

National Plan to End Violence against Women and Children 2022–2032: Second Action Plan Consultation Submission

August 2026

Acknowledgement of Traditional Owners

Safe and Equal acknowledges Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as the traditional and ongoing custodians of the lands on which we live and work. 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, community and culture.

Recognition of Victim Survivors

Safe and Equal recognises the strength and resilience of adults, children and young people who have experienced family violence and recognise that it is essential that responses to family violence are informed by their expert knowledge and advocacy. We pay respects to those who did not survive and acknowledge friends and family members who have lost loved ones to this preventable and far-reaching issue.

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. Our vision is a world where everyone is safe, respected and thriving, living free from family and gender-based violence.

Our work prioritises the safety of all people experiencing, recovering from or at risk of family and gender-based violence. While we know that most family violence is perpetrated by men against women and children, we recognise that family violence impacts people across a diversity of gender identities, social and cultural contexts, and within various intimate, family and other relationships. We apply an intersectional feminist lens in our work to address the gendered drivers of violence, and how these overlap and intersect with additional forms of violence, oppression and inequality.

We believe in and work towards a world where people are not only safe and free from family and gender-based violence but are respected for who they are and thriving in their lives.

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Introduction

Everyone deserves to live safely and thrive, however family and gender-based violence in Australia remains a national crisis. On average, one woman is killed every 11 days by an intimate partner.¹ Since the release of the *National Plan to End Violence against Women and Children 2022-2032 (National Plan)* in October 2022, there have been 414 deaths of women and children due to gender-based and family violence.² 31 percent of women have experienced physical violence and 22 percent of women have experienced sexual violence since the age of 15.³ Despite these high numbers, reporting likely underrepresents the true extent of family and gender-based violence, including missing and murdered Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women,⁴ as incidents are often underreported.

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 opportunity to contribute to the *Second Action Plan 2027-2032 (Second Action Plan)*. In order to address the scope and scale of the family violence crisis requires significant, enduring and coordinated action and investment across the country. All levels of government have key roles and responsibilities under the *National Plan* including States and Territories.

Ending family violence requires robust, long-term resourcing across the entire continuum, from primary prevention and early intervention to response and long-term recovery. Sustainable resourcing is the most critical action needed to address gender-based and family violence, with responsibility for investment held by the Commonwealth and States and Territories.

There are four key pillars that must remain foundational to the *Second Action Plan*:

- An intersectional feminist framework
- Cultural safety, equity and access
- Accountability for people who use family violence
- The critical role of specialisation

An intersectional feminist framework

An intersectional feminist framework recognises that family and gender-based violence occurs in the context of both gender inequality and multiple other forms of structural and systemic inequality and discrimination, such as racism, colonialism, classism, heteronormativity, cisnormativity, homo-, bi- and transphobia, ableism and ageism, as well as social stigma surrounding past or current mental health, substance use, sex industry

¹ Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) (2026), *Family domestic and sexual violence*, Australian Government, <https://www.aihw.gov.au/family-domestic-and-sexual-violence/responses-and-outcomes/domestic-homicide#findings>.

Note there are multiple sources used to track the current level of homicides in Australia.

² Moody, S (n.d) *Women & Children Lost to Violence: Database*, The RED HEART Movement. <https://australianfemicidewatch.org/database/>

³ Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) (2023), *Personal Safety, Australia*, ABS. <https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/people/crime-and-justice/personal-safety-australia/latest-release>

⁴ There are no current and complete national figures of women and children are 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.

experience and criminalisation. Applying this lens highlights the ways in which systematically marginalised groups are disproportionately impacted by family and gender-based violence, creating unique challenges for individuals and communities and the experiences of additional barriers to safety and support.

Critically, Australia's colonial history and ongoing colonisation have had devastating impacts on the lives of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Safe and Equal recognise the colonialism, violent dispossession of land and families, war and occupation, attempted genocide, police violence and racism and discrimination faced by Aboriginal communities.⁵

The *Second Action Plan* is an opportunity to further embed an intersectional lens and approach to how Australia tackles family and gender-based violence. This lens necessitates a focus on eliminating systemic discrimination, supporting individuals to navigate services and have their needs met, alongside changing the system over time so it is safe and meets the needs of everyone. In primary prevention, the focus is on social structures and ideas that need to change, on a large scale, across society. The application of an intersectional feminist lens seeks to shift current systems and build a safer future, providing a foundation to meet the goals of the *National Plan*.

Design from intersecting margins outward

Family and gender-based violence is shaped by intersecting systems of power and inequality; racism, ableism, migration and visa status, economic inequality, sexuality and gender identity can intersect with gender inequality to shape experiences of violence, access to safety, and the way victim survivors experience and are responded to by institutions and service systems.

An effective national response must move beyond treating particular communities as discrete or additional 'priority cohorts' and instead recognise and address the structural conditions that create unequal experiences of violence, safety and recovery.

The measure of an intersectional *Second Action Plan* should not simply be whether diverse communities can access existing systems, but whether those systems redistribute power, remove structural barriers and deliver equitable safety, autonomy and recovery.

Recommendations:

- 1) Shift national service design standards so that:
 - commissioning frameworks recognise how gender inequality intersects with racism, ableism, migration and visa status, economic inequality, sexuality, gender identity, age and geographic disadvantage to shape experiences of violence and access to safety
 - systems are designed around those experiencing the greatest and most complex structural barriers, rather than treating their needs as 'add-ons' to a mainstream model

⁵ Safe and Equal (2026) *Supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people*, Melbourne: Safe and Equal.
<https://safeandequal.org.au/working-in-family-violence/tailored-inclusive-support/aboriginal-and-torres-strait-islander-people/>

- 2) Establish non-adverse policy settings for victim survivors with temporary or precarious visa status and victim survivors with disabilities requiring accessible emergency accommodation and specialised care, guaranteeing equitable access to emergency housing, Medicare, legal aid and income support regardless of migration or disability status
- 3) Ensure government policies and service systems do not create or deepen dependency on people using violence including through:
 - visa dependency
 - exclusion from income support
 - inaccessible housing
 - reliance on the person using violence for disability supports
 - removing barriers to Medicare and legal assistance

Cultural safety, equity and access

It is essential that we collectively work for a system that is culturally safe, equitable, accessible, and non-discriminatory.⁶ Across the continuum, the system must be safe, tailored and respect the choices of all victim survivors, in recognition of the intersectionality and heterogeneity of people as individuals, and solutions from community-led primary prevention must be valued and supported.

Aboriginal self-determination and Cultural Safety are critical. Violence is not a problem Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples can or should solve in isolation, nor is family, domestic and sexual violence a part of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures.⁷

We welcome the *Our Ways – Strong Ways – Our Voices: National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Plan to End Family, Domestic and Sexual Violence 2026-2036* (*Our Ways – Strong Ways – Our Voices*) as a dedicated national strategy to end violence against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and children, and the new national Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Family, Domestic and Sexual Violence Peak, *Our Ways Strong Together* as important mechanisms to build cultural competencies and Cultural Safety via genuine meaningful engagement between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal communities.

As recognised in the *Second Action Plan* consultation paper, people from systemically marginalised communities have unique experiences of family and gender-based violence and require tailored individualised responses and support across the continuum.

To develop, monitor and evaluate the *Second Action Plan*, the Commonwealth government must consult and work with victim survivors, communities, organisations and specialist service providers across a range of communities including (but not limited to):

- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander

⁶ Djirra, (2020) *Monitoring the Family Violence Reforms: Djirra's Submission to the Family Violence Reform Implementation Monitor*, Djirra. <https://djirra.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/Djirras-Submission-to-the-Family-Violence-Reform-Implementation-Monitor-July-2020-FINAL.pdf>

⁷ Australian Government Department of Social Services. (2026). *Our Ways – Strong Ways – Our Voices: National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Plan to End Family, Domestic and Sexual Violence 2026–2036*. <https://www.dss.gov.au/first-nations-national-plan-end-family-domestic-and-sexual-violence/resource/our-ways-strong-ways-our-voices-national-aboriginal-and-torres-strait-islander-plan-end-family-domestic-and-sexual-violence-2026-2036>

- LGBTIQ+
- Multicultural, ethno-specific and faith-based
- People with a disability
- Older people
- People with experience in the sex industry
- Criminalised people
- People who use substances
- People with mental ill health
- Rural and regional

Recommendations:

- 4) Ensure services uphold equity and respect client agency by:
 - removing conditional support requirements (such as mandatory engagement with specific government, migration, or disability support systems) that disproportionately deter migrant, marginalised and women with disability
 - service responses should avoid practices that reproduce dynamics of control, surveillance or dependency experienced in abusive relationships, and should support informed choice, self-determination and autonomy in decisions about safety, support and recovery
- 5) Require all policy-making bodies and funded service providers to conduct regular intersectional access and equity audits that:
 - assess not only whether different groups can access services, but how institutional rules, policies and practices may create or reinforce unequal power, exclusion or outcomes
 - examine commissioning and funding rules, eligibility criteria, documentation requirements, visa conditions, physical and digital environments, language access, data systems and governance structures, and identify where these interact to produce structural barriers to safety, support and recovery
- 6) Require all federally funded specialist domestic, family, and sexual violence services to meet rigorous "Substantive Access & Equity Standards":
 - measuring success by trust, full physical, digital, and communicative accessibility, cultural safety, and service completion shifting the focus on intake numbers
 - access, experience and outcome data should be disaggregated across relevant intersecting factors to identify where structural inequities persist and where particular groups experience poorer outcomes. This should enable services and governments to understand, for example, how disability, migration or visa status, language barriers and economic insecurity can intersect to shape access to services, experiences of support and safety outcomes.
- 7) Ensure service responses recognise that the forms, experiences and impacts of violence, as well as pathways to safety, can differ according to intersecting social, economic and institutional conditions

- 8) Embed tailored, accessible and culturally safe pathways that respond to the distinct experiences and structural barriers faced by a range of communities⁸
- 9) Fund designated training, entry, and professional development streams for workers from marginalised and culturally diverse backgrounds to build a representative, non-exclusionary workforce. Alongside workforce diversity, require continuous critical-reflexivity and institutional capability development to identify and address sexism, racism, ableism, class bias, migration-related assumptions and cis-heteronormative practices embedded within organisations and service systems.

Accountability for people who use family violence

Safe and Equal recognises that holding people who use violence accountable for their actions is critical to keeping victim survivors safe; our systems still largely focus on the victim survivor as responsible for their own, or their children's safety. For example, in Victoria, funded behaviour change program places equate to approximately 10 percent of the recorded domestic and family violence perpetrator population.⁹

Safe and Equal welcomes the recognition that the Commonwealth is giving attention the issue of weaponisation of systems by persons using violence, with accountability of the person using violence needing to be strengthened across all systems, including policing, justice, courts and child protection.

The critical role of specialisation

Efforts to prevent family and gender-based violence is best understood as a 'continuum' across four areas: primary prevention, early intervention, response and recovery and healing.¹⁰ Initiatives focused across each area of the continuum reinforce and complement each other to create a holistic and integrated overall approach and are further bolstered by coordination and collaboration across the continuum. However, each area of the continuum is separate and distinct, and require individualised evidence, funding and workforce specialisation.

Primary prevention focuses on whole-of-population initiatives - it is the work that seeks to change the underlying social conditions that produce and drive family and gender-based violence and that excuse, justify or even promote it. It works across the whole population to address the attitudes, norms, practices, structures and power imbalances that drive family and gender-based violence. As a result, the primary prevention workforce are the people and organisations whose work aim to shift the attitudes, behaviours and social context that enables family and gender-based violence to occur across a range of

⁸ Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander; LGBTIQ+; Multicultural, ethno-specific and faith-based; People with a disability ; Older people; People with experience in the sex industry; Criminalised people; People who use substances; People with mental ill health ; Rural and regional

⁹ Family Violence Reform Implementation Monitor. (2023). Monitoring Victoria's family violence reforms – Service response for perpetrators and people using violence within the family. State Government of Victoria. <https://archive.fvrim.vic.gov.au/monitoring-victorias-family-violence-reforms-service-response-perpetrators-and-people-using-violence-within-family>

¹⁰ Department of Social Services (2022) *The National Plan to End Violence against Women and Children 2022–2032*, Australian Government. <https://www.dss.gov.au/national-plan-end-violence-against-women-and-children/resource/national-plan-end-violence-against-women-and-children-2022-2032>

communities and audiences.¹¹ This includes work such as implementing whole-school initiatives that promote gender equality and respectful relationships; and initiatives that engage men and boys in challenging stereotypes and the dominant forms of masculinity that are linked to the perpetration of violence.

Early intervention works with people at higher risk of experiencing or perpetrating gender-based and family violence and is underpinned by a workforce skilled in identifying early signs of risk or harm and equipped to shift these trajectories.

Response includes Specialist Family Violence Services (SFVSs), who focus on the safety and support needs of victim survivors of family violence (including children and young people) via risk assessment, safety planning and case management.¹² SFVS practitioners require a deep understanding of risk and safety, work in a trauma-informed, person-centred way and centralise perpetrator accountability.¹³

While early recovery work is often taken on by SFVS practitioners, sustained recovery work requires specialised skillsets across relational and therapeutic approaches over the long-term, to support victim survivors to rebuild their confidence, agency, wellbeing and lives as a whole.

To achieve an effective system and outcomes overall, we must have a specialist informed approach as a key underpinning for a shared evidence base and to build consistent understanding in order to inform impactful and efficient actions, interventions and initiatives.

Alongside the foundational pillars, our submission focuses on the following areas:

- a) Dedicated national funding across the entire continuum
- b) The role of critical adjacent sectors in victim survivor safety and recovery
- c) Children and young people
- d) Robust governance of the *Second Action Plan*

a) Dedicated national funding across the entire continuum

For the Federal government to achieve its aim of ending family violence, it is essential that the family and gender-based violence sector is properly resourced, with sustainable, coordinated funding across the entire continuum, including primary prevention, early intervention, crisis response and recovery.

¹¹ Department of Families, Fairness and Housing (DFFH) (2026) *Primary prevention of family and gender-based violence: Capability framework*, State of Victoria. <https://www.vic.gov.au/primary-prevention-family-violence-and-gender-based-violence-capability-framework>

¹² Safe and Equal (2025) *Preventing and responding to family violence*, Melbourne: Safe and Equal <https://safeandequal.org.au/understanding-family-violence/preventing-responding/>

¹³ Safe and Equal (2020) *Code of Practice: Principles and Standards for Specialist Family Violence Services for Victim survivors*, Melbourne: Safe and Equal. <https://safeandequal.org.au/working-in-family-violence/service-responses/specialist-family-violence-services/the-code-of-practice/>

Data

As recognised in the consultation paper for the *Second Action Plan*, population level data on the prevalence of gender-based and family violence ‘does not adequately capture information about some population groups who may experience higher, more severe, or different forms of violence’.¹⁴ However, data and statistics are essential for informed-decision-making and often influence funding across the continuum.

The *Second Action Plan* consultation paper does not recognise the breadth of inadequate data across marginalised communities, which needs to be further developed across all communities facing structural discrimination and barriers to reporting, this should include LGBTIQ+ communities, multicultural, ethno-specific and faith-based communities, people with disabilities, older people, people in the sex industry, criminalised people, and victim survivors living in rural, regional and remote areas.

Some examples of data gaps include:

- *Private Lives 3: The Health and Wellbeing of LGBTIQ People in Victoria* is the largest and most comprehensive survey of the health and wellbeing of LGBTIQ people.¹⁵ While this survey showed a disproportionately high number of respondents have experienced intimate partner violence in their lifetime at 61 percent, the true scale is likely far greater given that many LGBTIQ+ people often do not feel safe or confident reporting violence due to experiences of discrimination and mistrust of services. Trans and gender diverse people also experience family violence at disproportionately high rates, yet this violence is frequently minimised, misread, or overlooked.
- The current evidence base relating to victim survivors in the sex industry also lags significantly behind broader developments in Australian family violence research, policy and practice.¹⁶

Data limitations impact on a number of important considerations including:

- resourcing for tailored response
- investment in frontline workforce capacity and capability building to provide responses to victim survivors across communities
- strengthening the evidence base with relation to non-homogenous individual experiences and needs across stereotypically homogenised communities

Existing data shows Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women face disproportionately high levels of violence and are 27 times more likely than non-Aboriginal women to be

¹⁴ Australia's National Research Organisation for Women's Safety (ANROWS) and Department of Social Services (2026) *Evidence to Action: informing direction for the Second Action Plan, Consultation Paper in support for the National Plan to End Violence against Women and Children 2022-2032*, Australian Government, p.23. <https://engage.dss.gov.au/second-action-plan/consultation-paper/>

¹⁵ Hill, A. O, Bourne, A, McNair, R, Carman, M & Lyons, A (2020) *Private Lives 3: The health and wellbeing of LGBTIQ people in Australia*, Melbourne, Australia: Australian Research Centre in Sex, Health and Society, La Trobe University. <https://www.latrobe.edu.au/arcs/hs/work/lgbtiq-health/private-lives-3>

¹⁶ Hirsch, RV (2022) *The extent, nature and impact of family, domestic, and sexual violence (FDSV) against women in the Australian sex industry*, Project Respect. https://www.projectrespect.org.au/our_advocacy

hospitalised due to family violence.¹⁷ Yet it's likely these statistics do not show the true extent and disproportionate experiences of gender-based and family violence towards Aboriginal victim survivors; the data is reliant on self-reporting to mainstream institutions for which there is a long history of distrust, due to numerous atrocities including forced child removal from Aboriginal families.¹⁸ To support fulsome data collection, we support the *Our Ways – Strong Ways – Our Voices* focus on Indigenous Data Sovereignty and recommend the *Second Action Plan* utilise Maïam Nayri Wingara Indigenous Data Sovereignty Principles to ensure that any data use is self-determined and can 'become a tool for safety, healing and justice.'¹⁹

Administrative datasets also fail to capture the experiences of a number of communities and population groups. Recent analysis from Safety Measures, a cross-jurisdictional partnership between Safe and Equal and five other specialist domestic and family violence peaks and service providers, found that the identities and experiences of LGBTIQ+ people, people on temporary visas, people with disability, and children and young people remain largely invisible within the Specialist Homelessness Services Collection, the most significant source of specialist family violence service data across the country.²⁰

The Safety Measures initiative also found that current data systems struggle to measure unmet demand, service capacity, and core specialist family violence practice, reinforcing the need for more nuanced, community-informed data collection and reporting approaches that support better policy, funding and service planning decisions.

Recommendations:

- 10) Funding for ACCOs to be resourced for the purposes of community-led collection and analysis of data, in line with Indigenous Data Sovereignty principles
- 11) Investment in community-led research and consultation on community data needs should be prioritised as part of the development of the next Australian National Research Agenda²¹
- 12) Incorporate lessons learned through the Safety Measures initiative into improvements to the SHS Collection and the ongoing development of a national specialist FDV data collection
- 13) Establish an independent national monitoring framework that:
 - explicitly identifies and tracks intersectional disparities in access, experience and outcomes, rather than measuring service access alone
 - examines outcomes including safety, housing stability, economic security, service completion, justice outcomes and access to recovery supports,

¹⁷ Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) (2026) *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people*, AIHW, <https://www.aihw.gov.au/family-domestic-and-sexual-violence/population-groups/aboriginal-and-torres-strait-islander-people>

¹⁸ Djirra (2022) *Supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people*, Djirra <https://safeandequal.org.au/working-in-family-violence/tailored-inclusive-support/aboriginal-and-torres-strait-islander-people/>

¹⁹ Department of Social Services (DSS) (2026) *Our Ways – Strong Ways – Our Voices: National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Plan to End Family, Domestic and Sexual Violence 2026-2036*, Australian Government, p.62. <https://www.dss.gov.au/first-nations-national-plan-end-family-domestic-and-sexual-violence/resource/our-ways-strong-ways-our-voices-national-aboriginal-and-torres-strait-islander-plan-end-family-domestic-and-sexual-violence-2026-2036>

²⁰ Simms, L., Campese, S., & Riseborough, C. (2026). *Coming into view: Emerging insights from specialist domestic and family violence service data across jurisdictions*. Safety Measures. <https://www.safetymeasures.org.au/publications>

²¹ <https://www.anrows.org.au/publication/australian-national-research-agenda-to-end-violence-against-women-and-children/>

- with data disaggregated across relevant intersecting factors to identify where particular groups experience persistent or compounded inequities
- is reported on transparently by government in progressing and addressing disparities and the structural and systemic barriers contributing to them
- this framework could be trialled in Victoria initially to test and evaluate the model

Primary prevention and early intervention must remain distinct

The *Second Action Plan* consultation paper has combined primary prevention and early intervention, and notes that there are ‘differing views across policy, research and practice sectors about whether they should be treated separately to support more targeted responses.’²²

Safe and Equal recommend primary prevention and early intervention remain distinct domains and retain separate approaches across policy, implementation, evaluation and workforce development. While primary prevention and early intervention are complementary mechanisms, they are not interchangeable – they operate at different points along the continuum and have their own goals and specialisations.²³ Merging the two together risks diluting the specialist skillset each require, and removing focus from both evidence-bases, particularly the growing evidence-base for early intervention initiatives.

Primary prevention and early intervention are distinct yet complementary. In practice they are often delivered in ways that are mutually reinforcing, requiring the family violence workforce to be aware of the connections across the continuum. This is recognised in the new Victorian Government *Primary prevention of family and gender-based violence: Capability Framework*. A framework outlining the skills, knowledge and behaviours required of the organisations and workforce delivering primary prevention activity.

Funding for Primary Prevention

Ending family and gender-based violence means a focus on the upstream causes of this violence – the gendered drivers. Primary prevention activities focus on these drivers, delivering work across various settings including schools, universities, TAFEs, workplaces, women’s health services and local government. Specialist prevention initiatives are led by a specialised workforce and a dedicated focus on stopping family and gender-based violence before it starts. Prevention activities can be led by specialist organisations but also includes smaller, community-led organisations who engage with marginalised communities who may be underserved by mainstream efforts.

Current short-term funding cycles undermine the effectiveness of all primary prevention efforts, resulting in disrupted program delivery and impact. It is critical to scale up work in key settings and strengthen whole-of-community efforts, while continuing to trial, test and

²² Australia’s National Research Organisation for Women’s Safety (ANROWS) and Department of Social Services (2026) *Evidence to Action: informing direction for the Second Action Plan, Consultation Paper in support for the National Plan to End Violence against Women and Children 2022-2032*, Australian Government, p.23. <https://engage.dss.gov.au/second-action-plan/consultation-paper/>

²³ Hewitt, S & Carman, M (2025) *Early intervention in family and gender-based violence: Scoping paper*, Melbourne: Safe and Equal, <https://safeandequal.org.au/policy-and-advocacy/research-reports/>

build the evidence base for emerging work.²⁴ Five-year minimum funding arrangements, coupled with investment in evaluation within programming, would support program continuity and contribute to workforce stability and retention. As primary prevention outcomes are realised over the long term, funding models should reflect this reality. Coordination, not just programs, and evaluation should also be funded: this helps avoid piecemeal or insufficiently supported approaches which may show some immediate impacts but lose longer-term realisation of benefits.

Our Watch is Australia's leader in the primary prevention of violence against women and plays a key national leadership role in the design and implementation of evidence-based frameworks and practice guidance. This leadership is necessary at a national level, working alongside leaders and peak bodies in states and territories, in order to support the scale-up required in primary prevention at this time. This role must be in coordination with government and organisations leading change in states and territories to ensure efforts are supporting the growth and development of place-based organisations to lead and sustain progress made.

Primary prevention has a long history of addressing the gendered drivers of violence, including harmful forms of masculinity and male peer relationships that emphasise domination, aggression and control, including transphobia and homophobia. We welcome increased investment in and specialisation of programming across the continuum to engage men and boys in this work, but emphasise the importance of following appropriate principles, including a transformative approach, inclusive of intersectionality, solutions at all levels of society, and accountability to women and the women's movement.

Safe and Equal has developed a Theory of Change²⁵ on engaging masculinities and men in primary prevention and early intervention, in partnership with the Victorian Women's Health Services Network and Jesuit Social Services – The Men's Project, to bring together our respective roles and expertise and progress the work on masculinities in a collaborative and accountable ways. This Theory of Change can be used as a decision-making tool to fund and coordinate effective and safe activities to prevent family and gender-based violence and the partnership is delivering an initial program informed by this tool. Further, there is an opportunity to consider the extension of the knowledge and practice base in primary prevention on engaging harmful masculinities throughout the entire continuum.

Primary prevention outcomes are starting to show a positive impact in reducing perpetration and the attitudes that drive it: the work is effective and requires continued commitment.

Recommendations:

- 14) Maintain a clear distinction between primary prevention and early intervention across policy, implementation, evaluation and workforce skills
- 15) Sustain investment in Our Watch to support upskilling and implementation of *Change the story* and associated frameworks, resources and tools, delivered in collaboration with states and territories across jurisdictions

²⁴ Respect Victoria. 2025. *Maintain the momentum: Three yearly report to parliament on the progress of prevention 2022–2024*. Melbourne: Respect Victoria.

²⁵ Publication forthcoming in 2026

16) Clarify the relationship and differences across primary prevention, early intervention, response and recovery, in the *Second Action Plan*, to support alignment in policy, program design and investments

17) Future prevention investment should include:

- 5-year minimum funding agreements for all primary prevention initiatives. Ensure sufficient investment in monitoring and evaluation of initiatives to support building practice evidence and the evidence base.
- Program design principles that require all investments to commit to genuine partnership in design and delivery, with investment to support a collaborative process
- funding for prevention programs on addressing harmful masculinity, developing healthy masculinities, and engaging men and boys backed by design principles that require accountability to women in all investments related to this area²⁶

Funding for community-led prevention

As a result of Royal Commission into Family Violence, transformation has occurred across the systems in Victoria involved in preventing and responding to family violence. Primary prevention has become well established through dedicated funding, policy frameworks and action plans; this system was built on a long history of community-level activity and activism. This work remains hidden, underappreciated and under resourced – in Victoria and across Australia.

Community-led initiatives are a critical part of the prevention landscape, finding solutions and preventing violence in their communities.²⁷ The *Second Action Plan* should recognise community-led prevention as critical to delivering prevention activity at scale, and with impact.

The experiences and understanding of communities influence how people think and talk about family and gender-based violence, as well as many issues relevant to the gendered drivers, like gender roles, family, relationships and sexuality. This means that all primary prevention policies, programs and messages must address this complexity in order to be effective, and this is best understood from the communities living in and addressing this complexity every day. Community-led prevention helps ensure groups are not homogenised, locating and empowering in-community solutions.

There is a longstanding history of prevention work undertaken by Aboriginal and Torres Strait communities, much of which long predates Australia's history of primary prevention work. Aboriginal-led, self-determined prevention approaches are some of the best examples of primary prevention work and are culturally safe and tailored to Aboriginal communities. There is significant opportunity for the broader prevention sector to learn from Aboriginal-led prevention through stronger partnerships and collaboration with Aboriginal

²⁶ Maintaining accountability to women is key to avoiding gender unequal or exploitative practices and taking a genuinely gender transformative approach: Our Watch. (2022). *Men in focus practice guide: Addressing masculinities and working with men in the prevention of men's violence against women*. Melbourne, Australia: Our Watch.

²⁷ Respect Victoria (2026) *Recognising and enabling community-led and specialist prevention work*, Melbourne: Respect Victoria. <https://www.respectvictoria.vic.gov.au/our-work/reporting-progress-prevention/maintain-the-momentum/progress-challenges-recommendations/enabling-prevention-work>

Community Controlled Organisations (ACCOs), Aboriginal peak bodies, partnerships and the Aboriginal organisations leading this work. However, all elements must be funded sustainably to undertake grassroots prevention work but also to foster learnings within the mainstream prevention sector as relevant.

In Victoria, LGBTIQ+ community-led organisations such as the Zoe Belle Gender Collective (ZBGC) are undertaking highly specialised prevention work, such as increasing understanding of transmisogyny and how to dismantle it, in recognition that transmisogyny is a key driver of violence against trans women and transfeminine people.²⁸ However, most LGBTIQ+ community-led organisations, as well as other organisations that provide community-led prevention work to other marginalised communities, are small and significantly under-resourced.²⁹

Funding for mainstream workforce capacity and capability building is also necessary for organisations working in prevention across a range of communities, including multicultural, ethno-specific and faith-based communities, women with disabilities and LGBTIQ+ communities.

We welcome the forthcoming release of *Changing with Pride* and call for support for its implementation to enable a nationally coordinated approach in preventing violence with and for the LGBTIQ+ community.³⁰

Recommendations:

- 18) Commit to the implementation of *Our Ways, Strong Ways, Our Voices* including through increased investment and work with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and ACCOs to lead self-determined prevention initiatives
- 19) Increase investment in community-led approaches and organisations to lead primary prevention activities including:
 - dedicated prevention programs for multicultural, ethno-specific and faith-based communities to ensure cultural responsiveness, relevance and impact
 - progress actions outlined in the *Changing the landscape* framework to prevent violence against women and girls with disabilities
 - meaningful inclusion at the national level through dedicated actions to address violence against trans women. This includes investment in trans and gender diverse organisations, who must be well resourced to co-lead this work and provide expert advice on behalf of their communities.³¹

²⁸ Women's Health in the North (2024) *Allyship in Action – Building Bystander Action for Trans and Gender Equity: Forum Outcomes Paper*, Women's Health in the North. <https://www.whin.org.au/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2024/09/Allyship-in-Action-paper-2.pdf>

²⁹ Carman, M, Fairchild, J, Parsons, M, Farrugia, C, Power, J, & Bourne, A (2020) *Pride in Prevention: A guide to primary prevention of family violence experienced by LGBTIQ communities*, Rainbow Health Australia. <https://rainbowhealthaustralia.org.au/news/pride-in-prevention-evaluation-guide-launch>

³⁰ Rainbow Health Australia and Our Watch (forthcoming) *Changing with Pride*, Melbourne: Rainbow Health Australia and Our Watch.

³¹ Safe and Equal (2026). *Submission to the Inquiry into anti-LGBTIQ+ hate crimes in Victoria*, Melbourne: Legislative Council Legal and Social Issues Committee, Parliament of Victoria. <https://safeandequal.org.au/2026/05/13/legislative-council-legal-and-social-issues-committee-inquiry-into-anti-lgbtqa-hate-crimes-in-victoria/>

- 20) Invest in a national capability building program that supports the primary prevention sector to implement *Changing with Pride* at scale, including practical resources, tools, guidance, and structured peer learning opportunities to share emerging practice across the sector. This program should be developed with and for the LGBTIQ+ community.
- 21) Ensure community-led expertise is an explicit area of attention in policy development, evaluating and measuring success and funded activity in the *Second Action Plan*

Primary prevention workforce development

Primary prevention practitioners herald from many disciplines and fields, dispersed across a wide range of organisations and settings.³² Our Watch recognises the need for a national coordinated primary prevention workforce approach to define, coordinate, and strengthen the prevention workforce.³³ This includes necessary recognition of distinct workplace challenges and worker wellbeing, including experiences of backlash and resistance to progressive social change.³⁴ A flexible national approach would not only help sustain the high-quality and specialist prevention workforce that already exists, but it would provide the necessary foundation for national workforce stability, capability development and system-wide impact to occur.

As part of this approach, workforce capacity building could be supported by consistent professional development opportunities. A successful example in Victoria is the *Statewide prevention workforce development program* (the Statewide program) and *Fast Track* intensive leadership programs. With the Statewide program and *Fast Track Prevention* stream proven to increase the knowledge, skills and capabilities for primary prevention practitioners,³⁵ the newly established *Leadership Foundations* has been designed to build leadership capability and management skills across middle-management levels, a gap which is often unaddressed across the prevention workforce.

Developing a skilled, supported, connected diverse and growing workforce requires key infrastructure, tools and practices, many of which have been tested and implemented in different jurisdictions and settings. A coordinated approach to workforce development for primary prevention would enable to capture and share the evidence of what works, enabling rapid and informed workforce development scaled to suit need in each state and territory. To realise a violence-free future, a foundational element is getting the workers in place to deliver primary prevention to stop violence before it starts.

Recommendations:

- 22) Develop a coordinated national primary prevention workforce approach to sustain a high-quality, diverse and specialist primary prevention workforce. Ensure that a

³² Carman, M Fairchild, J Cooper, M & Ditcham, A (2024) *Foundations for Action: Understanding the primary prevention workforce in Victoria*, Melbourne: Safe and Equal. <https://safeandequal.org.au/resources/foundations-for-action-understanding-the-primary-prevention-workforce-in-victoria/>

³³ Our Watch (2025) *Policy brief: Developing a primary prevention workforce*, Our Watch.

<https://www.ourwatch.org.au/submissions/policy-brief-developing-a-primary-prevention-workforce>

³⁴ Our Watch (2023) *Growing with change: Developing an expert workforce to prevent violence against women*, Melbourne, Australia: Our Watch. <https://www.ourwatch.org.au/change-the-story/growing-with-change>

³⁵ Henry, K, Mooney, B & Ditcham, A (2025) *Fast Track Intensive Leadership Programs 2022-2024 Evaluation Report*, Safe and Equal. https://safeandequal.org.au/wp-content/uploads/FastTrack_EvaluationReport_2022-24_A4_FINAL_03.pdf

national approach is informed by state and territory workforce investments, planning and professional development offerings already underway.

- 23) Ensure continued investment in capability development across the primary prevention workforce. This should be developed and delivered by, or co-delivered with, community and community-led organisations to ensure relevance and impact.

Funding for specialist family violence response

SFVSs provide critical support for victim survivors (adults, children and young people) and include ACCOs and targeted SFVSs. Specialist family violence services save lives.

ACCOs provide community-led responses for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and communities, which includes ACCOs who provide specialist family violence services. We support the *Our Ways – Strong Ways – Our Voices* focus on long-term, sustainable and flexible funding models that increase the sustainability and proportion of funding to ACCOs.³⁶

Targeted SFVSs provide support to victim survivors across a range of communities and are often community-led including multicultural, ethno-specific and faith-based communities, LGBTIQ+ communities, older people, people with a disability and people in the sex industry. Targeted services are under immense pressure, responding to high volumes of self and community referrals and referrals from mainstream services that are increasingly at capacity.³⁷

Demand for Specialist Family Violence Services

Despite their critical work, SFVSs face increasing demand with already limited resources.³⁸ SFVSs continue to report unsustainable demand and increasing complexity in their work, with little capacity to respond to need beyond immediate crisis or to provide early intervention or recovery support.³⁹

In order to build better demand data nationally, we support the Federal government's commissioning of the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) to complete the *Specialist Crisis FDV services* pilot project, including the dedicated First Nations phase of work.⁴⁰ Creating this evidence-base long-term relies on the collection, collation and reporting of data from SFVSs. However, this creates an additional burden for SFVSs, whose core business is to respond to victim survivors, and SFVSs must be funded separately to participate in data and evidence gathering, as well as fulfilling current reporting requirements. As recommended by *Our Ways – Strong Ways – Our Voices*,

³⁶ Department of Social Services (DSS) (2026) *Our Ways – Strong Ways – Our Voices: National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Plan to End Family, Domestic and Sexual Violence 2026-2036*, Australian Government, p.62.

<https://www.dss.gov.au/first-nations-national-plan-end-family-domestic-and-sexual-violence/resource/our-ways-strong-ways-our-voices-national-aboriginal-and-torres-strait-islander-plan-end-family-domestic-and-sexual-violence-2026-2036>

³⁷ Tassone, J (2025) *Measuring Specialist Family Violence Service Demand and Capacity Report 2025*, Melbourne: Safe and Equal. <https://safeandequal.org.au/wp-content/uploads/Measuring-Demand-and-Capacity-2025-FINAL.pdf>

³⁸ Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence Commission (2024) *Yearly Report to Parliament, Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence Commission*, Australian Government. <https://www.dfsvc.gov.au/yearly-report-2025>

³⁹ Tassone, J (2025) *Measuring Specialist Family Violence Service Demand and Capacity Report 2025*, Melbourne: Safe and Equal. <https://safeandequal.org.au/wp-content/uploads/Measuring-Demand-and-Capacity-2025-FINAL.pdf>

⁴⁰ Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) (2026) *Family, domestic and sexual violence: Pilot data collection for specialist crisis FDV services*, Australian Government. <https://www.aihw.gov.au/family-domestic-and-sexual-violence/resources/pilot-data-collection-for-specialist-crisis-fdv-services>

ACCOs must also be resourced for the purposes of community-led collection and analysis of data.⁴¹

With no current national evidence base on demand on SFVSs, we know that in Victoria approximately 3,750 victim survivors seeking help from SFVSs in 2024-25 were unable to receive any support.⁴² This has led to 42 per cent of SFVS case management services forced to operate a waitlist due to under resourcing.⁴³ To manage escalating demand, 65 per cent of services report practitioners work overtime to cope with workload, despite personal cost – 70 percent report workload levels had impacted retention and staff wellbeing in their organisations.⁴⁴

To meet demand in Victoria alone, SFVSs require a 62 percent increase in core funding (an increase of \$187 million per year) – this includes funding to ensure SFVSs are able to work with children and young people as victim survivors in their own right.⁴⁵ Additional investment would increase the capacity of the SFVSs sector to respond to victim survivors needs but is also predicted to generate a six-fold return on investment in economic benefits – generating \$2.8 billion work of benefits for victim survivor and the state in Victoria alone.⁴⁶

SFVSs are also under pressure due to short-term funding cycles; these undermine program stability and staff retention, cause service disruption and diminished program quality and effectiveness. This risks successful initiatives being scaled back or discontinued, potentially recommencing only after contracts are renewed and staff replaced. These cycles erode community trust and create inefficiencies, as organisations devote substantial resources to advocacy and securing additional funding at the expense of direct service provision.

We welcome the funding provided by the Federal Government in partnership with states and territories as part of the Federal Funding Agreement (FFA), including recent announcements of a longer-term funding span of five years for some initiatives and programs. Over the course of the current FFA, annual funding appears to have decreased from \$135 million per year in 2021-22 to \$73.2 million per year across 2025-2030.⁴⁷ While recognising that not all federal funding is provided through this component of the FFA, any overall decline in funding for frontline family violence response at a time when family violence has been deemed a national emergency impacts on victim survivor access, safety and recovery, with an overlap between response and recovery. Crisis response lays the groundwork for recovery by working across ‘life domains’ necessary for recovery⁴⁸, and

⁴¹ Department of Social Services (DSS) (2026) *Our Ways – Strong Ways – Our Voices: National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Plan to End Family, Domestic and Sexual Violence 2026-2036*, Australian Government, p.62.

⁴² <https://www.dss.gov.au/first-nations-national-plan-end-family-domestic-and-sexual-violence/resource/our-ways-strong-ways-our-voices-national-aboriginal-and-torres-strait-islander-plan-end-family-domestic-and-sexual-violence-2026-2036>

⁴³ Equity Economics (2025) *The costs and benefits of fully meeting demand for specialist family violence services in Victoria*, Melbourne: Safe and Equal. <https://safeandequal.org.au/policy-and-advocacy/research-reports/>

⁴⁴ Safety is prioritised, with cases triaged and victim survivors at the highest risk of imminent harm assigned to case managers immediately, however victim survivors at other levels of risk are forced to wait. Tassone, J (2026) *Measuring Specialist Family Violence Service Demand and Capacity Report 2025*, Melbourne: Safe and Equal.

⁴⁵ Tassone, J (2025) *Measuring Specialist Family Violence Service Demand and Capacity Report 2025*, Melbourne: Safe and Equal. <https://safeandequal.org.au/wp-content/uploads/Measuring-Demand-and-Capacity-2025-FINAL.pdf>

⁴⁶ Equity Economics (2025) *The costs and benefits of fully meeting demand for specialist family violence services in Victoria*, Melbourne: Safe and Equal. <https://safeandequal.org.au/policy-and-advocacy/research-reports/>

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Federal Financial Relations (2021) *Family, Domestic and Sexual Violence Responses (2021-30)*, Commonwealth of Australia. <https://federalfinancialrelations.gov.au/agreements/family-domestic-and-sexual-violence-responses-2021-30>

⁴⁹ These include housing, education, employment, health and wellbeing, justice and legal matters, financial and material assistance, transport, as well as relationships with family and friends. *Family Violence Case Management Program Requirements*.

assisting victim survivors to build intrinsic empowerment to navigate the next steps of their journey.

Rural and regional considerations

Victim survivors in rural and regional areas face unique barriers including accessing safe and appropriate housing, in addition to those present in metropolitan areas.⁴⁹

A survey of SFVSs⁵⁰ has found:

- noted '*challenges in rural Victoria finding suitably qualified staff*,' while another reported a '*lack of suitably qualified and experienced staff in [their] local area*.'
- fixed term contracts, mandatory minimum qualifications requirements, and short-term funding were also identified as barriers to attracting and retaining staff, particularly those with limited experience
- vacancies in leadership roles, such as team leader roles, had direct operational impacts, with managers required to step into frontline supervision and case direction. Small teams reported significant indirect pressure on remaining staff to absorb referrals and meet service targets, as one service noted that they are '*unable to compete with the broader family violence sector job market*,' although the demands of the role remain significant
- services operating in regional and rural areas described additional constraints, including the '*impact of traveling from regional area to access face to face training*,' and limited face-to-face training opportunities. In response to this, some services stated that they relied on virtual training options, though observed '*reduced levels of staff engagement*.'

Recommendations:

- 24) An increase to funding for ACCOs, and a commitment to long-term, sustainable and flexible funding models
- 25) Utilise the findings of the *Specialist Crisis FDV services* pilot project to inform data system improvements to better collect and understand service demand at both the national and across states and territories level
- 26) Increased and sustainable Federal government investment in Specialist Family Violence Services nationwide to meet rising demand.⁵¹ All funding should:
 - be provided as a five-year minimum commitment to enable long-term planning and reduce workforce insecurity
 - move away from short-term competitive tender models toward long-term, block-funded contracts for specialist, community-led and culturally safe specialist services to secure sustainable service continuity and access
 - have commissioning frameworks that recognise and adequately fund the additional resources required to deliver substantive equity, including

⁴⁹ Safe and Equal (2023) *Rural and Regional Housing Statement: Challenges and recommendations for improving safe, affordable, and long-term housing options for victim survivors of family violence in rural and regional Victoria*. <https://safeandequal.org.au/policy-and-advocacy/policy-positions-and-analysis/>

⁵⁰ Tassone, J (2025) *Measuring Specialist Family Violence Service Demand and Capacity Report 2025*, Melbourne: Safe and Equal. <https://safeandequal.org.au/wp-content/uploads/Measuring-Demand-and-Capacity-2025-FINAL.pdf>

⁵¹ Including the Federation Funding Agreement, Family, Domestic and Sexual Violence Responses (2021-30).

interpreting and language services, disability access and reasonable adjustments, outreach, community engagement and specialist cultural and intersectional expertise

- ensure equity and accessibility requirements are matched by the resources necessary to deliver specialist services effectively
- ensure rural and regional needs are considered, accounted for and resourced

Specialist family violence workforce development

A sustainable SFVS sector is reliant on having a skilled, highly specialised workforce to deliver necessary supports to victim survivors. However, fundamental workforce issues persist. Stressful and high-risk working conditions, limited career development and progression opportunities and the prevalence of short-term contracts leading to job insecurity all negatively impact on workforce attraction, retention and development. High levels of demand and workforce shortages equate to practitioners working overtime – a survey of SFVSs found 70 per cent report workload levels had impacted retention and staff wellbeing in their organisations.⁵²

A planned, deliberate, and strategic approach to recruiting, developing, and supporting the SFVS workforce is critical. Governments and services must engage with universities, TAFEs, and professional accreditation bodies in collaborative planning, curriculum design, and workforce strategy development to build a sustainable workforce pipeline that can adequately respond to increasing service demand. Workforce planning also needs to integrate ongoing workforce supports such as access to professional development, supervision and health and wellbeing supports to mitigate the effects of burnout and vicarious trauma.

Recommendation:

- 27) Investment in workforce pipeline initiatives, professional development and worker wellbeing initiatives focused on improving health and wellbeing for specialist family violence workers

Funding for early intervention, recovery and healing⁵³

Early intervention and recovery remain under-resourced parts of the system, receiving insufficient policy attention and targeted funding. As demand for crisis services increases, resources are diverted away from these critical areas, limiting the system's capacity to prevent escalation and support long-term recovery.

A 2025 Safe and Equal member survey showed early intervention initiatives are under-resourced, inconsistently funded, and often embedded within broader programs not

⁵² Tassone, J (2025) *Measuring Specialist Family Violence Service Demand and Capacity Report 2025*, Melbourne: Safe and Equal. <https://safeandequal.org.au/wp-content/uploads/Measuring-Demand-and-Capacity-2025-FINAL.pdf>

⁵³ Recovery and healing also has a specific meaning for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, and healing as a practice is deeply rooted in First Nations' approaches. Please see: Sinko, L, James, R. and Hughesdon, K (2022) Healing after gender-based violence: A qualitative meta synthesis using meta-ethnography, *Trauma, Violence & Abuse*, 23(4), 1184-1197. doi: 10.1177/1524838021991305.

specifically designed for early intervention.⁵⁴ This equates to program instability, practitioner burnout, and the inability to scale existing effective approaches. We know there is existing early intervention work being done in overlapping ways with primary prevention (for example, work in councils and schools, community-led prevention) and with specialist family violence services, services for people who use violence, legal services and services for children, young people and families. Targeted investment is needed to build upon this existing work, and to coordinate and build a system of effective early intervention.

Recovery support, which is essential for rebuilding the lives of victim survivors, is similarly under resourced. Housing, legal support, financial support and wellbeing support services are just some of the critical enablers of recovery, due to the long-term financial, legal and health impacts of family violence. However, these systems are chronically underfunded, and many victim survivors are unable to access the support they need. Longer-term support is needed to support recovery and healing, including access to SFVSs beyond immediate crisis periods, as well as long-term access to family violence-informed therapeutic counselling which often have long waitlists. Some SFVSs deliver dedicated recovery programs and activities, which combine therapeutic supports, alongside building social connections and financial independence. However, while these programs do exist, they are inconsistently available to victim survivors, amidst an already fragmented landscape of support.

Recommendations:

- 28) Increase investment in family and gender-based violence early intervention including coordination and cross-sector collaboration to strategically advance this work
- 29) Increased and dedicated funding for recovery initiatives and programs including therapeutic care, peer-to-peer support, and pathways back into education and employment

b) The role of critical adjacent sectors in victim survivor safety and recovery

Victim survivors rely on the expert risk assessment, case management and safety planning skills of specialist family violence services to work towards safety and recovery. However, without access to safe and affordable housing, legal and financial support, mental health and disability services, victim survivors are limited, if not prevented entirely, from recovering from their experiences of family violence. Victim survivors are accessing a range of fragmented, under-resourced and stretched systems, with no guarantee of having their needs met.

⁵⁴ Hewitt, S & Carman, M (2025) *Early intervention in family and gender-based violence: Scoping paper*, Melbourne: Safe and Equal, <https://safeandequal.org.au/policy-and-advocacy/research-reports/>

Housing and homelessness

Family violence is the main reason women and children leave their home in Australia, with victim survivors making up 42% of Specialist Homelessness Services clients.⁵⁵ Due to compounding discriminations and inadequate appropriate housing options, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander victim survivors and victim survivors from marginalised groups face higher rates of homelessness and additional barriers to housing.⁵⁶

Aboriginal victim survivors are more likely to have experienced homelessness as a result of family violence than non-Aboriginal people,⁵⁷ and face systemic racism and discrimination in the housing market. With family violence a major driver for Child Protection involvement and entry into out-of-home care for Aboriginal children,⁵⁸ the lack of culturally safe and affordable housing not only increases family violence risk, but it also increases the risk of Aboriginal children being removed from their family and culture.

The current lack of affordable housing options limits victim survivor safety and recovery as they face uncertainty and the forced 'choice' between violence and homelessness. Conversely, it also limits the ability of people using violence to find affordable housing themselves, which compounds the likelihood of them remaining or returning home, or seeking housing with new partners or family members who they may also choose to be violent towards.

Where victim survivors wish, the primary response should be for adult and child victim survivors to remain safely in their own homes, with the person using violence removed. This is currently supported via the Keeping Women Safe in their Homes (KWSITH) program, which provides funding for home security upgrades for victim survivors and for which funding has been provided until 2027.⁵⁹

While the KWSITH program provides needed support and should continue, ultimately the responsibility for the safety of victim survivors must sit with the broader response system, and to ensure people using violence are held accountable. Remaining safely at home is imperative for Aboriginal victim survivors and marginalised victim survivors, who face additional structural challenges in finding appropriate accommodation, such as culturally safe or accessible properties.

⁵⁵ Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute (AHURI) (2022) *Housing, homelessness and domestic and family violence*, AHURI. <https://www.ahuri.edu.au/analysis/brief/housing-homelessness-and-domestic-and-family-violence>

⁵⁶ Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) (2019) *Family, domestic and sexual violence in Australia: continuing the national story*, AIHW. <https://www.aihw.gov.au/getmedia/b0037b2d-a651-4abf-9f7b-00a85e3de528/aihw-fdv3-FDSV-in-Australia2019.pdf.aspx?inline=true>

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) (National Indigenous Australians Agency) (2026) *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Performance Framework: 2.12 Child protection*, AIHW. <https://www.indigenoushpf.gov.au/measures/2-12-child-protection>

⁵⁹ Department of Social Services (DSS) (2025) *Keeping Women Safe in their Homes*, Australian Government. <https://www.dss.gov.au/national-plan-end-violence-against-women-and-children/progress/first-action-plan-progress/first-action-plan-activities-addendum/keeping-women-safe-their-homes>

Recommendation:

- 30) Continuation of funding for Safe at Home responses including the Keeping Women Safe in their Homes program and Personal Safety Initiative⁶⁰

Specialist Family Violence Refuges

Refuges provide secure crisis accommodation, risk assessment, and a range of supports for victim survivors. The Safe Places grant program is a welcome initiative and could be strengthened by reviewing application requirements (currently applications must be received through specific housing providers which limits direct access by refuge providers) and expanding to include operational funding as part of the program.

Private rental and social housing

We commend the Federal Government in making changes to the Capital Gains Tax system, and the potential positive impacts of this on longer-term housing affordability.

According to the *2026 Anglicare Rental Affordability Snapshot*, of the 49,000 total rental properties available nationwide, only 255 (0.5%) could be afforded by a single person earning minimum wage, without entering housing stress.⁶¹ For a single person on Jobseeker and/or Parenting Payments, this drops to 54 total available properties and worsens even further to 17 affordable properties in the entire country for a person on the Disability Support Pension.⁶² The *Economic Inclusion Advisory Council* also found more than 70 per cent of Commonwealth Rent Assistance households are in housing stress and paying over 30 per cent of their income on housing costs. This includes 30 per cent of households that are paying over half of their income on housing.⁶³

Social housing

Commonwealth initiatives investing in social housing are welcome (such as the *Housing Australia Future Fund* and *Social Housing Accelerator Payment*). However, further investment is required to truly address the demand for social housing. Nationally there are approximately 206,000 households on the social housing (public and community housing) waitlist.⁶⁴ Forty-three per cent of households on this list are labelled as 'greatest-need' across four factors, including risk from family violence.⁶⁵ To meet demand, Victoria alone requires an additional 377,000 social homes to be built in the next 25 years, with a minimum of 83,000 required solely for victim survivors across the same period.⁶⁶

⁶⁰ The Personal Safety Initiative (PSI) is a non-crisis support program providing home security audits, tailored technology upgrades, and case management to help family violence victim survivors remain safely in their homes.

⁶¹ Anglicare, *Rental Affordability Snapshot* (2026), <https://www.anglicarevic.org.au/research/victorian-rental-affordability-snapshot-2026/>

The Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute defines *housing stress* as when a household's income level is in the bottom 40% of the national income distribution and they pay more than 30% of their income on housing; The Economic Inclusion Advisory Committee (EIAC) (2026) *2026 Report to Government*, Australian Government.

<https://www.dss.gov.au/committees-and-panels/resource/economic-inclusion-advisory-committee-2026-report>

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ The Economic Inclusion Advisory Committee (EIAC) (2025) *2025 Report to Government*, Australian Government.

<https://www.dss.gov.au/committees/resource/economic-inclusion-advisory-committee-2025-report>

⁶⁴ Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) (2026) *Housing assistance in Australia*, AIHW.

<https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/housing-assistance/housing-assistance-in-australia-2026/contents/households-and-waitlists>

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ SGS Economics and Planning (2025) *Growing Social Housing: Data, insights and targets*, Victorian Housing Peaks Alliance. <https://apo.org.au/node/330589>

The demand for long-term housing compounds the experience of victim survivors and impacts existing demand on SFVSs. When victim survivor needs are not met due to unavailable housing, victim survivors remain at risk and are more likely to return for family violence support. For victim survivors who have been able to obtain a refuge space, the lack of exit pathways can mean they remain in refuge for extended periods, which also blocks other victim survivors from accessing refuge places and increases the likelihood of victim survivors returning to a person using violence due to the lack of available options.

The *National Plan* recognises that housing is the “key to ending violence against women and children”,⁶⁷ and the Federal government must continue to invest in housing and work with state and territory governments to adequately address housing needs.

Recommendations:

- 31) Review application requirements for the Safer Places grant program and inclusions such as operational costs
- 32) Increase Commonwealth Rent Assistance payments as recommended by the *Economic Inclusion Advisory Committee*⁶⁸
- 33) Invest in social housing – with Victoria requiring an additional 377,000 homes across 25 years including 83,000 social homes allocated for victim survivors

Legal support

Family violence often means victim survivors are navigating multiple legal systems across different jurisdictions that requires legal advice, support and representation. This complexity can be overwhelming and confusing and includes barriers to access. A significant number of victim survivors are navigating these systems without legal advice and representation. Approximately 52,000 women per year are unable to access legal support from Women’s Legal Services Australia,⁶⁹ with a minimum of 400 victim survivors of family violence turned away from community legal centres per day.⁷⁰ In addition, only 8 per cent of the population qualify for legal aid;⁷¹ despite approximately 14 per cent of the population living below the poverty line.⁷²

We welcome the investment provided by the *National Access to Justice Partnership 2025-2023 (NAJP)* to legal services. However, funding levels remain insufficient to meet demand, with Community Legal Centres Australia calculating an additional \$96 million is needed annually to meet this demand.⁷³ Pay parity of the workforce is also important with community legal workers requiring a \$72 million injection to increase salaries to comparable

⁶⁷ Department of Social Services (DSS) (2022) *The National Plan to End Violence against Women and Children 2022–2032*, Australian Government, p.58. <https://www.dss.gov.au/national-plan-end-violence-against-women-and-children>

⁶⁸ The Economic Inclusion Advisory Committee (EIAC) (2026) *2026 Report to Government*, Australian Government. <https://www.dss.gov.au/committees-and-panels/resource/economic-inclusion-advisory-committee-2026-report>

⁶⁹ Women’s Legal Services Australia (2025) *Federal Pre-Budget Submission 2025-26*, Women’s Legal Services Australia. <https://www.wlsa.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2025/02/WLSA-Federal-Pre-Budget-Submission-2025-26-FINAL.pdf>

⁷⁰ Community Legal Centres Australia (2025) *2026-27 Pre-Budget Submission*, Community Legal Centres Australia. <https://clcs.org.au/federal-budget/>

⁷¹ Balmer, NJ & McDonald HM (2025) *Access to just this? Eligibility for legal aid in Australia and its implications*, Victoria Law Foundation. <https://www.victorialawfoundation.org.au/research-publications/access-to-just-this>

⁷² https://povertyandinequality.acoss.org.au/poverty_in_australia_2025_overview/

⁷³ Community Legal Centres Australia (2025) *2026-27 Pre-Budget Submission*, Community Legal Centres Australia. <https://clcs.org.au/federal-budget/>

rates. The risk is that skilled practitioners will leave the workforce, impacting negatively on service delivery.⁷⁴

Systems abuse

Systems abuse refers to the manipulation of the systems (often the legal system) by people using violence, done so in order to exert control over, threaten and harass a current or former partner.⁷⁵ Systems abuse committed by people using violence can include misidentification, the tactic of 'conflicting out',⁷⁶ using vexatious claims against victim survivors, deliberately drawing out court proceedings to continue to control the victim survivor and/or misusing family law proceedings.

Family violence is a major risk factor prevalent in the work of the federal courts.⁷⁷ Recent changes to family law are welcome, however, our members report that systems abuse within the family law system remains a current and pressing issue. A major protective factor against weaponisation of systems is the provision of legal advice and support, including access to early and ongoing family law legal assistance for victim survivors. However, funding for victim survivors accessing the Federal Circuit and Family Court of Australia (FCFCoA) is currently inadequate, with National Legal Aid advocating for a reinstatement of \$17.1million to respond to demand for family law.⁷⁸ We note that inadequate funding has already led to Legal Aid NSW being forced to narrow access to essential Independent Children's Lawyers.⁷⁹ Alongside this, 2026/27 funding for the Commonwealth Cross-Examination Scheme was limited to six months only.

Investment in early and preventative legal assistance and programs provides a range of benefits including supporting victim survivors' safety and recovery alongside systemic economic benefits. A report commissioned by National Legal Aid, found that the provision of legal aid delivers \$600 million in savings to the community, government and the justice system. These savings are demonstrated most noticeably in legal assistance preventing family violence and stopping it from escalating. The report found that for every \$1 invested in legal aid services by the Commonwealth government an equivalent benefit of \$2.25 was delivered. More than half these savings (\$378 million) were in supporting women and children escaping domestic and family violence.⁸⁰

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Reeves, E (2018) *Research Brief: Systems Abuse*, Monash Gender and Family Violence Prevention Centre. https://arts.monash.edu/_data/assets/pdf_file/0005/1529852/rb-systems-abuse.pdf

⁷⁶ This is when perpetrators deliberately contact legal support services in order to ensure those legal services then cannot work with or support the victim survivor.

⁷⁷ Federal Circuit and Family Court of Australia (2023) *Family Violence Plan 2023–2026*, Federal Circuit and Family Court of Australia. <https://www.fcfcoa.gov.au/fi/fv/fv-plan-2023>

⁷⁸ National Legal Aid (2026) *2026-27 Pre-Budget Submission: Submission to The Treasury*, National Legal Aid. <https://nationallegalaid.org.au/policy-and-advocacy/submissions/2026-27-pre-budget-sub>

⁷⁹ Legal Aid New South Wales (2026) *Legal Aid NSW reduces family law services amid budget pressure*, Legal Aid New South Wales. <https://www.legalaid.nsw.gov.au/about-us/news/media-releases/2026-05-13-budget-and-family-law-changes-media-release>

⁸⁰ National Legal Aid (2023) *The benefits of providing access to justice*, National Legal Aid <https://nationallegalaid.org.au/policy-and-advocacy/reports/the-benefits-of-providing-access-to-justice>

Misidentification

One tactic of systems abuse is misidentification,⁸¹ which is where a victim survivor is incorrectly identified as the person using violence, and vice versa.⁸² People using violence capitalise on existing structural oppression and systemic bias to encourage systems and services to misidentify victim survivors. Misidentification has devastating effects – people who use violence remain unaccountable, whereas victim survivors face long-term consequences which can include the inability to access support services, increased family violence risk, criminalisation, restrictions to employment, homelessness and forced child removal.⁸³ Legal support services and SFVSs are the most well-equipped to recognise and advocate for the rectification of misidentification across systems, and funding is required to ensure both systems can respond adequately to misidentified victim survivors.

Recommendations:

- 34) Expand legal support access through increased investment in community legal services including Community Legal Centres Australia estimates as a minimum
- 35) Reinstatement of \$17.1 million per annum to support victim survivors of domestic and family violence impacted by Federal Circuit and Family Court reforms
- 36) Continuation of funding for the Commonwealth Cross-Examination Scheme
- 37) Develop a better understanding and visibility of systems abuse in the family law system, through data and training for relevant professionals

Weaponisation of government systems

It is being increasingly recognised that people who use violence weaponise systems and that, in some cases, the systems themselves can inflict further harm on victim survivors. Safe and Equal welcomes the recognition, attention and funding the Government is currently giving to the weaponisation of government systems,⁸⁴ including announcements in the 2026/27 Federal Budget to address misuse of the child support system.⁸⁵

There are opportunities to further support victim survivors by shifting responsibility to systems, such as making Agency Collect,⁸⁶ the default option for child support collection processes and resourcing the Australian Tax Office to investigate more child support cases.⁸⁷ In addition, the complex intersection between tax assessments, child support and family tax benefits continue to create harm – addressing the inequities in the intersection of

⁸¹ Reeves, E, Fitz-Gibbon, K, Meyer, S & Walklate, S (2025) Incredible Women: Legal Systems Abuse, Coercive Control, and the Credibility of Victim-Survivors, *Violence Against Women*, 31(3-4) 767-788. doi: 10.1177/10778012231220370

⁸² Victims of Crime Commissioner (2023) *Silenced and sidelined: Systemic inquiry into victim participation in the justice system*, Victims of Crime Commissioner. https://victimsofcrimecommissioner.vic.gov.au/media/lpujix5h/silenced-and-sidelined_systemic-inquiry-into-victim-participation.pdf

⁸³ This is of particular concern for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, and fear of misidentification and child removal is a significant barrier for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women reporting to police. Please see: Yoorook Justice Commission, (2025) Yoorook for Transformation: Third Interim report – Volume 4, Melbourne: Yoorook Justice Commission p. 158. https://cdn.craft.cloud/06ad3276-b3d9-4912-bcbb-37795aade9a8/assets/documents/YoorookForTransformation_ThirdInterimReport-Volume4_Accessible.pdf

⁸⁴ This also includes closing loopholes within tax and corporate systems, and around social security debts and superannuation. PM&C. (2024). Audit of Australian Government Systems. <https://www.pmc.gov.au/office-women/womens-safety/audit-australian-government-systems>

⁸⁵ Department of Premier and Cabinet (2026) *Women's Budget Statement*, Australian Government. <https://budget.gov.au/content/womens-statement/download/womens-budget-statement-2026-27.pdf>

⁸⁶ Agency Collect is where child support payments are collected and made by the Commonwealth Child Support Agency, rather than Private Collect where the person paying child support pays the recipient directly.

⁸⁷ Department of Social Services (2026) *Economic Inclusion Advisory Committee 2026 report*. Department of Social Services. <https://www.dss.gov.au/committees-and-panels/resource/economic-inclusion-advisory-committee-2026-report>

these systems, will require major ongoing reform, such as separating child support from Family Tax Benefit completely.⁸⁸

To safeguard against weaponisation by people using violence, all systems must be specifically designed to prevent them from being weaponised in the first place. This includes within Commonwealth Government systems, as well as across a range of corporate systems, including banking, finance, telecommunications, superannuation, insurance and essential services. Safety by Design principles provide an existing structure for the design, review and analysis of systems,⁸⁹ which places responsibility for safety with service providers, rather than victim survivors themselves, and we strongly support the government using these principles across their systems abuse audit work.

While we recognise the Commonwealth government does not have direct responsibility for corporate systems, we strongly encourage the government to mandate Safety by Design principles when Australian organisations or companies are designing or reviewing products, services and/or systems.

Recommendations:

- 38) Safe and Equal supports Recommendation 7 of the *Economic Inclusion Advisory Committee* 2026 report for the Government to provide additional resources to the Australian Tax Office's Lodgement Enforcement Program to investigate more child support cases and ensure Agency Collect is the default collection method for all new child support cases
- 39) The Federal government to continue to incorporate Safety by Design principles into government systems, and to mandate private systems to include Safety by Design when designing or reviewing products, services and/or systems
- 40) The Federal government should:
 - partner across portfolios (NDIS, Home Affairs, Health, Social Services) to guarantee accessible emergency housing, personal care support during crisis, Medicare, legal assistance and income support
 - ensure government policies, eligibility requirements and service systems do not create or deepen dependency on perpetrators or exclude victim survivors from safety because of migration or visa status, disability, economic insecurity or other structural barriers

Mental health support

At a national level, there is broad agreement that family violence is a key driver for mental ill health, suicide, self-harm and suicide attempts. There is insufficient availability of mental health services in Australia, making it difficult for victim survivors to access timely and appropriate mental health support;⁹⁰ a finding further corroborated by our member services

⁸⁸ Cook, K Byrt, A; Edwards, T Burgin, R & Dimopoulos, G (2026) *Fembot Debt: Data injustices, child support and family tax benefit debts*, Swinburne University. doi: 10.25916/sut.31991106.v1

⁸⁹ eSafety Commissioner (2026) *Safety by Design*, Australian Government. <https://www.esafety.gov.au/industry/safety-by-design>

⁹⁰ Productivity Commission (2025) *Mental Health and Suicide Prevention Agreement Review: What we heard*, Australian Government. <https://www.pc.gov.au/inquiries-and-research/mental-health-review/report/>

and lived experience survivor advocates.⁹¹ Adequate funding for the mental health sector is critical to ensure victim survivors receive the help they need. As one survivor advocate stated:

“They [mental health services] don't have enough people. They don't have enough funding, and they certainly don't have enough people that are trained.”⁹²

The complexity of the intersection of family violence and mental health requires improved collaboration and coordination across the family violence and mental health sectors. Greater resourcing is needed for both sectors to share expertise and training and strengthen collaboration through complementary risk assessment frameworks.

Recommendation:

- 41) Increased, adequate funding for mental health support services. This should include investment to strengthen collaboration across sectors, including cross-sector training and complementary risk assessment practices

The National Disability Insurance Scheme

The National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) is changing, leaving fewer alternatives available to victim survivors with disability trying to escape violence.⁹³ While the impending changes to the NDIS remain unclear, this is expected to result in reduced supports and the exclusion of many participants, particularly for victim survivors who are already underserved by the scheme.⁹⁴ People with disability who are experiencing family violence will likely bear the brunt of these changes, as reduced access to supports undermines their capacity to remain connected, visible and safe.⁹⁵

In addition, the rapidly changing nature of family violence risk means victim survivors who do have access to the NDIS require additional flexibility. NDIS participants experiencing family violence should be able to quickly access and adapt their plan, at both the initial assessment stage and in response to their changing circumstances.

Recommendation:

- 42) Family violence should be a key consideration in the new NDIS framework including:
- the introduction of guidance for the National Disability Insurance Agency (NDIA) to responsively adjust NDIS plans for victim survivors
 - family violence capability building for disability services

⁹¹ Please see: Safe and Equal's submission to the Standing Committee on Social Policy and Legal Affairs *Inquiry into the relationship between domestic, family and sexual violence (DFSV) and suicide*.

⁹² Tapsell, A (2026) *Standing Committee on Social Policy and Legal Affairs Inquiry into the relationship between domestic, family and sexual violence (DFSV) and suicide*, Melbourne: Safe and Equal. https://safeandequal.org.au/wp-content/uploads/SUB-20260226-Inquiry-into-the-relationship-between-DFSV-and-suicide_Final.pdf

⁹³ Britt, J (2026) *For women with disability fleeing violence, NDIS reforms are making safety harder*. Women's Agenda. <https://womensagenda.com.au/latest/the-only-safe-place-is-the-one-shes-trying-to-leave/>

⁹⁴ Women with Disabilities Australia (WWDA) (2026) *Submission: Gendered Risks of the NDIS Amendment Bill 2026*, WWDA. <https://wwda.org.au/our-resources/publication/gendered-risks-of-the-ndis-amendment-bill-2026/>

⁹⁵ Ibid.

- an assessment of unintended consequences in the new framework for victim survivors of family violence

Victim survivor financial recovery

Family violence has significant economic and financial impacts. People using violence often use financial abuse, including restricting access to education or the labour market, and using systems abuse to drain victim survivors' economic resources, including by prolonging legal proceedings. This economic abuse can often continue long after separation. In addition, family violence can impact victim survivors' participation in employment and other economic activity, which disrupts their financial stability, makes them more likely to experience poverty,⁹⁶ and undermines their independence and wellbeing long-term.⁹⁷

Economic security should be recognised as fundamental to prevention, safety and recovery; this includes access to income support, safe and affordable housing, employment rights, social protection and pathways to financial independence. There should also be a focus on structural barriers experienced by victim survivors whose economic security is affected by migration or visa status, disability, caring responsibilities or exclusion from employment and social protections systems.

Investment in financial supports for victim survivors

Approximately 36-40% of victim survivors of intimate partner violence receive any type of government payment.⁹⁸ Yet, victim survivors who receive government payments are less likely to be able to afford to flee a person using violence, and to remain separated long-term, without the risk of poverty. For example, 45% of wage earners permanently leave a person using violence the first time they leave, while only 26% of people receiving income support do.⁹⁹

The *Economic Inclusion Advisory Committee* evidences the inadequacy of income support payments.¹⁰⁰ For victim survivors, the inadequacy of these payments impacts not only on victim survivors' immediate needs but their long-term economic security and overall wellbeing – making them more likely to slide into poverty, or to return to a person using violence. The Committee research found that increases to the adequacy of the JobSeeker payment would create long-term benefits to the Australian economy, with a benefit of \$1.24 for every dollar invested.¹⁰¹

Recommendation:

⁹⁶ Particularly victim survivors with children. Please see: Summers, A (2022) *The Choice: Violence or Poverty*, University of Technology Sydney. doi: 10.26195/3s1r-4977

⁹⁷ Cortis, N & Bullen, J (2016) *Domestic violence and women's economic security: Building Australia's capacity for prevention and redress: Final report*, Sydney: Australia's National Research Organisation for Women's Safety (ANROWS). <https://anrowsdev.wpenginepowered.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/ANROWS-Horizons-Report-Domestic-violence-and-womens-economic-security-2.pdf>

⁹⁸ Note: This statistic does not include family violence committed by family members and would likely be higher if the full definition of family violence was measured; The Economic Inclusion Advisory Committee (EIAC) (2025) *2025 Report to Government*, Australian Government. <https://www.dss.gov.au/committees/resource/economic-inclusion-advisory-committee-2025-report>

⁹⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰⁰ The Economic Inclusion Advisory Committee (EIAC) (2026) *2026 Report to Government*, Australian Government. <https://www.dss.gov.au/committees-and-panels/resource/economic-inclusion-advisory-committee-2026-report>

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

- 43) Safe and Equal supports Recommendation 1 of the *Economic Inclusion Advisory Committee 2026* report for the Government to commit to a substantial increase in the base rates of JobSeeker and related working age payments.¹⁰² These payments include the Parenting Payment, Disability Support Pension, Carer Payment and Youth Allowance.

Victim survivors on temporary visas

Victim survivors on temporary visas face fears of visa cancellation or visa refusal if they attempt to separate from the person using violence.¹⁰³ In addition, victim survivors on temporary visas face multiple barriers to support, often ineligible for many federal and state and territory government supports, including Medicare, social housing and income support payments.¹⁰⁴

Recommendation:

- 44) Aligned to the National Advocacy Group on Women on Temporary Visas Experiencing Violence *Blueprint for Reform*,¹⁰⁵ victim survivors on temporary visas should:

- have access to protections, services and justice;
- be eligible for social security, including Medicare;
- be able to access social and public housing; and
- that specialist and legal services that provide support to victim survivors on temporary visas are funded sustainably.

Leaving Violence Program

Where a victim survivor can leave a person using violence, the Leaving Violence Program (LVP) can provide significant assistance, helping to cover some of the immediate and urgent costs. Victim survivors that are leaving or have recently left a family violence situation will be in crisis, and it takes considerable time to navigate complex systems and work through multiple actions needed to establish safety for themselves and their children.

Currently, eligibility for the LVP is limited to intimate partner violence. However, family violence can occur in a range of family and familial-like relationships, as recognised Victorian *Family Violence Protection Act*.¹⁰⁶ This includes young people aged 16 and 17 who may have experienced intimate partner violence and/or violence from other family

¹⁰² Ibid.

¹⁰³ Hay, K (2026) *2026-27 Federal Budget: Pre Budget Submission*, Melbourne: Safe and Equal. <https://safeandequal.org.au/wp-content/uploads/Safe-and-Equal-2026-27-Federal-Budget-Submission.pdf>; 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*, National Advocacy Group on Women on Temporary Visas Experiencing Violence. <https://iarc.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2023/01/Blueprint-for-reform-2022-v071222.pdf>

¹⁰⁴ 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*, National Advocacy Group on Women on Temporary Visas Experiencing Violence. <https://iarc.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2023/01/Blueprint-for-reform-2022-v071222.pdf>

¹⁰⁵ Segrave, M & Vasil, S (2024) *Expanding family violence provisions is not enough to make temporary migrants safe*, Women's Agenda. <https://womensagenda.com.au/latest/expanding-family-violence-provisions-is-not-enough-to-make-temporary-migrants-safe/>

¹⁰⁶ <https://www.legislation.vic.gov.au/in-force/acts/family-violence-protection-act-2008/068>

members, including parents.¹⁰⁷ The LVP would be particularly beneficial for young people who are more likely to be reliant on a person using family violence for housing and financial supports, and are less likely to have their own financial resources.

Eligibility changes could assist victim survivors who currently experience access barriers to this program to receive this essential and potentially life-saving support.

Recommendation:

45) Increase access to the LVP through:

- extending the application window from 12 weeks to 6-months from leaving the relationship
- including other forms of family violence rather than limiting to intimate-partner contexts only
- including young people aged 16 and 17

c) Children and young people

Safe and Equal welcomes the focus in the *Second Action Plan* on responding to children and young people and their experiences of family violence as victim survivors in their own right. Children and young people require responses across the whole continuum, from prevention approaches to focused and tailored response services, and ensuring that the voices of children and young people are embedded across responses. Listening to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and additional systemically marginalised groups experiences must also be prioritised.

The impacts of family violence on children and young people

There are no circumstances in which children and young people who have experienced family violence (which includes being exposed to, and/or having witnessed family violence) or are currently living with family violence are not impacted.¹⁰⁸ This places significant risk on both their immediate and long-term health, development and wellbeing.¹⁰⁹

Children and young people can experience family violence from a range of people using violence, including intimate partners, family members and people who they have a familial-like relationship with, including carers. In addition, people using violence will target children

¹⁰⁷ Corrie, T, Moore, S & Anderson, T (2021) *Amplify: Turning up the Volume on Young People and Family Violence*, Melbourne City Mission (MCM). https://www.mcm.org.au/-/media/mcm/content-repository-files/amplify_turning-up-the-volume-on-young-people-and-family-violence.pdf

¹⁰⁸ Gillfeather-Spetere, S & Watson, A (2024) *In their own right: Actions to improve children and young people's safety from domestic, family and sexual violence*, Sydney: Australia's National Research Organisation for Women's Safety (ANROWS). <https://www.anrows.org.au/publication/children-young-peoples-safety/>

¹⁰⁹ Arai, L, Shaw, A, Feder, G, Howarth, E, MacMillan, H, Moore, THM, Stanley, N & Gregory, A (2019) *Hope, Agency, and the Lived Experience of Violence: A Qualitative Systematic Review of Children's Perspectives on Domestic Violence and Abuse, Trauma, Violence & Abuse*, 22(3), 427-438. doi: 10.1177/1524838019849582; Australia's National Research Organisation for Women's Safety (ANROWS) (2018) *Research summary: The impacts of domestic and family violence on children*, Sydney: ANROWS. <https://www.anrows.org.au/publication/research-summary-the-impacts-of-domestic-and-family-violence-on-children/>; Noble-Carr, D, Moore, T & McArthur, M (2021) The nature and extent of qualitative research conducted with children about their experiences of domestic violence: Findings from a meta-synthesis, *Trauma, Violence & Abuse*, 22(4), pp. 928-943. doi: 10.1177/1524838019888885.

and young people as a tactic of their family violence against an adult victim survivor,¹¹⁰ including child sexual abuse,¹¹¹ which has devastating, negative effects across childhood, lifespan and between generations.¹¹²

The landmark *Australian Child Maltreatment Study* has demonstrated that experiences of child maltreatment – including violence, abuse and neglect – are strongly associated with mental health disorders (e.g., major depressive disorder, generalised anxiety disorder, post-traumatic stress disorder and alcohol use disorder) and health risk behaviours, including suicidality.¹¹³ In addition to these negative effects on children and young people's lives, the connection between children's experience of family violence and the likelihood of those children going on to use violence in their own relationships and homes is increasingly documented.¹¹⁴

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children

It is difficult to obtain robust data on the experiences of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children,¹¹⁵ which increases the invisibility of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in policy and responses to family violence.¹¹⁶ Aboriginal children, due to the ongoing effects of colonisation and discrimination, experience disproportionately higher rates of family violence,¹¹⁷ which is a leading factor in family separation and placement in out-of-home care. The disproportionate involvement of Child Protection in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families reflects the intersecting impacts of family violence, homelessness, poverty and systemic racism.¹¹⁸

The intergenerational transmission of trauma for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people who have experienced family violence is significant, contributing to poorer life outcomes, impacting the ability to learn and develop positive relationships with others and increasing risk for future victimisation and involvement with youth justice systems.¹¹⁹ Efforts to improve responses for Aboriginal children and young people must

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹¹ Richards, K & Hussey, E (2026) Why Do Adults Sexually Abuse Children? A Systematic Scoping Review of How Male Perpetrators Qualitatively Account for Their Actions, *Victims & Offenders*, 1-45. doi:10.1080/15564886.2026.2615842.

¹¹² Haslam, D, Mathews, B, Pacella, R, Scott, JG, Finkelhor, D, Higgins, DJ, Meinck F, Erskine, HE, Thomas HJ, Lawrence, D & Malacova, E (2023) *The prevalence and impact of child maltreatment in Australia: findings from the Australian Child Maltreatment Study: Brief Report*, Australian Child Maltreatment Study, Queensland University of Technology, doi. org/10.5204/rep.eprints.239397.

¹¹³ Ibid.

¹¹⁴ Fitz-Gibbon K, Meyer S, Boxall H, Maher J, and Roberts S (2022) *Adolescent family violence in Australia: a national study of service and support needs for young people who use family violence*, Sydney: Australia's National Research Organisation for Women's Safety (ANROWS). <https://www.anrows.org.au/publication/adolescent-family-violence-in-australia-a-national-study-of-service-and-support-needs-for-young-people-who-use-family-violence/>

¹¹⁵ Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (2026) *Family, domestic and sexual violence: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people*, AIHW. <https://www.aihw.gov.au/family-domestic-and-sexual-violence/population-groups/aboriginal-and-torres-strait-islander-people>

¹¹⁶ SNAICC – National Voice for our Children (2025) *Family Matters Report 2025*, SNAICC, <https://www.snaicc.org.au/our-work/child-and-family-wellbeing/family-matters/>

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

¹¹⁸ Yoorrook Justice Commission (2023) *Yoorrook for Justice: Report into Victoria's Child Protection and Criminal Justice Systems. Chapter 3: Early intervention and prevention*, Melbourne: Yoorrook Justice Commission, <https://www.yoorrook.org.au/reports-and-recommendations/reports>; Yoorrook Justice Commission (2025) *Yoorrook for Transformation: Third Interim Report, Volume 1*, Melbourne: Yoorrook Justice Commission. <https://www.yoorrook.org.au/reports-and-recommendations>

¹¹⁹ Morgan, G, Butler, C, French, R, Creamer, T, Hillan, L, Ruggiero, E, Parsons, J, Prior, G, Idagi, L, Bruce, R, Gray, T, Jia, T, Hostalek, M, Gibson, J, Mitchell, B, Lea, T, Clancy, K, Barber, U, Higgins, D ... Trew, S (2022) *New Ways for Our Families: Designing an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural practice framework and system responses to address the impacts of domestic and family violence on children and young people*, Sydney: Australia's National Research

include resourcing for Aboriginal communities to self-determine approaches and maintain children's connections to culture and kin.

Recommendation:

- 46) Resource Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and organisations to self-determine approaches and maintain children and young people's connections to culture

Children and young people from systemically marginalised groups

Children and young people from systemically marginalised groups have distinct experiences of family violence, shaped by compounding structural factors. People using violence will often choose to target a child or young person's individualised needs, including limiting access to cultural connections and/or necessary disability supports, and/or utilising specifically discriminatory tactics of family violence.

For example, LGBTIQ+ children and young people are at increased risk of homo/bi/intersex/transphobic family violence from their family of origin. In addition to their individual experiences of family violence, children and young people from systematically marginalised backgrounds may also have difficulties in accessing support services,¹²⁰ despite unique needs that require tailored responses.

Learning from lived experience expertise

Although governments have acknowledged the importance of lived experience, children and young people's voices are still not being heard.¹²¹ Listening directly to children and young people and incorporating their expertise helps us to understand system shortcomings, inform better practice and drive reforms needed to ensure that all children and young people are recognised, supported and safe.¹²² Any work in this space should continue to build on existing work, such as the recent ANROWS convened children and young person roundtable,¹²³ to ensure children and young people are not continually repeating themselves.

Children and young people must be engaged in genuine co-design, to ensure that their perspectives are treated as central to building effective and responsive systems.¹²⁴ When

Organisation for Women's Safety (ANROWS). <https://www.anrows.org.au/publication/new-ways-for-our-families-designing-an-aboriginal-and-torres-strait-islander-cultural-practice-framework-and-system-responses-to-address-the-impacts-of-dfv-on-children-and-yo/>

¹²⁰ Tarpey-Brown, G; Kirwan, J, Wise, S, Alisic, E, Vaughan, C & Block, K (2024) Domestic and family violence affecting children and young people from culturally and racially marginalized migrant backgrounds in Australia: A scoping review of child experiences and service responses, *Trauma, Violence and Abuse*, 5(25), 3872-3886. doi: 10.1177/1524838024126538

¹²¹ Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence Commission (2025) *Yearly Report to Parliament*, Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence Commission, Australian Government. <https://www.dfsvc.gov.au/yearly-report-2025>

¹²² Fitz-Gibbon, K (2025) *Silence and inaction: Children and young people's experiences of violence and systemic failure in South Australia*. Report prepared for the South Australian Royal Commission into Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence, Victoria: Seque Consulting. doi: 10.6084/m9.figshare.29067608

¹²³ Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence Commission (2026) *New report urges action for children and young people experiencing violence – not just listening*, Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence Commission. <https://www.dfsvc.gov.au/media-release/new-report-urges-action-children-and-young-people-experiencing-violence-not-just-listening>

¹²⁴ Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence Commission (2025) *Yearly Report to Parliament*, Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence Commission, Australian Government. <https://www.dfsvc.gov.au/yearly-report-2025>

children and young people are excluded, systems and services lack critical insights into what makes them feel safe and supported.¹²⁵ In line with recognising children and young people as victim survivors in their own right, the establishment of, and ongoing consultation with youth advisory groups means that their voices can be embedded in shaping family violence responses.

Recommendation:

- 47) Safe and Equal supports Recommendation 19 of the Commissioners report,¹²⁶ for the Commonwealth to establish a National Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence Youth Advisory Council to ensure the voices and perspectives of young people are safely embedded in the national action planning process and provide an accountability mechanism during implementation of the Action Plan. This should include representation from children and young people from systematically marginalised communities, as well as young adults who experienced family violence as a child or young person.

Primary prevention approaches for children and young people

Respectful Relationships Education (RRE) is one of the most established and evidence-based forms of primary prevention, and Victoria has led the way.¹²⁷

The National Plan emphasises strengthening positive, equal and respectful relationships between all people, and stipulates that children and young people in Australia should be able to access age-appropriate consent and respectful relationships education, as an important strategy for ending gender-based violence. The RRE model operationalises these principles by providing opportunities for children and young people to develop and reflect on knowledge, skills, attitudes and behaviours that underpin and are needed to build and maintain respectful, equitable and safe relationships.¹²⁸ The education setting plays a powerful role in shaping how young people view the world and is a critical site for prevention work, given that attitudes towards gender equality and consent are formed early and reinforced in adolescence.¹²⁹ When fully implemented, RRE works at every level of the school as an educational setting, workplace, and community hub, leading to positive benefits for students, their parents, teachers and staff, and the broader community.

The National Respectful Relationships Education Framework was established to promote a clear and consistent national understanding of RRE and assist with the planning and delivery of age and developmentally appropriate, evidence-based and expert-developed RRE.¹³⁰ However, approaches to respectful relationships education take many forms across Australian schools and the definition for RRE varies across jurisdictions and

¹²⁵ Ibid.

¹²⁶ Ibid.

¹²⁷ Our Watch (2025) *Respectful relationships education: A blueprint for preventing gender-based violence through education systems* <https://www.ourwatch.org.au/education/resources/blueprint>

¹²⁸ Department of Education (2026) *National Respectful Relationships Education Framework*, Australian Government <https://www.education.gov.au/schooling/resources/national-respectful-relationships-education-framework>

¹²⁹ Our Watch and University of Melbourne Youth Research Collective (2026) *Young people, online worlds and respectful relationships education: What the research tells us*, Our Watch.

<https://www.ourwatch.org.au/education/resources/australian-curriculum-guide>

¹³⁰ Ibid.

sectors.¹³¹ In addition to inconsistencies, issues have been identified with teacher capacity and readiness due to workforce demands. There is also significant concern for the growing backlash teachers are experiencing in the classroom, fuelled by gender stereotypes and dominant forms of masculinity, and leading to safety concerns, burnout and resistance to engaging with RRE content.

Funding for the *The National Respectful Relationships Education Framework* will cease in 2028, before the framework has had sufficient time to achieve its intended outcomes across Australian primary and secondary schools. Every person in the school community deserves to be respected and treated equally, and the success of RRE will be dependent on long-term financial and political commitment.¹³²

Affirmative consent education programs have also shown promise with children and young people. *The Supporting Young People to Understand Affirmative Consent Program (2022-2025)* was established to improve knowledge on affirmative consent through out-of-school community-based educational initiatives.¹³³ The development of the *Second Action Plan* presents a key opportunity to build on Victoria's approach to affirmative consent and healthy relationships education by scaling programs that are mutually reinforcing of engaging youth in school, and out of school settings.

Ultimately, the design of peer-led/delivered affirmative consent education and respectful relationships education will have the greatest impact on children and young people, to ensure that content is relevant and responsive to their lived experiences. The more input received from young people, the more likely that solutions, education and messaging will resonate with them. Generational change to end family and gender-based violence, means that work needs to be done now with and for people of all ages: this change is not inevitable and requires investment.

Recommendations:

- 48) Commit to ongoing funding for the implementation of the National Respectful Relationships Education Framework, with a nationally coordinated approach in school settings across Australia. This should include workforce development for educators, parent and carer engagement and evaluation.
- 49) Consider investment in out of school community focused programming, developed by and with young people to complement RRE roll out nation-wide

¹³¹ Department of Education (2026) *National Respectful Relationships Education Framework*, Australian Government <https://www.education.gov.au/schooling/resources/national-respectful-relationships-education-framework>; Pfitzner, N, Ollis, D, Stewart, R, Allen, KA, Fitz-Gibbon, K, & Flynn, A (2022) *Respectful Relationships Education in Australian: National Stocktake and Gap Analysis of Respectful Relationships Education Material and Resources: Final Report*, Monash University. https://bridges.monash.edu/articles/report/Respectful_Relationships_Education_in_Australia_National_Stocktake_and_Gap_Analysis_of_Respectful_Relationships_Education_Material_and_Resources_Final_Report/21099592?file=37467172

¹³² Ibid.

¹³³ Respect Victoria (2026) *Recognising and enabling community-led and specialist prevention work*, Melbourne: Respect Victoria. <https://www.respectvictoria.vic.gov.au/our-work/reporting-progress-prevention/maintain-the-momentum/progress-challenges-recommendations/enabling-prevention-work>

Specialist family violence services working with children and young people as victim survivors in their own right

Many specialist family violence services are currently working with children and young people. Safe and Equal's 2025 *Measuring Specialist Family Violence Service Demand and Capacity Report* found that approximately 20 per cent of services are providing case management and 67 per cent of refuges have dedicated staff or teams for children and young people.¹³⁴ However, most initiatives that provide this dedicated support are funded through uncoordinated, piecemeal resourcing that is short-term and insecure.¹³⁵ In Victoria alone, a minimum investment of \$33 million per annum is needed to meet current service demand for children and young people.¹³⁶

Increased funding is required for SFVSs to support strengthened engagement and service provision with children and young people. Alongside this, resourcing is required to ensure SFVS workforces are equipped with the capability to work with children and young people across all ages.

Recommendations:

- 50) Resourcing to support SFVSs to strengthen their work with children and young people as victim survivors in their own right
- 51) Investment in workforce capability building to respond to children and young people as victim survivors in their own right across all ages

Dedicated programs for children and young people

Responses for children and young victim survivors requires child and youth-focused family violence programs for at-risk young people across all ages and stages; co-designed and developed by children and young people themselves. There are limited programs designed to respond to children and young people victim survivors.

In Victoria, *Amplify* is one program demonstrating positive outcomes for children and young people, and fills a vital gap in service system responses for young people experiencing family violence and homelessness.¹³⁷ A recent evaluation of the program found young people would have remained at high risk of serious harm or lethality – either remaining in (or returning to) the situation of family violence or being forced into other unsafe situations.¹³⁸ However, programs such as *Amplify* have limited capacity and often operate on time-limited funding. Child and youth-focused family violence programs must be developed, expanded and supported, in consultation with youth services, specialist family violence services and young people.

¹³⁴ Tassone, J (2025) *Measuring Specialist Family Violence Service Demand and Capacity Report 2025*, Melbourne: Safe and Equal. <https://safeandequal.org.au/wp-content/uploads/Measuring-Demand-and-Capacity-2025-FINAL.pdf>

¹³⁵ Safe and Equal (2025), *Victorian State Budget 2026-27 Submission*, Melbourne: Safe and Equal. <https://safeandequal.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2026-27-Victorian-State-Budget-Submission- FINAL .pdf>

¹³⁶ Ibid.

¹³⁷ RMIT Centre for Innovative Justice (2025) *We kept changing; they kept changing with us. Evaluation of Melbourne City Mission's Amplify Program: Final Report*, Melbourne City Mission (MCM). <https://www.mcm.org.au/-/media/mcm/documents/research-and-advocacy/research/amplify-evaluation-2025.pdf>

¹³⁸ Ibid.

Recommendations:

- 52) Invest in tailored programs such as *Amplify* nationally
- 53) Resource the co-design, development and delivery of child and youth-focused family violence programs

Targeted early intervention and recovery initiatives

Targeted early intervention and recovery initiatives for children and young people are fundamentally under-resourced parts of the system. Increasing access to earlier supports is likely to prevent children and young people from needing to access support later in life. Additionally, an increased focus on children and young people and investment in early intervention initiatives for offers opportunities to break intergenerational cycles of violence through early intervention and recovery responses; for example, at least 89 per cent of young people who had used family violence reported experiencing abuse as a child.¹³⁹

Existing work in the specialist family violence, sexual violence and harmful sexual behaviour sectors, children and family services and work with adolescents using violence in the home could be scaled up to break cycles of intergenerational violence among children and young people who have experienced violence and improve long-term outcomes.¹⁴⁰

Recommendation:

- 54) Dedicated resourcing and development of children and young people early intervention and recovery initiatives

Direct financial support for children and young people

Safe and Equal welcomes the recent \$60 million investment in the new National Youth Housing Supplement, designed to assist young people in accessing social housing. However, more needs to be done to lift young people out of crisis, who are at significant risk of homelessness and poverty. The *Anglicare Rental Affordability 2026 Snapshot* shows that there are no affordable and appropriate rental properties for young people on youth allowance.¹⁴¹

Recommendation:

- 55) An increase to Youth Allowance

d) Robust governance of the Second Action Plan

An essential component to achieving the aims of *the National Plan* is ensuring strong governance structures, accountability mechanisms and data collection to rigorously

¹³⁹ Fitz-Gibbon, K & Meyer, S (2022) *Almost 9 in 10 young Australians who use family violence experienced child abuse: new research*, The Conversation. <https://theconversation.com/almost-9-in-10-young-australians-who-use-family-violence-experienced-child-abuse-new-research-190058>

¹⁴⁰ Hewitt, S & Carman, M (2025) *Early intervention in family and gender-based violence: Scoping paper*. Melbourne: Safe and Equal. <https://safeandequal.org.au/policy-and-advocacy/research-reports/>

¹⁴¹ Anglicare Australia (2026) *Victorian Rental Affordability Snapshot 2026*, Anglicare Australia. <https://www.anglicarevic.org.au/research/victorian-rental-affordability-snapshot-2026/>

measure progress and impact. This requires elevating accountability within governance structures, the strategic alignment of key national frameworks, and stronger data collection and reporting.

The strengthened governance of the *National Plan* introduced in December 2025,¹⁴² is welcome, and there are opportunities to further embed Aboriginal self-determination and ensure genuine partnership with the specialist sector and victim survivors.

Strategic alignment of plans and key national frameworks

The *Second Action Plan* must be aligned with the *First Action Plan*, as well as *Our Ways – Strong Ways – Our Voices* and its associated action plan(s). In addition, as work across the continuum of gender-based and family violence cuts across numerous sectors, there is the need for strategic alignment across key national frameworks adjacent, but critical, to the success of efforts to end family and gender-based violence. These include, but are not limited to:

- *Closing the Gap Framework & National Agreement 2020–2031*¹⁴³
- *Safe and Supported: National Framework for Protecting Australia’s Children 2021–2031*¹⁴⁴
- *Australia’s Disability Strategy 2021–2031*¹⁴⁵
- *Change The Story* (2021) and key frameworks¹⁴⁶
- *The National Suicide Prevention Strategy 2025–2035*¹⁴⁷
- *Homes for Australia: A National Plan*¹⁴⁸, and
- *The National Plan to End the Abuse and Mistreatment of Older People 2026–2036*¹⁴⁹

Aboriginal self-determination

Our Ways – Strong Ways – Our Voices makes a strong commitment to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander voice, agency and self-determination, stating accountability will be achieved through a governance structure that will ensure shared decision-making at every

¹⁴² Department of Social Services (DSS) (2025) *Working together to achieve change: governance arrangements. Appendix to the National Plan to End Violence against Women and Children 2022–2032*, Australian Government.

<https://www.dss.gov.au/national-plan-end-violence-against-women-and-children/resource/working-together-achieve-change-governance-arrangements>

¹⁴³ Closing the Gap (2020) *National Agreement on Closing the Gap*, Closing the Gap.

<https://www.closingthegap.gov.au/national-agreement/national-agreement-closing-the-gap>

¹⁴⁴ Department of Social Services (2021) *Safe and Supported: The National Framework for Protecting Australia’s Children 2021–2031*, Australian Government. <https://www.dss.gov.au/child-protection/resource/national-framework-protecting-australias-children-2021-2031>

¹⁴⁵ Department of Social Services (2024) *Australia’s Disability Strategy 2021–2031 (ADS)*, Australian Government.

<https://www.disabilitygateway.gov.au/document/11081>

¹⁴⁶ Our Watch <https://www.ourwatch.org.au/change-the-story>

¹⁴⁷ National Suicide Prevention Office and Australian Government, (2025) *The National Suicide Prevention Strategy 2025–2035*, Australian Government. <https://www.mentalhealthcommission.gov.au/nspo/publications/national-suicide-prevention-strategy>

¹⁴⁸ Australian Government Treasury (2026) *Homes for Australia: A National Plan*, Australian Government.

<https://treasury.gov.au/publication/p2026-773858>

¹⁴⁹ Australian Government (2026) *The National Plan to End the Abuse and Mistreatment of Older People 2026–2036*, Australian Government. <https://www.ag.gov.au/rights-and-protections/publications/national-plan-end-abuse-and-mistreatment-older-people-2026-2036>

stage.¹⁵⁰ To achieve these commitments and embed Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander self-determination principles it is essential that co-design and shared decision-making is embedded throughout both the *Our Ways – Strong Ways – Our Voices* and the *National Plan* governance structures.

The current governance structure shows the *Our Ways Strong Together* peak body as advisory,¹⁵¹ with a review of the governance structure to be undertaken with the release *Our Ways – Strong Ways – Our Voices*. The intention to interlink governance across the plans will strengthen and uphold the commitment to shared decision making across both *Our Ways – Strong Ways – Our Voices* and the *National Plan*.

Lived Experience

It is essential that the governance structure supports victim survivors to be genuinely and safely involved in decision making, policy development and implementation. Moving beyond listening and consultation and embedding lived experience in service design and policy development leads to better outcomes for all victim survivors.¹⁵² As stated in *the National Plan*, ‘no effective solutions can be developed without the people affected by them’.¹⁵³

Family and gender-based sector expertise

We welcome the inclusion of sector expertise in the governance structure. 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.

The primary prevention sector and the SFVSS sector provide critical information and understanding related to emerging issues, system gaps and practical impacts of reform. Meaningful sector participation will support more effective implementation, improve transparency and monitoring, strengthen community confidence in the *National Plan*, and contribute to better outcomes for victim survivors and stopping violence before it starts. The National Alliance of Domestic and Family Violence Specialist Services (NADFVSS) should be resourced to provide sector representation within the governance structure.

Recommendations:

¹⁵⁰ Department of Social Services (DSS) (2026) *Our Ways – Strong Ways – Our Voices: National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Plan to End Family, Domestic and Sexual Violence 2026-2036*, Australian Government, p.62.

<https://www.dss.gov.au/first-nations-national-plan-end-family-domestic-and-sexual-violence/resource/our-ways-strong-ways-our-voices-national-aboriginal-and-torres-strait-islander-plan-end-family-domestic-and-sexual-violence-2026-2036>

¹⁵¹ Department of Social Services (DSS) (2025) *Working together to achieve change: governance arrangements. Appendix to the National Plan to End Violence against Women and Children 2022-2032*, Australian Government.

<https://www.dss.gov.au/national-plan-end-violence-against-women-and-children/resource/working-together-achieve-change-governance-arrangements>

¹⁵² Victorian Government (2021) *Lived Experience: Embedding lived experience of family violence into policy development and service delivery*, Victorian Government. <https://www.vic.gov.au/family-violence-reform-rolling-action-plan-2020-2023/reform-principles/lived-experience>

¹⁵³ Department of Social Services (2022) *The National Plan to End Violence against Women and Children 2022–2032*, Australian Government, p.95. <https://www.dss.gov.au/national-plan-end-violence-against-women-and-children/resource/national-plan-end-violence-against-women-and-children-2022-2032>

- 56) The commitment to upholding Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander voice, agency and self-determination through shared decision making is upheld throughout the governance of both the *National Plan* and *Our Ways – Strong Ways – Our Voices*
- 57) Embed lived experience and community expertise within governance with genuine decision-making authority, including representation of First Nations women, women with disabilities, culturally diverse women, and LGBTIQ+ people. Participation should be:
 - appropriately remunerated, accessible and adequately supported to ensure safe participation
 - have transparent mechanisms demonstrating how lived experience and community expertise has informed and shaped policy, funding and governance decisions
- 58) Specialist sector expertise across prevention and response should be meaningfully embedded in the governance of *the National Plan*
- 59) The National Alliance of Domestic and Family Violence Specialist Services (NADFVSS) is resourced to provide sector representation as part of governance structures

Data, Monitoring and Accountability

The success of the *National Plan* is highly dependent on the effective monitoring and review of the associated action plans. Safe and Equal welcomes the recently released *Monitoring and Reporting Framework*¹⁵⁴ (MRF) and its focus on the effective oversight and coordination of the governance mechanisms, including lived experience and sector representation. We also welcome the MRF's strengthening of processes to evaluate achievement against the *National Plan*'s outcomes rather than activities, with annual public reporting to support ongoing monitoring and accountability.

To support the translation of activities into outcomes, we recommend that all new activities developed under the *Second Action Plan* include clear alignment to the six *National Plan* outcomes,¹⁵⁵ with adequately funded evaluation built into activity design.

For the MRF to be effective, current data gaps against the *National Plan* priorities need to be addressed over the long term. While there have been recent improvements in the data related to family violence, it remains fragmented and incomplete, with inconsistencies across jurisdictions.¹⁵⁶ It is also heavily reliant on infrequent surveys, such as the Personal Safety Survey conducted every 4 years. These gaps in data lessens the ability to measure the change generated by the *National Plan*. ANROWS recommends improvements to the collection of family violence related data, including better use of administrative data that is

¹⁵⁴ Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence Commission and Australian Government (2026) *Monitoring and Reporting Framework: National Plan to End Violence against Women and Children 2022-2032*, Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence Commission. <https://www.dfsvc.gov.au/monitoring-and-reporting-framework>

¹⁵⁵ These six outcomes broadly encapsulate: 1. effective supports for people impacted by gender-based violence, 2. effective prevention programs, 3. improved community attitudes, 4. accountability for people who use violence, 5. safety and support for children and young people, and 6. women are safe, respected and equal. Please see: Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence Commission and Australian Government (2026) *Monitoring and Reporting Framework: National Plan to End Violence against Women and Children 2022-2032*, Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence Commission. <https://www.dfsvc.gov.au/monitoring-and-reporting-framework>

¹⁵⁶ Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence Commission (2024) *Yearly Report to Parliament, Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence Commission*, Australian Government. <https://www.dfsvc.gov.au/yearly-report-2025>

already collected, the establishment of a new, national minimum data set where new data collection is required, and improved data sharing and linkage.¹⁵⁷

We also support the *MRF's* focus on funding transparency and the plan to develop a National Funding Mapping Framework.

Recommendations:

- 60) That work commenced under Action 2 of the *First Action Plan* is continued and extended,¹⁵⁸ prioritising:
 - developing a standardised family violence minimum dataset
 - improved data collection, standardisation and data sharing so that data can be captured and reported against the outcomes of the *National Plan*
- 61) New activities funded under the *Second Action Plan* to include embedded evaluation frameworks and clear alignment to *National Plan* outcomes
- 62) Greater public reporting and transparency of *National Plan* funding including the National Funding Mapping Framework
- 63) Safe and Equal supports Recommendation 6 of the Commissioners report¹⁵⁹, which outlines a 12-18 month review cycle, including adaptability to changing contexts and emerging evidence

Conclusion

We commend the Commonwealth government on the ongoing commitment and focus on family and gender-based, and the impact *The National Plan* has had on increased awareness of family and gender-based violence.

Maintaining the vision of ending family and gender-based violence requires action now to meet the needs of victim survivors and in preventing violence before it begins. With a continued national emergency on family and gender-based violence, we must not lose investment and momentum in order to stop violence before it starts, intervene earlier and ensure all adult, child and young person victim survivors are able to get support when they need it, to reach safety and recover.

¹⁵⁷ The Australian National Research Agenda to End Violence against Women and Children (ANRA) 2023-2028. (2023). Available at: <https://www.anrows.org.au/publication/australian-national-research-agenda-to-end-violence-against-women-and-children/>

¹⁵⁸ Action 2: Improve the national evidence base by working towards consistent terminology and monitoring and evaluation frameworks, and by strengthening collection and sharing of data and evidence. Please see: Department of Social Services (2023) *First Action Plan 2023–2027: Under the National Plan to End Violence against Women and Children 2022–2032*, Australian Government. <https://www.dss.gov.au/national-plan-end-violence-against-women-and-children/resource/first-action-plan-2023-2027>

¹⁵⁹ Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence Commission (2024) *Yearly Report to Parliament, Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence Commission*, Australian Government. <https://www.dfsvc.gov.au/yearly-report-2025>

Summary of recommendations

- 1) Shift national service design standards so that:
 - commissioning frameworks recognise how gender inequality intersects with racism, ableism, migration and visa status, economic inequality, sexuality, gender identity, age and geographic disadvantage to shape experiences of violence and access to safety
 - systems are designed around those experiencing the greatest and most complex structural barriers, rather than treating their needs as ‘add-ons’ to a mainstream model
- 2) Establish non-adverse policy settings for victim survivors with temporary or precarious visa status and victim survivors with disabilities requiring accessible emergency accommodation and specialised car, guaranteeing equitable access to emergency housing, Medicare, legal aid and income support regardless of migration or disability status
- 3) Ensure government policies and service systems do not create or deepen dependency on people using violence including through:
 - visa dependency
 - exclusion from income support
 - inaccessible housing
 - reliance on the person using violence for disability supports
 - removing barriers to Medicare and legal assistance
- 4) Ensure services uphold equity and respect client agency by:
 - removing conditional support requirements (such as mandatory engagement with specific government, migration, or disability support systems) that disproportionately deter migrant, marginalised and women with disability
 - service responses should avoid practices that reproduce dynamics of control, surveillance or dependency experienced in abusive relationships, and should support informed choice, self-determination and autonomy in decisions about safety, support and recovery
- 5) Require all policy-making bodies and funded service providers to conduct regular intersectional access and equity audits that:
 - assess not only whether different groups can access services, but how institutional rules, policies and practices may create or reinforce unequal power, exclusion or outcomes
 - examine commissioning and funding rules, eligibility criteria, documentation requirements, visa conditions, physical and digital environments, language access, data systems and governance structures, and identify where these interact to produce structural barriers to safety, support and recovery

- 6) Require all federally funded specialist domestic, family, and sexual violence services to meet rigorous "Substantive Access & Equity Standards":
 - measuring success by trust, full physical, digital, and communicative accessibility, cultural safety, and service completion shifting the focus on intake numbers
 - access, experience and outcome data should be disaggregated across relevant intersecting factors to identify where structural inequities persist and where particular groups experience poorer outcomes. This should enable services and governments to understand, for example, how disability, migration or visa status, language barriers and economic insecurity can intersect to shape access to services, experiences of support and safety outcomes.
- 7) Ensure service responses recognise that the forms, experiences and impacts of violence, as well as pathways to safety, can differ according to intersecting social, economic and institutional conditions
- 8) Embed tailored, accessible and culturally safe pathways that respond to the distinct experiences and structural barriers faced by a range of communities
- 9) Fund designated training, entry, and professional development streams for workers from marginalised and culturally diverse backgrounds to build a representative, non-exclusionary workforce. Alongside workforce diversity, require continuous critical-reflexivity and institutional capability development to identify and address sexism, racism, ableism, class bias, migration-related assumptions and cis-heteronormative practices embedded within organisations and service systems.
- 10) Funding for ACCOs to be resourced for the purposes of community-led collection and analysis of data, in line with Indigenous Data Sovereignty principles
- 11) Investment in community-led research and consultation on community data needs should be prioritised as part of the development of the next Australian National Research Agenda
- 12) Incorporate lessons learned through the Safety Measures initiative into improvements to the SHS Collection and the ongoing development of a national specialist FDV data collection
- 13) Establish an independent national monitoring framework that:
 - explicitly identifies and tracks intersectional disparities in access, experience and outcomes, rather than measuring service access alone
 - examines outcomes including safety, housing stability, economic security, service completion, justice outcomes and access to recovery supports, with data disaggregated across relevant intersecting factors to identify where particular groups experience persistent or compounded inequities

- is reported on transparently by government in progressing and addressing disparities and the structural and systemic barriers contributing to them
 - this framework could be trialled in Victoria initially to test and evaluate the model
- 14) Maintain a clear distinction between primary prevention and early intervention across policy, implementation, evaluation and workforce skills
- 15) Sustain investment in Our Watch to support upskilling and implementation of *Change the story* and associated frameworks, resources and tools, delivered in collaboration with states and territories across jurisdictions
- 16) Clarify the relationship and differences across primary prevention, early intervention, response and recovery, in the *Second Action Plan*, to support alignment in policy, program design and investments
- 17) Future prevention investment should include:
- 5-year minimum funding agreements for all primary prevention initiatives. Ensure sufficient investment in monitoring and evaluation of initiatives to support building practice evidence and the evidence base
 - Program design principles that require all investments to commitment to genuine partnership in design and delivery, with investment to support a collaborative process
 - funding for prevention programs on addressing harmful masculinity, developing healthy masculinities, and engaging men and boys backed by design principles that require accountability to women in all investments related to this area
- 18) Commit to the implementation of *Our Ways, Strong Ways, Our Voices* including through increased investment and work with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and ACCOs to lead self-determined prevention initiatives
- 19) Increase investment in community-led approaches and organisations to lead primary prevention activities including:
- dedicated prevention programs for multicultural, ethno-specific and faith-based communities to ensure cultural responsiveness, relevance and impact
 - progress actions outlined in the *Changing the landscape* framework to prevent violence against women and girls with disabilities
 - meaningful inclusion at the national level through dedicated actions to address violence against trans women. This includes investment in trans and gender diverse organisations, who must be well resourced to co-lead this work and provide expert advice on behalf of their communities.
- 20) Invest in a national capability building program that supports the primary prevention sector to implement *Changing with Pride* at scale, including practical resources,

tools, guidance, and structured peer learning opportunities to share emerging practice across the sector. This program should be developed with and for the LGBTIQA+ community.

- 21) Ensure community-led expertise is an explicit area of attention in policy development, evaluating and measuring success and funded activity in the *Second Action Plan*
- 22) Develop a coordinated national primary prevention workforce approach to sustain a high-quality, diverse and specialist primary prevention workforce. Ensure that a national approach is informed by state and territory workforce investments, planning and professional development offerings already underway.
- 23) Ensure continued investment in capability development across the primary prevention workforce. This should be developed and delivered by, or co-delivered with, community and community-led organisations to ensure relevance and impact.
- 24) An increase to funding for ACCOs, and a commitment to long-term, sustainable and flexible funding models
- 25) Utilise the findings of the *Specialist Crisis FDV services* pilot project to inform data system improvements to better collect and understand service demand at both the national and across states and territories level
- 26) Increased and sustainable Federal government investment in Specialist Family Violence Services nationwide to meet rising demand. All funding should:
 - be provided as a five-year minimum commitment to enable long-term planning and reduce workforce insecurity
 - move away from short-term competitive tender models toward long-term, block-funded contracts for specialist, community-led and culturally safe specialist services to secure sustainable service continuity and access
 - have commissioning frameworks that recognise and adequately fund the additional resources required to deliver substantive equity, including interpreting and language services, disability access and reasonable adjustments, outreach, community engagement and specialist cultural and intersectional expertise
 - ensure equity and accessibility requirements are matched by the resources necessary to deliver specialist services effectively
 - ensure rural and regional needs are considered, accounted for and resourced
- 27) Investment in workforce pipeline initiatives, professional development and worker wellbeing initiatives focused on improving health and wellbeing for specialist family violence workers

- 28) Increase investment in family and gender-based violence early intervention including coordination and cross-sector collaboration to strategically advance this work
- 29) Increased and dedicated funding for recovery initiatives and programs including therapeutic care, peer-to-peer support, and pathways back into education and employment
- 30) Continuation of funding for Safe at Home responses including the Keeping Women Safe in their Homes program and Personal Safety Initiative
- 31) Review application requirements for the Safer Places grant program and inclusions such as operational costs
- 32) Increase Commonwealth Rent Assistance payments as recommended by the *Economic Inclusion Advisory Committee*
- 33) Invest in social housing – with Victoria requiring an additional 377,000 homes across 25 years including 83,000 social homes allocated for victim survivors
- 34) Expand legal support access through increased investment in community legal services including Community Legal Centres Australia estimates as a minimum
- 35) Reinstatement \$17.1 million per annum to support victim survivors of domestic and family violence impacted by Federal Circuit and Family Court reforms
- 36) Continuation of funding for the Commonwealth Cross-Examination Scheme
- 37) Develop a better understanding and visibility of systems abuse in the family law system, through data and training for relevant professionals
- 38) Safe and Equal supports Recommendation 7 of the *Economic Inclusion Advisory Committee* 2026 report for the Government to provide additional resources to the Australian Tax Office's Lodgement Enforcement Program to investigate more child support cases and ensure Agency Collect is the default collection method for all new child support cases
- 39) The Federal government to continue to incorporate Safety by Design principles into government systems, and to mandate private systems to include Safety by Design when designing or reviewing products, services and/or systems
- 40) The Federal government should:
 - partner across portfolios (NDIS, Home Affairs, Health, Social Services) to guarantee accessible emergency housing, personal care support during crisis, Medicare, legal assistance and income support

- ensure government policies, eligibility requirements and service systems do not create or deepen dependency on perpetrators or exclude victim survivors from safety because of migration or visa status, disability, economic insecurity or other structural barriers

41) Increased, adequate funding for mental health support services. This should include investment to strengthen collaboration across sectors, including cross-sector training and complementary risk assessment practices

42) Family violence should be a key consideration in the new NDIS framework including:

- the introduction of guidance for the National Disability Insurance Agency (NDIA) to responsively adjust NDIS plans for victim survivors
- family violence capability building for disability services
- an assessment of unintended consequences in the new framework for victim survivors of family violence

43) Safe and Equal supports Recommendation 1 of the *Economic Inclusion Advisory Committee 2026* report for the Government to commit to a substantial increase in the base rates of JobSeeker and related working age payments. These payments include the Parenting Payment, Disability Support Pension, Carer Payment and Youth Allowance.

44) Aligned to the National Advocacy Group on Women on Temporary Visas Experiencing Violence *Blueprint for Reform*, victim survivors on temporary visas should:

- have access to protections, services and justice;
- be eligible for social security, including Medicare;
- be able to access social and public housing; and
- that specialist and legal services that provide support to victim survivors on temporary visas are funded sustainably.

45) Increase access to the LVP through:

- extending the application window from 12 weeks to 6-months from leaving the relationship
- including other forms of family violence rather than limiting to intimate-partner contexts only
- including young people aged 16 and 17

46) Resource Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and organisations to self-determine approaches and maintain children and young people's connections to culture

47) Safe and Equal supports Recommendation 19 of the Commissioners report, for the Commonwealth to establish a National Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence Youth Advisory Council to ensure the voices and perspectives of young people are safely embedded in the national action planning process and provide an accountability mechanism during implementation of the Action Plan. This should

include representation from children and young people from systematically marginalised communities, as well as young adults who experienced family violence as a child or young person

- 48) Commit to ongoing funding for the implementation of the *National Respectful Relationships Education Framework*, with a nationally coordinated approach in school settings across Australia. This should include workforce development for educators, parent and carer engagement and evaluation.
- 49) Consider investment in out of school community focused programming, developed by and with young people to complement RRE roll out nation-wide
- 50) Resourcing to support SFVSSs to strengthen their work with children and young people as victim survivors in their own right
- 51) Investment in workforce capability building to respond to children and young people as victim survivors in their own right across all ages
- 52) Invest in tailored programs such as *Amplify* nationally
- 53) Resource the co-design, development and delivery of child and youth-focused family violence programs
- 54) Dedicated resourcing and development of children and young people early intervention and recovery initiatives
- 55) An increase to Youth Allowance
- 56) The commitment to upholding Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander voice, agency and self-determination through shared decision making is upheld throughout the governance of both the *National Plan* and *Our Ways – Strong Ways – Our Voices*
- 57) Embed lived experience and community expertise within governance with genuine decision-making authority, including representation of First Nations women, women with disabilities, culturally diverse women and LGBTIQ+ people. Participation should be:
 - appropriately remunerated, accessible and adequately supported to ensure safe participation
 - have transparent mechanisms demonstrating how lived experience and community expertise has informed and shaped policy, funding and governance decisions
- 58) Specialist sector expertise across prevention and response should be meaningfully embedded in the governance of *the National Plan*
- 59) The National Alliance of Domestic and Family Violence Specialist Services (NADFVSS) is resourced to provide sector representation as part of governance structures

- 60) That work commenced under Action 2 of the *First Action Plan* is continued and extended, prioritising:
- developing a standardised family violence minimum dataset
 - improved data collection, standardisation and data sharing so that data can be captured and reported against the outcomes of the *National Plan*
- 61) New activities funded under the *Second Action Plan* to include embedded evaluation frameworks and clear alignment to *National Plan* outcomes
- 62) Greater public reporting and transparency of *National Plan* funding including the National Funding Mapping Framework
- 63) Safe and Equal supports Recommendation 6 of the Commissioners report which outlines a 12-18 month review cycle, including adaptability to changing contexts and emerging evidence