

27 AND 30 JULY 2026



People with lived experience of domestic, family and sexual violence

Second Action Plan consultation report



Purpose of the session

The Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence (DFSV) Commission brought together people with lived and living experience of DFSV to help shape advice on priorities for the Second Action Plan. Members of the Lived Experience Advisory Council and other lived experience leaders reviewed the proposed stakeholder list and identified gaps, helping to ensure representation across First Nations peoples, other priority cohorts and people with intersecting lived experience identities. The DFSV Commission then directly invited individuals with lived experience and approached relevant organisations, councils and networks to identify a lived experience representative from their community or membership network.

The sessions explored what is working, where gaps remain, and what changes are needed to improve safety, healing, recovery and long-term outcomes. The sessions further explored gaps in addressing the needs of diverse communities, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Participant insights will help shape recommendations for inclusion in the Second Action Plan and continue to directly inform the DFSV Commission's advice to Government.

Executive summary

This report summarises the views, experiences and recommendations shared by participants across two lived experience consultations convened by the DFSV Commission. Participants drew on their lived and living expertise of DFSV, child sexual abuse (CSA), intrafamilial child sexual abuse (IFCSA), coercive control, systems engagement and recovery. Across both consultations, participants consistently highlighted the need for responses that centre agency for people who have experienced DFSV, improve trust and accountability within systems, strengthen prevention efforts, and invest in long-term healing and recovery.

Participants described significant barriers to safety and support, including fragmented service systems, inappropriate or unsafe systemic responses, information asymmetry, financial insecurity, housing instability, cultural and systemic barriers, and responses that often require people to reach crisis point before assistance becomes available. They suggested that new pathways for finding safety are needed as existing pathways are too often unsafe. Participants also emphasised the importance of recognising coercive control as a foundational driver of violence, improving responses to children and young people, increasing visibility of IFCSA, and ensuring diverse community experiences are reflected in policy, service design and implementation.

Participants identified both longstanding and emerging challenges for the Second Action Plan, including technology-facilitated abuse (TFA), artificial intelligence (AI), digital exclusion and evolving forms of coercive control. Throughout both consultations there was a strong and consistent message that people with lived experience should be embedded across governance, policy development, implementation and evaluation, with community-led solutions recognised as critical to improving safety, healing and recovery outcomes.

What we heard

Note: Individual participants have not been identified in this summary.

Overarching themes

- Effective responses require a shift from basic compliance towards safe, person-centred outcomes. Participants emphasised that people who have experienced DFSV should be empowered to make informed decisions about their own safety, wellbeing and recovery. They consistently highlighted the importance of having safe choices, information, autonomy and practical support that respects them as experts in their own lives.
- Participants described widespread mistrust of systems and services resulting from fragmented responses, inconsistent practices and experiences of institutional harm. They called for more coordinated, transparent and accountable systems that prioritise safety and wellbeing.
- Participants consistently called for greater investment in prevention through education, community awareness and cultural change. They described a need for earlier conversations about healthy relationships, coercive control, boundaries and abuse across schools, families, workplaces and communities.
- Participants consistently emphasised that finding safety is only one stage of the recovery journey. They highlighted the need for sustained investment in housing, economic security, healing and long-term recovery supports.
- Participants consistently identified coercive control as a foundational form of harm that remains poorly understood and inadequately addressed, particularly when linked with CSA. They also called for greater recognition of IFCSA and for children to be recognised as victims in their own right within DFSV policy, prevention and response frameworks.
- Participants emphasised that effective responses must be tailored to diverse experiences and informed by those closest to the issue. They consistently advocated for culturally safe, community-led approaches.
- Meaningful lived experience guidance and leadership is needed, not only in consultation processes but throughout governance, funding, service design, implementation and evaluation.
- Participants identified technology-facilitated abuse (TFA) as a significant and rapidly evolving challenge. They described technology as increasingly being used to extend coercive control, surveillance, exploitation and abuse.

Agency, choice and informed decision-making

What participants told us

Participants described systems that often prioritise institutional processes over the agency of people impacted by violence. Many spoke about not understanding their rights, available options or the likely consequences of engaging with different services, legal systems or interventions. Participants repeatedly highlighted the value of receiving clear information upfront and being able to make informed decisions based on their own circumstances rather than being directed towards a single pathway. They emphasised that people with lived experience of DFSV often need support to understand options rather than being told what decisions to make.

A recurring message was that safety does not look the same for everyone. Participants challenged assumptions that people impacted by DFSV always want to leave a relationship, engage police or pursue criminal justice outcomes. Some highlighted that people experiencing violence may want the violence to stop rather than the relationship to end. Participants also emphasised the importance of peer navigators and support from people with lived experience who can help explain systems, reduce isolation and support informed decision-making throughout the journey of a person experiencing violence.

What participants said needs to change

- Recognise that there are multiple pathways to safety and recovery.
- Provide clear, accessible and culturally appropriate information about rights, options and likely outcomes.
- Embed safe choices throughout service and system responses.
- Introduce clearer accountability, handover processes and system navigation supports, including peer navigators.
- Expand peer navigation and lived experience support models.
- Support informed decision-making rather than directing people with lived experience of DFSV toward predetermined responses.
- Design responses that recognise diverse cultural contexts and individual circumstances.
- Provide diverse response options for people living in rural, regional and remote locations.

System reform, trust, accountability and accessible responses

What participants told us

- Many participants described needing to repeatedly tell their story across multiple services and jurisdictions, often while managing trauma, safety concerns and complex service systems.
- There was strong support for more coordinated information sharing, such as between DFSV services, health services and Centrelink, as well as concerns about inaccurate records, loss of context, privacy breaches and information being shared without consent. Participants described examples where poor information sharing increased risk, reinforced misinformation or created opportunities for people who use violence to manipulate systems. Participants repeatedly raised concerns about accountability, including the need for mechanisms to correct inaccurate records, improve oversight, ensure context remains attached to information and focus on whether systems improve safety rather than simply completing administrative tasks.
- Participants also described experiences of being disbelieved, misidentified, judged or harmed by systems that lacked understanding of trauma, coercive control or diverse lived experiences. Many discussed experiences of not being believed, having trauma responses misunderstood or being judged against notions of the “perfect” or “good” victim. In fact, multiple participants described that unless they are the “perfect” or “good” victim, interacting with service responses such as police, could be dangerous. Participants also noted a fear of being honest as disclosing mental health concerns or suicidality may risk losing children.

What participants said needs to change

- Reduce the burden on people with lived experience of DFSV to repeatedly tell their stories.
- Develop survivor-controlled information sharing models that prioritise informed consent.
- Improve coordination and accountability across systems and jurisdictions.
- Improve information quality, transparency and opportunities to correct inaccurate records.
- Improve system responses for complex case management.
- Address misidentification and system-driven harms.
- Build trust through transparency, responsiveness and meaningful accountability.
- Measure success by safety and wellbeing outcomes rather than administrative processes.

Prevention through education, awareness and cultural change

What participants told us

Participants reflected on the ways social norms, cultural beliefs and community narratives can make violence difficult to recognise. Many described growing up with understandings of relationships, gender roles and love that normalised unhealthy behaviours or obscured coercive control.

Participants highlighted that many people do not identify their experiences as violence because they lack the language, education or examples needed to recognise harmful behaviours.

Participants also challenged the assumption that responsibility for recognising and responding to violence should rest solely with the people who are directly impacted by DFSV. They pointed to multiple societal touchpoints, such as schools, healthcare providers, workplaces, community organisations, gyms, pharmacies, banks, and broader communities as critical sites for prevention and early identification. They noted that the media has a role in shaping the cultural narratives around DFSV in Australia and would like to see higher standards of practice in reporting on DFSV.

Some participants also raised the importance of earlier support and education for people who use violence before behaviours escalate.

What participants said needs to change

- Strengthen healthy and respectful relationships education across schools and communities.
- Improve community awareness of coercive control, DFSV, CSA and IFCSA, using tools to communicate with the wide range of cultures within Australian society.
- Invest in community-led education and prevention initiatives.
- Improve media literacy, public awareness campaigns and community conversations.
- Challenge societal assumptions and narratives around people who use violence to foster a shift from framing people who use violence as monsters to recognising that people using violence are usually known, liked and loved by those around them.
- Expand opportunities for earlier intervention and support for people using violence.
- Equip frontline professionals to identify violence earlier and respond appropriately.

Moving beyond crisis: long-term healing, recovery and economic security

What participants told us

Many participants felt current systems focus heavily on crisis intervention while neglecting what happens afterwards. Participants described recovery as a long-term process that requires stable housing, financial independence, employment opportunities, therapeutic support, community connection and ongoing assistance. Several participants noted that people with lived experience of violence are often expected to navigate recovery largely on their own after initial crisis responses end.

Housing insecurity, financial dependence and poverty were repeatedly identified as barriers to both safety and recovery. Participants described circumstances where remaining in a violent situation was less risky than homelessness, the uncertainty and stress of family court, financial insecurity, and loss of community that would arise from leaving. Recovery was framed not only as individual healing, but also as rebuilding stability, agency, connections and hope for the future.

What participants said needs to change

- Increase investment in long-term healing and recovery initiatives.
- Improve access to safe, affordable and long-term housing.
- Strengthen economic empowerment and employment pathways.
- Invest in peer support and community-led recovery programs.
- Improve access to specialist therapeutic services.
- Improve access to legal services, particularly in rural, regional and remote locations.
- Ensure support remains available beyond the initial crisis period.

Recognition of coercive control, intrafamilial child sexual abuse and children’s experiences in general

What participants told us

Participants described coercive control as a central mechanism underpinning many forms of violence, including child sexual abuse and IFCSA. They highlighted how coercion, manipulation, gaslighting and control can prevent people from recognising their experiences as abuse, delay disclosure and create significant barriers to seeking support. Participants noted that coercive control is not well understood in the community and that all domestic and family violence includes an element of coercive control.

There was also significant discussion about IFCSA as a hidden and under-recognised form of violence. Participants described barriers to disclosure, community silence, intergenerational impacts and the lack of visibility of IFCSA within current policy and service systems.

Children and young people were frequently described as overlooked by existing responses, with significant barriers to tailored services, particularly if they are trying to access them without a parent or guardian, and inadequate recognition of their experiences. Additional consideration should be given to young carers and young parents in government policy.

What participants said needs to change

- Increase recognition of coercive control throughout prevention, response and recovery frameworks.
- Explicitly recognise IFCSA within domestic, family and sexual violence policy and responses.
- Develop stronger policy and practice responses to IFCSA, including a national strategy or framework for addressing it.
- Improve community awareness and reduce stigma associated with CSA and IFCSA.
- Increase opportunities for peer support and specialist services for survivors of IFCSA.
- Improve support pathways for all children and young people impacted by DFSV, including housing support.
- Strengthen workforce capability to recognise and respond to children who have experienced violence.

Diverse communities, lived experience leadership and community-led solutions

What participants told us

Participants highlighted the limitations of one-size-fits-all approaches, noting that experiences of DFSV are shaped by culture, geography, disability, age, language, migration status and other intersecting factors. First Nations participants spoke about trust, self-determination, culture, Country and the legacy of colonisation. Migrant and refugee participants discussed racism, discrimination, language barriers, visa insecurity and culturally unsafe responses. Participants also highlighted barriers facing people with disability, young people and those living in rural, regional and remote communities.

Across both consultations there was strong support for lived experience leadership, not only in consultation processes but throughout governance, funding, service design, implementation and evaluation. Participants emphasised that policy solutions should be informed by people with direct experience and by communities themselves.

“Embed lived experience across governance structure. It should be involved in the design, delivery and monitoring of what happens under the plan. The people closest to the issue should be involved in policy and funding decisions. Keep pushing for lived experience.”

PARTICIPANT

What participants said needs to change

- Embed lived experience expertise across governance, policy, funding and program design.
- Invest in local, community-led, and culturally safe responses.
- Increase access to interpreters, bicultural workers and culturally appropriate services.
- Recognise diversity within communities and avoid one-size-fits-all approaches.
- Under representation of lived experience voices who have suffered from addiction and poor mental health
- Strengthen responses for First Nations, migrant and refugee, CALD, people living with disability, LGBTIQ+SB, and regional, rural and remote communities.
- Equip, inform and engage trusted community-based networks, faith and community leaders and informal support structures alongside formal services.

Technology-facilitated abuse, artificial intelligence and digital safety

What participants told us

Participants discussed a broad spectrum of technology-facilitated harms, including image-based abuse, stalking through tracking devices, online grooming, surveillance through digital accounts, voice cloning, identity fraud, AI-generated content, cyber abuse and algorithm-driven misogyny. Several participants expressed concern that awareness, policy, legal and service responses are struggling to keep pace with technological developments.

Participants emphasised that digital safety is becoming an increasingly important component of safety planning for people impacted by DFSV. They also highlighted the uneven impacts of technology, noting that some communities face digital exclusion while others face heightened risks due to extensive digital connectivity. Participants called for stronger accountability for platforms, corporations and technology developers, alongside greater investment in Safety by Design approaches.

What participants said needs to change

- Strengthen policy, legislative and regulatory responses to TFA and AI-enabled abuse.
- Invest in digital literacy and technology safety education across the community.
- Embed Safety by Design requirements and accountability for all service providers and technology companies.
- Improve sector capability to respond to technology-facilitated abuse in a coordinated and collaborative way.
- Ensure digital safety is embedded within DFSV prevention, response and recovery efforts.

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

