

24 JULY 2026



Migrant and multicultural communities

Second Action Plan consultation report



Purpose of the session

This session was conducted as part of the Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence (DFSV) Commission's consultations to inform the development of the Second Action Plan under the National Plan. The DFSV Commission worked with a guiding group of representatives from Settlement Services International (SSI), InTouch Multicultural Centre Against Family Violence, the Australian Multicultural Women's Alliance and the Settlement Council of Australia. The Guiding Group identified organisations leading community-based and community-led initiatives within multicultural communities. This approach enabled the DFSV Commission to engage directly with organisations delivering innovative work on the ground, including several that had not previously engaged with the DFSV Commission.

The session was structured as an open discussion, giving participants the opportunity to raise issues they considered important and was also focused on three key questions:

- What data and evidence or specific mechanisms will help improve our knowledge?
- What specific priority actions would participants like to see included in the Second Action Plan?
- What examples of community-led initiatives should be considered?

Executive summary

Participants consistently highlighted that current domestic, family and sexual violence (DfSV) responses do not adequately reflect the needs and experiences of multicultural communities.

Racism and discrimination are key drivers of both community vulnerabilities and systemic failures across the systems intended to support and protect communities. Many of the challenges discussed, including funding inequities, limited cultural responsiveness, lack of data and poor engagement outcomes, are viewed as symptoms of broader systemic racism and discrimination affecting multicultural communities.

A key concern was the lack of robust and disaggregated data, with existing national datasets often failing to capture migration status, cultural background, language, and migration related forms of abuse. Participants stressed that multicultural organisations hold valuable quantitative and qualitative evidence that is currently underutilised and should be incorporated into policy, service design and evaluation.

Participants emphasised the need for greater investment in prevention, early intervention, healing and recovery, noting that government responses remain heavily focused on crisis.

Multicultural organisations were described as critical providers of trusted, community-led support, education and recovery pathways. They bring specialised expertise in working across cultures, yet this capability remains under-recognised as a professional specialisation. Participants noted that these organisations continue to face fragmented, short-term funding arrangements that limit their ability to deliver sustainable outcomes. They called for longer-term funding and commissioning models, greater recognition of multicultural organisations as core components of the service system, and increased investment in culturally responsive community education, particularly on coercive control, financial abuse and migration-related abuse.

Several opportunities for reform were identified, including stronger engagement with people who use violence, improved support for temporary visa holders, and better system integration. Participants highlighted the need for culturally appropriate interventions that balance accountability with trauma-informed healing and behaviour change, as well as reforms to address visa-related vulnerabilities that can be exploited by perpetrators. Stronger partnerships between multicultural organisations and specialist family violence services, enhanced information sharing, and investment in bilingual and bicultural workforces were seen as essential to improving service accessibility and outcomes. Overall, participants emphasised that community-led and culturally responsive approaches are central to achieving long-term improvements in prevention, safety and recovery.

What we heard

Overarching themes

- Multicultural communities were highlighted as being ‘invisible’ in the evidence base because current systems do not adequately capture population data, migration experiences, language needs, racism, coercive control, help-seeking pathways or recovery outcomes. Until data collection improves, policy and funding decisions will continue to underestimate both the scale and nature of violence experienced by multicultural communities.
- Working effectively with men and people who use violence was identified as a missing piece of the current system. Multicultural communities need culturally relevant, trusted and adequately funded intervention programs to achieve long-term prevention and safety outcomes.
- The need for consistent and appropriate funding was one of the strongest and most consistent themes across the roundtable. Participants expressed a view that the current funding model is insufficient, short-term and not aligned with the realities of supporting multicultural communities affected by DFSV.
- Prevention and healing and recovery were of most strongly supported themes in the discussion. Participants consistently argued that response to DFSV is too focused on crisis intervention and not sufficiently invested in preventing violence before it occurs.
- Cross-cultural practice was highlighted as a specialised professional skill that is often overlooked and undervalued across Australia. Cultural specialisation needs to formally be recognised and resourced as a specialist field, in the same way that addiction, family violence, and sexual violence services are recognised as areas requiring specific expertise and training.
- Visa status was described as both a source of vulnerability and a tool of coercive control, and many argued that current systems leave temporary visa holders without equal access to safety, recovery and justice.
- System integration and workforce capacity are foundational enablers for prevention, intervention and recovery outcomes.
- Community education was one of the most consistently supported prevention strategies discussed during the roundtable. Participants saw it as essential for increasing awareness, reducing stigma, promoting help-seeking, and preventing violence before it escalates.
- Community-led approaches are some of the most effective and trusted responses to DFSV in multicultural communities. The main point is that communities are often better positioned than mainstream systems to engage people early, build trust, reduce stigma and support long-term recovery.

Data and evidence gaps

What participants told us

- National data collections must capture the complexity of issues and population cohorts:
 - Disaggregated data is imperative. Data that captures age, cultural background, visa status, migration pathway, and language spoken.
 - Data needs to capture the different forms of violence (including violence perpetrated by in-law families, violence linked to forced marriages).
- Migration and visa status needs to be collected consistently. Migration status should be a standard field in national data collections, not just included in special studies. Without this, migration-linked barriers, systems abuse and visa-related vulnerabilities remain invisible.
- Crisis responses are more routinely measured than prevention or recovery. National data tends to focus on police reports, crisis contacts and service demand, but does not sufficiently track recovery, prevention or long-term outcomes.
- Services and organisations that work directly with communities hold substantial knowledge. These organisations and services perform their own research, and this data is not being captured by government.

What participants said needs to change

- Generate an improved evidence-base by investing in participatory and co-designed research approaches with multicultural young people.
- Establish and/or formalise partnerships between government and multicultural organisations to access quantitative and qualitative data and build further capabilities in data and evidence gathering. This work needs to be supported by data agencies like the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW).
- Strengthening partnerships with multicultural and community-based organisations was identified as an opportunity, so data reflects where people seek help, as well as prevention work already happening in communities.

“It’s not enough to say culturally and linguistically diverse. We need to understand the nuances and differences of individual communities.”

PARTICIPANT

Engaging people who use violence

What participants told us

- The current system places significant emphasis on responses to people experiencing DFSV, but has underinvested in culturally responsive interventions for people who use violence, particularly men in multicultural communities.
- Current responses are viewed as overly punitive, with insufficient focus on therapeutic intervention, trauma, shame and behaviour change.
- Many mainstream men's behaviour change programs (MBCPs) do not effectively engage multicultural men.
- Currently, models of these programs are being imposed to multicultural men on how they should be engaged and what healing should look like.
- There is a need to rethink how these programs are designed and delivered as existing models alone are insufficient and often fail to reflect cultural, linguistic, and gender-specific realities.
- Healing frameworks should not be limited to people who have experienced DFSV, but also include men and people who use violence.

What participants said needs to change

- Engaging effectively with people who use violence must be a priority.
- The Second Action Plan needs to invest in community-led initiatives and culturally appropriate work with men who use violence.
- Programs need to balance accountability with trauma-informed and healing-focused approaches.

Appropriate, sustained funding for interventions in multicultural communities

What participants told us

- There has been a rise in demand for support and an increase in the complexity of issues.
- Persistent under-resourcing means that services cannot meet demand and face workforce pressures.
- Funding is piecemeal. Successful pilots often remain isolated, meaning knowledge and outcomes are not brought together or scaled.
- Short-term funding cycles are incompatible with the consistency required for long-term change and impact.
- Funding models should formally recognise multicultural organisations as core components of the service system.
- Current funding models do not reflect challenges, which include:
 - Prevention outcomes take time to emerge
 - Workforce retention and recruitment require certainty
 - Recovery and healing are long-term processes
 - Trust-building takes time.

What participants said needs to change

There needs to be a fundamental shift to:

- Five-year funding cycles (as opposed to short-term models of 12 months)
- Long-term commissioning models and sustainable operational funding
- Reduction of competitive processes which allow for growth of an ecosystem for collaboration and coordination.

Prevention, early intervention and healing and recovery

What participants told us

- Participants felt governments invest heavily in crisis responses but insufficiently in prevention and healing and recovery.
- Participants emphasised that healing and recovery is an important pillar to responses and requires dedicated investment. They also highlighted that healing and recovery should be embedded as foundational elements of long-term prevention strategies and integrated into early intervention approaches.
- Prevention funding is often sporadic, uncoordinated and disconnected from long-term strategy.
- Early interventions need to integrate healing and recovery and need to be community-led.
- Services need targeted, culturally safe early intervention, recovery and support pathways for multicultural children and young people.
- Healing requires integration and sustained investment in housing, legal, health, employment, financial and recovery supports.
- Preventative and early-stage support occurring within communities is often unseen or underestimated by governments and policymakers.
- Many people do not initially approach police, courts or specialist family violence services. Instead, they often seek help from ethnic community organisations, community leaders, women's groups, settlement services.

What participants said needs to change

- More support for prevention early intervention and healing and recovery. Funding should reflect their recognition of their importance for long-term impact and a pillar on its own right
- Invest in community-led education (see 'community education and relationship building' section).

Temporary visa holders and systems harm

What participants told us

- Perpetrators can leverage visa insecurity because the system itself creates dependency and uncertainty. Migration related abuse include:
 - Sponsorship-related abuse
 - Threats connected to visa applications
 - Manipulation of immigration processes
 - Financial control linked to migration dependency
 - Transnational abuse involving family members overseas.
- Particular concern was expressed about:
 - Sponsorship-related abuse
 - Threats connected to visa applications
 - Manipulation of immigration processes
 - Financial control linked to migration dependency
 - Transnational abuse involving family members overseas.
- Some forms of visa-related abuse are not recognised and remain largely invisible (due also to the lack of data collected on this). These forms include:
 - Older mothers brought to Australia by their adult children and subsequently experiencing abuse
 - Situations where existing family violence visa provisions do not apply
 - Women and children taken or abandoned overseas and unable to return easily to Australia
 - Cases involving sponsorship dependency and transnational coercion.
 - Women on temporary visas are often excluded from recovery pathways and face difficulties accessing housing, employment support, income support and long-term counselling.

What participants said needs to change

- Temporary visa holders should be a priority group for reform.
- Eligibility requirements should be immediately and regularly reviewed, and access to support audited and monitored.

System integration and workforce

What participants told us

- System navigation is daunting for people with lived experience.
- Multicultural organisations should be recognised as core service providers, not just referral partners.
- Stronger partnerships are needed between multicultural organisations and specialist family violence services.
- Integrated models can reduce stigma and build community capacity.
- Information sharing is crucial for better responses (example on revoked Apprehended Violence Orders (AVOs, referral pathways not known by mainstream system).
- Participants shared examples of bicultural workers embedded in mainstream services which are building mainstream service capacity.

What participants said needs to change

- Create and support pathways for bicultural and bilingual workforce integration (formal partnerships between specialist mainstream domestic violence services and multicultural organisations).
- Create safe mechanisms for sharing information across services and systems.
- Recognise the value of cultural specialisation by building sustainable career pathways.

Community education and relationship building

What participants told us

- Mainstream awareness campaigns often fail to reach multicultural communities effectively because they do not account for language, migration experiences, cultural frameworks, or community-specific barriers.
- Community education is most effective when it is locally led, culturally relevant, delivered by trusted organisations, and focused on building understanding before violence reaches crisis point.
- There is need for education on:
 - Coercive control
 - Financial abuse
 - Elder abuse
 - Technology-facilitated abuse
 - Migration-related abuse.
- Concepts such as coercive control may not have direct equivalents in some community languages, making education even more important.
- Schools are important settings for children and youth engagement. Mainstream programs often overlook cultural lens.

What participants said needs to change

- Fund multicultural organisations to undertake education work, leveraging the trust they have already with communities and cultural knowledge for appropriate messaging.
- Prevention education needs long-term investment and education in schools should begin early.
- Increasing awareness of coercive control and non-physical abuse ('led by community for community').

Community-led approaches are key to success

What participants told us

- Trusted relationships are often the gateway to support, making community organisations critical to prevention, early intervention and recovery.
- Participants explicitly provided example of community-led men's programs. These included:
 - Men's Councils and 'Connection is Prevention' initiatives (Multicultural Communities Council of Australia).
 - South Asian, Vietnamese and Dari-language men's programs (Australian Vietnamese Women's Association and SydWest Multicultural Services).
- Examples of promising practice models mentioned included:
 - Bilingual family violence services delivered by trusted multicultural organisations.
 - Community hub models that combine family violence, settlement, health and social support services (e.g. Australian Vietnamese Women's Association, Multicultural Communities Council of South Australia).
 - Community education delivered through cultural groups, faith leaders and local networks.
 - Place-based partnerships between multicultural organisations, specialist services, police, schools and councils.

What participants said needs to change

- Community-led models, co-creation and collaboration models should be supported.

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

