

4 AUGUST 2026



Families bereaved by femicide

Second Action Plan consultation report



Purpose of the session

This session formed part of the Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence (DFSV) Commission's consultation program to inform the development of the Second Action Plan under the *National Plan to End Violence against Women and Children 2022–2032*. The DFSV Commission partnered with Sherele Moody from Australian Femicide Watch to engage family members and loved ones of murdered women and children from her network. The session was also attended by members of the DFSV Commission's Lived Experience Advisory Council also bereaved by femicide.

The discussion was intentionally open in format, providing participants with the opportunity to identify and explore issues most important to them. The conversation focused on opportunities to strengthen early intervention, improve responses to domestic, family and sexual violence, and better support recovery and healing for people who have experienced violence, as well as families and loved ones affected by femicide.

Executive summary

A strong and consistent theme throughout the consultation was the failure of information sharing across systems, including police, child protection, mental health, justice and support services, particularly where matters crossed state and territory borders. Participants described numerous instances where critical information about people using violence, prior offending, mental health concerns or escalating risk was known within parts of the service system but not shared with those able to intervene. Concerns about inadequate bail decisions, insufficient monitoring of high-risk offenders and a lack of accountability for agencies, professionals and bystanders who failed to act were also prominent. Many participants believed that more effective risk assessment, nationally coordinated information-sharing arrangements and stronger oversight of high-risk perpetrators may have created opportunities to prevent the deaths of women and children.

Participants consistently reflected on multiple missed opportunities for early intervention before serious violence occurred. Across a range of service systems, families described warning signs and risk factors that were identified but not acted upon, contributing to escalating harm and, ultimately, femicide. These experiences reinforced a view that current responses are often fragmented and reactive, rather than proactive and preventative.

The importance of prevention through education and broader cultural change was also a significant focus of discussion. Participants expressed concern about the prevalence of misogyny, harmful attitudes towards women and girls, and the growing influence of online content that normalises violence, entitlement and disrespect. Many called for age-appropriate education from early childhood through to secondary school on respectful relationships, consent, gender equality, emotional regulation, coercive control, and domestic and family violence. Participants also highlighted the need to better equip schools, teachers and communities to recognise and respond to children impacted by trauma, grief and family violence. There was a strong view that greater investment in prevention is required to address the attitudes, behaviours and early warning signs that can contribute to violence against women and children before significant harm occurs.

A further dominant theme was the perception that justice, legal and support systems too often fail victims and their families while affording greater protections to those who use violence. Participants described challenging and traumatic experiences across police investigations, coronial processes, court proceedings and victims' support systems, frequently reporting feelings of exclusion, silencing and inadequate support. Many also spoke of difficulties accessing counselling, financial assistance and practical supports in the aftermath of homicide. Participants called for more trauma-informed and family-centred responses, immediate and ongoing support for families bereaved by domestic, family and sexual violence, improved opportunities for victims' families to participate in legal processes, stronger accountability across institutions, and greater recognition of femicide as a distinct form of violence against women.

What we heard

Overarching themes

- The system is currently missing opportunities to intervene early before a significant violent incident. Multiple warning signs are being missed by agencies, contributing to increased risk within the community and resulting in femicide.
- Information sharing between agencies and jurisdictions is in drastic need of significant improvement, to improve safety for women and children and reduce the risk of serious harm.
- Current justice system processes, including bail arrangements, intervention orders and sentencing, are falling significantly short of family and community expectations of justice.
- The processes required for families to engage with the justice system are complex, opaque and in many cases contributing to ongoing trauma for families bereaved by femicide.
- The justice system is being weaponised by some perpetrators to impede families' access to justice, including through gag orders and shaming by defense counsel.
- There are significant opportunities to improve education, particularly for children and young people, on bodily safety, consent and respectful relationships.
- Online misogyny is having a dramatic impact on the rise of violence towards women.
- Healing and recovery support must be lifelong and include psychological, physical and financial recovery options which are affordable and accessible.
- There is an opportunity to hold media and other public institutions more accountable to victims through improved reporting and greater privacy protection.
- Children and young people must be adequately supported to reduce the potential for intergenerational trauma.

Information sharing within and between agencies and jurisdictions

What participants told us

- A lack of information sharing between relevant agencies, including child protection and police, has contributed directly to increased risk of victimisation.
- A gap in information sharing between jurisdictions has led to an increased risk of people who use violence being released or unmonitored in the community.
- Better communication between police, courts, mental health services and child protection would dramatically improve opportunities for early intervention.
- The fragmentation of systems is allowing dangerous offenders to “fall through the cracks.”

What participants said needs to change

- Information sharing internal to and between organisations needs to be urgently addressed.
- A national database containing relevant information on people known to be a risk to the community should be established and maintained.
- Improved communication between jurisdictions in instances where people with a history of violence are relocating.

Bail, sentencing and accountability for people who use violence

What participants told us

- Many participants expressed frustration with repeat offenders receiving bail or being released into the community without adequate protections in place.
- Some participants reported a dismay with the lack of accountability for offenders and those responsible for supervising them, including instances where the release of defendants was predicated on supervision by responsible community members.
- Several participants noted that in their cases, violent offender were repeatedly released despite known risks.
- There was strong sentiment among the group that current justice responses prioritise offender rights over victim safety.
- Many participants noted that their experiences had left them feeling a high level of distrust in policing and legal systems.

What participants said needs to change

- Tougher bail laws for repeat violent offenders.
- Stronger monitoring of high-risk offenders.
- Comprehensive risk assessments for people on bail or leaving prison.
- Ankle monitoring for serious offenders.
- Greater accountability for people acting as bail guarantors, including financial incentives.
- Better enforcement of intervention orders.
- Mandatory no-contact periods after family violence orders.

Justice system accountability to victims’ families

What participants told us

- Participants reported that significant opportunities to intervene early were not actioned because their concerns, or those of other family members, were not taken seriously.
- Many participants reported feeling dismissed by the police either at the time of initial report of homicide or throughout the investigation.
- Many family members noted that they felt marginalised within justice and court proceedings, and having to process their own grief while also engaging in complex court environments.
- Several participants noted their frustration at a lack of information sharing and transparency within the court process, including lack of awareness of bail conditions or arrangements which jeopardised safety and healing.
- Some participants raised that they felt silenced by court processes, including through victim impact statements, while courts prioritised the comfort and safety of people who use violence.

“I just wanted information on how the case against the person who killed my loved one was progressing. I got given a pamphlet for grief counselling. I got referred to another service and they gave me the same pamphlet for grief counselling. I don’t want a pamphlet for grief counselling, I want to know what’s going on.”

PARTICIPANT

What participants said needs to change

- Increase opportunities for families to have transparency and access to information in proceedings, including coronial investigations, police investigations and civil proceedings.
- Shift emphasis from support for perpetrators to support for victims’ families.
- Increase police and court officer training to respond more appropriately and effectively to families bereaved by femicide.

Education for children, young people and the broader community

What participants told us

- Participants expressed strong support for increased education for all ages on gender-based violence, consent and body safety.
- Participants noted that this education needs to begin early and consider not just respectful relationships education but also attitudes, consent, help seeking, emotional regulation and resilience.
- Participants strongly supported improved education challenging misogyny and harmful gendered stereotypes, including the need to challenge an emerging threat from online spaces which are radicalising young men.
- Participants noted the need for this education to include parents to ensure that the information being received by children and young people would be reinforced in their homes.
- Some participants also noted that better teacher training in trauma-informed practice to improve responses to families bereaved by femicide would have both an immediate and longer-term impact, diminishing stigma and providing support at the same time.

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Healing and recovery support for people bereaved by femicide

What participants told us

- Many participants described both themselves and other family members developing complex PTSD and compound grief because of their bereavement, with ongoing health and psychological impacts for children, parents and extended family.
- Participants noted that many and multiple systems required them to “prove” they had been traumatised by repeatedly sharing their story with multiple agencies and individuals.
- Participants expressed frustration that support services available were either crisis-driven or not fit for purpose.
- Some participants noted that they were provided with a one-size-fits-all counselling response from organisations which should have been offering a broader range of supports, and that this counselling was not appropriate to their needs.
- Participants observed that many interventions are heavily siloed and don’t adequately address the needs of whole families to work separately and collectively on their healing and recovery journey.
- Participants noted that the impacts of femicide were not only psychological, noting long-term financial impacts experienced by families because of bereavement. These impacts included persistent housing insecurity, financial instability and high costs of support and care.
- Some participants noted that the ongoing administrative burden of engaging with court systems, governments and victim support agencies left them feeling socially isolated and exhausted.
- In many cases, this effort continues for years and decades, while families continue to fight for justice alongside their attempts to heal and recover from trauma.

What participants said needs to change

- Lifelong, practical support should be provided to all family members who have experienced bereavement caused by femicide.
- Immediate counselling access regardless of legal and financial status.
- Flexible emergency financial assistance, and other forms of emergency support should be provided, including funeral support.
- An emphasis should be on family-centred approaches rather than individualised responses.
- A flexible approach to government support for victims’ families must be available to ensure that help is available when and if it is needed.
- A more sophisticated approach to assistance for victims is required to address multiple impacts of femicide both in the immediate crisis response and then across the lifespan.

Culture, media reporting and privacy

What participants told us

- Participants noted the importance of acknowledging that femicide was a term which comprised a range of different circumstances including intimate partner homicide, filicide, acquaintance homicide and stranger homicide.
- Some participants noted that there has been a failure of governments to identify femicide and its causes as a distinct issue.
- Many participants expressed frustration that in some cases, femicide is being framed as being related to mental illness or other factors while overlooking the presence of misogynistic or harmful views about women held by the perpetrator.
- Participants expressed dismay with media and public reporting relating to femicide.
- Some participants reported that institutions seemed reluctant to name violence against women as being the result of harmful attitudes towards individual women and women as a group.
- Some participants noted that the public “fascination” with true crime and violence against women has led to multiple media agencies and individuals profiting off the lives of victims and their families, with privacy rights extinguished through public records provided by courts.
- By contrast, many participants expressed frustration at the use of gag orders by perpetrators to conceal their identities, resulting in ongoing harm to families through lack of accountability.

What participants said needs to change

- There is an opportunity to break cycles of harmful reporting by media agencies and outlets.
- A greater emphasis by courts and other public institutions in maintaining the privacy of victims following their death.

Children and intergenerational trauma

What participants told us

- Participants noted that young people bereaved by femicide experience significant ongoing trauma which is exacerbated by:
 - Bullying and stigma experienced in school and in the community;
 - Lack of trauma-informed educational environments, including lack of appropriate responses by educators and the education system;
 - Insufficient support for grieving siblings and children;
 - Exposure to misogynistic attitudes among peers.
- Some participants expressed concern and frustration that young people were not provided with an opportunity to talk openly about their experiences and grief or were in some cases actively prohibited from discussing it.
- Participants also noted the significant harm caused by intergenerational trauma for extended family members including children, grandchildren and cousins.

What participants said needs to change

- Improved and immediate access to appropriate and sustained counselling support for children and young people.
- The service system needs to respond to and resource lifelong access to service and supports for people bereaved by femicide.

We sincerely thank everyone who generously shared their time and insights with us.

