



Australian Government

The National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women

Immediate Government Actions · April 2009





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Time For Action

The Government's goal is to reduce all violence in our communities.

Sexual assault and domestic and family violence are among the most pervasive forms of violence.

The Government's position on domestic violence and sexual assault is one of zero tolerance—one victim of violence is one too many.

Sexual assault and domestic and family violence are crimes most often perpetrated by men against women. This violence is usually perpetrated by men whom women know, in their own home and often repeatedly.¹

One in three Australian women will report being a victim of physical violence and almost one in five will report being a victim of sexual violence in their lifetime, according to the Australian Bureau of Statistics².

Approximately 350,000 women will experience physical violence and 125,000 women will experience sexual violence each year.³

Some groups of women experience higher rates of violence. These include Indigenous women,⁴ women with disabilities,⁵ women from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds,⁶ younger women and older women.⁷

Whatever the form violence takes, it has serious and often devastating consequences for victims, their extended families and the community.

Violence against women also comes at an enormous economic cost. New research released by the Government shows that each year violence against women costs the nation \$13.6 billion.⁸ This figure is expected to rise to \$15.6 billion by 2021.

Violence against women is preventable.

Governments and the community have made gains over time in addressing violence against women. Increased reporting, law reform and increased community awareness have made an impact.

Clearly there is still a need for more work in this area.

The Australian Government is leading the development of a *National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women*. The *Plan* will bring together the efforts of all levels of government, the non-government sector and the wider community. It will identify how the combined work of police, courts, legal systems, health and community services and education can contribute to a reduction in the levels of domestic violence and sexual assault.

1 Australian Bureau of Statistics (2005) *Personal Safety Survey*, ABS Cat. No. 4906.0, Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia.

2 Ibid.

3 Ibid.

4 ABS (2005); Mouzos, J. and Makkai, T. (2004) *Women's experiences of male violence: Findings from the Australian component of the International Violence Against Women Survey*, Research and Public Policy Series, No. 56, Canberra: Australian Institute of Criminology.

5 ABS (2005); Lievore, D. (2005a) 'Prosecutorial Decisions in Adult Sexual Assault Cases' *Trends and Issues in Crime and Criminal Justice*, Issue.1, p. 291.

6 ABS (2005).

7 Ibid.

8 KPMG (2009) *The Cost of Violence against Women and their Children*. Safety Taskforce, Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs, Australian Government.

The National Plan

In May 2008 the Government established an 11-member National Council to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children, under the leadership of Ms Libby Lloyd AM.

The Council's task was to provide the Government with advice on the development of an evidence-based *National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children*.

The Council, with the support of the Government, conducted significant research to assess the existing evidence, the operation of legal systems and the economic cost of violence against women.

The Council also consulted with more than 2,000 Australians—survivors of violence; perpetrators of violence; educators; service providers; people living in rural and remote areas; members of Indigenous and culturally and linguistically diverse communities; women with disabilities; members of the judiciary; representatives of the State and Territory Governments; and, members of the public.

The Council developed five documents for the Government:

- » *Time for Action: The National Council's Plan for Australia to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children, 2009–2021;*
- » *A Snapshot to Time for Action;*
- » *Background Paper to Time for Action;*
- » *The Cost of Violence Against Women and their Children; and*
- » *An Analysis of Domestic Violence Laws in Australia.*

Time for Action contains the Council's recommendations for a *National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women* to be developed and agreed by COAG. It is an extensive report with findings that relate to the responsibilities of all governments and the community. *Time for Action* recommends that the Australian Government take leadership on a long-term plan to reduce violence against women. The report identifies six key outcome areas, proposes strategies and actions in each area and identifies 20 high-priority actions.

Australian Government Action

The Australian Government is committed to providing national leadership in reducing violence.

The Australian Government supports the direction of the *Time for Action* report and the need for action in each of the six outcome areas described. The Government gave the National Council to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children a wide brief so that a broad-based plan of action could be developed. Many of the Council's recommendations require joint effort by the Commonwealth, State and Territory Governments and the community more broadly.

The Australian Government will take *Time for Action* to COAG.

Involving all governments is critical to providing integrated support for victims and reducing violence into the future. State and Territory Governments deliver a range of services from legal and policing, to services for victims and for perpetrators. They also fund and coordinate many services provided by the non-government sector. The Australian Government delivers support and services through the family law system and provides significant support for key services delivered through the States and Territories such as hospitals, schools and housing.

The Australian Government will work with the State and Territory Governments to develop the *National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women* for release in 2010.

Time for Action identifies six key outcome areas and 20 high-priority actions that require an urgent response. The Government has agreed to immediately implement eleven, will consult with the States and Territories on seven and will consider two within the context of the *National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women*.

Starting in 2009, the Australian Government will fund a new package of actions to reduce violence against women. The Government will:

- 1. Invest \$12.5 million for a new national domestic violence and sexual assault telephone and online crisis service. The new service will be run by professional staff and make active referrals to follow up services. The new service will operate 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.**
- 2. Invest \$26 million for primary prevention activities including \$9 million to improve the quality and uptake of respectful relationships programs for school age young people and \$17 million for social marketing focused on changing attitudes and behaviours that contribute to violence.**
- 3. Invest \$3 million to support research on perpetrator treatment and the greater harmonisation of Federal and State and Territory laws.**

4. **Work with the States and Territories through the Standing Committee of Attorneys-General to:**
 - a. Establish a national scheme for the registration of domestic and family violence orders. This scheme will allow orders to be enforced across State and Territory borders.
 - b. Improve the uptake of relevant coronial recommendations.
 - c. Identify the most effective methods to investigate and prosecute sexual assault cases.
5. Develop a multi-disciplinary training package for lawyers, judicial officers, counsellors and other professionals working in the family law system, to improve consistency in the handling of family violence cases.
6. Ask the Australian Law Reform Commission to work with State and Territory law reform commissions to examine the inter-relationship of Federal and State and Territory laws that relate to the safety of women and their children.
7. Establish the *Violence Against Women Advisory Group* to advise on the National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women.

01 Communities are safe and free from violence

Violence against women can only be reduced through the joint action of the community, governments, services and the non-government sector.

The Council found that communities, governments and services working together can make a real difference to reducing violence. The Council recommended urgent action is taken to develop a National Primary Prevention Framework;⁹ support men who oppose violence against women;¹⁰ establish a Centre of Excellence for the Prevention of Violence against Women;¹¹ reduce overcrowding in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities;¹² and include freedom from violence against women as a goal in the National Research Priorities.¹³

Governments must support the community to change the attitudes that support violence. The Australian Government, working with the States and Territories, is well positioned to support groups that oppose violence and improve the evidence of what works in changing attitudes and beliefs.

The Australian Government has already committed \$1 million to the White Ribbon Campaign to support men taking action to oppose violence. This is helping men's ambassadors to work in rural and remote communities. The Government provides \$14 million per annum to community organisations that assist men improve their relationships with partners and children under the *Men and Family Relationships Services*. The Government also provides \$4 million each year to organisations that support families affected by violence through the *Specialised Family Violence Services Program*.

Overcrowding in remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities contributes to high rates of domestic and family violence. The Australian Government is investing \$5.5 billion to reduce overcrowding, homelessness and housing shortages in remote communities as part of its commitment to close the gap between Indigenous and non Indigenous Australians.

In addition, the Australian Government will invest \$26 million for primary prevention activities to reduce violence against women. Work has already begun to improve the quality and uptake of respectful relationships programs for school age young people at a cost of \$9 million over five years. The Government will also develop social marketing to change attitudes and behaviours which contribute to violence with an investment of \$17 million over four years.

9 Action 1.1.1.

10 Action 1.3.1.

11 Action 1.1.2.

12 Action 1.1.3.

13 Action 1.5.1.

The Government will work with the States and Territories to establish a National Centre of Excellence for the Prevention of Violence against Women. The National Centre will deliver good quality and relevant research so that people working in the field have access to the best available evidence. This will build on the work of the Australian Domestic and Family Violence Clearinghouse and the Australian Centre for the Study of Sexual Assault.

The Australian Government will consider the place of violence in the National Research Priorities.

02 Relationships are respectful

Violence against women would be significantly reduced if all women experienced safe and respectful relationships. The Council highlighted the critical need for all people, particularly young people, to develop the skills to maintain respectful relationships. The Council recommended urgent action is taken to trial and evaluate respectful relationships programs for young people¹⁴ and build the capacity of the workforce delivering prevention education.¹⁵

Respectful relationship programs are education services that seek to develop the skills people need to treat their partners with respect. These programs complement the impact of strong role models in teaching young people about positive relationships.

A number of programs already operate in schools and other settings. The Australian Government is progressing a review of the *National Safe Schools Framework* with a focus on teacher training in positive student management, responses to victimisation and abuse, teaching of values, and the emergence of technologies and their impact on student wellbeing and protection.

The Australian Government is committed to increasing the uptake of respectful relationships programs in schools and services used by young people. The Government will work with the States and Territories through COAG to increase the take-up of respectful relationships programs as the evidence about the impact and effectiveness of these programs develops.

In addition, the Australian Government will invest \$9 million to improve the quality and uptake of respectful relationships programs nationally.

Work on this initiative is already well progressed. This year 31 sites nationally will test six different programs. Programs will be implemented mostly in mainstream school settings and will reach up to 8,000 young people over a period of five years. Programs will also be implemented in non-school settings and will target vulnerable young people including those with intellectual disability, young people who have left school and young people living in remote communities.

The Australian Government will fund an evaluation of the leading South Australian respectful relationships program *Keeping Safe*. This program is currently delivered in all South Australian schools. The evaluation will form the basis of further work to develop best practice in the violence prevention education sector.

Evaluation of the trial sites and existing programs will provide frontline workers with the resources they need to run effective respectful relationships programs.

14 Action 2.2.1.

15 Action 2.1.1.

03 Services meet the needs of women and their children

When violence occurs victims and their children need access to support services that are responsive to their needs. The Council found that women need access to high-quality crisis and support services that can respond to women's need for personal safety, housing and counselling. The Council recommended urgent action is taken to establish a new professionally staffed telephone and online crisis support service;¹⁶ implement reforms on domestic violence and homelessness put forward in *The Road Home: A National Approach to Reducing Homelessness*;¹⁷ audit existing crisis services for their accessibility to all women;¹⁸ ensure children exposed to violence do not have their safety or wellbeing compromised;¹⁹ and, fund healing centres for Indigenous communities.²⁰

A high-quality and accessible service system is critical to the Government's effort to reduce the impact of violence against women. While many services are administered by State and Territory Governments, the Australian Government contributes funding in important programs such as homelessness and has a role in working with States and Territories to develop quality standards.

Domestic violence is a primary cause of homelessness.²¹ Where women are forced to leave home due to violence they will benefit from the Australian Government's \$8.5 billion investment in social housing (*the National Partnership Agreement on Homelessness, The Road Home and A Place to Call Home*) which will provide women with improved housing options including exit points from crisis support services. *Safe at Home* programs will be funded to assist women to stay safely in their homes through joint action from police, health and community services. *Safe at Home* programs also provide funds to improve home security or short term rental accommodation. Additional children's workers will also be employed in crisis accommodation services. This funding represents the largest ever investment by the Australian Government in social housing.

The Australian Government is working with the States and Territories to respond to the needs of children affected by violence through the development of a *National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children*. The *National Framework* is being considered by the Council of Australian Governments and will provide a national approach to protecting children. It will have a clear focus on preventing child abuse and neglect and intervening early when children are at risk.

16 Action 3.3.1.

17 Action 3.2.1.

18 Action 3.2.2.

19 Action 3.3.4.

20 Action 3.3.2.

21 Australian Institute of Health and Welfare. (2007) *Homeless people in SAAP, Supported Accommodation Assistance Program National Data Collection Agency Annual Report 2005-06*, AIHW Catalogue No. HOU156. Canberra: Australian Institute of Health and Welfare.
Marcolin, S. (2005) *Female SAAP clients and children escaping domestic and family violence 2003-04*, Bulletin Issue 30, Canberra: Australian Institute of Health and Welfare.

The Government's new *Family Support Program* is part of the Commonwealth's effort under the *National Framework* to bring together a range of early intervention and specialist services to better focus government programs on the needs of families and children at risk. The transition to the new program commenced in February 2009.

The Government is developing a *National Disability Strategy*. The details of the *Strategy* are currently under consideration, including how the Government may improve the safety of women with disabilities.

Newly arrived female migrants and refugees who have experienced sexual assault or domestic and family violence continue to benefit from the Australian Government's *Complex Case Support Services* as well as other settlement services. In addition, Australia includes a visa category for women and their children who are in danger of victimisation, harassment or serious abuse because of their gender.

Programs to promote healing in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and respond to family violence continue to be important priorities for the Government. In response to past policies and practices that have impacted the health and family life of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, the Government will establish an Indigenous Healing Foundation. The Foundation will have a strong focus on supporting families and communities overcome grief and trauma with a strong focus on the Stolen Generations. Support will also include addressing the impacts of addiction, family violence, sexual abuse and suicide.

\$15.5 million is provided under the Family Violence Partnership and Family Violence Regional Activities programs to support services that work to reduce the incidence and impact of family violence, including child abuse and neglect, in Indigenous communities. Funding is being provided to support healing services in Western Australia. The Northern Territory Emergency Response has funded nine cooling-off centres for men, 22 safe houses for women and ten staff to support a Mobile Child Protection Team.

In addition, the Australian Government will provide \$12.5 million for a new national telephone and online crisis service. The new service will be run by professional staff and make active referrals to follow up services. The new service will operate 24 hours a day, 7 days a week and will build on existing specialist services. Consultations on the new model have already begun.

04 Responses are just

Domestic violence and sexual assault are criminal acts. The Council identified that preventing and reducing violence against women requires strong laws that are effectively administered and hold perpetrators accountable. The Council recommended urgent action is taken to establish a national registration scheme for domestic violence protection orders;²² implement processes to review all deaths resulting from domestic and family violence;²³ make a reference to the Australian Law Reform Commission to examine the interaction of domestic violence, child protection and federal family law;²⁴ and, contribute to the development of the proposed Convention on Justice and Support for Victims of Crime and Abuse of Power.²⁵

Australia should have a fair and just legal system that holds perpetrators accountable and provides protection to victims of violence. The process of administering justice should ensure access for women including in providing evidence.

In 2008, the Government provided \$500,000 to the Australian Institute of Criminology to undertake research into domestic-related homicides and identify opportunities to improve early intervention and the understanding of risk factors.

The Government continues to respond to domestic and family violence as part of its responsibility for family law. From 1 July 2009 family dispute resolution practitioners will be required to be skilled in domestic and family violence and the new family law environment. The Government is subsidising training for registered practitioners.

Major reforms to the *Family Law Act 1975* were implemented in 2006. The Australian Institute of Family Studies is evaluating these reforms on behalf of the Government and is expected to report in late 2009.

The Government continues to support legal services that assist victims of domestic violence through community legal centres, Family Violence Prevention Legal Services and legal aid. The Government is also providing \$400 million over two years to assist families experiencing relationship difficulties through specialist services provided from 458 Early Intervention Services, 65 Family Relationship Centres and 182 Post Separation Services. Programs include counselling, dispute mediation and parenting support. Families in conflict are supported by these programs with a range of services including the provision of safe venues for changeovers, and advising on contact arrangements with children.

22 Action 4.3.1.

23 Action 4.3.2.

24 Action 4.2.1.

25 Action 4.1.1.

In addition, the Government, through the Standing Committee of Attorneys-General:

- » **Has established a working group to develop a national scheme for the registration of domestic and family violence orders. This scheme will allow orders to be enforced across State and Territory borders.**
- » **Will work with the States and Territories to assess the impact of strategies to encourage responsiveness to Coroners' recommendations including on domestic violence related deaths.**
- » **Has commissioned an audit of best practice in the investigation and prosecution of sexual assault cases.**

The Australian Law Reform Commission will work with State and Territory Law Reform Commissions to examine the inter-relationship of Federal and State and Territory laws that relate to the safety of women and their children.

The Government will develop a multi-disciplinary training package for lawyers, judicial officers, counsellors and other professionals working in the family law system, to improve consistency in the handling of family violence cases.

A draft Convention on Justice and Support for Victims of Crime and Abuse of Power has been drafted by the World Society of Victimology and the International Victimology Institute. The Government is committed to upholding its international obligations and taking leadership within the United Nations to promote and protect human rights. The Government will consider the proposed Convention on Justice and Support for Victims of Crime and Abuse of Power within this context.

05 Perpetrators stop their violence

Perpetrators of violence need to be held accountable for their actions. Support should also be made available to help perpetrators end their violence. The Council emphasised that perpetrators of violence need to take responsibility for their actions. The Council recommended urgent action is taken to progress research regarding the effectiveness of perpetrator treatment programs;²⁶ develop and test a program tailored for perpetrators serving custodial sentences;²⁷ and, establish cooling-off places for men in remote communities.²⁸

Over the past two years, the Government has invested almost \$22 million into the Northern Territory Emergency Response Family Support Package to fund nine cooling-off centres for men, 22 safe houses for women and their children, and provide ten staff to support a Mobile Child Protection Team. The Government has also invested \$17 million this year for 69 Night Patrol Services which support 73 remote communities, and \$6 million for 63 additional police in the Northern Territory.

In addition, the Government will invest \$3 million to support research on perpetrator treatment programs and the greater harmonisation of Federal and State and Territory laws. The perpetrator treatment research will be designed in consultation with the States and Territories and experts in the treatment field. In the longer term, such research will be conducted in partnership with the States and Territories, including through the National Centre of Excellence.

The Government will discuss the place of perpetrator treatment programs in prisons with the States and Territories when *Time for Action* is considered by COAG.

26 Action 5.4.1.

27 Action 5.1.1.

28 Action 5.2.1.

06 Systems work together effectively

Violence against women requires responses from all levels of government, the service systems and the wider community. The Council found that all systems needed to work together to make a major difference to the prevalence and the impacts of violence against women. The Council recommended urgent action is taken to ensure Commonwealth, State, Territory and Local Governments work together to respond to violence against women and establish performance reporting measures that encourage collaboration.²⁹

Already the Government's social inclusion agenda incorporates the need for departments to work together and for governments to work more closely with the not-for-profit sector. A National Compact is being developed with the not-for-profit sector that will support greater joint action on complex social issues such as violence against women and their children.

Involving all governments and the wider community is critical to reducing violence against women. Many of *Time for Action's* recommendations require joint effort by the Commonwealth, State and Territory Governments and the community more broadly.

The Australian Government will take *Time for Action* to COAG.

The Australian Government will work with the State and Territory Governments to develop the *National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women* for release in 2010.

The *National Plan* will include clear measures of performance.

²⁹ Action 6.1.1.

Priority actions

The Government has responded to the 20 high-priority actions identified in *Time for Action*.

The Australian Government agrees to act immediately and build on current activities to:

- 1.1.1. Develop a national primary prevention framework.
- 1.1.3. Reduce overcrowding in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Communities.
- 1.3.1. Support men who oppose violence against women.
- 2.1.1. Build the capacity of the prevention education field.
- 2.2.1. Implement and evaluate educational programs that encourage respectful relationships.
- 3.2.1. Implement reforms as put forward in *The Road Home: A National Approach to Reducing Homelessness*.
- 3.3.1. Establish a professional national telephone and online crisis support service.
- 3.3.4. Ensure children exposed to violence do not have their safety or wellbeing compromised.
- 4.2.1. Make a reference to the Australian Law Reform Commission to examine the integration of domestic violence, child protection and federal family law.
- 5.2.1. Establish cooling-off places for men in remote communities.
- 5.4.1. Fund and deliver a perpetrator research agenda.

The Australian Government agrees to consult with the States and Territories to develop national responses to:

- 1.1.2. Establish a National Centre of Excellence.
- 3.2.2. Audit crisis accommodation services for their accessibility for all women.
- 3.3.2. Fund healing centres for Indigenous communities.
- 4.3.1. Establish a national registration scheme for domestic and family violence protection orders.
- 4.3.2. Establish or build on emerging domestic homicide/fatality review processes.
- 5.1.1. Fund and develop a correctional-facility specific domestic violence program to be tested in Australian prisons.
- 6.1.1. Ensure Commonwealth, State, Territory and Local government agencies work together to respond to violence against women and establish reporting measures that encourage collaboration.

The Australian Government agrees to further consider to:

- 1.5.1. Include violence against women as a goal in the National Research Priorities.
- 4.1.1. Contribute to the development of the proposed draft Convention on Justice and Support for Victims of Crime and Abuse of Power.

Acknowledgment

The Government greatly appreciates the efforts of the National Council in producing the *Time for Action* report and its other publications.

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For a full copy of *Time for Action*, *Background Paper* and the *Cost of Violence* report, go to www.fahcsia.gov.au/sa/women or phone **1300 764 656**.

