

2026-27 FEDERAL BUDGET

PRE-BUDGET SUBMISSION

January 2026

Acknowledgement of Traditional Owners

Safe and Equal is based on Wurundjeri Country. We acknowledge Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as the traditional and ongoing custodians of the lands on which we live and work, and we pay respects to Elders past and present. We acknowledge that sovereignty has never been ceded and recognise First Nations peoples' rights to self-determination and continuing connections to land, waters and community.

Honouring Victim Survivors

Safe and Equal acknowledges the strength and resilience of adults, children and young people who have experienced family violence and recognises that it is essential that responses to family violence are informed by their expert knowledge and advocacy. We pay respects to those who have not survived and acknowledge the lasting impacts of this preventable violence on families and communities.

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About Safe and Equal

Safe and Equal is the peak body for Victorian organisations that specialise in family and gender-based violence across the continuum, including primary prevention, early intervention, response and recovery.

Introduction

Family and gender-based violence in Australia is a national crisis. On average, a woman is killed due to family violence every six days¹. 31 percent of women have experienced physical violence and 22 percent of women have experienced sexual violence since the age of 15.² Police callouts for family violence incidents in Victoria have steadily increased, with a 15 percent rise from 2022 to 2025.³ This reporting likely underrepresents the true extent of family and gender-based violence, particularly of missing and murdered Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women,⁴ as incidents are often underreported.

It is clear the scope and scale of the family violence crisis in this country calls for significant, enduring and coordinated action and investment.

We welcome the commitment of the Federal Government to address family and gender-based violence under the *National Plan to End Violence against Women and Children 2022–2032 (National Plan)* and the *First Action Plan 2023–2027 (First Action Plan)*, however there are gaps that undermine the National Plan's bold commitment to end family and gender-based violence in a generation. This includes:

- Short-term, insufficient funding for the specialist work necessary to prevent and respond to family and gender-based violence
- Investment in critical adjacent sectors that impact victim survivors' safety, wellbeing and recovery, including housing, legal and disability supports, and protections for victim survivors on temporary visas
- Strategic coordination of activities under the *First Action Plan 2023–2027*
- The need for strategic alignment across key national frameworks adjacent, but critical, to the success of efforts to end family and gender-based violence, including but not limited to:

¹ Miles, H and Bricknell S (2025), *Homicide in Australia 2023–24, Statistical Report no. 52*, Australian Institute of Criminology (AIC). Accessed: 8 January 2026. <https://www.aic.gov.au/publications/sr/sr52>

² Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS), (2023), *Personal Safety, Australia*, ABS, Australian Government. Accessed: 8 January 2026. <https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/people/crime-and-justice/personal-safety-australia/latest-release>

³ Crime Statistics Agency Victoria (2025), *Family Incidents*. State Government of Victoria. Accessed: 8 January 2025. <https://www.crimestatistics.vic.gov.au/crime-statistics/latest-victorian-crime-data/family-incidents-2>

⁴ There are no current and complete national figures of women and children killed each year. Many deaths go unacknowledged as family or gender-based violence, including missing people or deaths that are still under investigation. The number of people murdered is likely higher than reported figures.

- The *National Plan to End Violence against Women and Children 2022–2032*,
- *Australia's Disability Strategy 2021–2031*
- *Safe and Supported: National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children 2021–2031*
- *Closing the Gap Framework & National Agreement 2020–2031*
- The pending *National Housing and Homelessness Plan*, and
- The *National Plan to End the Abuse and Mistreatment of Older People*

To address these gaps and to take additional measures to achieve the vision in the National Plan, we make nine recommendations:

Recommendation 1: Increased and secure investment for specialist family violence services, including Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations and targeted family violence services

Specialist Family Violence Services (SFVS)⁵ provide critical support for victim survivors (adults, children and young people). Targeted specialist family services provide support to victim survivors across a range of communities and are often community-led including multicultural, ethno-specific and faith-based communities, LGBTIQA+ communities, older people, people with a disability and people in the sex industry.

Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations (ACCOs) provide community-led responses for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and communities, this includes ACCOs who provide specialist family violence services.

Despite this critical work, SFVSs remain under resourced while facing increasing demand. In Victoria, 42 percent of SFVS case management services need to operate a waitlist. Services prioritise safety within their organisational capacity, with victim survivors at 'serious risk requiring immediate protection' typically assigned to a case manager immediately, with 33 per cent of services reporting victim survivors at 'serious risk' may wait up to five days.⁶ 65 per cent of services report practitioners work overtime to manage workload, and 70 percent report workload levels had impacted retention and staff wellbeing in their organisations.⁷

There is no current national measurement of unmet demand for SFVSs. This has been recognised by the Commonwealth in their commissioning of the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) to complete the Pilot Data Collection, which aims to improve "understanding of demand

⁵ Specialist Family Violence Services in Victoria are funded services and programs that work directly with victim survivors of family violence, providing dedicated resources and advocacy to promote their rights and respond to their safety and support needs. Source: Safe and Equal (2020). Code of Practice: Principles and Standards for Specialist Family Violence Services for Victim survivors. 2nd Edition. Accessed: 14 January 2026. <https://safeandequal.org.au/working-in-family-violence/service-responses/specialist-family-violence-services/the-code-of-practice/>

⁶ Tassone, J (2025) Measuring Specialist Family Violence Service Demand and Capacity Report 2025, Melbourne: Safe and Equal. Accessed: 8 January 2026. <https://safeandequal.org.au/wp-content/uploads/Measuring-Demand-and-Capacity-2025-FINAL.pdf>

⁷ Ibid.

and unmet demand for FDV services".⁸ However, SFVs are facing high levels of demand now, and cannot wait for the pilot project to be completed.

The Federal Government has a critical role in ensuring that increased funding is made available to the sector through increasing funding via the Family, Domestic and Sexual Violence National Partnership (FDSV National Partnership Agreement) under the National Agreement on Social Housing and Homelessness (NASSH). This funding should be provided to SFVs as a five-year minimum commitment to enable long-term planning and reduce workforce insecurity.⁹

Recommendation 2: Dedicated national funding for on-the-ground primary prevention

To achieve a society without family and gender-based violence, we must retain and strengthen existing primary prevention initiatives and the skilled workforce that delivers them. The primary prevention workforce is diverse, highly skilled and possesses deep expertise in social and structural change, gender norms and systemic forms of discrimination and inequality.¹⁰ However, the workforce works tirelessly to stretch limited resources to drive long-term societal change.¹¹

While investment in Our Watch's national leadership role is important, there is a lack of dedicated funding at the national level for on-the-ground primary prevention programming. The Commonwealth must invest in key primary prevention organisations and infrastructure across States and Territories to support the workforce's development, growth, retention, and sustainability at the national, state, regional and local levels. This will ensure that focused and strategically planned primary prevention work is carried out across jurisdictions.

Without investment in primary prevention, family and gender-based violence will never become a thing of the past.

Recommendation 3: Improved oversight and accountability to measure, monitor and report on outcomes

The success of the National Plan is highly dependent on the effective monitoring and review of the associated action plans. Governance of the action plans must be strengthened, to improve

⁸ Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, *Family, domestic and sexual violence – Pilot data collection for specialist crisis FDV services*. Australian Government. Accessed: 15 January 2026. <https://www.aihw.gov.au/family-domestic-and-sexual-violence/resources/pilot-data-collection-for-specialist-crisis-fdv-services>

⁹ As recommended in the Independent Review of the Victorian Public Service and as recently implemented by the NSW government. Silver, H (2025), 'Independent Review of the Victorian Public Service – Final Report', Accessed: 12 January 2026. <https://www.vic.gov.au/vps-review>; Communities and Justice (2026) NSW Government delivers nation-leading community service agreement', NSW Government. Accessed: 12 January 2026. <https://dcj.nsw.gov.au/news-and-media/media-releases/2026/nsw-government-delivers-nation-leading-community-service-agreement.html>

¹⁰ Carman, M, Fairchild, J, Cooper, M & Ditcham, A (2023) *Foundations for Action: Understanding the primary prevention workforce in Victoria*. Melbourne: Safe and Equal. Accessed 21 January 2026. <https://safeandequal.org.au/resources/foundations-for-action-understanding-the-primary-prevention-workforce-in-victoria/>; Our Watch. (2023). *Growing with change: Developing an expert workforce to prevent violence against women*. Melbourne, Australia: Our Watch. Accessed 21 January 2026. <https://www.ourwatch.org.au/change-the-story/growing-with-change>

¹¹ Our Watch (2024) Building strong foundations to support primary prevention of violence against women, Our Watch. Accessed 21 January 2026. <https://www.ourwatch.org.au/submissions/building-strong-foundations-prevention-infrastructure>

oversight and accountability of targets. Any governance structure should include regular transparent reporting to Cabinet and embed lived experience and sector representation.

We welcome the recently introduced governance arrangements for the National Plan as of December 2025,¹² inclusive of sector expertise. For this governance arrangement to be effective, it must be supported by the implementation of robust and transparent consultation mechanisms including via the governance support structures outlined. We recommend the National Alliance of DFV Specialist Services (NADFVSS)¹³ is resourced to provide effective jurisdictional sector representation as part of the new governance structure.

Recommendation 4: Commence early consultation to develop a robust and informed second national action plan

With the *First Action Plan* due to end in 2027, there's an opportunity to start early on the development of the second plan. Adopting an earlier development timeline and approach will support activities that are well informed and fit the needs of the sector and victim survivors across the country.

We support Recommendation 6 of the Commissioners report,¹⁴ which outlines that the Commonwealth and States and Territories must start developing the second action plan immediately and that this plan is reviewed every 12–18 months to make sure it is fit for purpose and can adapt to changing contexts and emerging evidence. This should be co-designed with relevant stakeholders including NADFVSS and SFVs across the country, and include measurable targets, bring other relevant national plans into alignment, and build in evaluation metrics and data collection.

Recommendation 5: Invest to provide sufficient levels of social housing nationally

Homelessness and family violence are inextricably linked, with family violence the leading cause of homelessness for people in Australia¹⁵ and safe and affordable housing being critical to preventing, mitigating and helping victim survivors escape and recover from family violence.

Due to rising rates in the private rental market, social housing is usually the only long-term safe and affordable housing option available for many victim survivors. Despite this, social housing is often unattainable for victim survivors due to decades of lack of investment.

¹² Commonwealth of Australia (Department of Social Services) (2025) *Structure of governance arrangements*. Accessed 15 January 2026. <https://www.dss.gov.au/national-plan-end-gender-based-violence/resource/structure-governance-arrangements>

¹³ WESNET, *National Alliance of DFV Specialist Services*. Accessed: 15 January 2026. <https://wesnet.org.au/nadfvss/>

¹⁴ Commonwealth of Australia (Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence Commission) (2025) *Yearly Report to Parliament*. Accessed: 19 January 2026. <https://www.dfsvc.gov.au/yearly-report-2025>

¹⁵ Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, (2025) *Specialist homelessness services annual report 2024–25*. Accessed 8 January 2026. <https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/homelessness-services/specialist-homelessness-services-annual-report/contents/clients-who-have-experienced-fdsv>

The Commonwealth has recognised via the *National Plan* that housing is essential to ending family violence in a generation¹⁶ and we welcome the *First Action Plan*'s housing and homelessness initiatives. These initiatives, alongside the *Housing Australia Future Fund* and *Social Housing Accelerator Payment* will have an impact, however further investment is required to address the lack of safe and accessible housing options for people experiencing family violence.

A 2025 report commissioned by the Victorian Housing Peaks Alliance found Victoria alone will need to build an additional 377,000 social homes by 2051 to meet projected demand for social housing, with 83,000 social homes needed just for victim survivors across the same period.¹⁷ This increase in social housing stock cannot be achieved by state investment alone. This requires a joint commitment from the Commonwealth and state and territory governments to ensure these social homes are delivered.

Recommendation 6: Expand legal support access for victim survivors through increased investment in community legal services

An estimated 52,000 women per year are unable to access women's legal support,¹⁸ with a minimum of 400 victim survivors turned away from community legal centers daily.¹⁹ The inability to receive affordable legal representation dramatically affects victim survivors' access to justice and creates opportunities for people using family violence to undertake systems abuse.

The investment provided by the *National Access to Justice Partnership 2025-2023 (NJAP)* to legal services is welcomed. However, women's and community legal services report funding levels remain insufficient to meet demand. Community Legal Centres Australia has urgently called for an additional \$96 million per year to meet this demand,²⁰ with National Legal Aid noting an additional \$17.1million is needed to adequately respond to victim survivors accessing the Federal Circuit and Family Court of Australia (FCFCOA).²¹

16 Commonwealth of Australia (Department of Social Services) (2022) National Plan to End Violence against Women and Children, pg. 57

17 SGS Economics and Planning (2025) Growing Social Housing: Data, insights and targets. Accessed: 8 January 2026. https://vcoss.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2025/05/Growing-Social-Housing_Final.pdf

18 Women's Legal Services Australia (2025) Federal Pre-Budget Submission 2025-26, Accessed: 9 January 2026. <https://www.wlsa.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2025/02/WLSA-Federal-Pre-Budget-Submission-2025-26-FINAL.pdf>

19 Community Legal Centres Australia (2025) 2026-27 Pre-Budget Submission, Accessed: 15 January 2026. <https://clcs.org.au/federal-budget/>

20 Community Legal Centres Australia (2025) 2026-27 Pre-Budget Submission, Accessed: 15 January 2026. <https://clcs.org.au/federal-budget/>

21 National Legal Aid (2026), 2026-27 Pre-Budget Submission. Accessed: 15 January 2025. <https://nationallegalaid.org.au/policy-and-advocacy/submissions/2026-27-pre-budget-sub>

Pay parity of the workforce is also a key consideration, with community legal workers requiring an investment of \$72 million to bring salaries up to comparable rates;²² otherwise there is a risk the size of the workforce will decrease and impact service delivery.

Recommendation 7: Expand eligibility for the national Leaving Violence Program

The Leaving Violence Program (LVP) supports eligible victim survivors leaving violent intimate partner relationships. Small eligibility changes will provide more victim survivors with access to this valuable support:

- a. Extend the application window from 12 weeks to 6 months from leaving the relationship

Victim survivors that are leaving or have recently left a family violence situation will be in crisis, and it takes considerable time to work through the multiple actions required to establish safety. Extending the application window recognises the complexity of family violence, evidence and data on attempts to leave and reduces the risk that victim survivors who need this payment may miss out.

- b. include family violence committed by family members rather than limiting to intimate-partner contexts only
- c. include young people aged 16 and 17

Family violence is broader than intimate partner violence, with victim survivors facing family violence from family members and people with whom they have familial-like relationships. This includes 16- to 18-year-olds, who may experience intimate partner violence, family violence from parents and/or other family members, or both.²³ The ability to access this payment would be particularly beneficial for young people, who are less likely to have available financial resources, and are more likely to be dependent on a person using violence for housing and economic support.

Recommendation 8: Introduce guidance for the National Disability Insurance Agency (NDIA) to responsively adjust National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) plans for victim survivors

Women with disabilities are 40 per cent more likely to experience family violence than women without disabilities.²⁴ This means that recipients of NDIS support will also be victim survivors of family violence. NDIA and NDIS responses must be tailored and able to respond to the complex,

²² Community Legal Centres Australia (2025) 2026–27 Pre-Budget Submission, Accessed: 15 January 2026. <https://clcsc.org.au/federal-budget/>

²³ Corrie, T., Moore, S. and Anderson, T. (2021). *Amplify: Turning up the Volume on Young People and Family Violence*. Accessed: 14 January 2026. https://www.mcm.org.au/-/media/mcm/content-repository-files/amplify_turning-up-the-volume-on-young-people-and-family-violence.pdf

²⁴ Backhouse, C., & Toivonen, C. (2018). *National Risk Assessment Principles for domestic and family violence: Companion resource. A summary of the evidence-base supporting the development and implementation of the National Risk Assessment Principles for domestic and family violence (ANROWS Insights 09/2018)*. Sydney, NSW.

changing and individual needs of victim survivors with disabilities to help keep them safe and support them to thrive.

Family violence situations are dynamic and will change rapidly – for example, a victim survivor may have to change accommodation at very short notice to remain safe. In these situations, victim survivors must be able to easily contact a person at the NDIA and change their NDIS plans urgently and without the requirement to undertake a new fulsome assessment.

Family violence must be a key consideration in the new framework for the NDIS, which is to be implemented by mid-2026.²⁵ It is vital the framework includes the development of clear guidance and processes through which an NDIS participant experiencing family violence can quickly access and adapt their package, at both the initial assessment stage and in response to their changing circumstances.

Recommendation 9: Immigration reform is needed for victim survivors on temporary visas

Temporary migration visa holders experiencing family violence face significant additional challenges to seeking help and establishing safety compared to citizens or permanent residents.²⁶ Due to their ineligibility for basic social services such as income support and Medicare, victim survivors on temporary visas are more likely to be forced to 'choose' between remaining in a family violence situation, or leaving and risking homelessness and financial stress.

To urgently address this, we endorse the Blueprint for Reform²⁷ developed by the National Advocacy Group on Women on Temporary Visas Experiencing Violence, which recommends that victim survivors on temporary visas:

- i. can access protections, services and justice;
- ii. are eligible for social security, including Medicare;
- iii. can access social and public housing; and
- iv. that specialist and legal services that provide support to victim survivors on temporary visas are funded sustainably.

²⁵ Australian Government (Department of Health, Disability and Ageing) (2026) *New framework planning*. Accessed: 19 January 2026.

<https://www.health.gov.au/topics/disability-and-carers/reforms-and-reviews/new-framework-planning>

²⁶ Australian Red Cross (2024), *Temporary Visa Holders Experiencing Family and Domestic Violence Pilot Report of key findings*. Accessed: 15 January 2026. <https://www.redcross.org.au/globalassets/cms/publications/temporary-visa-holders-experiencing-family-and-domestic-violence-pilot-october-2024.pdf>.

²⁷ National Advocacy Group on Women on Temporary Visas Experiencing Violence (2022) *Blueprint For Reform – Removing barriers to safety for victims/survivors of domestic and family violence who are on temporary visas*. Accessed: 14 January 2026. <https://iarc.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2023/01/Blueprint-for-reform-2022-v071222.pdf>.