



Federal Budget 2022-23 – Women's Safety

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Intimate partner violence, including violence in both cohabiting and non-cohabiting relationships and emotional abuse is prevalent, affecting one in three women since the age of 15. One in four women have experienced violence or abuse from a cohabiting partner. If we only consider physical and sexual violence, then one in six women have experienced at least one incident of violence by a cohabiting partner.

On Tuesday, as politicians were busy getting ready for Josh Frydenberg's budget speech, the artist Dans Bain and News Corp journalist Sherele Moody, who set up the Red Heart Campaign, laid out the names of the 2,000 people who had been killed since 2008 on the lawn out the front of Parliament House. It was 30 metres long.


Violence against women and their children is an urgent and challenging human rights and public health issue. As Treasurer Josh Frydenberg rightly acknowledged in his budget speech last week, the human cost of not getting this right is ever present. Despite this acknowledgement, the budget handed down by the Treasurer did not offer the transformational level of funding required to match the Morrison Government's stated objective to "eliminate" violence against women and children.

The stated commitment to women's safety is not borne out by financial investment. The commitments are piecemeal, and many are not even new. A budget commitment of \$1.3 billion over 6 years from 2021/22 towards initiatives to reduce all forms of family, domestic and sexual violence against women and children, and to establish, enhance and expand initiatives that address the full life cycle of violence across prevention, early intervention, response, and recovery is an acknowledgement that there is major work to be done for women's safety in Australia. However, the relatively small investment is generally for women's safety 'initiatives'.

The \$1.3 billion budget spend includes:

- \$222 million in prevention initiatives, including the previously announced \$104.4 million over 5 years to support the work of Our Watch, Australia's leading prevention organisation and funds for consent education
- \$52.4 million over 4 years to protect victim-survivors against cross-examination by family violence perpetrators



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- \$20 million over 4 years to establish a women’s trauma recovery centre at the Illawarra Women’s Health Centre
 - \$3.4 million to support the implementation of recommendations from the Respect@Work report
 - \$6 million over 4 years to update the federal government’s respectful relationships education online platform
 - \$47.9 million over five years for a new campaign that focuses on confronting the attitudes and expectations of some men which can condone or excuse violence.
 - \$20 million over five years to improve the safety of victim-survivors and keep men in view by establishing a fund for states and territories to trial electronic monitoring of high-risk and persistent family and domestic violence offenders.


These initiatives are important and helpful but do not build the strong, sustainable foundations required to make meaningful, systemic, long-term inroads into violence against women and their children. For example, the budget repeats the announcement for a dedicated Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Action Plan, but the commitment is overshadowed by the fact that the budget fails to adequately fund Aboriginal family violence and legal services – which are critical to safety.

Similarly, the budget announced the continuation of financial and legal support for temporary visa holders if they are experiencing domestic and family violence. But there is no extension of this measure and the response does not address the limited access to support for temporary visa holders, or the need for reform to the visa and migration pathways for non-citizens who experience domestic and family violence.

The budget fails to sufficiently recognise the systemic ways women’s inequality is linked to violence, and how violence and abuse is sustained via inequality. As Kate Fitz-Gibbon and Marie Segrave state: “Women’s safety does not exist in a vacuum. Glaring concerns continue, around un- and underemployment, slow wage growth, the cost of living, gender inequality and superannuation and the long-term impact on women working in the least valued jobs.”

With Australia falling from 12th to 70th in the world for women’s economic participation and opportunity in the last 14 years, there ought to have been more of a focus on accessible childcare, addressing the wage and superannuation gap, protection from sexual harassment at work, and social and affordable housing for women. Purposeful investment in housing is integral to women’s safety. While the Government pledged a \$2 billion boost for affordable housing and extra support for first-home buyers, it failed to address any long-term solutions to the housing crisis. The draft National Plan to End Violence Against Women and Children expressly recognised the need for more social housing, yet it’s been completely overlooked.





Research from the [Nowhere to Go report in 2021](#), showed that if 16,810 homes were built in Australia—equal to the number of women returning to violent partners because they cannot find long-term, affordable housing—it would create 47,000 jobs and provide a \$15.3 billion boost to the economy.

Despite the disappointing lack of a systems, safety in all policies approach, we are pleased to see continued and increased funding for initiatives such as the escaping violence payment (EVP), which has been allocated \$240m. The additional funding would support up to 37,500 women fleeing violence. However, women escaping domestic violence say they are struggling to access the \$5,000 government payment including \$1,500 in cash to help victim-survivors leave abusive partners. Women and specialist family and domestic violence services have reported delays of up to 12 weeks and poor communication with EVP service providers.

In Senate estimates in February, the Social Services Minister, Anne Ruston, said the Government was working to fix the delays. As part of the new funding the Department of Social Services will work with UnitingCare and conduct an independent evaluation to ensure the settings of the program were meeting the needs of women escaping violent partners.


The other major criticism of the payment is only \$1,500 of the \$5,000 is available in cash, with the rest provided in the form of a voucher to be spent on goods or services or paying for bonds or school fees. Cash payments provide women with agency and the autonomy to make their own choices about what to spend the \$5,000 on to assist them to live independently.

There has been a dramatic increase in the number of women being subjected to technology-based abuse, including abusive texts, tracking of smartphones and hidden cameras. A national survey by women's services network WESNET found almost all women experiencing domestic and family violence suffered from technology abuse. Hence, we are pleased to see nearly \$55m will be invested in a program that provides technology checks to ensure people who have experienced domestic and family violence are not subjected to further abuse. Key points:

- A new program will let victim survivors check if GPS tracking programs or bugs have been installed on their devices
- The Keeping Women Safe in their Homes program will be expanded
- Millions more will go to the eSafety Commissioner

Funded technology programs/services include checking a victim-survivors phone and computer to see if any GPS tracking programs or bugs have been installed, as well as searching for cameras hidden in toys, vents, or lights in homes.





There are some private companies that already offer the service, but the government's Keeping Women Safe in their Homes program will use this funding to establish a national provider to ensure assistance is consistent regardless of where a person lives.

Currently, the program supports about 2,300 women per year, and it is expected to grow to 6,000.

The technology package also includes \$20m in grants that will fund GPS tracking trials, to be run by the states and territories. Some states already have programs in place where perpetrators are required to wear a tracking device but reports on their effectiveness have been mixed.

Another \$27m will be spent on online safety initiatives, including more funding for the eSafety Commissioner.

Finally, we were pleased to see \$25m in the budget over five years to provide specialised and dedicated services for women to address the impacts of domestic and family violence, and to research recovery responses. It is important to invest in highly needed recovery initiatives, such as the Illawarra Women's Trauma Recovery Centre. The centre will bring together primary health care, mental health care, legal, housing and financial support delivered in one place for as long as needed. There will both crisis support and longer-term care and connection to community. However, most states and territories have the capacity to pilot a similar initiative. The need for recovery programs is high and placed-based 'recovery centres' are appropriate and necessary.

