

## Protocols to guide police strip searches may not exist

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Redfern Legal Centre (RLC) supports the New South Wales Coroner's call for NSW Police to release its strip search protocols, but says its own recent application under freedom of information seeking Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) to guide police strip searches found no such materials.

Under access to information laws, Redfern Legal Centre requested to view the Standard Operating Procedures for strip searches but none were found. Instead, RLC was provided with copies of extracts from the publicly available *Code of Practice for CRIME* and the *NSW Police Force Handbook*.

Previous media reporting has uncovered some references to police training materials guiding the use of police strip searches, but none of these materials have been made public.

Samantha Lee, Head of Redfern Legal Centre's Police Accountability Practice states, "Materials guiding police on the use of strip searches should be immediately put on the public record. The public has a right to know if there are clear and well-informed protocols to inform the actions of police undertaking strip searches.

"A strip search is a process that allows a police officer to order a person to remove all of their clothing, and in some cases lift their breasts or genitals, and stand naked in front of two armed strangers," Ms Lee continued.

"As well as robust laws to protect the public, rigorous and clear guidance should be available to all police undertaking this invasive and humiliating process to ensure that a strip search is only used in the most exceptional of circumstances."

Ms Lee further states, "The *Code of Practice for CRIME* clearly states, 'You may not strip search as a matter of policy. You must be able to justify your decision in each case.'"

"It's time this barbaric practice is stopped and the law changed to ensure that a strip search is no longer used as a tool of intimidation and punishment. Any officer suspected of acting unlawfully and using a strip search as a tool of intimidation should be referred to the New South Wales Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions for the consideration of possible criminal charges," Ms Lee said.

In November last year, Redfern Legal Centre launched the 'Safe and Sound' campaign ([www.safeandsound.org.au](http://www.safeandsound.org.au)). The campaign aims to change strip-search laws in New South Wales to ensure better safeguards for members of the public and improved guidance for police.

**Launch of report into strip-search laws:** Redfern Legal Centre has commissioned a report from UNSW Law to compare the operation of police strip-search laws in NSW with other jurisdictions across Australia and internationally, due for release on 22 August.

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