



Senator the Hon Anne Ruston
Minister for Women's Safety (Cth)

Senator the Hon Marisse Payne
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Hon Yvette Berry MLA
Minister for the Prevention of
Domestic and Family Violence (ACT)

Hon Michelle Lensink MLC
Minister for Human Services (SA)

Hon Mark Speakman MP
Minister for the Prevention of
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Hon Kate Worden MLA
Minister for Territory Families (NT)

Hon Shannon Fentiman MP
Minister for the Prevention of
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Hon Jacquie Petrusma MP
Minister for the Prevention of Family
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Hon Gabrielle Williams MP
Minister for the Prevention of Family
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Hon Simone McGurk MLA
Minister for the Prevention of Family
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Dear National Federation Reform Council Taskforce on Women's Safety,

We write to you as a group of Australia's peak bodies, advocates and leading organisations representing and working in specialist family, domestic and sexual violence services. Together we have hundreds of members across every state and territory that collectively employ tens of thousands of dedicated staff, focused on responding to and preventing family, domestic and sexual violence. We work directly and indirectly with people who experience and people who use violence every day, and the essential specialist workforces within this sector.

We seek a future where all victim survivors of men's violence, overwhelmingly women, are adequately supported and provided opportunities to flourish; where men who use domestic and family violence are kept in view and supported to change their behaviour; holistic responses to sexual violence are readily available for all victim survivors; where primary prevention activities reduce violence by effectively addressing structural and systemic inequalities; and where specialist workforces are strong, valued, and supported to build this future, by the end of the next national plan.

We have come together to highlight core priorities in the lead up to the next National Plan, and the Women's Safety Summit in September 2021. As Australia's family, domestic and sexual violence peak bodies, we are offering our collective, expansive, and diverse expertise to support the development of a meaningful National Plan.

The next National Plan:

The National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children 2010-2022 has played a vital role in expanding the national infrastructure to prevent and respond to family, domestic and sexual violence. Organisations and services such as 1800RESPECT, Our Watch, ANROWS, the Family Violence Prevention and Legal Services (FVPLS), the Personal Safety Survey (PSS) and the National Community Attitudes Survey (NCAS) have made a vital contribution to ensuring access to support, information and evidence about how to best support people experiencing violence and to prevent it from occurring. Funding must continue for these critical elements of national infrastructure and their expansion considered in strong consultation with the specialist sector.

Importantly, the above organisations have unearthed and raised public awareness of the horrific experience of too many women and children, and the critical gaps in systems responses that are currently in place to keep them safe.

Since the commencement of the current National Plan, Australians have become aware of a social issue of epidemic proportions, and they expect more in response. Family, domestic and sexual violence must be core business for all governments. *It has substantial social and economic costs and requires a coordinated, whole of community response - across workplaces, social security, education, community events.* A whole community, whole of government response can only be achieved with a capable and competent workforce. This also requires a dedicated and resourced focus. The safety and wellbeing of women and their children depends on this.

As priorities, we urge the Taskforce on Women's Safety to consider the following recommendations are incorporated in the next National Plan:

1. Expanded support for primary prevention, with an evidence-based, whole of community approach. Funding for Our Watch and other Commonwealth, state and territory funded programs has been integral to establish a solid foundation for primary prevention work which Australia is leading internationally. Building on and expanding this work is essential to end gendered violence. Not only is this important for children and young people, but also because focused efforts are necessary to reach people where they work, where they socialise, and where they live if we are going to address the epidemic levels of physical, non-physical violence. The focus must also be expanded for preventing sexual violence. Funding for evidence based projects must be prioritised to target gender inequity at an individual, institutional and systemic level. Economically, investment in this area will reduce long-term spending on responses to domestic, family and sexual violence.
2. New, specific investment in early intervention as a priority. Early intervention remains a significant gap in Australia's approach to preventing and responding to family, domestic and sexual violence. We need strategies to increase community awareness and confidence in recognising abuse and identifying appropriate pathways for support. We also need services to be better resourced to work with individuals and families as soon as behaviour or problems are identified; across all sectors not only in specialist domestic violence services; at important life stages where violence is more likely to commence; and with 'lower risk' men who are using violence. This investment reduces the long-term costs of men's violence against women. Due to current and ongoing levels of demand on crisis response and intervention, this funding must be additional.
3. Increased and longer-term investment in tertiary victim support services. Funding for specialist services remains insufficient despite the increased investment since the beginning of the National Plan. An increased focus on the issue has led to increased levels of disclosures and need for services. Funding must be sustainable and matched to the level of need to reduce injuries, fatalities and ongoing harm. Increased short-term COVID funding from the Commonwealth, states and territories should be provided on an ongoing basis at a minimum. This includes better responding to sexual violence.
4. Significantly expanded focus on sexual violence. Responses to sexual violence are not adequate; yet it is experienced by too many across our community - both by known and unknown perpetrators - and must be elevated in the next National Plan. Rates of domestic and family violence including sexual abuse of children are too common and lead to life long detrimental impacts to victim-survivors. Although sexual violence was included in the first national plan, the increased reporting rates and knowledge regarding best practice calls for specific, measurable actions to address sexual violence. These actions must be co-designed and catered to be appropriate for marginalised communities and their children. This increased focus on sexual violence must be across the spectrum - from

prevention to recovery, and across all ages (including young women and older women) and all community settings (including aged care facilities, schools, disability care and support). NCAS findings show that we are not making the progress we need to in shifting attitudes to sexual violence in intimate partner relationships. This has serious implications for women's and girls' help-seeking behaviours. Primary prevention efforts need to better incorporate the prevention of intimate partner sexual violence.

5. Shifting disproportionate burden from victim survivor to the people using violence. For too long, the burden of leaving a violent relationship has been disproportionately placed on victim survivors. Within the justice system, the burden of proof is often upon the victim survivor rather than the perpetrator. Reconfiguring the justice system; system-wide training around risk-identification and expanding perpetrator interventions to break the cycle of violence will be essential in shifting this burden.
6. Recognising children and young people as victims in their own rights. Significant research has shown the long-term impacts on children and young people who have experienced (including witnessing) family violence, yet they are seldom seen as individuals and victims in their own right. There is a need for child-centred interventions. Children and young people must be, as a starting point, acknowledged and listened to so the support system can support their recovery. Unique supports are required to respond to child victim survivors. Practical, strengths-based interventions that enable and build the capacity of children and young people to connect with and participate in their communities are necessary; along with therapeutic interventions.
7. Greater research to support evidence-based interventions. We must build off the amazing work of Australia's research community around family, domestic and sexual violence (including ANROWS), to reduce the gaps in data and evidence. Much more work is needed in particular around working with children and young people as victims in their own right; improving responses to sexual violence across the entire community; diverse cohorts and communities of people experiencing violence; evaluating responses over time and improving the knowledge sharing and efficacy of interventions with men who use violence and abuse.
8. Family Law and family violence. Many family violence victims across Australia need access to a family law response to keep them safe and financially secure, both in the short and long term. Reform is needed to ensure a safe and effective family law framework that crosses over the family law system and other federal, state and territory systems, including the family violence and child protection systems. The framework will ensure that justice systems respond appropriately to family violence, effective legal help is provided for the most disadvantaged, all professionals in the system have an understanding of family violence, and families have increased access to safe dispute resolution models.
9. Prioritising initiatives led by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. It is essential that the second National Plan prioritises programs and policies led by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and organisations, with delivery implemented by Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations. Greater funding for Aboriginal Controlled Community Organisations and programs led through self determination are essential if we are to address family, domestic and sexual violence across all communities across Australia. The second National Plan must also prioritise investment into Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander response, prevention and legal organisations, including the fourteen FVPLS organisations. FVPLSs work exclusively with victim survivors of family violence and sexual assault, the vast majority being Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and children.
10. Recognition that everyone has different life experiences and backgrounds and requires different responses. The next National Plan should be framed around how primary prevention, early intervention, tertiary response and recovery services can meet an individual or community's needs,

noting individual backgrounds and experiences will impact responses. Funding must be increased for specialist women's and community-led services led by different community-based organisations (i.e. First Nations Peoples; sexuality and gender diverse; LGBTIQ+; multicultural; disability; women experiencing poverty), and to build the capacity of mainstream organisations to respond safely and effectively to all people. This must include a recognition of the dynamics and risks of violence in intimate partner (including non-cohabitating) and family relationships, as well as 'family like' relationships such as chosen family or carer relationships. Tailored and inclusive approaches to direct and community outreach is especially important for increasing awareness and breaking down existing barriers to support across diverse communities.

11. Expand victim survivor choice and control through appropriate pathways for support, intervention and accountability. The experiences of victim survivors of family, domestic and sexual violence are unique and require specialist and tailored responses. Victim survivors must be provided with choices around the responses they want – whether social, civil and/or criminal. These should not be limited to criminal or police intervention. The next National Plan should include funding for piloting accountability programs and safety intervention approaches which sit beside or outside the criminal justice system.
12. Strengthened workforce supported by sustainable funding arrangements. Throughout the first National Plan, initiatives have not always succeeded to their full potential due to short funding cycles. This negatively impacts services' capacity to attract, train and retain specialist staff and plan service delivery, as well as clients' experience of services. It is impossible to retain and build the strongest workforce possible when there is a constant fear of losing funding. More funding is needed. Indeed, skilling up the whole sector to respond appropriately to family violence is critical, but should not be done at the cost of core service delivery in specialist services.

This is not an exhaustive list of priorities, however, it represents a range of areas where not enough is being done – greater funding is required if we are to seriously transform our community to be safer for women and children and prevent future violence from occurring.

National Partnership Agreement

One of the limitations of the current National Plan is that it hasn't focused on inter-jurisdictional coordination – it is often seen as a Commonwealth Plan. *Commonwealth versus State Government service delivery boundaries are not consequential to people who use or experience violence.* Moving into the next National Plan, better and more formalised coordination is required.

As such, we congratulate the Commonwealth Government for their announcement of a National Partnership Agreement and look forward to seeing intergovernmental cooperation. A National Partnership Agreement recognises domestic, family and sexualised violence as a core activity of all governments – similar to the agreements made in housing, health, mental health.

We are supportive of the approach of a National Partnership Agreement and urge individual governments to commit to this for the life of the next National Plan – not just for two years - and ensure that increased investment in specialist family violence service is included from all jurisdictions is part of this agreement.

During your negotiations, we urge you to pay particular attention to the many places across remote Australia, where support for extremely complex needs in very remote contexts is not adequately funded. We need to better support these communities.

Furthermore, consideration should be given to how this National Partnership Agreement will interact with existing specialist services' funding under other intergovernmental agreements (particularly, housing and homelessness).

Data and Monitoring

We welcome the inclusion of \$18.9 million over four years to establish a new performance and data monitoring framework in the 2021-22 Federal Budget, noting it will be critical for the next National Plan. For too long there has been a lack of transparency around actual funding levels, expected levels of service provision, and comparable rates of domestic, family and sexual violence across jurisdictions.

We propose that using a model similar to the Productivity Commission's Report on Government Services for the life of the next National Plan will be important in providing transparency, and enabling innovation around 'what works'.

In the development of this report, we strongly recommend the Commonwealth, State and Territory Governments work with the specialist sector. However, to start this conversation, we have proposed a number of measures for your consideration. We know in some cases jurisdictions will not measure this information already – but they should start, and providers should be adequately resourced to collect and report on this data (Attachment A).

We look forward to continuing to engage in the planned consultations for the National Plan, including the Women's Safety Summit.

Yours sincerely,

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ATTACHMENT A – SUGGESTED DATA POINTS FOR CONSIDERATION FOR NATIONAL REPORTING ON DOMESTIC, FAMILY AND SEXUAL VIOLENCE

NB: These areas of measurement are provided as an indication of areas which would benefit from measurement. It remains important that engagement across the specialist sector is undertaken, as this list isn't meant to be exhaustive.

1. Victim Support

- a. Funding and number of calls for intake services, including 1800RESPECT;
- b. Funding and number of clients (adult and child) for crisis services (including refuges and Keeping Women Safe in Their Homes);
- c. Number and rates of clients turned away;
- d. Funding and number of victims able to access specialist legal assistance
- e. Average duration of engagement with crisis services;
- f. Reason for dis-engagement with crisis service/s;
- g. Funding and numbers of clients for early intervention supports;
- h. Funding and numbers of clients for specialist family violence counselling and financial counselling;
- i. Waiting lists and duration of counselling;
- j. Number of and reasons for family violence victims accessing their superannuation early;
- k. Outcomes of family law property settlements where family violence allegations made;
- l. Housing and homelessness rates for victim survivors; and
- m. Number and average value of flexible support packages or equivalent.

2. Rates of Domestic, Family and Intimate Violence

- a. Personal Safety Survey data comparison;
- b. Number of incidents responded to by police;
- c. Number of intervention orders (disaggregated by gender); and
- d. Number of breaches of intervention orders.

3. Sexual Assault:

- a. Personal Safety Survey data comparison, including police and other services, and friends and family;
- b. Numbers of sexual assault reported to Police (broken down by relationship), other services;
- c. Feelings of public safety (i.e. streets, venues, offices)
- d. Number of cases considered through Courts; and
- e. Number of successful prosecutions.

4. Primary prevention:

- a. Funding for primary prevention programs (per capita);
- b. Attitudes to gender equality (i.e. NCAS);
- c. Attitudes to violence against women (i.e. NCAS); and
- d. Other NCAS and Workplace Gender Equality Agency data.

5. Justice responses

- a. Number of perpetrators charged and sentenced for domestic violence offences (community corrections and prison);
- b. Number of perpetrators charged and sentenced for sexualised violence offences (community corrections and prison);
- c. Number of protection orders granted;
- d. Average sentencing for family violence incidents;
- e. Average sentencing for sexualised violence incidents;
- f. Number of safe outcomes for family violence victims accessing the family law and justice systems; and
- g. Financial outcomes for family violence victims accessing the family law and justice systems.

6. Perpetrator responses:

- a. Funding and number of community sector led perpetrator interventions (broken down Referral – Self, Courts and Community Corrections);
- b. Average wait time for funded positions;
- c. Average number of weeks for perpetrator intervention; and
- d. Funding and number of family law system led perpetrator interventions.

7. Priority communities:

- a. Above statistics, where available, including gender break down, and information regarding priority communities including First Nations Peoples, LGBTIQ+ individuals, women with disability, women from refugee and migrant backgrounds, older Australians and regional/rural demographics, women experiencing poverty.