



Ending Violence Against Women Queensland (EVAWQ)

Peak Body for Sexual Violence, Women's Health, Domestic & Family Violence

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Subject: EVAWQ submission to the National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children consultation

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National Action Plan to Reduce Violence Against women and their children

EVAWQ response

Executive Summary

Ending Violence Against Women Queensland (EVAWQ) provides a representative and united voice for Queensland women and children affected by gender-based violence, and the individuals and service agencies that provide specialist support. EVAWQ represents the domestic and family violence, women's health, refuges and sexual violence sectors in Queensland. We aim to inform and share the depth and diversity of knowledge from specialist services within the women's sector to a broad range of government and non-government stakeholders in relation to all aspects of gender-based violence against women.

The *National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children 2010-2022* has been an important reference point for national responses to domestic and family violence and sexual violence. Organisations and services such as Our Watch, ANROWS, 1800RESPECT, the Personal Safety Survey (PSS) and the National Community Attitudes Survey (NCAS) funded under the National Plan have proven vital in ensuring ongoing evidence, research and support in primary prevention and response to domestic and family violence and sexual violence victim survivors, perpetrators and systems. It is essential these services and supports have continued funding and expansion to ensure the ongoing work in this space matches the increasing need.

Community understanding and attitudes toward domestic and family violence have increased over time as has the public recognition of inefficiencies in systems and responses, leading to often devastating outcomes for women and children. The next National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children (the Fifth National Plan) must go further than the current National Plan in addressing these issues with clear outcomes and expectations of resourcing and support in line with public expectation that a reduction in the gendered violence against women and their children will be a priority of government. There are substantial social and economic costs associated with



domestic and family violence and we need a whole of government and community coordinated response.

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

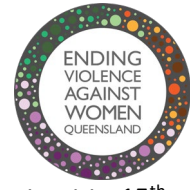
- Investment in Primary Prevention and addressing the core drivers of domestic, sexual, and family violence.
- Strong Governance including a National Partnership Agreement, clear and measurable targets and investment in data and monitoring.
- Establishment of an independent victims' commissioner.
- A separate Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander National Plan to acknowledge and respect the impact of Colonisation and the cultural strengths and local solutions to prevent domestic, family, and sexual violence.
- Understanding and recognition that everyone has different life experiences and backgrounds and requires different responses.
- Addressing global pandemic's and disaster's impacts on Women's safety.
- Addressing Domestic Violence as a driver for homelessness.
- Reform of Primary and Secondary education.
- Recognising and enhancing the role of integrated multi-disciplinary approaches to policing.

Primary Prevention

Primary Prevention remains the single most important goal to reduce violence against women and their children. We support the call to expanded support for primary prevention, with an evidence-based, whole of community approachⁱ.

Addressing the gender based drivers of domestic violence is the key to prevention for the future and is essential to the development of the Fifth National Action Plan. Acknowledging that gender inequality is both the core of the problem and it is the heart of the solutionⁱⁱ. Where power and resources are equally distributed between men and women, and people do not believe that men and women have specific characteristics that make them unequal results in reduced violence against women.

Gender inequality is a social condition that is manifest through the distribution of power, resources and opportunity within society and is reinforced through social norms. Gender equality has regressed in Australia in the last decade. The World Economic Forum annual global gender gap index indicates that Australia's overall pay gap has worsened from 23rd position in 2010 to 35th in 2017 and Australia has fallen from 12th (in 2006) for economic participation and opportunity to 70thⁱⁱⁱ We have also seen a gendered impact of COVID -19 worsening conditions for women such as escalations of victimisation of intimate partner violence and barriers to help seeking^{iv}. The UN identified that gender inequality has deepened, exacerbated by COVID-19^v.



In 2021 Australia was ranked 50th in The Global Gender Gap Index rankings^{vi} a stark contrast to 15th in 2006^{vii}. This demonstrates an environment where gender equality is regressing in Australia. Evidence shows that women are at greater risk of family, domestic and sexual violence. However, between 2005 and 2016, rates of partner violence against women have remained relatively stable^{viii} at a time where we are seeing reductions in other crimes, especially violent crimes in Australia. The Fifth National Plan needs to address gender equity as the fundamental key to preventing violence against women and children.

Domestic Violence costs the Australian people \$21.7 Billion every year¹. The Fifth National Plan needs a substantial commitment to funding coordinated evidence-based primary prevention of violence initiatives. Investing in prevention creates substantial long-term savings for government and the community by stopping the violence from occurring in the first place. Carceral solutions lead to an ongoing financial burden, while effective evidence-based prevention reduces pressure across all parts of the social services, health, housing and criminal justice system. Alongside the financial savings, actively preventing men's violence against women and children reduces the huge human toll that encompasses trauma, ill-health, reduced social participation, injury and death.

Furthermore, the funding arrangements for the specialist workforce need to be strengthened to meet demand and utilise evidence-based interventions to achieve outcomes. This requires new, specific investment in early intervention as a priority, increased and longer-term investment in tertiary victim support services, Significantly expanded focus on sexual violence response and prevention services, Shifting disproportionate burden from victim survivor to the people using violence, Recognising children and young people as victims in their own rights and providing strengthened support and protections for children and greater research to support evidence-based interventions.

Governance

The Fifth National Plan is an opportunity for Governments to demonstrate leadership through shared accountability for the responsibility for the prevention of violence against women and children as a core priority for all industries and areas of government and business. We believe a National Partnership Agreement is required alongside clear and measurable targets embedded in the Fifth National Plan and investment in data and monitoring. Our Nation requires strong governance between Federal, State and Local Governments that are all committed to building a society based on gender equality and respect for women. Without real targets governments have not had accountability mechanisms to measure performance against the National Plan resulting in an under investment in key activities required to achieve the vision that *'Australian women and their children live free from violence in safe communities'*.

Violence against women and children is a social health epidemic in Australia and it is crucial that the Federal Government recognise the urgent need to invest in women's safety and address the critical gaps in frontline domestic violence services alongside primary prevention. The Fifth National Plan needs to be accompanied with an increased investment with a 10-year commitment, alongside



addressing the gender-based drivers as a key to reduce the national burden of domestic violence related costs.

The Fifth National Plan is an opportunity for signalling a significant review of family law and court systems with an understanding of the use of systems as a coercive control abuse tactic that affects victims and children. We recommend using survivors' voices to inform the design of law and Court system responses. This would include reform shifting disproportionate burden from victim survivor to the people using violence and recognising children and young people as victims in their own rights.

Call for an Independent Victims' Commissioner

We call for the establishment of an independent statutory advocate through an Independent Victims' Commissioner to monitor treatment of victims by criminal justice agencies (Police, Prosecutors, Courts, Corrections), to provide community and sector education to raise awareness of victim rights, enhance sector collaboration to improve service responses to victims and provide advice to Minister/s (via a direct report) on matters relating to victims. This will strengthen governance and promote the rights and wellbeing of victims and survivors, and quality responses for victims.

The ACT has a Victims of Crime Commissioner whose role is to promote and protect the rights of people who experience crime and to ensure they can access the support they need.

This advocacy and education role includes:

- Advocating for individuals who experience crime
- Advocating for reforms to the justice system
- Consulting with victims of crime and promoting reforms to meet their needs; and
- Advising the ACT Minister for Justice on matters in relation to victims of crime in the ACT

They also support collaboration between agencies in the ACT, for example:

- As the Chair of the Family Violence Intervention Program Coordinating Committee.
- As the Domestic Violence Project Coordinator, they assist the Domestic Violence Prevention Council.
- They contribute to the work of the ACT Victims Advisory Board.

It is their job to work with the criminal justice system to ensure that people who experience crime are treated in accordance with the governing principles for the treatment of victims of crime. They do this by:

- Trying to resolve concerns that victims of crime raise with me about their treatment by police, prosecutions, the courts or corrective services; and
- Referring formal complaints about non-compliance with the governing principles to the appropriate complaints entity.



Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander National Plan

We support the call from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people for the development and implementation of their own national plan to address family and sexual violence, acknowledging the unique strengths of culture and connection to land, alongside the ongoing impact of colonisation requiring a unique plan to address the needs and strengths of our First Nations Peoples. We recommend that this plan focuses on the calls to action from National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders Women's Alliance NATSIWA, such as accessibility, the ability to maintain social distancing, clean water, access to healthy food, housing, children in out of home care and parenting planning, women in prison, and essential support service's^{ix}.

Recognising diversity

For the National plan to be effective in achieving its aims, it will need to recognise that different life experiences and backgrounds require different responses. Intersections of marginalisation can exacerbate the impacts of domestic, sexual and family violence and create additional barriers in accessing supports, self-determination and choice. The Fifth National Plan must include a plan to resource and support safe and inclusive services to ensure these marginalised women and children receive appropriate support and recognition that everyone has different life experiences and backgrounds and requires different responses. For example;

- Culturally and linguistically diverse people face unique barriers and challenges accessing supports. Particularly in relation to Visas, removing barriers to victims on temporary Visas. Income access^x.
- LGBTQI+ experience additional layers of coercive control and emotional abuse and DV and sexual abuse in same sex relationships is under reported. It is important that the service system is able to respond with inclusive responses that remove the additional barriers that people face.

Women and Children with Disabilities

The Fourth Action Plan acknowledges the disproportionate rates of domestic, family, and sexual violence against people with disability.^{xi} We recommend that this remains a priority within the Fifth National Plan.

Evidence demonstrates that women with disabilities are vulnerable to higher rates of both physical and sexual abuse from both those closest to them and strangers, when compared with other women^{xii}. We support the principles to underpin practice outlined by ANROWS^{xiii} and recommend the appropriate investment in building service capacity through enhanced training and development of joined up, holistic service responses to meet these standards;

- Accessibility is more than providing physical access: services must be approachable, acceptable, appropriate, affordable, and available to women with disabilities.
- Women with disabilities experience complexity in their lives and are multi-dimensional people: disability is in play with other personal and social factors that interact to impact on both the experience of disability and experiences of inclusion or exclusion. Service planning and delivery must be enhanced by the use of an intersectional lens.



- Women with disabilities need more than safety planning; they need social and relational support in a safe and inclusive environment.
- DFV service data collection must include data on experiences of disability of service users, and disability services data must include data on experiences of violence and abuse. This data needs to be used by services and in academic research to inform practice. The ideas and opinions of women with disabilities who have used services should be included within the context of research, service evaluation, and improvements.
- All aspects of tertiary response services for women with disabilities must be informed and enhanced by cross-sector collaboration.

Addressing Global Pandemic's and Disaster's Impacts on Women's Safety

For many women, the pandemic coincided with the onset or escalation of violence and abuse. Two-thirds of women who experienced physical or sexual violence by a current or former cohabiting partner since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic said the violence had started or escalated^{xiv}. The COVID-19 pandemic has had a significant impact on increased demand for crisis services and complexity of needs for people needing services. Furthermore, evidence demonstrates that women are significantly victimised and impacted as a population group by pandemics and natural disasters.

Pandemic management policy has addressed public health needs in a rapidly changing environment, and the DFV sector welcomed the one off investment into frontline services during the pandemic and responded to the pandemic by continuing to provide frontline services with established business continuity plans in place.

It is important for the Fifth National Plan to address the ongoing impact of COVID-19 and apply these lessons to future proofing for the gendered impacts of global pandemics and disasters and revising government policy to apply lessons from the management of COVID-19 and ensuring that gender inequality is not further exacerbated in future pandemic's and disaster's experienced in Australia. These lessons can be applied to disaster management for impending disasters such as bushfires, flooding or future pandemics.

Addressing Domestic Violence as a Driver for Homelessness

To appropriately address the impacts of domestic and family violence on growing homelessness issues across the Nation, the Fifth National Plan needs to prioritise provision of increased housing access to address homelessness. This includes prioritising increased affordable and accessible housing for women and children fleeing domestic violence and a commitment to make temporary accommodation to people perpetrating abuse to access temporary accommodation so that the family can stay at home safely and are not dislocated from their own schools, networks and communities.



The Role of Education

Education in schools embedded within the curriculum to address the drivers of gender based violence, consent and healthy relationships education with all young people before the age of 15 years is a key action we are calling for in the Fifth National Plan.

The Fifth National Plan can provide a benchmark for a minimum standard of Primary and Secondary School curriculum. This change could be a target set out within the new National Plan and implemented with clear accountability and performance targets in all Primary and Secondary Schools and a target for full roll out by 2023. This investment is a central component of Primary Prevention and reducing the future burden and impacts of domestic and family violence.

Policing

The Fifth National Plan is in an opportunity to create a framework to re-imagine the policing of violence against women and children in Australia to achieve better outcomes for our national future. A Police response utilising multi-disciplinary teams, increased collaboration with local agency responses, and with trauma responsive practice embedded. Australia has much to learn from models such as Argentina and the significant evaluative data available for such models^{xv}.

EVAWQ support the Womens Safety NSW submission response to the Parliamentary enquiry on Family, Domestic and Sexual Abuse in relation to the following core aspects that may be adapted and integrated into Australian Policing such as:

- Greater presence of women police in police stations and within the ranks of general duties officers, specifically to support victim-survivors making reports of violence.
- Implementation of a more integrated service response to domestic and family violence, combining policing with counselling, social work, legal support, and other crucial support services through an onsite partnership approach with a women's specialist domestic and family violence service program.
- Use of a more informal environment with comfortable facilities and spaces appropriate for children to increase women's comfort and likelihood to engage with police.
- Support provided to victim-survivors at police stations not being conditional on a formal police report being made.
- Increased community engagement through awareness campaigns, events, outreach programs, support groups, and education; and
- Increased community work targeting offender behaviour and addressing the values that underpin violence against women^{xvi}.

Conclusion

We urge governments to work collaboratively to support and resource the Fifth National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children. The epidemic of domestic and family violence is everyone's responsibility and there are clear recommendations for how Australia can commit to keeping women and children safe.



Investment and prioritisation of activities that focus on primary prevention, alongside activities that support victim survivors such as an Independent Victims Commissioner, will reduce the social and economic impacts that violence against women and children have on Australian society.

Ensuring this next National Plan considers intersectionality and diversity in its response to make the commitment that the most vulnerable of women and children are considered in their unique circumstances.

In an environment where we are faced with global pandemics, crisis and disasters, the impact on women and children and their safety needs to be a focus of government response and policy. Housing is a critical area that needs a significant government investment and response.

Systems that victim survivors have to engage with for safety need careful review and reimagining to provide victim centred responses, policing as a first responder is an important part of this reform.

EVAWQ thanks the government for the opportunity to make a submission to the National Federation Reform Council Taskforce on Women’s Safety on the fifth National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children.

Signatures of Support

Ending Violence Against Women Queensland



Lutheran Services- Mary & Martha’s Domestic Violence Refuge



Mackay’s Women’s Service



Women’s Health QLD



Domestic Violence Action Centre



Sera’s Women’s Shelter



Children by Choice



DV Connect



ⁱ [a-high-price-to-pay.pdf \(pwc.com.au\)](https://www.pwc.com/au/en/issues-and-ideas/industry-specific-advice/financial-services/a-high-price-to-pay.pdf)

ⁱⁱ Our Watch, Australia’s National Research Organisation for Women’s Safety (ANROWS) and VicHealth (2015) Change the story: A shared framework for the primary prevention of violence against women and their children in Australia, Our Watch, Melbourne, Australia.

ⁱⁱⁱ <https://womensagenda.com.au/latest/australia-has-fallen-way-behind-on-the-global-gender-gap-ranking/>



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- ^{iv} Boxall H, Morgan A & Brown R 2020. *The prevalence of domestic violence among women during the COVID-19 pandemic*. Statistical Bulletin no. 28. Canberra: Australian Institute of Criminology. <https://doi.org/10.52922/sb04718>
- ^v <https://www.unwomen.org/-/media/headquarters/attachments/sections/library/publications/2020/policy-brief-the-impact-of-covid-19-on-women-en.pdf?la=en&vs=1406>
- ^{vi} http://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF_GGGR_2021.pdf
- ^{vii} http://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF_GenderGap_Report_2006.pdf
- ^{viii} <https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/domestic-violence/family-domestic-sexual-violence-in-australia-2018/summary>
- ^{ix} <http://natsiwa.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/1.National-plan-to-reduce-violence-against-women-1.pdf>
- ^x https://awava.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/Blueprint-for-Reform_web_version.pdf
- ^{xi} Fourth Action Plan 2019-2022, Commonwealth of Australia, 2019.
- ^{xii} Frawley P Dyson S Robinson S & Dixon J (2015) *What Does It Take? Developing Informed and Effective Tertiary Responses to Violence and Abuse of Women and Girls with Disabilities in Australia: State of Knowledge paper* ANROWS
- ^{xiii} Frawley P Dyson S Robinson S & Dixon J (2015) *What Does It Take? Developing Informed and Effective Tertiary Responses to Violence and Abuse of Women and Girls with Disabilities in Australia: State of Knowledge paper* ANROWS
- ^{xiv} Boxall H, Morgan A & Brown R 2020. *The prevalence of domestic violence among women during the COVID-19 pandemic*. Statistical Bulletin no. 28. Canberra: Australian Institute of Criminology. <https://doi.org/10.52922/sb04718>
- ^{xv} <https://research.qut.edu.au/centre-for-justice/wp-content/uploads/sites/304/2020/10/Briefing-paper-series-July-2020-Issue-6.pdf>
- ^{xvi} https://www.womenssafetynsw.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/Womens-Safety-NSW_Submission-to-the-Parliamentary-Inquiry-into-FDSV_FINAL.pdf