



PRESS RELEASE

Universities leave sexual violence off national conference agenda

Fair Agenda, End Rape on Campus Australia, National Union of Students and The Hunting Ground Australia Project have expressed dismay about Universities Australia's priorities, ahead of their annual national Higher Education Conference this week.

According to the [program](#) made available on the [conference website](#), Universities Australia's three day conference will feature break out sessions on 20 different topics. None of these will be dedicated to the problem of sexual assault or sexual violence, despite Australian Human Rights Commission data proving this is an issue of huge prevalence.

"I'd like to say that I'm surprised. But universities have proven time and time again that most of them aren't taking this issue seriously enough." Says Sharna Bremner, Director of End Rape on Campus Australia.

"Sexual violence on campus is an ongoing and pervasive issue. It's compromising students' wellbeing, their safety, and their futures. It's mind boggling that this issue isn't front and centre on a Universities Australia conference agenda." Says Renee Carr, Fair Agenda.

"Universities should be giving a main stage platform to experts from sexual assault services. They should be dedicating multiple break-out sessions to the various areas they need to step up for student safety, including: prevention, immediate response, and support for the hundreds, if not thousands, of their students recovering from the trauma of sexual assault. Instead, the issue doesn't even get a mention in the promoted program." Ms Carr added.

"Last year the Australian Human Rights Centre at UNSW, led by Professor Andrea Durbach, released an extensive 100 page Good Practice Guide for universities, detailing the best policies, procedures and practices for dealing with sexual violence from around the world. There's enough in that report to discuss for days; yet the universities haven't even dedicated a single break session out to the issue." Says Allison Henry, Campaign Director at The Hunting Ground Australia Project.

"The event program doesn't list a single speaker from a sexual assault service. But they've got two people in with expertise in sport. In fact, there's a stream focused on improving student life, where the speaker list seems to suggest they think the key problem on campus is that students aren't involved enough in sport." Added Kate Crossin, NUS Women's Officer.

"This kind of prioritisation is exactly why we need an independent expert-led taskforce, to hold universities to account. It's time for the Government to step in

and ensure there's a mechanism to ensure universities act on this issue of student safety." Added Ms Carr.

"We know that many residences housing university students are still not providing what experts consider to be the pretty basic intervention of face-to-face expert-led training in consent, and preventing sexual violence. What's more, we also know that dozens of residences aren't involving experts from a sexual assault service. There are clear and urgent things left to do." Added Ms Carr.

This week End Rape on Campus Australia launched the 200 page *Red Zone Report*, exposing horrifying instances of hazing and sexual violence across the Group of Eight universities, including men masturbating into female residents' shampoo bottles, and revelations from the Kelly family.

Fair Agenda, End Rape on Campus Australia, National Union of Students, The Hunting Ground Australia Project have issued a [joint statement](#) calling for Federal Education Minister Birmingham to establish an independent expert-led taskforce to track, assess and publicly report on university and residences' measures to prevent, with powers to act if universities and residences fail to act for student safety. The four groups have also sought a urgent meeting with the Minister, in light of the *Red Zone Report* revelations.

Information about the campaign is available at www.fairagenda.org/taskforce

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