Women’s Safety Ministers met on 7 August 2020, their fifth meeting this year.

**Ministers remain concerned about the impact of COVID-19 on women’s safety**

Women’s Safety Ministers acknowledged the work of all jurisdictions to control the spread of COVID-19 and address the impacts to women’s safety and wellbeing. In particular, Ministers acknowledged the devastating situation in Victoria and offered messages of support to people in Stage 3 and Stage 4 restrictions.

Women’s Safety Ministers noted evidence from a recent Australian Institute of Criminology (AIC) survey, as well as emerging service demand trends from across all jurisdictions show that the COVID-19 pandemic has coincided with the onset or escalation of violence and abuse for women. Further evidence shows that across all jurisdictions there has been an increase in information-seeking and referral-seeking trends, and impact on services over the COVID-19 pandemic period – though the extent is difficult to quantify without more data.

**Update on the National Partnership on COVID-19 Domestic and Family Violence Responses**

Ministers welcomed the progress to date in implementing the National Partnership on COVID-19 Domestic and Family Violence Responses. Ministers noted that all jurisdictions have received the first three payments from the Commonwealth under the $130 million National Partnership, totalling $61.75 million.

Ministers noted the importance of allocating the remaining $68.25 million of National Partnership funding to provide certainty for jurisdictions and the family and domestic violence sector to plan and respond to critical needs amidst the evolving COVID-19 pandemic. The Commonwealth preferred option was to deliver the remaining funding on a needs basis given the diversity of experience in relation to COVID-19 across jurisdictions to date and the evolving nature of the pandemic. State and Territory Ministers were supportive of a per capita allocation, due to the challenges in producing comparable and consistent data regarding demand across jurisdictions. On that basis, the Commonwealth will allocate the remaining $68.25 million of National Partnership funding to states and territories on a per capita basis at the next available payment date.

Ministers agreed to work together to collect and analyse data showing the impact of COVID-19 on the safety of women and their children and committed to providing further data and reporting to support future action.

**Women’s safety remains a priority for all governments under new National Cabinet governance arrangements**

Women’s Safety Ministers welcomed the decision of National Cabinet in May 2020 to continue to prioritise women’s safety as a national priority under the reformed Commonwealth-State architecture. Women’s Safety Ministers’ meetings are a productive forum to discuss priorities and collectively agree urgent actions during the COVID-19 pandemic and beyond. Ministers agreed to
hold meetings quarterly, with a continued focus on the impacts of COVID-19 on women’s safety, implementation of the Fourth Action Plan of the National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children 2010-2022 and the development and implementation of the next National Plan, in addition to other actions to reduce domestic, family and sexual violence.

Women-specific impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic and recovery efforts

Ministers noted that women often face disproportionate impacts in times of crisis and committed to work together on this issue. National and international data relating to the COVID-19 pandemic is demonstrating the significant consequences for women’s safety, women’s economic security, and negative impacts on physical and mental health. Ministers expressed their ongoing commitment to gender equality and its associated economic and social benefits, as well as the need to ensure gains towards gender equality are not lost during COVID-19. Ministers noted there are opportunities for all jurisdictions/government at all levels to address gender equality through their various response and recovery stages.

Women on temporary visas experiencing violence remain a priority for Women’s Safety

Women’s Safety Ministers noted ongoing work in supporting women on temporary visas who are experiencing violence. It remains a priority for all governments who will work together to explore data on the extent of and responses to the issue.

Ministers welcomed the continued efforts of the Department of Home Affairs’ Community Liaison Officer Network, which regularly connect with multicultural communities and government partners to share information. During the COVID-19 pandemic, domestic violence sessions have continued to be held by the Community Liaison Officer Network in partnership with other relevant agencies, which includes disseminating information about options for visa holders experiencing domestic and family violence and improving access to support services.

Next National Plan for Reducing Violence against Women and their Children

Women’s Safety Ministers noted work underway to develop the next National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children, and agreed for targeted consultations on the National Plan to occur in 2021.

Ministers noted the Minister for Women, Senator the Hon Marise Payne, and the Minister for Families and Social Services, Senator the Hon Anne Ruston, have referred an inquiry into family, domestic and sexual violence to the House Standing Committee on Social Policy and Legal Affairs. The inquiry will provide critical information from a range of stakeholders, and its findings and further consultations will inform the development of the next National Plan.

Help is available if you, or someone you know, is experiencing violence. In the case of an emergency call 000. For information, support and counselling contact 1800RESPECT (1800 737 732) or visit www.1800respect.org.au.