



# Men and Boys Roundtable

## Background

The National Plan to End Violence against Women and Children 2022–2032 (the National Plan) calls for a **“clear and sustained focus on perpetration”**<sup>1</sup> to end violence against women and children. But the strategies implemented to date have not been as effective as what are needed.

There is growing consensus that a more focused and comprehensive approach is needed to engage men and boys in efforts to prevent and respond to domestic, family and sexual violence (DFSV).

As outlined in the Commission’s 2024 Yearly Report to Parliament, **“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.”**<sup>2</sup>

## Reviewing insights from 2023

In November 2023, the Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence Commission (the Commission) held its first roundtable meeting on Men and Masculinities, which identified five key themes:

1. Many men are alienated by the idea of toxic masculinity in the absence of a positive model for healthy or positive ways of being.
2. The systems themselves are traumatising for many who experience them, regardless of their entry point.
3. There is a lack of clarity relating to men’s experience as both perpetrators and victims of violence, not only by the community but also by the service and justice systems.
4. There must be more sustained and sustainable funding as well as better evaluation of early intervention programs and initiatives.
5. There is growing concern about misogyny online, including misogynist influencers and violent pornography.<sup>3</sup>

## 2024 Men and Boys Roundtable

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**2024 brought about a significant shift in the way men and boys are considered in the work to prevent and respond to DFSV.**

Specific recommendations or findings related to men and boys were included in the Commission's Yearly Report to Parliament<sup>4</sup>, the Rapid Review into Prevention Approaches Report<sup>5</sup>, the meeting outcomes from National Cabinet, and the Senate Inquiry into Missing and Murdered First Nations Women, among others.

On 12 November 2024 the Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence Commission convened a roundtable including over 40 participants from community, government and academia to progress the conversation about better ways to work with men and boys to prevent and respond to DFSV. The roundtable also delved into the critical question: what do we mean when we say we need to “engage men”?

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# What we heard



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## Priority areas for action

Roundtable attendees identified the following as key actions for governments to prioritise.

### 1. Increase engagement and learning opportunities:

We must learn more from men and boys, and also learn more from practitioners doing the work.

### 2. Diversity and intersectionality:

Better recognition of the diversity among and within men and boys is critical for better engagement and outcomes. We need to increase funding to community-specific MBCPs.

### 3. Men's behaviour change programs (MBCP):

We must diversify the service options available to men using violence.

### 4. Prioritise boys and young men:

This is particularly important in early intervention programs based on risk factors, such as experiences of abuse in childhood or who are displaying harmful behaviours.

### 5. Activate the health sector:

Acknowledge the role that health sector already plays in supporting men and boys, while also further integrating their support into DFSV-specific programs.

## 1. Increase engagement and learning opportunities

To ensure the programs that are designed to engage with men and boys are effective, they must be co-designed by men and boys, but the formal mechanisms to do this do not yet exist.

### Language and engagement

Holding men accountable for the harm they cause remains critical. Yet, roundtable participants feel the stereotypical approach of speaking to and about men that places them all as 'a problem to be fixed,' and that sees men and ideas of masculinity as negative until proven otherwise, must change. This dominant narrative can present all men as violent and potentially dangerous. This may not be how this language is intended but is often how it is received. This disengages men who want to contribute to efforts to eliminate DFSV, and can also inhibit men from seeking support for their behaviour.

### Learning and sharing

There must be greater sharing of knowledge across the sector. There is a wealth of experience and valuable work being done, but it often remains siloed and is not shared with other practitioners. November 2024 roundtable participants identified important opportunities to learn from specific community groups, such as First Nations communities and the LGBTIQA+SB community, and from other organisations already doing this work. However, the necessary structures for fostering collaboration and knowledge exchange do not yet exist.

## 2. Diversity and intersectionality

### Local solutions to local problems

Policies and programs must be designed and implemented by and for the group that policy or program is seeking to engage. Funding structures and guidelines must better allow for program and policy design and implementation to be adapted to specific local contexts by its local community while ensuring that they still align with evidence and relevant guidelines.

### Intersectionality and inclusion

Intersectionality needs to be embedded into efforts by understanding and engaging with the specific intersections between gender, masculinity, sexism and other processes of power, such as racism, homophobia, colonisation and ableism, among others, in order to be truly accessible for the men the program is seeking to engage. Efforts to eliminate DFSV cannot be separated from efforts to eliminate racism, homophobia, ableism and other forms of discrimination.

### Accessibility and intersectionality of MBCPs

Roundtable participants reinforced the importance of intersectionality within MBCPs to ensure they are accessible to, and effective with, men across society.

There must be space for programs to be tailored by the local community, for the local community, where they can be developed and customised collaboratively by local leaders and subject matter experts, in line with minimum standards.

For First Nations communities and the LGBTIQA+SB communities, working with men using violence is centred in compassion, with a strengths-based perspective that seeks to support men to change. Participants agreed that the mainstream must learn from the organisations that do whole-of-family and whole-of-community response to violence.

### 3. Men's Behaviour Change Programs

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#### There is an overreliance on men's behaviours change programs.

Men's behaviour-change programs (MBCP), as critical as they are, have come to represent the entire service system available to men who use violence, even though this was never their intended role. MBCPs should be part of a diverse eco-system of services available to men either using, or at risk of using violence, where men needing support can be referred to the most appropriate service for that individual man. However, this service system does not yet exist.

#### Evidence brief

In October 2024, the Commission commissioned ANROWS to develop an evidence brief on the latest evidence regarding MBCPs. A draft of this evidence review was presented for discussion at the November 2024 roundtable and highlighted several important actions that must be undertaken to improve the efficacy of MBCPs and to, most importantly, increase safety for the partner in a violent relationship. This Evidence Brief has now been formally released and can be viewed in full [here](#).

### 4. Prioritise boys and young men

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#### Act early for better prevention

2024 roundtable participants suggested there should be an increased focus on early intervention for boys and young men using violence, and an increased focus on healing for boys who have grown up, or are growing up, in violent homes.

There are significant numbers of children who have been exposed to DFSV<sup>6</sup> and this exposure has significant, long-lasting developmental impacts, including a link between "childhood exposure to domestic and family violence with future perpetration."<sup>7</sup>

### 5. Activate the health system

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#### Opportunities

Attendees supported the position that providing holistic responses to men using violence is a key to effectively supporting violent men to use violence less. Building the capacity of the health sector to support the specialist work being undertaken with men using violence can ensure those men get the holistic support they need to not use violence, while engaging in an ecosystem of reinforcing messaging that does not collude or victim blame.

#### Risks

However, there is great need to ensure this workforce has the appropriate skills and training. Without a detailed understanding of the dynamics of family violence and the often-manipulative practices of people using violence, non-specialist service providers can accidentally become collusive, can minimise the impact of violence, and potentially fall into victim blaming practices.

# The Commission will:



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- Reflect what we have heard in our 2025 Yearly Report to Parliament
  - Release a more detail snapshot from what it has heard from experts regarding better work with men and boys to address DFSV.
  - Support DSS in the development of National Men's Behaviour Changes, as was agreed to at National Cabinet in September 2024.
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## ENDNOTES

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<sup>1</sup> Commonwealth of Australia, 2022, *The National Plan to End Violence against Women and Children 2022–2032*, [National Plan to End Violence against Women and Children 2022–2032](https://www.dfsvc.gov.au/sites/default/files/2024-10/DFSVC0011%20YearlyReport2024%28A4%29_FA6.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence Commission, 2024, *Yearly Report to Parliament*, [https://www.dfsvc.gov.au/sites/default/files/2024-10/DFSVC0011%20YearlyReport2024%28A4%29\\_FA6.pdf](https://www.dfsvc.gov.au/sites/default/files/2024-10/DFSVC0011%20YearlyReport2024%28A4%29_FA6.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence Commission, 2023, *Roundtable into Men and Masculinities*, [Roundtable into Men & Masculinities November-2023.pdf](https://www.dfsvc.gov.au/sites/default/files/2023-11/DFSVC0011%20Roundtable%20into%20Men%20and%20Masculinities_November-2023.pdf) (dfsvc.gov.au)

<sup>4</sup> Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence Commission, 2024, *Yearly Report to Parliament*, [https://www.dfsvc.gov.au/sites/default/files/2024-10/DFSVC0011%20YearlyReport2024%28A4%29\\_FA6.pdf](https://www.dfsvc.gov.au/sites/default/files/2024-10/DFSVC0011%20YearlyReport2024%28A4%29_FA6.pdf)

<sup>5</sup> Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet, 2024, *Rapid Review of Prevention Approaches*, [Rapid Review of Prevention Approaches | PM&C](https://www.pmc.gov.au/rapid-review/prevention-approaches)

<sup>6</sup> Haslam et al., 2023, *The prevalence and impact of child maltreatment in Australia: Findings from the Australian Child Maltreatment Study: Brief Report*, [The prevalence and impact of child maltreatment in Australia: Findings from the Australian Child Maltreatment Study: 2023 Brief Report – The Australian Child Maltreatment Study \(ACMS\)](https://www.aifs.gov.au/acs/research/child-maltreatment-study/2023-brief-report)

<sup>7</sup> AIFS, 2015, *Children's exposure to domestic and family violence*, [Children's exposure to domestic and family violence | Australian Institute of Family Studies \(aifs.gov.au\)](https://www.aifs.gov.au/acs/research/childrens-exposure-to-domestic-and-family-violence)

