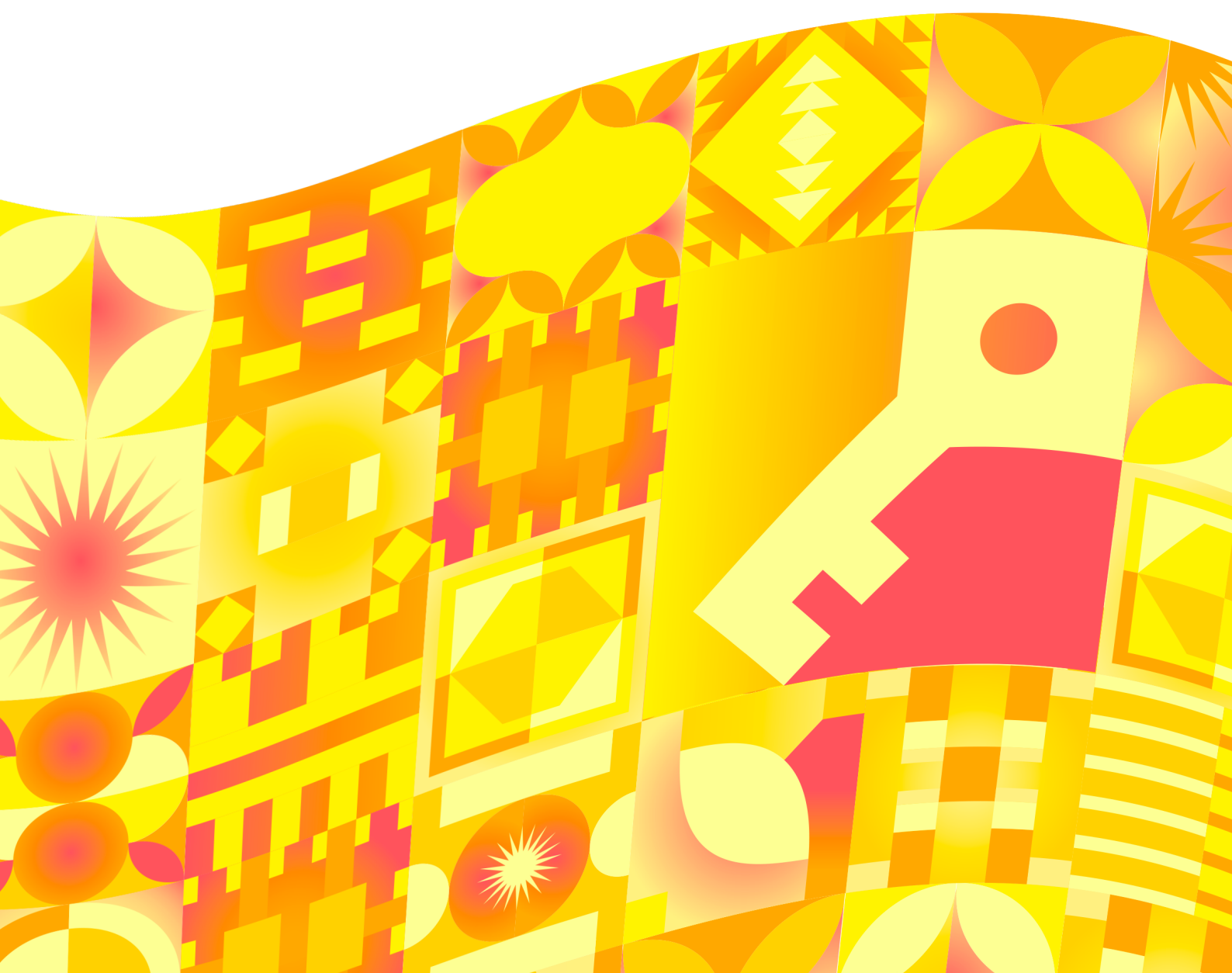


Unlocking the Prevention Potential

Accelerating action to end domestic,
family and sexual violence



Prepared by the Rapid Review Expert Panel:

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Acknowledgments

This report is dedicated to the survivors of domestic, family and sexual violence. Your strength, resilience, and bravery stand as a constant reminder of why this work is necessary. You have shown us what it means to continue living in the face of unimaginable harm, and it is your courage that drives us forward—towards building a system that does more than respond. We are committed to creating a system that earns your trust; safeguards your dignity; and ensures your safety.

To those whose lives were tragically cut short by violence, we carry your memory as a call to action. You deserved more than what our systems offered. Your absence serves as a painful reminder that we must do better—our responsibility is to ensure that no more lives are lost to preventable violence.

This work is not just about addressing past failures, it's about creating something better. A system that communities can rely on, where prevention, protection and trust are paramount. This report imagines a future where safety is not a privilege, but a human right, and where justice is delivered with care, compassion and certainty.

In particular, this work acknowledges the strength of generations of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders—traditional owners of unceded country across this land and holders of knowledge and wisdom about the solutions that work for their own families and communities.

To the advocates, service providers, and Australians who stand beside survivors every day—your dedication, persistence, and belief in a better system continue to inspire this journey. Together, we strive for a world where violence is no longer tolerated and where communities can live in safety, trust, and peace.

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Acronyms

Term	Definition
ABS	Australian Bureau of Statistics
ACCO	Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisation
ACCHO	Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation
AIC	Australian Institute of Criminology
AIFS	Australian Institute of Family Studies
AIHW	Australian Institute of Health and Welfare
ANROWS	Australia's National Research Organisation for Women's Safety
AOD	Alcohol and other drugs
AVITH	Adolescent violence in the home
DFV	Domestic and family violence
DFSV	Domestic, family and sexual violence
IPV	Intimate partner violence
LGBTIQA+	Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex, queer, asexual and other sexually or gender diverse people
MBCP	Men's behaviour change program
NCIS	National Criminal Intelligence System
NLAP	National Legal Assistance Partnership
PSS	Personal Safety Survey
SFVCs	Specialist Family Violence Courts

Executive summary



Background and context

Work has been occurring for decades at the frontline, policy and decision-making levels to reduce and ultimately end domestic, family and sexual violence (DFSV). This includes through the current *National Plan to End Violence against Women and Children 2022–2032* (National Plan), as well as its predecessor and the recently released *Working for Women: A Strategy for Gender Equality*.¹ This work is crucial to acknowledge and to honour—particularly for those on the frontline, who continue to respond to growing demand and increased risk and complexity.

The challenge that we have been tackling as a community, however, is a complex and perennial one—a fundamental human rights issue, driven by millennia of gendered and other forms of structural inequality, then compounded by an array of systems, industries and, recently, online forces that push back against our collective progress. In combination this means that, despite our gains, our shared task to prevent violence in all its forms has potentially become more difficult than ever before.

In April 2024, the Prime Minister labelled a rise in homicides of women and children a national crisis.² This rise follows a recent upward trend, despite the decline over the previous three decades.³ Yet even this categorisation as a ‘crisis’ belies the problem’s true scale. In particular, the untold number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and children who are missing, presumed murdered, remains a source of grief, questions and national shame.

The extent of this challenge calls for us to assess our current approaches and ask what more can be done. This does not mean diverting from what we know must remain a priority. Rather, it means expanding our gaze and hearing what the frontline, lived experience advocates and communities across Australia tell us makes a difference. It means learning from the evidence and a broad range of sectors—and shedding light on areas which may not have been considered through a DFSV or prevention frame. Put simply, it means identifying every opportunity to unlock the ‘prevention potential’.



Rapid Review of Prevention Approaches

The Rapid Review of Prevention Approaches (the Review) announced on 1 May 2024 was given the considerable job of bringing these opportunities into focus. As such, the six members of the multidisciplinary Review Panel—supported by three co-convenors and a Secretariat from the Commonwealth Office for Women—were tasked through broad Terms of Reference to provide independent advice on opportunities to expand and strengthen prevention efforts across all forms of violence against women and children, including a particular focus on preventing homicides.

The Review process was, as its name suggests, a particularly rapid one, in which the Panel and co-convenors met regularly over the course of 12 weeks to discuss and explore priority areas of focus.

As accelerated as this process was, the timeframe recognised the urgency of the challenge and the fact that the Australian community rightly expects governments to take swift, decisive action to end violence against women.

That said, the Review was commissioned to bring additional, short-term momentum to established long term processes and was therefore guided by the advice of existing governance structures, including the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Advisory Council on family, domestic and sexual violence, the First Nations National Plan Steering Committee, the National Plan Advisory Group, the National Women's Alliances, as well as the Lived Experience Advisory Council supported by the National Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence Commission (DFSV Commission). These governance groups remain the authorities to which the Review referred, while bringing in additional areas of focus where opportunities arose.

The Review also received targeted briefings on a wide array of areas, ranging from primary prevention, cohort-specific and intersectional considerations, frontline responses, safety by design principles, sources of available data, and existing and emerging evidence regarding a range of systemic factors. In doing so, the Review noted the extent of information already being collected, as well as activity being conducted, at all government levels, while also identifying that considerable gaps and opportunities persist.

The Review was also supported by specifically commissioned work, with Australia's National Research Organisation for Women's Safety (ANROWS), the Australian Institute of Family Studies (AIFS), and the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) providing advice and a stocktake of evidence relevant to certain areas. Key emerging evidence and specific data was also sourced and made available to inform the Review.

The rapid timeline did not allow for the Review to call for submissions, however the Review did look to the extensive existing evidence collected through recent consultation processes. This included wide-ranging consultations conducted by the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Advisory Council on family, domestic and sexual violence. The Review also conducted a specific consultation concerning the needs of the Torres Strait region.

This remote area of Australia is too often excluded from consideration, with funding and data related to this region frequently subsumed within wider categorisations, despite it being a distinct region with its own strengths, experiences and barriers to women's safety.

Table 1. List of stakeholder groups consulted to inform the Rapid Review of Prevention Approaches

Stakeholder engagements
Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Advisory Council on family, domestic and sexual violence and First Nations National Plan Steering Committee
Australia's National Research Organisation for Women's Safety
Australian Criminal Intelligence Commission
Commonwealth Government agencies including data agencies
Communities and frontline services in the Torres Strait Islands
Domestic, family and sexual violence peak bodies and frontline services
Key academics with multidisciplinary expertise
Lived Experience Advisory Council
National Plan Advisory Group
National Women's Alliances (Equality Rights Alliance, Harmony Alliance, National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Women's Alliance, National Rural Women's Coalition, National Women's Safety Alliance, Women with Disabilities Australia)
Organisations that work on safety by design in the technology and financial sectors
Organisations that work with children and young people
Organisations that work with men and boys
Organisations that work with migrant and refugee women
Organisations that work with the LGBTIQ+ community including a visit to the Pride Centre (Melbourne)
OurWatch
Senate Standing Committee on Legal and Constitutional Affairs
Women and Women's Safety Senior Officials from States and Territories

Findings and Recommendations



Given its rapid nature, the Review could not draw conclusions across every area of policy or service delivery. While it was charged with identifying prevention opportunities across the full spectrum of Australia's DFSV response, the Review's scope needed to be sharp and inject momentum where obvious needs presented and where there were clear actions available to governments. It also needed to identify ways to leverage existing processes for future and more sustained reform.

A National Emergency—and an ongoing national priority

The significance of gender-based violence as a standalone issue for National Cabinet should not be underestimated. Since being established in 2020, National Cabinet has taken on an unprecedented level of authority and has encouraged swift, decisive action across areas of government policy and investment. This makes it an appropriate body to continue to monitor what the Review suggests is more than a national crisis, but a national emergency. The Review therefore recommends that gender-based violence becomes an ongoing priority for National Cabinet to ensure that government accountability, as well as sustained investment and attention, is maintained.

Crucially, the Review acknowledges with sorrow the missing, presumed murdered Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and children, as well as the courage of their families in their quest for accountability. For this reason and, more broadly, the Review recognises that the experience of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and children must be a national priority, urging the strengthening of culturally informed and place-based DFSV responses for First Nations communities, noting the significant work under way to develop a First Nations National Plan. This should include urgent consideration of the evidence presented by families and communities to the *Senate Inquiry into Missing and Murdered First Nations women and children*, as well as the commitments under Target 13 of the *National Agreement on Closing the Gap*.⁴

To guide implementation of this report's recommendations, the Review also calls for communities that experience marginalisation to be prioritised. In addition to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, prioritised communities should include: refugee, as well as long term and recently arrived migrant communities; women and children with disabilities; people from LGBTIQ+ communities; older women, and women in regional and remote communities. Addressing gender-based violence for communities that experience intersecting forms of marginalisation lays the foundation for population-wide success. Where applicable, implementation of these recommendations should involve a genuine and sustained co-design in partnership with affected communities to ensure that they can identify the priorities of greatest value and urgency to them.

The prevention potential

A focus on the challenge, however, is not enough when the task ahead of us as a nation is so immense—and when our efforts thus far have not yielded the results for which we had hoped. As a result, the Review also recommends that the Commonwealth, states and territories expand their approach to prevention and leverage all prevention touchpoints more effectively. This includes by commissioning an independent review of our current national prevention framework, Change the story, so that it continues to evolve and keep pace with global evidence; brings in valuable insights from a diversity of sectors; and considers the experiences of all communities.⁵

To supercharge Australia's prevention response, the Review also recommends the establishment of a five year Prevention Innovation Fund. This would resource and evaluate innovative prevention efforts to understand, assess and share what works in an Australian context and at a community-based level.

Prevention through people

The Review has chosen to place particular focus on supporting children and young people—and to do so by enabling young people's voices to drive change and hold government to account. By placing safety and recovery for children at the centre of our prevention efforts, we not only prevent further trauma in the present, but also stem future trajectories of harm. As a result, the Review recommends a strategic and coordinated approach to recognising children and young people as victim-survivors in their own right. As a starting point, a Youth Taskforce should be established under the National Plan, supported by the DFSV Commission, to ensure that a strong focus on action and implementation accelerates this priority.

In addition, the Review recommends that these strategic efforts be complemented by an immediate emphasis on support and recovery for young children, with a particular focus on supporting children's relationships with a protective parent. Further, the Review recommends development of youth-specific and informed responses for young people who have experienced harm and may also go on to use harm in different contexts, including by drawing on available practice frameworks published by ANROWS. The Review also recommends the development and delivery of a tailored response to assist young people escaping DFSV, in recognition that certain cohorts of young people will not be in the care of statutory child protection systems or a protective parent.

Separately, the Review highlights the potential that lies in working more effectively and meaningfully with men and boys on preventing DFSV. This includes the promotion of healthy masculinities to counter the growing influence of online misogyny. The Review notes that this requires a national and coordinated approach and should include intersectional, DFSV-informed mechanisms, including those which support engagement with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander men. It also involves adopting a national definition and measurement methodology for healthy masculinities, as well as the development or expansion of DFSV-informed responses focusing on men's life transitions, including leaving school, new fatherhood, relationship breakdown, recent migration and becoming unemployed.

In addition to unlocking the prevention potential through supporting children and young people and engaging more effectively with men and boys, the Review recognises that efforts to support women must remain central. In particular, the Review recognises the prevention potential that lies in structural levers—systemic and policy mechanisms which lay the social and economic conditions for support and improved safety. Improving women’s economic security is recognised internationally as a best practice prevention strategy. As a result, the Review recommends priority actions in this area, including the implementation of particular Women’s Economic Equality Taskforce (WEET) recommendations, as well as other structural reforms that will contribute to the financial freedom of women and their children and improve safety.

Further, the Review recognises the immense prevention potential embedded within the Australian community. Good practice exists in pockets around the country, including resources that help friends and family respond to disclosures and connect victim-survivors with support and people using violence with services that can address risk. Since friends and family are most often the first (and sometimes the only) support for people impacted by DFSV, the Review recognises that governments should prioritise investment in more targeted education and skills-building for this relational cohort. Embedding DFSV knowledge within the community will not only unlock a significant area of prevention, but also contribute to the improvement of community attitudes more generally.

Prevention through responses

Urgently, the Review recognises the prevention potential embedded in frontline crisis responses. The Review has aimed to highlight that—when appropriately resourced—DFSV crisis responses not only support immediate safety but lay the groundwork for safety to be sustained. For too long, however, investment in DFSV crisis response has perceived policing as the priority, with the Review hearing from specialist crisis services that they are unable to keep up with demand and escalating risk to such a point that their staff are overwhelmed and that some victim-survivors may not receive a response.

As such, the Review recommends a needs analysis to determine unmet demand in DFSV crisis response, recovery and healing (excluding police) with the view to develop a pathway to fund demand. This needs analysis should take diverse groups into consideration, as well as the demand for targeted and culturally safe responses, such as ethno-specific services and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-led organisations.

More immediately, the Review recommends that there should be a significant funding uplift in certain frontline areas. Here it is vital that the role of public legal assistance be acknowledged as a frontline response, noting the recent Independent Review of the National Legal Assistance Partnership finding about the ‘neglect’ of this sector.⁶ This is not only because legal assistance is an access to justice issue, but because legal assistance can improve safety for victim-survivors, particularly for women and children involved in protection order matters and family law proceedings. Importantly, it can also reduce risk and facilitate compliance with orders by engaging people using violence in a trauma and DFSV-informed way.

It is also vital to note the dire need for crisis accommodation for victim-survivors, particularly in remote and regional communities, such as the Torres Strait, where the Review heard that there was only one shelter to service the entire region. A crucial further step in unlocking the prevention potential therefore involves recognising the value of specialist crisis accommodation that provides a wraparound service, such as the Sanctuary model in Victoria. It also involves resourcing the DFSV sector for long-term case management, following the needs analysis identified above, as well as increasing linkage between the DFSV and homelessness sectors and aligning these sectors in national frameworks and plans.

In addition to pulling these prevention levers, significant potential lies in activating the health response, including by building capacity and capability to identify DFSV and intervene in appropriate ways. This involves equipping and resourcing practitioners across health settings to identify and support a diverse range of victim-survivors and people who use violence, as well as increasing capacity for doctors to spend appropriate time with people affected by DFSV. Further, the Review identified the potential in enabling an uplift in training of health professionals in primary and mental health settings and accelerating cross-sector collaboration between the alcohol and other drugs (AOD) and DFSV specialist sector. Just as significant is the value in recognising DFSV across relevant health, wellbeing and equity policies across government, so that DFSV and health do not sit in policy isolation.

Reducing risk in people who use violence and keeping them in view is clearly a priority objective. This has not been as well understood or actioned as other areas, however, with opportunities to reduce risk that lie at earlier points along the spectrum often overlooked. This means that efforts should be focused on interventions early in police and legal system interaction. In addition to the value of DFSV-informed legal assistance, particularly at the protection order stage, this includes facilitating men's access to information and assistance beyond legal needs, as this can help to reduce risk and improve compliance. Access to crisis accommodation, for example, can reduce escalation and prevent perpetrators from returning home when they have been excluded by police.

Along the spectrum, it is just as vital to improve the supply, quality and capability of men's behaviour change programs (MBCPs), which the Review recognises were always intended to function as a coordinated community response. The Review recommends that MBCPs be supported to enable increased engagement and retention, as well as continuous improvement—to ensure that their contribution to our collective efforts to hold men using violence to account can be maximised to the greatest possible extent.

Further, MBCPs should be resourced to facilitate access to service provision which addresses needs related to substance abuse, histories of trauma and mental ill-health, while recognising that this must occur through a DFSV-informed lens. These programs should be community and context specific, meeting cultural and other needs, while also prioritising support for victim-survivors through partner and family safety contact—a central, but often under-resourced, aspect of their work.

In keeping with this focus on a coordinated community response, it is vital to recognise the role of a shared understanding of risk and the capacity to access information which can support good decision making. As such, the Review recommends that all governments develop a shared understanding and language about risk by developing nationally consistent risk assessment and management principles. These principles should be applied across the full range of roles identified as having decision-making and/or support functions in relation to DFSV, while taking a proactive approach to preventing misidentification, particularly in relation to members of diverse communities. The Review further recommends that this be accompanied by strengthened information sharing, including through the National Criminal Intelligence System (NCIS).

Additionally, the Review recommends the introduction and expansion of multi-agency responses. This includes highlighting the value of fit-for-purpose police co-responder models, as well as evidence informed focused deterrence models. It also includes highlighting the urgent need for access to collaborative responses which increase access to forensic examination in sexual offence matters. This is a vital prevention measure, as many victim-survivors indicate that they report to police and undergo initial examination primarily in the hope that this may ultimately stop an offender from harming others. Accordingly, leveraging collaborations to increase access to forensic examination which may later support prosecution is important for victim-survivor choice. Access to examination in remote areas and in primary health settings, rather than through police, can expand this choice further, so that victim-survivors can disclose in a familiar or culturally safe environment and then later determine whether they wish to report.

Crucially, the Review recommends a national approach which can strengthen systems responses to high risk perpetrators, including through trialling and evaluating DFSV threat assessment centres. Finally, the Review recognises that adequate, timely and DFSV-informed police response and investigation is a critical prevention measure. As such, the Review recommends transparency through public reporting of response and investigation data, as well as that all jurisdictions establish mechanisms for independent civilian oversight of police that are DFSV-informed and sit outside of policing authorities.

Associated with the need for more DFSV-informed decision-making, capacity and capability, the Review recognises the urgent need to build the specialist DFSV workforce, as well as to uplift and expand workforce capability of all services that frequently engage with victim-survivors and people who use violence. The Review recommends that this be achieved through analysis of current and future labour supply for the DFSV specialist services sector, which can then inform the embedding of a secure and appropriately resourced sector.

In addition to the above needs analysis, the Review also recommends the establishment of a DFSV National Workforce Development Strategy to expand capacity and capability in the related DFSV specialist sector including sexual violence and MBOP sectors. Further, the Review recommends a broader strategy to improve capability uplift across other frontline responses, such as health, police, courts and legal assistance, child protection, AOD and mental health.

Finally, the Review recognises the need for a specific focus on the prevention of, and service and justice responses to, sexual violence, as well as its co-occurrence with domestic and family violence. The Review therefore recommends that greater priority and focus be given to Action 6 of the *First Action Plan (2023–2027)* of the National Plan—noting opportunities to consider the needs of particularly vulnerable cohorts.⁷ This includes women and children vulnerable to sexual exploitation, those working in the sex industry, as well as women and children from Aboriginal and Torres

Strait Islander communities who are being murdered and disappeared. The Review further notes opportunities for prioritisation of responses to child sexual abuse, including incest and harmful sexual behaviours by children and young people, as well as the potential for expanded reporting options and alternative, community-based responses, such as restorative approaches—informed by the pending recommendations of the Australian Law Reform Commission's inquiry into justice responses to sexual violence.

Prevention through systems and industries

Beyond prevention through people and responses, the Review recognises the influential role of systems and industries in the prevention of DFSV, as well as in its perpetuation and escalation where these systems are abused. As such, the Review recommends immediate audits of the weaponisation of government systems by perpetrators of DFSV, including of systems where significant harm is occurring, such as family law, child support, taxation and immigration systems. The Review notes that the respective audits and responses should be informed by safety by design principles, given their effectiveness in other important areas of recent reform such as in the technology and financial sectors.

The Review also acknowledges that certain industries, such as alcohol, gambling, media and technology, are particularly well positioned to prevent and reduce DFSV. This is in part because these same industries too often function as the foundation for, or means of, the escalation of abuse. As such, the Review recommends that governments review and amend alcohol and gambling regulatory environments to prioritise the prevention of DFSV. This includes through restrictions on alcohol sale, advertising and delivery timeframes; restrictions leading to a total ban on advertising in gambling; and an examination of the density of electronic gaming machines and use of online gambling in relation to DFSV prevalence. Further, the Review recommends that the Commonwealth Government work with the Foundation for Alcohol Research and Education (FARE) and other bodies in an integrated and focused effort to reduce the role of alcohol in DFSV.

Beyond this, the Review recommends that governments establish and embed national standards for media reporting on gender-based violence to prevent the perpetuation of harmful narratives that can escalate risk. The Review also urges governments to ensure that the current age-verification pilot related to online pornography tests not only the relevant technology, but its implementation, including participation of major technology platforms. In addition, the Review recommends the provision of ongoing support to the eSafety Commission to protect victim-survivors from tech-based abuse and to work with the technology industry and government on improving policies, practice, transparency and accountability for an increasingly complex and hazardous online environment.

Prevention through learning and data

Efforts to unlock the potential of prevention also require accountability for, and monitoring of, these ongoing prevention efforts. The Review therefore recommends that the Commonwealth Government expand the functions and powers of the DFSV Commission and establish it as a statutory authority. Expanded powers functions should include the DFSV Commission: performing a clearinghouse function; having stronger powers to gather information; and to continue monitoring the implementation and funding associated with the implementation of the National Plan.

Further, it is vital to acknowledge that improvements in our prevention efforts, wherever they fall along the spectrum, must be informed by accurate information. In particular, the Review found that Australia currently struggles with insufficient information and disaggregated data about particular communities, including those in remote areas such as the Torres Strait. Recognising the crucial role of data sovereignty, the Review recommends working in partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities to embark on a process to determine a community-led, self-determined approach to data collection that accounts for Indigenous data sovereignty principles, in line with the Closing the Gap Priority Reforms.

Further, the Review recommends improved and disaggregated data collection around the intersection of gender-based violence with the experiences of older Australians, people with disability, long term and recently arrived migrant and refugee communities, LGBTIQ+ communities and communities in regional areas, as well as improved data collection about the impacts on children affected by family law processes.

The Review recommends improved data collection to understand the scale of the challenge that we face, as well as how we are tracking to address it. This includes the establishment of a centralised national data set on the extent and nature of perpetration; as well as enhancements to the measurements framework under the National Plan to include further quantitative targets.

In addition to these efforts, we must also continue to examine and learn from where our prevention efforts have failed and where DFSV-related deaths have tragically occurred. Death review panels provide salient lessons about those prevention points that did not work, or where victim-survivors fell through the gaps. As such, the Review recommends that state and territory governments work to establish and uplift death review panels across all jurisdictions, including with an emphasis on First Nations support units and protocols.

Highlighting the importance of recognising and accounting for suicides related to DFSV-victimisations—numbers not currently accounted for in conventional assessments of the ongoing national crisis—the Review also recommends an urgent inquiry into the relationship between suicide and experiences of DFSV victimisation. These numbers are not currently accounted for and therefore skew our understanding of the impact of DFSV. Capturing this data will enable the true scale of what the Review contends is actually a state of national emergency to finally be understood.



Conclusion

The Review recognises that opportunities for prevention of DFSV exist at an individual, community, systems and societal level. Prevention can happen through people, responses, and systems and industries. This builds on the approach of the National Plan, agreed by the Commonwealth and the states and territories, which acknowledges the need to be agile and responsive to the evolving evidence base. The Review's recommendations identify where violence and abuse can be prevented before it happens, when it occurs and before it becomes fatal.

Importantly, each of the above recommendations is designed to be as flexible and practical as possible and must be tested and co-designed with the communities that it is likely to impact. This is a task to which governments must commit if it is genuinely to unlock the prevention potential. Implementation of these recommendations also requires dismantling siloed ways of working—overcoming the barriers of federation, where feasible, in the spirit adopted when facing other threats presenting on a national scale. The Review's advice will be one stepping stone on a road which so many have been building for decades. Its purpose in many ways has been to add urgency to some obvious investment needs and to open doors to which multiple people or sectors have pointed for years. As such, many of the recommendations here have been made elsewhere or are ones for which individuals and sectors have been calling for some time.

That said, it was clear over just 12 weeks of review, consultation and consideration that the path ahead does not just involve tinkering at the edges but instead requires a surge of activity and investment around people, responses and systems. What's more, it demands examination of the mechanisms and levers that, thus far, have not created the momentum towards increased safety and accountability—and reduced homicides—that we would expect. As a result, many of this Review's recommendations are about identifying those mechanisms and levers which embed an effective and whole-of-community approach to prevention over the longer-term.

The scale of the challenge and the complex nature of DFSV may seem overwhelming. The fact that the Review could identify so many areas ripe for meaningful reform over such a short period of time, however, is also a sign of promise. Put simply, there is a lot more that can be done if we draw on lessons available across multiple sectors and approach the task in an expansive and collaborative way. That in itself should be a cause for energy and action.

By commissioning this Review and outlining broad Terms of Reference, the Commonwealth has recognised that prevention of violence can be seen as core business for every workforce, community and individual, regardless of whether they saw themselves situated in this task before. Similarly, by commissioning this Review, all governments will have a mandate for bold action—a prevention potential that the Review sincerely hopes they are ready and willing to seize.

Terms of Reference

Overview

Violence against women and children remains a national crisis in Australia. While there has been significant action and investment towards ending gender-based violence, including through the *National Plan to End Violence against Women and Children 2022–2032* (the National Plan), the recent increase in rates of intimate partner homicide shows the need to continually identify gaps and opportunities to strengthen our current approach and accelerate efforts to stop violence against women.

On 1 May 2024, following a meeting of the National Cabinet, the Commonwealth announced it would undertake a rapid review of evidence-based approaches to prevent gender-based violence. This work will be led by a Panel of experts (the Panel). The Panel will provide practical advice to Government on further action to prevent gender-based violence, which builds on the considerable work underway under the National Plan. It will be co-convened by Australia's Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence Commissioner (the Commissioner), Ms Micaela Cronin, the Executive Director of the Commonwealth Office for Women, Ms Padma Raman, and the Secretary of the Department of Social Services, Mr Ray Griggs AO CSC.

Scope

Drawing on existing evidence and best-practice approaches, the Panel's work will address opportunities to strengthen prevention efforts and approaches across all forms of violence against women and children, including a particular focus on homicides. Prevention will be conceived broadly to include anything that contributes to reduced levels of gender-based violence. It will build on Australia's current approaches to prevention and consider whether they need to be further adapted or refined.

The Commissioner and co-convenors will report to the Minister for Social Services and the Minister for Women on behalf of the Panel, with the focus areas of:

- Targeted approaches to preventing violence, with a focus on identifying what works across the life cycle and for different groups of people. This includes:
 - prevention and early intervention for those most at risk of experiencing or perpetrating violence;
 - the most effective settings and approaches for preventing violence and intervening early; and
 - pathways and approaches specific to different types of violence.
- Engaging with determinants, risk factors, pathways and intersecting factors for gender-based violence, including different and emerging forms of violence, and the role of key industries;
- Whole of system opportunities for prevention and intervention, including stronger accountability and consequences for people who choose to use violence.
- Opportunities to effect attitudinal change and accelerate progress to prevent violence against women and children, including at a local level. This could include consideration of place-based and saturation models.

In undertaking its work, the Panel will consider:

- Opportunities to engage with men to support prevention, acknowledging that family, domestic and sexual violence is overwhelmingly perpetrated by men, against women.
- New approaches that governments, the non-government sector and industry that can take to prevent gender-based violence in Australia.
- The experiences and needs of different groups of people, including First Nations people, culturally and linguistically diverse people, people with disability and LGBTQIA+ people.
- Developing practical and realistic recommendations for future effort over short, medium and longer-term time horizons.

The work will inform the Commonwealth's report back to National Cabinet in the third quarter of 2024.

Stakeholder engagement

Throughout its work, the Panel will consult regularly with Our Watch, ANROWS, the National Women's Alliances, states and territories, and other stakeholders they determine appropriate.

The Panel will also undertake targeted stakeholder consultations via a series of roundtables. Roundtables will include members of the National Plan Advisory Group, the First Nations National Plan Steering Committee, people with lived experience of violence, frontline services, and academics and data experts.

Membership

- Dr Anne Summers AO
- Dr Todd Fernando
- Dr Leigh Gassner APM
- Ms Elena Campbell
- Ms Jess Hill
- Dr Zac Seidler

Deliverables

The Panel will provide a final report to the Commonwealth Government, with specific and practical advice on the best approach(es) to strengthen prevention efforts across all forms of violence against women and children in Australia. This report will be delivered by 15 August 2024 to the Commonwealth Minister for Social Services and the Minister for Women. The final report will also be provided to the Prime Minister to inform the Commonwealth come back to National Cabinet ahead of its meeting in the third quarter of 2024.

Recommendations



Principles

The following principles underpin each recommendation and should be at the forefront in their implementation. In our efforts to prevent DFSV, Australia must:

1. Explicitly prioritise the experiences and needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and recognise that DFSV in Australia is rooted in our historical context and colonial legacy. To address this violence and prevent it, our efforts must be genuinely led by First Nations peoples in a way that embeds and promotes cultural safety, place-based approaches and self-determination.
2. Adopt an intersectional approach to preventing DFSV that understands this violence as being symptomatic of broader, systemic issues that intersect with race, class, disability, and sexuality and recognises the intersectional realities that exacerbate violence for certain groups.
3. Embed implementation science to bridge the gap between research and practice. To do this, build in the systematic uptake of research findings, including emerging evidence, across the implementation of policy, programs and practice in Australia. Where appropriate, implementation of recommendations needs to involve genuine engagement and testing with the people and communities they will impact, especially Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.
4. Collect more data to address gaps in our understanding. This should prioritise opportunities to collect both qualitative and quantitative data and building in activities that improve and expand data collection.
5. Continually inspect, understand and adapt to the emerging and changing role of technology. This should include understanding and responding to the opportunities that technology may present, as well as the unintended consequences technology may cause or exacerbate.

Recommendations

A national emergency— and an ongoing national priority

1. The Commonwealth and state and territory governments to agree that ‘ending gender-based violence, including violence against children and young people’ becomes an ongoing priority of National Cabinet.
2. The Commonwealth and state and territory governments to strongly embed and build on culturally-informed and place-based domestic, family and sexual violence responses for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women, families and communities, noting the significant work under way to develop a First Nations National Plan. This should include genuine and ongoing consideration of the evidence provided to the *Senate Inquiry into Missing and Murdered First Nations women and children*, and the commitments under Target 13 of the *National Agreement on Closing the Gap*.
3. The Commonwealth and state and territory governments to prioritise the experiences of communities that are marginalised especially Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, migrant and refugee communities, women and children with disabilities, LGBTIQ+ people, older women and regional and remote communities in implementing all of the recommendations in this report. Addressing gender-based violence for communities experiencing intersecting forms of marginalisation lays the foundation for population-wide success. Where applicable, implementation should involve a genuine and sustained co-design approach to ensure that affected communities are identifying priorities of greatest urgency and value to them.

The prevention potential

4. The Commonwealth and state and territory governments to expand their approach to prevention to acknowledge the global evidence base to leverage all prevention touchpoints more effectively. This should include:
 - a. an independent review and expansion of *Change the story* beyond primary prevention, with a focus on accommodating the evolving global evidence base around the prevention of violence across early intervention, response and recovery; and
 - b. establishing a five-year co-funded Prevention Innovation Fund, understanding what works better in an Australian context and at a community level.

Prevention through people

5. The Commonwealth and state and territory governments to adopt a strategic and coordinated approach to embedding the distinct experiences of children and young people in their own right. This includes through the establishment of a Youth Taskforce under the *National Plan to End Violence against Women and Children 2022–2032* (National Plan), supported by the Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence Commission, to ensure implementation of the National Plan accelerates a focus on children and young people. This strategic work should be complemented by more immediate efforts to support children and young people who have experienced violence, including:
 - a. support and recovery for young children, with a focus on programmatic responses which maintain and repair a relationship with the protective parent, including in the context of the family law system, as well as upskilling Independent Children’s Lawyers (Commonwealth and states and territories);
 - b. developing tailored and developmentally appropriate, as well as youth-specific and informed, service responses for child sexual abuse, children and young people who have experienced family violence, young people using violence at home, and young people using and/or experiencing violence in intimate relationships, drawing on available evidence and practice frameworks available through Australia’s National Research Organisation for Women’s Safety (ANROWS) (states and territories); and
 - c. in recognition that certain cohorts of young people will not be in the care of statutory child protection systems or a protective parent, develop and deliver an appropriate and tailored response to young people escaping violence and seeking financial support and safe housing (Commonwealth and states and territories).
6. The Commonwealth Government, with states and territories, to develop a national, coordinated and co-designed approach to engaging with men and boys, and on healthy masculinities and violence prevention. This should include:
 - a. establishing intersectional, DFSV-informed advisory mechanisms for engaging with men and boys with multi-disciplinary expertise (e.g., health, education, tech), including the establishment of an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Men’s Advisory Body;
 - b. adopting a strengths-based national definition and measurement methodology for healthy masculinities to guide future campaigns and/or program implementation;
 - c. developing or expanding DFSV-informed program responses across sectors, focusing on healthy relationships and masculinities throughout men’s life transitions, including school leavers, new fathers, separation/relationship breakdown, recent migration and recent unemployment; and
 - d. developing a national response, attuned to the experiences of men and boys, responding to the rise of online misogyny and radicalisation through targeted investment in research to understand relevant risk factors and the extent of harm; collaboration with specialist frontline educators; and a focus on evidence-based tech-industry regulation.

7. The Commonwealth to undertake further structural reforms to strengthen women's economic equality, in recognition of the interconnectedness between lack of economic security and vulnerability to DFSV. This should include:
 - a. consistent with the recommendations of the Women's Economic Equality Taskforce (WEET), abolishing the Child Care Subsidy Activity Test, as an immediate first step towards universal access to early education for Australian children, noting the current Activity Test limits flexibility in accessing child care for women in casual and insecure work;
 - b. adopting in full the WEET recommendation to remove a major and escalating form of financial abuse against women seeking child support (recommendation 6.5);
 - c. expanding eligibility for the Low Income Super Tax Offset (LISTO), in order to increase women's superannuation balances as they age;
 - d. developing a successor plan to the *National Plan to Respond to the Abuse of Older Australians (Elder Abuse) 2019–2023*;
 - e. undertaking further reforms including expanding eligibility to address the economic insecurity experienced by women on visas who are victim-survivors of DFSV; and
 - f. strengthening workplace health and safety laws to complement the positive duty on employers to prevent workplace sexual harassment, sex discrimination and harassment under the *Sex Discrimination Act 1984* (Cth).

8. The Commonwealth and state and territory governments to expand the evidence base on how to build capability of family and friends to identify and respond to DFSV as "natural responders" in their relational contexts with victim-survivors and perpetrators. In the immediate term, the Commonwealth should resource Lifeline's DV-alert to expand its current community-focussed program offering, prioritising increased reach and frequency of facilitator-led delivery to regional and remote areas, as well as delivery virtually.

Prevention through responses

9. The Commonwealth, through the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) and with state and territory governments, to expedite a needs analysis to determine unmet demand in DFSV crisis response, recovery and healing (excluding police), with the view to develop a pathway to fund demand. This should take into consideration the needs of different groups of women and children and the demand for targeted and culturally safe responses, such as ethno-specific services and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-controlled organisations, with a particular focus on remote communities.
More immediately, there should be a significant funding uplift for:
 - a. legal services, noting the recommendations of the Independent Review of the National Legal Assistance Partnership (NLAP) and the expiry of the current partnership on 30 June 2025;
 - b. crisis accommodation, noting commitments to date and what is outlined in *Recommendation 10*; and
 - c. establishment of nationally consistent travel assistance for people escaping DFSV who live in remote areas (Commonwealth and states and territories).
10. The Commonwealth and state and territory governments to apply a prevention lens to the resourcing and delivery of crisis response and recovery services. This includes through:
 - a. replacing motels and other high-cost temporary crisis accommodation with specialist crisis accommodation that provide wraparound services (states and territories);
 - b. resourcing the DFSV sector for long-term case management, following the needs analysis identified in *Recommendation 9* (states and territories); and
 - c. increasing linkage between the DFSV and homelessness sectors, and align these sectors in national frameworks and plans (Commonwealth and states and territories).
11. The Commonwealth and state and territory governments to activate the health system and workforce as a key prevention lever. This should include:
 - a. equipping and resourcing General Practitioners (GPs), perinatal, and mental health and alcohol and other drug (AOD) services to identify and support DFSV victim-survivors and people who use violence (Commonwealth and states and territories);
 - b. creating a specific Medicare item number for GPs that enables them to spend appropriate time with people affected by DFSV (Commonwealth);
 - c. mandating training of professionals in general primary and mental health settings in adult and child safeguarding, including DFSV, as a requirement for registration through the Australian Health Practitioner Regulation Agency (Commonwealth and states and territories); and

- d. Increasing cross-sector collaboration between the AOD and DFSV sector and provide specialised services for women that are family friendly and support caring for children (states and territories).
12. The Commonwealth and state and territory governments to take targeted efforts to address the significant gaps in responses to people who use violence. This should include:
- a. strengthening initial justice responses to facilitate advice and assistance beyond legal needs, which can help to reduce risk and improve compliance, including access to crisis accommodation (states and territories); and
 - b. improving the national evidence base, quality, capability and supply of men's behaviour change programs, including through a focus on continuous improvement. Behaviour change programs should:
 - i. be part of a community-coordinated response;
 - ii. be provided at appropriate intervention points;
 - iii. emphasise the value of associated support to victim-survivors through partner and family safety contact; and
 - iv. facilitate/co-locate access to support for needs related to harmful substance abuse, histories of trauma, cognitive impairment and mental ill-health through a DFSV-informed lens (states and territories, with Commonwealth supporting national consistency and best practice).
13. The Commonwealth and state and territory governments to work together to strengthen multi-agency approaches and better manage risk, with a lens on harm and safety, for victim-survivors of DFSV, including risk of homicide and suicide. This should include:
- a. the development and implementation of nationally consistent risk assessment and management principles to be utilised across the full range of roles identified as having decision-making and/or support functions in relation to DFSV, with a proactive approach to preventing misidentification (Commonwealth and states and territories);
 - b. strengthening information sharing within and across jurisdictions – including through the National Criminal Intelligence System (NCIS) (Commonwealth and states and territories);
 - c. the introduction and expansion of multi-agency responses, including fit-for-purpose police co-responder models—with an immediate focus on collaborative responses that increase access to forensic examinations (states and territories);
 - d. a national approach to strengthen systems responses to high-risk perpetrators, including through trialling and evaluating DFSV threat assessment centres and evidence-based focussed deterrence models (states and territories, with Commonwealth support); and

- e. all jurisdictions establishing mechanisms that are DFSV-informed for independent oversight and accountability of police response and management of DFSV (including members investigated for DFSV). These mechanisms should sit outside of police forces and be civilian-led (states and territories).
14. The Commonwealth and state and territory governments to work together to build the specialist DFSV workforce and expand workforce capability of all services that frequently engage with victim-survivors and people who use violence. This should be done through:
- a. commissioning analysis into current and future labour supply for the DFSV specialist services sector and recommendations to build and support a secure and sustainably resourced sector;
 - b. establishing a DFSV National Workforce Development Strategy that would expand the capacity and capability of sectors, such as the DFSV specialist sector, providing emergency services and accommodation, and including the men's behaviour change sector and the sexual violence sector; and
 - c. establishing a strategy for capability uplift across other intersecting workforces, and prioritising legal, justice, child protection and health (including AOD and mental health) sectors.
15. The Commonwealth and state and territory governments should further expand and prioritise work on Action 6 in the *First Action Plan (2023–2027)* of the National Plan to recognise the full range of sexual violence including where it occurs apart from DFV particularly noting the recommendations from the forthcoming Australian Law Reform Commission inquiry into justice responses to sexual violence.

Prevention through systems and industries

16. The Commonwealth and state and territory governments to undertake an immediate audit of how DFSV perpetrators are weaponising government systems, and to respond to these findings. This audit and subsequent plans for reform should be informed by Safety by Design principles. The Commonwealth Government should build on work that is already underway and prioritise systems where significant harm is occurring, such as: family law, child support, immigration, and taxation.
17. The Commonwealth and state and territory governments to work with industries that are well positioned to prevent and reduce DFSV, including homicide, with a focus on alcohol and gambling industries, in addition to media and pornography. This includes reviewing and strengthening alcohol and gambling regulatory environments to prioritise the prevention of gender-based violence. This should include:
 - a. adopting clear primary objectives in state and territory liquor regulatory regimes to prevent gender-based violence, alongside existing objectives around alcohol harm reduction (states and territories);
 - b. restrictions on alcohol sales, delivery timeframes (states and territories) and advertising (Commonwealth and states and territories);
 - c. stronger restrictions leading to a total ban on advertising of gambling (Commonwealth and states and territories);
 - d. examining the density of electronic gaming machines, and use of online gambling, in relation to the prevalence of DFSV across different populations and communities (Commonwealth and states and territories);
 - e. establishing and embedding national standards for media reporting on gender-based violence (Commonwealth); and
 - f. ensuring the age-verification pilot for online pornography tests both the technology, and how age verification assurance systems will be implemented, including the participation of the major technology platforms used by Australian children.

Further, the Review recommends that the Commonwealth Government work with the Foundation for Alcohol Research and Education (FARE) and other organisations on a framework to ensure the development of an integrated and focused effort to address the role of alcohol in DFSV.

18. The Commonwealth Government to continue to support the eSafety Commissioner to undertake increasingly complex work preventing gender-based violence, which includes working with the technology industry on the improvement of policies, practices and accountability.

Prevention through learning and data

19. The Commonwealth Government to expand the functions and powers of the National Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence Commission and establish it as a statutory authority. Expanded powers should include performing a clearinghouse function, having stronger powers to gather information, and to continue monitoring the implementation and funding associated with the National Plan.
20. The Commonwealth and state and territory governments to further strengthen data collection, in relation to DFSV. This includes:
 - a. working in partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities to embark on a process to determine a community led approach to data collection that accounts for Indigenous data sovereignty principles;
 - b. increasing intersectional and disaggregated data, as well as a particular focus on improving data on regional, rural and remote communities such as the Torres Strait Islands, in addition to improving data on LGBTIQ+ experiences, experiences of people with a disability, and children and young people affected by family law processes;
 - c. establishing a national data set focusing on the extent and nature of perpetration to inform and improve response; and
 - d. prioritising enhancements to the measurements framework for the National Plan to include further quantitative targets.
21. The Commonwealth and state and territory governments to develop a consistent approach to death review processes and improve knowledge on the relationship between DFSV and suicide. This should include:
 - a. establishing and uplifting death review panels across all jurisdictions, including with First Nations support units and protocols (state and territory governments);
 - b. strengthening national coordination and consistency of DFSV death review processes, and learning and sharing of findings (state and territory governments supported by Commonwealth); and
 - c. initiating an urgent inquiry into the relationship between DFSV victimisation and suicide, with a view to developing a methodology for accurate counting of the DFSV death toll (Commonwealth, state and territory governments).

Gender-Based Violence in Australia at a Glance (August 2024)

Attitudes towards gender equality and violence

In Australia, between 2009 and 2021, there was a **positive shift in attitudes** that reject gender inequality and violence against women. There was also an **improvement in understanding** of violence against women.¹ However, of the respondents to the National Community Attitudes towards Violence against Women Survey (NCAS) in 2021:

25% believed that women who do not leave their abusive partners are partly responsible for violence continuing.¹

41% agreed that many women misinterpret innocent remarks as sexist.

23% believed domestic violence is a normal reaction to day-to-day stress.²

Men who strongly endorse norms that reflect socially dominant forms of masculinity were more than:

8 times more likely to have perpetrated sexual violence against an intimate partner (including **28 times more likely** to have used fear to coerce a partner into having sex);

5 times more likely to have perpetrated physical violence against an intimate partner (including **17 times more likely** to have hit a partner with a fist or something else that could hurt them).³

Victim-survivor characteristics

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples



First Nations people aged 15 and over in 2018–2019 who had experienced physical harm in the last 12 months **reported the perpetrator was an intimate partner or family member.**⁴

LGBTIQA+

60.7% of the surveyed LGBTIQA+ community had experienced violence by an intimate partner in their lifetime.⁵

Disability

Women with disability are **twice as likely** to report an incident of sexual violence over their lifetime than women without disability (**33%** of women with disability compared to **16%** of women without disability).⁶

Rural and remote Australians

Women living outside major cities were **1.5 times as likely** to have experienced partner violence than women living in major cities (**23%** compared with **15%**).⁷

Children and young people

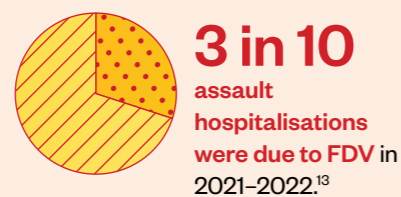
Around **9 in 10** filicides that occurred in a domestic and family violence context, demonstrated evidence of a history of intimate partner violence prior to the filicide.⁸

Relationship with perpetrator

Women were **more likely** to have experienced physical and/or sexual violence since the age of 15 by a known person (**35%** or 3.5 million) than a stranger (**11%** or 1.1 million).⁹

Experiences of violence

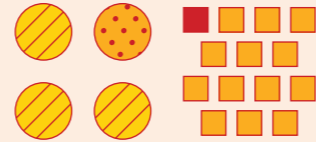
Hospitalisation



Prevalence and scale of violence against women

1 in 4 women and 1 in 14 men

have experienced violence by an intimate partner since the age of 15.



1 in 4 women and 1 in 7 men had experienced emotional abuse by a current or previous cohabiting partner since the age of 15.

1 in 5 women and 1 in 16 men had experienced sexual violence since the age of 15.¹⁰

Intimate partner homicide

There have been **1,710 female victims** of intimate partner homicide from 1 July 1989 to 30 June 2024.¹¹

Financial Abuse

80% of women report that their ex-partner had replaced physical abuse with financial abuse via child support as a way to control them since they separated.¹²

Police

>1 in 2 (53% or 76,900) police-recorded assaults were related to FDV nationally (excluding Victoria and Queensland) in 2022.¹⁴

Perpetration of violence

FDV offending

There were **88,377** offenders proceeded against by police for at least one FDV-related offence in 2022–2023, up **6,504** offenders (or 8%) from 2021–2022 across Australia.²⁰ This was a quarter (25%) of all offenders recorded nationally.¹⁵

In 2022–2023, the most common offences for FDV defendants were:

41% Assault
39% Breach of violence order
10% Stalking, harassment or threatening behaviour
7% Property damage.¹⁶

Gender



68% of filicides in a DFV context was perpetrated by male filicide offenders.¹⁸

Employment status

Perpetrators of FV were found to have higher levels of unemployment and were more likely to be from more disadvantaged areas.¹⁹

However, **non-physical forms of violence** (such as shouting, provoking arguments and controlling behaviours) were found to be more common among offenders with higher levels of education and employment.²⁰ Those who self-reported coercive controlling behaviours were more likely to have completed Year 12 or above and to earn \$100,000 per annum or more.²¹

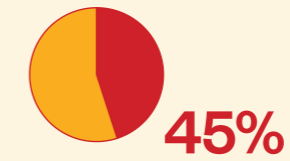
Risk factors for perpetration

Childhood abuse

An estimated **1.2 million people** (43%) aged 18 years and over who experienced childhood abuse before the age of 15 went on to experience violence or abuse by a cohabiting partner as an adult.²²

89% of young people (aged 16–20 years) who had used violence in the home reported that they had experienced child abuse.²³

History of FDV



of primary homicide offenders had a history of domestic and family violence: **28%** as a perpetrator, **4%** as a victim and **13%** as both a victim and perpetrator.²⁴

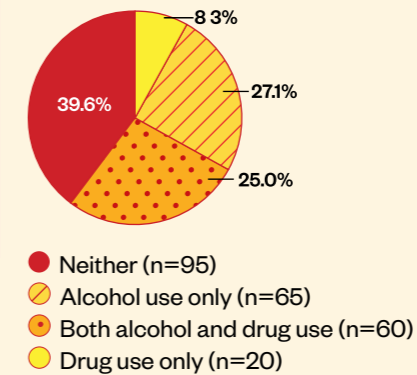
Between **39%** and **55%** of domestic violence offenders had a prior history of violence towards an intimate partner.²⁵

Alcohol and substance use



of males who killed a female intimate partner engaged in problematic drug and/or alcohol use in the lead-up to, or at the time of, the homicide.²⁶

Problematic substance use: Male homicide offender, female homicide victim (n=240)²⁷



Gambling

Studies have found that between **16–56% of people with a gambling problem perpetrate DFV**, and **11%** of IPV perpetrators report a gambling problem.²⁸

Pathways into perpetration

There is no single pathway that leads to intimate partner homicide. Recent research shows complex pathways such as:

“Persistent and disorderly”

Present in **40%** of analysed cases. Offenders were often Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander peoples; had complex histories of trauma and abuse; had co-occurring mental, emotional and physical health problems; and had significant histories of violence towards intimate partners and others.²⁹

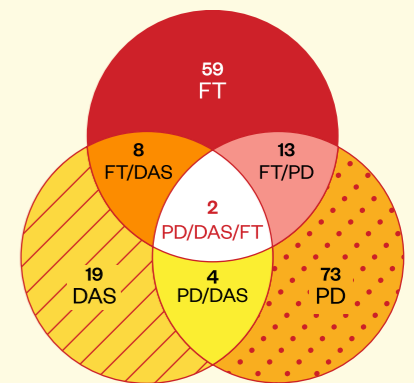
“Fixated threat”

Present in **33%** of analysed cases. Despite being jealous, controlling and abusive in their relationships, these offenders were relatively functional in other domains of their life. In many cases they were typically middle-class men who were well respected in their communities and had low levels of contact with the criminal justice system.³⁰

“Deterioration/acute stressor”

Present in **11%** of analysed cases. These men tended to be non-Indigenous, older, and to have significant emotional, mental and physical health problems. They tended to have non-abusive relationships with the victim until the onset or exacerbation of a significant life stressor (or stressors) triggered a deterioration in their health and wellbeing, impacting on their attitude towards the victim.³¹

Three primary pathways³²



FT Fixed threat
DAS Deterioration/acute stressors
PD Persistent and disorderly

Prevalence of domestic, family and sexual violence (DFSV) at a glance

A key component of the national emergency is the rate at which Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women are being murdered and disappeared. While the availability of disaggregated data is limited, the information we do have suggests First Nations women are murdered at higher rates than the general Australian population, and primarily in the context of domestic and family violence. This table details the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women who were killed each year between 2014–2015 and 2022–2023, and the numbers killed by an intimate partner or other family member.

The Review notes that this data only includes homicides that have been finalised (either by the courts or other means) and does not capture the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and children who have been disappeared, presumed murdered.

Table 1: Female Indigenous victims of homicide and their relationship with the primary offender, 1 July 2014–30 June 2023¹

Year	Total female homicide victims	Female victims of intimate partner homicide	Female victims of family member-perpetrated homicide
2014–15	15	7	7
2015–16	13	9	3
2016–17	9	7	1
2017–18	9	8	0
2018–19	6	5	1
2019–20	20	7	7
2020–21	5	4	1
2021–22	12	8	2
2022–23	13	5	4

¹Data presented refer to an individual's sex (i.e. sex characteristics) rather than gender (i.e. 'social and cultural identity, expression and experience'). Some of the 2022–23 data presented may exclude Western Australia where data may not be available.²

Women's experience of cohabiting partner violence in the last 12 months has decreased over the period from 2005 to 2021–22. Table 2 presents prevalence rates of violence and abuse for adult women in the last 12 months. It is expressed as a percentage of all Australian women aged 18 years and over.

Table 2: Women aged 18 years and over who experienced violence and emotional abuse from a cohabiting partner in the last 12 months, 2005 to 2021–22³

Proportion (%) of total population

	2005	2012	2016	2021–22
Sexual violence	0.4	0.3	0.5	0.4
Physical violence	1.2	1.4	1.3	*0.7
Emotional abuse	na	4.7	4.8	*3.9
Total violence	1.5	1.5	1.7	*0.9

* The difference in the prevalence rate between 2016 and 2021–22 is statistically significant.

Like Table 2, the following table shows similar results for women's experience of cohabiting partner violence and abuse, however focussed on the last two years. It shows a decrease in total violence and emotional abuse between 2016 and 2021–2022.

Table 3: Women aged 18 years and over who experienced violence and emotional abuse from a cohabiting partner in the last two years, 2005 to 2021–22⁴

Proportion (%) of total population

	2005	2012	2016	2021–22
Emotional abuse	na	6.1	6.5	*5.3
Total violence	2.5	2.6	2.7	*1.7

* The difference in the prevalence rate between 2016 and 2021–22 is statistically significant.

Table 4 includes data on adult women's experiences of partner violence and abuse since age 15. It also compares prevalence for current and previous partners. It shows that since age 15, while total violence slightly fell, it slightly decreased for current partners but increased for previous partners. There were similar results for emotional abuse, while sexual violence rates rose.

Table 4: Prevalence of women, aged 18 years and over, who have experienced partner violence and abuse since age 15, 2016 and 2021–22⁵

Proportion (%) of total population

Type of violence	2016	2021–22
Physical violence	15.9	14.9
Sexual violence	5.1	6.2
Total	17.3	16.9

Proportion (%) of total population

Relationship status at the time of the physical or sexual violence	2016	2021–22
Current partner	2.9	1.7
Previous partner	14.6	15.5

Proportion (%) of total population

Emotional abuse	2016	2021–22
Current partner	6.1	4.3
Previous partner	18.0	19.6
Total emotional abuse	23.0	22.9

As outlined in Table 5, between 2016 and 2021–2022 there has been a significant increase in women's experiences of a current or previous partner tracking their movements. In this context, tracking refers to a partner keeping track of where they were and who they were with (e.g. constant phone calls, GPS tracking, monitoring through social media).

Table 5: Of women who experienced emotional abuse, numbers and proportion of women who experienced tracking of movements, 2016 and 2021–22⁶

	2016		2021–22		
Tracking of movements	Estimate ('000)	%	Estimate ('000)	%	% Increase between 2016 & 2021
Current partner	56.7	9.9	66.5	15.4	56
Previous partner	455.1	26.9	641.5	33.0	23

The Review recognises more focus is urgently needed to prevent violence against people with intersecting identities, including people with disability, LGBTIQ+ people and both long term and recently arrived migrant and refugee communities. While Australia has some helpful population-level data, we lack disaggregated data on our most marginalised communities affected by DFSV. What data we have, including in Table 6, indicates these communities face higher rates of violence than the population as a whole.

Table 6 presents prevalence rates of violence and abuse for adult women in the last 12 months. It is expressed as a percentage of all Australian women aged 18 years and over.

Table 6: Women aged 18 years and over, who have experienced violence and abuse by a cohabiting partner in the last two years, disaggregated by sexual orientation, disability status and country of birth, 2021–22⁷

Proportion (%) of total population

Sexual orientation	Experienced partner violence	Experienced partner emotional abuse	Experienced partner economic abuse
Heterosexual	1.6	5.2	3.1
Gay, lesbian, bisexual or different term (a) (b)	*3.9	7.1	*4.1

Proportion (%) of total population

Disability status (c)	Experienced partner violence	Experienced partner emotional abuse	Experienced partner economic abuse
Has disability	2.2	7.0	4.6
Does not have disability	1.5	4.6	2.4

Proportion (%) of total population

Country of birth	Experienced partner violence	Experienced partner emotional abuse	Experienced partner economic abuse
Australia	2.1	5.6	3.5
Born overseas	1.0	4.8	2.3
Total women	1.7	5.3	3.1

*Notes:

(a) Different terms that people may use to describe their sexual orientation include asexual, pansexual and queer.

(b) While data for women who identified as gay or lesbian, bisexual, or who used a different term such as asexual, pansexual or queer have been combined into a single output category, experiences of partner violence may vary across each group.

(c) Disability refers to any limitation, restriction or impairment which restricts everyday activities and has lasted, or is likely to last, for at least six months.

* estimate has a relative standard error of 25% to 50% and should be used with caution.

A national emergency— and an ongoing national priority

An ongoing, national priority

On 28 April 2024 the Prime Minister declared that Australia faced a ‘national crisis’ of violence against women, with one woman being killed every four days.⁸ On 1 May 2024, National Cabinet met to discuss this national crisis as a standalone issue, the significance of which should not be underestimated. The Commonwealth agreed to deliver a range of new measures to address it, including establishment of this Rapid Review of Prevention Approaches (the Review).



Trends in homicide

- A total number of 58 women were victims of domestic homicide in 2023, up from 35 killed in 2022 and 33 killed in 2021.⁹
- Recent figures available in NSW show that, of a total of 550 domestic-violence context homicides, 331 were women killed between 1 July 2000 and 30 June 2022.¹⁰
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are disproportionately represented as victims of intimate partner homicide. A 2022-23 study found that homicide victimisation rates for Indigenous females was 3.07 per 100,000 compared with 0.45 per 100,000 for non-Indigenous females.¹¹

Since then, more women have died violently. While data sources vary, one widely used source counts the number of violent deaths of women at 54, and of children at 10, as at 15 August 2024.¹² These alarming figures are not an aberration. Figures from the Australian Institute of Criminology (AIC) indicate that, despite a steady (57 per cent) decline in intimate partner homicides since 1989–1990, an alarming uptick has occurred in the past two years.¹³ To this we must add the deaths of missing and murdered women—in particular Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women who have been disappeared.¹⁴ This is an acute aspect of the wider national crisis and should be a source of great collective shame.

Communities whose identities make them especially vulnerable to DSFV must also be highlighted. This includes women with disabilities, who evidence indicates are more likely to have experienced violence in the preceding 12 months than women without disability; refugee and migrant women, who face particular barriers to reporting violence and seeking help; and members of LGBTIQ+ communities, who may experience abuse in intimate or other relationships as well as from families of origin, yet face similar barriers to support, including fear that their disclosures will be weaponised.¹⁵

Data relating to the homicides of children and young people, meanwhile, is likely to be underreported but should be brought firmly into the spotlight. In cases of filicide where there was a DSFV context, for example, children are often not reported as a victim of violence to authorities, despite domestic and family violence (DFV) being a significant risk factor for filicide.¹⁶ This means that we often need to look to individual data sources or studies, rather than having a consistent national picture.



Trends in filicide

In New South Wales between 1 July 2000 and 30 June 2022, 96 children were killed by a parent in a domestic violence context. The 96 children killed ranged from four weeks to 15 years of age. The average age of child victims was 4.1 years. Almost 40 per cent of children were aged one year or less. Almost 20 per cent of children killed identified as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander.¹⁷

The recent ANROWS filicide report showed that, within the 86 cases in the study, 9 in 10 (88 per cent) were associated with a history of intimate partner violence. Men comprised two-thirds (68 per cent) of the parents who killed their children overall. When mothers killed their children, it often followed a history of experiencing violence.¹⁸

Nearly half (46 per cent) of the children killed by their parents were aged under two years old. Approximately one quarter (26 per cent) of children killed identified as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander. This is despite First Nations children comprising around 6 per cent of Australia's child population.¹⁹

A recent report released by ANROWS, however, indicates that 76 per cent of filicides nationwide occur within the context of DFV, involving a history of child abuse, intimate partner violence, or both. This study involved 113 cases of filicide occurring between 2010 and 2018, with 86 cases (76 per cent) having an identifiable history of DFV.²⁰

If Australia is to achieve the stated goal in the National Plan to eliminate gender-based within a generation, it is vital that we acknowledge the true nature scale of the challenge which, as the Review discusses later in this report, may be even bigger than we currently understand.

It is also vital that we understand the imperative at both a national and international level. Put simply, Australia has obligations under multiple conventions to which it is a signatory to prevent violence against women and children. These obligations fall under the *Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women* (CEDAW), the *Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities* (CRPD), the *Convention on the Elimination of Race Discrimination* (CERD), the *Convention on the Rights of the Child* (CRC), the *Optional Protocol to the Convention against Torture and other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment* (OPCAT), and the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples* (UNDRIP). Progressing implementation of these treaties and fulfilling Australia's international obligations is fundamental to ending gender-based violence, particularly against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and children, and must remain at the forefront of our collective work.

Given that we have made these commitments on the international stage, it is therefore fitting that we acknowledge the objective of ending gender-based violence at the highest level of national authority—and do so on a continuous basis. Accordingly, the Review calls on National Cabinet to acknowledge gender-based violence as an ongoing priority—one with an urgency commensurate with climate change and national security—acknowledging that this is not only a national crisis but a genuine state of national emergency. This should remain a priority for the duration of the National Plan, recognising that the Commonwealth and states and territories hold powerful levers which sit across multiple government portfolios and systems.

While the Review recognises that the Women and Women's Safety Ministerial Council, which reports to National Cabinet, leads the ongoing implementation of the National Plan and should continue to do so, the scale and complexity of this national emergency also requires National Cabinet to drive efforts across all Ministerial Councils in a sustained and multifaceted way. Importantly, National Cabinet should also explicitly connect ending DFSV with other nationally significant work, including the *National Agreement on Closing the Gap*, disability and health reform, as well as addressing Australia's housing crisis, to ensure that a whole-of-society, intersectional and genuine partnership approach is applied at the highest level and so that we can link cross-government efforts to the ongoing work of the National Plan.



Recommendation 1

The Commonwealth and state and territory governments to agree that 'ending gender-based violence, including violence against children and young people' becomes an ongoing priority of National Cabinet.

Prioritising Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities

The Review acknowledges with profound sorrow the personal and systemic trauma of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families whose mothers, aunties, sisters, daughters and children have been disappeared, presumed murdered. The Review calls for urgent and ongoing consideration of the advocacy and evidence presented by these courageous families and communities to the recent *Senate Inquiry into Missing and Murdered First Nations women and children* (the Inquiry) in their ongoing quest for justice.



Senate Inquiry into Missing and Murdered First Nations women and children

The *Senate Inquiry into Missing and Murdered First Nations women and children* (the Inquiry), whilst noting the challenges with determining accurate figures of missing and murdered First Nations women and children due to data inconsistencies and under reporting, made a number of harrowing findings.

In relation to homicide victims, the Inquiry found that: “[the] data shows that First Nations women and children are significantly over-represented as homicide victims. It is extremely disconcerting to note the extended trend data and the fact that this is happening in contemporary Australia.”

The Inquiry noted:

- “The National Homicide Monitoring Program has data for murdered First Nations women and children from 1989–1990 to 2022–2023. Over this period, 476 women were recorded as victims of homicide (murder and manslaughter) and 158 children were recorded as victims of homicide (murder, manslaughter and infanticide).”
- “To place this data in context, First Nations women represented 16 per cent of all Australian women homicide victims, despite comprising between two to three per cent of the adult female population. Similarly, First Nations children represented 13 per cent of all child homicide victims.”
- “The Australian Institute of Criminology noted that, from 2005–2006 to 2022–2023, First Nations women consistently experienced higher rates of murder than their non-Indigenous counterparts (three to 13 times higher). Similarly, the rates of murder were higher for First Nations children, compared with non-Indigenous children (on average three times higher).”

In relation to missing people, the Inquiry found that “data collection inconsistencies across jurisdictions – such as for Indigenous status – mask the true extent of the disappearances, however, the available data shows that there is a high and grossly disproportionate number of disappeared First Nations women and children, compared to their non-Indigenous counterparts. Across the whole of Australia, the data is deeply disturbing. In the Northern Territory, the data is horrendous.”²¹

This Inquiry was a window to the way in which systems continue to fail First Nations communities, including through inadequate and discriminatory law enforcement responses, significant gaps in data collection and a lack of culturally safe services.²² The Review notes that levers for systemic reform are recommended throughout this report which have these systemic considerations firmly in mind. More generally, it is vital that ongoing attention, resources and scrutiny be directed towards this challenge to correct these systemic failures; pay respect to the memories of the disappeared, presumed murdered; and prevent further First Nations families from bearing burdens of unanswered grief.

More broadly, the Review acknowledges the dignity and strength of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities—the women, children, sistergirls and brotherboys, and the men who stand beside them. First Nations women and girls have long identified that they hold the solutions to what works to keep them and their families safe. The Review also recognises the unique and intersectional challenges faced by First Nations women, families, and communities, which are rooted in colonisation, intergenerational trauma, systemic racism and resulting social and economic disadvantage. This highlights the critical need for a robust, culturally-informed and self-determined approach to addressing DFSV experienced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women

The Review drew on the advice of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Advisory Council on family, domestic and sexual violence and First Nations National Plan Steering Committee, including the lessons from the Advisory Council's own widespread consultation processes. The Review heard about:

- the need for holistic and whole of community spaces, supports and resources, including case management for people using violence;
- understanding early intervention as prevention, particularly in Aboriginal medical services;
- cross-sector partnerships, particularly between the health and justice systems;
- gaps in interventions for young people;
- opportunities for better prevention and early intervention through Community Justice Groups;
- managing people using violence by balancing the needs for recovery and healing;
- Aboriginal men lacking collective representation and role models across the DFSV conversation;
- responses to Aboriginal men being punitive, rather than trauma-informed and focusing on healing;
- an absence of research focus on what works for Aboriginal men;
- narratives needing to change to depict Aboriginal men in a strengths-based way; and
- Aboriginal-led activities producing better outcomes for communities through self-determination.

Consultation in the Torres Strait Islands

The Review also drew on its specific consultation on Thursday Island in the Torres Strait, in which community members told us clearly what they have been highlighting for years. The Review heard that:

- the Torres Strait needs to be seen by government as diverse, with many communities, rather than as one homogenous region, noting that “the realities of the Torres Strait need to be heard”;
- the funding model for the region needs to be reconsidered, with funding currently going through complex administrative structures rather than straight to community;
- a profound lack of access to services across the islands leaving people at risk – with only one crisis shelter across all the islands, no substance abuse services, no crisis housing for men and very few outreach workers who are stretched trying to service multiple distinct communities;
- that crucial responses such as High Risk Teams and Community Justice Groups are currently run on a volunteer basis rather than being appropriately funded; and
- that challenges are compounded by lack of transport and investment in emergency infrastructure to address this—with the associated isolation and prohibitive cost that this brings.

As such, the significant work already underway to develop a standalone First Nations National Plan is taking the lead by tailoring responses to the specific needs and strengths of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. This Plan, being co-designed with First Nations leaders, communities and organisations, seeks to embed culturally informed practices at every level of the DFSV framework. Embedding and expanding these efforts is crucial in ensuring that the initiatives within this Plan are not only sustained but also scaled to meet broader and evolving community needs. The Review also acknowledges that it is essential that culturally-informed and self-determined practices are not merely add-ons but are deeply embedded within the broader DFSV prevention framework.

In addition to tailoring services to be culturally safe and responsive, this also involves drawing on the wisdom and knowledge of communities, including Elders, and ensuring that First Nations communities, are at the forefront of designing, implementing, and evaluating these services. It also requires a commitment to Indigenous data sovereignty, as noted again later in the report; recognising the importance of community-controlled and led organisations; and ensuring that First Nations voices are central to decision-making processes.

Implementation will also necessitate strong cross-sector collaboration. Given the intersectional nature of the issues faced by First Nations women and communities, responses must be holistic and integrated across health, justice, housing and social services (including child protection). This should draw on the strengths of existing programs, such as Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisations (ACCHOs), while addressing gaps identified by the Inquiry.

Alongside the standalone First Nations National Plan, it is essential that all actions from this recommendation align with the reform areas of the *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Action Plan 2023–2025* which call for: voice, self-determination and agency; strength, resilience and therapeutic healing; reform of institutions and systems; adequate evidence and data eco-systems; and inclusion and intersectionality. Actions and responses to this recommendation should also consider commitments under Target 13 of the *National Agreement on Closing the Gap*, which calls for, by 2031, the rate of all forms of family violence and abuse against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and children to be reduced by at least 50 per cent, as progress towards zero.²³

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Action Plan

“ Truth-telling is a foundational stone within Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples’ healing practices. Establishing an honest account of events and processes, both historical and contemporary, is essential to forming mutual understanding between non-Indigenous people and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.”

— *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Action Plan 2023–2025*

Action Plan Reform Areas:

- 1. Voice, self-determination and agency**
Shared decision-making in genuine partnership with government. Community-led solutions including primary prevention, early intervention, response and recovery services. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples are front and centre of the design and delivery.
- 2. Strength, resilience and therapeutic healing**
Primary prevention, early intervention, response and recovery services are trauma-informed, healing-focused, culturally safe, place-based and kinship centred. Cultural knowledge and practices are developed by and for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to address the impacts of intergenerational trauma. Health and wellbeing are prioritised.
- 3. Reform institutions and systems**
Whole-of-government responses to eliminate systemic biases and structural racism are embedded across the family, domestic and sexual violence service system. Build capacity in the workforce.
- 4. Evidence and data eco-systems – understanding our stories**
A local, culturally informed data and evidence eco-system is created and managed by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.
- 5. Inclusion and intersectionality**
Diverse experiences are acknowledged including women, girls, men, boys, Elders, Stolen Generations, people living remotely, people with disability, and LGBTIQ+ Sistergirl and Brotherboy communities.

Finally, success hinges on effective monitoring and accountability. This includes ensuring that the progress of culturally-informed and self-determined approaches to DFSV are regularly reviewed and that there is transparent reporting on the outcomes of initiatives under the First Nations National Plan. It is also critical that these efforts are adequately resourced, with clear commitment from all levels of government to sustain and expand these initiatives over time. This represents a vital step towards ensuring that the unique needs of First Nations women, families, and communities are met within the national DFSV response framework.



Recommendation 2

The Commonwealth and state and territory governments to strongly embed and build on culturally-informed and place-based domestic, family and sexual violence responses for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women, families and communities, noting the significant work under way to develop a First Nations National Plan. This should include genuine and ongoing consideration of the evidence provided to the Senate Inquiry into Missing and Murdered First Nations women and children, and the commitments under Target 13 of the *National Agreement on Closing the Gap*.

Recognising intersecting identities and experiences

The Review recognises with deep respect the work being led by diverse and marginalised communities across Australia to end gender-based violence. People and organisations are standing up to ensure that their specific experiences of violence are understood as gender-based violence and become an integral part of Australia's DFSV response. The Review acknowledges that this work has often gone unheard and that more focus is urgently needed to prevent violence against people with intersecting identities.

The Review acknowledges the way in which users of violence may prey on points of diversity and difference to further their abuse. This Review heard that this includes, but is not limited to:

- isolation of First Nations women from their communities, particularly in remote areas such as the Torres Strait, as well as threats to report to statutory authorities, such as child protection;
- withholding of medication (including hormones and gender-affirming medication); income support payments; and mobility and accessibility devices;
- sexual control through restrictive practices (chemical, physical and mechanical restraints);
- gender-based violence that is legally permitted against women and girls with disability and older women, such as third-party consent by guardians (including family members) or tribunals for sterilisation procedures, menstrual suppression, contraception and abortion;
- substituted decision-making (perpetrators taking out guardianship orders or power of attorney), and threatening to report, or actual reports to child protection based on disability;
- threats to 'out' a partner or family member or to reveal their HIV status to others;
- threats to 'out' a victim-survivor who is engaged in the sex work industry;
- isolation of victim-survivors in regional and remote communities, including through removing means of transport, as well as in the context of the availability of guns; and
- isolation of victim-survivors in migrant and refugee communities, including through weaponisation of insecure visa status.

The Review also recognises the way in which homophobia, transphobia, racism, xenophobia, ableism and ageism intersect with sexism to compound and influence the violence perpetrated against women, children and gender-diverse people, including trans women and men and sister-girls and brother-boys. This is compounded by intersecting experiences of systemic marginalisation and oppression, including colonisation, resulting in certain groups of people being at greater risk of experiencing violence.

Despite this, responses to these diverse experiences through law, policy and practice continue to be uncoordinated, piecemeal and ad hoc and often fail to involve the voices of lived experience from the communities for which they are designed. The lack of an intersectional analysis and multi-sectoral collaboration means that specific concerns for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, long term and recently arrived migrant and refugee communities, women and children with disabilities, LGBTIQ+ communities, older women and people in regional and remote communities remain inadequately identified and addressed.



The ASPIRE Project

The Review heard about a range of initiatives that work with and are led by diverse communities to better understand and more appropriately tailor responses to their experiences of violence. For example, the Analysing Safety and Place in Immigrant and Refugee Experience (ASPIRE) Project worked with several communities across metropolitan and regional Tasmania and Victoria to generate rich evidence about immigrant and refugee women's experiences of violence. The participatory research project encouraged culturally-appropriate prevention and support interventions and supported building local communities' awareness and capacity to respond to violence against immigrant and refugee women.²⁴

As such, the Review acknowledges that generalist or 'mainstream' services cannot adequately or appropriately meet the needs of diverse communities. Instead, the Review recognises the value of developing intersectional and tailored DSFV responses. The Review therefore recommends that governments give priority to the experiences and needs of diverse communities and those experiencing marginalisation in implementing every recommendation in this report. This is because a focus on what works for those experiencing marginalisation or with intersecting needs can lay the foundation for population-wide success.

Community-led, sustained genuine co-design is also crucial for creating lasting and meaningful change. The Review acknowledges that it is vital that communities are supported to identify the priorities that are of greatest urgency and value to them, as well as enabled through real-time and dynamic feedback processes to keep responses relevant and responsive to changing needs. Equally, it is vital that this occur through appropriately resourced and long term approaches to ensure that those priorities are actioned and reviewed, with a view to ultimately embedding them through relevant structural mechanisms.



Recommendation 3

The Commonwealth and state and territory governments to prioritise the experiences of communities that are marginalised especially Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, migrant and refugee communities, women and children with disabilities, LGBTIQ+ people, older women and regional and remote communities in implementing all of the recommendations in this report. Addressing gender-based violence for communities experiencing intersecting forms of marginalisation lays the foundation for population-wide success. Where applicable, implementation should involve a genuine and sustained co-design approach to ensure that affected communities are identifying priorities of greatest urgency and value to them.

The prevention potential

When the Australian Government released the first iteration of the *National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children 2010–2022* (First National Plan) in February 2011, followed by the associated *Change the story* prevention framework in November 2015, this approach was innovative and world-leading.²⁵ It was based on international evidence that highlighted the strong correlation between harmful gender stereotypes, violence-supportive attitudes and gender inequality and the perpetration of violence against women and children.²⁶

“ We must face up to where we are falling short and look for new ways to do better ... We must recognise that gender equality—while essential—does not safeguard against violence on its own. Indeed, even nations that lead the world on measures of gender equality are dealing with their own shocking rates of violence. Some of it—in the cruellest of ironies—occurring as a reaction to the progress being made ... This is why addressing family violence cannot begin and end with efforts to achieve gender equity or economic equality. We have to go deeper than that.”

— Prime Minister, the Hon Anthony Albanese MP.²⁷

At a time when no other country had a nationally coordinated approach to prevention, the Review recognises that Australia’s commitment to placing the improvement of community attitudes, respectful relationships and gender equality at the core of its mission to reduce gendered violence was groundbreaking. Gender inequality and harmful gendered attitudes are perennial challenges. Highlighting the historic and social context within which gendered violence thrives—and locking it in so firmly as the foundation for change—was significant. The Review acknowledges that we must keep sight of these longer-term objectives to achieve equality and end injustice for all Australians.

In the decade since the launch of the First National Plan, Australia’s prevention framework has evolved. In response to the advocacy of First Nations women, for example, it has been updated to recognise how the impacts of colonisation, racism, heterosexism, ableism and other forms of structural injustice all interact with gender, heavily influencing many people’s experience violence and associated harms.²⁸

The past decade has also seen a rapid expansion in the evidence base. Improved evidence exists around the way in which certain factors—such as adverse childhood experiences, mental health and substance abuse—also intersect with gender and other inequalities to drive violence and abuse, compound harm and limit access to support.²⁹

Australia has also begun to grapple more effectively with certain forms of gendered violence, including coercive control and its manifestations in financial and technological abuse.³⁰ Although local perpetration data needs to be developed further, a growing evidence base is now available on the pathways that lead to perpetration.³¹ This research shows how to interrupt those predictable pathways and to redirect the trajectories of those already perpetrating.³²

The Review acknowledges, however, that despite improvements to gender equality in a number of areas, we have not seen an associated downturn in the rates of gender-based violence.³³ In other words, women may be experiencing some improvements in socio-economic and other forms of equality, but still fear walking home alone or what awaits them when they get there. This is a serious impediment to our ongoing project to improve equality. In fact, we will not achieve gender equality until we see tangible reductions in gender-based violence.³⁴

Australia also faces an evolving threat environment, in which gains made over the past decade by dedicated prevention practitioners are being undermined by a growing backlash against women's rights, LGBTIQ+ diversity, and the campaign for racial equity.³⁵ This backlash is being orchestrated globally by a range of actors who are not only influencing global politics, but also targeting disaffected young men, especially online.³⁶

This impact is playing out in classrooms across Australia, where sexual harassment from male students towards teachers and peers is rising sharply,³⁷ as well as in the radicalisation of some young men globally.³⁸ Australia currently lacks a coherent strategy for responding to this backlash. If Australia does not meet this challenge, the Review notes that this will likely result in higher rates of violence and abuse. If we cannot meaningfully connect with men and boys, we risk undoing decades of progress.

As recognised above, Australia has reached a period of such acute crisis that it must be seen as a national emergency. At such a critical inflection point, we need to bring our collective work and efforts together. As the evidence continues to grow and expand, the Review has concluded that our approach must expand with it—and that every prevention opportunity must be unlocked. In other words, we need to be flexible and responsive and pull every lever available to us—as long as we are doing so in a domestic, family and sexual violence (DFSV)-informed way.

This means interrogating whether privileging one approach or lens over another might be holding back good work in certain areas. For example, *Change the story*, the framework that guides the national approach to prevention, designates known risk factors for violence—such as child maltreatment, trauma, and substance abuse—as 'reinforcing factors', secondary to the gendered drivers of violence.³⁹

While noting that these factors intersect with gender in many ways, this Review recognises that, in practice, the division of risk factors into first order/second order issues has led to those secondary risk factors being deprioritised, and some completely neglected. This approach does not align with internationally accepted prevention models, such as the World Health Organization Violence Prevention Alliance, which seek to address the interaction between *all* risk factors—at the individual, relationship, community and societal level.⁴⁰

The Review recognises that *Change the story* prioritises 'primary' prevention over 'secondary' and 'tertiary' prevention, designating 'primary' prevention as the form that will have the largest impact on gender-based violence.⁴¹ The Review heard from those working on the frontline and in community-based settings that, while the distinctions of 'primary', 'secondary' and 'tertiary' prevention may have meaning at a policy and theoretical level, the reality in practice is that they constantly overlap. What is more, the Review heard that these forms of prevention need to be operationalised *together* for service responses to be effective.

Further, the Review heard that this theoretical categorisation, as well as the siloing of services, often renders the real-life experiences of victim-survivors invisible. For example, the Review heard that engagement with a young person who is homeless and needs accommodation may formally be categorised as 'early intervention' if this is their first touchpoint with the homelessness sector. This young person's need for housing security will likely follow a long history of abuse, however, during which time they will have been visible to other services which all had opportunities to interrupt that young person's trajectory of harm and prevent it from escalating. 'Early intervention' for this young person therefore should have involved support early in childhood to identify and prevent further experiences of harm, rather than waiting till they touched the homelessness system. This highlights that, when it comes to the lived experience of people who experience and/or use violence, the neat lines that professionals have drawn around 'types' of prevention are abstract and can even lead to harm.

Similarly, the Review notes that Respectful Relationships programs in schools are classified as primary prevention—preventing violence before it occurs. The disclosures that those programs can elicit, however—and the response and referrals that should accompany these disclosures—fall within different categories that are theoretically 'downstream' from primary prevention. If these are not coordinated and resourced as part of a holistic response that incorporates awareness raising, education, response and support, we are missing a critical opportunity to prevent current and future harm. Even worse, young people may end up wishing that they had not disclosed.

Prevention opportunities exist across every domain—early intervention, response and recovery—and these should be given equal focus in our prevention strategies. More broadly, a violence prevention lens should be applied to every interaction with people using or experiencing DFSV, whether that be in schools, in court, in a doctor's rooms, or at a refuge for women and children.

The Review calls for every opportunity, and every available mechanism, to be activated to stem trajectories of harm. Significant prevention potential exists in places and spaces that our current prevention framework considers 'secondary' or unorthodox. These must be incorporated into our expanded approach to more effectively reduce DFSV.

The challenge, of course, does not just relate to conceptualisation, but how that impacts on funding and coordination. For example, the Review heard from many frontline services that current funding streams do not enable them to provide a holistic community-based response, but instead compel them to privilege one 'type' of prevention over another and design their programs within a narrow frame. In many cases, these frontline services do the holistic work regardless. Because this is neither officially funded nor accounted for, however, it puts enormous pressure on services—either to find philanthropic funds to do the work properly, or to do the extra work unfunded—leading to burn out and threatening their sustainability.

When examining the levers at our disposal, the Review has been both practical and broad. This has been in keeping with its Terms of Reference, scoping what the Review is calling 'the prevention potential', whereby we seek to apply all available evidence-based approaches that prevent and reduce DFSV in a practical way.⁴² This includes the specific focus on homicide prevention, which the current prevention framework positions at the extreme (or tertiary) end of our responses.

When homicides of women and children are escalating—and when we are faced with a global wave of organised misogyny—Australia must be open-minded and willing to interrogate how it can improve. In any area of policy, it is vital that we constantly reassess; test our approaches for efficacy and impact and collaborate.

Gender-based violence is endemic. It has touched nearly everyone in some way (even at early ages), either through their own lived experience or that of their parents and grandparents.⁴³ Prevention work is predominantly an effort at stemming the transmission or repetition of harm. Further, there is no one single factor that leads to perpetration. In keeping with a public health approach, the Review notes that we must accurately identify and direct attention to those risk factors, so we can also identify the protective factors and target our responses effectively.

The primary finding of this Review is that potential for prevention exists in more areas than Australia has previously recognised. This potential is explored throughout the remainder of this report, in which the Review highlights priority areas to guide policy action and inspire new ways of thinking and responding to this emergency. The Review invites policy and decision makers to rethink the way that they perceive prevention and the resulting opportunities for greater focus and investment. This was the task set out in the Review's Terms of Reference. It encourages policy and decision makers to recognise and truly understand that 'prevention' is not just about stopping violence before it starts, but also acting to prevent it from occurring again, as well as from escalating into ongoing harm.

Of equal importance is the invitation to break down current silos and expand our approach so that we do not get in the way of our own success. To do this, we must examine the current theory of change that informs our national prevention framework to ensure that it enables good practice; recognises intersectional experiences of all kinds; and, consistent with models of continuous improvement normalised across public health strategies, learns from and adapts to a perpetually growing evidence base. We have a responsibility, particularly to current and future generations, to be mature and curious in our approach to prevention, and constantly reassess whether our strategies are having the desired effect. If we can expand and unlock the potential of prevention, we will get closer to our shared goal: a country in which everybody feels valued, respected and safe.

Accordingly, the Review recommends that an independent review of *Change the story* be conducted by a multi-disciplinary team to keep pace with the evolving evidence base, both domestically and internationally, and to ensure that it accounts for the intersecting experiences of different communities. To accelerate community-based prevention interventions and understand what works in an Australian context, the Review also recommends the establishment of a five-year Prevention Innovation Fund, co-funded by the Commonwealth and states and territories. The purpose of this fund should be to unlock the prevention potential by:

- supporting critical prevention work being conducted in organisations across the country to respond to violence that has already occurred and to prevent further violence; and
- exploring interventions to prevent violence that meet different needs of local communities; and testing new approaches to prevention.

All projects funded under the Fund should be properly evaluated and inform the national evidence base through a new clearing house function in the Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence Commission (see *Recommendation 19*). The Fund should also:

- address key action areas named in this Review, the domains of the National Plan and be closely informed by Action 8 of the *First Action Plan 2023–2027*;⁴⁴
- explicitly prioritise intersectional approaches—including efforts to end violence against First Nations women and children, women and children with disability, migrant and refugee women and children, LGBTQIA+ people; and in remote and regional parts of Australia like the Torres Strait;
- prioritise community-controlled organisations and the specialist DFSV sector, including the sexual violence and men’s behaviour change program sector;
- prioritise collaborative and joined-up proposals and require non-specialist organisations (including alcohol and other drugs and homelessness services) to partner with a specialist DFSV service to be eligible;
- prioritise programs that target early intervention and recovery for children and young people; and
- be managed by an advisory panel that includes frontline service providers, lived experience advisors, and government representatives.



Recommendation 4

The Commonwealth and state and territory governments to expand their approach to prevention to acknowledge the global evidence base to leverage all prevention touchpoints more effectively. This should include:

- a. an independent review and expansion of Change the story beyond primary prevention, with a focus on accommodating the evolving global evidence base around the prevention of violence across early intervention, response and recovery; and
- b. establishing a five-year co-funded Prevention Innovation Fund, understanding what works better in an Australian context and at a community level.

Prevention through people



Safety and recovery for children and young people



Approximately one child is killed as a result of family violence every fortnight in Australia.⁴⁵

Australia's first National Child Maltreatment Study found that two thirds of Australians have been abused, neglected or exposed to domestic and family violence as children.⁴⁶ Children with disability are particularly at risk, as are children and young people from First Nations communities.⁴⁷

Child maltreatment disproportionately affects girls. As found in *The Australian Child Maltreatment Study* (Child Maltreatment Study), compared with young men, young women reported substantially higher rates of emotional abuse, child sexual abuse and neglect. However, no gender differences were found on rates of physical abuse and exposure to domestic violence. Compared to the full sample, young people (aged 16–24 years) reported higher levels of exposure to domestic violence and emotional abuse. The Child Maltreatment Study also found similar levels of sexual abuse and neglect and lower levels of physical abuse in young people compared to the full sample.⁴⁸

The first urgent area of prevention potential prioritised by the Review—but one that has largely remained untapped—is adequate recognition and support for children and young people as victim-survivors in their own right.⁴⁹ This is because, while children's experiences are acknowledged in the *National Plan to End Violence against Women and Children 2022–2032* (National Plan), this recognition is rarely being translated into services, safety and support.

Evidence indicates that the rate at which children and young people are experiencing violence is its own national emergency, with recent studies on the rates of child sexual abuse, child maltreatment and filicide, as well as suicides by young people following histories of trauma, demonstrating a shocking prevalence of harm from adult-perpetration—itsself a highly gendered phenomenon.⁵⁰

The Review recognises that evidence further demonstrates a clear link between experiences of different types of adult-perpetrated abuse in childhood with future victimisation, as well as the use of violence by young people at home and in intimate relationships.⁵¹ Preventing harm against children, and providing safety, support and recovery if it does occur, therefore becomes a powerful way of preventing violence in the future, including lethal violence, as well as in the immediate term.



The Victorian Crime Statistics Agency indicates that over 14,000 affected family members in a family violence police report from March 2023 to March 2024 were aged 15–24.⁵² Similarly, data from the Australian Institute of Family Studies showed that almost a third of 18- and 19-year-olds had experienced intimate partner violence.⁵³ Given that violence is under-reported by young people, and systems are still developing the capacity to identify young people as victim-survivors, this means that the actual figure is likely to be considerably higher.

From 2010-2011 to 2020-2021, 5,024 young people had at least one family and domestic violence (FDV)-related hospital stay while aged under 18. This equates to one child per day having an FDV hospital stay.⁵⁴

Among the 5,024 young people who had an FDV-related hospital stay:

- just over half (54 per cent) were female;
- around one third (33 per cent) were Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people; and
- over one-third (37 per cent) had their first FDV hospital stay before the age of 5.⁵⁵

Opportunities to intervene, however, are often missed by child protection responses that are poorly resourced, ill-equipped to respond to adults using harm, disconnected from communities and invariably under strain.⁵⁶ Despite evidence clearly demonstrating that young people need to be involved in designing youth-focused solutions and in a way that holds authority and is sustained, the possibilities enabled by a youth-specific service system have also not been developed in a consistent way.⁵⁷ In fact, the Review heard that more young people were being consulted across Australia than were receiving appropriate, youth-specific services that addressed their needs.

As a result, the Review sees an urgent need for a mechanism that can hold government at all levels accountable for the way that services and systems respond to children and young people and can help to realise the stated intent of the National Plan. The Review recommends the establishment of a Youth Taskforce, supported by the Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence Commission (DFSV Commission) that leads a national, strategic and coordinated approach to recognising and responding to children and young people's experience of domestic, family and sexual violence (DFSV) and preventing it from occurring, both now and in the future.

This Taskforce should be appropriately resourced, with a remit to examine all aspects of the National Plan relating to children and young people – including to define what recognising them as 'victim-survivors in their own right' should mean to children and young people in reality.⁵⁸ The Taskforce should also consider systems which directly affect children and young people, such as the family law, child support, child protection systems, as well service requirements for consent to access services.⁵⁹

The Review also recommends that all governments take immediate actions to support children and young people who have experienced violence and abuse. First, the Review recommends an uplift in investment and focus on support and recovery for children who have experienced DFSV. This includes investment in services which enable early identification of abuse—including in pre-natal, peri-natal, early childhood health and education settings as well as community-led services and out-of-home care—and which support the recovery of infants and small children and facilitate and repair relationships with a protective parent in the wake of violence and system intervention.

In particular, state and territory governments should invest in and be guided by community-led responses that: seek to preserve family and kinship arrangements; facilitate access to early childhood health and education for First Nations children, particularly in remote communities; address the harm of family law systems; and seek to respond to associated *National Agreement on Closing the Gap* targets.

The Review highlights the importance of specific supports for children of homicide victims, noting recent research that highlights the acute lack in this area as well as calls from the Inquiry into Missing and Murdered First Nations Women and Children for broader supports across families and kinship networks.⁶⁰

The Review also encourages greater use of DFSV-informed, non-adversarial approaches, including through consideration of findings from the pending Review of the Family Relationships Services Program as well as intensive training for Independent Children's Lawyers and independent report writers on the impacts of trauma on children and the way in which trauma can impact behaviours in children and protective parents. Vulnerable families should be supported to resolve family law matters outside harmful adversarial processes. Evidence has long shown how the adversarial family law system can cause acute ongoing trauma for children and young people, with repercussions including severe mental ill-health, homelessness and escalation of risk-taking behaviours.



Impact of trauma

Research has pointed to the impact of trauma on children's neurological and behavioural development, as well as to the significant overrepresentation of disability and neurodivergence in young people using violence at home.⁶¹ One study of legal system responses found that 24 per cent of young people across a sample of court and legal files specifically featured young people who were identified as having a cognitive impairment or, most specifically, Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD).⁶² This study did not suggest that neurodivergence or disability were a causal or contributing factor to adolescent violence in the home (AVITH). Rather, it highlighted that significant behaviours of concern resulting from young people's unmet support needs were being identified by the social service and legal systems as family violence instead.

Second, the Review recommends a significant investment and focus on development of services and responses that are age appropriate, youth-specific, trauma-informed, culturally appropriate and place based. These responses should be able to respond to experiences of DFSV in young people, including immediate safety, immediate and longer-term support, feelings of responsibility for siblings and even family pets; engagement in education and unmet legal needs, including so that intervention can prevent escalation of trauma and potential self-harm and suicidal ideation.⁶³ The Review recognises growing evidence that contact with service systems too often entrenches harm, disconnect from vital support environments such as education, and discourages future help-seeking, including by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people, young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds, young people with disability and young people identifying as LGBTIQ+.⁶⁴



Intersecting considerations and intergenerational transmission

Research on intergenerational transmission of violence in Australia finds that:

- children had higher odds of emotional/behavioural difficulties at age four associated with maternal violence exposures (maternal childhood abuse or intimate partner violence) and poor maternal physical or mental health;⁶⁵ and
- about 9 in 10 young people aged 16 to 20 who had used violence against a family member in their lifetime had witnessed FDV or been targeted by child abuse.⁶⁶

Young people from particular cohorts are at greater risk of violence. For example:

- Young people with diverse gender and sexual identities experience disproportionate rates of harm and additional barriers to support. This may include threats to ‘out’ them, while evidence suggests inadequate Child Protection responses to young people with diverse gender and sexual identities experiencing violence from their families of origin.⁶⁷
- Young people disengaged from school may often be experiencing family violence, with disengagement or exclusion from school removing opportunities for disclosure and support—a factor which increased over COVID-19 and has not subsequently recovered.⁶⁸
- Young people who have experienced trauma but are not in the care of a protective parent are also more vulnerable to additional violence,⁶⁹ including where they have ‘aged out’ of Child Protection systems.⁷⁰ This is despite lack of access to supports to live outside home, such as the Escaping Violence Payment, and despite Australian jurisdictions not being required to provide accommodation to those who have aged out of state care, as is the case in some international jurisdictions.⁷¹
- This lack of support or accommodation increases vulnerability to intimate partner violence, particularly where young people have no stable housing and are vulnerable to subsequent exploitation or the use of “survival sex” to put a roof over their heads.⁷²

The Review further highlights evidence indicating the significant prevalence of current and ongoing experiences of adult-perpetrated harm in the lives of young people who use violence.⁷³ It is vital to leverage available frameworks that can guide the development of a Model of Care for appropriate responses to the use of violence at home by young people, as well as emerging evidence about responses to young people’s use of violence in intimate relationships.⁷⁴ This includes evidence about the types of responses which are appropriate and work with young people on their own terms, as well as the types of interventions which are likely to make young people disengage or, worse, to escalate harm, such as service responses or approaches primarily designed for adults.⁷⁵



The Review heard about several initiatives and programs to address AVITH and the effects of violence in young people's lives:

- The AVITH Collaborative Practice Framework was developed through iterative engagement with practitioners as part of the larger “WRAP around families experiencing adolescent violence in the home (AVITH): Towards a collaborative service response” research project. The Framework aims to: support shared knowledge and consistency of practice; improve recognition of AVITH at the organisational and system levels; ensure role clarity across the system; and bridge knowledge gaps between systems. The Framework explains what the pillars of collaborative practice mean for practitioners, organisations and governments; provides practice examples of each of the collaborative practice principles; and identifies the enablers of collaborative practice. It will be useful to practitioners, organisations and government agencies working in the AVITH space.⁷⁶
- The K.I.N.D. program at Brisbane Youth Service stands for Kinship, Improving relationships, No violence and Developing skills. It works with young people, partners and family members to deal with the effects of violence in their lives. The Program aims to build wellbeing through enabling young people to better understand and manage their close relationships. Young people are supported through an individualised, one-on-one program aimed at understanding their behaviours and developing skills to respond in safe, non-violent, and healthy ways. The program aims to help young people develop emotional intelligence and emotional regulation, as well as develop insight into the impact of their behaviour on those around them, enhancing accountability. It recognises that domestic violence and homelessness intersect in young people's lives and aims to offer effective support at a critical development stage of early adulthood, and in a way that respects their experiences of trauma.⁷⁷

Finally, the Review notes the relationship between experiences of DFSV and youth homelessness.⁷⁸ Young people who have experienced violence are too often left homeless or seek security through other means. This can result in couch surfing or ‘survival sex’, simply because this option is safer than what they face at home, or other forms of risk-taking behaviour, including contact with the criminal justice system.⁷⁹ The Review heard that young people are often disbelieved about their experiences and presumed to be misrepresenting their circumstances or ‘misbehaving’ when seeking shelter away from their family of origin. Additionally, the Review heard that systems expect evidence of parental consent in circumstances where this is neither appropriate nor safe, such as the requirement for parental signature on Centrelink applications for an ‘unreasonable to live at home payment’. The Review also recognises that young people exiting youth detention or in out-of-home care are often placed in motels, caravan parks or other types of unstable and unsafe accommodation, which is likely to escalate harm.



Programs working to support the safety and recovery of children and young people

The Review heard about a range of different programs working to support the safety and recovery of children and young people:

- Nabu is Waminda’s family preservation and restoration program in the Illawarra and Shoalhaven region. Nabu is community-led and offers intensive support, walking alongside Aboriginal families where statutory authorities are involved or might be in the future. Nabu is a team of Elders, cultural mentors, family and program support workers, caseworkers and counsellors, and works with families for up to 12–18 months. The aim of the program is to keep families together and out of the system or to support them to reunite.⁸⁰
- The Safe and Together Model is a well-recognised approach to working with families which notes that “systems that touch on domestic violence and coercive control are often blind to the choices of perpetrators as parents ... The Safe & Together Model fills the gaps in knowledge and practice and assists all systems touching on domestic violence and child wellbeing to become domestic abuse-informed, supporting child well-being and safety across all partners in the domestic violence community.”⁸¹
- Melbourne City Mission’s Amplify Project seeks to understand the systemic gaps in providing care and support to young people experiencing family violence. By understanding what improvements can be made to family violence policies, laws, services, and practice, it works to ensure that young people are recognised as victim-survivors in their own right and are provided the services and support they need to live a safe, independent and fulfilling life outside of the homelessness system.⁸²

The Review notes with concern the conclusion of an evaluation of the Escaping Violence Payment pilot that this payment should not be extended to people below the age of 18 on the assumption that young people will be in the care of child protection systems.⁸³ As young people aged 15 or over have generally ‘aged out’ of child protection systems and may also be escaping violence without the care of a protective parent, the Review recommends urgent uptake of the evaluation’s separate conclusion that a tailored response be developed for this cohort of young people. This includes to provide financial assistance and other support to enable them to remain engaged in education and other supports, particularly where there are few services available in regional and remote areas.

“ There has been strong, ongoing and necessary advocacy around women being believed, but not much has changed for children and young people. We are often blamed and stigmatised for our own abuse and deemed ‘troublemakers’ if we act out in response to being abused or neglected. Women are often praised for leaving family violence situations, as they should be—but when children and young people leave in response to toxic family dynamics, we are labelled as ‘absconding,’ ‘rebellious’ or ‘naughty.’”⁸⁴

— Morgan Cataldo and the Y-Change team of Lived Experience Consultants (2020)

When implementing the above, the Review similarly encourages a broadening of consent requirements in applications for other support, such as Centrelink support or other services, for young people experiencing violence. Consent from a protective parent should be considered sufficient in circumstances where there is a history of violence from the other parent, particularly where there is potential for systems abuse in the context of Family Law proceedings. Alternatively, systems and services should consider accepting consent from a trusted adult in a young person's life, such as a caseworker or even an extended family member, where it is not safe for a young person to re-engage with either parent.



Recommendation 5

The Commonwealth and state and territory governments to adopt a strategic and coordinated approach to embedding the distinct experiences of children and young people in their own right. This includes through the establishment of a Youth Taskforce under the *National Plan to End Violence against Women and Children 2022–2032*, supported by the Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence Commission, to ensure implementation of the National Plan accelerates a focus on children and young people.

This strategic work should be complemented by more immediate efforts to support children and young people who have experienced violence, including:

- a. support and recovery for young children, with a focus on programmatic responses which maintain and repair a relationship with the protective parent, including in the context of the family law system, as well as upskilling Independent Children's Lawyers (Commonwealth and states and territories);
- b. developing tailored and developmentally appropriate, as well as youth-specific and informed, service responses for child sexual abuse, children and young people who have experienced family violence, young people using violence at home, and young people using and/or experiencing violence in intimate relationships, drawing on available evidence and practice frameworks available through Australia's National Research Organisation for Women's Safety (ANROWS) (states and territories); and
- c. in recognition that certain cohorts of young people will not be in the care of statutory child protection systems or a protective parent, develop and deliver an appropriate and tailored response to young people escaping violence and seeking financial support and safe housing (Commonwealth and states and territories).

Working with men and boys to promote healthy masculinities

The Review heard that a more strategic, evidence-based effort is required to respond to Action 5 in the *First Action Plan 2023–2027* under the National Plan that is focused on men and boys.⁸⁵ Connecting with men and boys as active decision makers and doing so in a meaningful way can engage them in the goal of violence prevention—including preventing the impacts that this violence, as well as its drivers, can have on men and boys themselves.

The Review acknowledges that efforts to do so must be strength-based, intentional, evidence-based and, crucially, DFSV-informed. The first port of call is to recognise the breadth of Australian men and masculinities by creating an advisory mechanism that represents diverse groups of men. This would support the effective tailoring of interventions to First Nations men, men from different cultural and religious backgrounds, and men who identify as gender or sexually diverse. While violence prevention initiatives have typically overlooked the lived experience of men and boys, either as people who use violence, victim-survivors, or both, this approach has shown promise in the development of revised definitions of healthy masculinities.⁸⁶

Population-wide efforts have not yet managed to galvanise the male population as intended. As such, the Review heard that any engagement with men and boys must mirror the complexity and diversity of their experience, including reaching them through health, education and the tech industry settings. Essential to such work is successful framing and communication of how men's engagement in preventing and ending DFSV will improve not only the lives of women and children, but also their own. This requires respecting and responding to histories of childhood maltreatment, addiction and mental health issues in men and boys with a focus on compassionate accountability.

To support these efforts, there must also be a focus on definition and measurement, given that national efforts to date have lacked coordination and focused primarily on measuring 'traditional' masculine norms.⁸⁷ These norms are often referred to as the 'man box': being ideas that boys and men should rigidly embody strength, self-reliance, and harmful attitudes towards women to meet their socialised gender role.⁸⁸

The Review heard that continuing to focus on masculinity from this deficit-based lens is unlikely to resonate with boys and men and can trigger substantial backlash or leave men and boys expressing limited awareness of positive ways to interact and behave.⁸⁹ To leverage healthy masculinities as they emerge, a co-designed tool should be developed and used in evaluations of all intervention activities across the prevention trajectory, including in the health system, sporting clubs, schools and workplaces, to understand what change we are measuring.



Currently, among Australian men, nearly 20 per cent believe that it is legitimate to violently resist feminism, and nearly 10 per cent find it understandable that young men who are rejected by women resort to violent vengeance.⁹⁰

A young man talking about why he was motivated to join the 'manosphere':

“ I felt as though I finally wasn't alone. I felt as though my voice did matter, and that I did have a place to fit in. It's very well known that women have a support network around them, men tend not to have the same support network”.⁹¹

Further, the Review has been deeply cognisant of the rising threat of online misogyny and powerful algorithms that threaten to mobilise men against gender equality, including in the so-called 'manosphere'.⁹² This has also been recognised as contributing to a rise in broader radicalisation. Online content remains increasingly unchecked and unmoderated, with young men becoming more isolated the longer that they spend time in these environments.⁹³ Health experts are therefore advocating for the attitudes held up by the 'manosphere' to be considered criminogenic in nature, given that misogynistic beliefs are a significant predictor of most forms of violent extremism and violence against women.⁹⁴

With platforms, content themes and modes of communication proliferating at a rapid rate, the Review recognises that we must build and leverage evidence, including lived experience, to inform intervention design.⁹⁵ The Review heard that Government should seek out and work alongside existing sector efforts to help define an aspirational, flexible view of the future of healthy masculinities and have an associated set of guidelines to inform all campaign and program design and implementation with men and boys.

Finally, the Review heard that key life transitions are often points of intervention for boys and men, as they are typically accompanied by a greater openness to help-seeking and behaviour change, alongside more likely contact with health and social services.

This applies especially to transitions in employment, intimate relationship breakdown and the transition to fatherhood, as well as to experiences of new arrival following migration. These transitions are also points often linked with the escalation of violence in tandem with an imbalance in men's resources for healthy distress management and emotional regulation amid transition.⁹⁶ Evidence suggests that openness to intervention and help-seeking do exist at this point, with new fathers who have used violence indicating support for a dedicated program to assist them in navigating the transition to fatherhood.⁹⁷ Men navigating relationship breakdown have also shown diverse patterns of help-seeking, spanning solitary and interpersonal work to better themselves.⁹⁸ The Review therefore recognises a clear need for wrap-around and holistic support, including for men's mental health and wellbeing, that engages with men in contexts and environments which feel secure, familiar and in which they can explore their values and how men want to perceive themselves, especially in relation to intimate partners and children.⁹⁹



The Review heard about a range of successful healthy masculinities models:

- *She is Not Your Rehab* in New Zealand (NZ) focuses on 'compassionate accountability' in their programs and messaging to men. Their new app 'Inner Boy' provides a male-oriented online space for healing and reclamation of healthy identities, and grappling with intergenerational trauma. An evaluation of this program indicated that men reported being more connected, not feeling alone, and wanting to make positive changes in their lives.¹⁰⁰
- *The Man Cave* is a preventative mental health and healthy relationships program, dedicated to supporting young men in Australia navigate the complexities of modern masculinities. The Man Cave delivers a range of evidence-based workshops (implemented in high schools and online) to inspire and encourage emotional intelligence, vulnerability, resilience and openness amongst young men.¹⁰¹
- *Dardi Munwurro* runs programs to break the cycle of intergenerational trauma in Aboriginal communities and disrupt the patterns of behaviour that can result in domestic violence by addressing the social determinants of First Nations men's health with an emphasis on family, community and culture.¹⁰²
- *Caring Dads* provides an Australia-first example of an evidence-based behaviour change program helping male recidivists of violence improve their relationship with their children. A pilot evaluation of the program showed significant positive impact and reduced exposure to violence.¹⁰³
- *Fathers Rock*, an EU-wide project funded by the European Commission, aims to support fathers at the crucial juncture in which they first become fathers, improving their social and emotional capacity and helping them become engaged fathers. Importantly, an umbrella review from more than 23 countries concluded that engaged fatherhood is linked with a reduction in rates of men's violence against women, in addition to a range of benefits for children, partners and the fathers themselves.¹⁰⁴
- *The Glen* is an example of an alcohol and other drugs (AOD) rehabilitation service providing culturally safe services for men focussed on holistic men's health and wellbeing with a trauma-informed lens. Managed by an Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisation (ACCO), it provides a culturally appropriate program of rehabilitation services alongside a program to maintain and strengthen connection to Aboriginal culture, traditional practices and ongoing involvement with Aboriginal Elders.¹⁰⁵
- The NZ-based *Love Better* campaign aims to help teenagers navigate a relationship breakup healthily, amid a cultural context where 68 per cent of NZ 16- to 24-year-olds have experienced harm that went beyond the normal hurt of breaking up.¹⁰⁶
- *Beyond Equality* has worked with nearly 100,000 young men in the United Kingdom to date, engaging them through workshops in schools, workplaces, sports, and universities. These workshops help participants re-think what it means to be a man, creating healthier cultures that promote respectful relationships, help-seeking, and personal growth and resilience.¹⁰⁷

“ Equality cannot be achieved when so many women are experiencing violence at the hands of men—often from men they know. This violence can be deadly. The threat of violence alone affects women’s lives and the choices they make. [Women’s] experiences of violence are often a driver of economic inequality and can be a consequence of it. The impact of violence can be immediate, enduring and intergenerational, with long-term health, wellbeing and economic consequences.”¹⁰⁸



Recommendation 6

The Commonwealth Government, with states and territories, to develop a national, coordinated and co-designed approach to engaging with men and boys, and on healthy masculinities and violence prevention. This should include:

- a. establishing intersectional, DFSV-informed advisory mechanisms for engaging with men and boys with multi-disciplinary expertise (e.g. health, education, tech), including the establishment of an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Men’s Advisory Body;
- b. adopting a strengths-based national definition and measurement methodology for healthy masculinities to guide future campaigns and/or program implementation;
- c. developing or expanding DFSV-informed program responses across sectors, focusing on healthy relationships and masculinities throughout men’s life transitions, including school leavers, new fathers, separation/relationship breakdown, recent migration and recent unemployment; and
- d. developing a national response, attuned to the experiences of men and boys, responding to the rise of online misogyny and radicalisation through targeted investment in research to understand relevant risk factors and the extent of harm; collaboration with specialist frontline educators; and a focus on evidence-based tech-industry regulation.

Strengthen women's economic security and combat financial abuse

Women's economic equality and security is a powerful prevention lever and a protective factor against DFSV. This can be a means of preventing violence in the first place, or escaping and recovering from violence if and when it occurs. Conversely, experience of DFSV can discourage, or even force, women from the workforce, thereby eroding their financial security and making them even more vulnerable to continuing abuse, including homicide.

Noting that a range of risk factors are present in the context of homicides, research indicates that unemployment is a significant risk factor for women killed by an intimate partner.¹⁰⁹ At the same time, women who want to leave violent relationships are often discouraged from doing so because of their lack of financial resources, and the justifiable fear that no longer having their partner's financial support may force them into poverty.¹¹⁰ ABS data showed that, in 2016, almost 50 per cent of women who left violent relationships, and thus became single mothers, were reliant on government benefits for their main source of income and living in poverty.¹¹¹



Economic security and equality play crucial roles in reducing the risk of gender-based violence. When women have access to education and training, stable, flexible and well-remunerated employment and financial resources, they gain autonomy and the power to make independent decisions about their lives. This economic independence can diminish their vulnerability to abusive and violent relationships by providing the means to leave or avoid situations where they might otherwise feel trapped due to financial dependence.

Policies to encourage women into secure employment, and to be able to stay in their jobs even if they are experiencing violence, are therefore prevention measures in their own right. This is particularly the case when 2021 data from the ABS Personal Safety Survey (PSS) reported that 451,000 women have had a previous partner who has controlled or tried to control them from working or otherwise earning income. Evidence also suggests particular risks when a male partner is not employed, or when a woman earns more than her male partner and is seen by him to be violating gender norms, often leading to increased violence.¹¹²

This means that the scale of the issue needs to be urgently addressed as both a safety measure, as well as an economic one. The Review recognises existing efforts by the Commonwealth Government to encourage women experiencing violence to remain in their jobs through legislated provision of 10 days paid domestic violence leave to be required as a minimum standard in all employment awards.¹¹³ Similar provisions have existed in both private and public sectors for almost two decades, although the Review notes that the leave was often unpaid and seldom applied to part-time or casual workers. The federal legislation is currently being reviewed and is likely to reveal the extent to which this leave is being taken up by people experiencing domestic violence.

The Review also recognises broader structural efforts by the Commonwealth Government to improve women's economic security, including through other industrial relations reform, changes to tax cuts, support for parents through investments in early childhood education and care and paid parental leave, and increases to social security payments. This work is set out in the Government's *Working for Women: A Strategy for Gender Equality* and related annual reporting tools: the Women's Budget Statement and the Status of Women Report Card.

It is clear that policies to encourage women to take up and remain in employment are an essential prevention tool, and the Review endorses those efforts, especially those directed at people who may have particular challenges in obtaining or retaining employment.

The Review therefore recommends that the Commonwealth Government prioritise implementation of the Women's Economic Equality Taskforce (WEET) 2023 recommendations in a number of important areas.¹¹⁴ In particular, the Review heard that lack of access to childcare is a particular barrier to women in casual and insecure work, keeping already vulnerable women in poverty.

The Review also heard that, too often, restricted eligibility for childcare resulted in vulnerable children's exclusion from early education environments that can support their healthy and age-appropriate development, including to identify and mitigate against the effects of early trauma.

Implementation of the WEET's recommendation in relation to the Child Care Subsidy Activity Test would mean that more vulnerable women and children have access to early childhood education. This in turn can help vulnerable women to increase their financial security through employment, while supporting young children's development and potential identification of support needs.

Further, the Review recognises that restricted access to child support payments is leaving too many victim-survivors in poverty and limiting their own recovery, as well as that of their children's. Withholding of child support and/or manipulation of child support systems is also a concerning and widespread form of financial abuse. Implementation of the WEET's recommendation in this regard would help to address this injustice, while also informed by the Review's later recommendation (16) that the Commonwealth conduct an audit of systems abuse, including in the child support context.

In addition, the Review recommends that eligibility is expanded for the Low Income Super Tax Offset (LISTO). The LISTO is a superannuation payment of up to \$500 for people who earn \$37,000 or less per year. Women make up the majority of LISTO recipients and would benefit most from its expansion, with the potential to improve women's superannuation balances and economic security in retirement. Further, a recent report by the Association of Superannuation Funds of Australia estimates that increasing the upper threshold to \$45,000 and increasing the maximum payment to \$700 would lead to an additional 1.2 million additional individuals receiving LISTO. The report also notes that nearly 60 per cent of the beneficiaries of this expansion would be women.¹¹⁵

The Review also notes the Women in Super recommendation to align the LISTO with PAYG thresholds and that:

“ ... realigning the LISTO would hugely benefit women, who, according to data collated by Women in Super from thirteen member super funds, make up 63 per cent of all LISTO recipients. Specifically, aligning the LISTO with PAYG thresholds would benefit the 632,000 Australian women who are earning between \$37,000 and \$45,000. As a result, a 30 year old woman earning \$30,000, could be \$56,170 better off in retirement.”¹¹⁶

The Review therefore encourages governments to consider ways to expand eligibility for the LISTO, noting its powerful potential to increase women’s superannuation balances as they age and improve women’s economic security.

In addition to considerations around superannuation and the gendered impact that reduced financial resources can have on women in later life, the Review recognises the wider impacts of financial and other forms of abuse on older Australians. The Review notes that this includes in the context of adult children returning to live with their parents after having used DFSV against an intimate partner. Evidence has also found that financial abuse of older Australians increased during COVID-19, with decreased opportunities for community connection to enable this to be identified.¹¹⁷

As the Commonwealth Government has acknowledged, “[t]o make the most of the opportunities a longer life provides, Australians need to prepare early to be healthy, independent, connected and safe.”¹¹⁸ Accordingly, the Review acknowledges the work under the *National Plan to Respond to the Abuse of Older Australians (Elder Abuse) 2019–2023* and urges the Commonwealth to maintain a continued focus in this area, developing a successor plan as soon as possible. This is to ensure that the distinct and intersecting forms of abuse directed towards older Australians—including in diverse populations—remain in view.

Beyond the WEET’s recommendations, the Review acknowledges the vital importance of access to services, entitlements and financial means for migrant and refugee women who may be isolated in their communities; have little means of seeking support; and are fearful of system intervention. The Review notes in particular the limitations of the family violence provisions in the *Migration Regulations 1994* (Cth) which should enable women and their dependents to apply for permanent residency in the context of DFSV but which involve multiple hurdles, including where women face barriers to proving a ‘genuine relationship’. These provisions also fail to consider particular forms of DFSV, such as financial abuse—including dowry abuse; the deception and coercion that the Review heard is often used to make someone enter a relationship and then sexually exploit them; and the impact of abuse by perpetrators or family members outside Australia, while also not being available to women who have not yet left a relationship.¹¹⁹

More generally the Review notes that financial abuse is fast becoming one of the most frequent forms of abuse, especially within the context of coercive control. In these situations, abusers not only try to control or limit their partners’ incomes, but often engage in practices such as running up debt in their partner’s name via credit cards of which she has no knowledge, or—again without her knowledge or consent—changing mortgage or rental agreements, making her liable for payments that she is unable to make. This can often lead to a situation whereby the partner abandons his family, with his partner and their children left homeless because they are unable to service these payments.¹²⁰



Positive duty

Under the *Sex Discrimination Act 1984* (Oth), organisations and businesses now have a positive duty to prevent, as far as possible, the following behaviour from occurring at work or in connection with work:

- sex discrimination
- sexual harassment
- sex-based harassment
- conduct that creates a hostile workplace environment on the ground of sex
- related acts of victimisation.

Businesses must take proactive steps to eliminate unlawful behaviours to meet their obligations under this Act. Responding to reports of unlawful behaviours once they occur is not enough.

- The positive duty was a key recommendation of the Commission's landmark *Respect@Work: Sexual Harassment National Inquiry Report*, which was led by former Sex Discrimination Commissioner Kate Jenkins AO, published in March 2020.¹²¹

Finally, the Review heard from legal and employee organisations that further work is required to ensure that workplaces are psychologically, as well as physically safe environments for women and, as such, support their financial security by enabling them to maintain employment. The Review recognises that improved social and economic conditions are a structural prevention lever, with access to secure and safe employment a crucial one.

While the new positive duty created under the *Sex Discrimination Act 1984* (Oth) is a welcome and very substantial step forward, the Review heard that a further opportunity exists to complement reform in the discrimination sphere with associated improvement in workplace safety frameworks. This is particularly the case given the attention that employers pay to these frameworks and the accountability levers that are available within them. As a result, the Review recommends that states and territories explore opportunities for a model approach to workplace safety laws which centres psychological safety and prevention of gender-based violence.



Recommendation 7

The Commonwealth to undertake further structural reforms to strengthen women's economic equality, in recognition of the interconnectedness between lack of economic security and vulnerability to DFSV. This should include:

- a. consistent with the recommendations of the Women's Economic Equality Taskforce (WEET), abolishing the Child Care Subsidy Activity Test, as an immediate first step towards universal access to early education for Australian children, noting the current Activity Test limits flexibility in accessing child care for women in casual and insecure work;
- b. adopting in full the WEET recommendation to remove a major and escalating form of financial abuse against women seeking child support (recommendation 6.5);
- c. expanding eligibility for the Low Income Super Tax Offset (LISTO), in order to increase women's superannuation balances as they age;
- d. developing a successor plan to the *National Plan to Respond to the Abuse of Older Australians (Elder Abuse) 2019–2023*;
- e. undertaking further reforms including expanding eligibility to address the economic insecurity experienced by women on visas who are victim-survivors of DFSV; and
- f. strengthening workplace health and safety laws to complement the positive duty on employers to prevent workplace sexual harassment, sex discrimination and harassment under the *Sex Discrimination Act 1984* (Cth).

Equip friends and family to respond and help

Building community confidence around how to identify the red flags of DFSV, especially coercive control, and then intervene safely is a powerful form of prevention. It can help to stop DFSV from escalating; support victim-survivors to make safe choices; and prevent potential homicide and DFSV-related suicide. The Review recognises that friends and family are by far the most common source of support for both victim-survivors and people using violence, with evidence suggesting that two-thirds will disclose first to someone they know, and many will never seek help from police or a specialist DFSV or health service.¹²² Friends and family are also typically the first to notice the red flags of coercive control.¹²³

While there has been significant investment into changing community attitudes and improving harmful gender norms, far less attention has been given to educating Australians on how best to respond to a disclosure from somebody close to them. This is a largely untapped prevention opportunity.

“ I wish that my family believed me ... They found it easier to believe that I was lying rather than he was capable of the abusive behaviour.”¹²⁴

“ I wish that my family had helped me earlier and been stronger in telling me things weren't right and that I deserved better.”¹²⁵

An ANROWS-funded study found that victim-survivors wanted friends and family to listen to them, believe them and understand their perspective over that of the perpetrator.¹²⁶ Many also wished that friends and family had tried harder to remain in contact, even when a perpetrator was isolating them, and also wished they had tried harder to intervene earlier.¹²⁷ The Review heard that assisting a friend or family member who is experiencing or perpetrating violence, however, can be extremely difficult. Many who do want to help feel ill-equipped to provide the right advice.

The Review recognises the immense prevention potential embedded within the Australian community, while acknowledging that unlocking this will require more targeted resourcing. Good practice exists in pockets around the country, such as resources that advise friends and family on how to respond to disclosures; have difficult conversations; help to connect victim-survivors to support; and refer people using violence to services that may help them to address their abuse.¹²⁸ Governments should prioritise investment in more targeted education and skills building for this relational cohort, including by drawing on the advice of those with lived experience. Embedding DFSV knowledge within the community would not only unlock a significant area of prevention, but also contribute to the improvement of community attitudes more generally.



Good practice examples of natural responder resources

Safe and Equal's *'Are You Safe at Home'* initiative focuses on the safety of all people experiencing and recovering from or at risk of family and gender-based violence. This initiative provides people who recognise or are responding to family violence, with educational resources when starting a conversation with people who may not feel safe at home, and advice on accessing support services to assist bystanders.¹²⁹

MATE Bystander Program's *'Be There'*, developed by Griffith University, is an education and intervention program teaching us all to be leaders in the prevention of violence and harmful behaviour. The program is designed to teach community members how to recognise abuse and have the confidence to speak out and offer help.¹³⁰

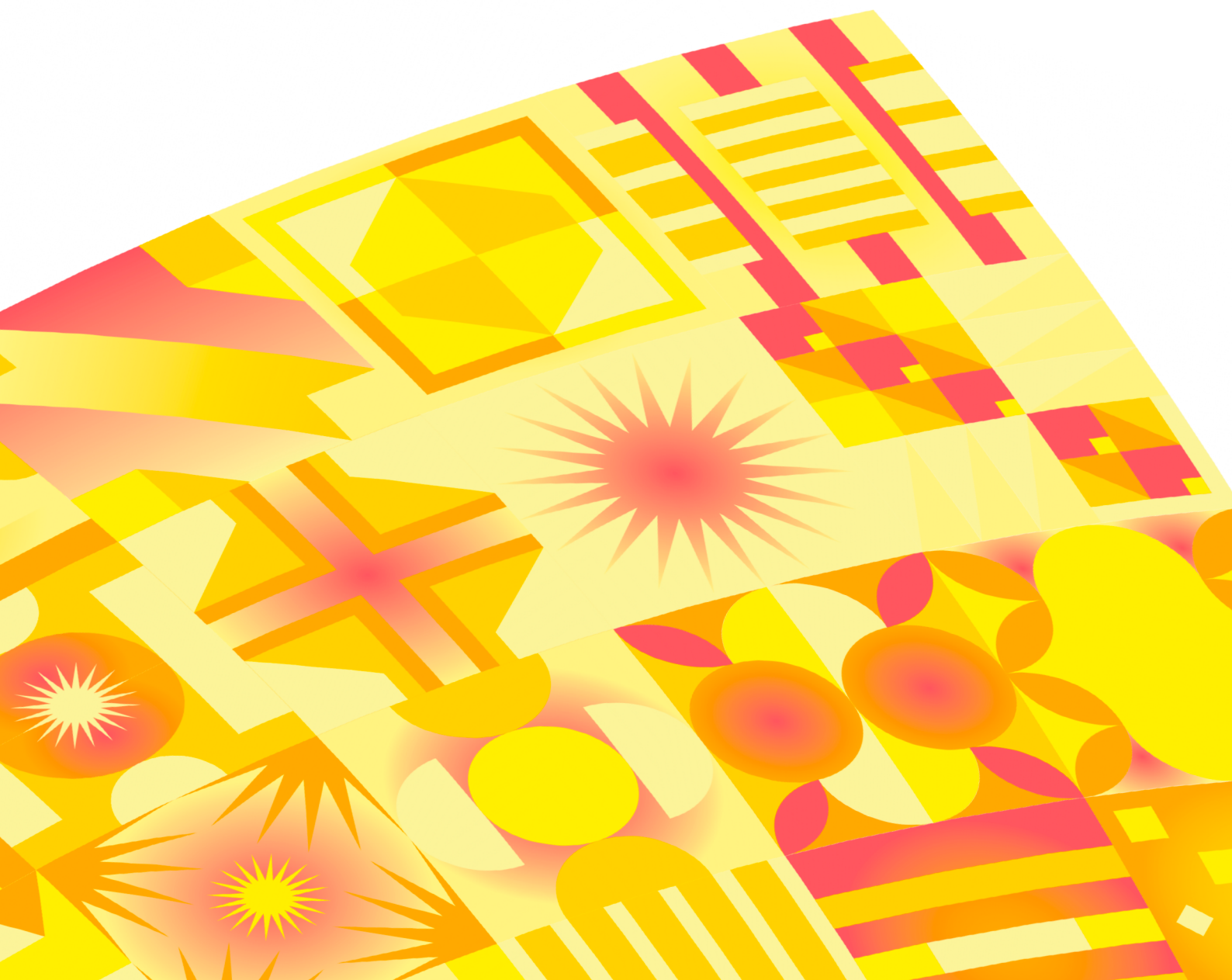
In the immediate term, the Review also recommends an increase in resourcing for Lifeline's DV-Alert program, which is already funded through the National Plan to provide virtual and in-person training to communities around Australia, and has reach into regional, rural and remote areas.¹³¹ These efforts must be complemented by increased support for ethno-specific programs, which can provide culturally, linguistically and religiously-appropriate advice and resources.



Recommendation 8

The Commonwealth and state and territory governments to expand the evidence base on how to build capability of family and friends to identify and respond to DFSV as "natural responders" in their relational contexts with victim-survivors and perpetrators. In the immediate term, the Commonwealth should resource Lifeline's DV-alert to expand its current community-focussed program offering, prioritising increased reach and frequency of facilitator-led delivery to regional and remote areas, as well as delivery virtually.

Prevention through responses



Assess demand and calculate the cost

To build a firm foundation for expanding Australia's approach to prevention, governments must provide adequate funding for DFSV services. For decades, however, services have been chronically underfunded. As reporting rates have steadily increased, this underfunding has created systemic problems that hinder the ability of these services to provide their life-saving services. Faced with critical staffing shortages, many report having no choice but to turn some victim-survivors away; leave phone calls unanswered; and conduct brief risk assessments on lethality to determine who they will be able to assist.

The Review heard about sector-wide frustration, not only in relation to limited capacity to respond to immediate needs, but also missed prevention opportunities to intervene early with families and provide post-crisis support to stop escalating violence, re-victimisation and—in the most severe cases—fatalities. By inadequately funding frontline services, we are undermining a life-saving prevention opportunity.

The Review has also heard there are significant service gaps for diverse and marginalised communities. This includes, but is not limited to: the absence of refuges for LGBTIQ+ people who are excluded from or feel unsafe accessing, refuges designed for heterosexual women; limited or no available services for people in remote communities, as well as for adolescents and young people not in the care of a protective parent or who are over a certain age; poor accessibility for people with mobility needs; and people being excluded from existing services as a result of substance misuse, acute mental ill-health concerns or other support needs which sees them labelled as 'too complex'.

As the Review heard, however, requests for increased funding have only short-term value. Instead, the Review recognises that, before placing a dollar figure on how much is enough, we need to establish national data on current and future demand, and link that to the funding required for services to meet it.

As such, the Review is calling on state and territory governments, and the Commonwealth, to expedite analysis of unmet demand. Based on these findings, all governments should develop sustained funding pathways to meet need. This analysis and response should explicitly address the diverse services need of different groups of people experiencing violence—including First Nations women and communities, LGBTIQ+ people, older women, migrant and refugee women, children and adolescents (including those who are not in the care of a protective parent), women with disability and people with additional support needs (including substance misuse, acute mental ill-health concerns and behavioural needs).

More immediately, the Review also recognises that the provision of legal assistance to victim-survivors of DFSV is not only an access to justice issue, but a frontline service that can improve safety and reduce risk. Independent legal advice from publicly funded duty lawyers can help to improve and tailor conditions on protection orders and mitigate against the negotiation of dangerous parenting agreements.¹³² Legal advice is also an essential protective element for First Nations mothers whose children are the subject of child protection intervention.¹³³ Further, specialist duty lawyers can ensure that respondents are more likely to understand and comply with these orders, increasing the potential for compliance and de-escalating risk. They also play a pivotal role explaining proceedings, especially when orders are brought by police.

More broadly, access to public legal assistance can function as a protective ‘issues-spotting’ mechanism, whereby wider unmet legal needs—including those that have resulted from or developed in association with the experience of DFSV—can be identified and addressed. This is an area which evidence shows is in much greater need of recognition and which can function as a vital prevention mechanism.¹³⁴

Urgently, public legal assistance for adult and child victim-survivors in the family law context can mitigate against systems abuse, particularly where practitioners who are adequately trained and trauma-informed should help to give voice to children and young people about their experiences and preferred care arrangements, including in protracted proceedings where the protective parent may be being perceived by the court or portrayed by a perpetrator parent as untruthful. Currently, a persistent lack of funding means that fewer and fewer victim-survivors have access to support, including through legal aid grants which can resource private practitioners.¹³⁵ Investment in public legal assistance that is directed towards DFSV is therefore a clear mechanism for preventing future—and often irreparable—harm, including harm escalating to homicide. It must therefore be an area of urgent attention.

“ The scariest thing about leaving or preparing to leave is not having somewhere to go. Homelessness services are underfunded ... so people are faced with either returning to unsafe situations or sleeping rough either by themselves or with children.”

— Kelly, victim-survivor.¹³⁶



High-cost emergency accommodation

The Panel were unable to identify any published and consistent data, either national or at a jurisdictional level, setting out how much money is being spent on high-cost motel accommodation for people experiencing DFSV. However, one state/territory-wide service (who wished to remain anonymous) informed the Panel they are spending approximately \$120,000–\$150,000 per month on temporary accommodations to support women and children escaping immediate threats of violence.

Another service provided data to the Review indicating that, between July 2023 and August 2024, they spent approximately \$32,000 on motel accommodation for 28 clients for 182 nights.

Noting Australia's current housing crisis, the Review also recommends immediate action to facilitate crisis accommodation to ensure safety and prevent violence from continuing. This includes the urgent need for trauma-informed crisis accommodation that supports recovery and healing, rather than a "motel model", which entrenches instability and harm. The Review suggests the Commonwealth Government consider expansion of the Safe Places Emergency Accommodation program, a capital works program funding the building, renovation or purchase of emergency accommodation for women and children experiencing DFSV. All governments should also consider increasing specialist DFSV housing options via the National Housing and Homelessness Agreement. The Review notes that investment in capital works must be considered alongside the required operational funding for services to run.

Further, the Review recognises the need for access to services in some of Australia's most remote and underserved communities, including the Torres Strait region, where mobility is hampered not only by distance but by water; lack of emergency infrastructure; and by the prohibitive expense of self-funding travel. The Review recommends that the Commonwealth, state and territory governments work together to establish a nationally consistent travel grant for people experiencing violence in remote and very-remote areas, to help prevent the escalation of violence.



Recommendation 9

The Commonwealth, through the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) and with state and territory governments, to expedite a needs analysis to determine unmet demand in DFSV crisis response, recovery and healing (excluding police), with the view to develop a pathway to fund demand. This should take into consideration the needs of different groups of women and children and the demand for targeted and culturally safe responses, such as ethno-specific services and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-controlled organisations, with a particular focus on remote communities.

More immediately, there should be a significant funding uplift for:

- a. legal services, noting the recommendations of the Independent Review of the National Legal Assistance Partnership (NLAP) and the expiry of the current partnership on 30 June 2025;
- b. crisis accommodation, noting commitments to date and what is outlined in *Recommendation 10*; and
- c. establishment of nationally consistent travel assistance for people escaping DFSV who live in remote areas (Commonwealth and states and territories).

Apply a prevention lens to crisis response and recovery

“ I was distraught as I did not know the area and didn’t know what I would do on my own at totally a new place that’s absolutely unknown to me for two weeks in a motel. During those two weeks I was in so much depression and chaos. Most women would have gone back in the situation ...”

— Adya, victim-survivor.¹³⁷

“ Joanne described her time at the refuge as, ‘the best support and someone to help you 24/7 when you are feeling hopeless. It gave me time to heal, get myself in a good place to have my kids back and allowed me to have parenting after family violence sessions, counselling every week and they [the practitioners] also helped me reconnect with employment so I could save towards reunification with the kids and getting our own place.’”

— Joanne, victim-survivor.¹³⁸

“ Aboriginal services are working with women who have complex and often multigenerational trauma and require long term and specialised support for themselves and their families.”

— Djirra, Family Violence Prevention Legal Service.¹³⁹

The Review acknowledges that specialist DFSV crisis response and recovery services are critical to the prevention landscape. Caseworkers, crisis line counsellors and specialist refuge workers act under enormous pressure, and during times of heightened crisis, to prevent homicide and DFSV-related suicide. These services are experts at managing safety and risk and work to extract victim-survivors from life-threatening situations, often calling in assistance from disparate systems to coordinate rescue missions across the country, including complicated extraction operations from Australia’s most remote areas. For many victim-survivors, this assistance is literally the difference between life and death.

The Review recognises that one of the most predictive factors of future victimisation is prior victimisation. A consistent crisis and recovery response that removes barriers to escaping abuse; helps victim-survivors to navigate a complex web of systems post-separation; and improves their economic security can protect them against re-victimisation, either from their current abusive partner, or a partner in the future.

The Review notes with concern that, over the past decade, there has been an increasing reliance on motels to provide crisis accommodation for women and children fleeing violence.



As the number of refuge beds have been eclipsed by escalating demand, motel stays have become long and protracted. In 2024, the average stay is now 14 nights, with the number of women and children accommodated every night reaching more than 200. This leaves many victim-survivors (up to 50 per cent) with no choice but to make an unsafe exit, and even return to the dangerous person from whom they just escaped. Important to note, the vast majority of these clients are facing elevated homicide risk—90 per cent have been strangled—and the majority are reporting active suicidality (52 per cent in April 2024). More than 90 per cent of callers to Safe Steps family violence crisis line in Victoria who are rated as ‘serious risk requiring immediate protection’ are placed in motels.¹⁴⁰

The Review recognises that, for victim-survivors at high risk, hotels and motels are not just inadequate, but dangerous. Unlike specialist refuges, there is no security, and with surveillance devices now commonly used by perpetrators to track their victims through their phones and cars, there is increased risk that perpetrators will be able to find and easily access victims at these insecure locations. Here the Review notes that these accommodation options are especially unsuitable for victim-survivors with disabilities or other health conditions.

To address the often dangerous and counter-productive use of motels, Safe Steps created the Sanctuary model—a wraparound service that accommodates women and children for three weeks, while they wait for a space in refuge.

The benefits of this approach are immediate. What’s more, the Review has heard that this specialist accommodation service is actually more cost effective than accommodating victim-survivors in motels. The Review notes that this is low-hanging fruit for governments and recommends that state and territory governments transition from the dangerous and counter-productive reliance on motels to ensure that women and children have access to specialist DFSV accommodation when they need it.



Women’s and Girls’ Emergency Centre ACCESS program

The ACCESS program is a free personalised mentoring program to support women to identify their strengths, build self-confidence and set goals for the future. It is a 3–6-month program that supports women and non-binary people aged 18+ who would like free mentoring either in-person or virtually. ACCESS mentors are women and non-binary people looking to support other women and non-binary people to build on their goals.¹⁴¹

Further, the Review notes that the circuitous route towards safety, independence and freedom can require long-term case management with specialist DFSV workers who know how to navigate these systems. Managing DFSV related processes alone can lead to debilitating stress and increased trauma and is made even more complex for victim-survivors who have limited English, or face communication impediments connected with disability.

As the Review notes in *Recommendation 5* (Children and Young People), vouchsafing recovery for protective parents and their children is not only essential for immediate safety, but also vital for interrupting intergenerational violence and disadvantage, which can prevent future victimisation and perpetration in the next generation.

Essential to this recovery is safe housing. DFSV is the leading cause of homelessness for women and children in Australia, and victim-survivors accounted for 42 per cent of Specialist Homelessness Services clients in 2020–21.¹⁴² Research from Safe and Equal shows that the vast majority of family violence services in Victoria commonly see repeat clients, and a lack of affordable housing is a key reason why victim-survivors return to live with their abuser.¹⁴³ The Review heard that provision of sustainable, affordable and accessible housing in initial contact with victim-survivors is an economic imperative for governments and the most significant impediment to keeping victim-survivors safe. Without this investment, especially in regional and remote areas, prevention will be undermined and cycles of poverty, violence and disadvantage will continue or even worsen.



Sanctuary model

In October 2023, Safe Steps Family Violence Response Centre, Victoria began the 12-month Sanctuary Pilot Program. This program provides short-term supported crisis accommodation to victim-survivors of domestic and family violence. At Sanctuary, Safe Steps staff provide 24/7 intensive face-to-face crisis support to residents, including children, until they can be referred to appropriate longer-term accommodation, including women's refuges.¹⁴⁴

At the core of the Sanctuary service model is a commitment to providing therapeutic, culturally safe, accessible, and tailored support to meet the individual needs and circumstances of all residents, including children. It aims to provide wrap-around support for residents, including through intensive, face-to-face case management support and a range of in/outreach services.¹⁴⁵

In contrast to motels, Sanctuary offers a safe, supportive environment that allows residents to build protective factors against domestic and family violence and, in doing so, increase the likelihood of positive longer-term outcomes. The Sanctuary pilot site is located in Melbourne's northern suburbs and includes seven fully-furnished, self-contained apartments and several large shared spaces, accessible for a range of ages and cultures. Since the pilot commenced, the site has provided support to more than 200 victim-survivors.¹⁴⁶

Sanctuary is the only supported crisis accommodation model of its kind in Victoria and addresses a critical gap in the service system for people escaping domestic and family violence.¹⁴⁷



Recommendation 10

The Commonwealth and state and territory governments to apply a prevention lens to the resourcing and delivery of crisis response and recovery services. This includes through:

- a. replacing motels and other high-cost temporary crisis accommodation with specialist crisis accommodation that provide wrap-around services (states and territories);
- b. resourcing the DFSV sector for long-term case management, following the needs analysis identified in *Recommendation 9* (states and territories); and
- c. increasing linkage between the DFSV and homelessness sectors, and align these sectors in national frameworks and plans (Commonwealth and states and territories).

Activate the health system



1 in 5 women who experienced violence from a current partner sought advice or support from a GP or other health professional.¹⁴⁸

As identified by the World Health Organization (WHO), the Review similarly recognises the largely untapped prevention potential across the health system.¹⁴⁹ Health professionals have contact with patients across the life course and, in particular, engage intensively with women at key high-risk periods for abuse onset and escalation, particularly during pregnancy and following childbirth. Older people vulnerable to elder abuse also frequently attend GPs and, in the context of coercive control and isolation, those health professionals may be their only external source of support.¹⁵⁰ This is also especially relevant for communities who may not be well served by specialist DFSV services, particularly patients in same-sex and transgender relationships. Evidence indicates that people who use violence are also far more likely to engage and disclose to health services than any other service, including a specialist service.¹⁵¹

Accordingly, the Review concludes that health ministers must prioritise upskilling and resourcing the health sector to identify and respond appropriately to DFSV, so that they have the confidence to broach the subject with patients who may be experiencing or perpetrating violence, as well as the skills to respond to disclosures in a trauma- and DFSV-informed way. As the WHO recommends, this is a key step to “address violence and its consequences and prevent future violence.”¹⁵²



DFSV and pregnancy

Around 34,500 women reported experiencing violence from a current partner while pregnant and 325,900 reported experiencing violence from a previous partner during their pregnancy.¹⁵³

Reviews of child death cases in Australia show that amongst other factors, a father’s violence towards the mother during pregnancy significantly increases risk.¹⁵⁴

The Review heard that key intervention sites for DFSV are located across general practice, antenatal clinics, community child health, mental health and emergency departments. When healthcare professionals fail to identify DFSV, or respond to disclosures with victim-blaming sentiments, however, the impacts can be fatal. Coroners have repeatedly identified that healthcare professionals lack the adequate skills and capacity to respond to DFSV. Here the Review notes that Victoria’s State Coroner recently reiterated this longstanding concern, stating that “without mandated family violence training, a portion of GPs will remain unskilled and ill-equipped to respond to patients’ disclosures of family violence.”¹⁵⁵



A review of 72 studies, conducted by the Safer Families Centre, identified personal and structural barriers that got in the way of health practitioners responding to DFSV.¹⁵⁶

The top three personal barriers were:

- **'I can't interfere'**: this highlights the belief that domestic abuse is a private matter and practitioners fear causing harm by intervening.
- **'I don't have control'**: this illustrates that practitioners feel frustrated when their advice is not followed.
- **'It's not my job'**: this illuminates the belief that addressing domestic abuse should be someone else's responsibility.

The top three structural barriers were:

- **Working in suboptimal environments**: practitioners are frustrated with the lack of privacy and limited time they have with patients.
- **Lack of system support**: there is a lack of management support and inadequate training, resources, policies and response protocols.
- **Impact of societal beliefs**: there can be a normalisation of victim blaming, including myths that women will lie about experiencing violence or that domestic abuse only happens to certain types of women.

The Review heard that child and adult safeguard training should be considered a necessary, life-saving requirement, on par with the mandatory requirement for training on CPR. The Review therefore recommends a consistent approach nationally to mandating DFSV training for two priority healthcare categories, being doctors in general practice and psychologists, developed in collaboration with the Royal College of General Practitioners.

The Review notes that opportunities for identification and intervention are especially critical for First Nations women and children in remote areas, where they are 24 times more likely to be hospitalised for domestic violence as people in major cities.¹⁵⁷ The need for a safe and culturally sensitive response is therefore especially vital and can be the difference between life and death.

To equip health professionals to respond more effectively, health ministers should consider expanding the *Readiness Program*, run by Safer Families: a national training program for primary care providers (including GPs, community health and Aboriginal Medical Services) to recognise, respond, refer and record DFSV using a trauma and DFSV-informed approach. This is a flexible, multifaceted training program that assists healthcare professionals to improve identification and risk assessment; respond to disclosures with active listening and non-judgment; improve understanding of how DFSV impacts children; provide more appropriate support for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families, migrant and refugee groups and older people; and increase the timely referral of women, men and children affected by DFSV.

Training and skills, however, are not sufficient. GPs must also be given the time to respond to the additional needs of their patients. Evidence indicates that a significant structural barrier is the frustration that practitioners felt with the lack of privacy and limited time they had with their patients.¹⁵⁸ To address this, the Review recommends that the Commonwealth Government creates a specific Medicare item number for GPs to spend extra time with patients affected by DFSV. Here the Review notes that any steps in this regard would need to be accompanied by privacy measures.

In addition to upskilling healthcare professionals more broadly, the Review recommends that particular attention and resourcing be given to developing DFSV specialisation across the alcohol and other drugs (AOD) sector, and to facilitating cross-sector collaboration. This kind of intervention is long overdue and holds enormous potential for reducing the recurrence of violence; for intervening more effectively with people using violence; and for preventing further harm to children.

The Review further recognises the potential for greater cross-sector collaboration between specialist DFSV services and the AOD sector, to enhance the AOD sector's responsiveness to DFSV, and ensure that victim-survivors and people using violence can access specialist DFSV assistance. State and territory governments should also ensure that mental health and AOD services are represented on multi-agency risk management panels.



AOD and users of violence

International studies suggest that 30–40 per cent of men participating in AOD interventions are perpetrators of DFSV and/or of sexual violence outside of the context of intimate relationships.¹⁵⁹ Crime statistics show that perpetrators of DFSV who abuse substances, especially alcohol, are more likely to inflict serious injury.¹⁶⁰ A high percentage of men attending MBCPs also present with substance abuse issues, which can impede their ability to remain engaged in programs.¹⁶¹

Women who access DFSV supports are also more likely to experience AOD issues, sometimes as a coping mechanism.¹⁶² Parental substance abuse is one of the leading contributors to child removal, aside from family violence, meaning that intervening through a DFSV-informed lens is an essential protective mechanism for children.¹⁶³

Activating health professionals to become first-line responders to DFSV is a national endeavour requiring substantial investment and coordination across governments and government departments. Just as important is activating a DFSV lens across health and broader equity policies, such as the Commonwealth's Ten Year LGBTIQ+ Health and Wellbeing Action Plan, so that DFSV is recognised in health interventions relevant to diverse and intersecting communities. This includes LGBTIQ+ communities, people with disability, older Australians, people in regional and remote areas and people from migrant and refugee communities. Here the Review notes that, if Australia is to continue to draw on a public health approach as one of the multiple frameworks that can help to prevent DFSV, as discussed at *Recommendation 4*, it is particularly crucial that the health sector itself steps squarely into this picture.



Wuchopperen Health Justice Partnership

Wuchopperen Health Service, a community controlled Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Service in Cairns, partnered with LawRight to form the Wuchopperen Health Justice Partnership. The Partnership grew from an on-site weekly legal clinic to provide two full-day, on-site clinics per week to Wuchopperen clients, deliver free legal advice, referral and casework (civil matters only).

Donella Mills, former managing lawyer at LawRight and Chair of the National Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation, spoke to the National Indigenous Times in 2021 about the Partnerships establishment stating, “I kept seeing this missing link, we were talking about family wellbeing, child protection, youth detention, we were talking about issues around chronic disease and I just kept thinking how can we be delivering services when we are not connecting people to legal representation? ... Our people will go to their ACCHO [primary health care service] and tell their doctor about all of their concerns because the trust is there. The trust is not in the legal institution”¹⁶⁴



Campbelltown Emergency Domestic Violence Pathway

In Sydney, Campbelltown Hospital, Macarthur Women’s Domestic Violence Court Advocacy and local police have developed an innovative partnership and domestic violence pathway. This pathway requires police to take any person with an injury or suspected injury from non-fatal strangulation, a choking incident or head injury in the context of DFSV to Campbelltown Hospital Emergency Department. There is a direct phone line and separate intake process to ensure these women are seen quickly and are taken to a safe space designated for this purpose, away from the hustle and bustle of the Emergency room.

Benefits include of this partnership include:

1. Medical evidence to support charges;
2. Immediate safety assessment for the victim and health needs addressed;
3. Access to trauma-informed medical care;
4. Link with DFSV services to support family and prosecution;
5. Fast track to medical attention; and
6. No requirement of police to stay, the hospital has a process to help get individuals home.¹⁶⁵



Recommendation 11

The Commonwealth and state and territory governments to activate the health system and workforce as a key prevention lever. This should include:

- a. equipping and resourcing General Practitioners (GPs), perinatal, and mental health and alcohol and other drug (AOD) services to identify and support DFSV victim-survivors and people who use violence (Commonwealth and states and territories);
- b. creating a specific Medicare item number for GPs that enables them to spend appropriate time with people affected by DFSV (Commonwealth);
- c. mandating training of professionals in general primary and mental health settings in adult and child safeguarding, including DFSV, as a requirement for registration through the Australian Health Practitioner Regulation Agency (Commonwealth and states and territories); and
- d. Increasing cross-sector collaboration between the AOD and DFSV sector and provide specialised services for women that are family friendly and support caring for children (states and territories).

Being smarter about responses to people using violence

Smarter interventions with people using violence can function as a vital lever for preventing escalation and future harm. The Review has highlighted the prevention potential in developing and promoting healthy masculinities, as well as in activating health sectors to identify abusive behaviour and intervene early. To prevent violence from escalating however, we must also apply a prevention lens to accountability and ensure that we are leveraging the prevention potential in every interaction along a spectrum of interactions.¹⁶⁶ In particular, evidence indicates that a window of opportunity exists in the initial stages of justice system contact which, if leveraged appropriately by police and legal practitioners, can improve understanding of court processes and reduce risk, including by addressing immediate support needs.¹⁶⁷ This is a clear opportunity to reduce risk and prevent the likelihood of further escalation and violence.



Research indicates that when people using violence have limited understanding of protection orders, receive little to no advice or information prior to an order being made, or have little capacity to absorb what is occurring, this raises the risk of them breaching the order.¹⁶⁸ As respondents usually attend court having had minimal support or advice, few may be in the position to make decisions or properly understand the content or consequences of protection orders.

The experience of the legal process itself can also be more important to people than the outcome, with research indicating that people are more likely to view an outcome as valid and comply with this outcome if they perceive the process as fair.¹⁶⁹ Research shows that procedural justice throughout the legal process can also maximise engagement with MBCPs when completion of a program is ordered.¹⁷⁰

Further, people using violence may have complex needs which have contributed to or escalated their use of DFSV, such as mental ill-health, substance abuse, unemployment or insecure housing, which often go unaddressed. When perpetrators are removed from the home, a lack of stable accommodation may lead them to return to their family or they may present to a first court appearance dangerously heightened, having spent the intervening days between police contact and court attendance living in their car or in unstable accommodation.¹⁷² Alternatively, people using violence who have been excluded from the home may be living with extended family or elderly parents, which could put these family members at risk.



Victoria Legal Aid has developed a specific Model to support duty lawyering across particular Specialist Family Violence Courts (SFVCs) in Victoria. The Model's activities combine to:

- increase the provision of quality information on legal assistance and court processes;
- increase duty lawyer resourcing across SFVCs;
- provide training and support to lawyers focused on trauma-informed and non-collusive practice, assessing and responding to broader legal needs and negotiating outside court;
- improve support for non-legal needs through the creation of new, dedicated roles, being Information and Referral Officers (IROs) based at each of the relevant sites; and
- improve cultural competency through the creation of dedicated Aboriginal Community Engagement (ACE) officers based at specific locations.

An interim evaluation of the Model found that the non-legal roles were making a real and particular difference to people's experience at court, providing people with additional help through support and referrals to legal and non-legal services like housing, health and community supports.¹⁷¹

The Review recommends that state and territory governments look to current models that leverage early points of justice system contact as a way of preventing future violence and abuse. The Review also recommends that states and territories, with the support of the Commonwealth Government, explore specific investment in crisis and short-term accommodation for people using violence who have been removed from the home.



Research shows that interventions which are designed to achieve 'perpetrator accountability' were always intended to be situated within a coordinated community response – including within a 'perpetrator intervention system' that is equally accountable to victim-survivors and their priorities for what safety means to them.¹⁷³ Coordinated community responses which work together to hold people using violence accountable and victim-survivors safe include the Gold Coast Integrated Response, in which MBCPs, specialist DFSV women's services, local health services, police and corrections share information to respond and manage dynamic risk.¹⁷⁴

The Review also recognises the substantial role played by Men's Behaviour Change Programs (MBCPs). Here the Review acknowledges that these programs were originally designed and intended to operate as a coordinated community response, but too often are forced to operate in disconnection from other services. This is despite being expected by policy and funding arrangements to carry responsibility for a man's risk alone.¹⁷⁵

While MBCPs are a core component of Australia's current intervention strategy and are frequently cited as equating to 'perpetrator accountability', the Review also acknowledges that the availability of these programs is often scarce. Further, few are specifically designed or resourced to work with people using violence from diverse communities or with intersecting needs.

The Review also heard, and evidence indicates, that there is variable quality and capability across MBCPs, with programs and practitioners calling for further work to identify and build what constitutes best practice.¹⁷⁶ Practitioners told the Review that MBCPs need to be appropriately resourced to address the wide range of issues which can contribute to, or escalate violence, and inhibit progress towards being a safer man. This may include mental ill-health, substance misuse, past and childhood experiences of trauma, gambling harm and housing and financial insecurity. The Review notes that, while these issues can all act as barriers to change, harm can also be compounded if these issues are addressed by practitioners who do not apply a DFSV-informed lens.



The Caledonian System

The Caledonian System is an integrated approach—for men aged over 16 with a criminal conviction—to address men's domestic abuse in Scotland that adopts a comprehensive risk management approach and provides services to men over an extended period of two years. This program includes individual, group and post-group work; support, safety planning and advocacy and liaison with other services to women; and support and advocacy for children.

The Review also heard the need for investment in programs that are culturally safe for men from First Nations and migrant and refugee backgrounds, with an additional need for supply of programs for people from LGBTIQ+ communities, as well as for people with cognitive or intellectual disability or other complex support needs.



Research released by ANROWS demonstrates that partner or family safety contact is often the most crucial component of MBCP work. This is because it often connects victim-survivors to their first source of support, while also providing a crucial reality check in relation to men's self-reported behaviour throughout their program participation.¹⁷⁷

Importantly, the Review recognises that programs wish to be supported as part of a coordinated community response, as their design originally intended. Just as vital to acknowledge, victim-survivors remain the primary focus of these programs. Evidence indicates that partner or family safety contact can be the most powerful intervention offered by these programs, making this a component that needs to be resourced.¹⁷⁸ The Review recommends that the Commonwealth and state and territory governments undertake immediate work to improve the supply and capability of these programs across a range of settings to enable increased engagement and retention. Resourcing should take into account the need for these programs to function as part of the overall specialist response to DFSV, rather than being seen as a separate sector with different objectives, which has never been the case.



The Review heard about a range of programs, including:

- The *Changing Ways* program in Victoria seeks to work with adults who pose a serious risk of harm to victim-survivors. Delivering intensive multi-agency intervention and individual behaviour change work, the program also works intensively with victim-survivors. Being delivered across three sites, this includes at an Aboriginal-led service, Dardi Munwurro, where practitioners are working to address the complex needs of people using violence, including disability, housing, substance use, mental health and justice and statutory intervention.¹⁷⁹
- The *Wuinparrinthei program* is a culturally appropriate youth prevention program for Aboriginal male adolescents who have displayed violent behaviour or are identified as being inclined towards violent behaviour. Young people engage in the program for 6 months, with the aim to mitigate the risk of violent behaviour through awareness and education about positive relationships, coercive control, anger management, positive choices and preventing violence.¹⁸⁰
- *Futures Free from Violence (FFFV)* offers women, trans, and gender diverse people who have used force and/or violence in family and intimate partner relationships the opportunity to work towards change in both a supported group and one-to-one therapeutic environment.¹⁸¹
- *Motivation4Change* uses an inLanguage, inCulture delivery model to address the significant barriers migrant and refugee men can face when engaging with mainstream family violence services. It combines one on-one case management and group sessions with an understanding of the migration journey, language, culture and faith into the program, using facilitators and other participants of a similar cultural background.¹⁸²



Recommendation 12

The Commonwealth and state and territory governments to take targeted efforts to address the significant gaps in responses to people who use violence. This should include:

- a. strengthening initial justice responses to facilitate advice and assistance beyond legal needs, which can help to reduce risk and improve compliance, including access to crisis accommodation (states and territories); and
- b. improving the national evidence base, quality, capability and supply of men's behaviour change programs, including through a focus on continuous improvement. Behaviour change programs should:
 - i. be part of a community-coordinated response;
 - ii. be provided at appropriate intervention points;
 - iii. emphasise the value of associated support to victim-survivors through partner and family safety contact; and
 - iv. facilitate/co-locate access to support for needs related to harmful substance abuse, histories of trauma, cognitive impairment and mental ill-health through a DFSV-informed lens (states and territories, with Commonwealth supporting national consistency and best practice).

Better risk assessment, decision-making and multi-agency approaches

The Review notes that a significant inhibitor to preventing DFSV and homicide is the lack of a nationally consistent approach to assessing harm and risk, as well as to managing safety. Recent homicides have highlighted an urgent need for stronger, more comprehensive and more consistent risk-assessment and intervention models to support decision-makers to identify, assess and then manage risk more effectively. This is critical for managing victim-survivor safety needs and for preventing escalation of harm. These frameworks can also uplift capability across workforces, including police, court staff, the judiciary, child protection and corrections, wherever people are making decisions which should be determined by DFSV-informed considerations. This includes giving visibility to the fact that not all decisions are currently made by people in positions of judicial authority, as the community might otherwise expect.

The Review recommends that Commonwealth and state and territory governments work together to develop greater national consistency in risk assessment. This should be developed in relation to adult victim-survivors, adults using violence and children and young people as victim-survivors in their own right.



Case study

“Maggie presented to The Orange Door seeking family violence support. She has a cognitive disability, and in her initial risk assessment, Maggie reported that her partner Stephen was mean to her dog, and that he would take the dog outside and tie him up. This was noted in her original referral report with no further context.

Due to her disability, The Orange Door referred Maggie to a private practice family violence consultant. Maggie had a number of sessions with the consultant, where the consultant could build trust and was able to take the time and find ways to communicate appropriately with Maggie.

During the fourth session with the consultant, it was established that the dog was actually an assistance animal for Maggie, not just a family pet. The consultant also elicited that when Maggie said Stephen was ‘mean to the dog’ and being ‘tied up’, he was actually tying the dog upside down by its feet and hitting it. Maggie also revealed that this was often in response to Maggie refusing demands for sex, or to get her to agree to sex with the threat of hurting the dog.

This information changed the risk assessment of the level and types of violence against Maggie significantly. Had the consultant not developed the shared communication understanding and taken the extra time with Maggie, she may not have been referred to the appropriate supports needed to recover from her family violence experiences.”¹⁸³

Any approach should be culturally-informed and responsive to how risk presents for different people and within particular communities, with a particular emphasis on preventing the potential for misidentification of victim-survivors and associated systems abuse. This is to ensure that the person most in need of protection is accurately identified at the outset, and so that the harm of misidentification is avoided. Particular focus should be given to preventing misidentification in risk assessment in relation to people from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, refugee and migrant communities, LGBTIQ+ communities, and people with disability.¹⁸⁴

Risk assessments are only effective, however, when the people conducting them are able to make safe and DSFV-informed decisions. In turn, safe decisions cannot be made without access to the right information. Information sharing regimes—where properly resourced and supported – can improve risk assessment, particularly where information about the person using violence would not otherwise be available.

The Review recommends that governments improve operational information sharing across and within jurisdictions to support consistent approaches to risk assessment. The information sharing scheme could be modelled on the Victorian Family Violence Information Sharing Scheme, which the Review heard from frontline services is of particular value, or could leverage the capacity and capability of the National Crime Information System (NCIS), described below. An information sharing scheme could also enable the registering of family court orders, family violence protection orders, child protection orders and other information that is relevant to assessments of risk.



Victorian MARAM Framework & Information Sharing Scheme

The Family Violence Multi-Agency Risk Assessment and Management Framework (MARAM) ensures that services are effectively identifying, assessing and managing family violence risk. The aim of MARAM is to increase safety and wellbeing by ensuring that relevant services can effectively identify, assess and manage family violence risk. The MARAM Framework has been established in legislation, meaning that organisations that are authorised through regulations, as well as organisations providing funded services relevant to family violence risk assessment and management, must align their policies, procedures, practice guidance and tools to the MARAM Framework.¹⁸⁵



What is the NCIS?

The National Criminal Intelligence System (NCIS) connects data from different Australian law enforcement agencies, providing cross-border secure access to policing information and criminal intelligence. The NCIS is a joint project led by the Australian Criminal Intelligence Commission with Australian police agencies and the Department of Home Affairs.

Each Australian law enforcement agency uses different systems for their day-to-day policing activities. By enabling cross-border information sharing, the NCIS enables police to access all available information about risks, details of entities, events of interest and a person's history.

Importantly, the Review also recommends greater awareness, and use, of the NCIS, as noted above. This could include consideration around careful expansion of access to certain professional cohorts, as well as work to align state and territory systems to enable accessibility and functionality.

The Review heard, and evidence supports, that there is a pressing need for greater collaboration and cross-agency responses to DFSV, especially for policing. The benefits of this approach have been evidenced in pilots and programs in various states and territories. Co-responder models involving collaborations of DFSV specialists with police, for example, can reduce the risk of misidentifying the person in need of protection; provide more consistently safe responses to victim-survivors, including by involving other supports such as interpreters; assist in identifying evidence to support charges; support police to respond to escalating demand, and enable the sharing of expertise and skills.



Misidentification

ANROWS funded research defines 'misidentification' as situations where the person experiencing DFSV or most in need of protection is wrongly taken to be the person perpetrating violence (the 'predominant aggressor') and the person perpetrating harm is wrongly identified as a person experiencing violence or as being most in need of protection.¹⁸⁶ An examination of data related to Women's Legal Service Victoria clients indicated that 10 per cent had been misidentified, with 5 out of 8 clients experiencing abuse during the incident where they were identified as the 'primary' aggressor, which included threats, physical violence, and restraint.¹⁸⁷ This echoes findings from a University of Melbourne review of Family Violence Reports from December 2015 to December 2017, where 48 per cent of reports where a woman was listed as the respondent were found to involve misidentification.¹⁸⁸

Far from an inadvertent outcome, 'misidentification' may be the deliberate outcome of a man's weaponisation of the system against his female partner. Alternatively or additionally, it may be the direct result of profiling and racism by statutory systems.¹⁸⁹ This is reflected in Victoria Police data which shows that, in 2020, close to 80 per cent of Aboriginal women named as a respondent in police Family Violence Reports had been recorded as a victim in the last five years, compared to nearly 60 per cent for all female respondents.¹⁹⁰

As the Queensland Women's Safety and Justice Taskforce found, co-responder models enable a specialist DFSV response to accompany police intervention, as well as 'warm referrals' to services and supports for both victim-survivors and people using violence.¹⁹¹ By working alongside and in consultation with different disciplines, police and other DFSV responders can provide more holistic and wrap-around responses to victim-survivors, including with the support of interpreters where relevant, while also developing capability. The Review recommends that state and territory governments introduce and expand multi-agency responses, including police co-responder models, underpinned by an appropriate impact evaluation framework.

Investment in collaborative responses should prioritise workforce development and capability uplift, as well as psychological and cultural safety for practitioners working in cross-disciplinary models. It should also support ongoing risk assessment through risk review meetings across policing, specialist support, perpetrator response, child protection and, where relevant, corrections. The Review also recommends that state and territory governments adopt evidence-based focused deterrence models, ensuring that such models are not limited to a policing response, but also include the offer of community-sector support, where appropriate.¹⁹²

Supports and co-responder models should urgently be made available at access points through Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-based services, with immediate investment in collaborations such as High Risk Teams and community justice panels, particularly in remote communities such as the Torres Strait.

Further considerations include ensuring that co-responder models or co-locations account for cultural safety—avoiding co-location in police stations, noting that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, LGBTIQ+ communities, people with prior criminal justice system contact, those involved in sex work, and those with uncertain immigration status, may be hesitant reporting any experiences of violence to police, particularly sexual violence. This means that co-responder models should be made available in services which support these diverse cohorts.



Co-responder models

There are a range of co-responder models, including:

- co-responder models or multi-disciplinary centres in which practitioners from different disciplines are co-located or otherwise inform each other's practice through regular secondary consults or flexible arrangements;¹⁹³
- where practitioners (for example, child protection) are available to provide secondary consults in a legal environment, such as the Family Court;¹⁹⁴
- where specialist DFSV and MBCP practitioners work in collaborative teams within child protection;¹⁹⁵ and
- community justice panels in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, which help to inform appropriate legal decision-making.



Alice Springs co-responder model

In June 2024, a new co-responder model trial in Mparntwe, Alice Springs commenced with the aim of offering greater support to victim-survivors of domestic and family violence and providing earlier intervention for users of violence.

This initiative is being run between the Department of Territory Families, Housing and Communities, Northern Territory Police, and specialist DFSV organisations, Women's Safety Services of Central Australia (WoSSCA) and Tangentyere Council Aboriginal Corporation.

Following the police response to domestic and family violence incidents in Alice Springs, three specialists from these organisations will work with victim-survivor to provide support and encourage perpetrators to partake in behaviour change programs.

These specialist support workers will be based at the Alice Springs Police Station and will be able to provide advice to police in real time.

It is hoped this new model will strengthen the integrated approach required by multiple agencies to address DFV and will see the workers provide specialist assistance and advice to police in relation to DFV.¹⁹⁶

In addition to expanding the development of alternative reporting options that are not reliant on contact with police, the Review recommends that the Commonwealth and state and territory Governments urgently invest in capability uplift for community-based or cohort specific services to respond appropriately to disclosures of DFSV, with a particular focus on disclosures of sexual assault.

Noting the particularly low reporting, prosecution and ultimate conviction rates of sexual offences, urgent investment should be directed at technology platforms which enable multi-disciplinary, cohort-appropriate and culturally safe forensic examinations.²⁰¹ Doing so can reduce trauma for victim-survivors, ensuring that they have the option of a forensic assessment without travelling significant distances while ‘holding evidence’.²⁰² It can also ensure that evidence is collected in a timely fashion by specialist examiners; and that local practitioners are supported and upskilled in real time.



Forensic examinations

Research in Victoria has identified a significant constraint on the availability of forensic examinations following sexual assault, including assault in the context of family violence.¹⁹⁷ This was initially because of restrictions on forensic examiners travelling while ‘stay at home’ orders were enforced during the COVID-19 pandemic. As a result, a victim-survivor who wanted a forensic examination had no choice but to ‘hold evidence’ (i.e. remain in the clothes in which they had been assaulted and avoid washing) while travelling in a police van to another part of Victoria to be examined.¹⁹⁸

During this time, many victim-survivor chose not to undergo a forensic examination after a sexual offence – losing the opportunity for forensic evidence to be collected that could inform (and sometimes be crucial to) any future prosecution.¹⁹⁹ As at September 2023, the full remit of forensic examinations had not been reinstated, with victim-survivors still limited in the forensic support that they can receive.²⁰⁰

At the other end of Australia, the Review heard that, to undergo forensic examination, victim-survivors of sexual offences in the Torres Strait need to travel to Cairns while holding evidence, leaving their support networks and family and travelling over 800 kilometres via boat and two plane flights or via helicopter. Community members explained that it would be valuable to have a doctor or nurse with the specialist examination skills, or the ability to get instructions over the phone or via technology for a nurse to do the examination, so that the victim-survivor did not have to make the choice between whether or not to leave the islands.

The Review further recommends that Commonwealth and state and territory governments consider the Australian Institute of Criminology's proposal to trial and evaluate domestic violence threat assessment centres, modelled on fixated risk assessment centres for countering violent extremism. These centres could offer a multi-agency approach to information gathering, monitoring and intervention among high-risk offenders during periods of acute risk.

Finally, the Review notes that one of the most crucial sources of prevention potential—particularly for domestic homicides—lies in police prioritising victim-survivor calls for assistance. As such, the Review supports longstanding calls—particularly from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities—for independent oversight bodies for police. Current conduct and complaints systems have been critiqued in various recent inquiries, including the Commission of Inquiry into Queensland Police (which also recommended civilian-led oversight for police).²⁰³ The need for accountability is significant, to reduce police-related harm and rebuild trust and confidence in the communities that they serve. The Review recommends that all jurisdictions implement transparent complaints mechanisms for genuinely independent oversight of police that are DFSV-informed, civilian-led and sit outside of police authorities.



North Ireland police accountability model

The Police Ombudsman for Northern Ireland (the Ombudsman) is free, independent and impartial and investigates all complaints and allegations made against law enforcement officials in Northern Ireland. The Ombudsman is able to deploy a range of investigative powers and has direct input into the outcomes of cases, while being institutionally independent from the police and free from external influence.²⁰⁴ Scholars have identified the Ombudsman as meeting a range of criteria for the civilian control model.²⁰⁵

Evidence examined by the Review also indicated that decisions regarding the prioritisation of sexual offence investigations also function as a barrier to preventing further offending, given that so many prosecutions do not proceed because of actions at the investigation stage.²⁰⁶

The Review therefore recommends greater public reporting on the rates and timeliness of responses to victim-survivor calls for emergency assistance, as well as the timeliness of police investigation from reporting through to decisions around whether to proceed to prosecution, particularly in sexual offence matters.

This includes decisions around when and why matters were not referred for prosecution, at a de-identified and aggregate level. Greater transparency and understanding around 'attrition' patterns—too often misconstrued primarily as the result of decisions of victim-survivor, which evidence shows is not the case—will improve accountability for police and prosecutorial decisions and increase the likelihood that this area will be treated as core police business.²⁰⁷



Recommendation 13

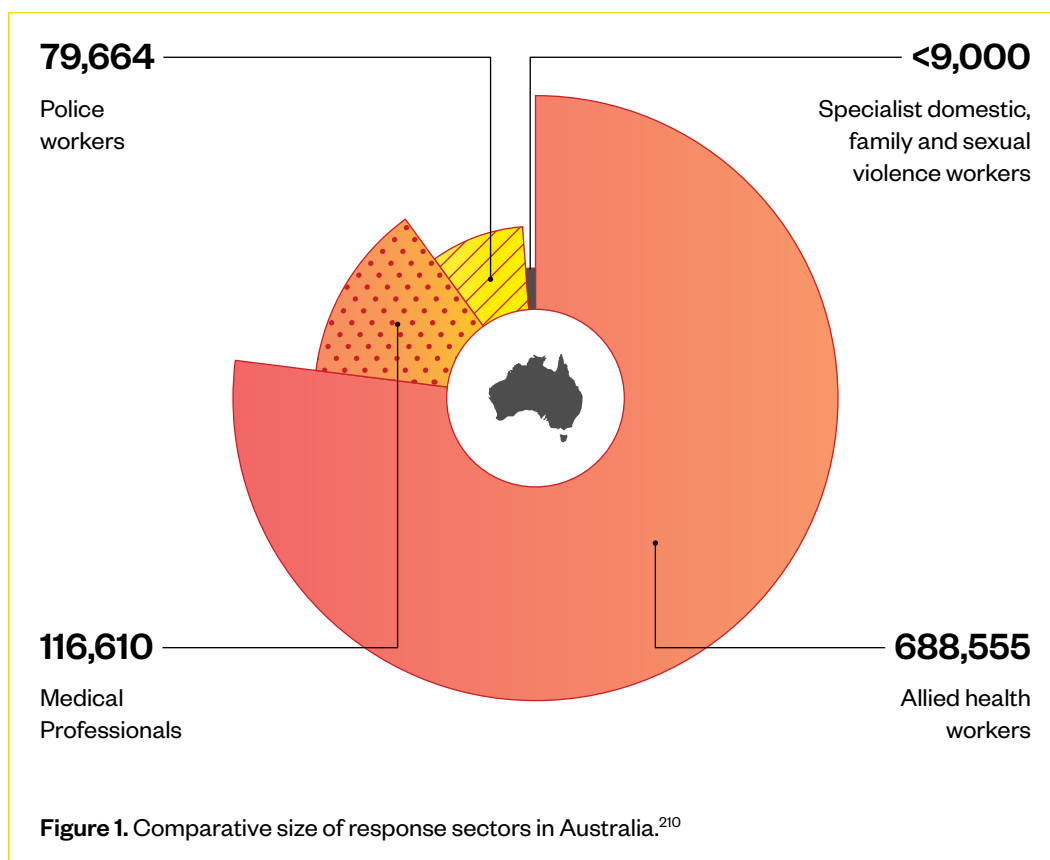
The Commonwealth and state and territory governments to work together to strengthen multi-agency approaches and better manage risk, with a lens on harm and safety, for victim-survivors of DFSV, including risk of homicide and suicide. This should include:

- a. the development and implementation of nationally consistent risk assessment and management principles to be utilised across the full range of roles identified as having decision-making and/or support functions in relation to DFSV, with a proactive approach to preventing misidentification (Commonwealth and states and territories);
- b. strengthening information sharing within and across jurisdictions – including through the National Criminal Intelligence System (NCIS) (Commonwealth and states and territories);
- c. the introduction and expansion of multi-agency responses, including fit-for-purpose police co-responder models – with an immediate focus on collaborative responses that increase access to forensic examinations (states and territories);
- d. a national approach to strengthen systems responses to high-risk perpetrators, including through trialling and evaluating DFSV threat assessment centres and evidence-based focussed deterrence models (states and territories, with Commonwealth support); and
- e. all jurisdictions establishing mechanisms that are DFSV-informed for independent oversight and accountability of police response and management of DFSV (including members investigated for DFSV). These mechanisms should sit outside of police forces and be civilian-led (states and territories).

Build a firm foundation for prevention

With the national emergency that Australia currently faces, comes substantial and unsustainable impacts on the DFSV workforce. The Review heard that the burnout rate for specialist DFSV workforces is alarming, with a level of lethality across presentations which staff are not equipped to respond to, especially at such consistent and sustained regularity. In particular, the Review heard that DFSV specialist staff are being exposed to extreme levels of vicarious and direct trauma which, when coupled with chronically low wages and limited psychological supports, are resulting in rapid staff turnover and protracted vacancies. This is particularly pertinent in regional, rural and remote areas, where services are unable to compete with opportunities in metro regions and the private sector, or where community-led organisations are often staffed by community members who require additional supports and considerations not often built into funding agreements.

The Review recognises that more work is required to resource and support the DFSV specialist (including MBCP) and sexual violence sectors—including to unlock their full prevention capacity.²⁰⁸ It also recognises that other workers who frequently engage with people who experience and use violence—including those who work in the health, legal and justice, child protection and education sectors—play a considerable role in identifying and preventing violence. The approach to building the DFSV skills and capacity of these workers, however, is piecemeal across sectors, services and locations.²⁰⁹



To take a sophisticated and well-informed approach to building the specialist sector, the Review recommends that an expert body, such as Jobs and Skills Australia, the Productivity Commission or other appropriate body, undertake analysis of the current and future labour supply for these specialist sectors and provide advice to governments on how to build a sustainable and professional workforce. The Review also recommends that a DFSV National Workforce Development Strategy be developed that covers these specialist sectors, as well as the broader sectors involved in DFSV prevention. This Strategy should focus on:

- Addressing workforce needs and sustainable funding for the specialist sectors, including: workforce attraction, pipeline and retention; training and skills development, including the role of universities and vocational education and training (VET); professionalisation; wages, noting the Fair Work Commission's gender undervaluation case that is under way; and supervision and management, noting the stressful and traumatic nature of work in these sectors.
- A systematic and coordinated way to build the DFSV skills, capability and qualifications of workers in broader sectors—for example, health, law and justice and education—including through universities, VET and on the job learning.
- DFSV specialist and broader sectors building skills to work with children and young people; First Nations people; people with disability; LGBTIQ+ people; and other culturally diverse communities. This includes supporting workforces in both mainstream and targeted services for these groups.



Recommendation 14

The Commonwealth and state and territory governments to work together to build the specialist DFSV workforce and expand workforce capability of all services that frequently engage with victim-survivors and people who use violence. This should be done through:

- a. commissioning analysis into current and future labour supply for the DFSV specialist services sector and recommendations to build and support a secure and sustainably resourced sector;
- b. establishing a DFSV National Workforce Development Strategy that would expand the capacity and capability of sectors, such as the DFSV specialist sector, providing emergency services and accommodation, and including the men's behaviour change sector and the sexual violence sector; and
- c. establishing a strategy for capability uplift across other intersecting workforces, and prioritising legal, justice, child protection and health (including AOD and mental health) sectors.

Bring sexual violence into focus

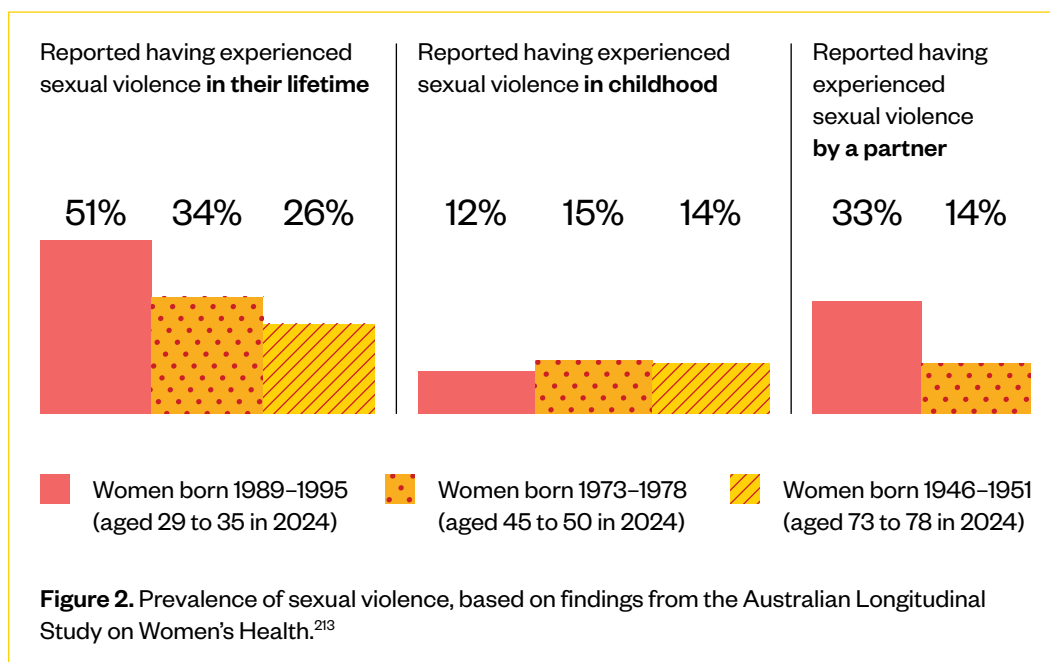


The number of victim-survivors of sexual assault recorded by police rose by 11 per cent in 2023, the 12th straight annual rise.²¹¹

There are an estimated 50 sexual assaults in residential aged care each week.²¹²

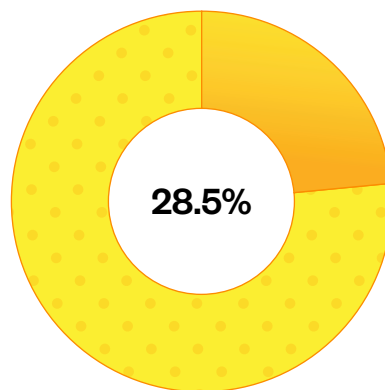
The Review recognises that Australia requires a stronger focus on preventing and responding to sexual violence amidst the wider attention on gender-based violence. Here the Review notes that sexual violence and domestic and family violence often co-occur.

Equally vital to acknowledge, sexual violence also occurs outside domestic and family settings and intimate partner relationships. As a result of divergent clinical, community and justice responses, however, sexual violence often receives a different response to domestic and family violence in the context of legal and support systems.



Findings from the Australian Child Maltreatment Study

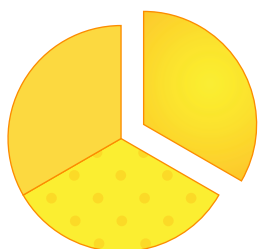
Whole sample. Overall, in our whole sample, we found the national prevalence of child sexual abuse in Australia is 28.5% (more than 1 in 4).



We found that child sexual abuse is inflicted to different extents by different classes of offender. Analysis of these data is ongoing, but we have found:

- adolescents aged under 18 inflict the highest proportion of child sexual abuse (12.9% of our total sample)
- parents, and other adult parent-like caregivers in the home, are the next most common class of offender (7.8% of our total sample).

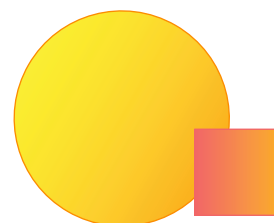
We identified a massive gender disparity:



more than **1 in 3** girls experienced child sexual abuse
(37.3%)



almost **1 in 5** boys experienced child sexual abuse
(18.8%)



girls are **twice as likely** to experience child sexual abuse as boys

Figure 3. Child sexual abuse in Australia, based on data from the Australian Child Maltreatment Study.²¹⁴

Increased reporting of sexual violence over recent years and, in particular, high levels of sexual violence experienced and reported by young women, highlight a need for urgent attention.²¹⁵ While consent laws have changed and associated education has become more widespread, the challenges of online pornography, deepfakes and other forms of generative artificial intelligence (AI) pose new and significant challenges. The Review recognises that approaches to prevent and respond to sexual violence must continue to evolve to meet the changing environment, especially online and amongst young people.

In light of increased reporting, the Review also heard that the specialist sexual violence sector is struggling with growing annual demand for their services and that, in particular, services gaps exist for diverse communities, for men and boys, as well as for children and young people. The Review also heard about a need for accountability in investigation by police as recognised in *Recommendation 13*; about a particular lack of access to forensic examination, as also noted in *Recommendation 13*; and about a need for a focus on the prevalence of child sexual abuse, including in the context of incest and harmful sexual behaviours by children.

To address this—and in recognition that sexual violence has not received adequate attention in the national policy landscape—the Review recommends that governments further expand and prioritise work on Action 6 in the *First Action Plan (2023–2027)* of the National Plan. This increased focus should:

- highlight the unique and evolving nature of sexual violence, and the need for prevention approaches and responses to meet these complexities and constant changes;
- include effective and evidence-based ways to teach consent to young people, as well as the dynamic nature of online influences and their impact on people's experience of the world and sexual behaviour;
- examine the resources needed for the specialist sexual violence sector, and broader sectors including education and health, to respond and meet the needs of victim-survivors more comprehensively, including survivors of child sexual abuse;
- noting the Australian Law Reform Commissions current reference on justice responses to sexual violence, due to report in January 2025, outline justice responses that validate victim-survivor experiences, potentially through processes outside the criminal justice system, such as through restorative approaches, including those based in the community; and
- address the needs of diverse communities and recognise different experiences of sexual violence, including; violence against women with disabilities and older women, including in institutional and residential settings; sexual exploitation of women on precarious visas and the need for greater accessibility to services which provide support for trafficked persons; sexual violence experienced by those working in the sex industry; and sexual violence experienced by First Nations women and LGBTIQ+ people.



A recent study has found that women and gender diverse people working in the Victorian sex industry:

- face increasing financial and immigration insecurity following COVID-19 and, as a result, endure greater levels of risk in their working and personal lives;
- face increased rates of intimate partner violence, particularly in the form of technology facilitated abuse as well as threats to ‘out’ their occupation; and
- felt unable to access sexual health, justice or sexual assault services.²¹⁶

The DFSV and justice sectors may struggle to identify modern slavery crimes under the *Criminal Code Act 1995* (Cth), which means that victim-survivors are not able to access support through the Support for Trafficked Peoples Program, as this relies on referral from (and therefore reporting to) Australian Federal Police. This may include where a perpetrator coerces or deceives a victim-survivor into entering what she thought to be an intimate partner relationship but where the perpetrator has exploited the victim-survivor for financial gain.²¹⁷

Evidence clearly indicates that the criminal justice system does not support recovery for victim-survivors of sexual violence, with recent research highlighting the key needs for recovery after sexual violence encompassing a gamut of different domains and experiences, including where recovery is impacted by ableism or other forms of discrimination.²¹⁸

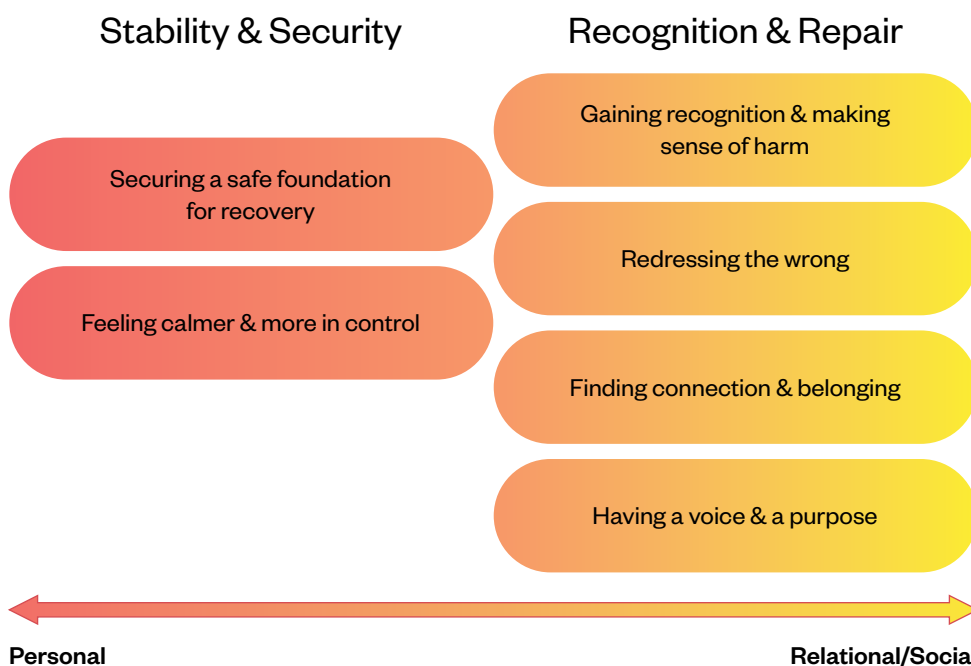


Figure 4. Key needs for recovery after sexual violence.²¹⁹

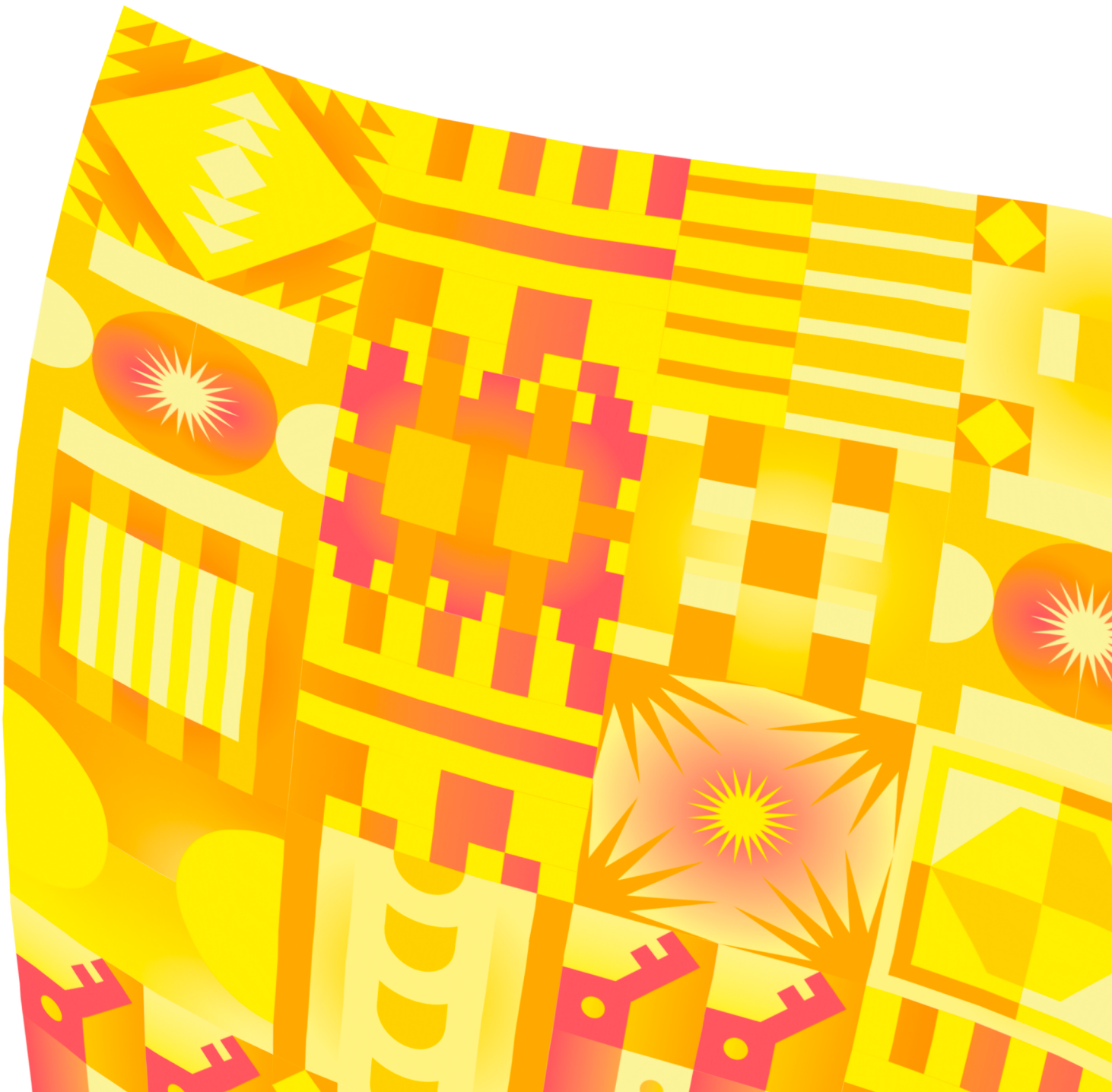
This Review notes that this increased focus should align with other national frameworks and plans including the *National Plan to End Violence against Women and Children 2022–2032*, *Working for Women: A Strategy for Gender Equality*, the *National Women’s Health Strategy 2020–2030*, *Australia’s Disability Strategy 2021–2031*, the *National Strategy to Prevent and Respond to Child Sexual Abuse 2021–2030*, *Safe & Supported: The National Framework for Protecting Australia’s Children 2021–2031* and the *National Action Plan to Combat Modern Slavery 2020–2025*. It should also align with forthcoming documents including the standalone national plan for First Nations family safety and a successor to the *National Plan to Respond to the Abuse of Older Australians (Elder Abuse) 2019–2023*.



Recommendation 15

The Commonwealth and state and territory governments should further expand and prioritise work on Action 6 in the *First Action Plan (2023–2027)* of the National Plan to recognise the full range of sexual violence including where it occurs apart from DFV particularly noting the recommendations from the forthcoming Australian Law Reform Commission inquiry into justice responses to sexual violence.

Prevention through systems and industries



Stop perpetrators weaponising systems

“ I’m trapped by the system. I have to deal with ongoing abuse via my children until they’re 18 ... I am not able to escape the abuse completely because of the systems in place that support the abuser ... It’s a life sentence of ongoing abuse even if you manage to leave the relationship.”²²⁰

“ The current system sent my children with this man, no matter how much they begged not to be sent. They were returned bruised externally, but the biggest damage was internally. They still speak about telling “professionals” that their Dad was hurting them, and not being heard.”²²¹

The Review recognises that government systems, at the Commonwealth, state and territory levels, are being manipulated and abused by perpetrators to control victim-survivors and extend DFSV. Perpetrators may seek to control victim-survivors by manipulating systems and services. Practically, this can manifest as the withholding of payments, not fully disclosing income and assets, prolonging legal proceedings, threats to cancel immigration visas, raising debts against a victim-survivors’ name and making false allegations and complaints.²²² Victim-survivors, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and migrant and refugee victim-survivors, may also be at risk to forms of systems abuse through wider family relationships.²²³

The Review heard that systems that were originally established to support women, children and at-risk communities – such as the family law, child support and child protection systems—are often abused by perpetrators and have a converse effect to their original intent.²²⁴ Corporate systems, such as banking and financial services, insurance, utilities and technology, are also exploited.

A well-recognised source of systems abuse includes the family law system, in which perpetrators attempt to drain the resources of victim-survivors through protracted and incessant legal proceedings; insisting on care arrangements which are unsafe and do not reflect the wishes of a child;²²⁵ and, as research indicates, undermining the mother-child bond by coaching children to view their mother in a negative light.²²⁶

It also includes the taxation system, which perpetrators are able to weaponise by placing tax debts in the names of former partners. This can contribute to debilitating financial burdens for victim-survivors, including insecure housing and prolonged economic instability. Economic abuse in the context of DFSV costs the economy an estimated \$10.9 billion per year and affects more than 2.4 million Australians.²²⁷

Further, the Review notes that victim-survivors are often primary caregivers of children in separation agreements. Services Australia records more than 660,000 separated families in the child support system, which perpetrators frequently misuse to abuse former partners through financial abuse and child support non-compliance.²²⁸ Eighty per cent of women involved in a Swinburne University survey have reported that their ex-partner replaced physical abuse with financial abuse via child support as a control tactic since separation.²²⁹

The Review heard about work currently underway with the eSafety Commissioner and technology sector to implement Safety by Design principles, as well as the work to embed safety by design in parts of the banking and financial services, utilities and other sectors. Safety by Design principles can help organisations and government systems to build DFSV safety principles and considerations proactively into their processes to; prevent processes from being leveraged for abuse, identify where existing risks and harms are occurring, and ensure that they are not being exploited by people who use gender-based violence to cause further harm.²³⁰ Taking a Safety by Design approach will help to unlock the prevention potential of these systems by removing opportunities for violence to become more entrenched and empower systems to respond proactively to evolving threats.



Safety by Design principles in the technology industry

Safety by Design puts user safety and rights at the centre of the design and development of online products and services. Rather than retrofitting safeguards after an issue has already occurred, such as gender-based violence, Safety by Design focuses on the ways that technology companies can minimise online threats by anticipating, detecting and eliminating online harms before they occur. Though originally designed for online products and services, Safety by Design is increasingly being used to guide the reform of other systems and institutions.

Safety by Design is underpinned by three key principles:

1. **Service provider responsibility**, which places the burden of safety on the service provider, and not on the user. This principle seeks to address known and anticipated harms during service design and provision.
2. **User empowerment and autonomy**, which prioritises the dignity of users. This principle focuses on ensuring that design features and functions preserve consumer and human rights.
3. **Transparency and accountability**, which recognises transparency and accountability as the hallmarks of a robust approach to safety. This principle focuses on publishing accessible and easy to understand policies and processes and establishing accountable complaints mechanisms.²³¹

The Review recommends that the Commonwealth, state and territory governments assess how their systems are currently being weaponised by perpetrators and apply Safety by Design principles as guidance for programmatic reform of these systems. This process should be agile and responsive, given that perpetrator tactics are adaptive, while future harms cannot always be identified ahead of time.



How have Safety by Design principles been applied to the banking sector?

The banking industry is a critical setting where proactive effort is needed to address financial abuse. This is because banks can often be the first to learn of abusive relationships—with research indicating that victims of financial abuse being more likely to seek assistance from their bank than from domestic and family violence services.²³²

In recent years, banks in Australia have implemented a range of actions in line with the Safety by Design principles to stop their products from being used for financial abuse.

- In 2019, an investigation by Commonwealth Bank identified 8,000 customers who received multiple low-value deposits, often less than \$1, with disturbing and potentially abusive messages in the transaction descriptions.²³³
- These findings prompted Australian banks to change their terms and conditions and introduce mechanisms that aimed to disrupt the technology-facilitated financial abuse occurring through their platforms.²³⁴
- By late 2022, the four major Australian banks had blocked 500,000 messages from across 300,000 individual accounts, as well as cancelling, suspending and/or warning more than 3000 customers of financial abuse.²³⁵
- By November 2023, 13 Australian banks had published new terms and conditions that made clear that financial abuse was an unacceptable customer behaviour, and that they would not condone the misuse of their products as a method of coercive control.²³⁶

The Review urges the Commonwealth Government to build on work that is already underway. Reform should be prioritised for systems that have been identified as causing the most reported harm, including the family law system, child support system, the immigration system and the taxation system. Given that this is a problem that requires a whole-of-society response, the Review also supports further action to address systems abuse by non-government systems.

This recommendation reinforces Action 5 of the *First Action Plan (2023–2027)* under the National Plan, which focuses on strengthening systems and services to hold people who choose to use violence more effectively to account, in order to better protect the safety and wellbeing of victim-survivors.



Recommendation 16

The Commonwealth and state and territory governments to undertake an immediate audit of how DFSV perpetrators are weaponising government systems, and to respond to these findings. This audit and subsequent plans for reform should be informed by Safety by Design principles.

The Commonwealth Government should build on work that is already underway and prioritise systems where significant harm is occurring, such as: family law, child support, immigration, and taxation.

Regulate industries that can do harm

The Review notes that it is standard public health practice to regulate or prevent the availability of products that contribute to harm. Accordingly, regulation must also be factored into our strategies to prevent DFSV. To date, however, industries that are well positioned to reduce harm—particularly alcohol, pornography, and gambling—have not been proactive about addressing the impact that their products and business models have on the rate and severity of violence and abuse against women and children.²³⁷

Alcohol

Alcohol has long been known to increase both the incidence and severity of physical and sexual violence within intimate relationships and families.²³⁸ The Review notes that a failure to consider DFSV in alcohol policy has allowed unprecedented growth in alcohol availability, both in the density of liquor outlets and the length of online delivery hours.²³⁹ This increase in availability has been statistically linked to increases in alcohol-related DFSV.²⁴⁰



Prevention through regulating harmful industries

Over 1 in 3 incidents of physical intimate partner violence involve alcohol, and alcohol-related incidents are twice as likely to involve severe physical violence and life-threatening injuries.²⁴¹

The Australian Domestic and Family Violence Death Review Network Data Report found that over 60 per cent of males who killed a female intimate partner engaged in problematic drug and/or alcohol use in the lead-up to, or at the time of, the homicide.²⁴² Alcohol abuse can also be a factor in child removal, and children who are removed from their families are then at risk of experiencing and/or perpetrating violence in intimate relationships. This risk is magnified for children born with Foetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD), which occurs between 1.1 to 5.0 per cent of children in western countries.²⁴³

Data also shows alcohol-related DFSV is particularly high in wealthy areas. According to 2024 data from the NSW Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research, the highest proportion of alcohol-related domestic violence assaults in Sydney occurred in its most affluent areas.²⁴⁴

Predominantly, DFSV-related alcohol restrictions to date have been targeted at Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. Too often such interventions have been stigmatising and harmful, notably when not done in partnership with local communities. Innovative approaches, however, have also been pioneered by First Nations leaders.²⁴⁵ The Review supports Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities to restrict alcohol in culturally appropriate ways that work best for them.



Lililwan Project

The Lililwan Project was Australia's first study of the prevalence of foetal alcohol spectrum disorder (FASD) in remote communities.²⁴⁶ Launched in 2010, the project aimed to address the high prevalence of FASD in the Fitzroy Valley region of Western Australia, particularly among Aboriginal children.

The project provided a number of recommendations to inform national efforts to address FASD, including to restrict access to alcohol, for example through volumetric taxes, community-led restrictions and the responsible marketing and sale of alcohol products.²⁴⁷

Critically, the Review recommends that regulatory action must now be extended to the broader Australian population. Evidence indicates that interventions to restrict the hours of sale have resulted in reductions in the number of DFSV victims presenting to hospital in Australia and a reduction in spousal homicide and domestic assaults.²⁴⁸

Given the strong role of alcohol in domestic homicide and DFSV, the Review recommends that state and territory governments adopt clear primary objectives in their liquor regulatory regimes to prevent gender-based violence, alongside existing objectives around alcohol harm reduction. This should be accompanied by evidence-based reforms to address availability and access, including regulations on liquor store density and operating hours, and online delivery.

Additionally, given the statistical increase in DFSV incidents during football grand finals, as well as the high number of children who watch sport on television and mobile apps, the Review recommends that alcohol advertising be restricted during sporting events.²⁴⁹

Gambling

“ We have a culture where sport and gambling are intrinsically linked. These behaviours are causing increasingly widespread and serious harm to individuals, families and communities.”

— Peta Murphy MP.²⁵⁰

“ He got in the car and tried to run me over ... for whatever reason it was my fault that ... [he] didn't win at ... gambling. So it was, like, well someone has to pay.”

— Interview participant.²⁵¹

“ He dragged me through the family law system ... and ... just continued to gamble and drive himself further into debt.”

— Interview participant.²⁵²

Minimal attention has been paid to the connection between problem gambling and DFSV, and regulatory decisions to date have barely taken DFSV harm into consideration. Evidence clearly shows that, where gambling co-exists with DFSV, it often escalates its frequency and/or severity.²⁵³ Survivor accounts illustrate how men's gambling harms can create situations that heighten the risk of intimate partner violence (IPV), such as men experiencing anger and shame over losses and responding with violence when female partners object to gambling-behaviours.²⁵⁴ Gambling can also be used to perpetuate financial abuse post-separation.²⁵⁵

The Review heard that there are clear regulatory opportunities for governments to prevent problem gambling both online and through restrictions on electronic gaming machines (EGMs). Online gambling is a growing area of concern in Australia, with around 21 per cent of the population now gambling online and Australians spending more on online gambling than any other country in the world.²⁵⁶

The Review supports the recommendations made in the Murphy Review, which dealt specifically with online gambling, and reiterates the recommendation for a total ban on gambling advertising. Given that EGMs are one of the most harmful forms of gambling in Australia, accounting for between 48 to 60 per cent of the total gambling expenditure in Australia between 2001–2002 to 2019–2020, the Review also recommends stronger regulation of EGMs.²⁵⁷



Postcodes in Victoria with no electronic gaming machines have 20 per cent fewer family incidents, and 30 per cent fewer domestic violence assaults when compared with postcodes that have 75 electronic gaming machines per 10,000 people.²⁵⁸

Pornography



Evidence shows that nearly half (48 per cent) of boys have seen pornography by the age of 13, and nearly half (48 per cent) of girls by the age of 15.²⁶⁹

Participants in the Beyond Silence study, which explored women's experiences of intimate partner sexual violence in Australia, spoke about pornography being used as a grooming tool (e.g. "using pornography to make me think those things were normal, and that's what everybody does") and having partners demand sexual acts that they had clearly communicated they "hated" (e.g. He didn't really seem to care that I said I hated it. He'd still ask for it and ... I would let him do it ... because it was something that he just really wanted, but I hated it.).²⁶⁰

The Review notes with concern that mainstream pornography has, by default, become the most prominent form of sex education for young people.²⁶¹ Children's unfettered access to free online pornography has normalised painful and dangerous sexual practices, including non-fatal strangulation—an act that, when used in the context of intimate partner violence, increases the likelihood of future homicide by 700 per cent.²⁶² It also shapes expectations of what is sexually 'normal', including the normalisation of requests for sexual images among children, and commonly features harmful messaging around male dominance; control, coercion and aggression; and female submission.²⁶³

Not all online pornography depicts harmful behaviour, but free mainstream sites commonly depict high levels of hostility, racist stereotypes and degradation, as well as content that fetishises incest. Evidence shows that men who use this kind of pornography are more likely to engage in violent sexual practices, like choking without consent.²⁶⁴ The Review heard that forensic examiners have seen an increase in young women presenting with non-fatal strangulation injuries from sex that began consensually, and then escalated unexpectedly to violence.

This is a global problem, and age verification is a harm minimisation strategy being pursued by governments internationally, including in the United Kingdom, United States of America and the European Union. The Review acknowledges that the Commonwealth Government in May 2024 committed \$6.5 million to pilot age verification technology, using guidance from the eSafety Commissioner's Roadmap for Age Verification.²⁶⁵ The Review recommends that this pilot be a genuine trial that tests both the technology and also how age verification assurance systems will be implemented, including the participation of the major technology platforms that are used by Australian children. For the development of this trial, the Review recommends that the Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development, Communications and the Arts liaise closely with the eSafety Commissioner and leverage its role as the regulator and technical expert in this area.

Age verification will not automatically address porn-related harms. To give young people the context they need to navigate the increasing pornification of mainstream culture, the Review recommends continued efforts to give young people literacy on porn, and the associated normalisation of non-fatal strangulation in sex, and therefore also supports increased support and resourcing to specialised sexual violence prevention programs like *'It's Time We Talked'*.²⁶⁶

Media

The need for ethical journalism

“Immediately after the murder [of my mum] there was some reporting and online commentary where people were saying things like, ‘This woman was murdered because she didn’t pass the salt’ and ‘The religion of peace strikes again’ – just these constant overdone clichés.”

— Amani Haydar.²⁶⁷

“As survivors of violence and intense anguish, how our mother’s case was reported on profoundly affected us. ... Our mother’s death was not something that should have been dramatised in order to sell papers, my father’s violence was not the result of a religious or cultural value, and it certainly wasn’t because he had a ‘brain snap’. My mother’s death was a result of the deeply entrenched gender-unequal society in which we existed, where my mother, sisters and I were my father’s possessions.”

— Arman Abrahamzadeh.²⁶⁸

“The only context in which I have seen the lies told by criminals regularly repeated (without context) in headlines is in reports about men’s violence against women.”

— Jane Gilmore, journalist and author.²⁶⁹

The Review notes that the media has a critical role in shaping how Australians think and talk about violence against women and children. Ethical reporting has the power to reinforce community attitudes that condone or tolerate violence; shape the way that women understand their own experiences of violence—including whether they take action or seek support; and also influence the way that perpetrators understand their own choices to use violence and whether to seek support to change their behaviour.²⁷⁰

Currently, there is limited evidence-based education for journalists on the drivers of violence or how to report on cases of DFSV safely and ethically, including DFSV-related homicides and suicides. The Review recommends that the Commonwealth Government build on media initiatives already underway and strengthen guidance and training materials for journalists and media outlets reporting on DFSV to help them address gender inequalities, challenge harmful gender stereotypes, avoid victim-blaming narratives and hold perpetrators to account.

Addressing these industry-based drivers of gender-based violence and ensuring that our systems and institutions are designed to support and protect people impacted by violence, is required to meet Actions 1 and 5 of the *First Action Plan (2023–2027)*.



Recommendation 17

The Commonwealth and state and territory governments to work with industries that are well positioned to prevent and reduce DFSV, including homicide, with a focus on alcohol and gambling industries, in addition to media and pornography. This includes reviewing and strengthening alcohol and gambling regulatory environments to prioritise the prevention of gender-based violence. This should include:

- a. adopting clear primary objectives in state and territory liquor regulatory regimes to prevent gender-based violence, alongside existing objectives around alcohol harm reduction (states and territories);
- b. restrictions on alcohol sales, delivery timeframes (states and territories) and advertising (Commonwealth and states and territories);
- c. stronger restrictions leading to a total ban on advertising of gambling (Commonwealth and states and territories);
- d. examining the density of electronic gaming machines, and use of online gambling, in relation to the prevalence of DFSV across different populations and communities (Commonwealth and states and territories);
- e. establishing and embedding national standards for media reporting on gender-based violence (Commonwealth); and
- f. ensuring the age-verification pilot for online pornography tests both the technology, and how age verification assurance systems will be implemented, including the participation of the major technology platforms used by Australian children.

Further, the Review recommends that the Commonwealth Government work with the Foundation for Alcohol Research and Education (FARE) and other organisations on a framework to ensure the development of an integrated and focused effort to address the role of alcohol in DFSV.

Protect victim-survivors from tech-facilitated abuse

“ [My] mobile phone was used to somehow create a tracking device on my phone that then my ex used to track my movements for over a year ... It emerged later that he knew every single place I went to ... What initially happened was that he ... sort of started telling me things that he knew I'd been doing. He said “Oh, you've been to this place and you've been here and there” ... If I went somewhere unusual, he would go there and hang out outside and wait and watch and use that to actually, yeah, locate me, stalk me when he wanted to. So that was bad.”

— Amahle, victim-survivor.²⁷¹

The Review recognises the work of the Commonwealth Government's eSafety Commissioner in addressing gender-based violence online. This work is critical in the face of rising rates and evolving means of technology-facilitated gender-based abuse.

Australia's eSafety Commissioner and regime are unique globally and provide a mechanism to regulate the complex and international problem of gender-based abuse and violence online. The eSafety Commissioner is a relatively new body that was established to safeguard all Australians from online harms and to promote safer, more positive online experiences. A significant proportion of the eSafety Commissioner's work focuses on the safety of women and children, in the context of increased cyberbullying of children and young people, adult cyber abuse and technology-facilitated abuse. The eSafety Commissioner is navigating a complex global regulatory environment and must remain vigilant in responding to forms of online violence against women and children, which are constantly evolving. It investigates online abuse complaints, including those resulting from experiences of DFSV, and also provides online safety programs and resources to all Australians.



Technology-facilitated abuse

- 99.3 per cent of Australian family, domestic and sexual violence practitioners had clients who experienced technology-facilitated family and domestic violence.²⁷²
- 62.3 per cent of Australian adults surveyed online (aged 18 to 54) had experienced technology-facilitated sexual violence.²⁷³
- 9,060 image-based abuse reports were handled by the eSafety Commissioner in 2022–23, which was a 117 per cent increase on the previous year.²⁷⁴
- Abusers who use tech-based abuse in family and domestic violence are also more likely to use physical violence against their partner and any children involved, and there's a higher risk of murder.²⁷⁵
- 1 in 4 people who purchased GPS tracking devices since 2023 have a history of domestic violence.²⁷⁶
- In 2021–22, according to the PSS, 641,500 Australian women had their movements tracked by an ex-partner. This was a significant increase from earlier years, where this number was 455,100 in the 2016 PSS. These figures record tracking by former partners only. Women in current relationships are also subjected to having their every movement monitored: 56,700 in 2016 and 66,500 in 2021–22.²⁷⁷



Sextortion

- Of child sexual abuse material reports made to the eSafety Commissioner, 1 in 8 were “self-generated”, with children being encouraged and coerced into making sexually explicit videos and images by predators online.²⁷⁸
- The eSafety Commission reports a 1,332 per cent increase in reports of sexual extortion, known as ‘sextortion’—with 432 reports made in 2018–19 compared to 6,187 reports made in 2022–23. These threats were predominantly issued by criminal enterprises against young men aged 18 to 24.²⁷⁹

A commitment to addressing new and emerging forms of violence online is critical to unlocking the prevention potential—to prevent violence from being perpetrated, escalating and turning into a fatality. The Review recommends that the eSafety Commissioner continues and expands on its work with the technology industry, as well as governments, to prevent gender-based violence. This should include work to improve policies, practices and accountability around online safety; increase transparency around harm; respond to evolving technologies such as tracking apps, deep fakes and generative AI; and provide support services for victim-survivors.



Women in leadership and online abuse

- 62 per cent of women with an online or media profile visible to the broader public have experienced online abuse.²⁸⁰
- 24 per cent of women are hesitant to move into a role that requires an online public or media presence, due to fear of or experiences of online abuse.²⁸¹



Recommendation 18

The Commonwealth Government to continue to support the eSafety Commissioner to undertake increasingly complex work preventing gender-based violence, which includes working with the technology industry on the improvement of policies, practices and accountability.

Prevention through learning and data



Strengthen knowledge sharing and accountability

The Review recognises that prevention through systems, industries and other mechanisms also requires a consideration of wider structural levers, such as those established to provide national leadership on DFSV. The DFSV Commission is an established executive agency and non-corporate Commonwealth entity, which promotes national coordination and consistency of data and evidence on best practice across a range of DFSV violence policies and system interactions.²⁸² Importantly, the DFSV Commission engages with people with lived experience to help amplify their voices and ensure that their diverse experiences are heard—to inform the development of policies and improve service delivery.

The Review considers it essential to prevention efforts that the DFSV Commission be established as a statutory authority with expanded functions—recognising the priority of this role in the context of the ongoing national agenda, as well as in the context of our wider international obligations under CEDAW, enabled at a national level by the external affairs power. This national model is consistent with the approach adopted on the establishment of a National Children's Commissioner.

The Review also recommends that the DFSV Commission perform a clearinghouse function, with a national repository of practice knowledge and stronger powers to gather information. This would contribute to the implementation of Action 2 of the *First Action Plan (2023–2027)* under the National Plan—on improving the national evidence base on gender-based violence. Operation of a clearinghouse would bring together community-based evidence and practice with the wider evidence base for prevention, early intervention, response and recovery and healing. This would contribute to increased efficiency and effectiveness of delivery of genuinely integrated responses to DFSV. Greater national consistency would make it easier for victim-survivors to navigate the DFSV system.

The Review also recommends that the DFSV Commission continue to monitor the implementation of the National Plan, including associated funding. This would promote transparency and accountability across both the Commonwealth and jurisdictional governments and increase visibility of jurisdictions' investment. Within this remit, the DFSV Commission should also monitor implementation of the recommendations of this Rapid Review.



Recommendation 19

The Commonwealth Government to expand the functions and powers of the National DFSV Commission and establish it as a statutory authority. Expanded powers should include performing a clearinghouse function, having stronger powers to gather information, and to continue monitoring the implementation and funding associated with the National Plan.

Collect better data to measure prevention and understand perpetration

The Review recognises the efforts of Australia's existing data agencies to facilitate access to information on available data and gaps on DFSV in Australia. The Review also recognises that there is considerable data and outcomes work underway under the National Plan, which acknowledges and is working to improve data on DFSV.

A national emergency as complex as gender-based violence requires rigorous and comprehensive data and evidence. Every data point tells us where we should be focused to unlock the prevention potential. This report reflects on how the online world contributes to gender-based violence, but the collection and sharing of data, evidence and information is a key means by which technology can facilitate appropriate responses and help to prevent the deaths of women and children. Australia is a complex federation with inconsistent data definitions and methods for collecting and reporting information. This challenge is not insurmountable, however, and can be addressed—motivated by a recognition of this crisis by the community and the highest levels of governments through National Cabinet.

While Australia has some helpful population-level data, we lack disaggregated data on our most marginalised communities affected by DFSV, particularly Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and those in remote parts of Australia, such as the Torres Strait.²⁸³ Australia also has very limited data on the prevalence, extent and nature of perpetration.²⁸⁴

Data and evidence is needed to inform policy and program responses, and to measure their efficacy. The Review recommends that Commonwealth, state and territory governments continue to work together to address data gaps. It also strongly urges governments to address evidence and data-informed policy that is grounded in rigorous evaluation and adapt to new knowledge as it emerges. This recommendation reinforces Action 2 of the *First Action Plan (2023–2027)* under the National Plan, which focuses on improving the national evidence base on gender-based violence.

In strengthening data collection processes, and in line with Reform Area 4 of the *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Action Plan 2023–2025*, the Review acknowledges the principles of Indigenous data sovereignty and self-determination and reinforces the need to implement these. Shifting ownership of DFSV data collected about First Nations peoples to the First Nations organisations that deliver community-based services is a key step to improving our data ecosystems and contributing to better safety outcomes for First Nations families and communities. Any continued measurement of the National Plan must be supported by qualitative and quantitative measures, including new data that emerges over time.



Indigenous Data Sovereignty

“Indigenous data sovereignty is a key tenet of self-determination. Furthermore, it is the right of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to exercise authority over and govern the creation, collection, ownership and use of their data. Therefore, data created and collated for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities should maintain a two-way information exchange to ensure Indigenous data sovereignty. This two-way exchange requires that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations be involved in all stages of the design, research, service development and evaluation models through formal and genuine partnership.”²⁸⁵

Reform Area Four of the *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Action Plan 2023–2025* focuses on evidence and data-ecosystems. In particular, it focuses on the need to explore opportunities to share access to data and information at a regional level, as per Closing the Gap Priority Reform Four.²⁸⁶ Priority Reform Four sets out that data and information sharing encompass the following:

- Partnerships are in place to guide the improved collection, access, management and use of data to inform shared decision-making.
- Governments provide communities and organisations with access to the same data and information they use to make decisions.
- Governments collect, handle and report data at sufficient levels of disaggregation, and in an accessible and timely way.
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and organisations are supported by governments to build capability and expertise in collecting, using and interpreting data in a meaningful way.



Recommendation 20

The Commonwealth and state and territory governments to further strengthen data collection, in relation to DFSV. This includes:

- a. working in partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities to embark on a process to determine a community led approach to data collection that accounts for Indigenous data sovereignty principles;
- b. increasing intersectional and disaggregated data, as well as a particular focus on improving data on regional, rural and remote communities such as the Torres Strait Islands, in addition to improving data on LGBTIQ+ experiences, experiences of people with a disability, and children and young people affected by family law processes;
- c. establishing a national data set focusing on the extent and nature of perpetration to inform and improve response; and
- d. prioritising enhancements to the measurements framework for the National Plan to include further quantitative targets.

Strengthen death review processes and evidence on suicide and DFSV-victimisation

Finally, the Review recognises that, while we work to unlock each prevention potential, we must continue to learn from where our efforts have failed. Death review processes provide a critical lens into the points of intervention that could have prevented a homicide.²⁸⁷ They also offer a cross-disciplinary and novel way of looking at systemic and other failures that need to be fixed to prevent future deaths. This approach is central to addressing gender-based violence and deaths in an effective way and should be prioritised as an area for continued resourcing and national coordination.

Despite this, inconsistent approaches to domestic and family violence death reviews operate across Australia. All jurisdictions have or are in the process of developing formalised domestic and family violence death reviews, with the exception of Tasmania.²⁸⁸ The Review therefore recommends that all states and territories establish, resource and uplift death review processes, including by learning and embedding insights from death reviews across the country.

The Review notes that, in establishing and uplifting death review processes, priority must be put on maintaining cultural appropriateness at each stage of an investigation into the death of a First Nations person, particularly in ensuring that the impact of the work of the jurisdiction does not perpetuate cycles of grief and loss on First Nations families. The Review recommends that death review panels across jurisdictions include First Nations support units and operate in line with related protocols.

Further to the alarming numbers featured earlier in this report, the Review recognises that Australia has yet to include suicide related to DFSV-victimisation in homicide data. Noting that many factors contribute to a person's decision to take their own lives, evidence suggests that suicides related to DFSV-victimisation potentially account for at least three times the number of female homicide deaths.



Victorian suicides linked to family violence

The Victorian Suicide Register, maintained by the Coroner's Court of Victoria, contains a "violence between deceased and partner/family member" field to record any evidence of family violence.²⁸⁹ In response to a request from this Review, the Victorian Coroner's Court provided the most recent available data (from 2009 to 2016) on female suicides where the deceased had ever experienced family violence. This data revealed that 210 (17.5 per cent) of female suicides over that period had experienced family violence.²⁹⁰

Suicide and DFSV among young people

Research shows that young people who experience domestic and family violence are at greater risk of suicide, or suicidal ideation.²⁹¹ For example, one study found that young people who described being "beaten by their parents" were almost twice as likely to report suicidal ideation, and almost three times as likely to attempt suicide during adolescence.²⁹²

An international lens: Domestic homicides and suspected victim suicides in the United Kingdom

The national Domestic Homicide Project, which examines all deaths identified by police as domestic abuse in the United Kingdom, found that a total of 242 domestic abuse-related deaths were recorded between April 2022 to March 2023.²⁹³ Of these, 93 were suspected victim suicide following domestic abuse, with the number of suspected victim-suicides following DFSV overtaking intimate partner homicides for the first time, potentially as a result of improved reporting and data recording by police officers.²⁹⁴

Incorporating figures of suicides related to DSFV victimisation is consistent with international practice. For example, In February 2024, the UK Government announced that Domestic Homicide Death reviews would now been expanded to include Domestic Abuse Related Death Reviews.²⁹⁵

Similarly, while a Victorian Commission for Children and Young People 2019 investigation into children who died by suicide and were known to child protection concluded that the lives of these "lost but not forgotten" young people "were marred by family violence, dysfunction and often chronic neglect", a disconnection persists between DSFV-victimisation and suicide in terms of government reporting and data collection in relation to young people.²⁹⁶ For example, the Australian Bureau of Statistics has linked a range of risk factors to youth suicide, while largely overlooking the specific role of trauma.²⁹⁷ This is despite the association between experiences of DSFV during childhood and youth suicide being well established internationally.²⁹⁸

The potential to prevent further suicide through DFSV-victimisation is deserving of further investigation. The Review recommends that intensive work occur to learn from overseas death review processes and to explore ways to improve Australian data to reflect the impact, prevalence and interconnectedness of DFSV victimisation and suicide. The Review also recommends a national inquiry into the relationship between DFSV-victimisation and suicide—so that the true scale of the national emergency facing Australia can finally be understood.



Starkly, evidence from Safe Steps shows that, when governments underfund crisis response, the results can be fatal. Reports from Safe Steps indicate that, three women suicided in Victorian motels in 2023, while they were awaiting a space in refuge.²⁹⁹



Recommendation 21

The Commonwealth and state and territory governments to develop a consistent approach to death review processes and improve knowledge on the relationship between DFSV and suicide. This should include:

- a. establishing and uplifting death review panels across all jurisdictions, including with First Nations support units and protocols (state and territory governments);
- b. strengthening national coordination and consistency of DFSV death review processes, and learning and sharing of findings (state and territory governments supported by Commonwealth); and
- c. initiating an urgent inquiry into the relationship between DFSV victimisation and suicide, with a view to developing a methodology for accurate counting of the DFSV death toll (Commonwealth, state and territory governments).

Conclusion



Given that Australia may be only just beginning to understand the scale of the challenge, the imperative to supercharge our prevention efforts is clear. To work towards the aims of the National Plan, we must widen our approach, as well as the lens we apply to the problem—zooming out to see the connections and this state of emergency’s full dimensions. This report has recommended ways to unlock the prevention potential along a spectrum of intervention, as well as within mechanisms that can be enabled to do more.

At the outset of this Review, the panel insisted that each of this report’s recommendations must be tested with the full range of communities that it is likely to impact. Implementation of these recommendations also requires a dismantling of siloed ways of working—overcoming the barriers of federation, where feasible, in the spirit adopted when facing other threats presenting on a national scale.

The Review’s recommendations are intended as an acceleration—a surge of attention and energy on a journey which many have travelled for years. Its purpose has been to spotlight some obvious investment needs while opening doors to new possibilities, both immediately and over the longer term.

The Review had the privilege of examining evidence and receiving briefings from a wide range of existing bodies, statutory authorities, communities, practitioners and advocates with lived experience. The Review panel was struck by the generosity and commitment of all those who participated, despite the extremely rapid timeframes—and we thank them for their time and for recognising the window of momentum that the Review represents.

The fact that the Review process quickly identified so many areas ripe for meaningful reform, is also a sign of promise. Put simply, there is a lot more that can be done if we draw on lessons available across multiple sectors and approach the task in an expansive and collaborative way. That in itself should be a cause for energy and action.

By commissioning this Review and outlining broad Terms of Reference, the Commonwealth has recognised that prevention of violence can be seen as core business for every workforce, community and individual. Similarly, by commissioning this Review and recognising DFSV as an issue of truly national significance, governments at all levels will have a mandate for bold action—a prevention potential that the Review now invites them to seize.

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