

The Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence Commission

Yearly Report to Parliament

National Plan to End Violence against
Women and Children 2022–2032

August 2024



Australian Government

Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence Commission



The Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence Commission Yearly Parliamentary Report

Yearly Report to Parliament

August 2024

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Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples are
advised that this publication may contain images or
names of deceased people.

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Acknowledgement of Country

The Commission acknowledges the
Traditional Owners of Country through
Australia on which we gather, live, work
and stand. We acknowledge all traditional
custodians, and their Elders past and
present, and pay our respects to their
continuing connection to land, waters
and community.

The Commission acknowledges and
honours the work of Aboriginal and
Torres Strait Islander peoples to end family
violence and is committed to partnering
with First Nations people in this work.

We acknowledge that we have a great deal
to learn from Aboriginal and Torres Strait
Islander ways of working. The Aboriginal
concept of *Dadirri* informs our approach
(Atkinson, 2002). *Dadirri* refers to a deep
contemplative process of listening to one
another in reciprocal relationships. The word
Dadirri is of the *Ngangikurungkurr* people
of the Daly area of the Northern Territory.
The activity of *Dadirri* has an equivalent in
many other First Nations communities
across Australia.



Dadirri refers to a deep contemplative process of
listening to one another in reciprocal relationships.

Acknowledgement of people with lived and living experience of domestic, family and sexual violence

The Commission acknowledges the
individual and collective expertise of
people with experience of domestic, family
and sexual violence. The Commission
recognises their vital contribution at all
levels, and values the courage of those
who share this unique perspective for the
purpose of learning and growing together
to achieve better outcomes for all.

The Commission values the unique
experiences, protective factors and
strengths of children and young people
and acknowledges they are also affected
by domestic, family and sexual violence.

“About the Commission

The Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence Commission (the Commission) is a national body dedicated to addressing and ending violence against women and children in all its forms.

The Commission was established as an Executive Agency within the Australian Government Department of Social Services under the *Public Service Act 1999* on 1 July 2022. The Commissioner, Micaela Cronin, commenced in her role on 1 November 2022.

Australia is one of only three countries in the world to have established such a Commission.

The Commission's establishment was recommended by the House Standing Committee on Social Policy and Legal

Affairs Inquiry on Family, Domestic and Sexual Violence, which recommended that 'the Australian Government establish as an independent statutory office a National Commissioner for the prevention of family, domestic and sexual violence' (Parliament of Australia, 2021). In keeping with the intent of the recommendation and the support of the government, the Commission operates as an independent agency, working collaboratively with agencies in lieu of statutory powers.

To undertake its role as outlined in the Executive Order (see Appendix 1), the Commission has four defined objectives:

1. Promote the National Plan (the National Plan) objectives to end gender-based violence and monitor impact.
2. Amplify the voices of people with lived and living experience for meaningful engagement in shaping policy design and service delivery.
3. Foster collaboration and coordination across government and community to enhance connection and reduce fragmentation and improve outcomes for people with lived or living experience of domestic, family or sexual violence.
4. Provide strategic advice to inform strengthened policy and practice, and improved outcomes.

The Commission is charged with providing a yearly report to Parliament on progress towards the objectives of the *The National Plan to End Violence against Women and Children 2022–2032*.

The Commission's role in measuring progress and impact

The Department of Social Services and the Commission both have responsibilities for monitoring the implementation and outcomes of the National Plan.

The Department of Social Services is the national policy lead for the National Plan, and leads the coordination, governance and reporting on its implementation, as well as developing and reporting under the National Plan's Outcomes Framework. When established, this reporting will form a key source of information that the Commission will draw on to assess progress and impact under the National Plan.

The Commission's measurement of progress and impact is informed by its extensive engagement with people with lived experience, those delivering critical services including specialist sector organisations and practitioners, the police and health sector, researchers and other organisations, and a range of other sources of evidence.

In subsequent reports, information and data collected under formal reporting mechanisms will enable a more comprehensive assessment of progress by the Commission. However, the Commission's yearly report to Parliament will always ensure that a range of perspectives and views are incorporated into its analysis.



“ Commissioner’s foreword



“
What gives me hope is that some of our biggest challenges and greatest opportunities for improvement are completely within our control to change.

Micaela Cronin
Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence Commissioner

The Australian Government established the Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence Commission in 2022 and charged it with an important task – to monitor progress and hold governments accountable for the delivery of the National Plan to End Violence against Women and Children.

As Australia’s first Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence Commissioner, I have been privileged to be in a unique position to talk with a broad range of stakeholders and voices from across Australia – people who have been directly affected by domestic, family and sexual violence, the sector, first responders, allied health services, system representatives, governments and the business community. This report draws on the breadth and depth of the experience, knowledge and expertise shared as part of the extensive engagement since the establishment of the Commission.

As I consider the year in review, I am profoundly aware of the sense of urgency, anger and distress that many people across the community feel at the scale and complexity of the problem we face – and our lack of progress in addressing it.

The Australian Institute of Criminology (AIC) report that in 2023–24, 43 women were victims of intimate partner homicide, compared with 34 in 2022–23. While we have seen a decline in homicides over the past three decades, the AIC reported a 28% increase in the rate of women killed by intimate partners in 2022–23, and a further 25% increase in the rate in 2023–24 (AIC, 2024).

We know that these numbers do not show the full extent of lives lost and harm done. Many more women and children are living with the terrible impact of gender-based violence every day. We know from research that publicly available data is likely to underestimate the true extent of domestic, family and sexual violence.

Every life lost to is one too many. Every person who lives with the on going impact of domestic, family or sexual violence requires us to strive to do better.

We will learn a great deal across the life of this ten-year National Plan. We must be prepared to listen and adapt. As members of the Independent Collective of Survivors wrote at the beginning of the National Plan. ‘We must be willing to sit in discomfort. It is time to be brave’.

The community continues to grapple with the impact of the COVID pandemic, cost of living pressures and the dramatic changes that the evolution of the internet and artificial intelligence is having on our lives. These and other factors are influencing the nature and impact of domestic, family and sexual violence.

We are witnessing the first generation to grow up exposed to violent pornography and misogyny online in a way that has never been seen before. Participants at the crisis talks convened by the Commission in May raised the importance of acknowledging the role of factors such as alcohol and other drugs, gambling, and pornography in promoting violence. While these factors do not in themselves cause violence, there is strong evidence that they contribute to reducing inhibition and result in more serious violence. There are now calls to have serious, evidence-based discussions about the role these factors have on violence and what levers the government can use to mitigate them. We must diligently reassess our approaches to prevention and response to ensure they are effective and adapting to the changing world around us.

We cannot afford to waste the opportunity presented both by this National Plan and the commitment from governments and leaders across the country to ‘do better’.

Within the term of this ten-year plan, all Australians should expect to see changes that bring us closer to the goal of eliminating gender-based violence in one generation. This report highlights key areas for opportunities to accelerate, amplify and drive impact.

What gives me hope is that some of our biggest challenges and greatest opportunities for improvement are completely within our control to change. Government institutions, policies and systems can be changed by governments – and there are passionate people in every institution working hard to bring about these changes.

Serious concerns have been raised that government systems, including the family court and child protection system, are causing harm, and that police too often misidentify women as the primary aggressor – with terrible consequences – when they are the person most in need of protection.

These outcomes are the result of systems and processes that can be changed with the necessary commitment and inputs, and with the sense of urgency that the current situation demands. And if we are bold and determined to achieve the goal of the National Plan – to end domestic, family and sexual violence within a generation.

Australian Government reporting on the National Plan is yet to commence. The availability of this data in the coming year will enable a clearer focus on assessing the outcomes of the National Plan.

I would like to thank departments across the Australian Government and all state and territory governments for the advice they provided to the Commission on their progress so far in advance of that formal reporting. In future years, the Commission will draw on performance reporting by the

Department of Social Services to assess progress.

The Commission has drawn on a range of sources of evidence in compiling this report including research, the advice of the Lived Experience Advisory Council, sector and community leaders, research and findings from Commission-convened roundtables to provide an assessment of the areas of the National Plan which require deeper focus to achieve impact.

I would also like take this opportunity to thank all those who have supported the Commission and me as the first Commissioner as we established the Commission, including my dedicated team, who bring deep expertise and passion to their work. The Commission is new and the scale of the challenge we face is immense.

The hundreds of lived experience advocates from across the country who put up their hands to express willingness to join the Lived Experience Advisory Council gives me hope – their passion, wisdom, courage and compassion. And the many others who have reached out to me, wanting to share their stories so that, in their words, ‘no one else has to experience what I have experienced’.



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Summary



This is the Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence Commission's (the Commission's) first report to Parliament on the progress of the *National Plan to End Violence against Women and Children 2022–2032 (the National Plan)*.

There is a wealth of work being driven by the National Plan across all levels of government. The Commission has witnessed the energy and the renewed drive that has resulted from the National Plan in its first year of implementation.

Significant work has been done to develop the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Action Plan 2023–2025, which focuses on recognising the specific needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in relation to family and sexual violence.

As the breadth of this work under way demonstrates, many interdependent and multi-faceted dimensions to the national crisis of domestic, family and sexual violence must be considered. The Commission is committed to work collaboratively with the Australian, state and territory governments, our community and people with a lived experience to tackle this crisis.

Each point of contact and engagement with people experiencing or perpetrating domestic, family and sexual violence is an opportunity to intervene effectively for prevention, early intervention, response, and healing and recovery. Governments must stop siloing their thinking and their actions.

About this report

The 2024 Yearly Report to Parliament presents the Commission's view on progress towards the objectives of the National Plan.

The analysis in this report draws on diverse forms of knowledge and evidence. It elevates lived experience alongside other expertise, including information from across jurisdictions and a wealth of highly specialised knowledge and experience.

This report highlights best practice in engaging with people with lived experience. It shines a light on examples of positive collaboration, system integration and shared governance. It also identifies gaps and opportunities for improvement and new ways of thinking raised with the Commission. The Lived Experience Advisory Council created by the Commission on behalf of the Australian Government is a critical recognition of the importance of learning from those with personal experience to shape policy design and service delivery that works.

Progress under the National Plan

The National Plan was delivered in October 2022. Since then, considerable progress has been made to lay the foundations for the much-needed reforms ahead. In August 2023, the First Action Plan and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Action Plan were delivered which will guide implementation of the National Plan in coming years.

Governments are committing substantial effort, investment and attention to eliminate violence against women and children in one generation – the vision of the National Plan.

All governments have built on and extended the mechanisms for cooperation established to develop the National Plan to drive its implementation. This has translated into a wide range of activities at all levels of government.

The work to develop a First Nations National Plan for Family Safety is under way. When completed this Plan will guide the systemic change needed to address the disproportionate impact of domestic, family and sexual violence on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, and to respond to the priority reforms identified in the National Agreement on Closing the Gap.

Australian Government reporting on progress towards the targets and outcomes under the National Plan has not yet begun. Led by the Department of Social Services, key components of planning have been delivered to support the ongoing measurement and reporting on targets and outcomes, including a Performance Measurement Plan and outcomes framework.

Further dedicated effort is needed to build the indicators and measures identified in the Performance

Measurement Plan. Only 16 of the 34 sub-outcomes can currently be measured.

Measurement planning to date is heavily reliant on data that is only collected every four to five years. Shorter-term measures are needed to support timely progress monitoring. The Commission acknowledges the complexity of developing new data sources but notes that this effort must be prioritised to measure progress within the life of the First Action Plan.

In future years, the Commission will draw on government reporting against the action plans which will begin later in 2024 to inform its annual assessment of progress under the National Plan.

Key findings

The Commission's engagement across the nation has focused on understanding how the National Plan has changed the landscape for those involved in its implementation, those with lived experience and the broader community.

This report explores areas across policy, implementation and service delivery that present opportunities to accelerate, amplify and drive impact towards the objectives of the National Plan over the coming years.

The findings are intended to be constructive and offer contemporary insights, noting the growing work across jurisdictions which will continue to inform progress towards eliminating violence against women and children. The Commission has also signalled key area of focus for the consideration of governments.

It is for Australian, state and territory governments to determine how they might respond to this report.

Key findings

Outlined below are the key findings for each chapter of the 2024 Yearly Report to Parliament.

Progressing the National Plan

The Commission will continue to focus on governance of the National Plan's implementation and efforts to assess and measure progress. We will draw on the available reporting mechanisms once established.

Areas for focus

- The Australian Government must prioritise developing the new data sources and measures needed to assess progress of the National Plan within the life of the First Action Plan.
- The Australian Government must strengthen measures that relate to the system experience

of people who have experienced domestic, family and sexual violence, particularly the experiences of priority communities.

- All governments must ensure robust information sharing and good governance processes for co-design and decision-making.

Embedding lived experience

Governments have recognised the critical role of lived experience in policymaking. Lived experience engagement needs to be embedded across all aspects of policy design, implementation and evaluation, prioritising a co-design approach.

Areas for focus

- All agencies that engage with people with lived experience must provide adequate support to those contributing. This includes offering suitable debriefing and support services, and remuneration for their time and effort spent supporting government activities.

- Governments must consider how to engage with people who have used violence, including those from diverse populations, to inform improved interventions.

Improving the capacity of our systems

Governments have invested significant public funds to address domestic, family and sexual violence. Despite this, services and systems are overwhelmed by community need.

Areas for focus

- Frontline and crisis services need to be better and more sustainably resourced.
- Governments must consider new ways to fund services to ensure effective responses. The Productivity Commission is well placed to help review funding levels and arrangements.

- The Australian Government must work with states and territories to align the Family Domestic and Sexual Violence National Partnership agreement to the National Plan and Action Plans. The Department of Social Services should also design funding models that provide more certainty through longer funding periods.

System governance: integration sharing and learning

Governments need to improve collaborative governance mechanisms across all systems, ensure robust monitoring and accountability, and drive greater integration, sharing and learning from one another.

Areas for focus

- Governments need to ensure their systems are not causing harm to people experiencing domestic, family and sexual violence.
- Governments should keep integrating and strengthening responses between the domestic and family violence, sexual assault, child protection and children and families' sectors to adequately address the safety and wellbeing of children and young people.

- As the First Nations National Plan for Family Safety is finalised, the Department of Social Services should clarify the coordination of governance and progress monitoring of both national plans.

- Governments should commit to publicly sharing all evaluation results related to the National Plan.

- The Standing Council of Attorneys-General should work on making death reviews faster, more consistent, and better funded across the country. This includes Tasmania establishing a death review function.

Engaging men

Men must be a part of every aspect of ending violence. Governments must support efforts to redefine masculinity and engage men effectively. More intervention options for men using or at risk of using violence are needed, which take a trauma-informed approach, improve information sharing and risk assessment and management.

Areas for focus

- Governments must work with service providers and the community to offer more support options for men who are concerned about their behaviour and increase the capacity of related service sectors to respond to men's needs.
- The quality of these responses should be ensured through national standards and guidelines, building on work already underway.

- Increased accountability for people who use violence is vital, taking into consideration the forms of accountability being sought by victim-survivors. Improved information sharing, risk assessments of men using violence known to the system and effective justice interventions that prevent harm are critical.

- Governments must prioritise developing new and better data on men who use violence, their pathways in and out of violence, and what works to engage men to end violence.

Building workforce capability

Workforce capability development needs national leadership, prioritising the specialist domestic, family, and sexual violence workforce. Since addressing domestic, family and sexual violence is a key element of work across many sectors, capability development and integration with these workforces is an opportunity to improve system responses.

Areas for focus

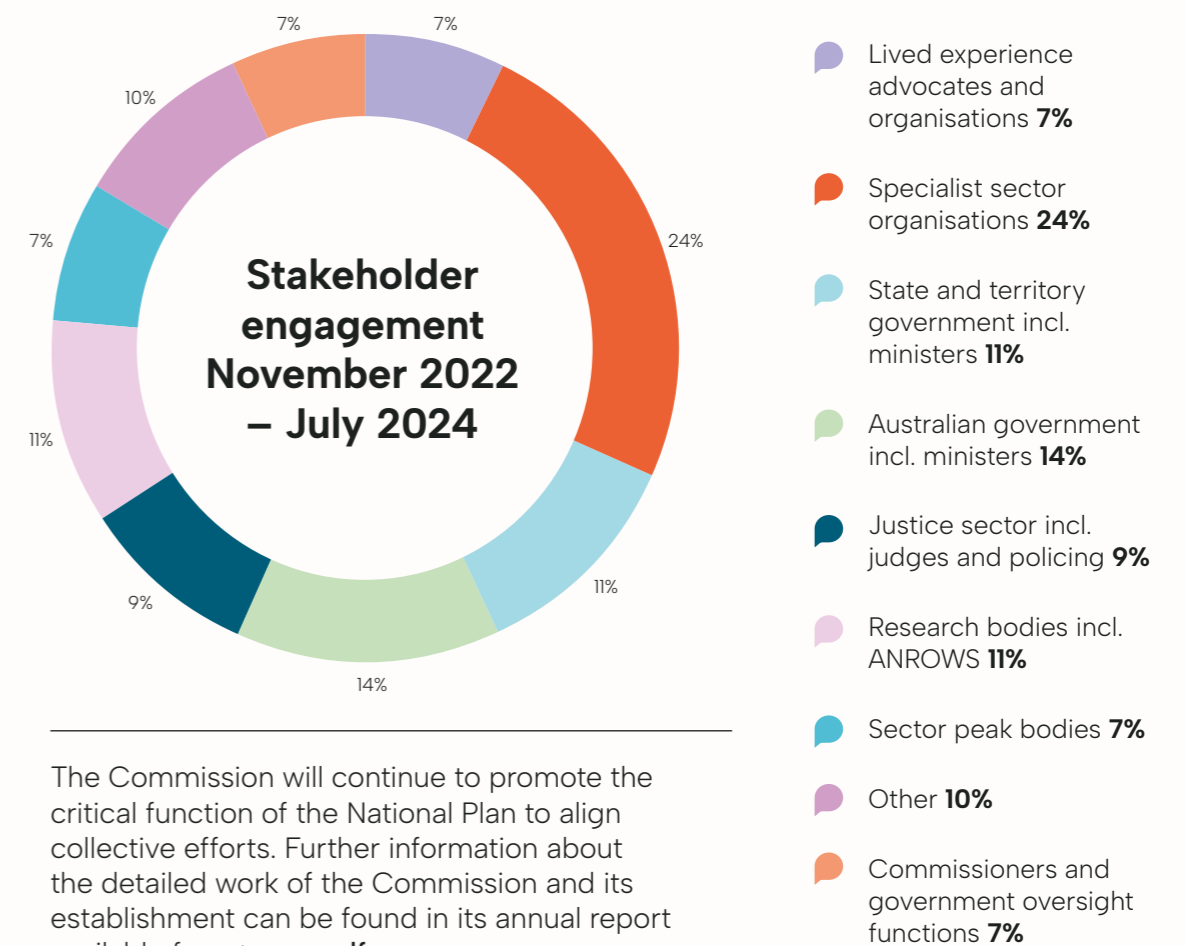
- A national workforce strategy will support collaborative workforce development. The Australian Government should build on work done by states and territories to develop a collaborative approach to national workforce development and investment, aligning with other social sector workforce planning to increase the number of qualified workers.

- All governments should leverage broader workforces to help prevent and respond to domestic, family and sexual violence. Workers should be well-equipped to intervene safely and effectively, with foundational training included in tertiary education for key professions, such as health and allied health, teaching, psychology and social work, and law.

Year in review



The Commission was established as a national body to promote and support the National Plan and has embedded the expectations of government in its strategic objectives. Over the past year, the Commission has delivered a range of activities to support monitoring progress towards the National Plan, ensuring that the Commission’s actions provide transparent robust feedback to government. The feedback given to government is informed by the broad range of stakeholders the Commission has engaged with during this time (Figure 1).



The Commission will continue to promote the critical function of the National Plan to align collective efforts. Further information about the detailed work of the Commission and its establishment can be found in its annual report available from ► www.dfsvc.gov.au.

Figure 1: Stakeholder engagement November 2022 – July 2024

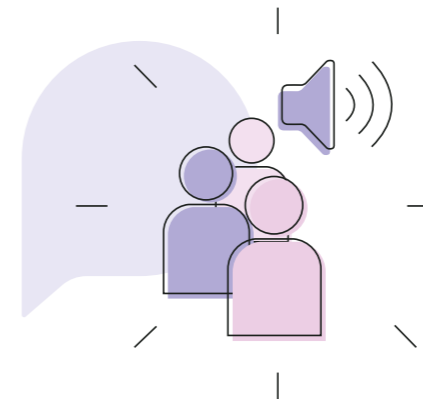
The Commission's activities in 2023–24 under its four objectives

Promote the National Plan objectives to end gender-based violence and monitor impact



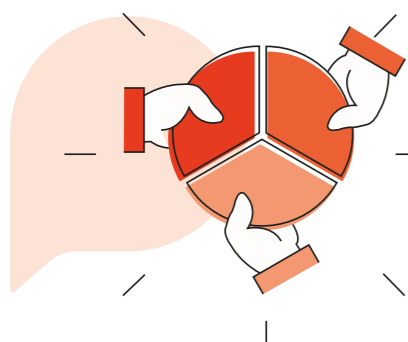
- Created platforms for nationally important conversations, including convening eight roundtables to discuss key National Plan (see Figure 2).
- Strengthened community understanding of gender-based violence and the Australian Government's response through forums and the media.
- Delivered keynote and conference presentations to a range of sectors, encouraging thought leadership on critical themes and areas of the National Plan.

Amplify the voices of people with lived and living experience for meaningful engagement in shaping policy design and service delivery



- Established the first ever national Lived Experience Advisory Council.
- Met with over 300 individuals and organisations, centring the voices and advocacy of people with a lived experience in these engagements.
- Integrated lived experience voices in roundtables, ensuring a range of perspectives and priority populations were represented.
- Worked alongside people with a lived experience to inform the Commission's formal submissions to government.

Foster collaboration and coordination across government and community, to enhance connection and reduce fragmentation to improve outcomes



- Engaged with the Australian, state and territory governments to understand issues, systems and structures which accelerate or impede progress on the National Plan.
- Convened cross-sector and cross-government engagement which encouraged the development of knowledge transfer, shared understanding, and closer working relationships.
- Created connections between government, sector, community, academia and business to enable greater collaboration in achieving the objectives of the National Plan.

Provide strategic advice to inform strengthened policy and practice, and improved outcomes



- Provided advice to Government in a range of formal and informal settings.
- Published reports including: an Interim Statement to Parliament, a yearly report to Parliament and annual report.
- The Commissioner:
 - participated in a range of government mechanisms to provide strategic direction and inform policy
 - regularly met with Australian, state and territory government and ministers
 - addressed the National Cabinet in May 2024 on the national crisis in gender-based violence.

Roundtables

The Commission holds regular roundtables on priority topics, usually in partnership with organisations with key expertise. These partnerships support strong participation by a range of stakeholders and engagement of diverse perspectives.

The Commission’s roundtable program foregrounds lived experience participation, centring the voices of people with lived experience at all public-facing events. The Commission embeds representation from organisations supporting or advocating for diverse populations and individuals, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, people with disability,

people from migrant or refugee backgrounds, and people from the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer (LGBTQ+) communities.

The Commission’s roundtables have created new spaces for critical national conversations to occur and promoted connections between agencies, government, researchers and those with lived and living experience.

These mechanisms contribute to the Commission’s knowledge base and provide a forum for considering new approaches. Roundtable summaries can be found on the Commission’s website at ► www.dfsvc.gov.au.

Figure 2 explains how roundtables inform the Commission’s work and lists the eight roundtables held in 2023–24.

How roundtables inform our work

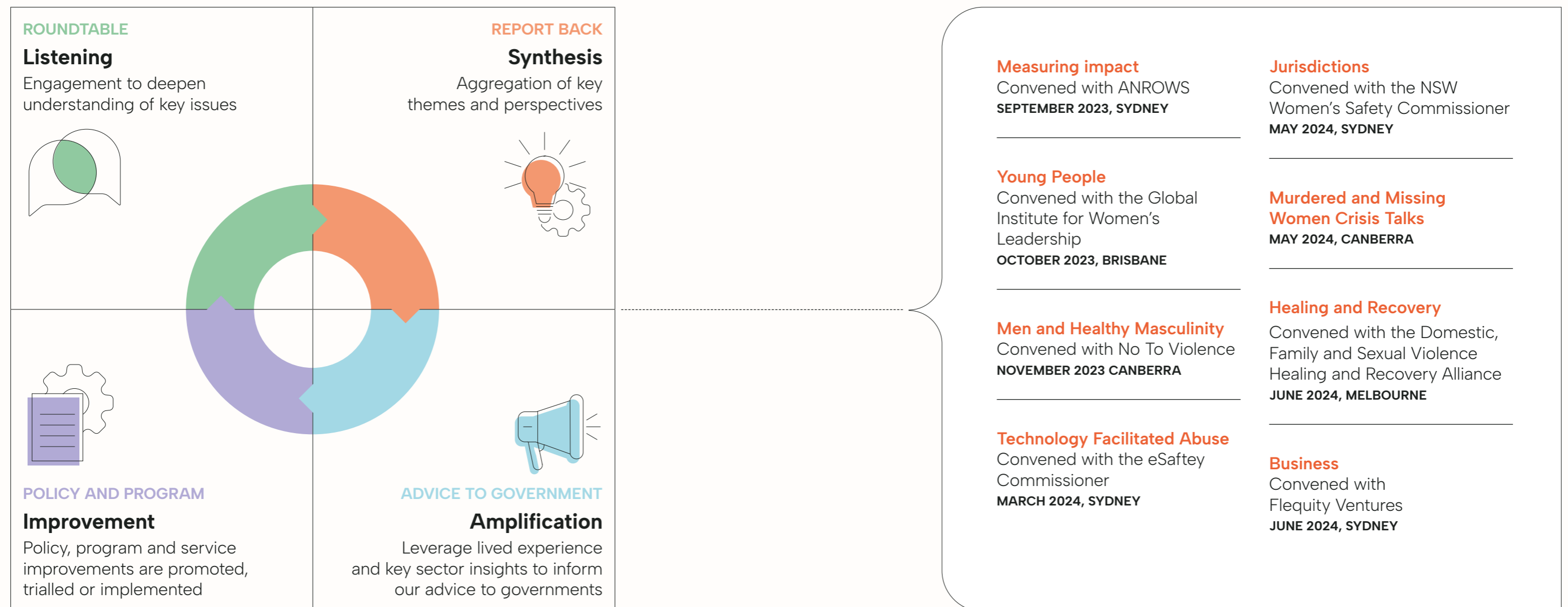


Figure 2: Roundtables in 2023–24 and how they inform the Commission’s work

About this report

A key role for the Commission is providing independent advice to government and the community on progress towards the objectives of the National Plan. This report forms a critical part of that role.

All Australian, state and territory governments have committed to the ten-year National Plan. Nearly two years after its launch in October 2022, the Commission reflects on the activities of government and enables the perspectives and views of those participating in action to end gender-based violence to be heard.

By putting lived experience perspectives side-by-side with what the Commission knows from data, research and practice, and sector knowledge (Figure 3), this first report to Parliament holds space for learning, sharing and critical reflection on progress towards the National Plan objectives.

Further detail on the information used in this report can be found in Appendix 2.

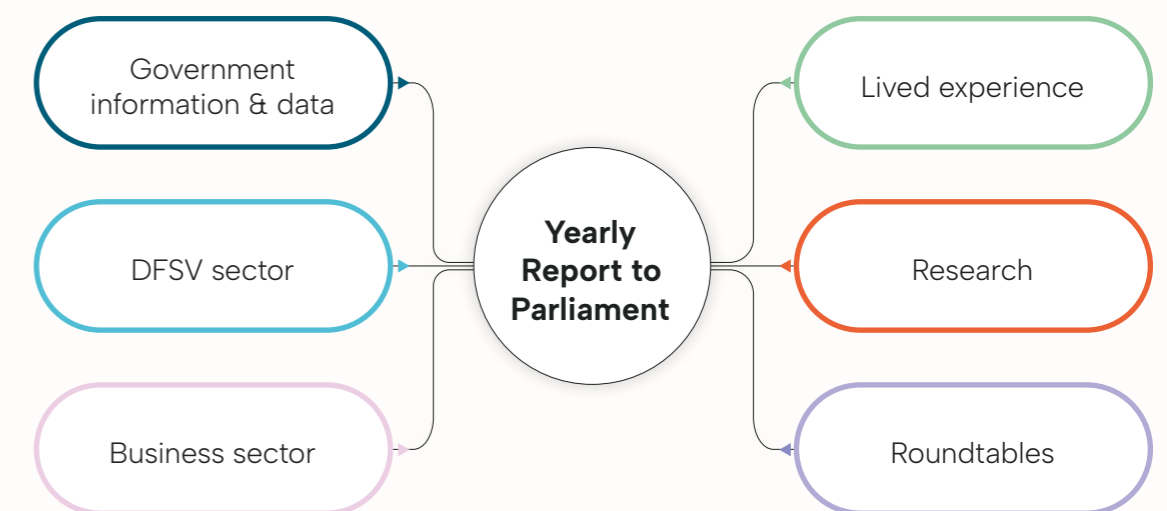


Figure 3: Sources of information for this report

Progress under the National Plan



‘The most significant change in the year, since the National Plan was implemented, has been the level of conversation that appears to exist about [gender-based violence] within the community. While we have experienced incredible tragedy as a nation, tragedy which has been ongoing for an exhaustive amount of years, the nation has now produced a lot of well overdue conversations that are intensely highlighting the need for rapid and drastic change. I find this to be an incredibly positive step towards meaningful transformation. It does now require real action.’

Sharon,
Lived Experience Advisory Council

The National Plan has given governments a clear focus on the actions and activities needed to ensure that systems and services can respond to and support people experiencing domestic, family and sexual violence, hold those who use violence accountable, and work to prevent violence from occurring.

The Commission has heard from Australian, state and territory governments, sector organisations and community that there is a wealth of activity now under way thanks to the attention and focus on the National Plan. There is a feeling of momentum for change that many wish to harness and grow.

Progress highlights

- ★ The National Plan is complemented by a suite of supporting documents that are designed to guide implementation.
- ★ Development of the First Nations National Plan for Family Safety is under way and due to be delivered in June 2025.
- ★ States and territories have work programs under way and are due to provide their first reports to the Department of Social Services on progress of these activities later in 2024.

Setting up the implementation architecture

Since its release, a number of supporting documents have been developed, setting out the activities needed to achieve the outcomes in the National Plan. Reporting and evaluation mechanisms are still being established, including reporting approaches for the First Action Plan and the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Action Plan, the evaluation strategy for the National Plan and reporting against the outcomes framework.

The Department of Social Services is the National Plan's lead agency within the Australian Government. It is leading the development of the implementation architecture and all supporting documents (Figure 4) and has a pivotal role in ensuring that delivery of the National Plan is meeting government, sector and community expectations.

The Department of Social Services also has a key coordination and monitoring function, ensuring that the hundreds of activities under way to support the National Plan are on track to achieve their intended outcomes. It will provide both the Australian Government and the Commission with regular progress updates.

These updates will be a critical source of data for the Commission's reporting in the coming years.

Developing the First Nations National Plan for Family Safety

Delivering a First Nations National Plan for Family Safety (First Nations National Plan) was a key election commitment for the Australian Government and is due to be delivered by June 2025.

The First Nations National Plan will provide the framework for all governments' commitments to achieving Closing the Gap Outcome 13:

By 2031, the rate of all forms of family violence and abuse against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and children is reduced at least by 50%, as progress towards zero (Australian Government, 2020).

The development of the First Nations National Plan is supported by:

- a First Nations Secretariat, SNAICC – National Voice for our Children, that will coordinate a national, public consultation process
- a First Nations National Plan Steering Committee that will provide guidance and advice to develop the First Nations National Plan from the diverse perspectives, views and experiences, across all states and territories, within Aboriginal and Torres Strait communities and within the domestic, family and sexual violence sector.

The Steering Committee, SNAICC Secretariat and the Department of Social Services will work to centre and capture the voices of victim-survivors of domestic, family and sexual violence throughout the process of developing the First Nations National Plan.

The First Nations National Plan is due to be delivered in June 2025.

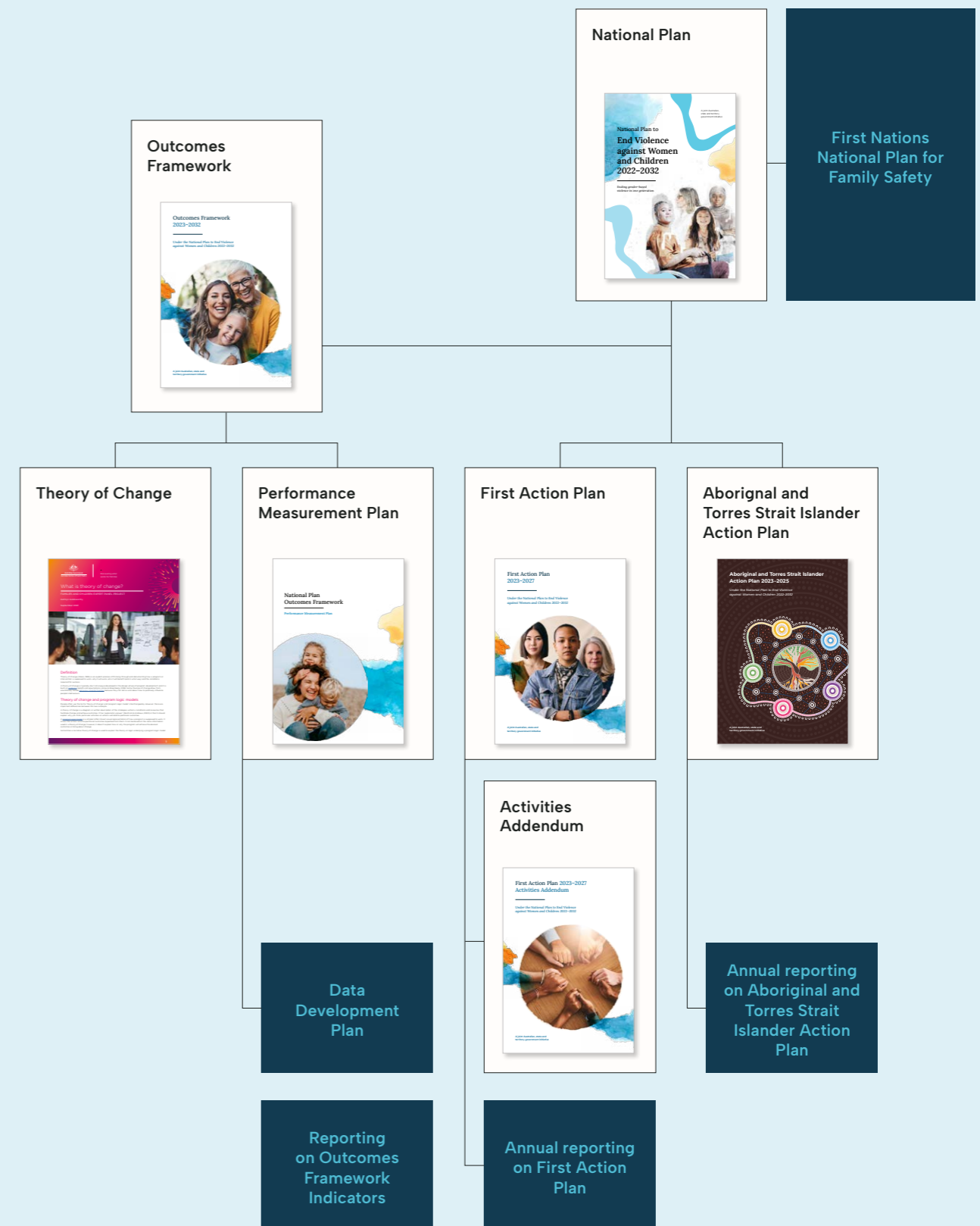


Figure 4: Implementation architecture of the National Plan

□ delivered ■ under development



‘The time for inquiries has expired. Recommendations have been made and must now be implemented.’

Deborah,
Lived Experience Advisory Council Member

Prioritising efforts to build available data

The Performance Measurement Plan released by the Department of Social Services in May 2024 establishes how the Australian Government will measure and report on progress towards outcomes and targets over the life of the National Plan. It includes 74 indicators and 126 measures with intended data sources for each of the six long-term outcomes (Figure 5) and their respective 34 sub-outcomes. It also identifies five measures and their intended data sources for the Closing the Gap Target 13. The Performance Measurement Plan will be regularly reviewed and updated as the data landscape changes over the life of the National Plan.

A Data Development Plan will recommend how to capture data for the indicators and measures with no existing data source. This plan is expected to be delivered later in 2024.

Dedicated effort to build upon the indicators and measures for which data is available will be essential given that

only 16 of the 34 sub-outcomes in the Outcomes Framework can currently be measured (Figure 6). Measurement is currently heavily reliant on survey data, such as the National Community Attitudes Survey and Personal Safety Survey, which are only available every four to five years.

A mix of shorter-term measures are needed to enable timely understanding of whether the reform program is on track to meet its longer-term outcomes. While the Commission acknowledges the complexity of developing new data sources, this must be prioritised to ensure that a more comprehensive set of measures is available to assess progress within the life of the First Action Plan.

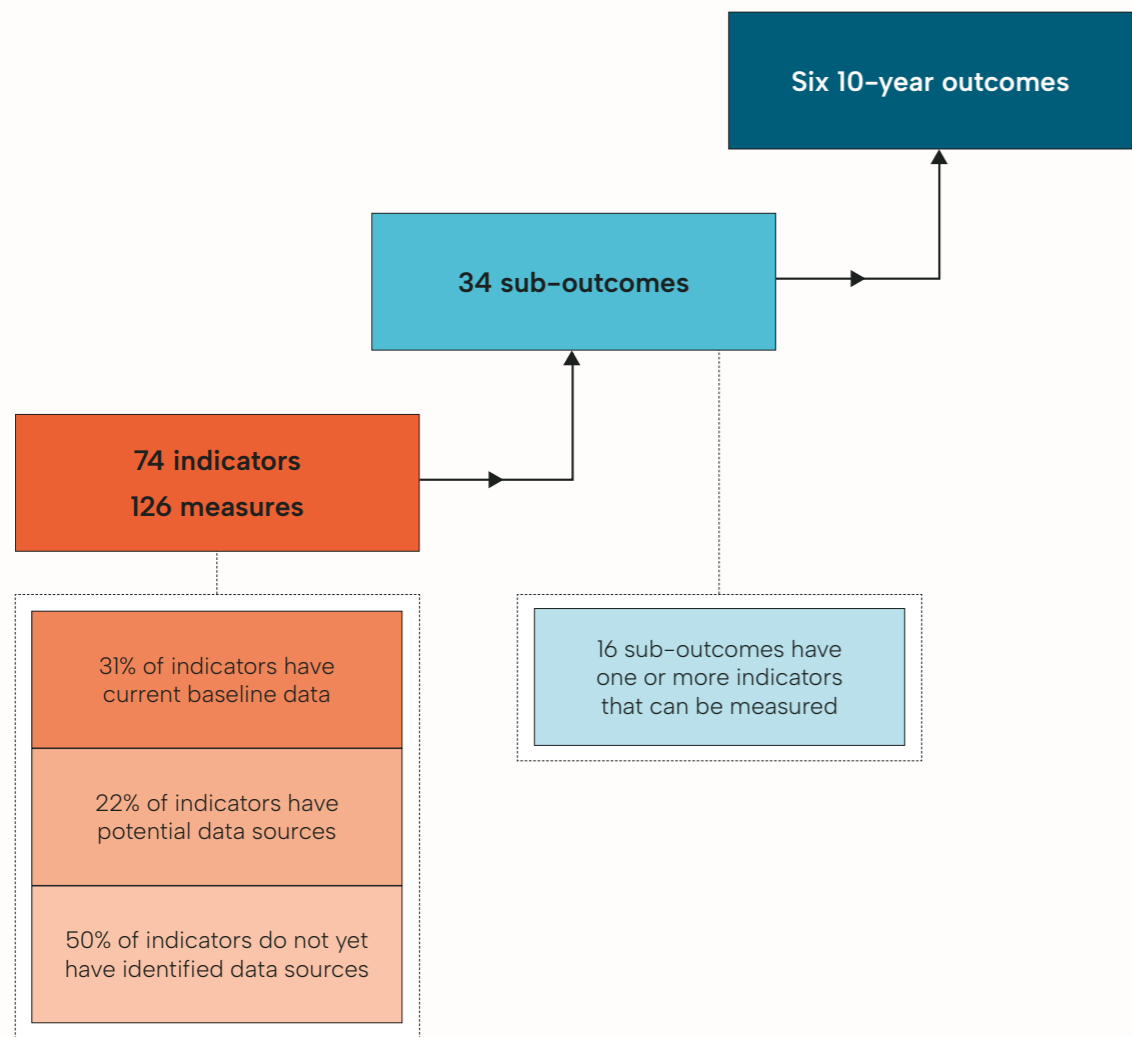
The current indicators and measures have a limited focus on the experiences of people who use systems and services. This likely reflects the data sources currently available to government.

Outcomes	Targets
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Systems and institutions effectively support and protect people impacted by gender-based violence Services and prevention programs are effective, culturally responsive, intersectional and accessible Community attitudes and beliefs embrace gender equality and condemn all forms of gendered violence without exception People who choose to use violence are accountable for their actions and stop their violent, coercive and abusive behaviours Children and young people are safe in all settings and are effectively supported by systems and services Women are safe and respected in all settings and experience economic, social, political and cultural equality 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 25% reduction per year in female victims of intimate partner homicide 2 point increase in community understanding of the behaviours that constitute FDSV every 4 years 2 point increase in community attitudes that condemn violence against women every 4 years 2 point increase in community attitudes that reject gender inequality every 4 years 2 point increase in community attitudes that reject sexual violence every 4 years By 2031, the rate of all forms of family violence and abuse against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and children is reduced at least by 50%, as progress towards zero

Figure 5: National Plan outcomes and targets

There are several specific measures relating to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. It is unclear whether available data will enable reporting against the current and planned measures for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, or other diverse populations in the National Plan.

As work to further develop outcomes measurement under the National Plan progresses, it will be important to consider how to strengthen understanding of the system experience of people who have experienced domestic, family and sexual violence. The Commission is committed to working actively to engage with people from diverse communities to better understand their experiences. This was identified as an important area of focus at the Commission’s Measuring Impact Roundtable (see Box 1).



Note: Some indicators in the Performance Measurement Plan have multiple measures listed for each. Some of those measures have a known data source and have baseline data available (Tier 2 measures), while other measures are still being developed (Tier 3 and 4 measures). As a result of this, the percentage of indicators in Figure 6 does not add up to 100%.

FIGURE 6: Indicators and measures under the National Plan

BOX 1

Measuring Impact Roundtable

In September 2023, the Commission co-convened the Measuring Impact Roundtable with ANROWS [Australian National Research Organisation for Women’s Safety].

The roundtable brought together more than 70 expert stakeholders from across the spectrum of social sector, government, business, research, people with lived experience and community.

Key insights from stakeholders that the Commission will examine further for advice to government include:

- creating regular opportunities to reflect on progress of the National Plan before the conclusion of the First Action Plan

- determining the critical impact questions to answer in the short and medium term
- mapping and then doing more with existing data sources and connecting data across systems
- understanding the service system experience from people with lived experience
- building workforce capability for high-quality evaluation and measuring impact.

Source: Measuring Impact Roundtable Summary Report (DFSV Commission, 2024)



Government progress towards implementing the First Action Plan and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Action Plan

Activity is already under way across the Australian, state and territory governments either directly in response to the National Plan or indirectly supporting achievement of its objectives.

Australian, state and territory governments have committed to delivering activities under the First Action Plan and the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Action Plan. Many of these initiatives will take time

to implement and achieve intended outcomes. Progress in implementing the actions under these plans will be publicly reported by the Department of Social Services. The format and timing of this reporting is under development but is expected to start later in 2024.

As this reporting is not yet available, the Commission has not been able to assess implementation progress in this report. Instead, the Commission has taken the approach of highlighting some of the initiatives that are under way across the country in support of the two action plans, as provided to the Commission by Australian, state and territory governments. These examples

illustrate the different levels of activity and breadth of settings in which action is being progressed across the country.

First Action Plan

National initiatives

At the national level, key initiatives in progress under the First Action Plan include the following:

+ Leaving Violence Program

Building on lessons from the Escaping Violence Program trial (activity under Action 4), the Leaving Violence Program was recently established as a permanent and ongoing program to support victim-survivors of intimate partner violence to make informed choices about leaving violent relationships and receive the vital support they need. See further detail in Box 2.

+ Consent and Respectful Relationships Education

The Consent and Respectful Relationships Education initiative (activity under Actions 1 and 6) is being delivered in primary and secondary schools across the country. The program is led by the Australian Government Department of Education in partnership with states, territories and the non-government school sector. Funding of \$77.6 million provided through the Federation Funding Agreement Schedule is supporting delivery of age-appropriate, evidence-based and expert-developed consent and respectful relationships education.

+ Inquiry into justice responses to sexual violence

The Australian Government Attorney-General's Department's inquiry into

justice responses to sexual violence (activity under Action 9), led by the Australian Law Reform Commission (ALRC), will inquire into ways to strengthen how the criminal justice system responds to sexual assault and prevents further harm to victims through the justice process. The Government has established a sexual violence lived-experience Expert Advisory Group to ensure the experience of victim-survivors are front and centre in the ALRC inquiry.

+ Nationally consistent specialist family and domestic violence service data

The Data and Digital Minister's Meeting is leading a data sharing project in collaboration with the Women and Women's Safety Ministerial Council (activity under Action 2) to develop an approach for nationally consistent specialist family and domestic violence service data. Nationally consistent data will improve understanding of family and domestic violence and levels of service demand and effectiveness to inform decisions about service planning and delivery.

+ Respect@Work Response and Action Plan

Implementation of the Respect@Work Response and Action Plan (activity under Action 6) within Australian Government departments includes providing 'first responder' training to first points of contact for complaints or reports of sexual harassment, new and updated guides and fact sheets on sexual harassment and sexual assault in the workplace, and developing a risk assessment template for managers to proactively assess risks in their work environment.

BOX 2

Escaping Violence Program trial

The Escaping Violence Program trial aims to reduce the financial insecurity individuals face when leaving a violent intimate partner relationship by providing access to financial assistance to support them to establish a home free from violence.

The trial provides eligible applicants with individualised financial assistance packages of up to \$5,000, including up to \$1,500 in cash or cash equivalents and the remaining funds provided in goods, services and supports.

There is high demand for the program with around 80% of applicants self-referring into the trial, some of whom report they have never engaged with a frontline service regarding the violence they experienced.

Throughout the life of the trial, the Escaping Violence Program has received significant scrutiny, with concerns raised early in the program about the number of people deemed ineligible, and the speed with which payments were reaching those in need.

An independent evaluation of the implementation of the Escaping Violence Program national trial was

published on the Department of Social Services website on 15 September 2023 (Whereto, 2023). The evaluation found that the trial had been effective in helping to relieve financial stress associated with leaving a violent relationship and in establishing a sense of emotional safety that contributed to healing.

On 1 May 2024, the Prime Minister announced that \$925.2 million over five years had been allocated to establish the Leaving Violence Program as a permanent and ongoing program. The trial will continue to be available until mid-2025 while the Leaving Violence Program is established. Establishment of the Leaving Violence Program will draw on lived experience and expert panel input to ensure the delivery model is safe and person centric.

An evaluation of the outcomes of the trial is critical and valuable data has been collected throughout to support this. Given the ongoing funding dedicated to the program, systematic data sharing and outcomes evaluation of the ongoing program is essential and can also provide a valuable knowledge base for future policy design.



+ Preventing Tech-based Abuse of Women Grants Program

In response to the rise in technology facilitated abuse, the Australian Government has established the Preventing Tech-based Abuse of Women Grants Program, administered by the eSafety Commissioner. The grants are aimed at improving the safety of Australian women and their children through the prevention of technology facilitated gender-based violence. The program will be delivered from 2023 to 2028 with a total of \$10 million available over at least three rounds, with the first round awarded in June 2024.

+ Commonwealth Public Sector Gender Equality Scorecard

The Workplace Gender Equality Agency have released their first Commonwealth Public Sector Gender Equality Scorecard (activity under Action 1) which examines the gender pay gap and gender equality performance across the six gender equality indicators and allows comparison with Australia's private sector.

State and territory initiatives

States and territories have work programs under way which both support and complement the actions of the First Action Plan as well as the objectives of the National Plan. States and territories are due to provide their first progress reports to the Department of Social Services in mid-2024.

A snapshot of state and territory initiatives against the 10 actions in the First Action Plan are outlined below.

Action 1

Advance gender equality and address the drivers of all forms of gender-based violence, including through initiatives aimed to improve community attitudes and norms toward family, domestic, and sexual violence

Activity

Queensland has released its *Plan for the Primary Prevention of Violence Against Women 2024–2028* which strengthens and focuses the Queensland Government's primary prevention efforts to target the gendered drivers and underlying social context to stop violence against women before it starts.

Action 2

Improve the national evidence base by working towards consistent terminology and monitoring and evaluation frameworks, and by strengthening collection and sharing of data and evidence

Activity

South Australia and Victoria are leading work to explore opportunities to strengthen national consistency and drive best practice approaches across jurisdictions, including relating to risk assessment and responses to sexual assault, as tasked by National Cabinet in May 2024.

Action 3

Increase and strengthen the capability of mainstream and specialist workforces to deliver quality services, activities and programs across the four domains, including those that are tailored to respond to the unique experiences of all victim-survivors

Activity

New South Wales is developing a 10-year domestic and family violence workforce development strategy in consultation with key stakeholders. A survey of the domestic and family violence workforce was undertaken in late 2023 to better understand the nature of the domestic and family violence workforce and identify potential gaps in knowledge, support and training.

Action 4

Build the capacity of services and systems that support victim-survivors to provide trauma-informed, connected and coordinated responses that support long-term recovery, health and wellbeing

Activity

In Victoria, digital antenatal screenings (iCOPE) are being administered through the Royal Women's Hospital supported by the Family, Domestic and Sexual Violence National Partnership agreement. These screen pregnant women in many different languages on their own device for risk factors including family violence.

Action 5

Strengthen systems and services to better hold people who choose to use violence to account, and provide opportunities to support people who have used violence, or are at risk of using violence, to change their behaviours, with the aim of protecting the safety and wellbeing of current and potential victim-survivors

Activity

New South Wales, as part of their Men's Behaviour Change Programs (MBCP) commissioning approach, has co-designed a MBCP program logic with the sector. An MBCP evaluation framework, including an updated Minimum Data Set, has been developed based on the co-designed MBCP program logic and an evaluation of MBCPs is commencing this year. The evaluation is expected to be complete by June 2026.

Action 6

Improve action to prevent and address sexual violence and harassment in all settings, across the four domains of the National Plan

Activity

In September 2023, the Queensland Government launched the first edition of the Sexual Violence Media Guide to support commencement of new laws allowing people charged with certain sexual offences to be named publicly. The guide also promotes a better understanding of the impacts of violence on victim-survivors and their families and provides guidance on safe and trauma-informed reporting, legal considerations, how to address community misconceptions about sexual violence and self-care tips for media on vicarious trauma.

Action 7

Work in formal partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to ensure policies and services are culturally competent, strengths based and trauma informed and meet the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and communities, aligning with the goals of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Action Plan

Activity

The Australian Capital Territory Government has funded a not-for-profit community organisation and an Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisation to consult with victim-survivors to develop an accessible and sustainable engagement model. Key principles and approaches that will underpin the model include taking a peer-based approach to community listening, using multiple streams of community listening and participation activities (a multi-modal approach), taking a healing-informed approach and ensuring engagement with existing lived experience networks.

Action 8

Develop and implement age-appropriate, culturally safe programs across all four domains, informed by children and young people, that support recovery and healing from trauma, and intervene early to address violence supportive behaviours

Activity

Western Australia has established two Youth Counselling Services aimed at young people aged between 10 and 24 years who have been exposed to, are experiencing, or are at risk of violence within their family, household or intimate relationships. The target group is inclusive of parents, people in state care and people who may be displaying harmful behaviours in their own family or intimate partner relationships. The service model was developed by The Australian Childhood Foundation, in partnership with the Youth Affairs Council of Western Australia and Karla Kulin Aboriginal Corporation.

Activity 8 (cont)

The service model was informed by the lived experience of members of a Youth Steering Group and a Sector Reference Group, which comprised key agencies including Aboriginal organisations and Elders. The Youth Counselling Service offers programs and activities that support healing and social connection and are person-centred, age appropriate and culturally safe for Aboriginal, culturally and linguistically diverse and LGBTIQ+ participants.

Action 9

Improve police responses and the justice system to better support victim-survivors through the provision of trauma-informed, culturally safe supports that promote safety and wellbeing, and hold people who choose to use violence to account

Activity

The Tasmanian Government has funded two multidisciplinary centres or 'Arch' Centres which opened in July and August 2023 in Launceston and Hobart, respectively. The Arch Centres provide survivor-centred, holistic and integrated responses to family and sexual violence. These centres are managed by a new Family and Sexual Violence Command within Tasmania Police, in partnership with community-based sexual assault support services. Arch Centres will put people affected by sexual violence at the centre of service delivery. The centres address some of the barriers and challenges people have faced previously when attempting to navigate different services and systems. A further \$5 million has been committed to establish a third centre in the north-west.

Action 10

Improve access to short-term, medium and long-term housing for women and children experiencing violence, including those living in institutional settings, and support women to stay in their own homes when they choose to do so

Activity

The *ProgramPilot projects to address homelessness for DFSV victim survivors* in the Northern Territory was established in 2023 through the Family, Domestic and Sexual Violence National Partnership agreement funding and provides rent-assisted transitional accommodation and wraparound supports for victim-survivors exiting from crisis accommodation services.

Note: This information was collated from information provided by governments to the Commission in May and June 2024, and from the Jurisdictional Roundtable, conducted in May 2024. This is not an exhaustive list of activities. Full reporting on progress towards the Action Plan will be provided by the Department of Social Services later in 2024.

The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Action Plan

The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Action Plan was released in August 2023. It was developed as a ‘concerted national effort to resource and empower community-led, self-determined approaches at every level – local, regional and national’ (DSS, 2023)(p.31).

The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Action Plan is the first of its kind. It was the result of long-term advocacy by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and organisations to ensure that the needs and experiences of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples were given specific priority by governments and communities.

The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Action Plan’s development was overseen by the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Advisory Council on family, domestic and sexual violence, a governance body aimed at ensuring the incorporation of lived and living experience, policy expertise and community voices in the development of policy. The reform priorities for the Plan are:

- Reform Area One: Voice, self-determination, and agency
- Reform Area Two: Strength, resilience and therapeutic healing
- Reform Area Three: Reform institutions and systems
- Reform Area Four: Evidence and data eco-systems
- Reform Area Five: Inclusion and intersectionality.

The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Action Plan sets out a range of initiatives under each reform area for implementation by Australian, state and

territory governments, emphasising collaboration and cooperation opportunities, as well as systems reform.

Initiatives under way

Formal frameworks to enable reporting against the actions in the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Action Plan are yet to be established. Some examples of work under way across the country to support the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Action Plan include the following:

+ First Nations national family, domestic and sexual violence peak body

The Australian Government committed to the creation of a First Nations national family, domestic and sexual violence peak body in the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Action Plan (p.50). This peak body will provide national governance across the sector, work with states and territories and their advisory bodies, consult with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander victim-survivors, and provide governance of the First Nations National Plan and associated action plans.

+ Closing the Gap Target 13 program of work

In New South Wales, the Transforming Aboriginal Outcomes Division in the Department of Communities and Justice is developing a Closing the Gap Target 13 program of work with a strong focus on self-determination, early intervention, healing and recovery. The program of work includes a range of initiatives and solutions that have been co-developed or co-designed, reflecting Aboriginal leadership and lived experience. This includes the development of the New South Wales

(NSW) Aboriginal Domestic Family and Sexual Violence Plan, which will support the National Plan.

+ First Nations Engagement Strategy

A First Nations Engagement Strategy has been developed by the Rural Support Service Prevention and Response to Violence Abuse and Neglect Team in South Australia in partnership with the regional Local Health Networks, to establish a formal partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. The strategy aims to ensure ongoing consultation, truth telling and capacity building when developing procedures, work instructions, training packages and resources that are focused on domestic, family and sexual violence.

+ Programs for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people using violence

Queensland is progressing a community-led project to design and pilot programs specifically tailored to meet the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people using violence. Additional funding was provided to support existing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Men’s Support Services from 1 July 2023.

+ Increased support for Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations

The Australian Capital Territory’s (ACT) Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence Office has increased investment over the past two years to support new and existing Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations to provide a range of holistic responses to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples impacted by domestic, family and sexual violence. In 2023–24,

\$1.863 million was invested directly in Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations to deliver specialist domestic and family violence services. In 2024–25, the ACT Government will deliver an additional \$2.588 million to Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander focused programs.

+ Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence Advisory Board

In the Northern Territory, a Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence Advisory Board has been established to advise the Minister for the Prevention of Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence. A position is being funded in an Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisation to work in collaboration with the domestic, family and sexual violence sector to provide input and advice from Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations on domestic, family and sexual violence policy developments and initiatives.

‘Our people no matter where they live, are culturally safe and strong, and live free from violence.’

Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander Action Plan, p.8

Moving forward

Since the release of the First Action Plan and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Action Plan in August 2023, the Commission has actively and meaningfully engaged with representatives of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities across the country, the sector and those tasked with implementing key activities under the National Plan.

The Commission has clearly heard that, while effort is under way, eliminating violence against women and children in one generation is a complex task and deeply interconnected across areas of policy. There are opportunities to strengthen our approach in these early stages to embed practices and arrangements that will support effective implementation throughout the life of the Plan.

The Commission has focused this report on supporting government to better understand the impact of its investment and efforts and identifying changes that can be made across policy, implementation and service delivery to accelerate impacts and achieve sustainable change – not just in the work of government but in the broader community effort to end gender-based violence.

Principles for sustainable change

Throughout the Commission's engagement, the Commission has consistently heard the need to 'hasten slowly'. While there is expectation to see urgent change, the pace and breadth of reform is significant and brings its own risks. With all this activity, there is risk of replicating silos and failing to achieve the intended impact. Governments must build robust information sharing mechanisms and practices, and good governance processes for co-design and decision-making to ensure sustainable change is achieved.

The evaluation of the 2010–2022 National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children found that governance structures and processes grew and matured over the life of the plan (KPMG, 2022). The Commission expects to see similar maturation of governance mechanisms and processes throughout the current National Plan. The Commission will continue to focus on governance of the National Plan's implementation and efforts to assess and measure progress, drawing on the available reporting mechanisms once established. This will enable the Commission to provide a clearer assessment of progress, risks and areas for improvement in future yearly reports.

Areas for Focus

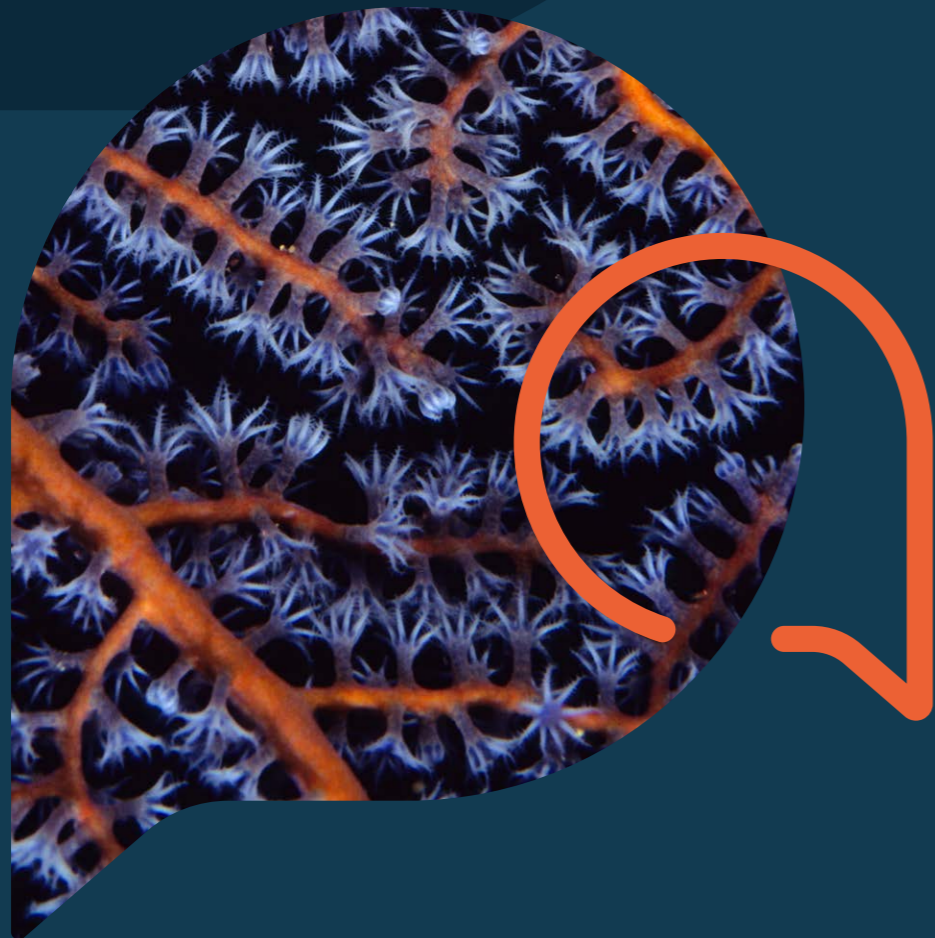
The Australian Government must prioritise developing the new data sources and measures needed to assess progress of the National Plan within the life of the First Action Plan.

The Australian Government must strengthen measures that relate to the system experience of people who have experienced domestic, family and sexual violence, particularly the experiences of priority communities.

All governments must ensure robust information sharing and good governance processes for co-design and decision-making.

Embedding lived experience

Lived experience expertise needs to be prioritised and valued by governments to ensure effective solutions for the people they serve.



It is not an overstatement to say that the nation has been rocked by the number of deaths of Australian women this year. This collective outrage and sadness culminated in thousands of people marching across the nation calling for change and an end to gendered based violence. The Prime Minister Anthony Albanese was right – this is a National Emergency. Ask any victim-survivor, advocate, expert or service provider and they will say there are no quick fixes – we need long term investment, reform and a paradigm shift in community attitudes to turn this around.

The voices of those who have directly experienced the devastation of domestic and family violence needs to be at the centre of any reform in this space. We have intimate knowledge of the journey of victims, the patterns of domestic, family, sexual violence and coercive control, and sadly the gaps and failures in the system.

As the inaugural Member Co-Chair of the first national Lived Experience Advisory Council for Domestic and Family Violence I sit alongside twelve passionate and committed survivors who are working with the Commission to bring our experience and knowledge

to government – and to give a voice to those who can no longer speak for themselves.

The diversity of the current Lived Experience Advisory Council is a testament to the commitment of the original Guiding Group who worked closely with the Commission to ensure that, where possible, we were able to reflect a diversity of culture, life experience, geographic spread and identity.

We are committed to working with government to drive positive, significant and long-lasting change.

Alison Scott,
Co Chair, Lived Experience Advisory Council

No effective solutions can be developed without the people most affected by them, and whom this National Plan intends to serve.

National Plan, p.68

The National Plan commits to embedding lived experience in policy and program development. The Commission is resolute in progressing this work, promoting a holistic, person-centred approach in everything we do.

The leadership of people with lived and living experience has been fundamental to progressing domestic, family and sexual violence as a national priority.

The work of advocates has led to governments recognising the importance of embedding lived experience in policy, planning and program delivery. Governments need to continue improving meaningful engagement with lived experience and ensure that it is valued, recognised and remunerated appropriately.

Amplifying the voices of people with lived experience in shaping policy design and service delivery is a key objective for the Commission.

The Lived Experience Advisory Council will continue to share their expertise and advice with the Commission to progress

towards the objectives of the National Plan.

The Lived Experience Advisory Council's role in providing advice to the Australian Government to improve domestic, family and sexual violence policy, systems and services remains essential to achieving the outcome of ending gender-based violence in one generation.

The Commission will prioritise the development and promotion of best practice models of lived experience engagement through a co-design approach with the Lived Experience Advisory Council. Through this work, the Commission will support governments to build their own capability to work with people with lived experience.

One of the most significant transformations in the domestic, family and sexual violence landscape in recent years has been the increase in the inclusion of the voices of lived experience in policy, planning and program delivery within governments.

Progress highlights

★ Voices of lived and living experience are increasingly being included in government policy, planning and program delivery. Positive examples include the Attorney-General's Department's Expert Advisory Group for the ALRC inquiry into responses to sexual violence and Victoria's Victim Survivors' Advisory Council now in its eighth year of operation.

★ The Commission established a national Lived Experience Advisory Council to bring personal experience, skills and expertise to help create and improve domestic, family and sexual violence policy, systems and services. Alongside the Commission, the Advisory Council will champion representation of the diversity of experiences from across the country, by both building and advocating for other mechanisms to embed lived experience perspectives across government.

Examples of these include:

- The Australian Government established the first national Lived Experience Advisory Council on domestic family and sexual violence (Box 3).
- The Australian Government's Attorney-General's Department has established a two-year lived-experience Expert Advisory Group to support the ALRC's inquiry justice responses to sexual violence in Australia (Attorney-General's Department, 2024a).
- The ACT Government is progressing towards establishing an intersectional and sustainable engagement mechanism for adult victim-survivors of domestic, family and sexual

violence. The mechanism will ensure the voices and experiences of people with lived experience of domestic, family and sexual violence remain central to the planning, implementation and evaluation of domestic, family and sexual violence reforms in the Australian Capital Territory (ACT Government, 2024).

- In Victoria, the Victim Survivors' Advisory Council is now in its eighth year of operation. It is the most established group of its kind providing advice on family and sexual violence policy, laws and systems across Australian jurisdictions. Its influence has helped to shape Victoria's family and sexual violence system (Victorian Government, 2024).

BOX 3

Establishing a national Lived Experience Advisory Council

In September 2023, the Australian Government established the first national Lived Experience Advisory Council to amplify the voices of people with lived experience of domestic, family and sexual violence at the national level.

The establishment of the Advisory Council was guided by seven inaugural members who worked with the Commission to undertake a national expression of interest process in August 2023 which attracted more than 400 applications. Twelve people with diverse backgrounds, identities and experiences from across Australia were selected to work with the

Commission for the next two years to bring their experience, skills and expertise to help create and improve policy, systems and services and report on implementation and progress towards the objectives of the National Plan.

This group is not expected to represent the diversity of experience across the country. The Commission is both building and championing other mechanisms to embed lived experience perspectives across government.

For more information on the Advisory Council including biographies of current members, visit the Commission's website at www.dfsvc.gov.au.





'The fact that the government is now engaging with and listening to those with sector and lived experience, and are making this a priority, is a step in the right direction and something that must continue.'

Lived Experience Advisory Council Member

People with lived experience must be appropriately remunerated for their expertise with supports put in place to ensure safe and meaningful engagement with government activities

It is critical that all governments understand the inherent value of lived experience engagement mechanisms and ensure that people who contribute their lived experience expertise are well supported and remunerated appropriately.

Adequate supports for those participating in processes, including appropriate and fit-for-purpose debriefing and counselling supports, and remuneration for time supporting government activities is a core principle for meaningful engagement and must be prioritised.

People with lived experience should be empowered to reflect their expertise into the processes of government. Remuneration and support for their expertise recognises that solutions are more successful when designed with the people most affected by them.

Box 4 gives an example of a framework developed to guide researchers in the ethical engagement of victim-survivors of domestic, family and sexual violence.

Government must engage with the lived experience of people who use violence

People who have used violence should be engaged to inform systems interventions to address the use of violence and improve safety. This approach should include people who use violence outside of the traditional framework for behaviour interventions aimed at white, heteronormative, cisgender people to ensure broader intersectionality and representation of the community.

Learning from people who have used violence offers an opportunity to improve systems to ensure greater safety for women and children, and to limit or eliminate re-offending is key. A recent study in the United Kingdom which incorporated the experience of people who had used violence found that an increase in time, skill and knowledge for those working with people on probation orders, delivering 'something akin to a therapeutic model' could have a dramatic effect on limiting re-offending and improving safety (Renehan & Gadd, 2024).

BOX 4

Australian Framework for the Ethical Co-Production of Research with Victim-survivors

Released in September 2023, the University of Melbourne Safer Families Centre has developed a framework to guide researchers in the ethical engagement of victim-survivors of domestic, family and sexual violence in co-produced research and evaluations.

The framework draws on the experience of the WEAVERS, a group of women with lived experience established in 2016 to show that engaging victim-survivors as co-researchers can be empowering and promote autonomy.

The framework was developed using co-design approaches by researchers Katie Lamb and Kelsey Hegarty in partnership with victim-survivor co-researchers from the WEAVERS co-design team.

The framework reflects the following principles:

- High-quality co-design research teams are made up of people with a broad range of expertise whether professional or based on experience, and all perspectives are valued.

- Researchers need to be clear about where their project sits on the continuum of co-design and be highly transparent about how much influence victim-survivor co-researchers will have on the research process and outcomes.
- The co-design research process should be developed with an understanding of trauma and with a shifted focus on how the process can add to healing rather than solely focusing on preventing distress.
- For victim-survivors to be equal partners and receive equitable benefits from co-design research and evaluations, research teams and funders must adequately invest in training, support and career pathways for victim-survivor co-researchers.
- It is vital that research funders ensure adequate resourcing and timelines to support genuine co-production, including research ideation with victim-survivors, and sustained relationships rather than short-term engagements.

The framework is available from ► www.saferfamilies.org.au/codesignframework.



Areas for Focus

All agencies that engage with people with lived experience must provide adequate support to those contributing. This includes offering suitable debriefing and support services, and remuneration for their time and effort spent supporting government activities.

Governments must consider how to engage with people who have used violence, including those from diverse populations, to inform improved interventions.

Engaging men

Men must be engaged in every aspect of ending violence.



The world has significantly changed and so must our definition of what it is to be a man. The issue of how we define masculinity is not a gender-specific problem; it has implications for both men and women. In order to address this issue in a meaningful way, everyone needs to play a role.

Movember,
Are you man enough? (Movember, 2015)

The overwhelming majority of domestic, family and sexual violence is perpetrated by men, most commonly against a woman that is known to them (Our Watch, 2021).

Governments, non-government organisations and academics have all recognised the importance of promoting positive, healthier concepts of masculinity that promote gender equality and respectful relationships.

In 2024–25, the Australian Government will invest \$34.8 million in an early intervention trial for adolescent boys who have experienced family and domestic violence and may be using or at risk of using violence in their relationships (DSS, 2024).

The importance of promoting, modelling and supporting healthy masculinity cannot be overstated in an environment where some men and boys are experiencing societal pressure to act or behave in a certain way because of their gender (see *Unpacking the Man Box* in Box 5).

Progress highlights

★ The Australian Government has invested in an early intervention trial for teenage boys who have experienced family and domestic violence and may be using or at risk of using violence in their relationships, and to establish community-led men's wellness centres for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

★ Victoria has recently appointed a new parliamentary position to increase focus on changing men's behaviour.



'Men have to be prepared to take responsibility for our actions and our attitudes. To educate our sons, to talk to our mates. To drive real change in the culture of our sporting clubs, our faith and community groups and our workplaces.'

Prime Minister Anthony Albanese,
2024 International Women's Day Speech (Prime Minister of Australia, 2024)

BOX 5

Unpacking the Man Box (2024)

The Man Box 2024 is a comprehensive study on attitudes to manhood and behaviours of Australian men aged 18 to 45. The 2024 study builds on the original research first published in 2018 and 2020 (The Men's Project & Flood, 2024).

The Man Box was the first Australian study to explore the association between attitudes to masculine stereotypes and the behaviours of men and to show how the results have changed over time.

The Man Box describes a set of beliefs within and across society that place pressure on men to act in a certain way and that represent a socially dominant form of masculinity. The 2024 study surveyed more than 3,500 Australian men on the *19 rules*

of the Man Box.

The 2024 findings are revealing:

- Almost four in ten men feel pressure to conform to Man Box rules.
- A quarter of Australian men aged 18 to 30 personally agree with Man Box rules.
- Men who most strongly agreed with Man Box rules were more likely to have perpetrated violence, hold violence-supportive attitudes and have consumed violent pornography.
- The men who most strongly agree with Man Box rules have a range of poor health outcomes.

Men have a critical role to play in ending gender-based violence. It is important that men challenge sexism and attitudes that support violence. They need to be active bystanders in situations where women are experiencing sexual harassment or discrimination on the basis of their gender. There are opportunities for more men to model and highlight positive forms of masculinity, including in online and digital environments.

National Plan, p.33

The online environment can be both a risk and an opportunity

The eSafety Commissioner's report *Being a Young Man Online* recognises the societal pressure being placed on men: 'In navigating these tensions, young men grapple with what it means to be a man in the digital age, and variously conform with and act in opposition to harmful masculine ideals' (eSafety Commissioner, 2024:75).

To combat negative influence, we must meet young men where they are and talk to them in a language that is accessible to them.

Positive masculinity needs to be promoted and modelled in a way that resonates with the diverse cultural, spiritual and individual experience of men and boys

Men and boys are not a homogenous group. To be successful, programs and services need to be place-based and person-centred, responding to the needs of the community they are working with. While there are positive place-based examples (see Box 6),

policies and programs that target culturally and linguistically diverse men are largely absent from national strategies.

Addressing domestic and family violence in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities cannot take place without understanding and recognising the influence of colonisation, disadvantage, racism and the historical and ongoing removal of children. Any approaches that work with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people must honour the abilities, knowledge and capacities gained through lived and living experience, rather than viewing things through a deficits-focused lens.

Shifting to a greater focus on men's healing is a critical step. The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Action Plan 2023–2025 acknowledges the power of healing and recovery and the need 'to go beyond punitive approaches for those who use violence and acknowledge that they are also in need of support to heal' (DSS, 2023: 53).

While there are risks of the negative influence on gender role models and relationships developed in online environments there are also opportunities to engage using online mechanisms which can connect all genders in both specialist and community spaces with each other to communicate positive messages model safe and positive behaviours and share learning.

Men and Masculinities Roundtable Summary Report (DFSV Commission, 2024)

BOX 6

Promising practice

South-East Community Links partnered with Lyndale Secondary College and Melbourne City Football Club to design and deliver an eight-week healthy masculinities program for Year 9 and 10 male students from refugee and migrant backgrounds.

This program has significantly increased participants' awareness and understanding of:

- societal pressures on men and boys – from 35% to 63%
- the link between unhealthy masculinity and violence – from 14% to 72%
- understanding about consent – from 50% to 82%.

South-East Community Links was funded under the Supporting Multicultural and Faith Communities to Prevent Violence Program.

Source: Information provided to the Commission by the Victorian Government (Vic Government, 2024)



There must be more options for those at risk of, or using violence, to get help

Men's Behaviour Change Programs (MBCP) remain the most used and commonly understood intervention for men who are using violence.

There are currently no agreed national standards for MBCPs. While some jurisdictions have standards in place, given the importance of MBCPs in the service response, developing national standards and guidelines should be strongly considered.

Development of national standards could investigate elements such as:

- the most appropriate approach to elicit behaviour change

- the minimum qualification for working in MBCPs
- the minimum length of time for which a program must run
- standards for monitoring and evaluation
- best practice for engaging with the partners of men in the programs.

ANROWS research measuring outcomes and program quality of MBCPs found that existing standards generally focused on the dynamic between heterosexual, cisgender men and women. Interventions for violence which is perpetrated outside of this framework are extremely limited and should also be considered when developing national standards (ANROWS, 2019).

We must equip mainstream service providers to respond to gender-based violence

In addition to Men's behaviour change programs, Government must also look to mainstream service providers as additional opportunities for intervention for men who use violence.

General practitioners, nurses, medical staff in hospitals, mental health and alcohol and other drug practitioners are key personnel who often engage with people where violence is known to be present.

Workers in these settings could benefit from training and skills to identify and respond to men who may be using violence in their relationship.

Working with men who are, or are at risk of, using violence must acknowledge experiences of trauma

The Australian Childhood Maltreatment Study shows that a significant number of people in the community experienced domestic, family and sexual violence as children. That exposure has previously been found to have significant, long-lasting developmental impacts (Haslam, et al., 2023).

While exposure to domestic and family violence alone is not seen as a factor in future perpetration of violence, there is a link between childhood experience of violence with adult use of violence (Campo, 2015).

Research on male perpetrators of intimate partner homicide has found that while there is not one single universal pathway to intimate partner homicide, 55% of offenders had experienced traumatic life events including war and conflict, homelessness, incarceration, abuse and neglect, and the death of significant family members and 32% had experienced abuse and neglect during their childhood and adolescence (Boxall, Doherty, Lawler, Franks, & Bricknell, 2022).

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander men need support to heal and recover from the impacts of colonisation

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities know the value of healing and have called on governments to provide greater options for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander men to heal and recover from the ongoing trauma of colonisation. As stated on page 53 of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Action Plan 2023–2025, ‘We need to go beyond just punitive approaches for those who use violence and acknowledge that they are also in need of support to heal’ (DSS, 2023). See Box 7 for examples of current programs tailored to the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander men.

BOX 7

Examples of programs working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait men

Projects and programs working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait men across the country:

- The Northern Territory is establishing a new program in the Big Rivers region that addresses both the gendered drivers of violence and the impacts of alcohol and colonisation on Aboriginal communities.
- Queensland has a community-led project to design and pilot perpetrator programs specifically tailored to meet the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.
- Victoria’s Aboriginal-led family violence services provide culturally safe responses for Aboriginal people using family violence.

Source: Information provided to the Commission (Old Government, 2024)
(NT Government, 2024) (Vic Government, 2024)



System responses need to be strengthened to hold people who use violence to account.

In the context of a 28% increase in domestic and family violence homicide in 2022–23, and the spate of deaths in early 2024, feedback received by Commission has pointed to the importance of improving the effectiveness of risk assessment and management and the need for all areas of the response system to better share information.

Evidence shows that in the vast majority of cases where a man has murdered a current or previous female partner, they were already known to either the police, the courts or the child protection system. In some cases, they had breached previous safety orders (Fitz-Gibbon, Walklate, McGowan, Maher, & McCulloch, 2024).

This shows the important role that the justice system can play in identifying high-risk individuals and preventing deaths.

In March 2024, National Cabinet agreed to strengthen accountability and consequences for perpetrators, including early intervention with high-risk perpetrators and serial offenders, and best practice justice responses that support people who have experienced violence.

Encouraging improvement in information sharing and risk assessment and management is a key focus for the Commission.

There is promising practice in Victoria where the Multi Agency Risk Assessment Management framework and the Family Violence Information Sharing Scheme have been demonstrated to increase collaboration and cooperation within Victoria.

Information provided to the DFSV Commission by the Victorian Government (Vic Government, 2024)



‘Evidence shows that if we are serious about ending violence against adult women, we need to get serious about stopping violence experienced in childhood. This is the hidden prevention opportunity that has been ignored.’

Anne Hollonds
National Children’s Commissioner (AHRC, 2024)

Governments must prioritise the development of new and better data on men who use violence

There remains a lack of evidence on people using violence, the pathways in and out of violence, and what works to reduce violence.

The First Action Plan Activities Addendum outlines data and evidence-building activities under Action 2 and the Data Development Plan presents an opportunity to build the evidence base around the use of violence.

Several priorities have been identified for data and evidence collection:

- Prevalence data on who is using gender-based violence. While there is an understanding about the extent to which women experience violence

and the various risk factors that lead to and result from violence, more data and research is needed around the prevalence and risk factors for those using violence.

- Understanding the pathways into, and importantly, out of using violence. ANROWS has been allocated an additional \$4.3 million to further build the evidence on perpetration pathways (Australian Government, 2024).
- Further understanding is needed about what works to engage non-violent men to become allies and adopt more non-violent forms of masculinity. This includes the individual, community and societal factors that lead men to adopt or reject certain versions of masculinity and, by extension, certain attitudes to gender-based violence.

Being able to safely share information across services and jurisdictions about an individual’s history of engaging in violent and abusive behaviour would support a coordinated approach to holding people who choose to use violence responsible.

National Plan, p.74

Areas for Focus

Governments must work with service providers and the community to offer more support options for men who are concerned about their behaviour and increase the capacity of related service sectors to respond to men’s needs.

The quality of these responses should be ensured through national standards and guidelines, building on work already underway.

Increased accountability for people who use violence is vital, taking into consideration the forms of accountability being sought by victim-survivors. Improved information sharing, risk assessments of men using violence known to the system and effective justice interventions that prevent harm are critical.

Governments must prioritise developing new and better data on men who use violence, their pathways in and out of violence, and what works to engage men to end violence.

Improving the capacity of our systems

Governments have invested significant public funds to address domestic, family and sexual violence. Despite this, services and systems continue to be overwhelmed by community need.



'Much greater investment is needed across the board from primary prevention through to healing and recovery.'

Hollie,
Lived Experience Advisory Council Member

Funding for domestic, family and sexual violence services has increased steadily over decades, reflecting a stronger policy and investment focus by governments as recognition grows about the scale and severity of the problem. Alongside this, the complexity of preventing and responding to domestic, family and sexual violence has also increased.

There are three critical aspects to understanding the capacity of the system that government needs to further develop:

- a clearer understanding of demand for existing services, how it is changing and growing and where the system needs to prioritise funding
- a more robust picture of unmet demand and the needs for services and support that are not currently available
- a comprehensive understanding of current funding from all governments, where it is being spent and how effective it is in driving delivery of the outcomes in the National Plan.

Progress highlights

- ★ The Australian Institute of Health and Welfare has been funded to develop a prototype for a national family and domestic violence specialist data collection. The purpose of this project is to develop, test and agree on a core set of data items that can be collected to quantify demand and help to understand the types of services accessed and outcomes achieved.
- ★ A new community-led primary prevention pilot is being trialled in Ballarat, Victoria to test a suite of reinforcing activities that span prevention and early intervention. This 'saturation' model is focused on a geographic area and promotes coordination across the different domains of activity, particularly prevention and early intervention. It is designed to build better evidence on what works to prevent violence from emerging when early risk factors are present.

Demand for crisis services is outstripping service capacity

Frontline response systems across the nation are under enormous pressure, often stretched beyond their capacity. The sector is seeing an increase in demand but also in complexity, requiring more time and specialist skills to adequately provide support. Insights across the service system all point to growing demand and risks to capacity to meet that demand as shown in Figure 7. In addition, Queensland's Auditor-General noted that 'the system that responds to DFV [Domestic and Family Violence] in Queensland is under pressure ... At a time when demand is increasing, there are significant gaps in the quality and coordination of

responses and services. Responders lack training, are missing information or not using it, and are not adequately assessing risk' (Qld Audit Office, 2022:2).

Funding for domestic, family and sexual violence has increased over the period of the previous and current national plans. Governments also took additional actions in response to increasing violence and community concern in the first half of 2024.¹

However, the service sector is calling on governments to increase funding to enable them to provide the levels of support and service to meet community need.

Services are consistently providing services above their funded targets, there are wait times for clients to be allocated case management support and this places them at increased risk, case managers are only able to work with those clients at the highest level of risk and only for short periods of support, and these pressures are having a corrosive impact on practitioners and services.

Safe and Equal, Measuring Family Violence Service Demand Project, p.10.

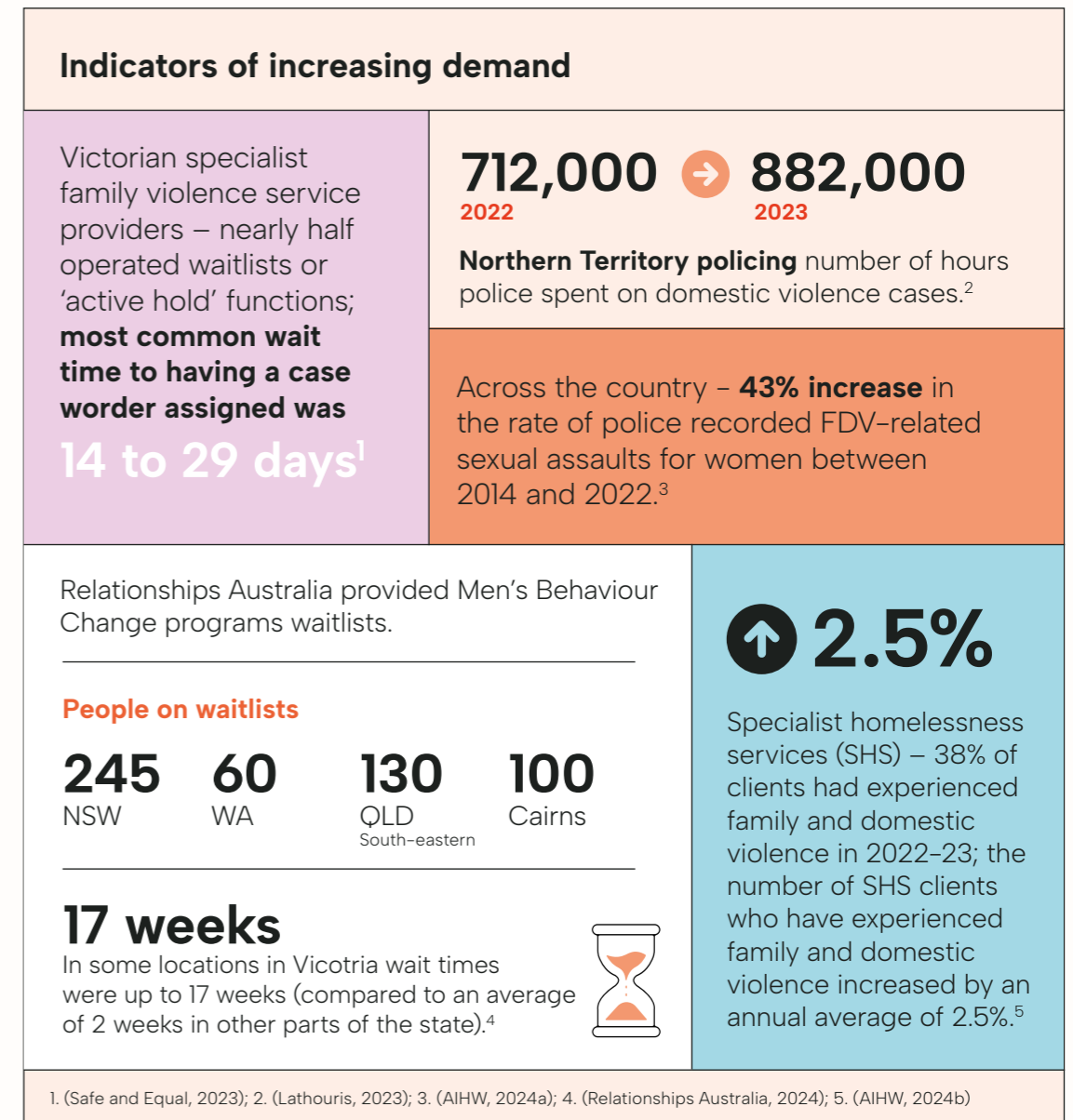


Figure 7: Demand for crisis services

Data is crucial to understanding the problem of gender-based violence, measuring our progress towards ending it, and informing decisions about funding, service design and delivery.

National Plan p.26

National funding

At the Commonwealth level, funding for domestic, family and sexual violence has been steadily growing over the last decade. MinterEllison analysis of budget documents between 2010–11 and 2023–24 found that ‘allocated DFSV [domestic, family and sexual violence] spending in Australian Government budgets has risen from between \$0 and \$4.5 million annually between 2010 and 2014 (less than 0.001% of the annual budget) to \$644 million (almost 0.1% of the annual budget) by 2023’ (MinterEllison, 2024).

It is difficult to quantify the full cost of domestic and family violence responses. Mainstream services (health, justice, education, child protection) provide support to the community to prevent, identify and respond to family violence. Improved visibility of this investment and greater recognition and tracking of the work of these broader system responses would enable greater accountability for both funding and outcomes.

The Australian Government could improve funding transparency by including reporting requirements in partnership agreements, through dedicated effectiveness and efficiency inquiries, and using nationally comparable reporting through the Productivity Commission’s Annual Report on Government Services. The Productivity Commission is well placed to examine national domestic, family and sexual violence funding. This examination could then support regular reporting by governments.

The Commission understands that the Department of Social Services is seeking to report on funding for domestic, family and sexual violence across the Commonwealth, states and territories as part of its Action Plan reporting.



‘To be most effective services on the frontline responding to victims and perpetrators of violence are critically in need of targeted funding. Funding that is committed and consistent; longer-term funding which equates to a decrease in precious time services devote to grant applications, at the expense of supporting clients, many of whom are in a crisis. Performance reports submitted by services who have a proven record of supporting victim/survivors is a less time consuming and onerous task than having to apply for further funding amid a national crisis, not knowing if that funding will even be granted.’

Deborah,
Lived Experience Advisory Council

Funding needs to be sustainable and consistent to provide certainty

Short-term funding is hampering efforts of the service system

The sector is clear that the lack of longer-term funding is entrenching uncertainty and instability for a workforce already under pressure, resulting in uncertainty for the broader community around availability and continuity of support.

The detrimental impact of short-term funding approaches by government was highlighted in an independent review of the National Legal Assistance Partnership, which found that ‘the level of competitive tendering has taken us to a place where, by design, we put organisations that are collaborative by nature in competition with each other ... This Review has not seen any evidence that demonstrates the superiority of this funding approach’ (Mundy, 2024).

The National Partnership on Family, Domestic and Sexual Violence Responses 2021–27 (FDSV National Partnership agreement), was first established in 2019 under the National Partnership on COVID–19 Domestic and Family Violence Responses. This invested \$130 million to support frontline services in response to increased demand on frontline services during the pandemic. Two subsequent agreements have grown from that original COVID–19 agreement with a further \$270.7 million committed for 2021–22 to 2022–23 and \$159.0 million for 2023–24 to 2024–25.

Through these agreements, Australian Government funding for service delivery has become an established part of the funding landscape. One of the purposes of the FDSV National Partnership agreement is to ‘support service providers to deliver critical family, domestic and sexual violence services to meet demand and to support those who need it most’ (DSS, 2024). There is no question that Australian Government investment is critical in supporting the service system.

Several national partnership agreements have an impact on funding for government systems that respond to and prevent domestic, family and sexual violence. These include:

Consent and Respectful Relationships Education

National Agreement on Social Housing and Homelessness

National Legal Assistance Partnership

National Agreement on Closing the Gap

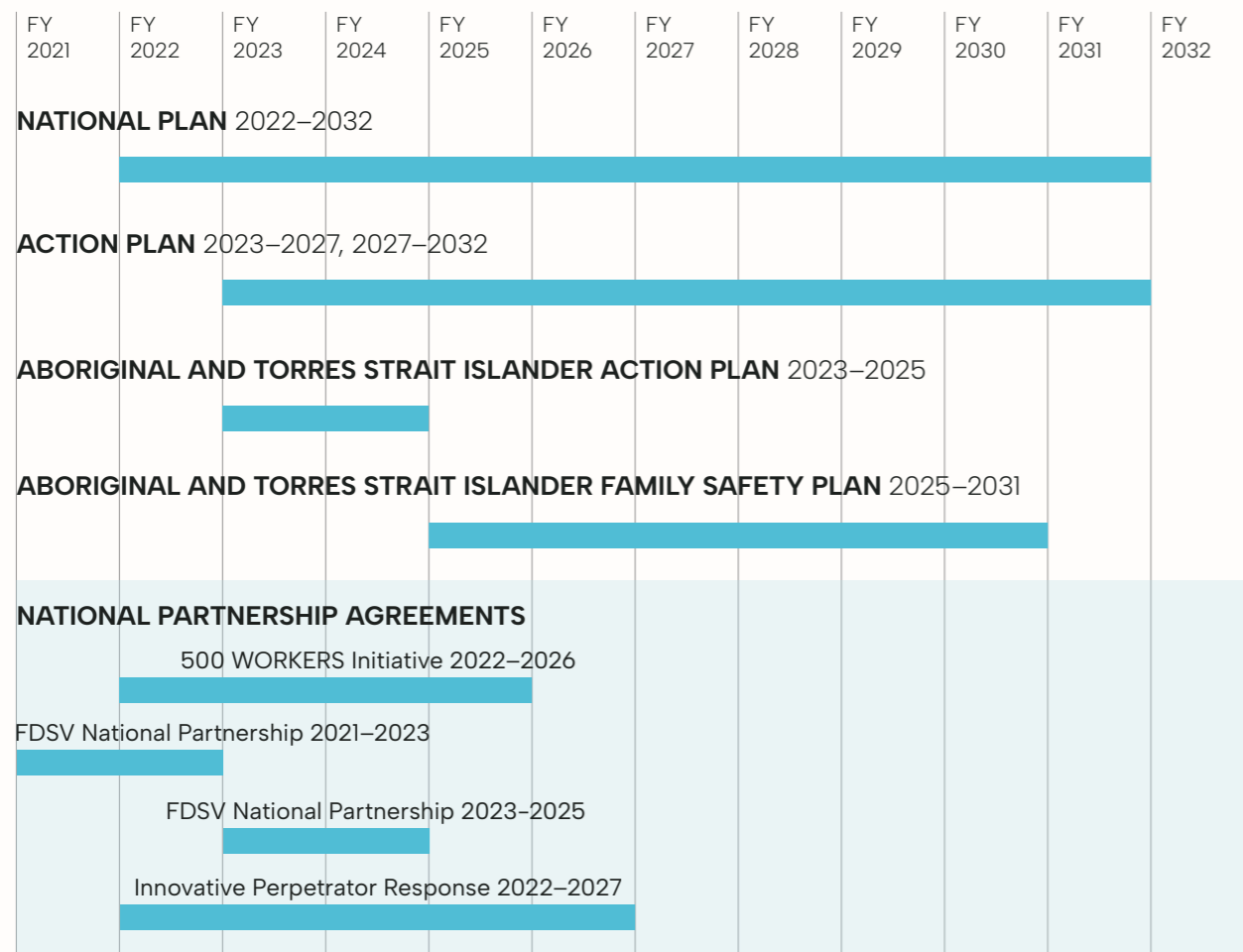


Figure 8: Alignment between national partnership agreements and the National Plan architecture

Figure 8 shows a disconnect between the sequencing and timing of the FDSV National Partnership agreements and the 10-year timeframe of the National Plan. Only two components – funding for the 500 Workers initiative and the innovative perpetrator responses – have funding allocated beyond 2024–2025. The length of the agreement is also inconsistent with other partnership agreements, for example the National Agreement on Social Housing and Homelessness which is a five-year funding agreement.

The shorter timeframe for allocated funding of frontline service support has not allowed for consistency for the sector delivering those services. The uncertainty surrounding continuity of funding has serious consequences for service capacity, with frontline services unable to secure or maintain staffing without a clear expectation of resourcing.

The shorter timeframe for allocated funding also results in state and territory resources being dedicated to the negotiation of agreements at a cost to

other policy activities. In addition, the disconnect between financial year reporting on FDSV National Partnership agreement projects and reporting to support the National Plan creates a burden of duplication and inefficiency in data requests and provisions between states and territories and the Australian Government.

The Department of Social Services is evaluating the FDSV National Partnership agreements to assess the outcomes and effectiveness of funding to date. This will be the first evaluation of the agreement and includes identifying outcomes from the COVID-19 National Partnership, Family, Domestic and Sexual Violence National Partnership, 500 Workers and Innovative Perpetrator Responses Initiatives. The evaluation will provide recommendations for how the funding model can be improved and provide examples of funding models that could be applied in future national partnership agreements.

The final evaluation report is due in May 2025, and will provide an opportunity to consider how national partnership agreements can drive the implementation of the National Plan. This will also be an opportunity for the Department of Social Services to work with states and territories to align the FDSV National Partnership agreement to the National Plan and Action Plans.

Siloed government structures and funding limit the ability to provide a person-centred and community responsive approach

Our systems and responses need to better reflect person-centred approaches and recognise the

interactions between the domains of the National Plan.

The four domains set out in the National Plan (prevention, early intervention, response, and healing and recovery) are ‘interconnected, with each action reinforcing the effectiveness of others. For example, recovery and healing from childhood trauma supports long-term prevention by addressing one of the factors that contribute to violence against women. High-quality and accessible response services hold perpetrators accountable, and in turn reduce the recurrence of violence’ (DSS, 2022: 78).

While the system is arranged in departments, organisations, programs and domains of the National Plan, people (and the challenges they are facing) do not conform to these artificial structures.

Work needs to be done to ensure that the incentives and structures of funding, program and project design and domains do not hamper the service system’s ability to provide person-centred approaches to responding to and preventing domestic, family and sexual violence (Box 8).

People that interact with these systems are frustrated and sometimes traumatised by a lack of recognition of their need for healing and recovery to be considered in early care and crisis responses (DFSVC Commission, 2024).

Many organisations, particularly Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations (ACCOs), tasked with a specific role – regardless of the funding source – frequently find themselves operating in each of the domains, with little or no recognition of this effort, and no additional funding to resource it.

This is also relevant for organisations that work with diverse populations (people with disability, people from migrant or refugee backgrounds, people from the LGBTQ+ communities, and older women). This necessitates delivering interventions across all domains of the National Plan, often alongside other forms of support.

Siloed funding approaches by governments increase the risk of:

- misidentification of women as perpetrators
- systems failures for those experiencing violence
- duplication of services across government departments or levels of government
- creating unintended gaps in service delivery by narrowing the services made available

- reducing career opportunities for workers keen to support an end to gender-based violence
- lack of recognition and funding for services appropriate to respond to activities across all four domains. An example of this is legal services funded to provide court support in domestic and family violence matters regularly go beyond this remit and provide case management and broader support to people experiencing violence. Staff recognise that this person-centred work improves the efficacy of the court support they provide. Despite this, the case management and broader support remain unfunded as they are outside the scope of their contracted services.

This challenge is felt particularly in ACCOs that regularly work with women, families and communities to respond

BOX 8

Providing consent education in schools

In Victoria, specialist sexual assault and harmful sexual behaviour services often undertake primary prevention in a range of community and workplace settings, including schools and universities.

When disclosures of sexual violence, including child sexual abuse, arise as a result of this work, these same services are expected to respond but generally 'do not have dedicated funding to do this work' and so have to delay responses to other survivors to accommodate schools.

At present, sexual assault services are largely funded under the 'response' domain. In contrast, in the past, this 'whole of community response' was recognised by governments as core work for specialist sexual assault services. Specialist sexual assault services continue to have both the expertise and desire to support communities with work considered as prevention and early intervention. They need more flexibility in their funding to provide the response that children, their parents/carers and communities both need and expect of them.

Source: Sexual Assault Services Victoria



BOX 9

Testing a saturation model approach

The recently announced community-led primary prevention pilot in Ballarat is based on a 'saturation' model in which mutually reinforcing prevention activities are concentrated into a focused geographic area.

According to Respect Victoria, 'The saturation model will be co-designed with the community and local services who are delivering programs and support on the ground. The model will trial the best combinations of approaches to intervene early with men at risk of using violence, combined with efforts to prevent violence from happening in the first place.' (Respect Victoria, 2024)

Investment of this nature has not been trialled in Australia to date. The pilot will support coordinated, multi-component prevention

activities, with scope for new partnerships across government, the community sector and the private sector.

The evaluation of the Ballarat pilot will measure the impact on levels of perpetration and victimisation over four years and will develop deeper evidence on how to maximise impact and accelerate change.

The model promotes coordination across the different domains of activity, particularly prevention and early intervention, and will build better evidence on what works to prevent violence from emerging when early risk factors are present. The scope for the model to demonstrate future avoided costs on health community and justice systems provides a compelling rationale for investment.

Source: Information provided to DFSV Commission by the Victorian Government (Vic Government, 2024)



to violence, providing services which centre healing and recovery and support for people experiencing violence as well as accountability for those using violence.² These organisations often also provide 24-hour services and carry the cultural load of managing relationships outside professional roles (DFSV Commission, 2024).

While there has been recent discussion on the positioning of primary prevention work, there is broad consensus that a holistic approach across the domains is required to see sustained reductions in

violence (Hill & Salter, 2024) (Maguire, 2024). A new approach being trialled in Victoria that builds on the past community prevention work of VicHealth is testing a suite of reinforcing activities that span prevention and early intervention (Box 9).

Areas for Focus

Frontline and crisis services need to be better and more sustainably resourced.

Governments must consider new ways to fund services to ensure effective responses. The Productivity Commission is well placed to help review funding levels and arrangements.

The Australian Government must work with states and territories to align the Family Domestic and Sexual Violence National Partnership agreement to the National Plan and Action Plans. The Department of Social Services should also design funding models that provide more certainty through longer funding periods.

Building workforce capability

Development of workforce capability needs national leadership and prioritisation.





‘Workforce capacity and investing in that is really, really, really critical and that has a direct impact on the capacity for women and their families to receive good services and to be able to recover well, and that’s what we want.’

Advocate,
Monash Consultation Report, 2021, National Plan, p.55

Achieving the objectives of the National Plan hinges on having an available workforce, across a wide range of sectors and organisations. This workforce should be adequately equipped to prevent and respond to domestic, family and sexual violence.

There is a need for a national approach to capacity building of the specialist workforce

The government has recognised the need to develop a strong workforce to respond to and prevent domestic, family and sexual violence as an area of priority for many years. It was a key action in the *Third Action Plan*

2016–2019 under the previous National Plan (COAG Advisory Panel, 2016).

The specialist workforce is small with a sophisticated understanding of the dynamics of violence and how to respond. However, they experience burnout, vicarious trauma and risks to their safety (DSS, 2022: 53).

More national action is needed to address the workforce challenges identified in the National Plan. While states and territories are each advancing work to build the workforce, a national strategy can drive initiatives to meet the capacity needs of the specialist workforce.

Progress highlights



The Department of Social Services has recently contracted the Social Research Centre to undertake a national specialist workforce survey, due to be completed by mid-2026.

The domestic, family and sexual violence workforce

The domestic, family and sexual violence workforce consists of two categories of workers:

- Specialist workers whose daily work involves responding to those who have experienced and/or use violence, as well as professionals who may work directly with these workers, such as trainers or specialist consultants in policy.
- Non-specialist workers whose work may intersect with gender-based violence as part of their wider role in the community, such as health professionals, police officers and teachers (AIHW, 2024c).

National data on the specialist domestic, family and sexual violence workforce is limited (AIHW, 2024c). This is due to the specialist workforce being relatively small and widely distributed across many organisations, including small, not-for-profit organisations that receive funding from a range of sources including state and territory governments, the Australian Government and philanthropy.

The size and capability of the workforce varies across the country. There is notable variability between metropolitan areas and regional and remote locations where attraction and retention challenges create additional risks for organisations in maintaining the specialist workforce.

The National Survey of Workers in the Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence Sectors was last conducted in 2018 by the University of NSW Social Policy Research Centre (SPRC) (Cortis, et al., 2018) (see Figure 9). The survey provides valuable information on those working in the services including workforce characteristics, workforce strengths, gaps, skill levels and skill-development needs. The Commission notes that the Department of Social Services has recently contracted the Social Research Centre to complete a national specialist workforce survey, due to be completed by mid-2026.

The specialist workforce must be equipped to respond to emerging challenges in gender-based violence

The evolving nature of violence against women and children is a constant challenge for the workforce. During the Commission’s Technology Facilitated Abuse Roundtable, participants noted challenges facing workers as they face new tools and methods of coercion and abuse. Specialist workers need to be equipped to respond to these emerging challenges including ongoing training to keep up with an evolving landscape (DFSV Commission, 2024).

The National Survey of Workers in the Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence Sectors found that while a high proportion of workers are tertiary educated, only 22% felt that their formal qualifications prepared them ‘very well’ or ‘extremely well’ for working with people affected by violence. The report found that workers with qualifications in social work or community services,



Highly feminised workforce with more than **4 in 5** workers identifying as female



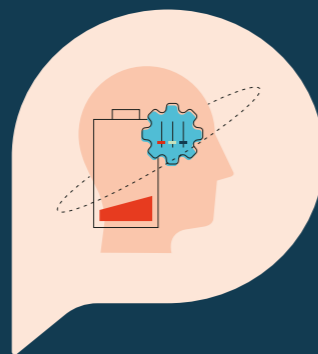
More than **90%** of workers reported having a post-school qualification



Almost half of workers said they felt under pressure to work harder (**44.5%**)



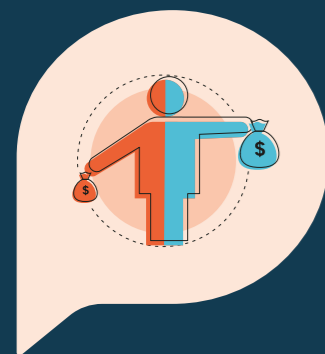
Many were worried about the future of their job (**44.5%**)



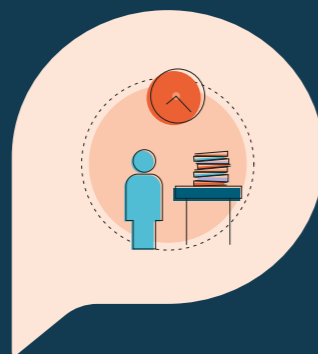
Almost half of workers said they feel emotionally drained from their work (**48.2%**)



The most common areas workers felt **training needed** were (in order): risk assessment, therapeutic approaches, legal training, general counselling, screening, and supervision training.



A substantial proportion did not feel they were paid fairly (**37.7%**)



More than **2 in 5** respondents said they worked unpaid hours at least once a week

Source: National Survey of Workers in the Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence Sectors 2018, pp. 9–11 (Cortis, et al., 2018)

Figure 9: Workforce characteristics

youth work or welfare studies, generally felt better prepared than others in responding to domestic, family and sexual violence. There is a need to 'embed skills to prevent and address gender-based violence in curricula, recognising the multiple pathways to working in services used by people affected by violence' (Cortis, et al., 2018).

Research relating to the domestic, family and sexual violence workforce often conflates the domestic and family violence workforce with the sexual violence workforce, which can mask important differences between the two. The Commission will have a greater focus on sexual violence and abuse over the coming year, which will include a focus on the sexual violence workforce.

A key early intervention priority in the National Plan is to 'support the establishment and expansion of evidence-based programs to work with people using violence'.

Working with people who use or have used violence requires highly specialised skills and capabilities. The workforce will need to grow quickly to achieve the objectives of the National Plan. Investment and planning are needed to identify and introduce the 'consistent standards' suggested in the National Plan to build the pipeline of workers to deliver safe, high-quality services (DSS, 2022: 112).

The Commission supports this objective and further discussion of the work needed to engage people who use violence is outlined earlier in this report under *Embedding lived experience*.

BOX 10

Lived experience of the workforce

Many workers have their own lived experience of violence, either personally, within their family or their community.

This has been in the roots of the workforce since its earliest days when places like the Elsie Women's Refuge provided care and support to people fleeing violence, as well as employment and an opportunity to support others.

As the recognition of the importance of lived experience voices to inform policy and practice grows within government and organisations, it is important to acknowledge the lived experience of the workforce – their own personal and professional experience from working on the frontline.



Growing the sector needs careful design and planning by governments

Governments need careful design and planning to attract and retain workers to specialist and non-specialist workforces. In addition to the training requirements described earlier, the proposed workforce strategy needs to include factors such as pay and conditions, workforce health and wellbeing, and career progression and satisfaction.

The National Plan recognises that 'Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations (ACCOs) must have autonomy to prioritise their own capacity building to enable services to be developed and delivered in culturally appropriate ways.' (DSS, 2022: 116). The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Action Plan also acknowledges the 'workforce challenges around attracting and retaining staff to family violence services, particularly in regional and remote locations, and the immediate capacity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations to partner or deliver family, domestic and sexual violence services' as a challenge to be addressed in the implementation of the Action Plan (Dss, 2023: 44).

The National Plan specifically identifies the attraction and retention challenges

in regional and remote communities. It notes that challenges with the availability of adequate infrastructure and housing need to be reflected in funding models (DSS, 2022: 53).

This must also be expanded to services that work with specific cohorts within the community, such as those working with people with disability, LGBTQ+ people, and/or people from migrant backgrounds, among others.

Incentives such as sign-on bonuses, accommodation grants, free training packages are valuable and effective tools that governments have employed in other sectors to attract workers. However, careful design is needed to prevent a distorting effect on organisations and workers in frontline services and fostering competition for staff where greater organisational cooperation is needed to achieve impact.

The domestic, family and sexual violence workforce cannot be developed in isolation from existing national and state and territory efforts to develop the wider social and community services sectors. Domestic, family and sexual violence is an intersectional problem and all parts of the social sector workforce need to be operating well to have a positive impact on the rates of domestic, family and sexual violence across the country.

It is important that specialist and mainstream workforces are able to recognise and respond to people with diverse experiences through an intersectional lens, understanding that different approaches may be needed for different people.

First Action Plan, p.32

BOX 11

500 Workers Initiative

The Australian Government committed \$169.4 million over four years from 2022–23 to 2025–26 to generate 500 new jobs for community organisations, by providing funding for additional frontline and community sector workers to support victim-survivors of domestic, family and sexual violence. This includes \$4.4 million in departmental funds (Department of Social Services, 2024).

Funding has been provided to state and territory governments through an extension of the FDSV National Partnership agreement. All jurisdictions have executed a multilateral agreement and project plans.

Recruiting the funded roles has taken more time and been more difficult than anticipated. At 31 July 2024, it was reported that 136 full-time equivalent workers had been recruited (Department of Social Services, 2024).

Governments and the community have expressed concerns about the pace of program implementation. The Commission notes that the complexities of implementation have contributed strongly to slow progress. The intention of this policy, to grow the critical workforce, is to be commended and is universally supported. The Commission notes that this initiative demonstrates the need for a co-design process which engages with the perspectives and needs of all delivery partners.



Capability development for existing broader workforces present a clear opportunity to radically improve community responses, and build the capability required for prevention, early intervention, and healing and recovery

Broader non-specialist workforces have a critical role to play in responding to and preventing domestic, family and sexual violence. These responsibilities need to be recognised and embedded in the roles and functions of these workforces.³

People with lived experience often talk about the incredible workers they have encountered on their path to safety: a support worker, police officer, prosecutor, doctor, nurse, who went 'above and beyond' to support someone experiencing violence.

Unfortunately, too many workers feel they lack the capability or capacity to respond. There is still too much variability in system responses to domestic, family and sexual violence. It should not be the 'luck of the draw' to encounter a worker who is ready and able to provide the necessary support when it is needed.

Education on the drivers of gender-based violence – and how to safely and ethically respond to and report it – must be integrated into the foundational training of the non-specialist workforce as part of gaining their qualifications.

National Plan, p. 53

There must be more foundational training and ongoing learning and development for broader workforces

The statement from delegates attending the National Plan summit identified broader non-specialist workforces as a critical priority for the National Plan, asking government to ‘ensure there is training and workforce development across sectors such as police, justice systems, health care and frontline services’ (p.25).

Non-specialist workers need to be equipped with the skills and knowledge to respond to and prevent violence. Existing programs funded by the Australian Government such as the DV-alert program, DV-aware, and Accredited Training for Sexual Violence Responses program (DSS, 2024) provide some essential training, but strengthening and diversifying this capacity nationally could provide greater access for the broader workforce.

Non-specialist workers do not always get enough initial education and training to feel confident to respond to or prevent domestic, family and sexual violence. Though a full-time general practitioner is likely to see around five

women who have experienced intimate partner abuse and violence every week (AIHW, 2024d), there is limited coverage of this topic in Australian university medical programs (Valpied, Aprico, Clewett, & Hegarty, 2017).

Domestic, family and sexual violence sectors found that ‘three in five workers with legal qualifications said their formal qualifications prepared them ‘not very well’ or ‘not at all’ for work in the sector, as did almost half of those with educational or psychology qualifications’ (Cortis, et al., 2018). Indeed, the Commission has heard that this wider workforce sometimes feels ill-equipped to respond to violence, unclear about the services and supports available to people and fearful of the risks associated with responding.

Foundational education and training for all workers who encounter domestic, family and sexual violence presents one of the biggest opportunities to have significant impact across our community. The Australian Government should work with the tertiary education sector to embed foundational education in relevant course content and with professional bodies to embed ongoing training as part of professional development and accreditation/ registration. See Box 11 for an example of frontline training in the Northern Territory.

Comparative size of response sectors in Australia:

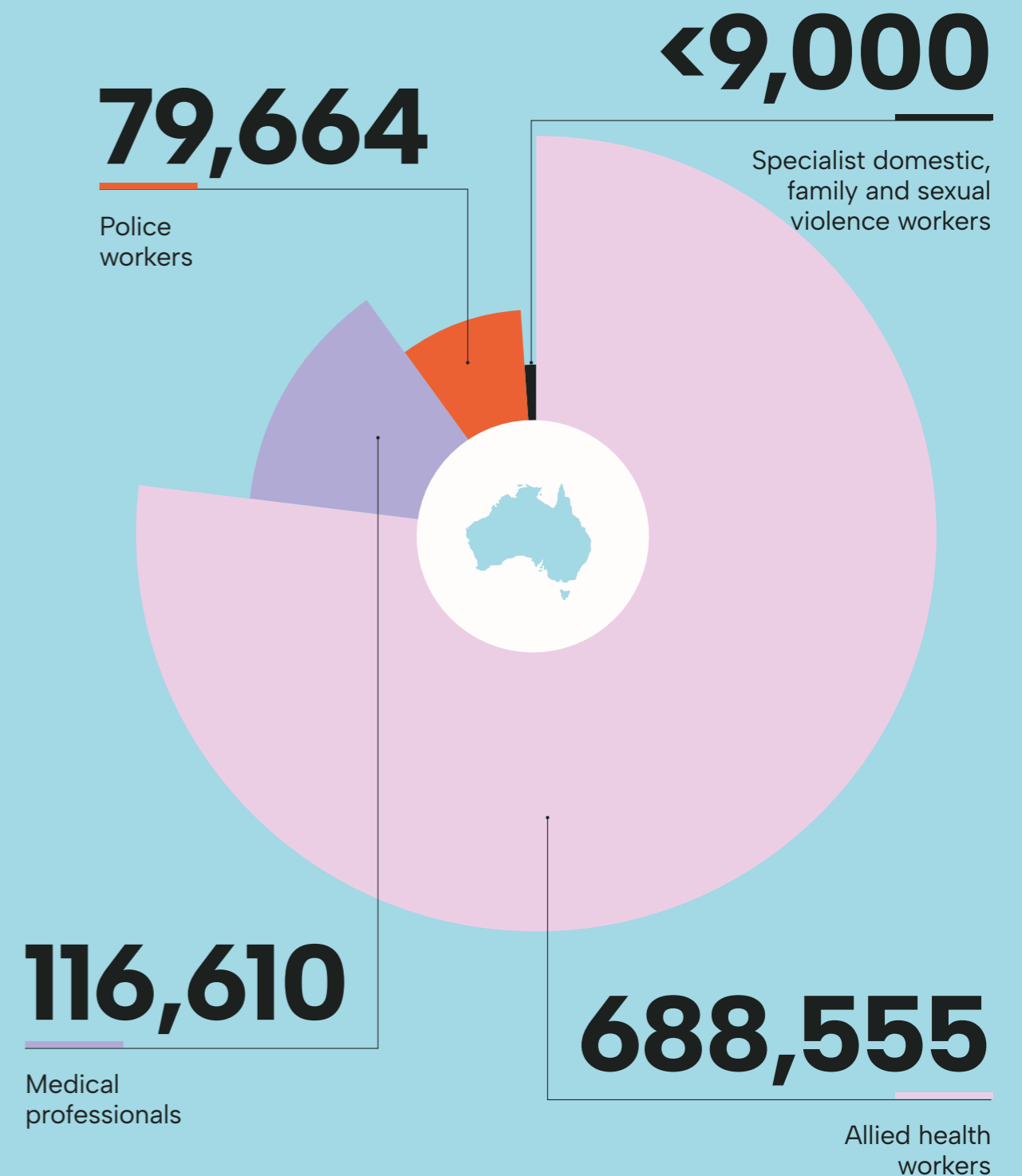


Figure 10: Relative workforce size

BOX 12

Frontline worker training for healthcare and police

In the Northern Territory, a new sector-developed package is being released which aims to improve domestic, family and sexual violence understanding for frontline workers in healthcare and police.

The Prevent Assist Respond Training, which centres victim-survivor voices, has been funded through the Northern Territory Government's 'Community and place-based partnerships for prevention and response to domestic, family and sexual violence' program.

Source: Information provided by the Northern Territory Government to the DFSV Commission (NT Government, 2024)



Ongoing professional development for all legal practitioners is a key area for further development. The Commission has heard the need for all those working in the justice system to have the knowledge and skills to respond to and prevent family violence.

The 2019 ALRC inquiry into the family law system recommended that there should be a consistent requirement for legal practitioners to undertake at least one unit of continuing professional development training relating to family violence every year (ALRC, 2019).

The Federal Circuit and Family Court of Australia has been working to provide professional development using the Safe and Together Institute training model to those working in the family court (FCFCOA, 2023). But more needs to be done to integrate family violence education into initial education and ongoing professional development for all legal practitioners.

Workforce development activity is already under way in some states and territories

The Commission acknowledges that states and territories have already begun significant work to address the needs of the domestic, family and sexual violence sector and workers in their jurisdictions:

- In 2017, Family Safety Victoria released its 10-year Industry Plan for Family Violence Prevention and Response and established a Centre for Workforce Excellence to lead initiatives to support workers and organisations who interact with victim-survivors and perpetrators of family violence (Vic Government, 2017).
- In 2019, Queensland funded WorkUP Queensland founded by The Healing Foundation and ANROWS to plan and grow workforce capability and capacity in the sector (WorkUP, 2024).

- The NSW Domestic and Family Violence Plan 2022–2027 includes specific focus areas on building workforce capacity and capability with a set of specific actions (NSW Government, 2022).
- In 2024, the Queensland Government released its Domestic and Family Violence Training and Change Management Framework for the broader domestic and family violence service system (Qld Government, 2023).
- The Northern Territory has a dedicated domestic, family and sexual violence workforce and sector development plan (NT Government).
- In early 2024, the ACT Government undertook an intensive engagement process with the domestic, family and sexual violence sector, other community services and government agencies to understand the needs and gaps in relation to training, capability and capacity for the community sector (ACT Government, 2024).

There is opportunity for the Australian Government to lead the development of a national, collaborative approach to national workforce development and investment, including tertiary education and innovation, subsidised training places, fee-free TAFE and innovation incentives for education providers.

A national workforce strategy will build an aligned collaborative approach to national workforce development and investment

A consistent theme in the Commission's engagement with governments and the sector is the need for a national workforce development strategy. This strategy is urgently needed to help meet significant existing unmet demand for services and expected growth in demand due to greater community awareness and increased reporting.

At a minimum, a national workforce strategy should:

- target the skills and training needs of the specialist workforce to ensure they can tackle the growing complexity of domestic, family and sexual violence
- acknowledge the essential role of non-specialist workforces and embed the responsibility to respond to and prevent domestic, family and sexual violence in the roles and functions of those workforces
- address the skills and training needs of the non-specialist workforce so that workers who encounter domestic, family and sexual violence are adequately equipped to respond
- include a focus on building the capability of all workforces to identify and respond to violence in diverse populations. For example, the Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of People with Disability was repeatedly told of instances where women with disability were not believed by police and health professionals when they disclosed their experiences (Royal Commission, 2023).

Areas for Focus

A national workforce strategy will support collaborative workforce development. The Australian Government should build on work done by states and territories to develop a collaborative approach to national workforce development and investment, aligning with other social sector workforce planning to increase the number of qualified workers.

All governments should leverage broader workforces to help prevent and respond to domestic, family and sexual violence. Workers should be well-equipped to intervene safely and effectively, with foundational training included in tertiary education for key professions, such as health and allied health, teaching, psychology and social work, and law.

System governance: integration sharing and learning

Governments need to improve collaborative governance mechanisms across all systems, ensure robust monitoring and accountability, and drive greater integration, sharing and learning from one another.



Domestic, family and sexual violence is a complex social issue that spans government portfolios, sectors and service systems. The National Plan recognises that ending violence against women and children needs coordinated effort with engagement across all levels of government and the community. This necessitates:

- effective, collaborative governance to progress efforts under the National Plan
- robust measurement and evaluation of the impact of initiatives and sharing knowledge to improve policies, services and systems.

- policy and service responses that address existing system silos that are causing harm to women and children experiencing domestic, family and sexual violence

Ending violence against women and children requires a holistic multi-sectorial and culturally informed approach and the coordinated efforts of multiple stakeholders.

National Plan, p.70

Progress highlights

- ★ The Attorney-General's Department has reformed the *Family Law Act 1975* to create a simpler and safer family law system and facilitate improved information sharing to address family safety risks.
- ★ The Australian Government is changing migration regulations under the National Plan to expand provisions to support people on temporary visas experiencing domestic, family and sexual violence.
- ★ A range of initiatives are under way across the Australian Government to improve the consistency and availability of data, led by the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS), the Australian Institute of Criminology (AIC) and ANROWS.
- ★ The Australian National Research Agenda 2023–2028 has been co-designed with people with lived experience, academics and practitioners. It focuses strongly on community-led research and partnerships, working with people with lived experience of violence, including children and young people, and recognising practitioners' expertise. It will drive the focus of collective research efforts in the coming years.

Migrant women, including those on temporary visas, also face structural barriers other women do not, such as the impact ending a relationship has on their visa status and eligibility for social security.

National Plan, p.72

Siloed service system responses are causing harm

The experience of domestic, family and sexual violence often touches every aspect of a person's life and can drive or influence their interactions with multiple service systems. The siloed nature of service system responses is causing harm and intersecting systems need to better recognise and respond to domestic, family and sexual violence. While individual services and workers do their best to help victim-survivors navigate complex service systems, the

burden and impact of this continues to largely fall on victim-survivors themselves (Women's Legal Services Australia, 2022) (KPMG, 2022).

Barriers to seeking support and achieving safety

The family law, visa and migration, and child protection systems continue to be among those most commonly raised as creating barriers to seeking support and achieving safety (KPMG, 2022).

BOX 13

Barriers to seeking support for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women

For Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women, the fear of their children being removed is a major barrier to seeking support for domestic and family violence (Langton, et al., 2020; Djirra, 2024).

This fear is well founded. The Victorian Commissioner for Children and Young People has highlighted the substantial role that family violence plays in Aboriginal children's

removal from their families – 88% of Aboriginal children in out-of-home care in Victoria have experienced family violence (Commission for Children and Young People, 2016). The recent audit of the NSW child protection system identified that some families are denied access to family preservation services because of the presence of domestic or family violence increasing the likelihood that children will be removed (Audit Office of NSW, 2024).



At the Commission’s Roundtable on Healing and Recovery, participants identified these systems as areas where harm affects people’s long-term healing and recovery from violence.

The National Plan recognises the critical role of the family law system in protecting those at risk or experiencing domestic, family and sexual violence. It acknowledges that while there has been progress, ‘work will continue’ to ensure safer outcomes for women and children (pp.61–62). The National Plan also recognises that for migrant and refugee women, immigration law and uncertain visa status can result in unique patterns of abuse (p.72).

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are removed from their families at disproportionately higher rates than non-Indigenous children (DSS, 2022). This is a major barrier for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women seeking support (Box 13).

We need an integrated response to the safety and wellbeing of children and young people

There is a critical intersection between children’s experience of family violence and other forms of child abuse and neglect. The Australian Childhood Maltreatment Study (see Box 14) found

BOX 14

Australian Childhood Maltreatment Study

In a national first, the Australian Childhood Maltreatment Study examined how many Australians had experienced any of five types of child maltreatment (physical abuse, sexual abuse, emotional abuse, neglect and exposure to domestic violence) and their impact on subsequent health outcomes.

The study highlights how frequent the experience of maltreatment in childhood is – 62% of the sample of 8,500 Australians had experienced one or more types – and how harmful these experiences are for individuals’ health and wellbeing, driving much higher rates of mental health disorders, substance abuse, suicide and self-harm.

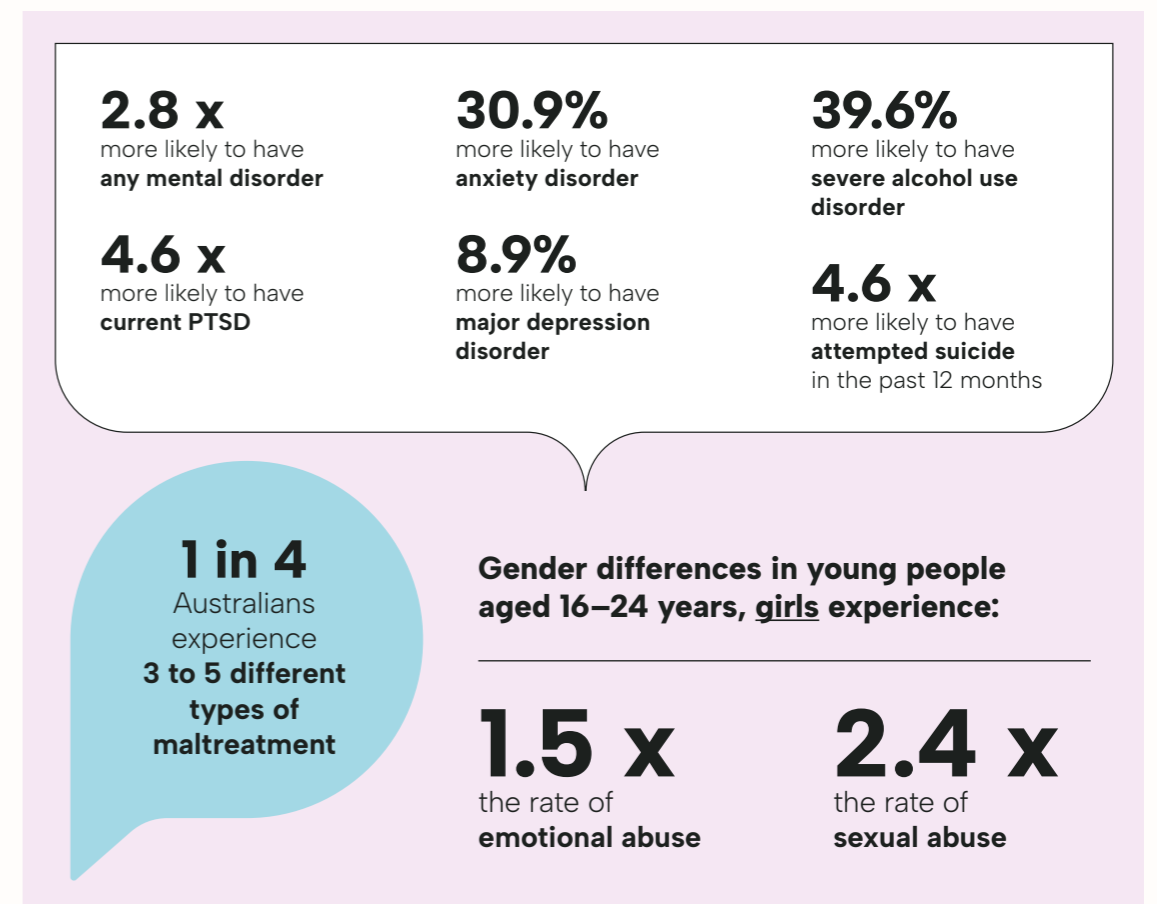
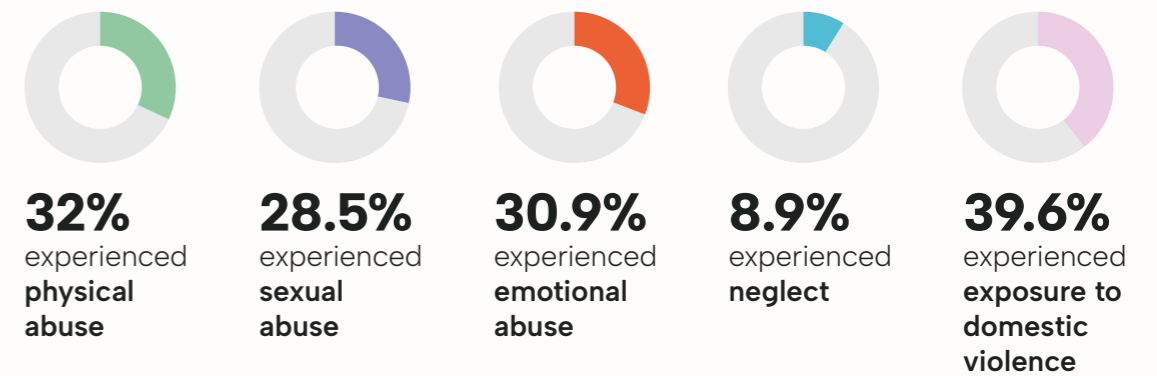
Exposure to domestic violence was the most common type of maltreatment – almost two-thirds of those who experienced one or more types were exposed to domestic violence. Importantly it almost always co-occurred with other types of maltreatment. The study also highlights the gendered nature of some types of maltreatment with substantially higher rates of sexual and emotional abuse experienced by girls.

The study report clearly positions child maltreatment as a public health imperative that requires national, coordinated effort across mental health, wellbeing, gender equality, violence prevention and social justice portfolios.

Source: Australian Childhood Maltreatment Study



Australian Childhood Maltreatment Study



Data reproduced with permission of Professor Ben Mathews, Lead Investigator, Australian Child Maltreatment Study.

Figure 11: Key statistics from the Australian Childhood Maltreatment Study

Child maltreatment is a major problem affecting today's Australian children and youth. It is not simply something that happened in the past. It is a matter of national urgency that we act collectively to reduce child maltreatment and its devastating consequences.

Australian Childhood Maltreatment Study, p.16

that, as well as being the most frequently experienced form of maltreatment, exposure to domestic violence (between the child's parents/caregivers) almost always co-occurred with other forms of maltreatment (Haslam, et al., 2023).

Given the co-occurrence of different types of maltreatment, we need integrated responses between the domestic and family violence, sexual assault, child protection and children and families' sectors to adequately address the safety and wellbeing of children and young people. However, these systems continue to operate in largely unconnected ways. This is particularly the case for children at heightened risk of violence, who can go on to also experience violence abuse and neglect in adulthood as highlighted through the Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of People with Disability (Royal Commission, 2023).

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community organisations have long delivered whole-of-family, holistic support, where the range of needs a family is experiencing are addressed in an integrated way. The Yoorrook Justice Commission's report into Victoria's child protection and criminal justice systems highlighted these practices as a model for an integrated approach (Yoorrook Justice Commission, 2023).

The actions in the First Action Plan Activities Addendum have limited focus on the intersection between child protection and domestic, family and sexual violence, with initiatives largely relating to workforce capacity building. Australian, state and territory governments should consider the implications of the Australian Childhood Maltreatment Study and identify opportunities to strengthen integrated early intervention, response and recovery for children and young people under the National Plan.

BOX 15

Family law reforms

Family Law Amendment (Information Sharing) Act 2023

The *Family Law Amendment (Information Sharing) Act 2023* (the Information Sharing Act) commenced on 6 May 2024. The Information Sharing Act gives effect to key aspects of the National Strategic Framework for Information Sharing between the Family Law and Family Violence and Child Protection Systems (National Framework), by providing a stronger legislative basis for enhanced information sharing from state and territory agencies (police, firearms and child protection) to the federal family law courts.

A statutory review will take place after 12 months from commencement. A second statutory review and an evaluation of the National Framework will take place three years from commencement.

Family Law Amendment Act 2023

The *Family Law Amendment Act 2023* (the Amendment Act) commenced on 6 May 2024. The Amendment Act makes significant reforms to Australia's family law system, including to the legal framework a court will apply when making parenting orders.

The reforms remove the 'presumption of equal shared parental responsibility' and related requirements for courts to consider certain time arrangements. The legislation simplifies the factors a court must consider when determining the parenting arrangements that are in the best interests of the child and highlights the importance of parenting arrangements that support the safety of children and those who care for them.

Other elements of the reforms include:

- a power for the courts to prevent further proceedings where they are harmful and without merit, to stop litigants who may be misusing the court system to cause harm to another party or a child
- simplified compliance and enforcement provisions for child-related orders
- a statutory requirement for Independent Children's Lawyers to meet with and seek the views of children.

Source: Australian Government Attorney-General's Department



Recent reforms to address systems where harm is occurring

Family law reforms

The Australian Government Attorney-General's Department recently led significant reforms to the *Family Law Act 1975* to create a simpler and safer family law system and facilitate improved information sharing to address family safety risks (see Box 15). This is in recognition of the extent of family violence in cases dealt with by the court – in 2022–23, 83% of matters alleged that a party had experienced family violence (FCFCOA, 2023) – and based on numerous inquiries, including a 2017 parliamentary inquiry on family law, that found that the existing laws were 'leading to unjust outcomes and compromising the safety of children' (Australian Parliament, 2017).

These reforms have been welcomed after many years of advocacy (Women's Legal Service Victoria, n.d.). Separate statutory reviews will be undertaken on the operation of both sets of amendments and will be critical to understand whether the amendments are achieving their aims. For the statutory review of the *Family Law Amendment Act 2023*, it will be important to examine the impact of the changes, aimed at outcomes-oriented implementation, on people going through the family court system, with a particular focus on the experience of women and children who have experienced domestic, family and sexual violence.

The experience and outcomes of involvement in family law processes is also influenced by a person's access to legal representation. The recent review of the National Legal Assistance Partnership 2020–2025 found that

there continue to be persistent gaps in the availability of legal assistance. The review recommends that Australian, state and territory governments should increase funding for civil and family law matters – estimated at a cost of \$459 million in 2025–26 (Attorney-General's Department, 2024b). Addressing the recommendations of the National Legal Assistance Partnership review will be of considerable benefit to people who have experienced domestic, family and sexual violence in supporting their safety and recovery.

Changes to migration regulations

The Australian Government is changing migration regulations under the National Plan to better support temporary visa holders who have experience domestic and family violence (see Box 16).

The expansion of provisions to support people on temporary visas experiencing domestic, family and sexual violence is a welcome initiative in light of recent findings that domestic violence is experienced by close to one-third of refugee women who settle in Australia (Spangaro, et al., 2024). The Commission encourages the Department of Home Affairs to evaluate the operation and impact of the provisions and accompanying support program that engages with temporary visa holders experiencing domestic, family and sexual violence and the organisations that support them, to improve data-informed decision-making. The Commission also acknowledges how critical the support provided by specialist organisations and legal services is for refugees to be able to access and navigate these provisions.

BOX 16

Migration regulation provisions relating to domestic, family and sexual violence

The *Migration Regulations 1994* contain provisions that allow certain visa applicants (primarily partner visa applicants) to be granted a permanent visa if their relationship has broken down and they, or a member of their family unit included in the application, have suffered domestic or family violence perpetrated by the sponsoring partner or primary applicant.

The provisions aim to ensure that visa applicants do not feel compelled to remain in a violent relationship to be granted a permanent visa. On

average, around 700 primary partner visa applicants seek access to the provisions each year.

The Government allocated \$10 million in the 2023–24 Budget to expand the provisions to more visa subclasses and extend the funding for the Domestic and Family Violence Support team, who assist visa applicants to regularise their visa status. The provisions will be extended to cover secondary applicants for most permanent visas, and additional cohorts of partner visa applicants.

Source: Australian Government Department of Home Affairs



Safety by design

The Commission recognises that the systems reform needed to overcome some of the issues identified above is complex and time consuming. Safety by design principles can guide this work. The eSafety Commissioner's Safety by Design initiative has been central to encouraging industries to take a proactive and preventative approach that focuses on embedding safety into the culture and leadership of an organisation (see Box 17). It also ensures user safety and rights are at the centre of the design and development of online products and services.

The initiative has been the product of substantial consultation and research and provides a wealth of resources to support implementation.

Governments can learn from and adopt safety by design principles and approaches in the design and delivery of systems and services to support improved outcomes for people experiencing domestic, family and sexual violence.

BOX 17

Safety by Design at the Business Roundtable

Central to the discussion at the Commission’s recent Business Roundtable was the importance of advancing safety by design in systems, and the shared responsibility of all types of providers to ensure that their systems emphasise safety for end users.

Safety by design is governed by three principles that provide platforms and services with guidance as they incorporate, assess and enhance user safety:

- service provider responsibility
- user empowerment and autonomy
- transparency and accountability.

These principles outline realistic, actionable and achievable measures that providers of all sizes can use to design and implement systems which prioritise safe participation in platforms and services.

Participants at the Business Roundtable acknowledged the opportunities available to government to ensure that it is considering and implementing systems based on these principles, to reduce the risk of systems harm to individuals and groups.

Source: Office of the eSafety Commissioner; Business Roundtable Summary Report 2024 (DFSV Commission, 2024)



Joined-up governance is needed to achieve the outcomes of the National Plan

Given the complex policy and service delivery landscape, effective governance both at the national level and within jurisdictions is critical for progressing efforts under the National Plan. Siloed approaches to implementing policy and programs impede the complex cross-portfolio work required to achieve the objectives of the National Plan and ultimately do not benefit people with lived experience of violence.

The evaluation of the first National Plan found that, while the Australian Government had established a clear national agenda and created governance structures to support greater collaboration, their leadership role could be strengthened to further improve collaboration and information sharing across jurisdictions. The evaluation recommended that ‘the new National Plan should seek to strengthen collaboration between the Australian Government, states and territories and service delivery agencies’ (KPMG, 2022). The Commission emphasises the need for this to be two-way sharing of information and collaboration between jurisdictions and the Australian Government.

Our work to progress policy priorities of the Action Plans will be coordinated through a governance structure providing oversight, strategic direction and progress tracking.

First Action Plan, p.62

Lived experience engagement and representation must be across the board

The Commission’s Roundtable with State and Territory Jurisdictions heard about the benefits of governance mechanisms that bring together government, sector and lived experience, ensuring that these different forms of expertise can shape governments’ reform efforts through genuine collaboration. Lived experience engagement and representation in formal governance across the broad range of government portfolios that intersect with domestic, family and sexual violence has an important role to play in informing policy and practice. These include health and mental health, education, child protection and family services, and treasury and finance portfolios in addition to the core

portfolios of women’s safety, police and other justice entities (DFSV Commission, 2024).

Self-determined governance and partnerships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities are critical to ensure that efforts under the National Plan meet the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait peoples. Further, this will help address the disproportionate and devastating impact of domestic, family and sexual violence perpetrated against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and children.

As the work to develop the First Nations National Plan for Family Safety continues, governments need to understand how to coordinate governance and monitor progress of the two national plans to ensure clear government accountability for delivery of both national plans.

Governance structures for the National Plan

At the national level, the Australian Government has established the following governance structures to oversee and guide implementation of the National Plan:

The **Department of Social Services** is the Australian Government’s policy lead agency on the National Plan. It leads coordination, governance and reporting on the National Plan’s implementation, as well as development and reporting under the National Plan’s Outcomes Framework.

The **Office for Women** works in collaboration with Australian Government departments to provide advice on women’s safety policy development. The Office for Women also works closely with the Department of Social Services to support strategic advice to Government on the impacts and outcomes of existing investment in women’s safety, and identifies cross-portfolio implementation needs.

The **Women and Women’s Safety Ministerial Council** (established in September 2022) will drive national progress on gender equality and women’s safety and has overarching responsibility for delivering the National Plan. The Ministerial Council is co-chaired by the Minister for Women, Senator the Hon Katy Gallagher and the Minister for Social Services, the Hon Amanda Rishworth MP. It brings together federal and state and territory ministers for women and ministers with portfolio responsibility for women, families and/or the prevention of domestic, family and sexual violence. The work of the Ministerial Council is supported through:

- a **Women and Women’s Safety Senior Officials** group and **Women’s Safety Jurisdictional Working Group** that works on priorities under the National Plan, including delivering joint activities in the First Action Plan Activities Addendum
- a separate **First Nations Jurisdictional Working Group** that works on priorities across both the First Action Plan, the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Action Plan and forthcoming First Nations National Plan.

Independent oversight of progress under the National Plan and First Nations National Plan is through the **Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence Commission** and, when established, the **First Nations National Peak Body**.

Lived experience and expert advice and consultation is through:

- a **Lived Experience Advisory Council** that provides strategic advice and solutions to government on ending domestic, family and sexual violence
- a **National Plan Advisory Group** with representatives from the family, domestic and sexual violence sectors – including research organisations, national and state-based peak bodies, National Women’s Alliances, sector experts and academics, victim-survivors and victim-survivor advocates, and individuals with specialised expertise and knowledge
- an **Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Advisory Council** with representatives from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations, academics and the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner
- a **First Nations Steering Committee** consisting of 12 non-government Aboriginal and Torres Strait representatives, two federal representatives, eight state and territory representatives, the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner and the Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence Commissioner.

BOX 18

Fostering collaboration and coordination in NSW

Work to progress actions under the National Plan in New South Wales has been aided by the progress made towards implementing the *NSW Domestic and Family Violence Plan 2022–2027* and *NSW Sexual Violence Plan 2022–2027*.

A key priority for the NSW Women’s Safety Commissioner is to strengthen governance mechanisms to facilitate effective implementation of these plans, enhance accountability and better utilise the domestic, family and sexual violence sector’s expertise.

Establishing the Women’s Safety Commissioner role has also created unique opportunities for NSW collaboration with the Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence Commissioner to lead cross-jurisdictional initiatives and reforms.

The Women’s Safety Commissioner has undertaken a range of initiatives that foster increased collaboration and cooperation between government, the domestic, family and sexual violence sector and the broader community. These include:

- the Stronger Together forums and roundtables for sector, religious and community leaders
- initiating a review of current domestic family and sexual violence governance arrangements in NSW
- co-convening a cross-jurisdictional domestic, family and sexual violence roundtable on 10 May 2024 with the Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence Commissioner.

Source: NSW Government



A range of other advisory bodies contribute to delivery and oversight of National Plan initiatives at the jurisdictional level through established state and territory governance mechanisms. The Department of Social Services is reviewing governance arrangements for the National Plan. This review is due later in 2024.

States and territories are at different stages in developing collaborative governance mechanisms to drive their

reform efforts and contributions to the National Plan. Examples of effective governance models and learnings from jurisdictions were shared at the Commission’s Jurisdictional Roundtable in May 2024 (see Box 18). One such model of self-determined, collaborative governance – the Dhelk Dja Partnership Forum, which oversees delivery of Victoria’s 10-year Aboriginal Family Violence Agreement – is illustrated in Box 19.

BOX 19

Dhelk Dja: Safe Our Way, Strong Culture, Strong Peoples, Strong Families 2018–28 Agreement

In 2018, Victoria committed to a formal, 10-year partnership with First Peoples through *Dhelk Dja: Safe Our Way Strong Culture, Strong Peoples, Strong Families 2018–28* (the Dhelk Dja Agreement).

The Dhelk Dja Agreement is the key First Peoples-led Victorian agreement that commits its signatories – First Peoples services, First Peoples communities and government – to work together over a 10-year period so that First Peoples, families and communities are living free from family violence.

Victoria has developed a model for self-determined decision-making and investment through the Dhelk Dja Partnership Forum, which includes a regional governance approach with representation from community elected regional action

groups. The Victim Survivors' Advisory Council has two First Peoples representatives that are members of the Dhelk Dja Koori Caucus and Dhelk Dja Partnership Forum. This ensures that voices of First Peoples with lived and living experience are included and can influence policy development, decision-making and investment for First Peoples communities. The Dhelk Dja Partnership Forum oversees the Dhelk Dja Agreement, as well as its successive three-year action plans.

The Dhelk Dja Monitoring Evaluation and Accountability Plan is the mechanism for how the Dhelk Dja Partnership Forum can monitor and evaluate its strategy through its life, including conducting an evaluation study.

Source: Victorian Government



As the evaluation findings of the first National Plan were not available when developing the current National Plan, it will be important for the Australian Government to ensure the evaluation findings are addressed when implementing the current National Plan. The Australian Government should also consider how it leverages the existing governance mechanisms to foster greater collaboration with jurisdictions, over and above sharing information about its work under the National Plan. This will be particularly important for

driving collaborative planning and delivery of the shared activities in the First Action Plan Activities Addendum.

As states and territories continue to develop and refine their governance models, the Commission encourages consideration by all governments of opportunities to strengthen partnerships with sector organisations and lived experience, as well as addressing system silos through cross-government engagement and collaboration.

Continuing to build a strong evidence base is central to the success of the National Plan. Our ability to provide quality responses to victim survivors, hold perpetrators to account and keep women and children safe is predicated on addressing data gaps and building strong data sharing mechanisms.

National Plan, p. 27

Building learning into everything we do

Robust data, evaluation and other forms of evidence are critical to inform our understanding of effective approaches for addressing domestic, family and sexual violence and assessing progress under the National Plan.

Through the first national plan, considerable progress was made to improve the evidence base on what works and on priority populations (KPMG, 2022). The establishment of Our Watch and ANROWS have been key contributors to this progress with both organisations delivering a wealth of research, evaluation and practice materials over the past 10 years.

Despite this progress, the ability to evaluate the impact of the first national plan was undermined by a lack of data and an absence of routine evaluation of the many pilot programs initiated during the life of the plan (KPMG, 2022). Building evidence through strategic research, data collection and analysis to improve services and track progress towards outcomes is the focus of the second action in the First Action Plan:

Action 2: Improve the national evidence base by working towards consistent terminology and monitoring and evaluation frameworks, and by strengthening collection and sharing of data and evidence.



'There needs to be greater transparency with allocation of funding, so that funding can be mapped to outcomes and gaps can be better targeted... It is difficult to know where the money is going let alone analyse whether it is being effectively targeted'

Famin,
Lived Experience Advisory Council Member

Australian Government initiatives to improve domestic, family and sexual violence data and strengthen the evidence base

Australian Institute of Health and Welfare

In 2021, the Department of Social Services funded the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare to develop the following:

Website with dedicated content on domestic, family and sexual violence

Launched in late 2023, the website brings together a range of sources to provide a comprehensive picture of domestic, family and sexual violence in Australia. It summarises changes in key measures over time and is regularly updated to include the latest data from national sources. This website will serve as the national platform for reporting measures in the Performance Measurement Plan during the life of the National Plan.

Prototype for a national family and domestic violence specialist crisis services data collection

The purpose of the prototype is to work with states and territories to develop, test and agree on a core set of data items that can be collected to provide information on the use of family and domestic violence services, as well as the characteristics and outcomes for people accessing these services. The project is expected to be completed by mid-2026.

Domestic, family and sexual violence integrated data system

The long-term goal of this integrated data system is to link existing de-identified data from a range of sources to provide more people-centred information, build a stronger evidence base and fill data gaps. The first version, scheduled for delivery by mid-2026, aims to link relevant subsets of data collections which identify population groups exposed to, or at risk of, domestic, family and sexual violence. This includes the Specialist Homelessness Services Collection and Child Protection National Minimum Data Set.

In addition, the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare is working to link death data with the Medicare Benefits Schedule, the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme, and data from specialist homelessness and alcohol and other drug treatment services. Since specialist homelessness services collect some data on family and domestic violence experience, the linked data can give insights into people who have experienced family and domestic violence, such as an estimate of the suicide rate and information on interactions with support services before death (AIHW, 2024e). However, these datasets do not identify people who have perpetrated domestic, family and sexual violence, which is a gap that may be addressed through further data linkage.

Australian Bureau of Statistics

Criminal Justice Data Asset

The ABS is developing the Criminal Justice Data Asset (CJDA). The CJDA is a longitudinal national data asset that will track how people move through the justice system, including police, criminal courts and adult corrections, at a national level.

The data is sourced from the administrative systems of state and territory criminal justice agencies, which already provide this data to the ABS to produce themed publications about people that interact with the criminal justice system.

The Australian Government has committed \$3.6 million in new funding over two years to bring the CJDA into production. The CJDA is expected to be available for approved projects in 2026 and will improve our understanding of how people using violence move through the criminal justice system (ABS, 2024).

Australian Institute of Criminology

The AIC oversees a range of data assets which will be used to expand and enrich understanding of domestic, family and sexual violence.

Australian Sexual Offence Statistical collection

The **Australian Sexual Offence Statistical collection** ([► www.aic.gov.au/publications/sr/sr47](http://www.aic.gov.au/publications/sr/sr47)) was established in 2022 to collate sexual offences recorded by police agencies across the country. The first report describes the number and characteristics of offenders and victim-survivors, the types of sexual offences resulting in an offender being

proceeded against and the prevalence of repeat offending.

National Homicide Monitoring Program

The **National Homicide Monitoring Program** ([► www.aic.gov.au/taxonomy/term/239](http://www.aic.gov.au/taxonomy/term/239)) records all homicide incidents, victims and offenders in Australia since 1990, including all forms of domestic homicide. In 2024, the AIC launched the Intimate Partner Homicide Dashboard, providing the most up-to-date and reliable count of intimate partner homicide victims in Australia.

National survey of pornography use and sexual violence

In mid-2023, the AIC surveyed 5,000 Australian residents aged 18–45 years to measure the prevalence of sexual violence perpetration and the relationship between pornography and sexual violence. Participants were asked about viewing of pornography, their perpetration of and victimisation by sexual violence, and other personal, attitudinal and background characteristics.

Estimating the prevalence of recorded family and domestic violence offending

The AIC and Griffith Criminology Institute collaborated on the first study to estimate the prevalence of recorded family and domestic violence offending in a population sample in Australia. The study used criminal history data for three birth cohorts in NSW.

Domestic Violence Threat Assessment Centre

Given that a significant proportion of intimate partner homicide perpetrators are motivated by fixation and grievances, the AIC has proposed a new approach to managing high-risk domestic violence perpetrators. The **Domestic Violence Threat Assessment Centre** (► www.aic.gov.au/publications/rip/rip48), modelled on the Fixated Threat Assessment Centre, offers a multi-agency approach to information gathering, monitoring and intervention among fixated domestic violence perpetrators during periods of acute risk (AIC, 2024).

Australia's National Research Organisation for Women's Safety

The Australian National Research Agenda (ANRA) 2023–2028, developed by ANROWS is a key mechanism for driving coordinated efforts to build the evidence base needed to end domestic, family and sexual violence (see Box 20). Developed in collaboration with people with lived experience and sector practitioners, the ANRA has a strong focus on community-led research and partnerships, working with people with lived experience of violence, including children and young people and recognising practitioners' expertise. The ANRA also recognises the value of non-western research methodologies.



BOX 20

The Australian National Research Agenda (ANRA) 2023–2028

Launched in November 2023, the ANRA is a national framework that identifies the evidence needed to end domestic, family and sexual violence and how that evidence should be produced.

It is intended to guide Australia's diverse research community to ensure that research and evaluation addresses the gaps that matter most.

ANROWS co-designed ANRA by bringing a survivor-advocate on board as co-lead, along with victim-survivors of domestic, family and sexual violence, academics and practitioners. The staged approach involved reflecting on the gaps in knowledge identified through the review of research, drawing on the ANROWS Evidence Portal for a birds-eye view of intervention research, and focus groups with victim-survivors. The identified gaps were reflected on in the co-design workshops and refined to develop the nine priority areas of research across three topics:

- **Systems and society:** structural inequalities, gender relations,

gender norms and attitudes, trauma and DFSV-informed victim-centred systems

- **Populations in focus:** Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, children and young people, people who use domestic, family and sexual violence
- **Types and patterns of violence:** sexual violence, coercive control, economic abuse

As well as the research gaps, it became clear that the way research is done matters as much as the areas of research. ANROWS developed ways of working and ways of knowing that aim to mitigate power imbalances and incorporate the voices of those most impacted. These approaches to research encourage us to listen to children when they are children, value practitioners' expertise and those with lived expertise, make better use of existing data, encourage community-led interventions, and understand and draw on non-western approaches to research.

Source: ANROWS



Evaluations under the National Plan

Evaluations currently under way

There is a breadth of evaluation work planned and under way across the Australian, state and territory governments, which will further our collective understanding of progress under the National Plan. The Department of Social Services alone have provided detail of more than 26 evaluations that are under way or planned. Other examples of this work include:

- The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander place-based trial in Cairns, Queensland of the Escaping Violence Program is currently being evaluated by the Department of Social Services. This is due for completion in 2024.
- The specialised and trauma-informed legal services for victim-survivors of sexual assault managed by the Australian Government Attorney-General's Department is being evaluated.
- Continuing professional development training for legal practitioners on coercive control – managed by the Australian Government Attorney-General's Department. The service provider will evaluate the training.
- In NSW, as part of the Men's Behaviour Change Program (MBCP), a MBCP program logic, evaluation framework and Minimum Data Set are being established. Evaluation will test the current MBCP program logic and assess the short-term outcomes of MBCPs at a whole-of-program level. This is due for completion in June 2026.

- In South Australia, the Office for Women has worked with ANROWS to map the pathways of change in the broader system and expected outcomes. The evaluation will explore whether the partnership and service model approach are working to inform future initiatives across the South Australian domestic, family and sexual violence sector.

The Department of Social Services is also developing an evaluation strategy for the current National Plan and its successive action plans, which is expected to be completed in late 2024. This is essential to measuring the success of the National Plan.

The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Action Plan also focuses strongly on evidence generation and data sharing in support of Closing the Gap's Target 13. In particular, there is a focus on Indigenous-led research, locally generated and culturally informed evidence, and sharing of data from mainstream systems and services with the community controlled sector (DSS, 2023)(p.47). The approach to monitoring and evaluation of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Action Plan is still being developed.

BOX 21

Australia's Domestic and Family Violence Death Review mechanisms

Domestic and family violence death reviews are an important mechanism to identify systemic gaps in service responses to domestic and family violence and develop evidence-based strategies to prevent future deaths.

All Australian states and territories, except Tasmania, have death review functions led by teams in coroners' courts, ombudsman's offices or government agencies.

In 2011, the Australian Domestic and Family Violence Death Review Network (the Network) was established to formalise collaboration between state and territory death review mechanisms. The Network's overarching goals are to:

- improve knowledge on the frequency, nature and determinants of domestic and family violence deaths, identifying practice and system changes that may improve outcomes for people affected by domestic and family violence and reduce these types of deaths

- analyse and compare themes and issues arising in domestic and family violence-related deaths
- analyse and compare domestic and family violence death review findings and recommendations.

The Network has adopted a consistent definition of domestic violence, developed a National Consensus Statement, data sharing protocols and a National Minimum Data Set on intimate partner homicides, and released two descriptive data reports in 2018 and 2022.

In 2016, the Australian Human Rights Commission recognised the need for a 'coherent national system of death review' and recommended, among other things, that the Australian Government establish a mechanism (potentially through legislative mandate) to monitor death review recommendations made to federal agencies.



The challenge of sharing and implementing findings

The commitment to evaluating initiatives under the National Plan is encouraging, but the challenge remains as to how to share the findings of the broad and disparate programs of work. There is also a critical role for synthesis of findings across research and evaluations to identify promising approaches in different contexts and with different communities, and to improve translating findings into practice. Now that the available evidence base is rapidly developing, greater emphasis should be placed on this distillation of knowledge and working in partnership with sector organisations to embed it in practice.

A major impediment to sharing and translating findings into practice is that the reports from many evaluations conducted or commissioned by governments are not publicly released. Governments at all levels need to commit not only to evaluating all domestic, family and sexual violence initiatives – and ensuring that appropriate funding for evaluation is included in initiative funding allocations – but to making the findings of these evaluations publicly available and easily accessible.

The importance of domestic and family violence death reviews

Domestic, family and sexual violence death review mechanisms can be improved to help prevent future deaths. The Commission's crisis talks on Missing and Murdered Women focused strongly on learning from system failures to prevent future deaths. Domestic, family and sexual violence death reviews are the key mechanism to do this (see Box 21) (Bugeja, et al., 2013).

Approaches to death reviews across the country

The legislation, resourcing and approach to death review functions varies widely across jurisdictions. Public availability of information about death review functions also varies with different approaches to reporting of findings and monitoring the implementation of recommendations.

NSW has a well-developed model, as described in Box 22.

A failure to implement DVDR [domestic violence death review] recommendations represents a lost opportunity to learn from the past to enhance the safety of domestic violence victims in the future.

Buxton-Namisnyk and Gibson (2024), p.164

BOX 22

NSW Domestic Violence Death Review Team

Since its establishment in 2010, the NSW Domestic Violence Death Review Team (DVDRT) has delivered seven reports and made 122 recommendations to improve systems and services for victims of domestic violence in an effort to reduce domestic violence homicide in NSW.

Under the *Coroners Act 2009* (NSW), the DVDRT must furnish a report of its findings and recommendations of deaths reviewed in the previous two years to the NSW Parliament. The 2019–2021 report was tabled in the NSW Parliament on 19 December 2022. The 2019–2021 report makes no new recommendations but instead analyses the extent to which the 122 recommendations made by the DVDRT have been implemented.

The report found that about 40% of the DVDRT's recommendations have been implemented and work is progressing on a further 32%. The report examines the stalling of progress in certain areas, specifically recommendations requiring interagency collaboration or concerning:

- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities
- child survivors of domestic violence homicide
- federal organisations/agencies.

The whole-of-government response to the 2019–2021 report was provided to the NSW State Coroner on 7 July 2023. The response indicated that the Minister for the Prevention of Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault would review work being carried out across government to progress outstanding and implementable recommendations to support the shared goal of positive systems and service improvements. The review will include seeking advice on challenges with implementation and where needed, alternative methods of implementation.

In May 2024, the NSW Government committed \$2 million over four years as part of its \$230 million emergency package to support the DVDRT and its work.

Source: NSW Government



Opportunities to strengthen death reviews

While acknowledging the strong foundations in place across the country, the Commission sees significant opportunities to strengthen Australia's death review mechanisms. These include:

- establishing a death review mechanism in Tasmania
- resourcing a suitable entity to permanently host the Australian Domestic and Family Violence Death Review Network, deliver its national functions and monitor death review recommendations made to Commonwealth agencies
- providing adequate, ongoing resourcing to jurisdictional death review functions to:
 - deliver their preventative functions in a timely manner
 - improve consistency between jurisdictions
 - effectively contribute to the work of the Australian Domestic and Family Violence Death Review Network
- ensuring Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander representation in death review teams or, where this is not possible, collaborative engagement with Aboriginal and Torres Strait organisations when carrying out the death review functions for cases relating to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people

- identifying and including suicides in the context of experiencing domestic and family violence in death reviews
- improving public communications on death reviews, such as through an Australian Domestic and Family Violence Death Review Network website and improving access to publicly available death review information in states and territories.

The value of death review mechanisms is in taking a systems approach across cases to identify prevention and intervention opportunities to reduce future deaths. Public value is best achieved when the data, findings and learnings from death reviews are shared across government agencies, non-government organisations and the community more broadly. Strengthening collaborative engagement between government agencies and sector organisations is critical for ensuring the findings are influencing policy and practice to reduce deaths.

Areas for Focus

Governments need to ensure their systems are not causing harm to people experiencing domestic, family and sexual violence.

Governments should keep integrating and strengthening responses between the domestic and family violence, sexual assault, child protection and children and families' sectors to adequately address the safety and wellbeing of children and young people.

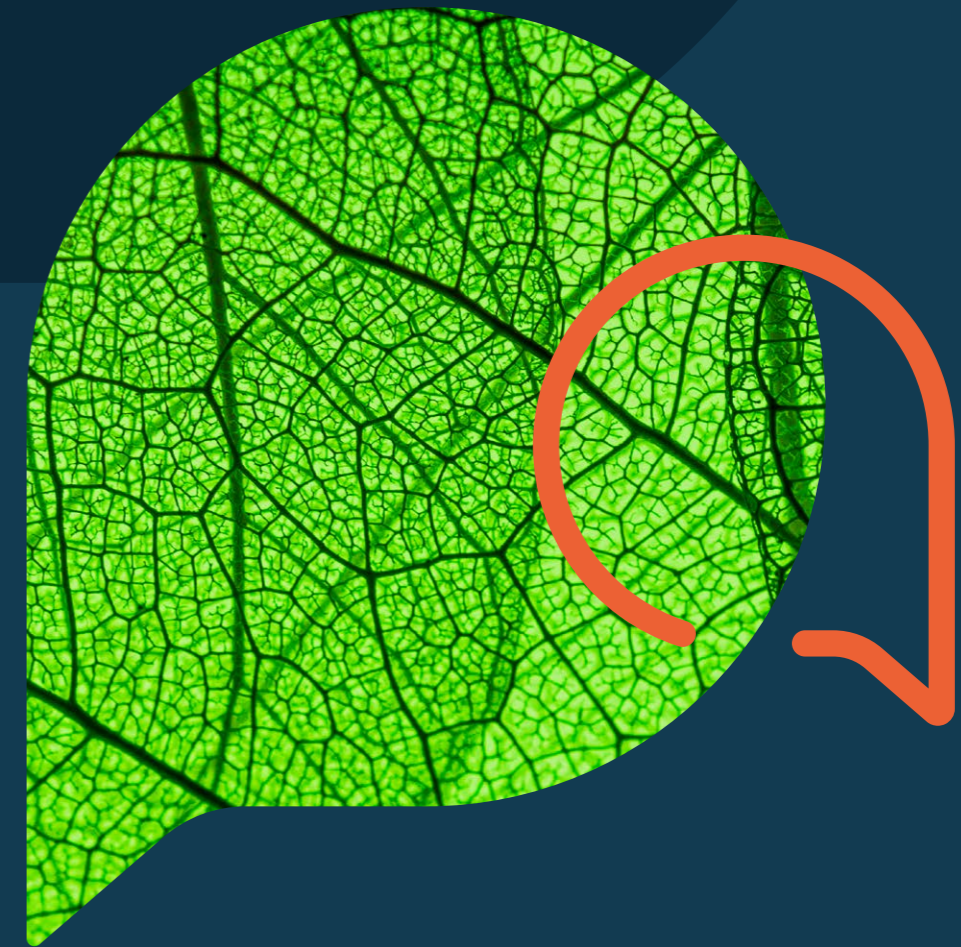
As the First Nations National Plan for Family Safety is finalised, the Department of Social Services should clarify the coordination of governance and progress monitoring of both national plans.

Governments should commit to publicly sharing all evaluation results related to the National Plan.

The Standing Council of Attorneys-General should work on making death reviews faster, more consistent, and better funded across the country. This includes Tasmania establishing a death review function.

The Commission has heard clearly that there is momentum for change and hope in the community about the impact of the important work under way. At the same time, we know that aspects of our systems are allowing violence to continue, and at worst, causing additional harm. This has to stop.

Supporting materials



●● The Commission's focus for the year ahead

The Commission's overarching focus for the year ahead is supporting government progress towards achieving the objectives of the National Plan.

Over the coming year, and in future yearly reports to Parliament, the Commission will continue to focus on promoting the National Plan objectives and monitoring its impact, including by examining:

- progress across governments in implementing actions in the First Action Plan and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Action Plan, and measuring progress through the Performance Management Plan and Outcomes Framework.
- government funding to priority areas under the National Plan, including analysis of the National Partnership on Family, Domestic and Sexual Violence Responses (FDSV NPA).
- governance arrangements to support achieving the objectives of the National Plan, with a focus on shared activities between Australian, state and territory governments.

The Commission's work program in 2025 and future yearly reporting will also examine in more detail a number of areas that the Commission considers to be lagging and requiring targeted efforts. This will include children and young people, and sexual violence. We will also continue our attention on systems – with focus on both strengthening the assessment and management of risk, and better addressing systems harm. Our approach and the specific areas of exploration will be developed in consultation with sector stakeholders, people with lived experience and government over the coming months.

The Commission takes heart from the extensive work under way by governments to address the systems, structures and attitudes that can help drive down the rates of gender-based violence. We acknowledge the recognition by all governments that this work has some way to go, and recommit our resources to playing our part in that progress.

●● Domestic, family and sexual violence language

The language we use when we talk about domestic, family and sexual violence matters.

The terminology used to discuss domestic, family and sexual violence, gender-based violence, and violence against women and children highlights the ongoing complexity of working in this space, as definitions vary across and within jurisdictions. The Commission recognises that not all terminology will reflect the lived experience of all people but will seek to use the most inclusive language possible.

The Commission will always remain open to learning and changing its language as the Commission grows based on the knowledge and advice from people with lived experience.

Why say both domestic and family violence?

Domestic violence, sometimes referred to as intimate partner violence, refers to physical, sexual, psychological, economic or emotional abuse by a current or former intimate partner to gain and maintain power and control over the other.

Family violence refers to violent or intimidating behaviours used by a family member, including a current or previous spouse, domestic partner, extended family or kinship relationship, to gain and maintain power and control over another.

Wherever possible, the Commission will use both domestic and family violence together to be inclusive of national differences in terminology.

Violence against women or gender-based violence?

The National Plan uses the terminology 'violence against women and children' to acknowledge the high prevalence of men's violence against women and children.

Wherever possible, the Commission uses the term 'gender-based violence'. This language recognises gendered violence is primarily perpetrated by men against women, while also recognising higher rates of domestic, family and sexual violence experienced by LGBTQI+ communities and other cohorts are underpinned by patriarchal norms.

People with lived experience or victim-survivors?

The Commission recognises and respects the terminology used by people who identify as victims and/or survivors of domestic, family and sexual violence. This language acknowledges the strength and resilience of people experiencing violence and is a powerful tool for advocacy. The Commission also recognises that there are many people who may have experienced domestic, family and sexual violence but do not identify with the terminology of victim-survivors.

The Commission recognises that there are many perspectives of the experience of domestic, family and sexual violence, and in using the term 'people with lived experience' we seek to be inclusive of the breadth of experiences. Where the term victim-survivor is used in a document title or in material provided to the Commission we have retained it.

People who use violence or perpetrators?

The phrase 'person who uses violence' and term 'perpetrator' are both used to refer to an individual who uses domestic, family or sexual violence to cause harm to another. Some prefer the term perpetrator as it aims to hold people who use violence accountable for their behaviour. This language is common within legal and policy contexts and we respect the broad use of this term in the sector.

Others prefer the phrase 'person who uses violence' as it recognises that people who use violence are not wholly defined by their use of violence and recognises the capacity for change. The term 'perpetrator' can also be alienating and can act as a barrier to seeking support for some people who use violence. The phrase 'person who uses violence' is also preferred in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. The Commission chooses to use 'people who use violence' where possible.

Where the term perpetrator is used in a document title or in material provided to the Commission, it has been retained.

First Nations people or Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people

In this report, the term First Nations is used when referring to reports, committees and bodies which use this language. In all other circumstances, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people is used (APSC, 2022).

A list of definitions for these and other terms used throughout is provided at the end of the report.

Support available

Support for domestic and family violence is available

If you, or someone you know is in immediate danger, please contact the police on Triple Zero (000).

If you or someone you know needs help, the following services are available to assist.

- 1800 Respect is a 24-hour free information and counselling service for people impacted by domestic, family or sexual violence. They can be contacted on 1800 737 732, 7 days a week or www.1800respect.org.au (telephone and online crisis support).
- MensLine Australia is a free telephone and online counselling service offering support for Australian men. They can be contacted on 1300 789 978 or you can visit www.mensline.org.au
- Lifeline is a 24-hour telephone crisis support service. They can be contacted on 13 11 14 or you can visit www.lifeline.org.au
- 13YARN is a 24-hour national crisis support line that offers a confidential one-on-one yarning opportunity with a Lifeline-trained Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander Crisis Supporter for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. They can be contacted on 13 92 76 or you can visit www.13yarn.org.au
- QLife is a free peer support and referral service for LGBTIQ+ people via telephone and webchat. They can be contacted on 1800 184 527 between 3pm and 12am, 7 days a week or you can visit www qlife.org.au

- Kids Helpline is a 24-hour free counselling service for young people aged between 5 and 25. They can be contacted on 1800 55 1800 or you can visit www.kidshelpline.com.au
- Elder Abuse Helpline is a free service that can provide referrals and assist anyone who experiences, witnesses or suspects that an older person is being abused. They are available 9am to 5pm, Monday to Friday at 1300 651 192.
- Suicide Call Back Service offers free professional counselling services and can be contacted on 1300 659 467 or you can visit www.suicidecallbackservice.org.au
- Beyondblue is a 24-hour free mental health service and can be contacted on 1300 224 636 or you can visit www.beyondblue.org.au Need help in your language?



Need help in your language?
Call 1800 512 451 and ask for an interpreter.

Definitions

<p>Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples</p>	<p>There are a wide range of nations, cultures and languages across mainland Australia and throughout the Torres Strait. ‘Aboriginal’ is a broad term that groups nations and custodians of mainland Australia and most of the islands, including Tasmania, K’gari, Palm Island, Mornington Island, Groote Eylandt, Bathurst and Melville Islands.</p> <p>‘Torres Strait Islander’ is a broad term grouping the peoples of at least 274 small islands between the northern tip of Cape York in Queensland and the south-west coast of Papua New Guinea. Many Torres Strait Islander peoples live on the Australian mainland. There are also two Torres Strait Islander communities at Bamaga and Seisia, within the Northern Peninsula Area of Queensland (APSC, 2023).</p>
<p>ANROWS [Australia’s National Research Organisation for Women’s Safety]</p>	<p>ANROWS was established as an initiative of Australia’s first national plan (2010–2022) by the Australian Government and all state and territory governments.</p> <p>Its primary function is to build the evidence base that supports ending violence against women and children in Australia. ANROWS is embedded in the National Plan architecture and will continue to deliver and develop this function across the next decade under the National Plan for 2022–2032.</p>
<p>Child sexual abuse</p>	<p>Child sexual abuse refers to sexual violence experienced by a person under the age of 16.</p>

<p>Domestic, family and sexual violence</p>	<p>The Commission uses the definition of domestic family and sexual violence in the <i>National Plan to End Violence against Women and Children 2022–2032</i> (the National Plan).</p> <p>Domestic violence refers to any behaviour within a past or current intimate relationship (including dates) that causes physical, sexual or psychological harm. Family violence is a broader term that captures violence perpetrated by parents (and guardians) against children, between other family members and in family-like settings.</p> <p>Sexual violence refers to sexual activity that happens where consent is not freely given or obtained, is withdrawn, or the person is unable to consent due to their age or other factors. It also occurs any time a person is forced, coerced or manipulated into any sexual/sexualised activity.</p> <p>Sexual violence can be non-physical and include unwanted sexualised comments, intrusive sexualised questions or sexual harassment.</p>
<p>Gender-based violence</p>	<p>The National Plan uses the terminology ‘violence against women and children’ to acknowledge the high prevalence of men’s violence against women and children.</p> <p>Wherever possible, the Commission uses the term ‘gender-based violence’ to recognise the impact of domestic, family and sexual violence on people of all ages, genders, sex characteristics and sexualities. This language recognises gendered violence is primarily perpetrated by men against women, while recognising higher rates of domestic, family and sexual violence experienced by LGBTQ+ communities and other cohorts are underpinned by patriarchal norms.</p>

<p>Intersectionality</p>	<p>In the context of addressing violence against women and children, an intersectional approach recognises that the way women experience gender and inequality can be different based on a range of other cultural, individual, historical, environmental or structural factors including (but not limited to) race, age, geographic location, sexual orientation, ability or class. This approach also recognises that the drivers, dynamics and impacts of violence women experience can be compounded and magnified by their experience of other forms of oppression and inequality, resulting in some groups of women experiencing higher rates and/or more severe forms of violence, or facing barriers to support and safety that other women do not experience. This definition has been adopted from the National Plan(p.129).</p>
<p>LGBTQ+ people</p>	<p>An acronym used to describe members of the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer communities. We note that data relating to LGBTQ+ people experience of violence is limited, however acknowledge that LGBTQ+ people experience domestic, family and sexual violence at higher rates to women in the general population.</p> <p>While the use of this acronym sometimes includes people with intersex variations, we note that people in this community have their own specific experiences of violence and service needs separate to those of the LGBTQ+ community. 'Intersex' does not refer to a particular gender identity or sexual orientation. This definition has been adopted from <i>LGBTIQ+ Health Australia</i>.</p>
<p>Men's Behaviour Change Programs (MBCPs)</p>	<p>MBCPs are designed for men who have used violence, coercion or control in their relationships with their partner, children or other family members. These programs aim to encourage men to take responsibility for their behaviour and provide them with the skills and tools necessary to change their behaviour and maintain respectful relationships. This definition has been adopted from <i>No to Violence</i>.</p>

<p>People who use violence</p>	<p>The phrase 'people who use violence' refers to the individual who uses domestic, family and sexual violence to cause harm to another. People who use violence are sometimes referred to as 'perpetrators'. The term perpetrator aims to hold people who use violence accountable for their behaviour, and we respect the broad use of this term in the sector. The term can also be alienating and a barrier to seeking support for some people who use violence. The Commission chooses to use the term 'people who use violence' where possible.</p>
<p>People who have experienced violence</p>	<p>We recognise and respect the terminology used by people who identify as victims and/or survivors of domestic, family and sexual violence. This language acknowledges the strength and resilience of people experiencing violence and is a powerful tool for advocacy. We also recognise that there are many people who may have experienced domestic, family and sexual violence but do not identify with the terminology of victim-survivors.</p> <p>The Commission recognises that there are many perspectives of the experience of domestic, family and sexual violence, and in using the term 'people with lived experience' we seek to be inclusive of the breadth of experiences.</p>
<p>Sexual violence</p>	<p>Sexual violence refers to the occurrence, attempt or threat of sexual assault by a current or former intimate partner, known person or stranger, experienced by a person over the age of 16 who does not or cannot give consent.</p>
<p>Specialist and non-specialist workforces</p>	<p>The National Plan and the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare categorise workforces who have roles in relation to domestic, family and sexual violence as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Specialist workers whose daily work involves responding to those who have experienced and/or used violence, as well as professionals who may work directly with these workers, such as trainers or specialist consultants in policy.

<p>Specialist and non-specialist workforces (cont)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Non-specialist workers whose work may intersect with domestic, family and sexual violence as part of their wider role in the community, such as health professionals, police officers and teachers. <p>The Commission has adopted this terminology while acknowledging that different categorisations and terminology are in use across the country (AIHW, 2024c).</p>
<p>Specialist Homelessness Service</p>	<p>A specialist homelessness service is an organisation that receive government funding under the National Housing and Homelessness Agreement. Specialist homelessness service offerings include provision of accommodation or accommodation-related services and/or assistance and support services to people experiencing homelessness or at risk of homelessness.</p>
<p>Technology facilitated abuse</p>	<p>A wide-ranging term that encompasses many subtypes of interpersonal violence and abuse using mobile, online and other digital technologies. These include harassing behaviours, sexual violence and image-based sexual abuse, monitoring and controlling behaviours, and emotional abuse and threats.</p>
<p>Trauma informed</p>	<p>Trauma-informed care and practice recognises the prevalence of trauma and its impacts on the emotional, psychological and social wellbeing of people and communities.</p> <p>Trauma-informed practice means integrating an understanding of past and current experiences of violence and trauma in all aspects of service delivery.</p> <p>The goal of trauma-informed systems is to avoid re-traumatising individuals and support safety choice and control to promote healing.</p>
<p>Women and men</p>	<p>The use of ‘women’ and ‘men’ in this report is inclusive of both cisgender and transgender women and men.</p> <p>Where we refer to information specific to cisgender, transgender and/or non-binary people, this is indicated in the report.</p>

Appendix 1

Order to establish the Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence Commission as an Executive Agency



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

Public Service Act 1999

Order to Establish the Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence Commission as an Executive Agency

I, General the Honourable David Hurley AC DSC (Retd), Governor-General of the Commonwealth of Australia, acting with the advice of the Federal Executive Council and under section 65 of the *Public Service Act 1999* (Cth):

- (a) establish the Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence Commission as an Executive Agency;
- (b) allocate the name Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence Commission to the Executive Agency;
- (c) allocate the name Commissioner to the Head of the Executive Agency;
- (d) identify the Minister for Women’s Safety as the Minister responsible for the Executive Agency;
- (e) specify the functions of the Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence Commission be as follows:
 - i. provide strategic policy advice to the Minister for Women’s Safety;
 - ii. promote and enhance coordination across Commonwealth, state and territory governments, and the not-for-profit and private sectors;
 - iii. promote coordinated and consistent monitoring and evaluation frameworks by all governments for the National Plan to End Violence against Women and Children 2022-2032 (National Plan);
 - iv. develop and maintain a supportive and structured approach to victim-survivor engagement;
 - v. inform priorities for policy, research and data collection in cooperation with jurisdictions and relevant organisations and agencies; and
 - vi. promote the objectives of the National Plan across all parts of Australian society.

This order will commence on 1 July 2022.

Dated 17 March 2022

Appendix 2

Information sources

The Commission's advice in this report is based on diverse sources of evidence, perspectives and expertise gathered through its activities in the last year, including:

- discussions and consultations with people with lived and living experience of domestic, family and sexual violence, including the Lived Experience Advisory Council
- engagement with Australian Government departments and agencies
- consultation and targeted forums and roundtables with sector stakeholders
- discussion and briefings with research organisations and researchers, businesses and community groups, other oversight bodies and commissions, and international organisations and bodies with a domestic, family and sexual violence focus
- review of relevant government reports and independent research and evaluations
- advice from Australian, state and territory governments on progress towards the achieving the aims of the National Plan.

Government reports

Pending commencement of formal reporting on implementation activity, the Commission has sought reflections from Australian, state and territory governments on progress towards the achieving the objectives of the National Plan. In addition to their responses, we have also reviewed information provided by governments in the public domain, including evaluations, media releases and Hansard and crime statistics reporting.

Research and evaluation

We have drawn on research and evaluation of activities relevant to the objectives of the National Plan and the areas of focus for this yearly report. These include evaluations of government-funded programs as well as independent research by the specialist sector, higher education institutions, industry bodies and other interested parties. A full list of resources used is available at the end of this report.

Engagement with sector stakeholders

Since her appointment, Commissioner Cronin has consulted extensively with representative and individual specialist family and sexual violence sector organisations across the nation. The Commission has also engaged extensively with a wide range of other stakeholders from broader sectors and industries who play a role in addressing domestic, family and sexual violence. These consultations have been a key information source for this report, providing vital intelligence on the experience of the workforce, systems design and pressures, and identifying opportunities for improvement.

Lived experience

Alongside direct engagement with the Lived Experience Advisory Council, the Commission has drawn on the considerable input of people with lived and living experience who have offered their personal and expert knowledge through meetings and roundtable participation. Quotes provided by Advisory Council members have been included throughout the report.

References

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 - 2 For example Aboriginal Controlled Community Organisations specialising in family violence such as Wirringa Baiya Aboriginal Women’s Legal Centre, Dardi Munwurro, Djirra.
 - 3 In Victoria, the Multi Agency Risk Assessment Management framework and information sharing scheme established under the *Family Violence Protection Act 2008* identifies prescribed workforces and has been transformational in providing a shared language and clear understanding of roles and responsibilities for the broader workforce. For more information on this approach, see the Report of the Family Violence Implementation Monitor, *Report of the Family Violence Reform Implementation Monitor – As at 1 November 2020* (4th report), 2020. ► www.fvrim.vic.gov.au/report-family-violence-reform-implementation-monitor-1-november-2020

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