with the Royal Commission by Courage to Care Australia Ltd on 8 May 2026.



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Background: [Courage to Care](#)

Courage to Care Australia Ltd is the national umbrella body for independent not-for-profit organisation Courage to Care, founded in 1992 as an initiative of B'nai B'rith, the world's oldest Jewish service organisation. Over more than 33 years, it has grown into Australia's largest provider of evidence-based Upstander and foundational anti-discrimination education.

An Upstander is someone who chooses to act, safely and effectively, when they witness discrimination or hatred, rather than remaining a bystander. This behavioural shift sits at the heart of Courage to Care's work, building the values, language and practical skills young people need to recognise and respond to discrimination before prejudiced attitudes become entrenched.

More than 180 volunteers, the majority from the Jewish community and many of them of Holocaust Survivors or their descendants, deliver Upstander Programs free of charge to government, Catholic and independent schools nationally, reaching more than 500,000 students over 33 years.

Courage to Care is a separate legal entity from B'nai B'rith, with its own vision, mission, values and DGR status. While founded within the Jewish community, its mission is universal: to educate young people to recognise and challenge discrimination in all its forms. Programs are proudly apolitical, curriculum-aligned, and contain no religious or political content.

Courage to Care Australia Ltd submission to the Royal Commission into Antisemitism and Social Cohesion was lodged on 8 May 2026 – an excerpt is available at courageforcare.org.au

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