CENTRE FOR
Women's Safety
and Wellbeing

Preventing violence,
promoting health,
advancing gender equality

# Submission to the *National Plan to End Violence Against Women and Children 2022-2032* – Second Action Plan Development

# Submission and Second Action Plan under the *National Strategy to Prevent and Respond to Child Sexual Abuse 2021–2030*

## Acknowledgement of Country

The Centre for Women's Safety and Wellbeing acknowledges the Whadjuk Nyoongar people as the Traditional Owners of the land on which we work. We acknowledge Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples of this nation, and we pay respect to Elders past and present. We acknowledge the continued deep spiritual attachment and relationship of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to this country and commit ourselves to the ongoing journey of reconciliation.

## Recognition of Victims and Survivors

The Centre for Women's Safety and Wellbeing recognises the strength and resilience of adults, children, and young people who have experienced domestic, family and sexual violence and acknowledge that it is essential that responses are informed by their expert knowledge and advocacy.

We pay respect to those who did not survive and acknowledge friends and family members who have lost loved ones to the preventable and far-reaching issue of domestic, family, and sexual violence.

## About the Centre for Women's Safety and Wellbeing

The Centre for Women's Safety and Wellbeing (CWSW) is the leading voice for women and children affected by gender-based violence in Western Australia and the peak body for domestic, family and sexual violence services and community-based women's health services in WA. CWSW works to prevent domestic, family and sexual violence against women and their children, promote women's health and wellbeing, and advance gender equity.

We work to ensure that the evidence base is taken up in policy and practice to further the safety, health and wellbeing of women and their children. We advocate for systems and structures that enable and support the safety, wellbeing and economic security of women.

CWSW also promotes non-violent and respectful attitudes and behaviours towards women and girls in the broader community, and community responsibility for violence prevention.

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## Introduction

The impacts of violence against women and children are profound, enduring and far-reaching, and they are not experienced equally. At the Centre for Women's Safety and Wellbeing we believe that all women and children have the right to live lives that are free from fear, violence, discrimination and inequity. Safety and security are the bedrock on which all opportunities in our lives are built.

Beyond the statistics, the sheer prevalence and threat of sexual violence in particular shapes how all women and girls perceive their safety and in turn this affects their freedom to participate in all areas of life. The threat of sexual violence and harassment directly affects women and girls' sense of safety in everyday life. The sheer volume of sexual violence that they see, witness as a bystander and feel as an imminent possibility acts to limit their freedom. This prevalence and ongoing threat of sexual and gender-based violence shapes how women and girls assess risk, navigate public and private spaces, and participate in work, community and social life.

This is why urgent and meaningful action to end violence against women and children must remain a national priority. The Second Action Plan is a critical opportunity to move from recognition to implementation, and to ensure that gender-based violence is addressed with the scale and urgency required.

CWSW notes the submissions made by our national peak bodies, the National Association of Services Against Sexual Violence and WESNET Australia and strongly supports the recommendations put forward which align with this submission.

CWSW also strongly supports the aligned consultation process for the Second Action Plans under the National Plan to End Violence Against Women and Children 2022–2032 and the National Strategy to Prevent and Respond to Child Sexual Abuse 2021–2030. This submission is intended to contribute to both processes, recognising that child sexual abuse sits within the broader continuum of sexual violence and must be addressed through connected prevention, response and recovery mechanisms.

This submission will direct the Commonwealth Government's attention to existing and emerging evidence and highlight priority areas for further action and reform. Alongside empirical evidence, the content of this submission draws on the practice knowledge and expertise of our members (specialist family and domestic violence

services, sexual assault services and community based women's health services) and lived experiences. We highlight key priorities and focus areas that we believe should be incorporated into the second Action Plan to address the issues and themes that have emerged during consultations with our specialist services and lived experience advocates.

## A note on terminology

Family and domestic violence and sexual violence are deeply interconnected forms of gendered violence that frequently co-occur but are not interchangeable terms.

Family and domestic violence is any incident or pattern of abuse, violence and/or restriction or control designed to instil fear or control in the context of an intimate partner, family or family-like relationship.

Although sexual violence is a form of family and domestic violence when it occurs in that relationship context, it can also occur outside intimate partner relationships and includes a broader range of violations such as sexual assault, child sexual abuse, image-based abuse, sexual harassment and exploitation.

Sexual violence encompasses a wide continuum of behaviours, ranging from sexualised jokes, harassment and coercion through to assault and rape. The concept of the "continuum of sexual violence" acknowledges that these behaviours are interconnected and cannot be easily separated into discrete categories. Importantly it is not a hierarchy of behaviours; rather it recognises that the harms across the continuum have significant consequences for victim-survivors. Many experiences occur in everyday environments, including workplaces and within relationships, including intimate partner and intra-familial contexts. These experiences are linked by underlying social norms and structural factors that enable and sustain violence.

At its core, gender-based violence is an abuse of power, underpinned by gender inequality as a primary driver, and must be understood within its broader social context rather than solely as a matter of individual offending. It is well recognised that social and cultural conditions (where we live, work, learn and socialise) can permit or prohibit sexual violence.

Many victim-survivors have experienced both forms of abuse, and the impacts on mental health and suicidality are often cumulative and compounding. This submission

will at times refer to specific elements that impact exclusively victim-survivors of family and domestic violence or sexual violence, and at times refer to both forms of abuse simultaneously. Maintaining a clear distinction of understanding between family and domestic violence and sexual violence is important to ensure the full breadth of victim-survivor experiences is recognised in policy, data and service responses.

When sexual violence is considered only through family and domestic violence frameworks, forms of abuse that occur outside of intimate partner relationships, particularly those affecting children and young people, women in community settings, workplaces and online spaces, can be overlooked. It also risks obscuring or conflating the drivers and causes of sexual violence.

This risks under-identifying key drivers linked to sexual violence, the shame and social stigma attached, and can lead to gaps in prevention, data collection and the required specialist responses. Likewise, it is important that sexual violence in an intimate partner context receives a specialist sexual violence response too. Recognising both the complex interplay and the distinctions is essential to accurately understand and address the pathways of experiences of violence.

### Operationalise intersectionality

Applying an intersectional lens throughout the Second Action Plan is necessary to ensure that we are responding to the complex structures that drive violence against women and children, and the barriers that victim survivors face to accessing safety and support. Structural inequality, discrimination and marginalisation impact family, domestic and sexual violence experiences and risk. It is critically important that these intersecting forms of inequality and oppression that enable violence against women and children are embedded and operationalised throughout all aspects of the Action Plan.

### Invest in and build on specialist family and domestic violence services and sexual assault services

Specialisation is critical to reducing and addressing family and domestic violence and sexual violence.  Services with specialist expertise in responding to family and domestic violence and sexual violence, such as specialist family and domestic violence services and sexual assault services, ensure that victim-survivors have access to

professionals with the appropriate skills, knowledge and expertise to meet all their safety and support needs.

When victim-survivors access specialist family and domestic violence services they are part of a broader family and domestic violence system, and associated legislation, that is intended to ensure that risk management and information sharing occurs collaboratively and in an integrated way. It is critical that the Action Plan recognises the vital importance of specialist family and domestic violence services and specialist sexual assault services.

Any new investment should be distributed through this existing specialist infrastructure including through state and territory governments. This will not only ensure efficiency it will also reduce system fragmentation by centralising responses to victim-survivors in specialist family and domestic violence services and sexual assault services. Importantly, this will mean that victim-survivors have access to safe and appropriate support including effective risk assessment, risk management and risk relevant information sharing.

Distributing funding outside of the family and domestic violence system is not conducive to ensuring the sharing of risk relevant information and risk management, which has significant safety implications for victim-survivors. CWSW would like to see the forthcoming Action Plan strengthen state-based specialist family and domestic violence responses and recognise the critical role that specialist family and domestic violence services play in assessing and managing family and domestic violence risk and supporting victim-survivors' long term safety, health and wellbeing.

# PART A – SEXUAL VIOLENCE

## National context

Significant developments have occurred nationally since the First Action Plan was developed, including increased public attention on sexual violence, significant lived experience advocacy, major legal and policy reform inquiries, growing recognition institutional abuse and child sexual abuse as critical national issues and the astronomical rise of online child sexual abuse and child sexual exploitation.

Despite this, sexual violence has still not been given sufficient attention as a distinct form of gender-based violence outside the context of intimate partner and family violence. While the intersections between family, domestic and sexual violence are significant, sexual violence requires dedicated policy, investment, data, workforce and service-system responses that reflect its specific drivers, impacts and pathways for victim-survivors.

The year 2027 will mark 10 years since both the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse and the emergence of the MeToo movement as a global catalyst for public disclosure and awareness. Over that decade, large numbers of victim-survivors have come forward, often at significant personal cost, to share their experiences, seek support and call for systemic change. Despite this, government investment and system reform have not kept pace with the scale of need that has been made visible.

Specialist sexual violence services across Australia remain stretched and under-resourced, with long waitlists and limited workforce capacity. In some regions of Australia, including WA, there are vast regional areas with no specialist sexual violence response at all.

There has been no dedicated national investment stream to build the specialist sexual violence service system at the scale required, leaving services to absorb increasing demand within already constrained and outdated funding models.

There has also been insufficient national development of the systems, infrastructure and leadership required to respond to sexual violence in Australia. Unlike other areas of gender-based violence reform, sexual violence has not yet benefited from a clear national service-system framework, workforce strategy, or sustained funding plan. The Second Action Plan provides an important opportunity to address this gap by treating sexual violence as a distinct national priority requiring coordinated prevention, response and accountability mechanisms.

## WA sexual violence context

Despite the significant prevalence and serious impacts of sexual violence, Western Australia has one of the least developed specialist sexual violence service systems in Australia when population, geography, workforce and funding are considered

(including the lowest funding and lowest workforce per captia in Australia). To further highlight this, there are just 12 FTE specialist sexual violence workers for the whole of regional WA.

CWSW has previously completed jurisdictional analyses which found that the current system in WA is significantly under-resourced and unable to meet the needs of victim-survivors. The regional Sexual Assault Support Services experience even further funding disparities, have very limited workforce capacity, and operate across extremely large geographic areas with significant unmet need. Furthermore, the current service system is fragmented across government and non-government service streams, with limited integration between crisis, therapeutic, child sexual abuse and regional support pathways. The WA sexual violence sector is made up of:

1. One metropolitan based Sexual Assault Resource Centre (SARC) (13 years and older) run as a government service under North Metropolitan Health Service (NMHS) and funded by the Mental Health Commission.
2. Five regional Sexual Assault Support Services (SASS) (13 years and older), delivered by non-government organisations, procured by North Metropolitan Health Service.
3. 15 Child Sexual Abuse Therapeutic Services (CSATs) and Indigenous Healing Services (IHS) for victim-survivors under 18 years and their families, delivered by non-government organisations, procured by the Department of Communities.

Metropolitan waitlists are more than 12months long, and regional waitlists have more than 65 victim-survivors waiting for just one service (if there is even one to attend at all).

WA requires a specialist sexual violence service system that is statewide, flexible, place-based, and capable of responding to the unique challenges associated with its geography. Previous reports have highlighted that specialist sexual violence services are most effective when they provide more than counselling alone. Best-practice models across Australia and internationally incorporate crisis support, therapeutic interventions, advocacy, court and legal support, system navigation, group programs, prevention activities, and workforce development. These services need to be delivered through survivor-centred, trauma-informed and intersectional frameworks that

recognise the complex and diverse needs of victim-survivors. This needs to be made a reality in WA.

WA's current sexual violence peak function is also significantly under-resourced compared with other jurisdictions and is not sufficient to effectively deliver support peak body functions such as being the central advocate, representative, and capacity-building organisation for specialist sexual violence and prevention services. With just 1 FTE attached to the peak function there is limited ability to embed workforce capacity and capability alongside the advocacy and service support functions.

## Priority areas for sexual violence

### *NASASV 5-point plan*

CWSW strongly supports NASASV's 5-point plan to address sexual violence in the next five years.

This includes:

1. Funding NASASV as the national peak body to enable; a national sexual violence mapping and data project; the development of a national sexual violence prevention framework and a national sexual violence workforce strategy to be undertaken.
2. Whole-of-Government agreement through the National Partnership Agreement (NPA) to support funding uplift to specialist sexual violence services across Australia
3. Dedicated focus on prevention of sexual violence
4. Strengthen prevention of and response to sexually violent technology-facilitated abuse of children, young people and adults
5. Prioritisation of specific Australian Law Reform Commission recommendations

This 5-point plan is not only immediately actionable but also lays critical infrastructure that is sorely needed in Australia to strengthen our responses to sexual violence.

### *Prevention*

Sexual violence prevention remains significantly underfunded when compared with crisis and response services, despite those services also being chronically under-resourced across Australia. Australia urgently needs a broader and more sustained

investment in sexual violence prevention that extends beyond school-based programs. While respectful relationships education is important, it cannot be the only prevention mechanism. Effective prevention must also respond to the specific settings, systems and social conditions in which sexual violence occurs, including workplaces, community organisations, online environments, institutions, public spaces and service systems. This requires place-based and context-specific approaches that are designed with local communities and specialist services, rather than one-size-fits-all programs.

Specialist sexual assault services play a critical prevention role through tertiary prevention delivered within service responses. This work is distinct, yet sits alongside, primary prevention and includes reducing the risk of re-victimisation and re-perpetration, supporting victim-survivors to stabilise and recover, strengthening safety and system navigation, reducing avoidable contact with justice, health and child protection systems, and interrupting intergenerational patterns of violence.

Properly resourced specialist services therefore do more than respond after harm has occurred; they actively reduce future harm by addressing the conducive contexts that enable sexual violence to occur and continue. This is genuine prevention work and should be recognised, funded and measured as part of Australia's broader prevention infrastructure.

Furthermore, to prevent sexual violence, we must first grapple with how normalised it is within our culture, particularly within heteronormative sex. Recently published research surveyed over 2,500 men anonymously about self-reported "sexual aggression"[1]. The findings are confronting:

- 95% reported using at least one strategy to obtain sex from a woman they knew did not consent
- 65% said these encounters resulted in forced sex
- 70% perceived no negative consequences

This research clearly highlights that sexual violence isn't simply a misunderstanding of consent. Many men do understand and choose to ignore it. When women are not seen or treated as fully human, their autonomy, safety and rights are more easily

[1] https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/08862605261432630

disregarded, and, in this study, many men feel entitled to women's bodies. If we are serious about preventing sexual violence, we need to make explicit the very high prevalence of sexual violence where women and children live, work, learn and socialise. We also need to be explicit about the kinds of sexual violence that is occurring and who is perpetrating it. The uncomfortable truth is that not doing enough to prevent and respond to the high prevalence of sexual violence against women and children provides an environment that permits it to continue to occur, to be normalised and for the deep harm to remain largely invisible. Victim-survivors of sexual violence have a right to transformative change which requires accountability and hard truths to be faced and addressed.

### *National Practice Standards*

The specialist sexual violence sector has had national practice standards since 1998; however, for the National Practice Standards to be operationalised in a meaningful and consistent way, dedicated implementation resourcing is required. The Commonwealth funded NASASV in 2020-21 to develop the third edition of the Standards; however, no resourcing has ever been provided to support their implementation across Australia.

Operationalising the Standards requires dedicated funding for NASASV and state and territory peak bodies to develop the resources and implementation supports needed by specialist sexual violence services to put the Standards into practice.

Doing so would enable a national approach to workforce and sector development, strengthening capability and quality across specialist sexual violence support services. It would also support tailored responses for specific demographics, communities and regions. Embedding the NASASV Practice Standards would strengthen workforce development, build sector capability and provide a shared national foundation for safe, consistent and high-quality specialist sexual violence responses to victim-survivors.

This work could also include developing the systems, governance and workforce capability required to support implementation, as well as delivering a structured capability-building program to uplift specialist practice across Australia.

### *Improving critical statutory responses*

Urgent action is required in relation to the family court and child protection management of child sexual abuse cases. This cannot be ignored in the development of the next National action plans.

***Family Court:***

Recent research, "I wish they knew what they'd stolen from me": Child sexual abuse and the Family Court[2], highlights and confirms longstanding concerns about the way child sexual abuse is understood and responded to in Family Court proceedings. The report found that children are often unable to give evidence directly about their own experiences and are frequently positioned as unreliable witnesses to the harm they have experienced. It also found that the Family Court process can be both retraumatising and an "anti-recovery" experience for victims and survivors of child sexual abuse.

These findings reinforce decades of advocacy from victim-survivors, specialist sexual violence services and advocates who have consistently raised concerns about the treatment of child sexual abuse allegations in family law settings. When systems minimise, disbelieve or fail to appropriately respond to children's disclosures, they compound harm and undermine safety and recovery. We urge the Government to adopt the report's recommendations in relation to Family Court proceedings involving child sexual abuse as a matter of urgency, and to include this reform as a priority area in the next Action Plan.

***Police and Child Protection reports:***

Prevention is critical, but preventing further harm after child sexual abuse has been identified or suspected is too often overlooked. Current responses focus heavily on whether a matter reaches the threshold for a police or child protection response, yet many children and families do not receive a meaningful intervention when allegations cannot be substantiated, do not proceed to prosecution, and then they fall between service system responsibilities. This creates a significant gap for children where harm may continue, and these children are left without specialist support, safety planning or coordinated intervention.

There is a concerning tendency for our systems to treat non-substantiation as equivalent to absence of harm. In practice, a decision not to proceed through police or child protection pathways reflects evidentiary barriers, disclosure dynamics, or the

[2] https://nationalcentre.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2026/06/MACSWEEN-FINAL-Full-Report-June-2026.pdf

developmental stage of the child, or the limitations of existing statutory frameworks. It should not mean that a child's experience, safety or recovery needs are dismissed. Australia urgently needs a multiagency model for responding to child sexual abuse that sits between, and connects with, criminal/civil justice, child protection, family law, health, education and specialist sexual violence services. Such a model should be child-centred, trauma-focused and grounded in children's rights, including the right to be heard, believed, protected and supported. It should also explicitly address the harm to children that can arise through Family Court processes and ensure that all agencies have clear duties to act in ways that prioritise's children's safety and recovery.

### *Technology-facilitated sexual violence*

Technology-facilitated sexual violence (TFSV) is a pervasive problem and a critical human rights and public safety issue. It requires immediate, coordinated intervention from governments, tech companies, and legal systems if we are to protect women's and children's rights in the digital era. The next Action Plan must take urgent and meaningful action on technology facilitated sexual violence This form of abuse is not a new phenomenon, rather it has repackaged sexual violence through rapidly evolving technologies. While technology has advanced at an unprecedented pace, efforts to prevent, regulate, and respond to these harms have not kept pace.

The next Action Plan should prioritise stronger regulatory obligations for technology and financial service providers, requiring them to identify, assess, mitigate, and transparently report on child sexual abuse risks associated businesses. Greater accountability must be placed on the companies whose platforms and systems enable these harms, rather than continuing to place the burden on individuals experiencing abuse. A more proactive and preventative approach is required, with greater responsibility placed on technology companies to identify and address foreseeable risks arising from their platforms and products and to act quickly when harm is being caused or harmful behaviours are being promoted or normalised.

The Australian Government should also consider the full range of available regulatory, criminal, civil, and other legal powers to remove or block pornographic material that promotes incest and child sexual abuse themes. Such content contributes to the normalisation of sexual violence and creates pathways to further exploitation.

Algorithms play a significant role in shaping and amplifying exposure to violent and degrading sexual content. They can facilitate access to child sexual abuse material, enable online grooming, connect offenders through online networks, expose children and young people to harmful content, support the creation and distribution of AI-generated child sexual abuse material. These technological systems are actively influencing the scale and persistence of technology-facilitated sexual violence that caused significant harm and fear both online and offline..

Cultural change is also needed within policing and the justice system. Technology-facilitated sexual violence is too often treated as less serious than contact offending, despite its profound and lasting impacts on victim-survivors. In many cases, victim-survivors continue to be blamed for the abuse they experience or are simply advised to block offenders or leave online platforms, rather than receiving meaningful protection or access to justice. Responses must recognise technology-facilitated sexual violence as a serious form of gendered violence and ensure victim-survivors receive the same level of protection, and accountability afforded to victims of offline sexual violence.

### *Commonwealth Government role as accountability mechanism*

The Second Action Plan must ensure there are dedicated sexual violence funding streams to create accountability in the state and territory funding decisions.

For example, in Western Australia, there are just six specialist adult sexual assault services to cover the whole state. Five of the six services cover regional WA – most of the landmass of state – and between them receive only $2 million a year. There is a significant need to resource the regional services to ensure access to regional and remote victim-survivors, through properly funded in-reach, outreach and increased location availability. There has been no meaningful investment in the specialist sexual violence sector in decades, despite lengthy waiting lists, an increase in the number of sexual violence incidences and the increasing presentations particularly due to technology-facilitated abuse and the impacts of violent mainstream pornography. Two-thirds of sexual violence occurs outside family and domestic violence settings, yet in WA adult sexual violence services have received no NPA funding at all. When NPA funding has been allocated in WA it has referred to services who have received it as “family, domestic and sexual violence services” when in fact they deliver no specialist sexual violence service.

Similarly, in WA none of the 500 family, domestic and sexual violence workers funded by the Commonwealth have been allocated to the specialist sexual violence sector. We have seen the difference this funding has made to sexual violence services in other states who have been recipients of this initiative. There must be equity in the funding distribution across Australia. It is incredibly disheartening to read media statements lamenting a "72% funding boost for our frontline family, domestic, and sexual violence workforce" and not see that reflected on the ground when the sector is straining under immense pressure in WA[3].

There is currently no nationally consistent public reporting to demonstrate what proportion of NPA funding or 500 workers each jurisdiction directs to sexual violence services and how funding is being distributed between family and domestic violence sector and the sexual violence sector. We strongly recommend that this be addressed in the next Action Plan.

### *Forensic medical examinations*

Forensic and medical examinations (FMEs) are a comprehensive physical examination of a person's body to collect evidence of a sexual assault, and to determine if any injuries or medical issues need to be addressed as a result of the assault. A lack of access to forensic and medical care can prevent victim-survivors from accessing justice, and critically FMEs enables access to immediate medical care (e.g. STI testing, emergency contraception etc) therefore is an important preventative health service. Access to FMEs in WA is extremely limited, particularly in the regions.

Victim-survivors routinely report being turned away from regional hospitals due to the lack of workforce capability and capacity to respond to these presentations, which compounds the harm to victim-survivors of sexual assault. The absence of psychosocial support from a worker with specialised knowledge and training, to sit alongside a victim-survivor during an FME is a missing link for many victim-survivors in regional and remote areas. This is considered best practice and yet is not an option in regional locations in WA.

We have heard many examples where victim-survivors are experiencing secondary victimisation either due to the lack of timeliness of the process or because the FME is

[3] https://ministers.dss.gov.au/media-releases/18771

delivered without regard or care to the intimate bodily violation that person has just experienced. Forensic medical examinations must be delivered by appropriately trained specialists in a person-centred, violence- and trauma-responsive manner. Australia does not currently have a harmonised national forensic sexual assault response framework. Standards, policies, funding, staffing, access pathways, and victim-survivor supports vary significantly across states and territories.

The issue must receive attention as part of the next Action Plan should address this gap so that in order to prevent further harm being experienced by victim-survivors are not exposed to further harm at the point of sexual violence when the forensic window may offer one of the first opportunities for safety, care and opportunity to have a positive, healing experience.

There is a clear opportunity to draw on the local specialist sexual assault support services and the nursing workforce to strengthen a critical role in this response. Many other jurisdictions are implementing Sexual Assault Nurse Examiner models (SANEs) to improve access to trauma- and violence-informed, person-centred care following a sexual assault. Opportunities for reform include:

- Ensure dedicated Sexual Assault Nurse Examiners are available at all public hospitals.
- Recognition of Sexual Assault Nurse Examiner expertise and specialisation of Sexual Assault Nurse Examiners through appropriated entitlements, and conditions, recognising extra and ongoing training and acknowledgement of the seriousness required and additional responsibilities and seriousness of the role.
- Strengthen referral pathways between local hospitals and local Sexual Assault Support Services to ensure continuity of care pre, during and post FME.
- Fund outreach models that enable Sexual Assault Support Services to attend hospitals and other settings to support victim-survivors throughout during the FME process.
- Explore co-location of Sexual Assault Nurse Examiners in other non-hospital settings, including specialist like Sexual Assault Support Services.

### *Critical enabling factors for change*

CWSW considers the following as essential enabling factors to create change:

- Rethink the current language around “lack of reporting”. Too often the inquiries, reports and research refer to victim-survivors not reporting due to “fears of not being believed” or “fears of retaliation”. CWSW feels strongly that the next Action Plan has a responsibility to victim-survivors to be clear that in many instances victim-survivors’ fears of the justice system are based on well founded realities. In most cases these reflect real failings and poor responses, including previous inadequate accountability, actual retaliation (including community isolation, dismissal or escalation of violence), breaches of confidentiality and/or a lack of meaningful action. The Action Plan should explicitly acknowledge that low reporting rates directly reflect a profound, well-documented lack of trust in the justice system, rooted in victim-survivors' real experiences of systemic failure and secondary trauma. Low reporting rates should prompt scrutiny of the systemic culture, behaviours and the inadequacy of existing response systems.
- Introduction of absolute privilege for counselling records, alongside stronger protections for other sensitive records such as safety plans, case notes, risk assessments and therapeutic documentation. Victim-survivors must be able to seek support, disclose harm and engage in services without fear that their private records will later be accessed and used against them in legal proceedings. Stronger protections are essential to uphold safety, confidentiality and trust in specialist services, and to remove a significant barrier to help-seeking and recovery.
- Urgent investment to establish baseline specialist sexual violence infrastructure across Australia. This requires a nationally coordinated investment approach that ensures every jurisdiction has access to core specialist sexual violence services, including crisis support, therapeutic responses, advocacy, legal and court support, child sexual abuse responses, regional and remote service models, Aboriginal-led and Aboriginal-self-determined services, workforce development and prevention capability. Without this baseline infrastructure, national reforms will continue to rely on an under-resourced service system that cannot meet current demand, need or future policy expectations.
- Embedding and operationalising the NASASV National Practice Standards is critical to the success of the next Action Plan. The Standards provide a shared

foundation for safe and high-quality specialist sexual violence responses, but they cannot be implemented effectively without dedicated resources and workforce development. Investment is needed to support NASASV, state and territory peaks, and specialist services to translate the Standards into practice, build sector capability and ensure victim-survivors can access consistent responses regardless of where they live.

## PART B – FAMILY & DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

### Urgent action on Murdered and Disappeared Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Women and Children.

CWSW notes that a national roundtable took place on 11 June 2026 to discuss urgent action on Murdered and Disappeared Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Women and Children. The roundtable, co-convened by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner, Katie Kiss, and Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence Commissioner, Micaela Cronin, brought together a powerful group of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women leaders, people with lived experience, government representatives, Aboriginal community-controlled organisations, advocates and practitioners, all seeking urgent and meaningful action on the national crisis of murdered and disappeared Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and children. The impact of this crisis is profound, devastating families, communities and the underlying sense of safety that all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and children deserve.

CWSW strongly supports the implementation of the urgent actions identified by roundtable participants, including that:

- National Cabinet provide an update on the implementation of recommendations of the 2024 Senate Committee Inquiry on the Missing and Murdered First Nations Women and Children.
- Murdered and Missing (Disappeared) Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Women and Children is a government priority, addressed through a Department of Social Services audit of inquiry recommendations and by all states and territories through national Ministerial Councils, including at their next Council meeting.

- National data collection and transparency is strengthened through the Data Policy Partnership in accordance with Priority Reform Four under the National Agreement on Closing the Gap, Shared Access to Data and Information at a Regional Level.
- Culturally appropriate mechanisms of national remembrance and recognition are established by the Prime Minister's Office and the Office for Women.

Leaders, community members and those with lived experience hold vital expertise on the scale and impact of the harm caused by violence and intersecting factors such as systemic racism and lack of access to justice. They also hold the answers as to how this crisis can be meaningfully addressed. It is critical that governments listen to this expertise and commit to working in true partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. The families and communities who carry the impossible weight of trauma and loss when women and children's lives are taken deserve honesty, accountability and justice.

As agreed by roundtable participants, the issue of murdered or disappeared Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and children cannot be understood solely through the lens of domestic and family violence. A broader list of factors such as systemic racism, institutional failures and discrimination must also be scrutinised. However, CWSW fully supports the adoption of roundtable recommendations under the Second National Plan, as critical to the safety of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and children.

### Sustainably fund Family and Domestic Violence Services

Despite significant investment by some states and territories since the development of the first National Plan, the lack of long-term sustainable funding for specialist family and domestic violence services continues to be a serious issue across the country. This means that current resources are not sufficient to respond to the increasing number of victim survivors seeking support.

Furthermore, baseline funding needs to increase to ensure it reflects the cost of delivering services and increasing demand on services. Current funding does not allow specialist family and domestic violence services to respond to the ever-increasing demand and to attract and retain the specialist family and domestic violence workforce and pay them fairly and equitably.

The National Partnership Agreement recognises domestic, family and sexualised violence as a core activity of all governments. We support the approach of a National Partnership Agreement and would like to see individual governments commit to sustainable funding for specialist family and domestic violence services as part of this agreement. Particular attention should be paid to rural, regional and remote areas in Australia. Funding in these communities needs to reflect the complexity of the service delivery environment rather than the size of the population. Funding should also support the principles of community development and community sustainability in remote Aboriginal communities and fund training programs tailored for local Aboriginal women who may be interested in developing the knowledge and skills to work in family violence services in their community.

*"... the Second beyond responding only to those who are visible within existing systems and recognise the broader, often hidden demand experienced by women, children and families affected by violence. Genuine reform requires adequate and sustained investment, improved understanding of unmet need, recognition of children and young people as victim-survivors in their own right, and stronger accountability across all levels of government. Without these changes, service systems will continue to respond to demand that is presented, rather than the full scale of need that exists within our communities."*

A commitment to ongoing, long-term and sustainable funding for specialist family and domestic violence services will enable them to plan service delivery, respond to the ever-increasing demand for services and to attract and retain the specialist family and domestic violence workforce.

## Invest in place-based service models that are tailored to victim-survivors' needs

**" If you are not working holistically - you are not really working with DV."**

Specialist family and domestic violence services that were visited and interviewed spoke of the need for specialist family and domestic violence services for women and children that offer assistance and support across multiple domains – from prevention to early intervention, safety planning whilst living with a violent and abusive person, crisis response and post-crisis recovery and healing. As expressed in all discussions, these domains are not linear, each woman's and child's journey is different and unique.

Services are acutely aware that to effectively assist victim-survivors it is essential to work in a way that is holistic and addresses the multiple factors that influence a woman's ability to live a life free of violence. Common elements of a holistic service model include:

*"Ultimately, the greatest opportunity is to move beyond crisis response and invest in a genuinely integrated system that combines prevention, early intervention, health, recovery and healing."*

- Crisis accommodation and post crisis accommodation support.
- Inreach and outreach services for women and children who are living with the perpetrator (and may not, cannot leave or have not yet left).
- Services and practical support that allow women and children to remain in their home and the perpetrator leave.
- Advocacy and case management.
- Peer support programs.
- Specialist services for children.
- Multi-agency coordinated responses.
- Access to rapid rehousing options and transitional housing.
- Healing and recovery services.

*"Our view is that the next five years should be spent building the connective tissue between health and specialist violence responses because the contact is already happening. What is missing is the capability, the pathway, and the funding that makes both possible."*

- Access to services for specific needs, such health, financial counselling, legal, AOD and immigration.
- Practical assistance for emergency relief, travel, brokerage and re-establishment.
- Pathway services for rebuilding, such as employment and education.
- Prevention initiatives.

Whilst all the above elements are seen to be critically important, few services receive core funding to deliver more than one to four of the components and many elements of the model receive little of no core funding. All agencies are all trying to offer more than core funding provides for to varying degrees.

**"There are problems with relying on philanthropic funding for what is essential core work."**

Many agencies resource their service model from multiple pots of funding. Larger organisations and those with have higher capabilities regarding submissions, impact measurement and public relations tend to be advantaged in attracting funds over

small, standalone services. Further, efforts to attract funding to deliver a more comprehensive service model come with a resource and opportunity costs which is not factored into the current funding model.

A compounding challenge is that core funding has not kept up with the real costs of delivering the basic service that an agency is funded to provide. This means that in addition to seeking funding for new initiatives, agencies are also trying to find ways to bridge the gap between core funding and real costs. In this scenario, discretionary funds, such as donations and fundraising, are often used to top of core funding for core services, rather than being used to increase overall capacity or provide non-funded programs. In some cases, agencies have had to reduce the geographical coverage of a program, reduce service hours or cease doing a service that is not part of the core funding.The Second Action Plan provides an opportunity to pilot integrated, holistic service models that address the multiple factors that influence women's and children's ability to live a life free of violence.

### Keep the person using violence in view and foster accountability

> *An integrated Model of Care coordinates clinical care, mental health, family violence support, psychosocial wellbeing, navigation and education under one roof, so that a woman tells her story once. The current funding architecture rewards service-by-service outputs and does not adequately fund the coordination work that makes a fragmented system navigable. We would encourage the Second Action Plan to fund care coordination and warm handover as legitimate, costed activities in their own right.*
>
> Community based women's health service

CWSW would like to see the next Action Plan more purposefully ensure responsibility across all relevant government and non-government agencies to improve interventions for people using violence and to keep them in view and accountable. The family and domestic violence response system is yet to effectively bring the person using violence into view of the system and to take responsibility for managing his dangerousness and the risk he poses to his partner/family. Thus, the burden of leaving a violent and harmful person continues to rest disproportionately on victim-survivors, including children.

Responsibility for violence must rest with the person using violence and a system-wide approach to keeping people using violence accountable must be much more actively developed to shift the burden away from victim-survivors. Work with men to support them to change their behaviours continues to be an important national priority, however, ongoing cultural change across the entire system is necessary if we are to shift the burden from victim-survivors to the people using violence and develop a system-wide approach to keeping people using violence in view and accountable.

## Nationally consistent definitions, family and domestic violence risk assessment and approach to data and evidence

*Definitions and understanding of family and domestic violence*

The lack of consistency in the way family and domestic violence is defined in Federal, State/Territory legislation and service systems create significant jurisdictional difference in approaches and barriers to coordination and information sharing across jurisdictions. System and jurisdictional inconsistencies create service gaps, inefficiencies and barriers to different systems working collaboratively and can impact on referrals being made between different systems. Fragmented responses can seriously compromise women's and children's safety.

CWSW would like to see a stronger commitment from the Australian Government and state and territory governments to develop a consistent definition and understanding of family and domestic violence which can be incorporated into relevant legislation and service systems to promote consistent approaches and responses to family and domestic violence. A shared understanding of family and domestic violence is fundamental to ending violence against women and children and providing holistic and consistent responses to all victim-survivors.

*Family and domestic violence risk assessment frameworks*

For family and domestic violence risk to be identified and assessed at every opportunity, it is reliant on the development of a shared understanding of family and domestic violence risk across service systems and this common understanding underpinning responses to victim-survivors. This will ensure that services and systems are responsible for assessing and managing risk and safety rather than this responsibility resting with an individual victim-survivor. The absence of a national

family and domestic violence risk assessment framework results in systems and services assessing risk differently, which has safety implications for victim-survivors.

*A national approach to data collection and addressing key data gaps*

Accurate and consistent collection and publication of data on family and domestic violence is critical to inform Australia's approach to preventing and responding to violence. It is good to see progress in this area. We would like to see the Action Plan further prioritise the gathering of a range of different kinds of data to ensure we build a comprehensive evidence base. The timely collection and analysis of data can help ensure that we have a full and comprehensive picture and understanding of violence against women and children which can inform planning, and funding and resourcing decisions.

There is no consistent approach to collecting and reporting data in each state/territory and at a federal level and the lack of national consistency in definitions of family and domestic violence results in data that is not comparable across states/territories. Current data collection and quality is limited by the lack of consistency of datasets across jurisdictions, over-reliance on policing data, and key gaps in data[4].

## Pilot family and domestic violence service models that work with women and children post-separation

Nearly all services consulted noted the importance of offering post-crisis support services. These can include therapeutic healing services, social connections, practical assistance and recovery pathways (such as employment).Whilst the need for post-crisis support is critical to promote recovery, re-establishment and prevent further violence, there is very little core funding for such programs. Agencies are doing what they can to attract additional funding for these services, often resulting in short term grants that build a program up only to see contraction after the grant is finished. Examples of agencies that are reorientating their work to beyond a crisis response include Orana's Switch Centre, which offers support before a crisis happens and long-term support after a crisis, including skills building and peer support.

4 Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (2019). *Family, domestic and sexual violence in Australia: continuing the national story 2019—In brief*. Cat. no. FDV 4. Canberra: AIHW.

The impacts of family and domestic violence on victim-survivors safety, health, wellbeing, economic and housing security, employment and education, social and family connections are significant and extend well beyond the immediate, short-term crisis support needs of victim-survivors.

**"Transitioning out (of a refuge) is a difficult time - capacity to keep supporting them is really important and has been missing."**

**"Women need help with healing for at least 1-2 years - we are all just crisis orientated."**

**"Almost no funding for programs for women to have practical, economic empowerment to help rebuild."**

Research consistently shows that separation does not guarantee safety. It can heighten the risk of violence and homicide, especially when institutional responses fail to address ongoing coercive control. These challenges are intensified by trauma, poverty, social stigma, and systemic neglect of non-physical abuse, especially when such abuse continues after separation.[5]

Although legal and policy frameworks increasingly acknowledge coercive control, responses remain inconsistent, often ineffective, and are frequently absent after separation[6]. Narrow definitions of harm, reliance on physical evidence, and a persistent emphasis on shared parenting or paternal rights obscure the realities of post-separation abuse.[7] Researchers and advocates have shown how legal, social, and economic institutions can be weaponised by the person using violence to maintain control, highlighting the urgent need for survivor-centred, trauma-and-violence-informed systems and stronger mechanisms for perpetrator accountability.[8]

In 2024 CWSW approached Curtin University researchers from the School of Allied Health to develop and conduct a research project that investigated the types of responses that could support women and their children who have experienced

[5] Taylor, B., Chung, D., Schulze, D., and Watts, L (2025). *Women's Experiences of Domestic and Family Violence Post Separation: A Journey into Freedom, Healing, and Re-establishment.* Centre for Women's Safety and Wellbeing & Care+Justice Group, Curtin School of Allied Health, Curtin University. Forthcoming.

[6] Spearman, K. J., Vaughan-Eden, V., Hardesty, J. L., & Campbell, J. (2024). Post-separation abuse: A literature review connecting tactics to harm. *Journal of Family Trauma, Child Custody & Child Development*, *21*(2), 145-164. https://doi.org/10.1080/26904586.2023.2177233

[7] Taylor, B., Chung, D., Schulze, D., and Watts, L (2025). *Women's Experiences of Domestic and Family Violence Post Separation: A Journey into Freedom, Healing, and Re-establishment.* Centre for Women's Safety and Wellbeing & Care+Justice Group, Curtin School of Allied Health, Curtin University. Forthcoming.

[8] Ibid.

violence and abuse, to re-establish their lives following separation from an abusive partner.[9]

The research concluded that leaving an abusive partner is not the end of violence for many women; it is often a shift in the dynamics of a prolonged struggle for autonomy, safety, and dignity. The findings demonstrate that post-separation coercive control is common, insidious, and often invisible to the systems meant to protect victim-survivors[10]. It is frequently motivated by a deliberate intent to harm, punish, or destabilise the lives of women and persists through legal, social, and economic mechanisms. Survivors are routinely retraumatised by institutions that minimise the relevance of prior abuse, prioritise parental contact over safety, and fail to hold perpetrators accountable for ongoing coercive control and systemic abuse.

The findings also reinforce that children, as victim-survivors in their own right, continue to experience the impacts of family and domestic violence long after separation. Post-separation abuse often disrupts mother/primary carer–child relationships, as abusive ex-partners manipulate systems to undermine protective parenting and maintain control. These dynamics contribute to emotional distress and developmental challenges for children while placing additional strain on mothers who are navigating recovery and safety.

Post-separation abuse causes significant and lasting harm to children, and these harms are exacerbated when institutions fail to recognise and respond effectively. However, even in the absence of post-separation abuse, the aftermath of family and domestic violence presents substantial challenges for survivors and their children.

Women's journeys into freedom are shaped not only by their personal strength but also by whether systems enable healing or continue to replicate the conditions of abuse. The findings call for a fundamental shift in how post-separation abuse is understood and addressed, one that centres survivor and child safety, demands structural accountability, and invests in long-term, TVI support. Systems must not only recognise post-separation abuse but also hold perpetrators to account with enforceable consequences that ensure consistent and just outcomes for their actions. Survivors deserve coordinated, healing-focused support that affirms their right to safety, healing, and autonomy, regardless of whether abuse continues. Women

[9] Ibid.
[10] Ibid.

and children's freedom from DFV must be met with systems that actively disrupt abuse and facilitate healing and reestablishment, not those that observe passively or replicate harm.[11]

## Safe at home, outreach and inreach service models

It was clear from service visits and interviews that non-residential service models are critical services that are under-represented in the overall service system. Concerns were expressed that much of the victim-survivor response model is premised on women leaving the person using violence and that this is not always a viable or preferable option for some women.

**"Expecting women to come to us in Karratha just doesn't work - we need to be able to go to the surrounding communities."**

Outreach and inreach programs either work with women as an alternative to crisis accommodation or work with women and children after exiting crisis accommodation. Along with Counselling, Advocacy and Support programs, these services can have an early intervention and/or post crisis focus. Offering non-refuge based models of support was identified as being particularly important for groups of women we know are not accessing refuges to a high degree, such as older women, refugee and migrant women, women with disability, working women and women with large families. Visits and interviews consistently called for greater funding for outreach programs, which, along with Safe at Home, currently represents a very small portion of the state core family and domestic violence funding.

**"The majority of women and children do not end up in refuges, but the whole conversation revolves around refuges. We need to look at better broader models - system responses should wrap around women so that they are safe in their own homes."**

All agencies that CWSW spoke to expressed the need for more service models that can reach in and support women who are living with a person using violence and more outreach and support services for women and children who have left the person using violence but are not residing in a refuge (either because they have exited a refuge or never went to a refuge). Safe at Home, Outreach and Counselling and Advocacy programs provide for some of this need but there is strong agreement that demand for such services dramatically outstrips supply.

[11] Taylor, B., Chung, D., Schulze, D., and Watts, L (2025). *Women's Experiences of Domestic and Family Violence Post Separation: A Journey into Freedom, Healing, and Re-establishment.* Centre for Women's Safety and Wellbeing & Care+Justice Group, Curtin School of Allied Health, Curtin University. Forthcoming.

## Improve access to justice system responses and legal support

Cases involving family and domestic violence are heard in many different legal jurisdictions resulting in many victim-survivors of family and domestic violence having intersecting and multijurisdictional legal matters. Navigating multiple jurisdictions can be highly confusing and complicated and the gaps that currently exist between jurisdictions provide opportunities for people using violence to manipulate the legal system to continue to coerce and control and intimidate the victim-survivor. For victim-survivors of family and domestic violence, these jurisdictional gaps not only exist across the various state-based courts but also extend into the federal jurisdiction through the family law system.

It is important that the Commonwealth Government does what it can to ensure that the family law system is more responsive to victim-survivors and delivers fair, just and safe outcomes. Given that many victim-survivors of family and domestic violence are likely to have multijurisdictional legal needs, it is crucial that state and federal legislation relating to family and domestic violence is complementary and consistent and that information sharing mechanisms are in place for safe and appropriate information sharing between state and federal courts.

Differences in how family and domestic violence risk is understood can result in contradictory rather than complementary and mutually reinforcing outcomes. This contradiction is evident in the family law system that requires victim-survivors to negotiate for their children to have contact with the person using violence when previously they have been issued with an intervention order in the State jurisdiction that prevents that person having contact with the children due to concerns for their safety as a result of family and domestic violence.

CWSW would like to see the Second Action Plan more pro-actively work to ensure that family and domestic violence specialisation is embedded across the justice system. This could include funding for interdisciplinary models across the family law system that ensure victim-survivors and people using violence have ready access to family and domestic violence practitioners, legal advice, purpose-built environments and ongoing family and domestic violence learning and development for all specialist family and domestic violence staff working in courts.

The Commonwealth Government also has a role to play in ensuring victim-survivors have access to specialised, free legal advice and representation. Due to the high costs of legal representation, and the eligibility tests for legal aid, the primary motivation for self-representing is financial'.[12] Free duty lawyer services are available at family law courts to provide advice, but due to high demand these services are not always readily available.

It is also important to explore and pilot justice responses that extend beyond traditional adversarial models of justice to look at alternative models that provide victim-survivors with greater control, agency and choice about how they pursue justice for the violence perpetrated against them.

## Embed Specialist Responses to Children and Young People

The impact of family and domestic violence on the safety, health, wellbeing and recovery of children and young people has been well documented. While we welcome the increased recognition across states and territories of children and young people as victim-survivors in their own right, we would like to see a more resourced and planned approach to responding safely to their unique experiences and support needs.

***"Children are often the unseen victim-survivors within family and domestic violence systems"***

While children and young people's wellbeing and support needs are closely interdependent to the protective parent/carer, a tailored and coordinated support response to children and young people should be offered at each stage of the service system and design. It is important that children and young people are being respected and heard as individuals, with their feelings, needs and interests being considered.

Currently, many children and young people are not having their own risk assessment completed as risk related information is being collected through their parent or carer. It is valuable to also hear directly from the young person, or consider their unique or specific risks. This is highly important, particularly when the person using violence continues to have access to the children.

12 Australia's National Research Organisation for Women's Safety. (2020). *Exploring the impact and effect of selfrepresentation by one or both parties in family law proceedings involving allegations of family violence: Key findings and future directions*. ANROWS.

Violence against children and young people has been shown to contribute to poor outcomes in many important areas such as physical health, education, housing and emotional and psychological wellbeing.[13] However, it is important to recognise that these outcomes are largely due to our collective inaction to respond to and support children and young people impacted by family and domestic violence.

Children and young people impacted by family violence are remarkably resilient and have often had to develop skills and abilities, emotional maturity and empathy well beyond their years. But without building on their protective factors we, as a society, often leave children and young people to go on to experience further victimisation as adults or to turn to using violence themselves. The forthcoming Action Plan has a responsibility to build a system that delivers policy, services and practice that responds to the specific safety and support needs of children and young people experiencing family and domestic violence.

It is critical that the Action Plan recognises the value and role of specialist family and domestic violence services and supports increased and sustainable funding to ensure their expanded and continued work with children and young people.

We also know that children and young people experiencing family and domestic violence often encounter other parts of the service system. Thus, it is important to invest in capacity building and collaborative practice across service sectors, including but not limited to Child Protection and the justice system.

Despite the overwhelming nature of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children's and young people's experiences of family and domestic violence, there has been a limited focus on understanding what will support them to heal from their experiences and break the intergenerational cycle of distress. Current responses rely heavily on the use of child protection processes that often lead to separation of children from their families and culture and leave them with limited support to process their experiences.[14] It is vital to identify what is working well so far (effective service responses), what

13 ANROWS (Australia's National Research Organisation for Women's Safety) (2018). *Research summary: the impacts of domestic and family violence on children*. Sydney: ANROWS.

[14] Davis, M. (2019). Family is culture: Review report. Independent review of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in out of home care. Department of Communities and Justice. https://familyisculture.nsw.gov.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0011/726329/Family-Is-Culture-Review-Report.pdf

more needs to be done to provide healing and support to children and young people and the resources required to support this.

Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations are best able to provide family and domestic violence services within a holistic child and family framework and should be provided with additional resources and support to enable culturally effective responses[15]. Procurement and contracting arrangements must support the realisation of self-determination and enable design of place-based and healing responses for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people.[16] Alongside this, it is critical that the lack of cultural capability and structural racism in the broader system is addressed**,** so that culturally safe referral pathways for children, young people and their families are increased.[17]

Collecting and analysing quality and consistent data as it relates specifically to children and young people's experiences of family and domestic violence is also essential. We need quality data to base the design, funding and delivery of services, and to effectively understand demand for services.[18] Any national data collection needs to be tailored to capture the profile and nature of the available services across Australia, along with the demographics of the children and young people accessing them and the outcomes of interventions.

*A critical reform is to recognise children and young people who experience violence* ***as*** *victim-survivors and clients in their own right, not simply as dependents attached to an adult's case. Each child should have their own voice, age-appropriate assessment, safety and recovery plan, named worker, direct access to specialist support and outcomes measured in their own right—while working alongside and strengthening their relationship with the victim-survivor parent or caregiver. This responds to the harm occurring now and reduces the likelihood that its effects become entrenched across the child's life course. - Specialist family and domestic violence service provider*

[15] 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 (Research report, 06/2022). ANROWS.
[16] Ibid.
[17] Ibid.
[18] Ibid.

## Increase efforts to ensure access to long-term safe, secure and affordable housing

Services described feeling ineffective because of the housing situation. There is strong agreement that there has been a significant and serious decline in affordable, secure housing options for women and children in refuges. The social housing stock has effectively declined over years and the private rental market is highly unaffordable. In remote services, the need is particularly acute.

Without long-term housing options, many adult and children victim-survivors are forced into homelessness or to return to an unsafe home.[19] For victim-survivors unable to stay at home or access private rental, social housing is the only long-term housing option. Across states and territories there is an urgent need for more social housing to provide women and children escaping family and domestic violence with somewhere to go, along with an ongoing need for additional investment in social housing to meet future projected demand. Increasing the proportion of social housing stock will be a significant step towards alleviating the lack of family and domestic violence accommodation to keep victim-survivors safe.[20]

## Prioritise victim-survivors of family and domestic violence with temporary migration status

The systemic barriers and challenges women on temporary visas who experience family and domestic violence face when they try to leave a violent partner will require long term attention by all levels of government and therefore it is important that this is prioritised in the Action Plan.

Temporary visa status can be used by people using violence as an additional tool for coercion and control. The complexity of the migration and social security systems, and the lack of consistency across states, territories and nationally, may result in cases where victim-survivors may theoretically be eligible to access support, but in reality cannot. This may be due to the inaccessibility of information and the inability to understand the complicated and confusing eligibility requirements for various

[19] Housing - Australian Institute of Health and Welfare
[20] Housing, homelessness and domestic and family violence | AHURI

payments. For victim-survivors of family violence who are deeply fatigued from living with chronic fear, navigating these systems.

Long-term structural change and collaboration across all levels of government is required to address the systemic barriers women on temporary visas currently encounter and to ensure that the legislative environment created by the Australian Government complements and supports state-based family and domestic violence responses.

### Embed responses to technology facilitated abuse

CWSW urges the Federal Government to provide ongoing funding for the Wesnet Safe Connections program, to ensure access and support for safe devices is available to family and domestic violence service providers and victim-survivors across the country.

This efficient, effective and low-cost program not only provides around 7500 devices to victim-survivors across the country but also trains specialist domestic and family violence workforce partners in how to to identify technology-facilitiated abuse and undertake technology safety planning with survivors. It is the only nationwide program of it's type, and is a crucial safety and support structure for victim-survivors and the specalist workforce. The program is currently only funded until 2027.

Technology-facilitated abuse is an insidious form of coercion and control, that not only undermines the physical safety of victim-survivors but has devastating impacts on their emotional wellbeing and healing journey. Advances in technology and the increasingly online nature of our world provides innumerable opportunities for perpetrators to weaponise technology, and continue to monitor, stalk and harass victim-survivors, as well as access critical safety and other private information. It is no longer necessary for a perpetrator to have significant means or advanced technological skill to use technology as a weapon of further harm.

Access to safe devices and tech safety planning are critical safety needs for victim-survivors, and the specialist domestic and family violence workforce must be supported to provide this safety. The Safe Connections program is an invaluable support to victim-survivors and the capability of the broader domestic and family

violence workforce. CWSW urges the Federal Government to commit to ongoing funding for this program to continue.

## Strategic, coordinated and evidence based investment in primary prevention

*Build on the existing evidence base*

The National Plan provides the foundation for a consistent and coordinated approach to prevention activities across the country. It provides the mechanisms for articulating how the available policy, legislative and regulatory levers will be used to drive the social, cultural, structural and systemic change required to prevent and ultimately end violence against women.lit is essential that all actions, mechanisms and programs are focused primarily on addressing the social, political and economic structures, practices and systems that create and support the drivers that consistently predict higher levels of violence against women and children.

it is critical that the Action Plan facilitates a consistent and integrated approach to preventing violence against women, and provides the scale, coordination and integration of activities required for long-term, effective and efficient prevention of violence against women and children.

*Sustainable, long-term funding for Primary Prevention*

The provision of discrete, short-term, project-specific funding only is recognised across the primary prevention sector as a significant barrier to organisational stability, resourcing sustainability, ongoing advocacy, long-term change and innovation.  Core and programmatic funding will help support longer-term projects and a more stable practitioner base; drive greater alignment and cohesion across organisations; strengthen and develop the workforce; build knowledge; strengthen the evaluation of primary prevention and contribute to the existing evidence

Increased long-term funding also enables organisations to pilot new approaches in emerging settings and contribute to the evidence base by implementing prevention programs in under-investigated settings and environments.

*Continuous development of the prevention workforce*

Coordinating workforce development at the national level will enable the workforce to meet the increasing demand for prevention activities across a range of complex settings and to scale-up and expand the reach of best-practise prevention policies, strategies, practice and research to progress the change needed to reduce and end violence against women and children.

*Scale-up comprehensive primary prevention programs in schools*

There continues to be a need to embed a whole school approach to respectful relationships education within all government schools, acknowledging that this is a highly effective, evidence-based approach for sustainable primary prevention.[21]

Comprehensive, rigorously researched materials designed by specialist prevention organisations and peak bodies are readily available to support the teaching of best-practise respectful relationships curriculum and ensure that this is rolled-out across Australia in clear and consistent ways to maximise its reach and impact.

A whole school approach to respectful relationships goes beyond classroom-based health and physical education and commits to holistic cultural and procedural change.

21 Our Watch, 2021, "Respectful Relationships Education in Schools: Evidence Paper", p.30. Respectful relationships education in schools: Evidence paper (ourwatch.org.au)