

Men and boys snapshot

Engaging with men and
boys to end domestic,
family and sexual violence



Commissioner's preface

Many of you urged us to increase our focus on men and boys as a vital step towards ending gendered violence.

Since our work began in November 2022, the Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence Commission (the Commission) has engaged with stakeholders from across the country.

We have spoken to lived experience advocates, specialist domestic, family and sexual violence (DFSV) community organisations, frontline professionals in the health, legal, education and police sectors, and leaders from business and government.

These insights have shaped the observations in this paper, and I thank everyone who contributed.

Indeed, this is a refrain I heard in Alice Springs at the start of my first tour of states and territories. It has been repeated everywhere I go: work with our men and boys – and I have been galvanised by the urgency with which it is put to me.

These calls acknowledge that there must be accountability for men who use violence, but that these men also need support from those around them, including friends, families and support services, to stop their violence.

This is a challenging and confronting topic to consider, particularly at a time when rates of homicide and sexual violence against women and children are so high.



Commissioner
Micaela Cronin



For decades, people working on the frontline, including specialist services, community leaders, health workers and educators, have been responding to the complex realities of domestic, family and sexual violence. Their deep expertise and tireless commitment have laid the groundwork for the approaches we take today.

However, engaging with men and boys does not and cannot mean diverting attention or funding away from people facing violence and the services that support them.

Nor does it mean minimising or excusing the harm men and boys cause with violent behaviour. On the contrary, engaging with men and boys seeks to increase accountability for their violence.

Our work must continue to centre the people affected by men's violence. It must be informed by evidence, and it must put safety first and remain accountable to women, girls and groups disproportionately impacted by violence.

This snapshot is intended to progress the national conversation on this important topic.

It does not pretend to have all the answers or canvas all the issues.

As we increase and expand our efforts to engage men and boys as part of the agenda to end violence against women, we must honour these foundations and ensure that new approaches strengthen, rather than undermine, the vital work already underway.

I hope this snapshot can contribute to respectful dialogue that builds a shared understanding of this important work.

Introduction

The evidence is very clear: most violence is perpetrated by men.

Working with men to address domestic, family and sexual violence is a complex and multifaceted task, and it will require many different approaches and interventions.

Research from the Australian National Research Organisation for Women's Safety (ANROWS), other government research agencies, and many academics is providing us with a complex and emerging picture of men's violence.

Importantly, this work is helping us understand individual pathways to using violence, as well as broader social factors that contribute to the use of violence and abuse.

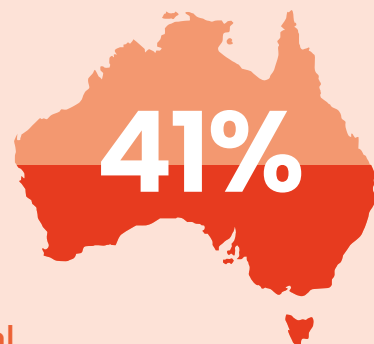
It also shows that we need better evidence about what works to create and support pathways out of using violence (ANROWS 2019).

In addition, while we know that many men who experience violence and abuse as children go on to use violence, not all men do. This points to the existence of protective factors that we can harness to prevent violence.

An estimated

**8 million
Australians**

aged 18 years and over have experience physical and/or sexual violence since the age of 15.



(ABS 2023)



This work with men and boys is not new.

While men's behaviour change programs have been around for decades, there remain divergent views about how the broader work with men and boys should be undertaken. There is also an increasing fear, driven by the rise of anti-feminist movements, that this work may be co-opted by nefarious actors.

This snapshot sets out the context and priority areas emerging from recent research, policy development and service delivery.

It provides a focus for a discussion about how we can better engage with men and boys to end gendered violence. It also invites reflection and reinvigoration to end gender-based violence in a generation.

To succeed, we must challenge ourselves to think critically and examine the evidence about what works, what needs to change and what more can be done.



"... despite our gains, our shared task to prevent violence in all its forms has potentially become more difficult than ever before."

Expert Panel, Rapid Review of Prevention Approaches (2024)

Key messages

● As we increase and expand our efforts to engage men and boys as part of the agenda to end violence against women, **we must honour the foundations that have been built** and ensure that new approaches strengthen, rather than undermine, the vital work already underway.

● Engage with men and boys to **change the conditions that enable DFSV**, including the gendered drivers of violence, and **promote accountability** as part of a broad-based approach to keep women and girls safe.

● We must do more to **embed the voices of people with lived experience** in policy and program design.

● **Expand prevention opportunities** across the service system, while ensuring services that respond to DFSV are resourced to keep pace with the needs of people who experience violence.

● Create a **shared understanding of all the factors that contribute to men's use of violence**, while acknowledging that there is no single approach that will reduce violence across the population.

● **Build a better evidence base to inform interventions** with men and boys. This includes further research to understand:

- the prevalence of violence
- pathways into and out of violence, and risk and protective factors
- how gender and gender norms interact with other reasons why men use violence
- effective bystander approaches
- the best ways to respond to online misogyny and anti-feminist extremism.

● Better **integrate men's behaviour change programs** and efforts to prevent violence more generally with the human services system and ensure these **programs meet agreed standards**.

● Expand program responses that **focus on promoting gender equality and healthy relationships and masculinities** for men and boys at key life transitions, with an explicit focus on sexism, homophobia and transphobia.



● We must foster agreement about how **extremism and men's violence** can be viewed within a national security lens.

● Learn from First Nations communities and community-led interventions that take a **holistic approach to men's health**. This acknowledges that the risk a person will use violence is associated with factors like childhood trauma, mental health, suicide and addiction.

● Develop a **national DFSV workforce development strategy** that leverages all frontline professionals to play a role in prevention and early intervention with men and boys at risk of using violence.

● Increase **connections between primary DFSV services and universal services** to provide holistic services for men to promote accountability and reduce violence.

● Adapt our efforts and approaches to ensure they are **engaging and effective for men and boys**, including providing opportunities to seek help online. Recognise men's diversity and ensure policies and programs reflect an intersectional approach that considers factors such as race, ethnicity, disability, socioeconomic status, sexuality and gender diversity.

● Ensure that our approaches are **relevant and accessible through co-designing engagement** on healthy masculinities and violence prevention with men and boys. We also need to support adults already engaging with men and boys everyday (for example, teachers, sports coaches, social workers, parents) to build the knowledge, skills and confidence to prevent violence.

● Use **strengths-based, inclusive language** to encourage men's participation and **promote help seeking**. Terms like 'toxic masculinity' are counterproductive.

Current trends

Despite the large body of research into DFSV, our knowledge about people who use violence is still developing and must continue to do so. However, we do know that most violence, including DFSV, is perpetrated by men (Flood et al. 2020).

We need to increase our understanding of risk factors and the extent of their harm in order to respond effectively.

Prevalence

There is currently no standardised approach to measuring the prevalence of perpetration of DFSV in Australia. This means that most of the key data is derived from victim-survivor experiences (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2025).

There is some recent research that begins to provide an insight into the rates of men using family, domestic and sexual violence.

In an Australian first, the Australian Institute of Criminology (AIC) recently undertook research to estimate the prevalence of recorded domestic and family violence (DFV) offending in a population sample in Australia (Payne and Morgan 2024).

This study found that 6.3% of people born in New South Wales – 9.6% of men and 3% of women – have been proceeded against by police for a DFV offence by age 37. Importantly, the AIC also found that just 2% of men born in New South Wales accounted for 45.4% of all DFV offences.

The Australian Institute of Family Studies (AIFS) *Ten to Men* survey (AIHW 2025; AIFS 2025) found that more than 1 in 3 Australian men (35%) aged 18–65 years have used intimate partner violence in their lifetime – up from 1 in 4 from a decade ago. The research also shows that each year, an estimated 120,000 men nationally use violence for the first time.

The Man Box 2024 study (Jesuit Social Services 2024) led by Jesuit Social Services in partnership with Respect Victoria supports these findings. The study found that almost a third of 18–30-year-old men (28%) reported perpetrating at least one of the 8 forms of violence it classified as intimate partner violence.



As confronting as these statistics are, we also know that most violence does not come to the attention of the criminal justice system. A recent Australian Law Reform Commission inquiry into justice responses to sexual violence found 9 out of 10 women who have experienced sexual violence did not report it to police (Australian Law Reform Commission 2025).

It is also clear from these statistics that if we are to meet our commitment under the *National Plan to End Violence Against Women and Children 2022–2032* (the National Plan) we need to engage with men and boys, more often and in different ways.

There is an urgent need for greater, targeted investment in research to understand the true scale of the perpetration of violence, as well as pathways into and out of perpetration.

Rise in misogynistic views among young men and boys

The National Community Attitudes Survey (ANROWS 2021) in 2021 found improvements in public understanding of, and attitudes towards, violence against women between 2013 and 2021.

However, other evidence shows a concerning rise in misogynistic views, particularly among young men and boys.

A recent University of Melbourne survey (Meger et al. 2024) found that:

- nearly 14% of respondents agreed with the use of violence to resist feminism
- support for anti-feminist violent extremism was highest among 18–29-year-olds, of whom 19% agreed with the legitimacy of violence to resist feminism. Men were also much more likely than women to express support for violent anti-feminist extremism
- 19.4% of male respondents agreed that feminism is damaging to our society and should be resisted by force if necessary.



"Practitioners ... reflected that public discussions about men and their role can focus on telling men what not to do, often leaving them feeling uncertain and confused about how to act. Young men who feel defensive, disenfranchised and uncertain may seek validation and guidance online."

eSafety Commission (n.d.)



"Protecting women and children is also about restoring the wellbeing of men, which will reduce incarceration and uplift the health and wellbeing of families and communities."

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Action Plan 2023–2025 (Department of Social Services 2023b)

Increasing numbers of men and boys are finding communities, particularly in online spaces, where their questions and uncertainty about their lives and future are co-opted and turned into resentment and hatred for women and feminism.

There is a growing recognition that online violent misogyny is linked to DFSV, and that it intersects with other forms of violent extremism. The current national *Counterterrorism and Violent Extremism Strategy* (Commonwealth of Australia 2025) explicitly references misogyny within the context of grievance-based violence.

We must foster agreement about how extremism and gendered violence can be viewed within a national security lens. This may present opportunities to use counter-terrorism knowledge to combat misogyny.

Policy context

Governments, researchers and community organisations are grappling with the urgency of responding to these alarming trends. This includes policy work to engage with men and boys.

The National Plan recognises that men have an important role to play to challenge views that support gender inequality and gender-based violence. It advocates working to change social attitudes and structural norms that condone violence against women and children, such as passive bystanding and victim blaming.

The National Plan's First Action Plan 2023–2027 (Department of Social Services 2023) includes actions for strengthening systems to hold people who use violence to account, and to support them to change their behaviour.



"Across history, gender inequality has overwhelmingly affected women more than men, with women who are marginalised because of their class, race and other factors facing even greater barriers. The data clearly demonstrates this continues to be the case – and nothing shows it more than the epidemic rates of violence against women.

Gender inequality and stereotypes also constrain men, limiting their choices, supports, and opportunities. Men are also victims of men's violence, and experience poorer education and health outcomes in a range of areas. They can feel unable to take on caring or traditional 'feminine' roles in their households and communities, and can miss out on connection with their families and friends."

Working for women (Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet 2024, p. 34)

The *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Action Plan 2023–2025* also highlights the need to provide men with additional support to enable and encourage them to choose non-violence.

Working for women: Australia's strategy for gender equality (Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet 2024) puts gender-based violence as priority 1: 'Equality cannot be achieved when so many women are experiencing violence at the hands of men and – often from men they know.'

The report from the *Rapid Review of Prevention Approaches (2024) Unlocking the prevention potential* also emphasises the importance of working effectively with men and boys to prevent violence.

In response to this report, National Cabinet committed \$4.7 billion in September 2024 to accelerate action under the *National Plan*. This includes measures to better identify and respond to high-risk users of violence.

ANROWS' national research agenda identifies people who use DFSV as a priority population for focus.

ANROWS argues that programs for men who use violence 'aren't just important – they're essential to breaking the cycle of violence' (ANROWS 2023).

Focus areas

Engaging men and boys meaningfully

Men are critical to the solution

This is not just ‘women’s work’. Addressing violence requires a response from the whole community, including men.

Many stakeholders told us that engagement must frame men as part of the solution rather than as a problem to be fixed. Too often, this does not happen.

The statistics about the prevalence of violence are confronting – but they also show that most men are not violent.

We must work better with those men, as well as men who use violence and the men who experienced violence as children or as young people, to support them to engage in the work to end gender-based violence and to better understand the factors that could have helped.

Increasing our focus on men and boys is vital to our efforts to keep women and girls safe through prevention. In fact, understanding the protective and risk factors for violence helps us work with men to hold them accountable for the harm they cause. This can help prevent violence before it occurs.

Promoting help seeking, accountability and the active participation of men in policy and program lifecycles will contribute to changing the conditions that enable violence.

And we must do this across the life course to capture opportunities for intervention and increased support at all ages.

First Nations communities and community-led interventions provide valuable lessons for working with men and boys. In many of these contexts, violence is seen as a whole-of-family

and whole-of-community issue. Everyone has a role in creating safety.

This approach is reflected in the *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Action Plan 2023–2025*.

It means responding to the full spectrum of men’s experiences of violence – men who use violence, men who are victims of violence particularly as children, men who are affected by violence against their loved ones, and men who use violence against themselves. For instance, adolescents using violence have often been victims of violence and abuse for many years. While not deterministic, they are also at higher risk of using violence against an intimate partner as an adult.

This work requires giving young men and boys the education and skills they need to have healthy relationships, understand consent, and communicate effectively and respectfully.

It also requires a holistic approach to men’s health. This recognises that factors like childhood trauma, mental health, suicide and addiction increase the risk a person will use violence.

Meeting men and boys where they are

Different men and boys will, due to their experiences, hold different risk and protective factors.

We need to use an intersectional lens to consider factors such as race, ethnicity, disability, socioeconomic status, sexuality, gender diversity and geography. And we must use evidence-based and trauma-informed programs that respond to community need.



It is concerning that, while there are promising place-based initiatives that support culturally and linguistically diverse men, these men remain largely absent from national strategies.

Similarly, initiatives targeting men and boys usually assume a cisgender and heterosexual audience, which limits their relevance for the LGBTIQ+ community.

Engagement with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander men must acknowledge and work within the ongoing multigenerational impacts of colonisation, racism and child removal policies. It must also acknowledge that what works in urban areas will not necessarily work in remote communities.

The National Agreement on Closing the Gap (2020) highlights the need for culturally safe, community-led responses to violence in Indigenous communities.

This also requires an expanded focus on men's healing, alongside specialist services.

The *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Action Plan 2023–2025* recognises that to end the cycle of violence, we need 'to go beyond punitive approaches for those who use violence and acknowledge that they are also in need of support to heal' (Department of Social Services 2023b).

In most instances the best responses to those using violence come from within their communities, with a level of community leadership and accountability.

Language matters

Language plays a crucial role in engaging men and boys effectively.

Policies, campaigns and services must use strengths-based, inclusive language to encourage men's participation.

Terms like 'toxic masculinity' and other deficit-based language alienate the very men we must reach. We need to use language that promotes positive change.

Moreover, programs and campaigns cannot simply be translated from English to other languages. They require a tailored approach.

Co-designing engagement with men and boys

To improve the ways in which we all work with and for men and boys, the Commission supports the recommendation of the *Unlocking the prevention potential report*.

This calls for the Commonwealth Government, with states and territories, to develop a national, coordinated and co-designed approach to engaging with men and boys on healthy masculinities and violence prevention. Noting the emergent nature of this effort, there is a need for greater transparency of respective practice approaches that are being used with different cohorts across different settings.

'Unlocking the prevention potential' recommendations:

- establish intersectional, DFSV-informed advisory mechanisms with multidisciplinary expertise for engaging with men and boys (for example around health, education or technology). This includes establishing an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Men's Advisory Body
- adopt a strengths-based national definition and measurement methodology for healthy masculinities to guide future campaigns and programs
- develop or expand DFSV-informed responses across sectors. These should focus on healthy relationships and masculinities at key transition points, such as leaving school, becoming a father, separating or relationship breakdown, recent migration and unemployment
- develop a national response, attuned to the experiences of men and boys, to reverse the rise of online misogyny and radicalisation. This includes targeted investment in research to understand risk factors and harm, collaboration with specialist frontline educators, and a focus on evidence-based regulation of the tech industry.

Accountability and responsibility

Men's behaviour change programs

There are two broad categories of funded interventions that address the perpetration of violence against women and children: police and legal responses, and men's behaviour change programs (MBCPs) (AIHW 2023).

MBCPs aim to challenge and change the attitudes and behaviours that underpin men's use of violence. They hold men accountable and help them to take responsibility for their actions by fostering self-awareness, accountability and a commitment to change.

There are many models of MBCPs grounded in different theoretical approaches and tailored for specific contexts or populations.

Although MBCPs are the cornerstone of responses to men who use violence, many communities across Australia still do not have access to even the most basic of these interventions – and where they do, there are all too often prohibitive waiting lists.

Further work is required to better integrate our understanding of coercive control into programs that seek to change men's behaviour. Focusing on coercive control may provide an effective entry point to working with men.

Better integration of MBCPs within the service system

Originally, MBCPs were intended as part of a coordinated community response, working with justice and other sectors to promote safety and reduce risk.

However, in practice, they are often funded in isolation from other sectors, with organisations driving their own efforts to establish and leverage wider relationships to achieve this original program aim.

Better integration of MBCPs with the justice, social services, health and child protection sectors would provide improved safety for people experiencing harm and violence, as well as holistic support for families (ANROWS 2025).



"With appropriate training and increased information sharing between agencies, human services agencies could work together with the justice system and with specialist domestic and family violence agencies to create a "web of accountability", and to guide men towards changing their violent behaviours, their violence-supportive attitudes and their use of coercive control."

ANROWS (2025)



Alternatives to MBCPs

Group-based MBCPs are not suitable for all men.

Some men need individual support, case management and coordination. Others need alternative interventions, such as those that focus on fathering.

We must develop formal and informal supports that help men understand the impacts of their behaviour and stay accountable for changing it.

However, despite the growing awareness of and demand for these alternative options, their availability is limited in most parts of Australia. Significant gaps also remain as it relates to adolescents at risk of or already using violence.

There are often additional challenges for those exiting prison who do not have secure housing or who are no longer welcome in their community. Ensuring appropriate social supports to those leaving prison are important to ensuring women and children's safety, and reducing recidivism.

Restorative justice

In addition to conventional responses to the use of DFSV, recent research, inquiries and reports reiterate the role of restorative justice as a way to address the justice needs (Australian Law Reform Commission 2024) of people who have experienced harm, including sexual violence.

The availability of restorative justice services should be expanded across the country. This can include using restorative justice to reset relationships within a family in response to an adolescent using violence at home. Too often intervention orders are the sole response leading to homelessness and criminalisation.

Some stakeholders express concern that responding to sexual violence outside the criminal justice system risks undermining community perceptions of its seriousness. However, the main goal should be to meet the different justice needs of different people who have experienced sexual violence – and we have heard consistently that not all of them want to go through the criminal justice system.

Restorative justice can also provide new ways for people who use violence to take responsibility for their actions and change their behaviour.

● Building the capacity of universal services to respond to gender-based violence

Sectors outside the primary DFSV sector – such as health, alcohol and other drug, and homelessness services, among others – play important roles in addressing DFSV.

We know that DFSV risk increases during times of relationship changes and breakdowns, unemployment, natural disasters, migration and fatherhood (McLindon et al. 2025). With wraparound support, these critical life events and transitions also provide opportunities to motivate men to change their behaviour.

Unlocking the prevention potential highlights the need to invest in frontline professionals, including police, legal, health, education and social services, who regularly interact with men at risk of using violence.

These sectors can help to provide early intervention to prevent violence, or prevent it escalating.

To do this, we need to ensure that workers have the skills and confidence to respond effectively. This means focusing on workforce education, training and ongoing professional development.

The *Ten to Men* study identified other important intervention points in men's lives, which the broader service sector can leverage.

For example, men who reported positive and caring relationships with a father or father figure, or had good social connections, were less likely to report having used intimate partner violence. In contrast, men who reported higher levels of depressive symptoms or had suicide-related experiences were more likely to use intimate partner violence.

These findings present clear areas for policy development and greater investment that is based on risk and risk management. It does not mean that improving men's mental health will simply eliminate men's violence. But it will support some men to be less violent.

The Commission has called for a national DFSV workforce development strategy, which must include all frontline workers who work with men and boys. Foundational training and ongoing learning must become core for these workforces.

We must invest in the development of these workforces to give them the skills, knowledge and resources they need to respond effectively to men and boys.



● Evidence-informed approaches to reducing violence

We also need to continue to build the evidence base around what works to engage men and boys, including pathways into and out of perpetration of DFSV.⁸

Understanding these pathways will enable us to intervene to prevent and respond to violence.

The Commission supports funding models that provide long-term certainty and the flexibility to adapt to local contexts.

Contracts should, where possible, focus on demonstrating long-term impact, such as increased safety, reduced use of violence or long-term positive attitudinal change, rather than short-term outputs, such as the number of people who attended a workshop.

Funding models must also include budget for program evaluation and a requirement for the lessons from that evaluation to be shared. Too often there is a disconnect between policy makers, practitioners and researchers.

These gaps must be closed through national governance arrangements that provide a mechanism to better incorporate research evidence, practitioner wisdom and lived experience including as we work towards development of the second *National Action Plan*.

We must do more to embed the voices of people with lived experience in policy and program design.

Doing this in a way that is trauma-informed and safe for everyone is complex work. We need more research on how to safely and appropriately work with those who have used violence.

The benefits of hearing the voices of people with a range of experiences are enormous.

⁸ The 2024–2025 Budget committed \$4.0 million for Australia's National Research Organisation for Women's Safety (ANROWS) to further build the evidence based on pathways into and out of perpetration of family, domestic and sexual violence.

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