Yearly Report

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DFSV COMMISSION

Australian Government

Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence Commission

Yearly Report to Parliament

September 2026

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PART 1

INTRODUCTION, EXECUTIVE SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

COMMISSIONER'S FOREWORD:
RARE, BRIEF, NON-RECURRING – GIVING OUR NATIONAL COMMITMENT A MEASURE WE CAN BE HELD TO

Micaela Cronin
Australia's Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence Commissioner
September 2026

'They defined ending homelessness as when homelessness is rare, brief and non-recurring. I think those terms really resonate with my vision of 2050, where gender-based violence is rare, brief, and non-recurring.'

Dr Quinn, Voices Towards 2050 podcast series

The *National Plan to End Violence against Women and Children 2022–2032* commits Australia to ending gender-based violence in a generation. It is the right ambition. It is also, as it stands, unmeasurable – there's no data point that tells us the day violence has 'ended.' Without a measure, it risks becoming a worthy ambition but one that no government can be held accountable to.

At the beginning of last year, I started the Commission's Voices Towards 2050 podcast for 2 reasons. One, to have a national conversation to build a concrete vision of our goal – a future in which we have successfully ended gender-based violence. Two, to foster hope that it is achievable, to ensure that we genuinely commit and take measurable action towards that vision.

Hope is a muscle, and we need to exercise it.

Over 19 conversations, I asked everyone the same question:

'What does a violence-free 2050 look like?'

What came back were consistent themes, echoed in the consultations for the Second Action Plan: that our focus and work must begin earlier – early in childhood, early when we see the patterns of violence emerging; that our approach needs to be transformed, not just reformed; and that our institutions need to learn to care rather than control, be accountable and address when they are causing harm. It was in these conversations, in episode 14, that Dr Quinn articulated a way to measure our goal, borrowing from the homelessness sector's definition of success: rare, brief and non-recurring.

Rare requires us to design responses with the people who are disproportionately impacted, often overlooked, under-represented in our data, over-policed and under-served by the very systems meant to help keep them safe. Not as a secondary thought but at the heart of design. When achieved, this will enable everyone to have access to appropriate resources to maintain positive wellbeing.

Brief means a person can find and maintain safety and healing quickly, not spend years lost in a system built in silos rather than around the whole person, their family and their community. When achieved, people will be surrounded by protective factors and strong social infrastructure.

Non-recurring means that healing is supported over the life course, and that children are recognised as rights holders, with needs that may be distinct from their parents', not just as witnesses – and it means holding people who use violence accountable while genuinely working to change their behaviour. When achieved, we will have effective, holistic responses for people who use violence.

While this report highlights important areas of progress, we also know we have a lot of work still to do. And that we must be vigilant about emerging risks, and where we are losing ground. To achieve the goals committed to by all governments in the National Plan, we must confront the scale and complexity of the problem. Our systems – police, courts, health, education, child protection – are built to respond to incidents and crises, not to the patterns of coercive control and grooming. While we have shifted our understanding of gender-based violence, we have not adequately enabled our systems to match these shifts.

Our systems are also designed on the assumption that gender-based violence happens to a minority. It does not. The evidence is clear that it affects at least half of us, quite possibly the majority over a lifetime – yet our child protection system, for example, which we know is often integrally associated with domestic, family and sexual violence, is resourced to respond to around 3% of children in any given year (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2026a; 2026b). That is a system built for the wrong scale and complexity entirely.

To make gender-based violence rare, brief and non-recurring, all governments – federal, state and territory – must be held accountable. That is what the Commission's *Monitoring and Reporting Framework* can do, if given the mandate to implement it fully.

This report emphasises 2 persistent issues we have pointed to in previous reports.

Sexual violence needs to be a distinct, resourced priority within the National Plan. Reports of sexual violence are at the highest level since national recording began in 1993 – 33 years ago. Roughly 6 in 10 incidents of sexual violence occur outside family and intimate partner relationships. And sexual violence too often gets treated as an adjunct to broader reform rather than the serious and distinct harm it is in its own right.

We must address the ways in which our **justice and family law systems** continue to fail to address the harm that is occurring in the community, and the ways in which these systems themselves contribute to or cause harm. People with lived experience keep telling us that these systems prolong harm rather than resolve harm. One participant in our consultations called the culture of our courts 'untouchable and unaccountable'.

Sexual violence and our justice and family law systems will be the focus of my year ahead.

This report sets out 8 recommendations built for exactly these tasks, and they are the fundamental challenges the Second Action Plan needs to address directly: co-designed policies for the people who face the greatest barriers to safety; investment redirected towards early intervention; the conditions for safety, healing and recovery treated as core infrastructure; whole-of-government ownership of the risks the decisions of all governments create; a National Evidence Collaboration that enables us all to learn and adapt faster; and monitoring and accountability with teeth. None of these ideas are new. They are the next, achievable steps towards a measure we judge ourselves against.

Much of what grounds this report is a year spent listening and connecting: 23 meetings with our Lived Experience Advisory Council, more than 71 public speaking engagements, and over 181 pieces of correspondence from people wanting to share their experiences. I have travelled across the country and taken part in 43 roundtables and consultations this year, because a system to ensure domestic, family and sexual violence is rare, brief and non-recurring cannot be designed without the people who understand what is needed the most.

Collectively, we have built the foundations of a national response. As Kyllie Cripps told us in the first season of our podcast: 'By 2050, we look back and know we did more than imagine a generation free from gender-based violence. We created it. We lived it into being together.'

We will know whether we have been successful when domestic, family and sexual violence is rare, brief and non-recurring.

LIVED EXPERIENCE ADVISORY COUNCIL CO-CHAIR'S FOREWORD: THE LENS WE CHOOSE

Holly Supple-Gurruwiwi
Co-Chair, Lived Experience Advisory Council, Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence Commission
September 2026

The future is rarely changed by what we already know.

It is changed by what we are finally willing to see.

Every generation inherits a choice.

Not whether to change the world.

But how to see it.

The lens we choose shapes what we notice.

What we value.

Whose voices we hear.

And ultimately, the systems we build.

From a First Nations worldview, knowledge carries responsibility.

We honour those who came before us.

We carry responsibility to those beside us.

We create better conditions for those who come after us.

That is the lens through which I have come to understand this work.

The Lived Experience Advisory Council was established because Australia chose to see differently.

It recognised that lived experience is not simply something to be heard.

It is expertise that strengthens policy, practice and reform.

Every conversation I have had throughout my term has reinforced one truth.

The way we see a problem shapes the way we respond to it.

Nowhere is that clearer than in how we see children.

For too long, children have been described as witnesses.

Image credit: Red Sands Creative

Yet children experience domestic, family and sexual violence in their own right.

If we see children as witnesses, we build one system.

If we recognise children as victim-survivors, we build another.

Changing that lens changes how we assess risk.

How we design services.

And how we protect children.

The same principle applies to accountability.

If we see accountability only as punishment, we respond after harm has occurred.

If we also see accountability as an opportunity to interrupt violence, strengthen responsibility and support lasting behavioural change, we begin creating different futures.

Supporting victim-survivors and holding people who use violence accountable are not competing priorities.

Both are essential if we are serious about ending domestic, family and sexual violence.

The same principle also applies to knowledge.

One of the most significant reforms currently underway is the development of nationally agreed language and definitions for domestic, family and sexual violence.

It may appear technical.

It is foundational.

When we use different language, we count different things.

When we count different things, we see different problems.

When we see different problems, we create different solutions.

Shared language strengthens evidence.

Evidence strengthens policy.

Policy shapes people's lives.

As this Council reflects on another year of progress, I also acknowledge those who made this work possible.

Those who spoke when no one was listening.

Those who challenged systems that were not yet ready to hear them.

Those who carried the weight of lived experience long before it was recognised as expertise.

We stand on their shoulders.

May those who come after us say the same of us.

If there is one message I hope this report leaves with its readers, it is this.

Every reform begins with a choice.

The choice to see differently.

To recognise what has always been there but has too often gone unseen.

To value lived experience not simply as testimony but as expertise.

Because when we change the lens, we change what becomes possible.

We do not choose the generation into which we are born.

We do choose what we leave behind.

The lens we choose today becomes the legacy we leave tomorrow.

ABOUT THIS REPORT

This report is the Commission's third Yearly Report to Parliament. It provides recommendations for priority activities over the next 12 months as we work towards the objectives of the *National Plan to End Violence against Women and Children 2022–2032* (National Plan).

Figure 1: Sources of information for this report

Throughout this report, the Commission uses case studies to showcase practical examples of programs and reforms driving positive change across the domestic, family and sexual violence system. These examples demonstrate where progress is occurring and what effective responses can look like in practice. While early outcomes are encouraging, continued evaluation will be critical to understanding impact, scalability and long-term effectiveness.

The Commission relies on timely, high-quality data and evidence to monitor progress, assess system performance and identify where reform efforts are improving outcomes under the National Plan. This report draws on the best available data and evidence at the time of preparation. It also highlights areas that need stronger data and evidence.

The Commission engages extensively with people with lived experience, sector leaders, service providers, researchers, governments and community representatives to inform its advice and reporting. These perspectives provide critical insight into how the system is functioning, where progress is occurring and where gaps remain.

This report brings the insights of people with lived experience together with data, research, practice and sector expertise to provide a more complete picture of progress under the National Plan. Over the past 2 months, the Commission has contributed to extensive consultation across the country for the development of the Second Action Plan, which has involved leading 20 roundtable discussions, and the Commission team participating in 36 roundtables in total. Since the 2025 Yearly Report, the Commission has led, facilitated or participated in a total of 43 roundtables. Collectively, consultations and engagement activities undertaken to inform the Second Action Plan have heard from approximately 1,000 people across Australia. This includes the Commission's own consultations, through which we have heard directly from more than 310 people with diverse

perspectives and lived experience. Combining these perspectives strengthens the Commission's ability to provide independent advice grounded in both evidence and real-world experience (refer to Figure 1).

This includes engaging with people with lived and living experience of domestic, family and sexual violence from across the priority populations identified within the National Plan. These perspectives are essential to understanding how policies, services and systems are experienced in practice. These priority populations are:

- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and children
- women and children living with disabilities
- women and children from culturally diverse, migrant and refugee backgrounds
- LGBTIQA+SB people, including Sistergirls and Brotherboys
- women and children living in rural, regional and remote communities.

The Commission recognises that experiences of violence, and the responses required, vary across the life span. Children and young people and older women are recognised as groups whose distinct experiences and needs are not always well served by existing systems and services.

The Commission also recognises the importance of engaging with men and boys, including those who have experienced violence and those who use or are at risk of using violence. Understanding these perspectives strengthens the system's ability to prevent violence, intervene earlier and respond more effectively to harmful behaviours.

This report considers the experience, needs and outcomes of these priority populations across all key system themes. Their perspectives are embedded throughout the analysis to ensure the report reflects where progress is being made, where barriers persist and where targeted action is most needed.

A note on language

The Commission uses both the terms *gender-based violence* and *domestic, family and sexual violence* within this report. We recognise that this terminology varies across sectors, communities and contexts. The Second Action Plan provides an opportunity to work towards shared, inclusive language and definitions that reflect the range of violence, experiences and people affected, and support greater consistency across policy, data collection, service delivery and reporting.

Use of artificial intelligence (AI)

To prepare this report, the Commission used AI to support specific analytical and administrative tasks. These uses include transcribing engagement activities and assisting in the synthesis, summarisation and identification of themes from information gathered in consultations, workshops and other engagement activities.

The Commission uses AI as a tool to enhance efficiency and support analysis; however, it has not replaced human judgement. At all stages, AI-generated outputs have been carefully reviewed, sense-checked and validated by Commission team members to ensure accuracy, contextual integrity and appropriate interpretation.

Importantly, the Commission did not use AI to generate findings, draw conclusions or make recommendations. The Commission is committed to transparency and responsible use of emerging technologies. Further detail on the Commission's approach to safe, ethical and transparent use of AI is available in the Commission's AI Transparency Statement.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT OF COUNTRY

The Commission acknowledges the Traditional Owners of Country through Australia on which we gather, live, work and stand. We acknowledge all traditional custodians, and their Elders past and present, and pay our respects to their continuing connection to land, waters and community.

The Commission acknowledges and honours the work of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to end family violence and is committed to partnering with First Nations people in this work.

We acknowledge that we have a great deal to learn from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander ways of working. The Aboriginal concept of Dadirri informs our approach (Atkinson, 2002). Dadirri refers to a deep contemplative process of listening to one another in reciprocal relationships. The word Dadirri is of the Ngangikurungkurr people of the Daly area of the Northern Territory. The activity of Dadirri has an equivalent in many other First Nations communities across Australia.

ABOUT THE ARTIST

Rachael Sarra's vibrant and varied creative practice embodies her experience as a proud mixed race, First Nations woman from Goreng Goreng Country. Driven by a belief that art and design are vital to communication, connection and culture, Rachael invites us to see the world through her eyes with bold colours, dynamic contours and thought-provoking conversations.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF PEOPLE WITH LIVED AND LIVING EXPERIENCE OF DOMESTIC, FAMILY AND SEXUAL VIOLENCE

The Commission acknowledges the individual and collective expertise of people with experience of domestic, family and sexual violence.

The Commission recognises their vital contribution at all levels, and values the courage of those who share this unique perspective for the purpose of learning and growing together to achieve better outcomes for all.

The Commission values the unique experiences, protective factors and strengths of children and young people and acknowledges they are also affected by domestic, family and sexual violence.

COVER ARTWORK

‘Seen and heard’ Amani Haydar

120 cm x 80 cm

Acrylic, pencil and watercolour on paper

ARTIST STATEMENT

This artwork is dedicated to members of the Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence Commission’s National Lived Experience Advisory Council and all lived experience advocates who work to elevate the voices and perspectives of victim-survivors of domestic, family and sexual violence. This artwork started off as a series of interconnected line drawings representing the threads of experience victim-survivors weave together when they share their stories. I then built up the colours and patterns to capture the energy we exchange when we work together as true allies who are prepared to disrupt systems and make them better for the most vulnerable members of our communities. Advocacy work takes a toll on victim-survivors but allows society and policymakers to better understand the issues people face after they have been harmed and when navigating inflexible or even punitive processes. The solidarities we build allow people to feel seen and heard and there is great power and validation in that. **– Amani Haydar, artist**

ABOUT THE ARTIST

Amani Haydar

Amani is an author, visual artist and advocate for women’s health and safety. She is based in Western Sydney. Amani’s groundbreaking feminist memoir *The Mother Wound,* published in 2021, explores the effects of domestic abuse and state-sanctioned violence on women. It has received several awards, including the 2022 Victorian Premier’s Prize for Nonfiction. In recognition of her advocacy against domestic violence, Amani received the 2021 UTS Faculty of Law Alumni Award and was named Local Woman of the Year for Bankstown in 2020. Drawing on her legal background and lived experiences, Amani has served on the boards of Bankstown Women’s Health Centre and the Australian Muslim Women’s Centre for Human Rights. She consults with various institutions on improving access and outcomes for victim-survivors. As an active visual artist and former Archibald Prize Finalist, Amani collaborates with various organisations to facilitate visual arts and storytelling workshops for victim-survivors from migrant communities.

SUPPORT FOR DOMESTIC, FAMILY AND SEXUAL VIOLENCE IS AVAILABLE

If you or someone you know needs help, the following services are available to assist.

Crisis and domestic, family and sexual violence support

1800RESPECT

is the national domestic, family and sexual violence counselling, information and support service for adults, children and young people. It is free and confidential and available **24 hours a day**, **7 days a week**. You can call **1800RESPECT** on **1800 737 732**, text **0458 737 732**, or visit **1800respect.org.au** for online chat and video call services.

The Suicide Call Back Service

offers free counselling support to people at risk of suicide, concerned about someone at risk or people experiencing emotional or mental health concerns, available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

1300 659 467

suicidecallbackservice.org.au

Men's Referral Service (MRS)

is a national counselling, information and referral service for men who have chosen to use violence and want to change. MRS operates 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

1300 766 491

mrs.org.au

Lifeline

provides 24-hour crisis support.

13 11 14

lifeline.org.au

13YARN

is a free and confidential 24-hour crisis support line for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

13 92 76

13yarn.org.au

IF YOU, OR SOMEONE YOU KNOW, IS IN **IMMEDIATE DANGER**, PLEASE CONTACT THE POLICE ON TRIPLE ZERO (**000**).

Specialist referral and counselling services

Kids Helpline

is a free counselling service for children and young people aged 5 to 25 years, available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

1800 551 800

kidshelpline.com.au

Beyond Blue

provides free counselling and mental health support, available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

1300 22 4636

beyondblue.org.au

MensLine Australia

is a free telephone and online counselling service offering support for Australian men. It is available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

1300 789 978

mensline.org.au

1800 ELDERHelp

is a free, confidential national phone line that provides information and support regarding elder abuse. The line automatically redirects callers to the dedicated support service or helpline in their specific state or territory.

1800 353 374

QLife

is a free and confidential peer-support and referral service run by LGBTIQA+SB people for LGBTIQA+SB people, available 3 pm to 9 pm every day.

1800 184 527

qlife.org.au

Need help in your language?

- If you need an interpreter, contact the Translating and Interpreting Service on 131 450.
- You can also find a certified interpreter, including for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages, through the National Accreditation Authority for Translators and Interpreters.
- If you are deaf or have a hearing or speech impairment, you can contact the National Relay Service. The service is available 24 hours a day from anywhere in Australia. Please visit **accesshub.gov.au/about-the-nrs/nrs-call-numbers-and-links**

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In its first, and now second, National Plan to end violence against women and children, Australia has laid the foundations of a national response to domestic, family and sexual violence. The next phase, driven by the Second Action Plan, is to build a system that prevents violence earlier, responds more equitably and continuously learns and improves.

We need to act now to ensure that gender-based violence is rare, brief and non-recurring in a generation.

Australia's national response to domestic, family and sexual violence has matured significantly over the past decade. Governments have increased investment, strengthened specialist services, established national governance arrangements and improved the collection of data and evidence. Domestic, family and sexual violence is now a whole-of-government priority, reflected as one of 6 National Cabinet priorities.

These developments have increased the ability of the whole system to respond to violence; however, they have not yet produced a consistently coordinated national response nor a clear account of whether policies and investments are improving outcomes for women and children.

Access and experience continue to vary according to where a person lives, the services they encounter and the barriers they face.

It is encouraging to see that the Australian Government, working with the states and territories, is developing related family and child safety action plans concurrently, to ensure they are aligned and work together. National leadership, commitment across all jurisdictions and cross-portfolio engagement to align the Second Action Plan under the *National Plan to End Violence against Women and Children 2022–2032*; 2 action plans under *Safe and Supported: the National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children 2021–2031 (the National Second Action Plan and the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Second Action Plan)*; the First Action Plan under *Our Ways – Strong Ways – Our Voices: National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Plan to End Family, Domestic and Sexual Violence 2026–2036*; and the Second Action Plan under the *National Strategy to Prevent and Respond to Child Sexual Abuse 2021–2030* will contribute to addressing gaps and improving outcomes for the community.

Building on the experience of the First Action Plan under the *National Plan to End Violence against Women and Children 2022–2032*, and evidence gathered to inform this report and the Second Action Plan, priorities for the next phase should be earlier intervention, improved coordination across the services and systems people use, direct investment in approaches with demonstrated impact, and strengthened national monitoring, accountability and continuous learning.

Too often we are missing opportunities to prevent violence, intervene earlier, support recovery and reduce future demand.

Australia has largely invested in systems designed to respond once violence reaches crisis point. Most investment is directed towards crisis, justice and emergency responses after violence has escalated. These services are essential, but on their own they will not reduce the prevalence or impact of gender-based violence. To achieve this we need to begin earlier in people's journeys, through our health and education systems, through access to housing, in our workplaces and communities.

We also need to recognise that while domestic, family and sexual violence are often interconnected, they are not always. Sexual violence occurs within intimate partner relationships but also across a broader range of contexts and relationships. Child sexual abuse is being addressed by government through the *National Strategy to Prevent and Respond to Child Sexual Abuse 2021–2030* led by the Attorney-General's Department. It has been demonstrated that there is value in

considering domestic, family and sexual violence together from a policy and systems perspective. This is particularly important where there are shared underlying drivers and a need for coordinated service system responses and prevention efforts. At the same time, sexual violence also has distinct dynamics, drivers and impacts, as well as service, justice and prevention aspects that require specific attention.

Nationally, sexual violence offences recorded by police are at their highest level since the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) started releasing figures more than 30 years ago. Despite record highs, we know that reporting rates to police remain extremely low. Inquiry after inquiry has found that many people experience poor responses from the justice, family law, health, education and community services systems. This requires a more deliberate national approach to growing our understanding of the drivers of sexual violence, evaluating what works and translating that evidence into policy and practice.

We now have a much greater understanding of the scale and complexity of domestic, family and sexual violence. However, most of our systemic responses have been designed to respond to 'incidents' rather than patterns of behaviour and experiences of harm, which we now understand as coercive control. In addition to this our systems assume that domestic, family and sexual violence only affects a small proportion of the population, which we now know is not the case.

The next phase of reform should include targeted investment in early intervention – identifying risk earlier and intervening before patterns of harm are entrenched and violence escalates. We need to strengthen our ability to identify emerging patterns of violence and understand and interrupt pathways into the use of violence – predominantly caused by men. Systems need to recognise and respond earlier to the impact of gender-based violence and improve support for healing and recovery.

This approach should be coupled with much-earlier identification of which policies and investments are working – for whom and where – and which need to be adapted. That means investing in a more systemic approach to bring together what we learn from research, administrative data, evaluations and people's lived and living experiences.

This includes the findings of systems reviews such as domestic and family violence death reviews. This will improve our ability to identify emerging risks, detect recurring system failures and continuously improve practice, investment and police responses. The Second Action Plan provides an opportunity to address existing fragmentation of data, uneven access to evaluation findings and limited evidence synthesis so governments can better understand what interventions are improving safety, recovery and wellbeing, particularly for priority populations.

The findings in this report point to 6 characteristics that we need to see in a mature national response. They will enable us to transition from building Australia's domestic, family and sexual violence system to improving our ability to deliver transformational change. A mature national response:

- strengthens monitoring and accountability to drive continuous improvement
- co-designs policies and services with and for people who experience the greatest barriers to safety
- invests earlier to prevent risks and emerging patterns from escalating
- invests strategically in the conditions that enable safety and recovery
- builds whole-of-government capability to identify and manage domestic, family and sexual violence risks
- brings together evidence to drive continuous learning and improvement.

This report also identifies 2 persistent issues that the Commission has previously highlighted. These issues remain significant barriers to achieving the objectives of the National Plan and continue to require sustained national attention.

Sexual violence requires targeted and sustained national attention, investment and reform. Justice and family law systems are continuing to cause harm for people and families experiencing violence, and we must build on existing reforms to strengthen safety, accountability and recovery.

In these areas, evidence and feedback from stakeholders and people with lived experience indicates that reform has not yet translated into consistently safer outcomes and requires concerted attention.

RECOMMENDATIONS OVERVIEW

Six characteristics of a mature system

RECOMMENDATIONS ✳

RECOMMENDATION 1

Strengthen whole-of-government capability to identify and manage domestic, family and sexual violence risks across policy, investment and service delivery.

RECOMMENDATION 2

Co-design policies and services with and for people who experience the greatest barriers to safety.

RECOMMENDATION 3

Target new investment towards early intervention.

RECOMMENDATION 4

Invest strategically in the conditions that enable people to achieve safety and recover from domestic, family and sexual violence.

RECOMMENDATION 5

Establish a National Evidence Collaboration to provide coordinated advice regarding research, evaluation, data, emerging issues and national evidence priorities.

RECOMMENDATION 6

Strengthen monitoring, accountability and continuous improvement across the National Plan.

Persistent system issues requiring sustained national attention

RECOMMENDATIONS ✳

RECOMMENDATION 7

Build on existing justice and family law reforms to strengthen safety, accountability and recovery for individuals and families experiencing family, domestic and sexual violence. Ensure children's experiences, safety concerns and views are recognised and supported.

RECOMMENDATION 8

Sexual violence must receive distinct and resourced priority within the National Plan.

Six characteristics of a mature system

RECOMMENDATION 1 ✳

Strengthen whole-of-government capability to identify and manage domestic, family and sexual violence risks across policy, investment and service delivery.

Our ability to effectively respond and address domestic, family and sexual violence is shaped by decisions made across all levels, and many parts of governments – housing, immigration, justice, family law, social security, education, health and employment policies can either strengthen safety or unintentionally create risk. Historically, domestic, family and sexual violence has been seen as the responsibility of social service portfolios. This is shifting now, but some parts of government still do not prioritise it in policy development, investment decisions and service design.

The Australian Government, and all state and territory governments, should continue to strengthen existing whole-of-government mechanisms to ensure domestic, family and sexual violence risks are consistently identified and addressed across policy development, investment decisions and service design.

Existing mechanisms, including the Australian Government's *Including Gender Framework*, and whole-of-government mechanisms such as the Secretaries Board, should be used to strengthen shared accountability, continuous learning and regular reviews of how government decisions influence the safety and experiences of people affected by domestic, family and sexual violence. This should extend to intergovernmental decision-making through National Cabinet and relevant Commonwealth–state ministerial forums, beyond the Women and Women's Safety Ministerial Council.

Government leadership should also support, encourage and learn from sectors beyond government about how to identify, address and prevent further harm through safer design of products, services and organisational practices.

RECOMMENDATION 2 ✳

Co-design policies and services with and for people who experience the greatest barriers to safety.

People continue to experience the system differently depending on who they are, where they live and the barriers they face. Governments should ensure that policies, services and reforms are co-designed to meet the needs of people who experience the greatest barriers to safety – those who are overrepresented, over-policed, overlooked and least well served by our responses to gender-based violence.

The National Plan has recognised that some people are disproportionately impacted by gender-based violence, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, women and children with disabilities, culturally and linguistically diverse communities, LGBTIQA+SB people, people in regional and remote Australia, migrants and refugees and at points in the life cycle – children and young people and older women. Designing systems with and for those disproportionately impacted is how the system becomes more effective and equitable for everyone.

Embedding lived experience perspectives in all aspects of policy and service design, improving accessibility, and ensuring responses reflect the complexity of people's lives rather than requiring people to navigate fragmented systems are also essential changes we need to continue to drive. Communities must be involved in defining the problems they face, from their perspective. People who experience the greatest barriers bring unique insight into how systems create, reinforce or remove barriers to safety. This is essential knowledge for governments in identifying the underlying causes that reforms need to address.

RECOMMENDATION 3 ✳

Target new investment towards early intervention.

Governments have made significant investments in responding to domestic, family and sexual violence. There has not been commensurate investment in the other pillars identified in the National Plan – most critically in early intervention.

While continued investment in crisis responses remains essential, on its own this will not reduce the prevalence of gender-based violence. Investment in crisis responses is vital in strengthening frontline services, holding people who use violence to account, and supporting those who experience violence. However, a more direct and targeted approach to stopping violence and reducing serious harm is the only way to achieve National Cabinet's agreed goal to end gender-based violence in a generation. National consultations have emphasised that crisis response is critical, but it is not enough to change incidence of gender-based violence and drive effective change.

Evidence increasingly points to the value of investing earlier in people's journey – where risks and emerging patterns can be identified, prevented, interrupted or reduced before those behaviours escalate and require crisis services.

Early intervention must work across the spectrum of violence. This means intervening earlier with men who are using, or at risk of using, violence, including through settings such as health and fatherhood services. For men and boys at risk of using violence, early intervention can strengthen healthy masculinities, emotional regulation, help-seeking and provide alternatives to harmful gender norms and behaviours. Early intervention also means recognising and responding earlier to children and young people experiencing violence and its impacts, supporting their safety and recovery and reducing the risk of harm continuing across their lives.

Given the scale of the problem, targeted new investment in early intervention must strategically leverage our existing infrastructure – health, mental health, education, child and family services.

RECOMMENDATION 4 ✳

Invest strategically in the conditions that enable people to achieve safety and recover from domestic, family and sexual violence.

Safety and recovery depend on coordinated access to housing, financial support and security, legal assistance, health care, counselling and other practical assistance. Evidence shows that the financial barriers to leaving violent relationships are substantial, while access to secure, affordable and appropriate housing remains one of the greatest constraints on achieving long-term safety.

All Australian governments should continue to strengthen investment in the domestic, family and sexual violence service system, while ensuring funding is transparent, strategically balanced and leveraged to best effect, and responsive to the needs of those who experience gender-based violence. Investment should support the conditions that enable people to achieve safety and recovery, including access to stable housing, financial security, legal assistance, therapeutic support and other services that reduce barriers to leaving violence and rebuilding their lives.

RECOMMENDATION 5 ✳

Establish a National Evidence Collaboration to provide coordinated advice regarding research, evaluation, data, emerging issues and national evidence priorities.

Building on the existing Convening on the Evidence Group chaired by Australia's National Research Organisation for Women's Safety (ANROWS), this collaboration will connect national research, evaluation and data agencies to strengthen evidence-informed decision-making, support monitoring of progress under the National Plan, and improve the translation of evidence into policy, practice and continuous system improvement.

The Convening on the Evidence Group currently brings together national institutions with key responsibilities for generating, stewarding and translating evidence on domestic, family and sexual violence. Chaired by ANROWS, the Evidence Group includes the ABS, the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW), the Australian Institute of Family Studies (AIFS), the Australian Institute of Criminology (AIC) and the Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence Commission (DFSVC).

Australia has made significant investment in national research, data and evaluation capability. This includes mechanisms to enable the knowledge and expertise of people with lived experience to inform the evidence system. The next stage of reform should embed enhanced coordination across these capabilities and sources of evidence. All knowledge gained through evaluation and learning processes should be consolidated and made available to governments through clear, timely advice about emerging risks, effective interventions and system performance.

This collaboration should also provide a mechanism for identifying emerging evidence priorities and coordinating rapid responses to new and emerging issues, ensuring governments can respond to changing patterns of violence and service demand.

RECOMMENDATION 6 ✳

Strengthen monitoring, accountability and continuous improvement across the National Plan.

Australian governments should strengthen national monitoring and accountability by ensuring they consistently provide publicly available responses in a timely way to significant findings and recommendations. This includes those arising from the Commission's Yearly Reports and the forthcoming mid-term review of the National Plan. Work should aim to improve transparency around progress and embed mechanisms to support continuous learning and system improvement across the National Plan.

This should include enabling the Commission to fully implement its Monitoring and Reporting Framework, supported by enduring institutional arrangements and appropriate information-gathering powers to provide timely and consistent access to information across governments and strengthen independent monitoring and accountability over the life of the plan.

Persistent system issues requiring sustained national attention

While this report identifies 6 characteristics of a mature national response, it also highlights 2 persistent system issues that continue to require focused national attention.

Both have been raised in previous Yearly Reports. Evidence gathered during this reporting period indicates they remain significant barriers to achieving the objectives of the National Plan. They require sustained action, investment and reform.

RECOMMENDATION 7 *

Build on existing justice and family law reforms to strengthen safety, accountability and recovery for individuals and families experiencing family, domestic and sexual violence. Ensure children's experiences, safety concerns and views are recognised and supported.

Justice and family law systems are continuing to cause harm for people and families experiencing violence. The Family Law Courts should be recognised and enabled to act as a family violence court, identifying risk early, protecting the safety of individuals and children and enabling access to confidential, therapeutic counselling and recovery.

The Attorney-General's Department, working with states and territories, including through the Standing Council on Attorneys-General, courts, relevant independent bodies, specialist services and people with lived experience, should lead a time-bound program of action across family law, police, child protection and related justice systems. The program should build on, rather than duplicate, existing reviews and reforms and include measurable actions.

RECOMMENDATION 8 *

Sexual violence must receive distinct and resourced priority within the National Plan.

Sexual violence requires targeted and sustained national attention, investment and reform. It remains an area characterised by increasing prevalence and poor outcomes seen across all types of sexual violence, all pillars of the National Plan and in most reports of people's experiences with services and systems.

While there is significant intersection between domestic, family and sexual violence, almost 60% of sexual assaults recorded by police occur in contexts outside family and intimate partner relationships (ABS, 2026). National reform should continue to address these distinct forms of violence and understand the different drivers. This should ensure investment, policy, evidence and service responses remain visible alongside broader domestic and family violence reforms.

THE COMMISSION'S
YEAR IN REVIEW

Building the evidence base for this Yearly Report

A core part of the Commission's role is to engage widely across Australia to understand how the domestic, family and sexual violence system is working in practice. Over the past year, the Commission undertook more than 700 engagements with stakeholders and community members across Australia. This included 43 consultations as part of the Second Action Plan and Commission roundtables.

The Commission's engagement reflects its unique role in bringing together the perspectives of people with lived and living experience, governments, the specialist domestic, family and sexual violence sector, related sectors, Aboriginal community-controlled organisations, non-government organisations, researchers and other community stakeholders. Through this work, the Commission identifies emerging issues, understands implementation challenges across jurisdictions and communities, and supports greater coordination across the system.

Insights gathered through these engagements form the foundations of the evidence base for the observations, system insights and advice contained throughout this Yearly Report.

At the same time, they advance the Commission's 4 objectives to support improved national outcomes:

1. **Promote the National Plan's objectives to end gender-based violence and monitor impact.**
2. **Amplify the voices of people with lived and living experience for meaningful engagement in shaping policy design and service delivery.**
3. **Foster collaboration and coordination across government and communities to enhance connection and reduce fragmentation to improve outcomes.**
4. **Provide strategic advice to inform strengthened policy and practice, and improved outcomes.**

The sections below outline key activities undertaken throughout the year against each of these objectives

Commission activities against its objectives

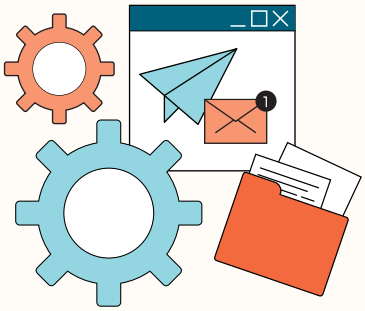
1.

Promote the National Plan's objectives to end gender-based violence and monitor impact

In 2026, the Commission used its communications and engagement activities to keep domestic, family and sexual violence high on the national agenda, build understanding of emerging issues and promote progress under the National Plan.

IN 2026, THE COMMISSION:

- used social media platforms, including LinkedIn and Instagram, to keep domestic, family and sexual violence and the National Plan at the forefront of national conversations, raise awareness of emerging issues and encourage engagement with reform
- convened an information-sharing webinar on the Australian Government's response to system abuse, bringing together stakeholders to share progress on a more coordinated national response
- undertook more than 71 public speaking engagements in forums that included representatives from government, research, industry and community organisations to promote the objectives of the National Plan, highlight challenges and influence policy and practice across sectors
- held consultation forums across Australia with people with lived experience, community organisations and service providers to identify barriers, understand emerging issues and ensure the Commission's monitoring, advice and recommendations reflected the experiences of those most affected by domestic, family and sexual violence
- launched season 2 of the Voices Towards 2050 podcast series, bringing together government and nationally recognised experts to examine coercive control, technology-facilitated abuse and family law reform, and issues affecting LGBTIQA+SB communities
- launched the Commission's first stakeholder newsletter to provide regular updates on the Commission's work, share emerging evidence and strengthen engagement with governments, researchers, service providers and the broader community.



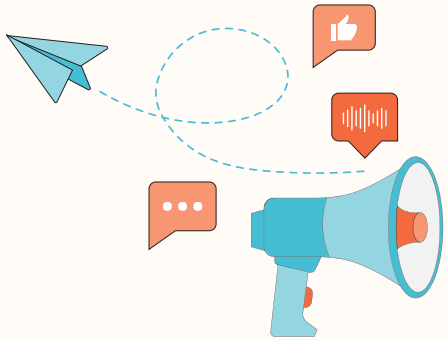
2.

Amplify the voices of people with lived and living experience for meaningful engagement in shaping policy design and service delivery

People with lived and living experience of domestic, family and sexual violence provide a critical source of evidence about how domestic, family and sexual violence systems are experienced in practice. Through ongoing engagement with the Lived Experience Advisory Council and broader lived experience communities, the Commission ensures its work, including this Yearly Report, reflects the experiences, perspectives and insights of those most directly impacted by violence and by the systems designed to respond to it.

IN 2026, THIS INCLUDED:

- meeting with the Lived Experience Advisory Council members 23 times, focusing on the Council's expanding program of work, advisory inputs and engagements
- Council members contributing to the consultation on the Second Action Plan, participating in consultations and helping the Commission synthesise and test emerging insights
- receiving more than 181 pieces of correspondence through the Commission's Enquiry Line and the Your Experience inbox, with 61% relating to lived and living experience of domestic, family and sexual violence. Recurring themes included police response, the family courts, coercive control, children and young people and financial abuse
- undertaking 10 Second Action Plan consultations dedicated to lived experience, including with young people, families bereaved by femicide and people impacted by justice responses to sexual violence and the family law system
- running a further 8 targeted sessions to seek less-visible perspectives, including those relating to people with disabilities, missing and murdered Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and girls, LGBTIQA+SB communities, sex workers and multicultural communities
- convening targeted meetings and consultations with children and young people (December 2025) and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander men (May 2026).



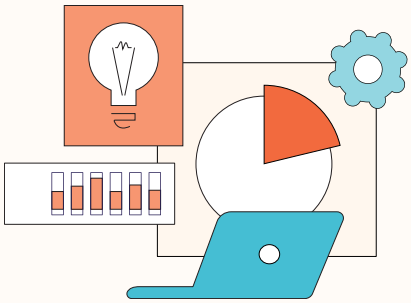
3.

Foster collaboration and coordination across government and community, to enhance connection and reduce fragmentation to improve outcomes

The Commission uses its national convening role to bring together governments, independent bodies, sectors and communities that might otherwise work separately. These connections help build shared understanding of system-level issues, identify common challenges across jurisdictions and create opportunities for more coordinated national responses.

IN 2026, THIS INCLUDED:

- bringing together national leaders around significant system issues, including co-convening with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner, Katie Kiss, a national discussion on missing and murdered Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and girls to help inform the Second Action Plan. The meeting was instigated by Dr Hannah McGlade, and hosted by the Governor-General, Her Excellency the Honourable Sam Mostyn AC
- 3 meetings, in December 2025 and May and June 2026, with Federal Commissioners and Ambassadors to identify system-level priorities, as well as to help inform the Second Action Plan
- leading a further 6 consultations, including sessions focused on people living with disabilities, LGBTIQA+SB communities, sex workers and multicultural communities
- strengthening coordination and collaboration across jurisdictions, the domestic, family and sexual violence sector and communities through targeted engagement, including jurisdictional visits and key forums:
  - New England region, including Hunter and Newcastle, New South Wales (November 2025)
  - Illawarra region, including Wollongong, New South Wales (November 2025)
  - Broome and Perth, Western Australia (December 2025)
  - Darwin, Alice Springs and the Big Rivers Region, Northern Territory (November 2025).



4.

Provide strategic advice to inform strengthened policy and practice, and improved outcomes

The Commission draws together insights from people with lived experience, engagement across jurisdictions and communities, national data and research to identify system-level issues and provide strategic advice on national policy and reform. This enables evidence gathered through the Commission's work to inform government decision-making, independent inquiries and other national processes.

IN 2026, THIS INCLUDED:

- providing strategic advice to government and independent inquiries on significant and emerging systems issues, including the relationship between domestic, family and sexual violence and suicide, and the inquiry into racism, hate and violence directed at Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people
- undertaking targeted consultations across jurisdictions to inform the Commission's advice on the development of the Second Action Plan, including in Sydney, Melbourne, Devonport, Darwin, Adelaide and Brisbane
- establishing a Youth Taskforce to advise government on the Second Action Plan. Building on the December 2025 Children and Young People Roundtable, 9 young advocates with lived experience developed advice across 4 workshops to inform actions for children and young people
- engaging across external forums and platforms outside the formal National Plan governance structure to provide strategic advice and contribute system insights. This included:
  - engaging with the Police Ministers Council and the Australia New Zealand Policing Advisory Agency
  - participating in the National Plan mid-term review
  - collaborating with ANROWS and data custodians to strengthen understanding of system impact and the evidence base
  - participating in the Foundation for Alcohol Research and Education (FARE) Advisory Committee to support the review and update of the *National Framework for Action to Prevent Alcohol-related Family Violence*.

DATA
SNAPSHOT

Progress under the National Plan is monitored through 6 national-level targets and 6 long-term outcomes. Together they provide different perspectives on whether Australia is making progress towards ending violence against women and children.

The 6 national targets provide a small set of measurable markers of progress. They cover:

- **female intimate partner homicide**
- **community understanding of violence against women**
- **community attitudes towards violence against women**
- **community attitudes towards gender inequality**
- **community attitudes towards sexual violence**
- **Closing the Gap Target 13.**

The 6 long-term outcomes provide a broader picture of the changes the National Plan seeks to achieve. They focus on measuring whether:

- systems and institutions effectively support and protect people impacted by gender-based violence
- services and prevention programs are effective, culturally responsive, intersectional and accessible
- community attitudes and beliefs embrace gender equality and condemn all forms of gendered violence without exception
- people who choose to use violence are accountable for their actions and stop their violent, coercive and abusive behaviours
- children and young people are safe in all settings and are effectively supported by systems and services
- women are safe and respected in all settings, and experience economic, social, political and cultural equality

AIHW brings together available national data to report progress against both the targets and outcomes. However, significant data gaps and reporting lags remain.

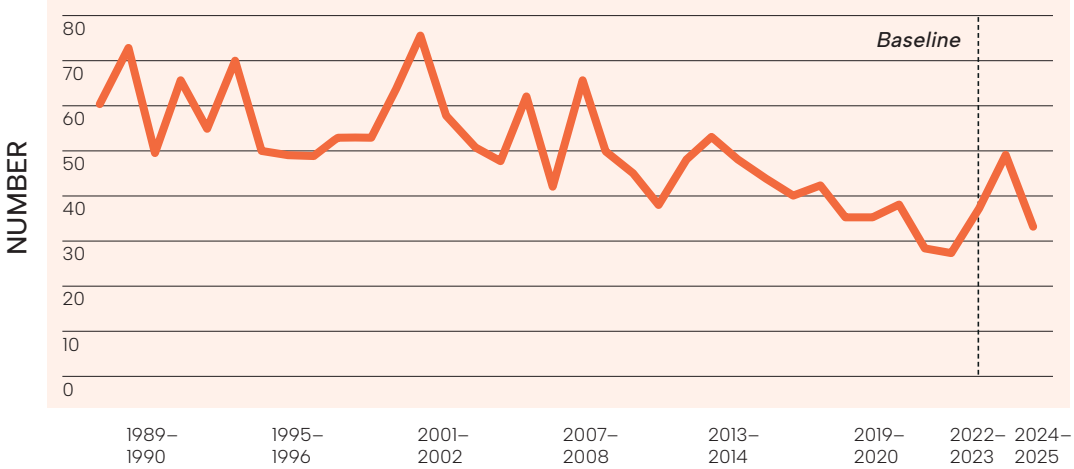
The following snapshot examines what the available data tell us about progress against the national targets and outcomes and highlights where data gaps continue to limit our ability to assess progress.

National targets

It is still too early to assess progress against most national targets. Only 5 of the 9 measures currently reported have data available since the National Plan baseline, limiting our ability to assess progress against the targets. Four of these 5 measures relate to Closing the Gap Target 13.

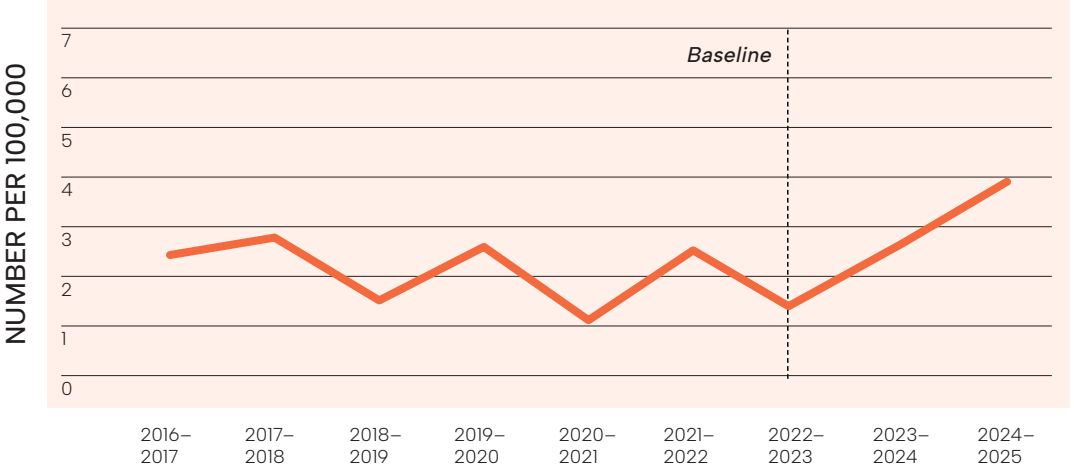
National targets

Female victims of intimate partner homicide



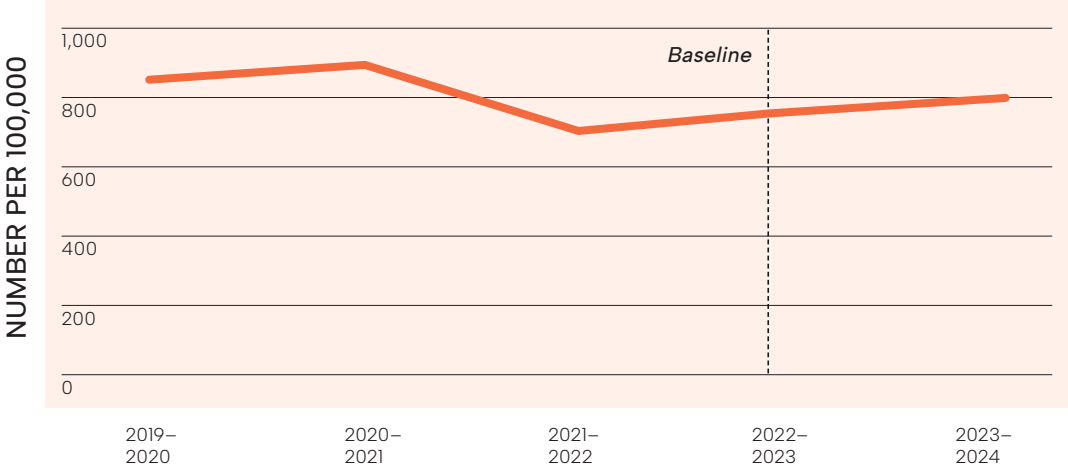
- Intimate partner homicide of women has declined substantially over the long term, from the much higher levels recorded in the 1990s and early 2000s.
- Since the National Plan baseline, however, the number has fluctuated markedly, rising in 2023–24 before falling again in 2024–25 – meaning it is too early to identify a sustained post-baseline trend.

First Nations female victims of intimate partner homicide



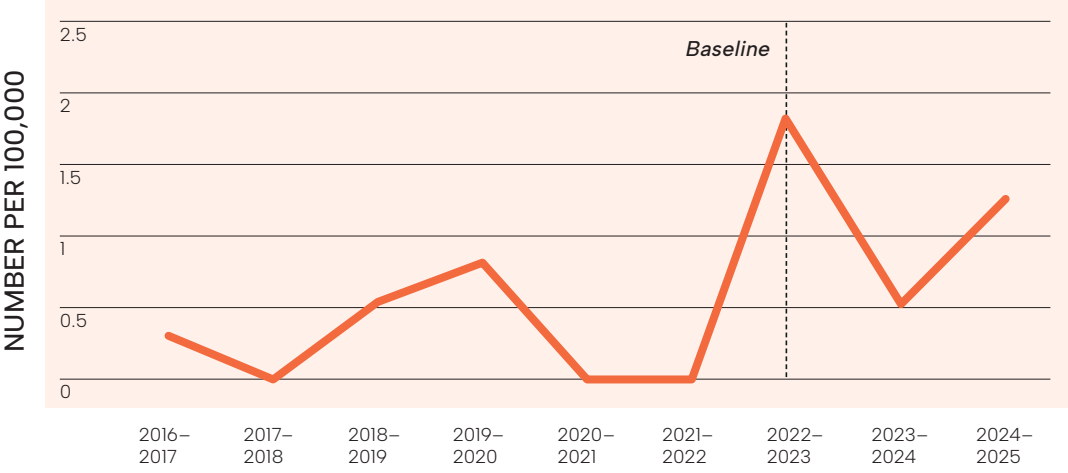
- The intimate partner homicide rate for First Nations women has increased in each of the 2 years since the 2022–23 baseline.
- In 2024–25 the rate reached its highest level in the available series, more than double the baseline rate.

Hospitalisations of First Nations women for family violence assault



- The rate of hospitalisations for First Nations women remains high, at around 783 per 100,000 women.
- Following a decline between 2020–21 and 2021–22, the rate increased and remains above the 2022–23 baseline.
- This recent trajectory is moving away from the reduction sought under Closing the Gap Target 13.

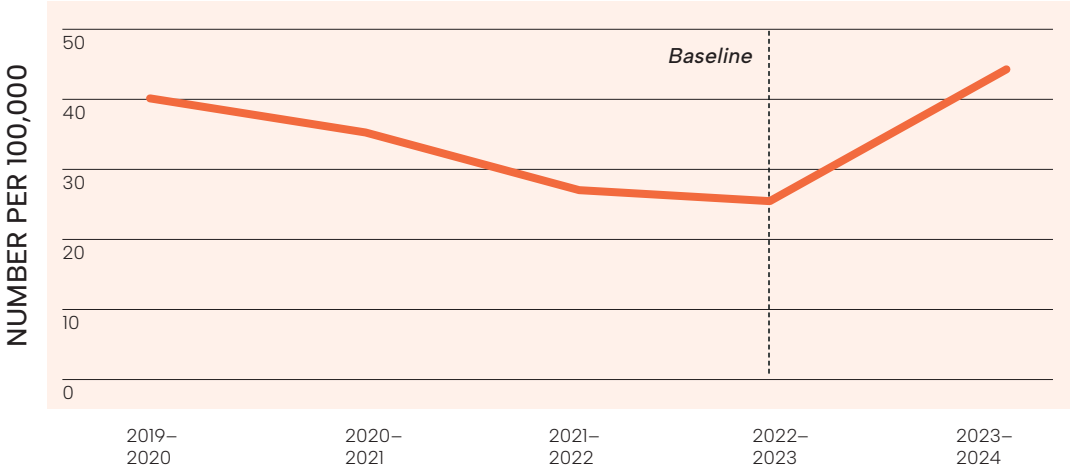
First Nations child victims of filicide



- Rates of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children (0–17) who were victims of filicide fluctuate substantially from year to year because of the small number of deaths underlying this measure.
- Since the 2022–23 baseline, the rate fell sharply in 2023–24 before increasing again in 2024–25.
- This volatility means a sustained post-baseline trend cannot yet be identified.

National Targets continued

Hospitalisations of First Nations children for family violence assault



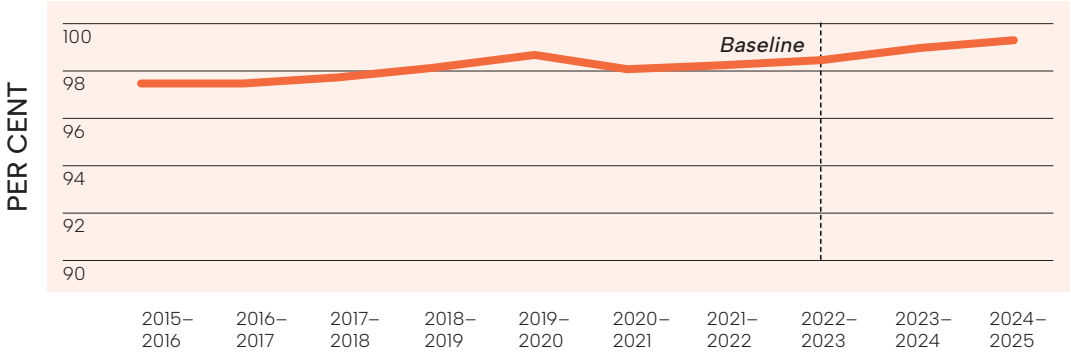
- Hospitalisation rates for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children fell steadily between 2019–20 and the 2022–23 baseline.
- That improvement reversed in 2023–24, with the rate increasing sharply in 2023–24 to its highest level in the available series.
- The first post baseline result is therefore moving away from, rather than towards, the reduction sought under Closing the Gap Target 13.

Outcome 1

Systems and institutions effectively support and protect people impacted by gender-based violence

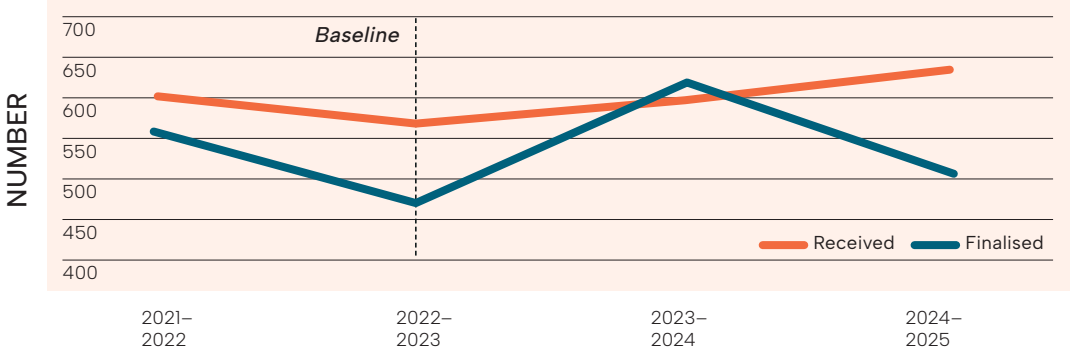
- **Only 2 of the 7** measures currently reported have post-baseline data.
- Available data show some improvement in the areas that can currently be measured, including workplace strategies to address sexual harassment.
- However, the limited post-baseline data do not yet provide a sufficient basis to assess whether systems and institutions are improving overall.

Workplaces with strategies in place targeting sexual harassment



- The proportion of workplaces reporting a strategy to address sexual harassment was already high at baseline and has continued to increase.
- In 2024–25, around 99% of workplaces reported having a strategy in place.
- This measure indicates widespread adoption of workplace strategies, but does not measure their quality, implementation or effectiveness in preventing sexual harassment.

Complaints received and finalised under the Sex Discrimination Act



The latest data in relation to complaints under the Sex Discrimination Act show a widening gap between complaints received and finalised, although this measure alone cannot establish the reasons for that change.

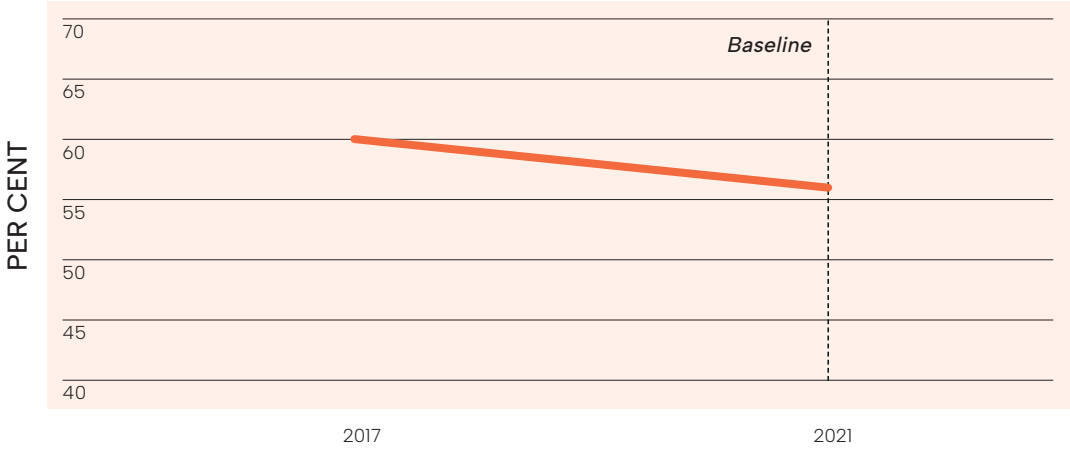
- Complaints received under the Sex Discrimination Act have increased in both years since the 2022–23 baseline, reaching the highest level in the available series in 2024–25.
- Complaints finalised increased in 2023–24 before falling substantially in 2024–25.
- In 2024–25 complaints received exceeded complaints finalised, reversing the position in the previous year.

Outcome 2

Services and prevention programs are effective, culturally responsive, intersectional and accessible

- **Only 1** measure is currently reported for Outcome 2, with data available only for the baseline year.
- There is not yet sufficient data to assess whether services and prevention programs are becoming more effective, accessible or responsive.
- Further data are needed to assess progress across this outcome over time.

People who said they would know where to go if they needed outside support for someone experiencing domestic violence, 2017 and 2021



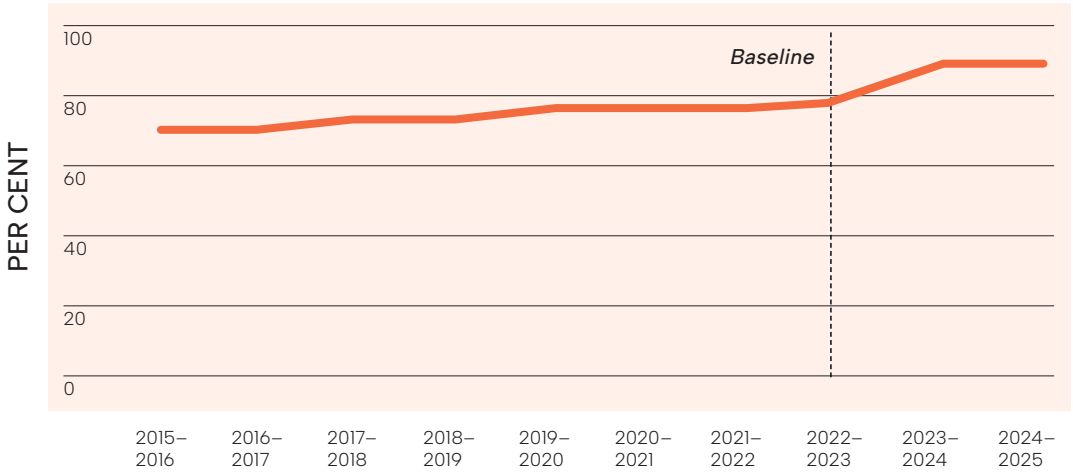
Note: Data for this measure may be difficult to interpret. For example, it is possible that a person does not immediately know where to go if they needed outside support for someone experiencing domestic violence, but they are confident they could find out this information quickly via internet search platforms.

Outcome 3

Community attitudes and beliefs embrace gender equality and condemn all forms of gendered violence without exception

- **Only one out of the 12** measures under Outcome 3 has post-baseline data.
- That measure shows positive movement in workplace action on gender equality, with the proportion of workplaces reporting policies or strategies to address gender inequality increasing since the National Plan baseline.
- This is a positive result, but it provides only a narrow indication of progress against an outcome concerned with community-wide attitudes and beliefs.
- More post-baseline data, including measures of community attitudes towards gender equality and gendered violence, are needed to assess progress against this outcome as a whole.

Workplaces with policies and strategies in place to address gender inequality

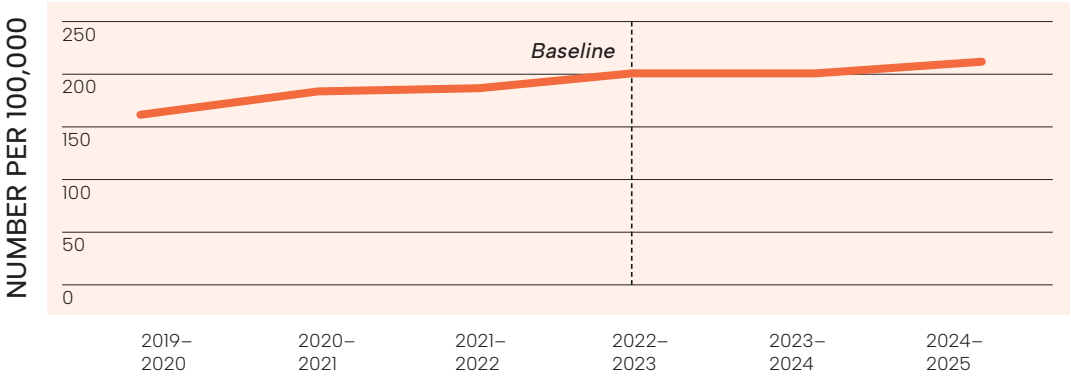


Outcome 4

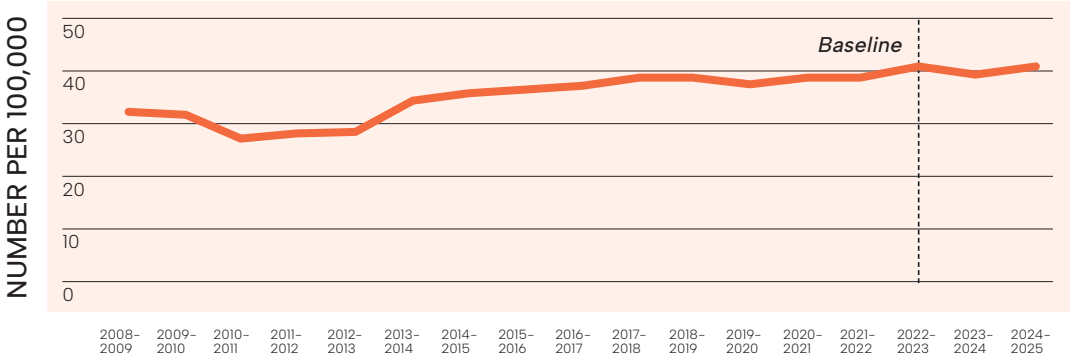
People who choose to use violence are accountable for their actions and stop their violent, coercive and abusive behaviours

- **All 3** of the measures currently reported for this outcome have post-baseline data.
- The measures show increasing contact with the justice system, including higher rates of police proceedings and breaches of FDV-related violence orders.
- Rates of recorded sexual assault and related offences have remained relatively stable since baseline, with no sustained reduction evident.
- Taken together, the available measures show increased system activity, but do not demonstrate that fewer people are using violence or that violent behaviour is reducing.

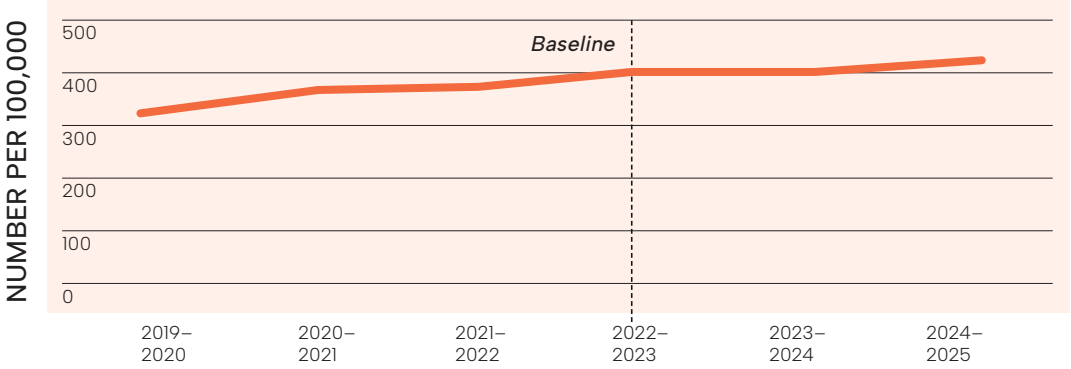
Breaches of FDV-related violence orders recorded by police



Offenders of sexual assaults and related offences across all age categories



Offenders of FDV-related offences proceeded against by police

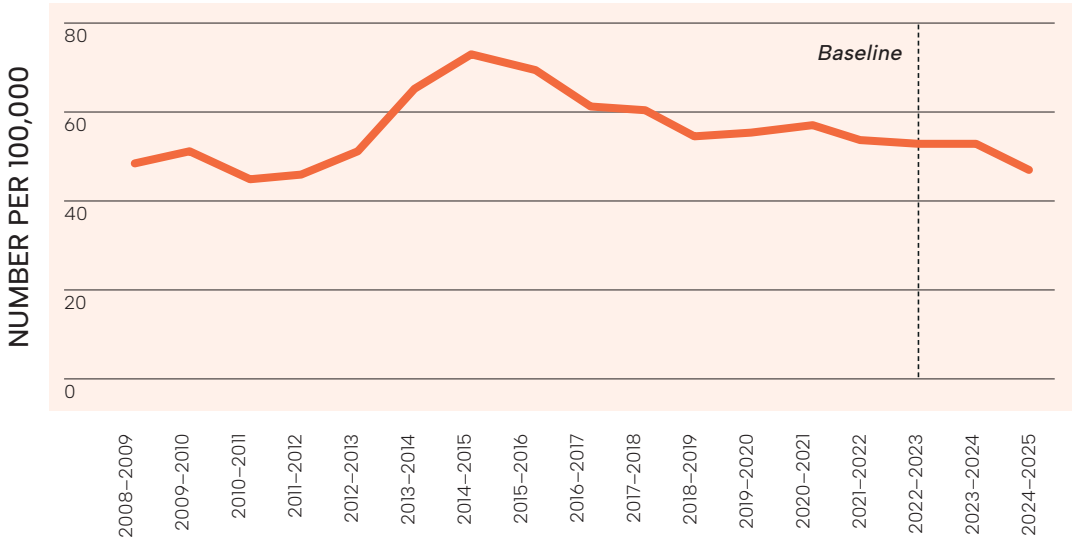


Outcome 5

Children and young people are safe in all settings and are effectively supported by systems and services

- **One out of 2** of the measures currently reported for this outcome has post-baseline data.
- The available measure shows a reduction in the rate of youth offenders of sexual assault and related offences since the baseline.
- While this is a positive movement, this measure alone cannot tell us whether children and young people are safer or being effectively supported by systems and services.
- More post-baseline data across the outcome are needed to assess progress for children and young people.

Youth offenders of sexual assault and related offences



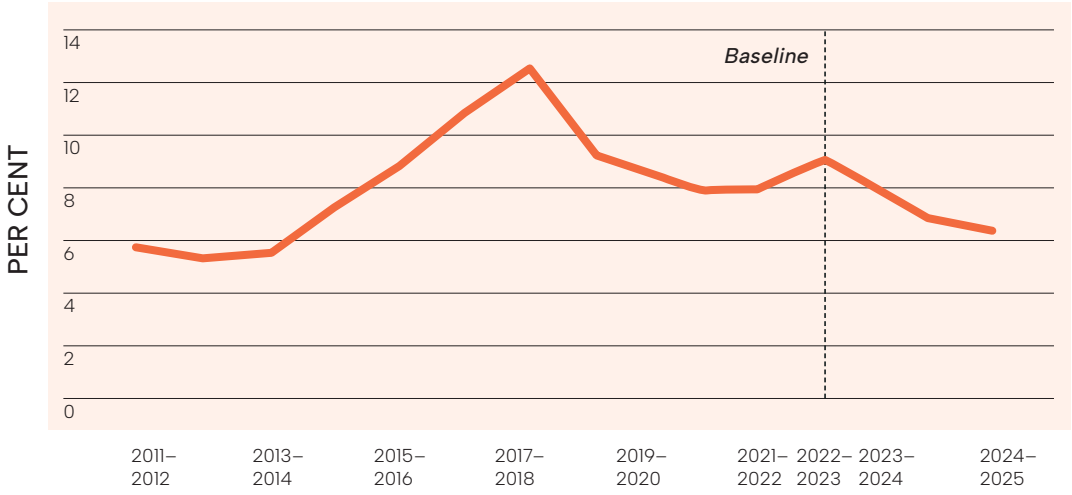
- Youth offender rates for sexual violence and related offences have declined since the National Plan baseline, with a larger fall in 2024–25.
- The rate is also substantially below the peak recorded in 2014–15.
- However, this measure captures young people recorded as offenders and does not measure the prevalence of violence experienced by children and young people or their experiences of systems and services.

Outcome 6

Women are safe and respected in all settings and experience economic, social, political and cultural equality

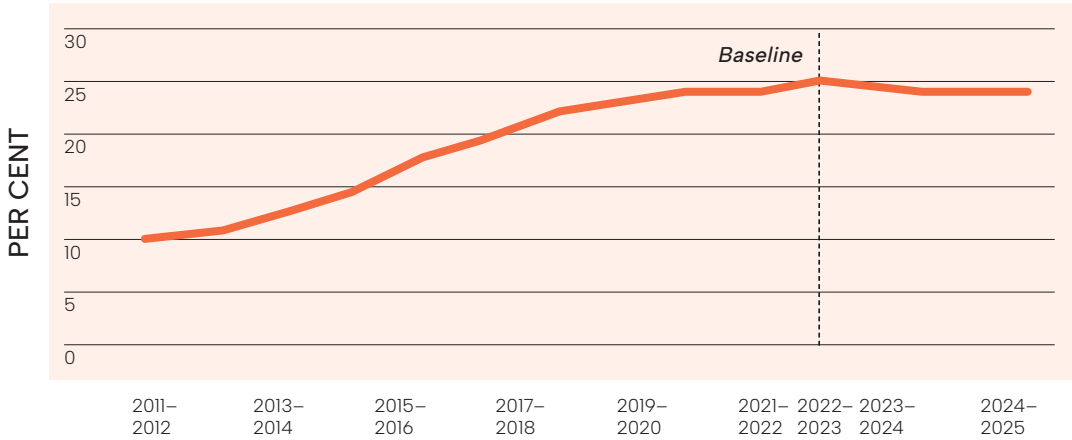
- **7 out of 8** of the measures currently reported have post baseline data; 4 are based on specialist homelessness services clients and 3 relate to gender equality.
- Measures of women's representation show positive movement, including increased representation in government, private-sector leadership and senior leadership roles, and the Australian Parliament.
- There are also signs of improved access to some supports, with unmet need for FDV-related services among specialist homelessness services clients declining since the baseline.
- Housing remains a significant pressure point; unmet need for accommodation remains high and persistent homelessness among women and children affected by family violence has increased since the baseline.
- Taken together, the measures show mixed progress across an outcome that encompasses both women's safety and broader economic, social, political and cultural equality.

Specialist homelessness services clients experiencing FDV whose need for FDV-related services was unmet



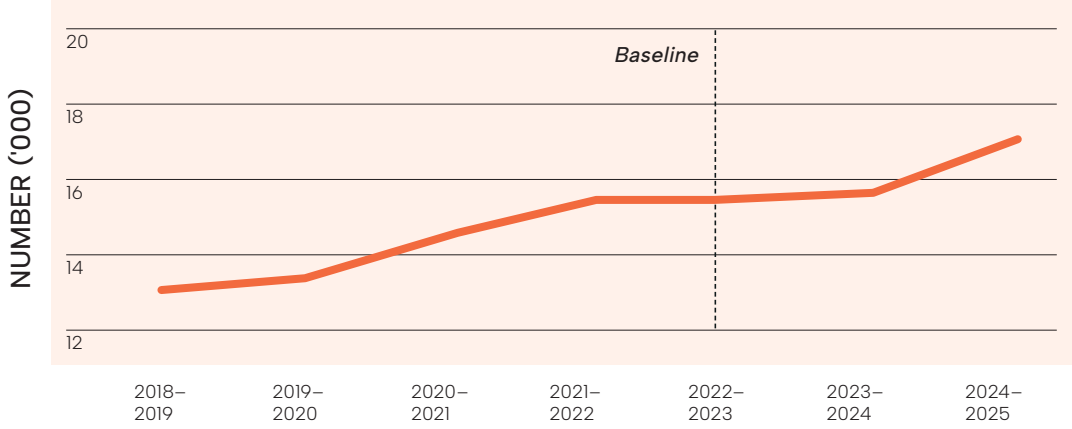
- Unmet need for FDV-related services among specialist homelessness services clients has declined since the baseline.
- The latest result is the lowest recorded since 2012-13.
- However, some specialist homelessness services clients experiencing FDV continue to have unmet needs for assistance related to family and domestic violence.

Specialist homelessness services clients experiencing FDV whose need for accommodation was unmet



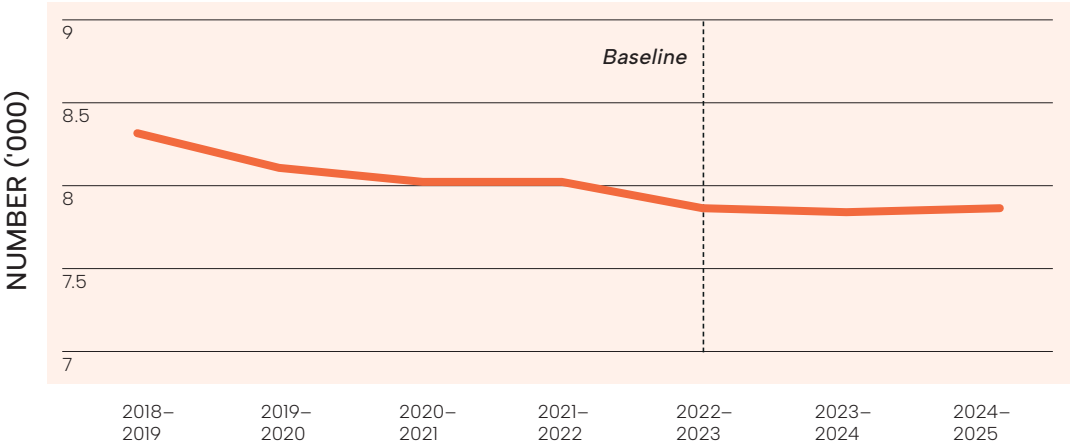
- Unmet need for accommodation remains high, with almost one in 4 specialist homelessness services clients experiencing FDV recorded as having unmet accommodation need.
- There has been little change since the National Plan baseline.
- The longer-term trend shows unmet accommodation need remains substantially higher than a decade ago.

Women and children affected by family violence experiencing persistent homelessness



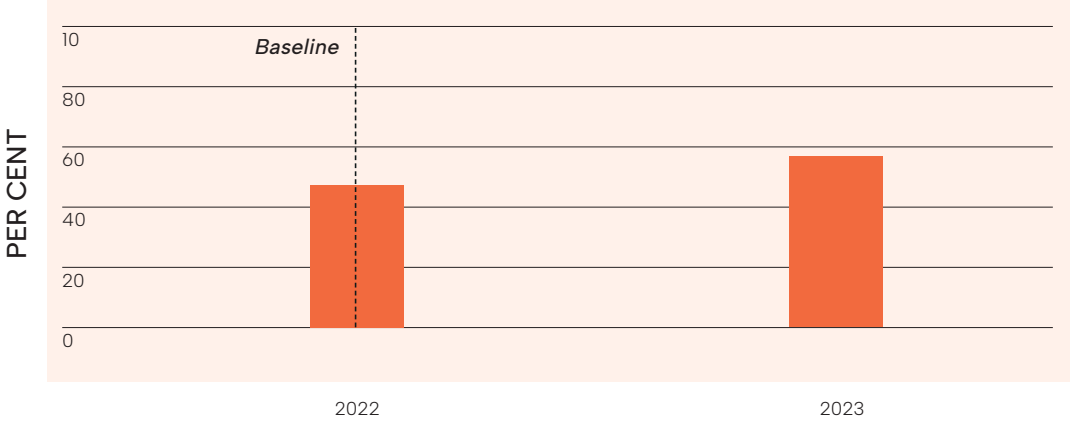
- Persistent homelessness among women and children affected by family violence has increased since the National Plan baseline.
- The increase was particularly marked in 2024–25.
- Persistent homelessness is now at its highest level in the period reported.

Women and children affected by family violence who return to homelessness after achieving housing



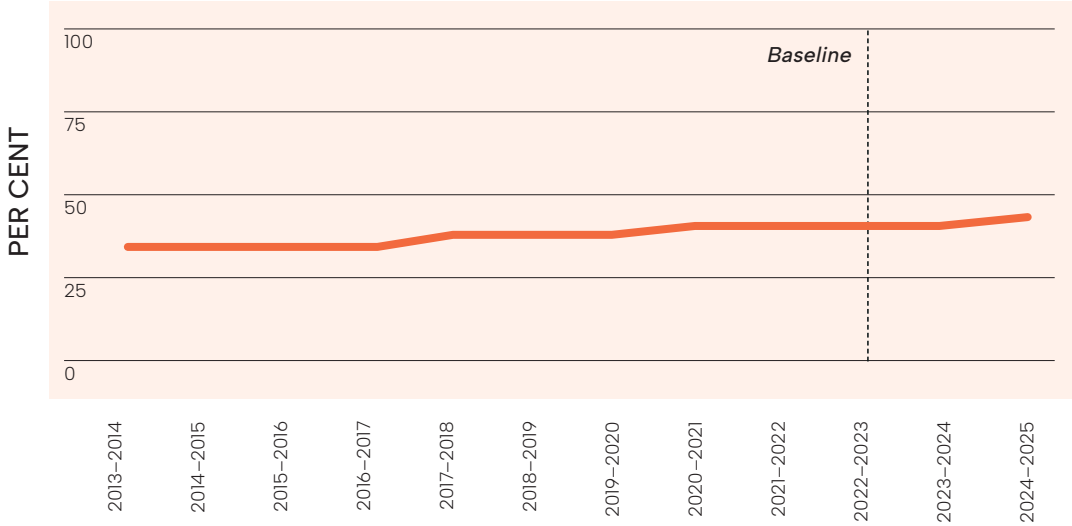
- The number of women and children returning to homelessness after achieving housing has remained relatively stable since the National Plan baseline.
- The rate remains below levels recorded in 2018–19.

Senior leadership roles held by women in government



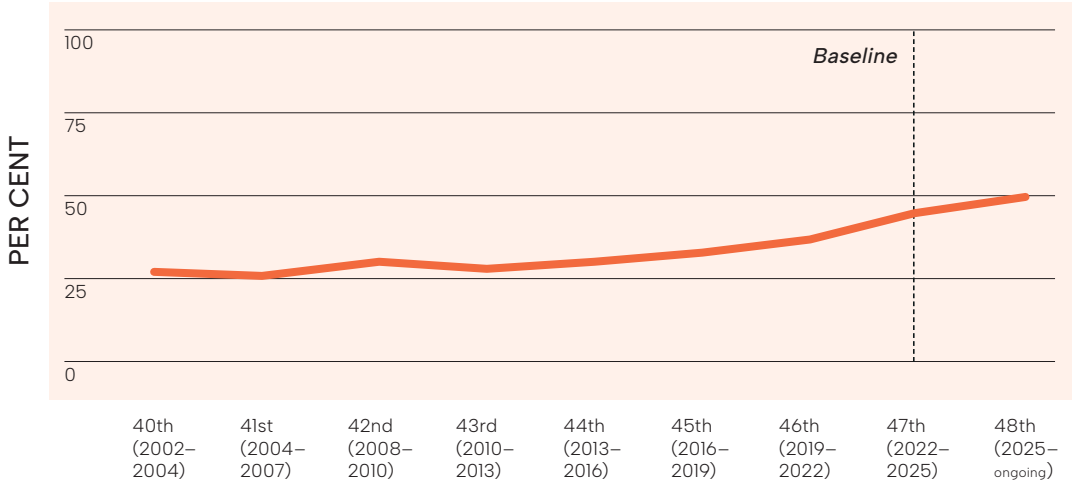
- Women's representation in senior leadership positions in the Commonwealth public sector increased between 2022 (National Plan baseline) and 2023.
- Women held the majority of senior leadership positions in the Commonwealth public sector in 2023, although data on the gender composition of CEOs and agency heads are not included in this measure.
- Further data are needed to establish whether this improvement is sustained.

Senior leadership roles held by women in private industry



- Women's representation in senior leadership in the private sector has increased gradually over the longer term.
- Representation has remained broadly stable since the National Plan baseline, increasing slightly in 2024–25.
- Women remain under-represented in senior leadership, with parity yet to be achieved.

Parliamentarians who are women



- Women's participation in the Australian Parliament has increased substantially over the longer term.
- Representation has continued to increase since the National Plan baseline.
- Women now comprise half of federal parliamentarians, reaching parity for the first time.

PART 2

NATIONAL PLAN CONTEXT AND SYSTEM – KEY DEVELOPMENTS SINCE 2025

HOW OUR 2025 YEARLY REPORT RECOMMENDATIONS HAVE INFORMED ACTION

The Commission's 2025 Yearly Report to Parliament made 30 recommendations to strengthen the systems, governance and capabilities needed to support implementation of the *National Plan to End Violence against Women and Children 2022–2032* (the National Plan).

These recommendations reflected the scale and complexity of reform required across Australia's domestic, family and sexual violence system, spanning governance and accountability, funding transparency, data and evidence capability, workforce capacity, service system reform, prevention and sexual violence reform.

Over the past year, governments, agencies and sector partners have taken forward a number of these recommendations. While the Commission has not undertaken a formal implementation audit, there are strong examples of progress in different priority areas:

Strengthening lived experience engagement

The Commission's Lived Experience Advisory Council is progressing work to strengthen lived experience mechanisms for embedding lived experience into national reform discussions and supporting the development of more consistent engagement approaches.

Refreshed National Plan governance arrangements and cross-portfolio alignment

The Department of Social Services has refreshed governance arrangements for the National Plan introducing stronger oversight and delivery mechanisms.

The Department of Social Services, the Attorney-General's Department and the Office for Women are also working to align the development of 5 new action plans under 4 national frameworks relating to family and child safety.

Implementation of elements of the Rapid Review of Prevention Approaches and National Plan reporting

Progress is underway to implement key recommendations of the Rapid Review, with governments investing in data development, workforce capability, prevention initiatives and responses to people who use violence. This includes new funding agreements, development of a national crisis services data collection, and early steps towards national workforce and men's behaviour change program reforms. The Office for Women publishes comprehensive updates of Rapid Review implementation and recommendations are being absorbed within the National Plan Activities Addendum reporting.

There is also increasing focus on engaging men and boys in prevention, as well as responding to emerging issues such as online misogyny and technology-facilitated abuse.

While these developments represent important progress, many reforms are still in early stages of implementation. Nationally consistent approaches to service demand analysis, workforce strategy, prevention architecture and quality assurance of men's behaviour change programs continue to be developed.

This work represents positive steps towards strengthening Australia's response to domestic, family and sexual violence. However, progress remains uneven, particularly in foundational reform areas such as funding transparency, consistent outcome measurement, unmet demand analysis and public visibility of implementation progress.

These ongoing challenges reinforce the Commission's view that lasting reform depends on strengthening the core system capabilities required to support coordinated action, accountability and continuous improvement.

This Yearly Report builds on the Commission's previous work by examining the system capabilities that remain critical to achieving long-term reform. It focuses on the areas where further national attention is needed to strengthen implementation, improve accountability and support continuous learning under the National Plan.

In particular, the report examines progress and remaining challenges across 4 priority areas:

- a national outcomes measurement and accountability system that can demonstrate impact and a stronger national data, research and evaluation capability to support evidence-informed reform
- greater transparency and accountability for investment under the National Plan
- application of intentional equity and safety design to ensure systems and services meet the needs of our most vulnerable populations
- more integrated systems that improve people's experience of support and services.

Delivering on the Commission's commitments

Alongside recommendations to governments, the Commission also committed to strengthening the national infrastructure that supports lived experience leadership.

These commitments recognise that meaningful engagement requires more than consultation – it requires consistent frameworks, capability and accountability.

This work comprises 3 interconnected initiatives being led by the Commission's Lived Experience Advisory Council:

1. a Lived Experience Engagement Framework to support safe, trauma-informed and culturally responsible engagement across the domestic, family and sexual violence system
2. a Lived Experience Evaluation Framework to help assess the quality, integrity and impact of lived experience engagement
3. an Audit of Lived Experience Engagement Mechanisms and development of metrics to establish a clearer national picture of current approaches and identify opportunities for improvement.

Together these projects will provide practical tools to support governments, organisations and systems to engage more effectively with people with lived experience.

In addition, as part of the Commission's recently released *Monitoring and Reporting Framework*, the Lived Experience Advisory Council has developed a pilot survey for people with lived experience.

> 'Individually, each project is important. Together, they represent something much bigger. They represent a shift from establishing lived experience leadership to embedding it. From creating a seat at the table to strengthening the table itself. Lived experience is not a story we tell. It is expertise we apply.'
>
> **Holly Supple-Gurruwiwi**
>
> Co-Chair, Lived Experience Advisory Council, June 2026, meeting with Minister Plibersek and Assistant Minister Kearney

MONITORING AND REPORTING *FRAMEWORK*

In July 2026, the Commission published a *Monitoring and Reporting Framework* (the framework) to clarify and guide its role to provide independent monitoring of the implementation and outcomes of the National Plan. The framework is a 2-year plan and will remain a living document.

The framework represents an important evolution in the Commission's approach to monitoring and reporting. Rather than focusing primarily on tracking activities and reforms, we have adopted a systems-based approach to assessing whether collective efforts are driving meaningful change (Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence Commission, 2026). This reflects the complexity of domestic, family and sexual violence, where outcomes are shaped not by individual programs alone, but by how effectively systems work together to prevent violence, respond to harm and support recovery.

The framework is central to the Commission's role. It strengthens the Commission's ability to identify systemic barriers by monitoring progress against outcomes and highlighting emerging risks and opportunities for reform.

The framework also provides greater clarity about what is required for effective national monitoring and accountability over the life of the National Plan. This includes access to timely and consistent information across governments, and enduring arrangements that support transparent and independent assessment of progress.

The need to strengthen these arrangements is not new. The Rapid Review recommended establishing the Commission as a statutory authority with expanded functions and stronger information-gathering powers, including to support continued monitoring of implementation and funding under the National Plan. The Commission reinforced the importance of stronger information-gathering powers in its 2025 Yearly Report.

With the *Monitoring and Reporting Framework* now in place, there is an opportunity to strengthen the institutional arrangements that support this national monitoring function. Statutory independence, accompanied by appropriate information-gathering powers, would provide a more enduring foundation for independent monitoring and accountability over the remaining life of the National Plan.

The 2026 Yearly Report to Parliament is the first report structured around the framework's focus areas. It uses them to assess progress and provide system-level insights on where greater attention is needed.

The framework outlines 7 areas of focus for the Commission's monitoring activities with guiding questions to inform lines of inquiry and assessment (refer to Table 1 below).

Table 1: Focus areas for the Commission's monitoring activities

Areas of focus	Why are we examining this?
Governance and accountability	To understand the extent to which newly established governance mechanisms are supporting effective oversight, coordination and integration of cross-government/sector efforts to achieve the outcomes of the National Plan.
Funding transparency	To understand how funding is being directed in support of the National Plan's outcomes and made visible to the sector and community.
Data development and outcome measurement	To understand the extent to which systems, data and reporting are available to enable the Australian Government to measure progress in achieving the National Plan's outcomes.
Evaluation and evidence building	To understand the extent to which research, evaluation and other forms of evidence are being generated in support of, and to inform, efforts under the National Plan.
Qualitative indicators of change	To support achievement of the National Plan objectives through drawing on the Commission's lived experience and stakeholder networks to understand where change is being experienced in systems and services to supplement quantitative outcome measurement.
Gaps and emerging issues	To support achievement of the National Plan objectives through utilising the Commission's lived experience and stakeholder networks to identify and raise gaps and emerging issues that require further action through the National Plan's associated Action Plans.
Towards system integration	To understand the pathway to integrating domestic, family and sexual violence systems.

The Framework is implemented through 6 engagement and information-gathering activities conducted with all sector stakeholders described in Figure 2 below.

Key engagement and information gathering activities

The framework comprises 6 interconnected engagement and information gathering activities with all sector stakeholders. These activities function as integrated components in synergy, ensuring that activity-based reporting, outcome reporting, the voice of lived experience, and service sector stakeholder input inform the framework and the Commission's analysis and reporting.

The 6 activities are depicted in Figure 2 and include:

- National Plan public activities reporting
- National Plan outcomes reporting
- engagement and mapping of state and territory plans, strategies and outcomes reporting
- lived experience voices
- development of a National Funding Mapping Framework
- the Commission's authoritative strategic advice.

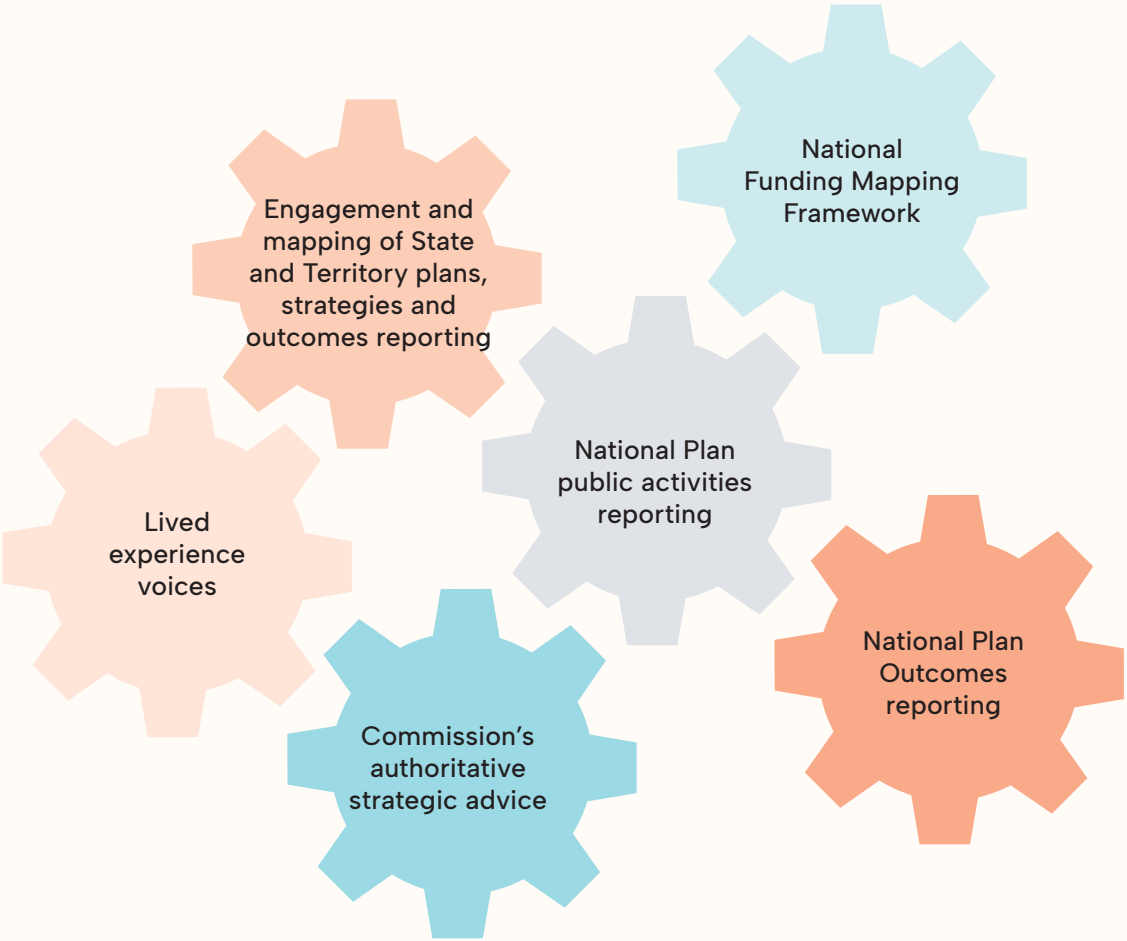


Figure 2: Key engagement and information-gathering activities

Stakeholders have regularly discussed with the Commission the need for clarification of the range of reporting responsibilities that key agencies within the National Plan hold. The framework presents a map of the Australian Government's reporting responsibilities under the National Plan (Figure 3 below).

National Plan reporting responsibilities

Reporting responsibilities under the National Plan to End Violence against Women and Children 2022–2032 (the National Plan) and Our Ways – Strong Ways – Our Voices: National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Plan to End Family, Domestic and Sexual Violence 2026–2036

National Plan activities and progress reporting

Department of Social Services (DSS)

Provides annual public reporting through:

- First Action Plan Activities Addendum
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Action Plan 2025 update
- Investments Report
- Highlight Report.

Data sources for these reports include Commonwealth, state and territory governments.

Our Ways – Strong Ways – Our Voices Plan was released in February 2026. Arrangements for activities reporting are to be finalised (refer to Figure 1).

National Indigenous Australians Agency (NIAA)

Leads Commonwealth implementation reporting including National Agreement on Closing the Gap Combined Annual Report and Implementation Plan.

Women and Women's Safety Ministerial Council

Provides updates to National Cabinet on progress on agreed priorities.

Office for Women

Reports on implementation of the Rapid Review of Prevention Approaches recommendations.

National Plan outcomes reporting

Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW)

Provides public dashboard reporting on the long-term outcomes and national targets identified in the *Outcomes framework 2023–2032* including:

- 6 long-term outcomes and sub-outcomes
- 6 national targets.

Data for these measures are compiled by AIHW from state and territory administrative datasets and national population and longitudinal datasets (e.g. AIC National Homicide Monitoring Program, National Community Attitudes towards Violence against Women, Personal Safety Survey, National Student Safety Survey, Longitudinal Study of Australian Children).

Our Ways – Strong Ways – Our Voices Plan was released in February 2026. The combined theory of change and outcomes framework is to be delivered (refer to Figure 1).

NIAA

Reports on National Agreement on Closing the Gap Targets 12 and 13.

Productivity Commission (PC)

Provides independent oversight and assessment through:

- Annual data compilation report on the 19 socioeconomic targets
- Closing the Gap dashboard
- 3-yearly independent review of progress

Building the evidence

Australia's National Research Organisation for Women's Safety (ANROWS)

ANROWS was established by the Commonwealth, state and territory governments under the first National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children (2010–2022). As an ongoing partner, ANROWS continues to build, strengthen and translate the evidence base that informs the current National Plan.

Australian Institute of Family Studies (AIFS)

AIFS is the Australian Government's key research agency into family wellbeing operating under the *Family Law Act 1975* conducting research relevant to policy and practice

Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS)

ABS is the Australian Government's national statistical agency providing trusted official statistics on a wide range of economic, social, population and environmental matters

Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW)

AIHW is an independent statutory Australian Government agency providing meaningful information and statistics on health and welfare data

System oversight

Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence Commission (DFSVC)

Drawing on the voice of lived experience through its Lived Experience Advisory Council, stakeholder engagement activities and system data, the DFSVC provides insight on progress towards the outcomes of the National Plan in its Yearly Report to Parliament.

Jurisdictional reporting

State and territory governments report domestic, family and sexual violence data, activities and outcomes according to their relevant structures, strategies and frameworks.

Figure 3: National Plan reporting responsibilities

STRONG GOVERNANCE ENABLES GOVERNMENTS TO LEAD TOGETHER, DRIVE SHARED OUTCOMES, LEARN AND ADAPT ITERATIVELY AND REMAIN ACCOUNTABLE FOR PROGRESS

Clear and strong foundations for national governance have been put in place. There is now stronger cross-government leadership, refreshed governance mechanisms and greater recognition of the value of drawing upon the voices of those with lived experience. The next phase is to ensure they lead collaboratively, learn and adapt iteratively and ensure accountability, to drive towards better outcomes for people experiencing domestic, family and sexual violence.

A mature governance system provides strong national leadership

Australia has made significant progress in establishing the governance arrangements needed to lead a coordinated national response to domestic, family and sexual violence. Over successive National Plans, governments have strengthened national leadership, implementation and accountability through new governance mechanisms that bring together governments, lived experience, the sector and independent expertise.

These developments reflect a growing recognition that domestic, family and sexual violence cannot be addressed by a single portfolio, agency or jurisdiction. Achieving the objectives of the National Plan requires coordinated action across governments and across the systems that influence people's safety, wellbeing and recovery.

Establishment of the DFSV Commission in 2022 was an important step to develop a mechanism to embed lived experience (through establishment of a Lived Experience Advisory Council), promote the National Plan, enhance coordination, monitor progress towards outcomes, and hold governments to account.

The past year has seen further important progress. The Department of Social Services has refreshed governance arrangements under the National Plan, strengthening implementation oversight, advisory mechanisms and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leadership. Together with the continued leadership of National Cabinet, the Women and Women's Safety Ministerial Council, the Commission and its Lived Experience Advisory Council, and the newly established Ministerial Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence Advisory Council, these arrangements provide a much stronger foundation for nationally coordinated reform than existed only a few years ago (refer to Figure 4).

Strong governance provides more than oversight of implementation. It enables governments to identify emerging issues, understand where systems are creating unintended harm and continuously improve policy, legislation, programs and investment over time.

Domestic, family and sexual violence intersects with health, education, justice, housing, child protection, immigration, social security, childcare, aged care, disability support and many other areas of government. Decisions made across each of these systems can strengthen safety, reduce risk and improve recovery, or unintentionally create additional barriers and harm. As governments increasingly recognise domestic, family and sexual violence as a whole-of-government responsibility, governance arrangements need to support coordinated decision-making across these portfolios. The development of the Second Action Plan provides a specific example of the way this acknowledgement is being operationalised, bringing together cross-portfolio Ministerial Councils to consider alignment between plans under development.

The Secretaries Working Group on Gender-Based Violence provides a practical example of how coordinated governance can identify emerging risks that span multiple portfolios and translate those insights into system reform (refer to Box 1: Secretaries Working Group on Gender-Based Violence).

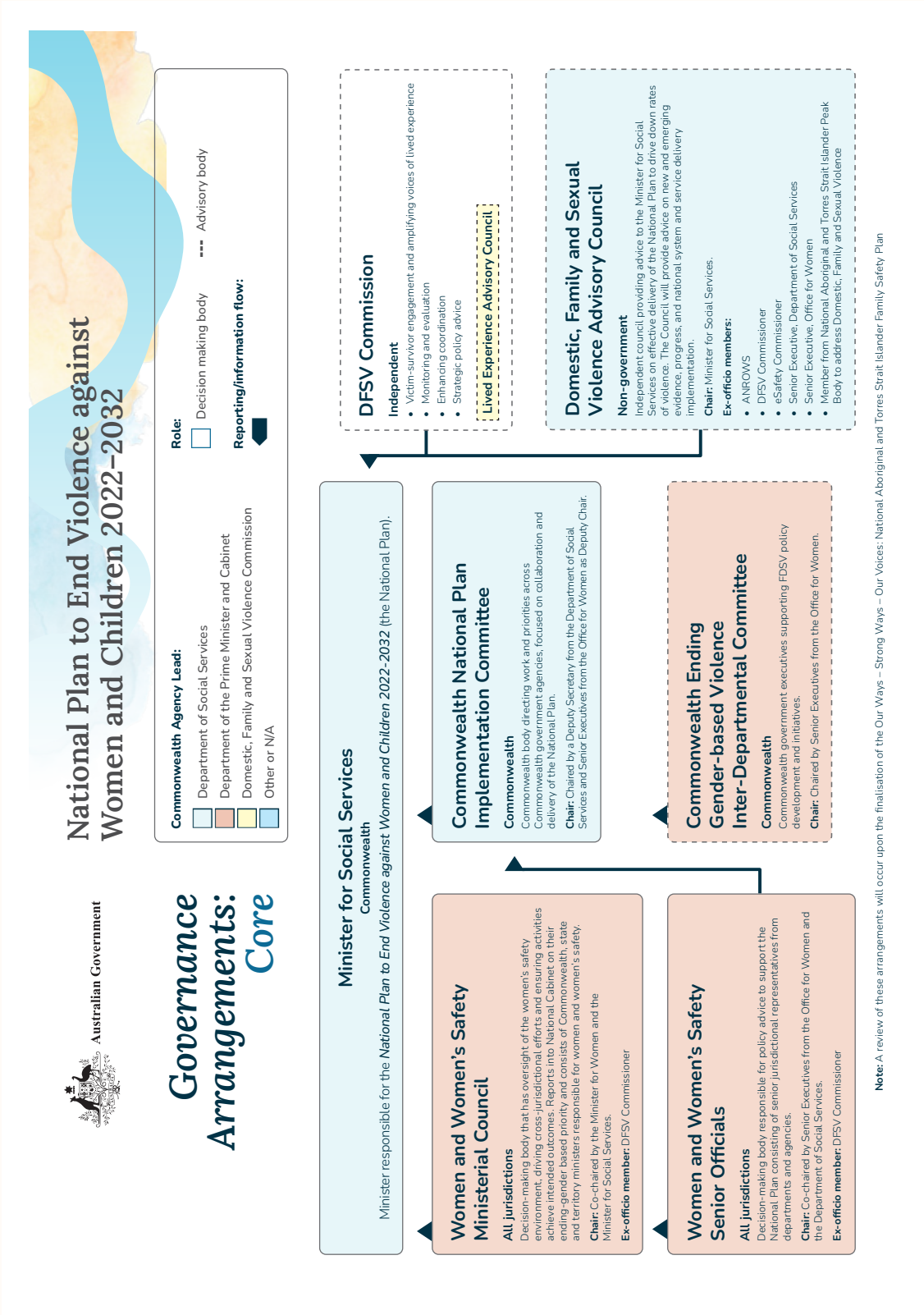


Figure 4: New governance arrangements under the National Plan

A mature governance system supports whole-of-government decision-making

RECOMMENDATION 1 *

Strengthen whole-of-government capability to identify and manage domestic, family and sexual violence risks across policy, investment and service delivery.

Our ability to effectively respond and address domestic, family and sexual violence is shaped by decisions made across all levels, and many parts of governments – housing, immigration, justice, family law, social security, education, health and employment policies can either strengthen safety or unintentionally create risk. Historically, domestic, family and sexual violence has been seen as the responsibility of social service portfolios. This is shifting now, but some parts of government still do not prioritise it in policy development, investment decisions and service design.

The Australian Government, and all state and territory governments, should continue to strengthen existing whole-of-government mechanisms to ensure domestic, family and sexual violence risks are consistently identified and addressed across policy development, investment decisions and service design. Existing mechanisms, including the Australian Government's *Including Gender Framework*, and whole-of-government mechanisms such as the Secretaries Board, should be used to strengthen shared accountability, continuous learning and regular reviews of how government decisions influence the safety and experiences of people affected by domestic, family and sexual violence. This should extend to intergovernmental decision-making through National Cabinet and relevant Commonwealth-state ministerial forums, beyond the Women and Women's Safety Ministerial Council.

Government leadership should also support, encourage and learn from sectors beyond government about how to identify, address and prevent further harm through safer design of products, services and organisational practices.

Box 1: Secretaries Working Group on Gender-Based Violence – cross-government leadership to address systems abuse in practice

Emerging understanding about forms of harm such as systems abuse highlights why governance arrangements must support coordination beyond traditional portfolio boundaries.

These harms often occur at the intersection of and across multiple systems simultaneously – including social security, taxation, child support, family law and banking – and cannot be effectively addressed through siloed responses.

The Secretaries Working Group on Gender-Based Violence (the Working Group) oversees the Audit of Australian Government Systems to identify areas where they are being weaponised by perpetrators of family and domestic violence to stamp out opportunities for systems abuse. The Working Group provides an example of governance structures supporting coordinated cross-government responses to these complex harms.

The Working Group brings together senior leaders across Commonwealth portfolios responsible for driving work on ending gender-based violence, including overseeing the Audit of Australian Government Systems. The Working Group is a subcommittee of the APS Secretaries Board. The Secretaries Board (the Board) was established under the *Public Service Act 1999* and is Chaired by the Secretary of the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet and comprises all Departmental Secretaries, the Australian Public Service Commissioner and the Chief Executive Officer of the National Indigenous Australians Agency. The Board takes responsibility for the stewardship and improvement of the APS, identifies strategic priorities, draws together advice from senior leaders in government, business and the community, and works collaboratively and model leadership behaviours (Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, n.d.-a).

The Board demonstrates how mature governance arrangements can identify emerging risks that no single portfolio can address alone.

By bringing together senior leaders across government, it enables coordinated action, shared accountability and system-wide learning, by:

- aligning leadership across portfolios around shared priorities
- enabling faster identification of emerging risks
- connecting strategic oversight with operational reform
- improving visibility and accountability for implementation.

The Audit of Australian Government Systems illustrates the importance of governance arrangements that can respond to emerging harms with agility, coordination and shared accountability.

A mature governance model will embed lived experience and self-determination

People with lived experience bring unique insight into how policies, programs and services operate in practice. Embedding lived experience within governance arrangements, alongside other expertise, strengthens decision-making by ensuring reforms are informed by the experiences of those most affected by them. Those who have had direct experience of the system are able to identify opportunities for improvement that may not be evident through administrative data or policy analysis alone.

In the Commission's 2025 Yearly Report, we committed to developing practical guidance to strengthen lived experience engagement across the domestic, family and sexual violence system. This reflects the Commission's role not only in ensuring the perspectives of people who have experiences of domestic, family and sexual violence inform national reform, but in building government capability to embed lived experience and expertise as a core element of policy development, service design and governance.

Over the past 3 years, the Commission's Lived Experience Advisory Council has demonstrated the value of embedding lived experience within national governance. The Council has strengthened the Commission's understanding of emerging issues, challenged assumptions, informed priorities and improved the quality of our advice to government. As Australia's first national lived experience governance mechanism in the domestic, family and sexual violence sector, it has provided valuable lessons about what effective lived experience governance looks like in practice. Led by the Council, the Commission is now using those lessons to develop tools and guidance that will support governments and organisations to establish more mature and meaningful lived experience governance arrangements.

The Commission has also observed increasing maturity in lived experience practice. This includes greater recognition of the different contributions of lived experience, lived expertise and broader system insights, and a stronger understanding of how each can inform policy, governance and service improvement.

In 2026, the Commission worked with the Lived Experience Advisory Council to design and conduct an audit of lived experience engagement mechanisms across Commonwealth agencies and national peak organisations. Initial findings indicate that engagement with lived experience expertise is continuing to mature. Around two-thirds of organisations surveyed reported having formal or informal lived experience mechanisms in place. This demonstrates growing recognition of the value of lived experience in shaping policy, program design and service improvement.

> 'The first thing I want to know is how we shifted power so that people with lived experience weren't just being consulted, but were actively empowered and centred.'
>
> **Dr Tessa Boyd-Caine**
> Voices Towards 2050 podcast series

The audit also identified important differences in governance maturity. While many organisations have established advisory groups or consultation processes, fewer have embedded lived experience within ongoing governance arrangements through formal governance structures, recruitment processes, remuneration, induction and ongoing support. These findings suggest that lived experience is increasingly being recognised as a strategic governance capability rather than solely as a source of consultation. This also highlights significant opportunities to strengthen practice across government. The full audit results will be published in late 2026.

Our Ways – Strong Ways – Our Voices provides an example of the direction of mature governance. The Plan places Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leadership, self-determination and First Nations-led solutions at the centre of efforts to end family, domestic and sexual violence. It also emphasises shared decision-making, accountability and the importance of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people having a meaningful role in decisions that affect them. These principles provide valuable lessons as governments continue to strengthen governance and accountability under the National Plan.

A mature governance system measures outcomes, not just activity

Governments have strengthened public reporting on implementation of the National Plan. Reporting now provides greater visibility of activities, investments and reforms underway across jurisdictions. This is an improvement on previous reporting. The next step is to demonstrate how these activities are contributing to the National Plan's long-term outcomes.

There is improved visibility of implementation activity through a growing suite of reporting products associated with the National Plan. These include the Investments Report, the Activities Addendum to the First Action Plan, the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Action Plan update, and implementation updates associated with the National Plan and related reforms. Public reporting on initiatives such as the Rapid Review of Prevention Approaches and the Audit of Australian Government Systems has further improved transparency and provided stakeholders with greater insight into work underway (refer to Box 2). The forthcoming mid-term review of the National Plan will also contribute to this (refer to 'Creating an evidence-informed learning domestic, family and sexual violence system').

This represents a significant improvement in governance maturity. However, while visibility of activity is progressing, there is still significant work to ensure transparent accountability for outcomes. This is illustrated in both the First Action Plan Activities Addendum and the Implementation Update.

Box 2: Formal National Plan implementation reporting available on the Department of Social Services website under 'Progress under the National Plan'

- *National Plan to End Violence against Women and Children 2022–2032: 2025 Highlights* (Highlights Report)
- *Investing in a Future Free from Gender-Based Violence* (Investments Report)
- *First Action Plan 2023–2027 Activities Addendum Update 2025* (First Action Plan Activities Addendum)
- *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Action Plan 2023–2025 Implementation Update* (Implementation Update)

Broader accountability and oversight reporting includes:

- National Plan outcomes reporting (AIHW Dashboards)
- *Rapid Review of Prevention Approaches: Australian Government implementation updates* (Prime Minister and Cabinet reporting)
- Audit of Australian Government Systems (Prime Minister and Cabinet reporting)
- the Commission's 2025 Yearly Report to Parliament.

First Action Plan Activities Addendum

The evolution of the Activities Addendum illustrates both the progress and the remaining challenge in National Plan governance. Since the Commission's 2025 Yearly Report, the Addendum has evolved into a searchable database, providing greater visibility of implementation activity across governments.

This is an improvement in transparency; however, the next phase of reporting needs to strengthen visibility of implementation progress and outcomes by clearly linking activities to the reforms to be delivered and the outcomes they are seeking to achieve.

This would enable governments, the sector and the community to better understand where reform is succeeding, where progress is slow and where additional effort is required.

Implementation Update

The 2025 National Plan Implementation Update provides the first public report on progress under the *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Action Plan 2023–2025* since its release. It demonstrates that governments have commenced implementation across a range of reform areas and highlights significant investments in foundational reform. This includes a $15 million First Nations-led data project to strengthen measurement of Closing the Gap Target 13.

However, the level of detail provided varies considerably across the report. While many service delivery initiatives include clear descriptions of activities undertaken, reporting on several foundation reforms is less developed.

For example, the Action Plan commits to an immediate foundational data review relating to missing and murdered Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and children. However, the Implementation Update does not provide a specific update on whether this review has commenced, its governance arrangements, expected milestones or anticipated outputs.

Similarly, while the $15 million First Nations-led data project is identified, the update provides limited information beyond advising that work is underway to finalise its scope and implementation approach.

These examples illustrate an opportunity for future reporting to provide greater visibility of progress on major foundation reforms. Reporting against implementation milestones, governance arrangements and expected deliverables would strengthen transparency, accountability and shared learning as these long-term reforms mature.

A mature governance model should embed Safety by Design principles

RECOMMENDATION 2 ✳

Co-design policies and services with and for people who experience the greatest barriers to safety.

People continue to experience the system differently depending on who they are, where they live and the barriers they face. Governments should ensure that policies, services and reforms are co-designed to meet the needs of people who experience the greatest barriers to safety – those who are overrepresented, over-policed, overlooked and least well served by our responses to gender-based violence.

The National Plan has recognised that some people are disproportionately impacted by gender-based violence, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, women and children with disabilities, culturally and linguistically diverse communities, LGBTIQA+SB people, people in regional and remote Australia, migrants and refugees and at points in the life cycle – children and young people and older women. Designing systems with and for those disproportionately impacted is how the system becomes more effective and equitable for everyone.

Embedding lived experience perspectives in all aspects of policy and service design, improving accessibility, and ensuring responses reflect the complexity of people's lives rather than requiring people to navigate fragmented systems are also essential changes we need to continue to drive. Communities must be involved in defining the problems they face, from their perspective. People who experience the greatest barriers bring unique insight into how systems create, reinforce or remove barriers to safety. This is essential knowledge for governments in identifying the underlying causes that reforms need to address.

The next phase of reform should strengthen government's ability to identify domestic, family and sexual violence risks before policies, legislation and programs are implemented. It should allow emerging risks to be identified throughout implementation.

The Australian Government has already established the *Gender analysis and gender impact assessment framework* as part of Cabinet and New Policy Proposal processes (refer to Box 3). This provides a strong foundation for considering the gendered impacts of government decisions, including the recognition that gender-based violence is a key consideration.

Box 3: Gender responsive budgeting

Gender responsive budgeting (GRB) is a core Australian Government commitment to drive gender equality by giving decision-makers information about the gendered impacts of proposals being considered by the Cabinet and its committees.

Working for women: A strategy for gender equality (Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, n.d.-b) highlights GRB as a key mechanism to ensure that government policies and investments support gender equality. GRB is the responsibility of all departments as set out in the Cabinet Handbook, Budget Process Operational Rules and *Working for women*. GRB weaves consideration of gender equality through the Cabinet and Budget process. It is a key way the government can identify, fund and support measures to close gender gaps and avoid decisions that inadvertently exacerbate gender inequality.

GRB requires policymakers to conduct gender analysis for all proposals. They must self-assess proposals against the 4 criteria for Gender Impact Assessment. Policymakers are required to complete a Gender Impact Assessment for proposals that meet one or more of the criteria. Policymakers use the outcomes of the gender analysis or Gender Impact Assessment to inform the Gender Equality Summary that is included in the Impacts Table of the Cabinet Submission or New Policy Proposal.

A full copy of the GRB guide can be found on the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet website.

As this framework matures, there is an opportunity to strengthen its contribution to domestic, family and sexual violence prevention. Reviewing recent policy proposals, including lessons from the Secretaries Board's work on systems abuse, would enable government to assess how effectively the current framework identifies domestic, family and sexual violence risks in practice. This includes whether existing trigger criteria remain appropriate and where guidance or capability could be strengthened.

Embedding this knowledge within existing government decision-making processes would support a practical Safety by Design (refer to Box 4: Safety by Design principles) approach, ensuring policies are routinely informed by evidence, lived experience and lessons from implementation before unintended harms occur.

Box 4: Safety by Design principles

There is growing recognition of the value of applying Safety by Design principles in the context of policy design and implementation.

Articulated by the eSafety Commissioner in 2019, Safety by Design is a prevention-led framework that embeds user safety into the design of products, platforms and services (eSafety Commissioner, 2019). It is underpinned by 3 core principles relating to addressing and anticipating harm: service provider responsibility, user empowerment and autonomy, and transparency and accountability.

The Australian Government is working to apply Safety by Design in system reform under the Audit of Australian Government Systems discussed above. Guidance has been developed to assist government agencies to apply Safety by Design in system reform and design (Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, 2026).

Applied to a government context, relevant principles include:

- government role – government systems should be designed to work in the best interest of users and to uphold human rights. They should be trauma informed and accessible, and ensure that responsibility for safety does not rest solely on the individuals navigating the system
- user empowerment and autonomy – people using government systems and services should be empowered to make informed decisions, with privacy and safety settings carefully balanced
- transparency and accountability – government should be accountable for and transparent about its approach to safety in systems, including through publicising implementation and outcomes of actions to ensure safety.

Government leadership should also support and encourage sectors beyond government to identify, address and prevent further harm to people affected by domestic, family and sexual violence through safer design of products, services and organisational practices.

Important work is also underway across Australia's regulatory system to strengthen responses and embed Safety by Design principles into products, services and organisational practice. Regulators across sectors including online safety, financial services, higher education and essential services are increasingly using regulatory standards, guidance, education and accountability mechanisms to improve responses and reduce further harm. This momentum should continue and be strengthened, particularly as digital environments become an increasingly significant setting for domestic, family and sexual violence.

CASE STUDY

Essential services

There is increasing understanding across the community that people using violence can weaponise products, systems and services to cause harm and that poorly designed systems can themselves produce harm.

Safety by Design has emerged as a key strategy to identify and address risks within the design of products, systems and services that can enable their weaponisation or inadvertently cause harm. This focus has fostered innovative partnerships between businesses, regulators and not-for-profits.

In 2024, the Victorian Essential Services Commission partnered with Thriving Communities Australia, alongside Flequity Ventures, Safe and Equal, and the Centre for Women's Economic Safety, to deliver a Safety by Design partnership project for the water and energy sectors (Essential Services Commission, 2025). The project was informed by engagement with business, regulators, the family violence and community sectors, and people with lived experience.

In March 2025, the *Safety by Design* for essential services report was released to help providers identify, assess and address risks of misuse and harm (Fitzpatrick, 2025). The report proposes a tailored Safety by Design model for the energy and water sectors, focused on preventing misuse, designing for safety and informed choice, and providing clear expectations and consequences where services are used to facilitate abuse.

Specific strategies for embedding Safety by Design identified in the report include:

- systematically identifying risks across customer touchpoints, informed by lived experience, complaints, risk incidents and environmental scanning
- prioritising and implementing mitigation strategies, with ongoing monitoring and input from people with lived experience to minimise unintended consequences
- setting clear expectations for respectful customer behaviour and taking a firm stance against the misuse of energy and water in domestic and family violence.

This initiative demonstrates how Safety by Design principles can be applied beyond the technology industry to improve the safety of services that are essential to people's safety, wellbeing and economic security.

CASE STUDY

Embedding Safety by Design across NSW Government

There is growing awareness of the way government systems can be misused by perpetrators of domestic and family violence as part of their control and abuse. This form of systems abuse often continues long after a relationship has ended, and it can have a devastating impact.

This issue was highlighted in the 2024 report of the Rapid Review of Prevention Approaches, *Unlocking the prevention potential: Accelerating action to end domestic, family and sexual violence* (Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, 2024), with a particular focus on federal systems such as taxation, child support, immigration and the family courts. The report recommended that all Commonwealth and state and territory governments undertake an immediate audit of how perpetrators weaponise government systems, and to respond to these findings appropriately.

In line with this recommendation, the NSW Women's Safety Commissioner is leading a program of work to identify and respond to the misuse of NSW Government systems by perpetrators of domestic and family violence. This aims to:

- understand whether and how NSW Government systems are being misused in the context of domestic and family violence
- prevent this misuse by embedding Safety by Design approaches across NSW Government.

Qualitative research conducted in 2024 with victim-survivors and frontline workers provided important insights into how NSW Government services can be misused in the context of domestic and family violence. Building on that research, the next phase of this project seeks to build the capability of NSW Government employees to embed Safety by Design into the design of systems, products and services. This will help to prevent future systems abuse and reduce harm to victim-survivors.

The project is guided by the eSafety Commissioner's Safety by Design principles (eSafety Commissioner, n.d.), which have also guided reform in other areas such as the financial and technology sectors.

To support part of this work, the NSW Women's Safety Commissioner engaged Flequity Ventures, a social enterprise led by Catherine Fitzpatrick, which specialises in disrupting financial abuse and gender bias through smarter product and service design across the public and private sectors.

CASE STUDY

Higher education reforms to establish enforceable standards to prevent and respond to gender-based violence

This case study highlights the role of the Higher Education Gender-Based Violence (GBV) Regulator in overseeing implementation of the *National Higher Education Code to Prevent and Respond to Gender-Based Violence* (National Code), which was passed by Parliament on 25 August 2025 (Department of Education, 2026).

The National Code establishes enforceable standards for higher education providers to strengthen prevention, response and accountability mechanisms across the sector.

The GBV Regulator is responsible for monitoring and enforcing National Code compliance, while working collaboratively with higher education providers to support systemic reform. This includes a focus on education, engagement and enforcement to drive continuous improvement in how institutions prevent and respond to GBV.

The National Code requires that each higher education provider implements a whole-of-organisation GBV Prevention and Response Plan with clear lines of accountability and oversight. It also mandates ongoing, inclusive and trauma-informed education and training to safely and effectively prevent and respond to GBV.

By embedding these requirements as enforceable standards, the regulatory approach strengthens organisational accountability and supports consistent capability uplift.

FUNDING AND INVESTMENT:
CHANGING THE SHAPE OF INVESTMENT TO ACHIEVE GREATER IMPACT

Australia's investment to address domestic, family and sexual violence has grown substantially over time. This investment has strengthened services and supported significant reform. The next phase is to ensure investment is commensurate with demand and becomes more transparent and sustainable. This includes progressively shaping investment towards the interventions most likely to reduce risk, respond before violence escalates and reduce future need for crisis support and intervention.

Governments have begun improving investment transparency

There have been genuine but modest improvements in the transparency of domestic, family and sexual violence investment.

The Australian Government has invested over $4.4 billion to support the National Plan since the 2022–23 October Budget. In 2025, the Department of Social Services also published a joint Australian, state and territory government investment report under the National Plan. This provided one of the clearest public snapshots to date of investment across prevention, early intervention, response, recovery and healing.

The Commonwealth's domain mapping represents a further important step. This mapping begins to show the shape, rather than only the total value, of investment.

However, current reporting still primarily captures announced or mapped investment. It does not yet provide a consistent national framework for tracking expenditure, distinguishing frontline investment from system capability, comparing investment across jurisdictions or assessing whether funding is aligned with demand and outcomes.

Differences in definitions also remain significant. Some jurisdictions include investments in policing, housing, courts, interventions for people who use violence, information-sharing systems and broader family violence reform infrastructure. Others primarily report investment in specialist programs and services. These differences may reflect legitimate variations in system design, but they limit national comparison and make changes in funding difficult to interpret.

The next step should therefore be to build on existing reporting rather than to create a separate process. Governments need common definitions and investment categories that enable funding to be understood by purpose, domain, population and outcome.

Investment is at an unprecedented scale but remains uneven

In the main, governments across Australia have continued to invest at unprecedented levels in domestic, family and sexual violence. The Australian Government has strengthened frontline services, expanded legal assistance, invested in Aboriginal community-controlled organisations, supported workforce growth, strengthened child safety, and improved access to crisis and recovery services (refer to Box 5).

Box 5: Commonwealth investment highlights

$3.9 billion

investment under the new National Access to Justice Partnership 2025–2030 (Attorney-General's Department, 2025)

$291.7 million to strengthen

the family, domestic and sexual violence frontline workforce, delivering a 72% funding boost under the next phase of the 500 Workers initiative (Department of Social Services, 2026c)

$182.6 million reform package

to strengthen the child support system and prevent its use as a tool of financial abuse (Department of Social Services, 2026e)

$925.2 million over 5 years

to establish the ongoing Leaving Violence Program, which commenced on 1 July 2025, following on from the Escaping Violence Program Trial (Department of Social Services, 2024)

$41.8 million

for 1800RESPECT, increasing funding by almost 40% to respond to growing demand (Department of Social Services, 2025a)

$218.3 million

over 4 years to deliver *Our Ways – Strong Ways – Our Voices*, the first dedicated national plan to end violence against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and children (Department of Social Services, 2026d). The investment will support Aboriginal community-controlled organisations to provide culturally safe, community led services, including crisis response, safety planning and healing supports

Almost $1 million

to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander fathers at risk of using violence with an Australian-first Caring Dads trial (Department of Social Services, 2025c). The culturally safe program, delivered in partnership with Yeddung Mura, a local Aboriginal community-controlled organisation, aims to strengthen parenting behaviours, improve family relationships, and increase safety for women and children

$21.8 million

to complete the national rollout of specialised, trauma informed sexual violence legal services, including Victoria's Justice Navigator pilot (Attorney-General's Department, 2026)

$12.25 million

in grant funding administered by the Attorney-General's Department has been awarded to 23 specialist and community organisations over 3 years (2025–26 to 2027–28) to expand support for victims and survivors of child sexual abuse and children displaying harmful sexual behaviours. The funding will strengthen early intervention, response, and recovery services, enhancing the capacity of providers to deliver timely, trauma informed support (Department of Social Services, 2025b)

$16.5 million

On 9 July 2026, the Australian Government announced an additional $16.5 million to strengthen 2 initiatives in Tasmania focused on responding to and preventing family, domestic and sexual violence. This includes $14.8 million to extend the 500 Workers initiative, with funding committed through to 2030, and an additional $1.7 million to support the Respectful Men Program (Department of Health, Disability and Ageing, 2026)

Most states and territories have also announced new investments, particularly in frontline capacity, service sustainability and reform implementation. These investments are essential and should continue at a level commensurate with demand.

However, the national picture is not uniform. While several jurisdictions have substantially increased investment, recent budget decisions in Queensland, the Northern Territory and Tasmania indicate reductions in identified domestic, family and sexual violence funding. These variations highlight the risk and impact of uneven service capacity and reform momentum across the country (refer to Box 6).

Box 6: State and territory budget announcements

- On 23 June 2026, the NSW Government announced a $184.1 million investment over 4 years to boost 6 frontline specialist domestic and family violence programs by 50% (NSW Government, 2026).
- In November 2025, the Australian and NSW Governments announced $3.9 million joint funding for a new digital service to improve safety for people experiencing violence (DV Notify) (Department of Social Services, 2025e). The pilot provides real time alerts about an alleged perpetrator's custody status, helping those experiencing violence make informed decisions and access support services. The NSW Government has committed a further $8.9 million in the 2025–26 Budget to expand and enhance the service over the next 2 years.
- On 21 May 2026, the ACT Government announced a $44.2 million investment over 4 years through the 2026–27 Budget to strengthen supports for people impacted by domestic, family and sexual violence (ACT Government, 2026a). The funding will provide more sustainable, long term support for frontline services, including crisis response, sexual violence services and behaviour change programs. It will also improve system capacity and certainty for the sector.
- In the 2026–27 Victorian Budget, the Victorian Government committed $100 million to respond to family violence, as part of broader community safety measures (Victorian Government, 2026). The investment supports prevention, response and recovery efforts, including frontline services and programs addressing family and sexual violence.

- On 2 December 2025, the Western Australian Government announced a $109.9 million package to strengthen family and domestic violence responses, including frontline services, early intervention, and system wide reforms (Government of Western Australia, 2025). This was followed by a $3.1 million funding boost announced on 16 June 2026 to expand domestic violence counselling and advocacy services, supporting 10 community organisations to increase access to support for people experiencing violence (Government of Western Australia, 2026).
- In December 2025, the South Australian Government released its response to the Royal Commission into Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence, accepting 129 of the 136 recommendations and committing an additional $674 million over 10 years (Government of South Australia, 2025).

However, 3 jurisdictions have announced recent decreases in their 2026–27 budgets:

- In the Northern Territory, funding for domestic, family and sexual violence services is set to decrease from $71 million to $63 million (Fitzgerald, 2026).
- Queensland's recent budget shows an approximate decrease of $40 million in relation to domestic, family and sexual violence services (Queensland Government, 2026a). This follows a change in the policing role and shows a departure from the national direction.
- Tasmania has reduced funding for Safe at Home, Tasmania Legal Aid, the Women's Legal Service and Health Justice Program – a reduction of approximately 20% of funding to women and the prevention of family violence budget (Tasmanian Government, 2026).

The challenge now must be to change the shape of investment to reduce prevalence

RECOMMENDATION 3 ✳

Target new investment towards early intervention.

Governments have made significant investments in responding to domestic, family and sexual violence. There has not been commensurate investment in the other pillars identified in the National Plan – most critically in early intervention.

While continued investment in crisis responses remains essential, on its own this will not reduce the prevalence of gender-based violence. Investment in crisis responses is vital in strengthening frontline services, holding people who use violence to account, and supporting those who experience violence. However, a more direct and targeted approach to stopping violence and reducing serious harm is the only way to achieve National Cabinet's agreed goal to end gender-based violence in a generation. National consultations have emphasised that crisis response is critical, but it is not enough to change incidence of gender-based violence and drive effective change.

Evidence increasingly points to the value of investing earlier in people's journey – where risks and emerging patterns can be identified, prevented, interrupted or reduced before those behaviours escalate and require crisis services.

Early intervention must work across the spectrum of violence. This means intervening earlier with men who are using, or at risk of using, violence, including through settings such as health and fatherhood services. For men and boys at risk of using violence, early intervention can strengthen healthy masculinities, emotional regulation, help-seeking and provide alternatives to harmful gender norms and behaviours. Early intervention also means recognising and responding earlier to children and young people experiencing violence and its impacts, supporting their safety and recovery and reducing the risk of harm continuing across their lives.

✳

'80% of police call-outs are domestic and family violence related. Imagine if that is eliminated, how much money and resources are available to do other things.'

Narelda Jacobs

Voices Towards 2050 podcast series

RECOMMENDATION 4 ✳

Invest strategically in the conditions that enable people to achieve safety and recover from domestic, family and sexual violence.

Safety and recovery depend on coordinated access to housing, financial support and security, legal assistance, health care, counselling and other practical assistance. Evidence shows that the financial barriers to leaving violent relationships are substantial, while access to secure, affordable and appropriate housing remains one of the greatest constraints on achieving long-term safety.

All Australian governments should continue to strengthen investment in the domestic, family and sexual violence service system, while ensuring funding is transparent, strategically balanced and leveraged to best effect, and responsive to the needs of those who experience gender-based violence. Investment should support the conditions that enable people to achieve safety and recovery, including access to stable housing, financial security, legal assistance, therapeutic support and other services that reduce barriers to leaving violence and rebuilding their lives.

While overall investment has increased significantly, current Commonwealth funding remains heavily weighted towards crisis and response services. Of the more than $4 billion invested since October 2022, approximately $3.1 billion (68.2%) has been committed to frontline services (Department of Social Services, 2026a). Of the $4.52 billion mapped across 147 initiatives:

- 68.2% is directed towards response
- 11.6% is directed towards recovery and healing
- 10.8% is directed towards prevention
- 9.4% is directed towards early intervention.

This investment profile reflects the scale and urgency of demand that faces crisis, justice, family law and frontline services. Investment in response is necessary and must continue at a level commensurate with demand. People experiencing violence need timely access to safety, including through crisis, transitional and long-term housing, legal assistance, health care and specialist support.

The Australian Government has invested $925.2 million over 5 years for the Leaving Violence Program to enable those escaping violence to receive financial support, safety assessments and referrals to support pathways (Department of Social Services, 2024).

However, responding to existing demand alone will not achieve the National Plan's ambition of ending gender-based violence within a generation. Governments need to progressively change the shape of investment by increasing the scale and reach of prevention, early intervention, recovery and healing.

This does not mean shifting funding away from already stretched crisis services. It means growing investment in the parts of the system most likely to prevent violence from escalating. This includes identifying risk earlier and reducing the number of people entering crisis systems over time.

The Second Action Plan provides an opportunity to focus investment on activities that intervene earlier in people's experience of domestic, family and sexual violence and provide support to reduce harm.

Some settings offer considerable opportunities. Health, mental health, education and early childhood systems have broad and repeated contact with children, young people, families and adults. This creates opportunities to recognise risk, respond earlier and connect people with support. For example:

- the research is clear that apart from friends and family, health professionals are the next most likely person someone will disclose their concerns to (AIHW, 2025)
- the Standing Council of Attorneys-General Working with Children Check agreement establishes a 'banned in one, banned in all' national framework
- Education Ministers' commitment to key safety reforms in the Early Childhood Education and Care sector.

Alcohol and other drugs, gambling, mental health and justice and family law services are also important intervention points for engaging men who may be using or at risk of using violence before harm escalates.

Changing the shape of investment will require more than assigning funding to broad National Plan domains. Governments will need evidence about which interventions work, for whom, in which settings and at what stage. They will also need to ensure that investment reaches communities currently experiencing the greatest barriers to safety and support, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, people living with disabilities, culturally and linguistically diverse communities, LGBTIQA+SB people and people living in regional and remote areas.

1 in 5 women who experienced violence from a current partner sought advice or support from a general practitioner or other health professional.

Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2025

CASE STUDY

Focused deterrence and Fixated Grievance Perpetrator Intervention Pilot consultations

Consultations commissioned by the Attorney-General's Department (Attorney-General's Department, 2026) provide early insight into 2 pilot models to strengthen system responses to people using violence: Focused Deterrence and Fixated Grievance Perpetrator Intervention Pilots (FGPIP, previously referred to as the Domestic Violence Threat Assessment Centre [DVTAC] pilot).

National Cabinet agreed to trial focused deterrence and the FGPIPs as part of the First Action Plan 2023–2027 Activities Addendum Update 2025. These pilots aim to strengthen system responses to high-risk and serial perpetrators of family and domestic violence. The Commonwealth has committed $28.6 million over 4 years from 2024–25 to pilot these innovative models, engaging both law enforcement and community services.

Focused deterrence is a multi-agency approach that brings together law enforcement, social services and community stakeholders to directly engage people using violence. It combines clear messaging of consequences with offers of support to change behaviour, alongside coordinated follow-up where violence continues. A central aim is to shift responsibility for safety from those experiencing violence to the system.

FGPIPs are a world-first initiative targeting individuals who exhibit fixated grievance-related behaviours at high risk of escalating harm. Using multidisciplinary teams, they are intended to identify, assess and intervene early with perpetrators to prevent family violence and intimate partner homicides.

Consultations highlight several implementation considerations. Individual safety must remain central, supported by proactive safety planning and strong risk management. Interventions need to be timely, credible and tailored to individual circumstances, and deterrence is most effective when combined with access to supports that enable sustained behaviour change.

Stakeholders also emphasised the need to reduce the burden on individuals experiencing violence. This includes strengthening information sharing and coordination, and ensuring models meet the needs of priority populations.

These pilots offer an opportunity to strengthen early identification and coordinated intervention. Their impact will depend on effective implementation, scale and integration across the system.

Better visibility is necessary to shape investment strategically

As investment has grown in scale and complexity, so too has the need for a clearer view of where funding is flowing, what and how government is purchasing and whether it is achieving its intended outcomes.

There remains no single, consolidated national picture of DFSV investment across the Commonwealth and state and territory governments. Investment is distributed across social services, justice and family law, policing, health, housing, education, child protection and other portfolios. This reflects the cross-cutting nature of domestic, family and sexual violence, but it makes it difficult to determine:

- the total level of investment
- how much is reaching frontline and specialist services
- how much is supporting workforce, data, research, infrastructure and broader system reform
- how funding is distributed across prevention, early intervention, response, recovery and healing
- whether investment reflects demand and inequity
- whether expenditure is contributing to improved outcomes.

Investment in workforce capability, data systems, research, evaluation, commissioning and national infrastructure is essential for an effective system. Clear reporting should distinguish these investments from funding for frontline service delivery. This will allow governments and Parliament to understand how funding supports different parts of the system.

Even at the Commonwealth level, identifying how much of the announced investment had reached frontline services is difficult. It requires manual aggregation across programs, agreements and portfolios (Department of Social Services, 2025d). This means that Parliament, governments and the public cannot easily reconcile headline funding announcements with expenditure on direct service delivery or broader system capability.

An analysis of Commonwealth budget papers by MinterEllison similarly found that funding measures were often announced as multi-year packages, reported inconsistently across portfolios and difficult to connect to actual expenditure or outcomes. Without clearer classification and reporting, governments cannot readily assess whether investment is balanced, sufficient or delivering the intended impact (MinterEllison, 2024).

> ‘There is currently no single, consolidated or transparent view of how much is being invested in domestic, family and sexual violence (DFSV) across the Commonwealth and state and territory governments.’
>
> Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence Commission, 2025b

Similarly, current funding reporting does not provide sufficient visibility of investment specifically directed to sexual violence. While sexual violence and domestic and family violence appropriately sit within an integrated national policy framework, they have distinct service systems, funding histories and responses. The *Rapid Review of Prevention Approaches* (Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, 2024) highlighted that sexual violence has not received adequate attention within the national policy landscape and identified the need for a stronger focus on sexual violence. While the *National Strategy to Prevent and Respond to Child Sexual Abuse 2021–2030* investment is clear and distinct and specifically directed to sexual violence, more broadly it is important that governments are able to separately identify and track investment directed to sexual violence within broader DFSV expenditure.

The way services are funded also shaped system capability

The scale and distribution of investment matter, but so too do the conditions attached to funding.

Sector representatives, peak bodies and people with lived experience consistently told the Commission that short-term, fragmented and administratively burdensome funding arrangements limit the effectiveness of services. The way funding is commissioned can affect whether organisations can recruit and retain skilled workers, plan for future demand, innovate and provide continuity of support.

Stakeholders identified several recurring consequences:

- **workforce instability:** short funding cycles make it difficult to recruit, retain and develop specialist staff or offer secure employment and clear career pathways
- **disruption to relationships:** service users consistently report that the relationship with their worker is critical. We also know that the capacity of organisations to collaborate relies on the network of relationships between and across the workforce
- **unrealistic service costs:** funding may not keep pace with award increases, enterprise agreements or the real costs of supervision, backfill, professional development and safe service delivery
- **administrative burden:** organisations spend substantial time applying for multiple grants and meeting different reporting, data and acquittal requirements

> ‘We consistently get 12-month funding contracts, and don’t hear about their renewal until the last minute – by which time we have lost the staff and have to begin recruitment again. This loses precious time and most importantly disrupts relationships – with clients and colleagues.’
>
> **Participant**
> Second Action Plan consultation session

- **limited planning, learning from evidence, innovation and improvement:** uncertain funding and underinvestment do not enable long-term service evaluation and investment in long-term capability
- **disproportionate impacts on smaller organisations:** small services and Aboriginal community-controlled organisations may face particular difficulty navigating complex commissioning and compliance arrangements
- **lack of resourcing for targeted effort:** place-based solutions and actions to meet the needs of priority cohorts are not provided adequate funding because their needs are invisible to large government systems.

These conditions can perpetuate a reactive system. Services remain focused on managing immediate demand while having limited capacity to develop, test and scale approaches that could reduce that demand over time.

The South Australian Royal Commission reached similar conclusions, identifying funding instability and fragmentation as barriers to workforce capability, service planning and effective responses to demand. The South Australian Government's subsequent commitment of $674 million over 10 years demonstrates the value of longer-term investment linked to an articulated reform program.

However, increased investment alone does not guarantee system effectiveness. Long-term funding needs to be accompanied by clear outcomes, accountability, evaluation and the capacity to adapt investment when evidence shows that approaches are not achieving the intended impact.

For people with lived experience, these are not abstract questions of funding architecture. They determine whether support is available when it is needed, whether people must repeatedly retell their story and rebuild relationships and trust, whether services can respond to changing needs and whether support continues long enough to enable safety, recovery and healing.

> 'What we need to do is come up with community approaches to stop the violence, because the violence will continue if we don't have community-based approaches.'
>
> **Adjunct Professor Muriel Bamblett AO**
> Voices Towards 2050 podcast series

Future investment should be sufficient, sustained and strategically shaped to meet the commitment of the National Plan

In its 2025 Yearly Report, the Commission recommended a national funding mapping framework to improve visibility of domestic, family and sexual violence funding and expenditure. The progress made since then confirms the value of that recommendation. However, it also shows that transparency is only one part of the task.

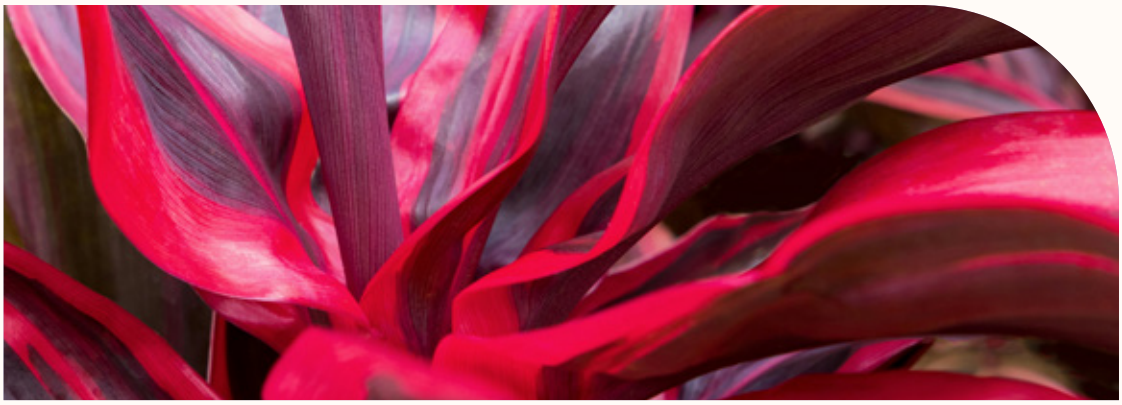
The next phase is to use investment information to support active stewardship of the system. Governments need to be able to assess not only how much is being invested but:

- whether response services are funded commensurate with demand
- whether prevention and early intervention are being delivered at sufficient scale
- whether investment is reaching people and communities facing the greatest barriers
- whether service funding supports a stable and capable workforce
- whether expenditure is improving outcomes and reducing future demand.

This requires a nationally consistent approach to defining, classifying and reporting investment, supported by stronger evidence about effectiveness and outcomes. It also requires governments to progressively increase investment in prevention and early intervention while sustaining essential crisis, response, recovery and healing services.

The objective is to shape investment across the full continuum so that fewer people experience violence, risk is identified earlier, services remain available when violence occurs, and people experiencing violence receive the support required for long-term recovery and healing.

We want to ensure that domestic, family and sexual violence becomes rare, brief and non-recurring.



CASE STUDY

Safety Measures – building the evidence needed to better support people experiencing domestic and family violence

For too long, Australia has lacked a clear picture of what specialist domestic and family violence services do, whom they support, and whether the system has the capacity to meet demand.

Safety Measures was established through a shared commitment to strengthen this evidence base. It brings together the expertise of more than 100 specialist service providers across the Northern Territory, South Australia and Victoria (Safety Measures, n.d.). This work does not include sexual violence services.

Safety Measures reflects growing calls for more transparent and comprehensive reporting of investment into service responses. In its *Measurement with meaning* report, Safety Measures found that funding information for specialist domestic and family violence services remains fragmented, opaque and difficult to track. Governments invest billions into responses to domestic and family violence, but much of this funding is dispersed across housing, justice, policing, health and broader social service systems. This makes it difficult to identify how much reaches frontline specialist domestic and family services. The report notes there is currently no consistent, transparent, public reporting of specialist domestic and family violence service funding across jurisdictions. This limits governments' and the sector's ability to assess investment against service demand or need.

The report also highlights that funding alone is not an adequate measure of service capacity. Workforce challenges, reporting requirements, policy settings and pressures in adjacent systems all affect the ability of services to respond to victim-survivors' needs. Importantly, Safety Measures found that demand is often filtered through existing service capacity. This means that available data reflects what services are resourced to provide rather than the full extent of support required.

Safety Measures underscores the need for better funding mapping, stronger data systems and more transparent reporting to ensure investment decisions are aligned with the needs of victim-survivors and the realities of specialist domestic and family violence service delivery.

CREATING AN EVIDENCE-INFORMED
LEARNING DOMESTIC, FAMILY AND SEXUAL VIOLENCE SYSTEM

There has been significant progress in building a stronger, evidence-informed domestic, family and sexual violence system by investing in data, research and evaluation. This has occurred alongside mechanisms that enable lived experience knowledge and expertise to inform the system. The next step is to move to a mature learning system that brings evidence together, applies it to decisions and uses what is learned to improve policy, practice and progress towards the outcomes of the National Plan.

Making better use of evidence across the domestic, family and sexual violence system

Australia has strengthened the evidence foundations needed to address domestic, family and sexual violence over the life of the First National Plan, and the First Action Plan under this second National Plan.

There has been significant investment in data, research and evaluation capability. In addition, lived experience and lived expertise are increasingly recognised as direct and essential sources of evidence about how responses work in practice. Together, these complementary sources of evidence have improved understanding of:

- the prevalence, patterns and drivers of violence
- attitudes and behaviours
- the experiences of people affected by violence
- how prevention, early intervention, response and recovery initiatives operate
- whether policies, programs, services and broader reforms are contributing to change (AIHW, 2025; ANROWS, 2026; DSS, 2026).

National institutions, including AIHW, ABS, AIC, AIFS and ANROWS have strengthened Australia's capacity to collect, analyse and interpret evidence. The Australian Research Council provided $35 million over 7 years in 2024 for the Centre of Excellence for the Elimination of Violence Against Women, the world's first centre to address the full range of forms of violence against women in Australia and the Indo-Pacific region. Governments are increasingly investing in linked administrative data, evaluation, monitoring frameworks and research. Lived experience knowledge and expertise is also becoming more systematically embedded in policy development, governance and evaluation. Together these developments represent significant progress towards a more mature national evidence system.

An evidence system generates, brings together and provides access to different forms of knowledge including the capabilities and sources of knowledge needed to understand domestic, family and sexual violence and improve responses. This includes data, research, evaluation, lived experience, practice wisdom, policy knowledge, institutions, frameworks and expertise.

The learning system is what happens when those parts are connected and used: evidence is coordinated, shared, synthesised, translated into decisions, tested through implementation and fed back into continuing improvement.

The Commission considers this progress to be one of the significant achievements of the First Action Plan. Compared with only a few years ago, governments have access to a much richer evidence base to inform decision-making. New linked data initiatives are underway, evaluation capability is expanding across jurisdictions, national research is becoming increasingly coordinated and lived experience is recognised as an essential source of evidence. While these developments vary in their maturity, they provide strong foundations for a national learning system.

Several national data initiatives are progressing that will support the building of required datasets, including:

- the Family, Domestic and Sexual Violence Integrated Data System (AIHW)
- a prototype national collection on specialist crisis family and domestic violence services (AIHW)
- the Criminal Justice Data Asset (ABS).

These national initiatives are expected to improve visibility of specialist family and domestic violence services, service pathways, demand and system interactions over time. However, they remain in their early stages and are not yet delivering nationally consistent, integrated reporting against National Plan outcomes.

Evaluating the effectiveness of the first 5 years of the First Action Plan / National Plan

The National Plan sets out a requirement for an evaluation of activity and outcomes at the end of the first 5 years. This has been replaced with a reduced scope, mid-term review of the National Plan focused on bringing together available evidence for synthesis. Learnings are intended to guide direction for the Second Action Plan commencing in 2027 and will be published by the end of 2026.

However, during the mid-term review of the National Plan (refer to Box 7), a number of challenges were encountered including

- challenges in mapping activities from the First Action Plan to their associated outcomes
- significant data gaps in the performance measurement plan, including those relating to priority populations
- a lack of accessible evaluation findings from federal, state and territory governments, with the many evaluations not made publicly available or shared and activities under the National Plan that have not yet been evaluated.

Importantly, these challenges are not unique to this review. They highlight broader evidence system maturity issues, including inconsistent outcomes measurement, limited evaluation coverage and barriers to accessing and synthesising evidence across jurisdictions. Addressing these constraints will be critical if governments are to understand not only what activities have been delivered, but whether they are contributing to improved outcomes.

A key contribution of the review has been demonstrating the value of structured collaboration between Australia's national evidence partners – AIFS, AIHW and ANROWS, with targeted requests made to the ABS. Bringing together expertise in policy, research, evaluation, monitoring and data has strengthened the collective capacity to assess progress and identify priorities for future evidence development.

Box 7: Mid-term review of the National Plan

The National Plan sets out a requirement for an evaluation of activity and outcomes at the end of the first 5 years. This has been replaced with a reduced scope, mid-term review of the National Plan that brings together available evidence for synthesis.

The Department of Social Services has engaged the AIFS to lead the mid-term review of the National Plan's evidence base.

AIFS is synthesising findings from Commonwealth, state and territory evaluations, alongside relevant research and reviews linked to the First Action Plan. This work is intended to assess effectiveness and progress against outcomes, and to identify emerging insights, evidence gaps and areas of promising practice.

Complementary components are being delivered by AIHW and ANROWS. AIHW is undertaking quantitative analysis of progress against National Plan outcomes and targets, including identification of data gaps. ANROWS is synthesising commissioned research to identify evidence gaps and future opportunities for Second Action Plan priorities.

The review commenced in January 2026 and is expected to conclude in late 2026.

A cross-agency Governance Group oversees the review. This includes senior representatives from the Department of Social Services, AIFS, AIHW, ANROWS and the Commission, reflecting their respective roles in policy, evaluation, research, data and monitoring under the National Plan. This group has provided a practical mechanism for collaboration between policy, evaluation, monitoring and evidence partners, supporting a more coordinated approach to understanding progress under the National Plan.

Towards a mature learning system

In addition to strong data, research and evaluation infrastructure, a mature learning system is defined by how it:

- sets evidence priorities
- values different ways of knowing
- works with people and communities affected by violence
- translates evidence into policy, practice and system improvement.

The rubric below shows how the domestic, family and sexual violence evidence system can develop into a mature learning system. It is an adaptation of 3 models intended as a guide only but it provides a baseline for ongoing monitoring and assessment (Rajit et al., 2025; Australian Centre for Evaluation, 2025b; Department of Finance, 2026).

STAGE OF MATURITY	KEY FEATURES
1. Foundational	• Evidence priorities and core infrastructure are being established. • Lived experience, practice and Indigenous knowledge are consulted but not consistently embedded. • Evidence activity is separate and project-based, with limited use in decisions.
2. Developing – Indicative current position	• Substantial evidence capability exists, but it remains fragmented and is not routinely shared. • Different forms of knowledge are increasingly recognised but mechanisms for lived experience participation and Indigenous methodologies are not consistently embedded. • Coordination, synthesis and feedback into policy and practice are not yet systematic.
3. Connected	• A well-developed evidence system operates through shared national priorities. • Research, data, evaluation, lived experience, practice and policy knowledge are integrated to shape priorities, evidence production and interpretation. • Evidence is routinely shared and applied through clear feedback loops.
4. Learning and improving	• Integrated and timely evidence is used to regularly review priorities, identify emerging needs and guide investment. • Missing knowledge is identified and addressed, with cultural integrity, safety, relevance and usefulness considered alongside technical quality. • Continuous evidence-informed learning informs policy, practice and future evidence priorities.

Using this rubric, Australia's domestic, family and sexual violence evidence system is assessed as developing, with some connected elements. Considerable capability now exists across data, research and evaluation, alongside mechanisms for lived experience knowledge and expertise. However, these elements do not yet operate as a coherent learning system.

While Australia has made substantial progress in building data, research, evaluation and lived experience capability, significant evidence gaps continue to limit national learning and accountability. Data remain fragmented across systems and jurisdictions, many National Plan measures are not yet supported by available data, evaluation findings are not routinely published or synthesised, and evidence about outcomes for priority populations remains uneven. These gaps make it difficult for governments to understand whether investments are improving safety, recovery and wellbeing, which approaches are most effective, and where reform efforts need to be adapted. The Second Action Plan provides an important opportunity to address these constraints by agreeing a smaller set of measurable outcomes, investing in enduring national data infrastructure, embedding and publishing evaluations, strengthening evaluation quality and readiness, and establishing coordinated national mechanisms to synthesise and translate evidence into policy, practice and investment decisions.

Moving towards a connected learning system requires attention and support to several priorities over the next 12 months:

- **strengthen National Plan outcomes measurement:** refresh the theory of change, outcomes framework and performance measurement plan to support a smaller set of measurable outcomes and measures for the Second Action Plan. The Second Action Plan provides an opportunity for these infrastructure elements to be adapted and evolve as the system matures and needs fit-for-purpose outcomes measurement
- **strengthen national data infrastructure:** continue to invest in enduring data linkage infrastructure and greater harmonisation across national datasets and longitudinal studies that can fill measurement gaps, progress implementation of specialist family and domestic violence crisis service data collection to the next stage, improve priority national datasets – including the National Health Data Hub, emergency department data, recorded crime and court data, legal assistance and primary care data – and address gaps for priority populations
- **establish routine mechanisms for publishing, synthesising and translating evaluation findings into policy and practice learning:** including publishing evaluation findings of Commonwealth Second Action Plan activities and establishing a systematic approach to collecting, synthesising and disseminating evaluation evidence
- **strengthen evaluation quality, readiness and learning:** support services, particularly under-resourced service providers, to build data capability and collect meaningful outcomes data. Evaluations should apply a domestic, family and sexual violence lens and centre the safety and wellbeing of people with lived experience
- **coordinate national evidence activity:** build on recent collaboration activities between evidence partners by establishing a permanent national evidence partnership
- **strengthen national evidence synthesis and access:** invest in an enhanced ANROWS clearinghouse as a central accessible source of domestic, family and sexual violence research, evaluation and synthesis, to systemise the collection, dissemination and translation of research and evaluation evidence.

RECOMMENDATION 5 ✳

Establish a National Evidence Collaboration to provide coordinated advice regarding research, evaluation, data, emerging issues and national evidence priorities.

Building on the existing Convening on the Evidence Group chaired by ANROWS, this collaboration will connect national research, evaluation and data agencies to strengthen evidence-informed decision-making, support monitoring of progress under the National Plan, and improve the translation of evidence into policy, practice and continuous system improvement.

The Convening on the Evidence Group currently brings together national institutions with key responsibilities for generating, stewarding and translating evidence on domestic, family and sexual violence. Chaired by ANROWS, the Group includes ABS, AIHW, AIFS, AIC and the Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence Commission.

Australia has made significant investment in national research, data and evaluation capability. This includes mechanisms to enable the knowledge and expertise of people with lived experience to inform the evidence system. The next stage of reform should embed enhanced coordination across these capabilities and sources of evidence. All knowledge gained through evaluation and learning processes should be consolidated and made available to governments through clear, timely advice about emerging risks, effective interventions and system performance.

This collaboration should also provide a mechanism for identifying emerging evidence priorities and coordinating rapid responses to new and emerging issues, ensuring governments can respond to changing patterns of violence and service demand.

Sources of evidence

A mature learning system brings together different but complementary sources of evidence to support the National Plan's goal of ending domestic, family and sexual violence. Each source answers different questions, and no single source is sufficient on its own:

- Data – including population surveys, administrative data and linked datasets with comparable and complementary data items – identify patterns in prevalence and use of violence, attitudes and behaviours, experiences across population groups, service demand and system interactions. Data can track progress against National Plan outcomes but cannot, on their own, explain what is driving change.
- Evaluation assesses whether prevention interventions, policies, programs, services and broader reforms are effective, for whom and under what circumstances, and whether they are contributing to National Plan outcomes.
- Research builds understanding of the drivers and patterns of violence, emerging forms of harm, and the conditions needed for long-term change.
- Lived experience knowledge and expertise provide critical insight into how violence and its drivers are understood and experienced, how prevention, early intervention, response and recovery operate in practice, where barriers arise, and what needs to change to improve safety, healing and recovery.
- Practice wisdom provides insight into the needs of people at risk of or experiencing violence, implementation challenges, promising approaches and opportunities to improve prevention and responses.
- Policy knowledge connects evidence with the National Plan's priorities, government decision-making, implementation responsibilities and opportunities for coordinated reform.

Together, these sources provide a fuller basis for assessing progress towards the National Plan outcomes, identifying gaps and inequities, and understanding what is contributing to change.

Consistent with the knowledge diamond first put forward by Humphreys and Kertesz (2012), research, policy, practice and lived experience offer distinct but complementary forms of knowledge. Bringing them together provides a fuller understanding of domestic, family and sexual violence and supports better prevention, policy, practice and system responses. The *Australian National Research Agenda 2023–2028* reflects this broader understanding of evidence. Alongside national research priorities, it identifies ways of working and ways of knowing that recognise the knowledge of people with lived experience, practitioners, children and young people, and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. It provides an important foundation for a national learning system that considers not only what evidence is produced, but whose knowledge is valued and how evidence is developed and used.

CASE STUDIES

Bringing data sources together

Several jurisdictions are demonstrating how compiling and linking administrative data can strengthen understanding of system pathways, patterns in the use of violence and opportunities for earlier intervention. These initiatives illustrate the potential of integrated, timely data to strengthen understanding of system patterns and pathways, identify opportunities for earlier intervention and improve decision-making. They provide an important foundation for future outcomes measurement.

NSW DVDRT Dashboard

The NSW Domestic Violence Death Review Team (DVDRT) Dashboard (Coroners Court of New South Wales, 2026) strengthens the timeliness and accessibility of evidence on domestic and family violence deaths. Established under the *Coroners Act 2009* (NSW), the DVDRT conducts detailed case reviews to identify risk patterns and missed opportunities for intervention. Since its launch in June 2026, with quarterly updates, the dashboard has made these findings more visible and usable across policy and service systems.

Longitudinal evidence underscores the gendered nature of domestic-violence homicide. Over 26 years, close to 300 women were killed by a current or former intimate partner following a history of violence. While 75 men were also killed by a partner, in three-quarters of these cases, this occurred in the context of their own use of violence rather than as the primary victim, indicating many deaths occurred in the context of resistance by those subject to violence.

The dashboard also highlights consistent perpetrator characteristics. The 'average' offender is an Australian-

born, non-Indigenous man in his early 30s, with knives most frequently used. This challenges assumptions that lethal violence is concentrated in marginalised groups and reinforces the centrality of male perpetration.

The dashboard demonstrates the value of timely, accessible data. Its impact will depend on how effectively insights are translated into earlier risk identification and coordinated system responses.

Family Violence Database (FVDB) in Victoria

Victoria's Family Violence Database (FVDB), delivered through the Crime Statistics Agency dashboard, demonstrates progress in compiling and integrating administrative data across the family violence system (Crime Statistics Agency, 2025). By linking police, justice and service datasets, the dashboard provides a more complete view of incidents and system responses. Recent enhancements incorporate justice pathways, including intervention order use and breaches, improving visibility of how cases progress through civil and criminal systems.

The FVDB highlights patterns of repeat offending and emerging perpetrator profiles, including high recidivism rates and a notable proportion of people with prior histories of victimisation. It also draws attention to the age profile of those using violence, pointing to early onset among younger cohorts.

Integration with selected health and social service data, including The Orange Door and Child Protection, strengthens insight into system interactions and geographic variation. From the Commission's perspective, this represents a meaningful step forward, while also illustrating ongoing limits in achieving fully integrated, longitudinal and nationally consistent data.

Persistent gaps remain in national domestic, family and sexual violence data

The National Plan is supported by an outcomes framework and performance measurement plan intended to monitor progress towards ending domestic, family and sexual violence. These frameworks are an important step towards nationally consistent measurement and provide governments with a common set of outcomes and indicators to guide implementation. However, the ability to demonstrate progress against these outcomes remains significantly constrained by gaps in national data.

The outcomes framework remains centred on 6 long-term outcomes supported by national targets and a comprehensive performance measurement plan comprising 131 measures. However, data for approximately 68% of these measures remain unavailable. More importantly, critical gaps remain in areas necessary to understand whether the National Plan is achieving its intended outcomes and where progress is not being made. As a consequence, reporting during the First Action Plan has continued to focus primarily on activities delivered and services funded rather than demonstrating whether those investments are contributing to improved safety, recovery and wellbeing.

This limitation has significant policy consequences. Without reliable outcomes measurement, governments cannot identify which investments are improving safety, where reform is most effective or whether implementation of the National Plan is reducing violence over time.

Data fragmentation remains a significant barrier to national learning (refer to Box 8). Considerable information continues to be collected across multiple federal, state and territory systems using different definitions, collection methods and reporting arrangements. This is often due to different purposes for data collection. While individual datasets provide valuable insights, they are often unable to demonstrate how people move through different parts of the system or whether interactions across health, justice and family law, housing, child protection and specialist services are contributing to improved outcomes. Linking data across services can provide a more complete picture of people's interactions with the service system. However, understanding longer-term outcomes, including for people who do not interact with services, requires longitudinal population-level data that can track experiences and outcomes over time. Specific improvements to data linkages within these systems must also grapple with the need to ensure privacy and safety of systems users.

> 'I would like us to be braver as a nation to really look at what is going on [for priority populations]. This data must be released.'
>
> **Participant**
>
> Second Action Plan consultation

Current data limitations are most pronounced for priority populations who are disproportionately affected by domestic, family and sexual violence and poorly represented in national datasets. Many collections capture priority populations as discrete groups, rather than reflecting the way people experience multiple and intersecting forms of disadvantage.

This limits understanding of how overlapping forms of disadvantage influence experiences of violence, access to services and outcomes.

Specific gaps remain for:

- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and children
- children and young people (including lived experience insight from children under 18)
- women and children living with disabilities
- culturally and linguistically diverse women
- LGBTIQA+SB people
- people who experience sexual violence both within and outside of intimate partner relationships
- older women
- sex workers (a cohort that is rarely identified despite being targeted for violence).

> ‘It’s not enough to say culturally and linguistically diverse. We need to understand the nuances and differences of individual communities.’
>
> **Participant**
>
> Second Action Plan consultation

In some cases, evidence exists but it is not used to inform services and understand prevalence. For example: sex worker peer organisations collect data on service use by their members; disability and aged care services and facilities collect data relating to harm through serious incident management systems; Sporting Integrity Australia collects data in relation to complaints and investigations in sport; and universities collect data as mandated by the *National Higher Education Code to Prevent and Respond to Gender-Based Violence*. These data sources should be considered as part of future approaches to strengthening national reporting and understanding unmet evidence needs.

A recent study by ANROWS (in press) identified distinct drivers and motivations behind the use of violence when perpetrated by people outside LGBTIQA+SB communities, compared to when it occurs within LGBTIQA+SB communities. This research demonstrated that perpetration from outside the community is often driven by homophobia and transphobia, hostility towards LGBTIQA+SB people and fetishisation and sexualisation of LGBTIQA+SB communities.

> ‘One thing we’re missing data on is perpetration. Who is actually using violence against our communities, why they’re using violence and what’s driving that?’
>
> **Participant**
>
> LGBTIQA+SB Second Action Plan consultation

Box 8: Evidence for the Second Action Plan highlights critical data gaps

The ANROWS consultation paper for the Second Action Plan confirms that, despite a substantial evidence base, Australia's data system remains fragmented and unable to support consistent, outcome-focused measurement (ANROWS, 2026). Evidence draws on surveys, administrative data and research, but varies in quality, coverage and timeliness.

Reliance on infrequent surveys, particularly the Personal Safety Survey (PSS), limits the ability to track changes in prevalence or detect emerging trends. The national picture remains episodic and retrospective, constraining timely responses to shifting risk.

The PSS is designed to produce nationally representative prevalence estimates of violence victimisation in Australia. It is underpinned by a robust sample frame (the ABS Address Register), enabling the survey to monitor changes in prevalence rates over time.

While the PSS provides information on prevalence, risk factors, incident characteristics and changes over time, additional population-specific research may be needed to provide greater context or more detailed insights into the experiences of particular high-risk groups. However, these studies should be used to complement, rather than replace, the PSS. There are barriers to achieving sufficiently large, representative samples that can detect changes in community reach. Some specific populations groups are not currently included in the sample. Ethics considerations need to be addressed in any activities that collect responses from priority populations including people in remote communities, living in aged care facilities and people living with disabilities.

Significant gaps persist across key areas, including victim-survivor pathways, help-seeking, use of violence, service demand and outcomes. Visibility of priority populations and intersecting disadvantage remains limited. While long-term trends are observable, the system cannot reliably assess outcomes or whether progress is equitable.

Strengthening data availability, integration and timeliness will be critical to support accountability, inform investment and ensure that the Second Action Plan is underpinned by credible evidence of impact.

For Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, nationally consistent data remains insufficient to measure progress against Closing the Gap Target 13.

The release of *Our Ways – Strong Ways – Our Voices: National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Plan to End Family, Domestic and Sexual Violence 2026–2036* provides an important opportunity to strengthen outcomes measurement for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. The development of a dedicated monitoring and evaluation framework, outcomes framework and theory of change has the potential to improve data governance, strengthen cultural integrity and support more meaningful measurement of progress towards Closing the Gap Target 13.

The Second Action Plan provides an opportunity to focus national outcomes measurement on achievable measures while longer-term data reforms continue. In the Commission's view, governments should continue investing in national linked data capability while also agreeing to a pragmatic set of priority outcome measures that can be consistently monitored throughout implementation of the Second Action Plan. This would improve transparency, strengthen accountability and enable governments to better understand whether reform efforts are translating into safer lives and stronger outcomes for people experiencing domestic, family and sexual violence, particularly to gauge outcomes for disproportionately affected communities.

Evaluation must drive continuous improvement

Evaluation enables governments to understand whether policies, programs and services are achieving their intended outcomes and where improvements are needed – they also enable shared learning across the system and the country. Evaluation is particularly important in a high-investment reform environment. It enables governments to distinguish between activity, implementation quality and contribution to outcomes, and provides the evidence required to refine programs, allocate resources effectively and identify approaches that warrant expansion. As investment in efforts to eliminate domestic, family and sexual violence continues to grow, evaluation provides the mechanism for identifying effective approaches, adapting implementation and ensuring public investment delivers the greatest possible benefit for people experiencing violence.

Evaluation quality depends on the quality of the information available. Many domestic, family and sexual violence organisations – particularly smaller and under-resourced service providers – do not have dedicated data or evaluation capability. Investment in evaluation should therefore include practical support for organisations to define outcomes, strengthen data systems and collect meaningful outcomes data without diverting resources from service delivery.

Target 13 under the National Agreement on Closing the Gap is to reduce the rate of all forms of family violence and abuse against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and children by 50% by 2031.

Across Australia, governments are placing increasing emphasis on evaluation as part of domestic, family and sexual violence reform (refer to Box 9). Monitoring and evaluation frameworks are being incorporated into national and jurisdictional strategies, evaluation capability is expanding, and there is growing recognition that evidence of effectiveness should inform future policy, service design and investment decisions (Australian Centre for Evaluation, 2025a).

Evaluation is increasingly recognised as an integral part of implementation rather than a process undertaken at the conclusion of a program, policy or initiative. Evaluation should be embedded from the outset and properly resourced as part of implementation. This includes funding evaluation activity and supporting delivery organisations to build evaluation readiness, establish clear outcomes, collect consistent and meaningful data, and understand how this information can improve their work. Early investment in outcomes measurement would strengthen the ability of later evaluations to assess effectiveness, rather than relying mainly on activity and output data.

Evaluation also strengthens accountability. Demonstrating that programs have been delivered is only one measure of success. Understanding whether those programs have improved safety, reduced harm or strengthened recovery provides governments with the evidence needed to direct future investment towards approaches that achieve the greatest impact.

To ensure accountability, evaluations should apply a domestic, family and sexual violence lens, including where relevant initiatives are delivered through health, justice, housing, education or other sectors. Evaluation design should centre safety for people with lived experience, wellbeing, recovery and improved outcomes, while managing the risks associated with collecting sensitive information. For interventions involving people who use violence, including men's behaviour change programs, measures of participation or changed attitudes are not sufficient on their own; evaluations should also examine safety and outcomes for people affected by violence.

The Commission considers that consistent, well-resourced evaluation informed by a domestic, family and sexual violence lens should become a defining characteristic of a mature learning system. This includes:

- embedding evaluation into the design and funding of new policies, programs and services
- supporting evaluation readiness and outcomes data capability
- applying common evaluation principles that centre safety and wellbeing for people with lived experience
- making evaluation findings publicly available wherever possible.

A more consistent approach will strengthen collective learning across jurisdictions and reduce duplication of effort while enabling governments to identify effective approaches that can be adapted and scaled nationally.

The Commission has engaged ANROWS to develop national evaluation principles for evaluating domestic, family and sexual violence programs under the National Plan. Together with the Commission's work to develop guidance on evaluating lived experience engagement, these initiatives will strengthen evaluation capability across governments and the broader sector while promoting greater consistency in how outcomes are assessed and reported.

Box 9: An increasing emphasis on evaluation

There are encouraging signs that governments are placing greater emphasis on evaluation as part of domestic, family and sexual violence reform:

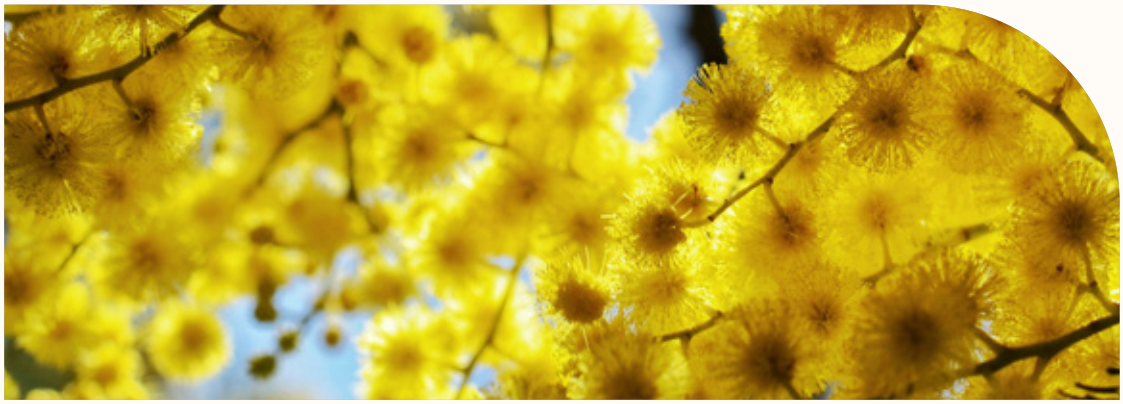
- A National Plan Mid-Term Review is currently underway to assess progress across the First Action Plan and inform the development of the Second Action Plan. AIFS and ANROWS are reviewing a collection of evaluation reports and research on DFSV programs and services to distil key themes from these important sources of evidence. Results will be available later in 2026.
- In February 2026, *Our Ways – Strong Ways – Our Voices: National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Plan to End Family, Domestic and Sexual Violence 2026–2036 (Our Ways – Strong Ways – Our Voices)* was released. The plan includes a blueprint to develop a monitoring and evaluation framework in collaboration with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and governments that has clear outcomes, indicators and plans for data development (Department of Social Services, 2026b).
- The Northern Territory Government has released its *Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence Reduction Strategy 2025–2028*. The strategy places an emphasis on data and evaluation and includes a monitoring, evaluation and accountability plan linked to the National Plan Outcomes Framework (Northern Territory Government, 2025).
- NSW released its *Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence Outcomes Monitoring and Reporting Framework to track the progress of the NSW Domestic and Family Violence Plan 2022–2027* and *NSW Sexual Violence Plan 2022–2027*. The framework sets the goal of increased monitoring and evaluation of services, systems and programs for continuous improvement and operates within a context of a *Human Services Outcomes Framework* and data collection (Department of Communities and Justice, 2025).
- The Queensland Government released *Safer Families, Safer Communities: A Domestic and Family Violence Reform Strategy for Queensland* which indicates a forthcoming Evaluation Framework for monitoring progress and system performance (Queensland Government, 2026b). Queensland already has a *Domestic, family and sexual violence system monitoring and evaluation framework*, which includes program evaluation guidelines (Queensland Government, 2023).
- In its response to the Royal Commission into Domestic and Family Violence in December 2025, the South Australian Government committed to robust ongoing monitoring, evaluation and impact assessment (Government of South Australia, 2025).
- The ACT Government has released the *ACT Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence Strategy* which includes a plan to finalise a monitoring and evaluation framework in the First Action Plan (ACT Government, 2026b).

Evaluation strengthens national learning

Individual evaluations generate valuable evidence, but their greatest value lies in the collective learning they create across the national system. Bringing evaluation findings together enables governments to identify common patterns, understand which approaches consistently deliver positive outcomes and recognise emerging implementation challenges across jurisdictions.

Australia is well placed to strengthen this national learning capability. Governments are increasingly commissioning evaluations across a wide range of domestic, family and sexual violence initiatives, while national organisations are developing greater capacity to synthesise evidence and identify lessons that extend beyond individual programs. Sharing evaluation findings more systematically would enable governments to build on successful approaches, avoid repeating ineffective practices and accelerate improvement across the National Plan. This requires governments to establish consistent expectations that commissioned evaluation findings will be shared, while recognising any ethical, cultural, privacy or safety limitations. It also requires investment in national mechanisms to collect, synthesise and translate findings so that lessons do not remain within individual programs, organisations or jurisdictions.

The Commission considers that evaluation evidence should become a routine source of national learning rather than remaining associated with individual programs or funding initiatives. Collectively, evaluations provide one of the strongest sources of evidence for understanding how the system is evolving, where reforms are delivering measurable benefits and where additional attention is required.



Research strengthens national capability

Research provides governments with the evidence needed to understand the changing nature of domestic, family and sexual violence. This includes identifying emerging issues and developing policies informed by the best available knowledge. Alongside outcomes measurement and evaluation, research enables governments to test assumptions, explore emerging issues, deepen their understanding of complex issues and strengthen responses to evolving patterns of violence.

Australia has invested significantly in national research capability through organisations such as ANROWS and AIFS. Together these organisations undertake nationally significant research, synthesise evidence from Australia and internationally, identify emerging knowledge gaps and make research accessible to governments, practitioners and the broader sector. Longitudinal studies, including *Ten to Men*, and the *Longitudinal Study of Australian Children* can provide unique insight into pathways into and out of violence, risk and protective factors, and patterns of change over time. Their value lies in informing prevention, early intervention and longer-term system reform. These studies continue to strengthen understanding of attitudes, behaviours and pathways associated with the use, and experience, of violence while informing future policy and prevention initiatives.

Research plays an important role in exploring emerging forms of violence, changing patterns of coercive control, technology-facilitated abuse and the effectiveness of policy and new interventions. This enables governments to anticipate future challenges and adapt policy responses before problems become more widespread, while supporting national data collections to monitor the changing landscape of domestic, family and sexual violence.

The Commission considers that maintaining a strong, coordinated national research capability will remain essential throughout implementation of the Second Action Plan. Continued investment in high-quality research, combined with greater integration between research, evaluation and outcomes measurement, will strengthen governments' ability to respond to emerging issues while ensuring policy decisions continue to be informed by robust evidence.

Lived experience strengthens system intelligence

People with lived experience bring knowledge that cannot be obtained through data, research or evaluation alone. Their experiences provide governments with direct insight into how policies, services and systems operate in practice, where barriers to safety remain and where reform is having the greatest impact.

Over many years, the domestic, family and sexual violence sector has increasingly recognised lived experience as an essential component of evidence. This reflects the sustained leadership of people who have direct experience of the system, advocates and community organisations who have demonstrated that people with lived experience are uniquely placed to identify system barriers, articulate emerging issues and shape more effective responses. Their contributions have strengthened policy development, service design, governance and evaluation across Australia.

The Commission considers that this represents an important shift in the maturity of the national evidence system. Lived experience is increasingly being recognised as a source of knowledge that complements data, research and evaluation. Together, these forms of evidence provide governments with a more complete understanding of how the system is performing and where change is needed.

A mature system values different forms of lived experience

The Commission's engagement throughout this reporting period has reinforced that lived experience is not a single perspective. People contribute different forms of knowledge depending on their experiences, the roles they play and the ways they engage with systems over time.

People navigating services, courts, police, health, housing, income support, employment services, aged care, disability support, early childhood education and care and community organisations provide critical insights into how systems function in practice and where they create barriers, gaps or unintended consequences. Their experiences help governments identify problems that may not yet be visible through data or formal evaluation.

Alongside these perspectives, lived experience advocates bring an additional level of expertise developed through sustained engagement with policy, reform processes and system improvement. Their experience enables them to identify recurring themes across many individual experiences, distinguish between isolated issues and systemic problems, and contribute to the design of practical reforms.

Together, these different perspectives strengthen governments' understanding of system performance. They provide intelligence that complements quantitative evidence and ensures that reform remains grounded in the experiences of the people the National Plan is intended to support.

Building capability for meaningful engagement

As lived experience becomes more embedded across governments, attention is increasingly turning from whether people should be engaged to how engagement can be undertaken safely, consistently and meaningfully.

The Commission has observed increasing maturity in lived experience practice across Australia. Governments and organisations are investing in trauma-informed engagement, establishing advisory structures, developing governance arrangements and recognising the expertise that develops through ongoing participation. Lived experience is increasingly being brought into decision-making in a systematic way across policy, program design, evaluation and governance processes from the outset. These developments need to be embedded to strengthen the quality of engagement while supporting more consistent approaches across the sector.

Current systems often reflect Western assumptions about service design, data collection and evaluation. This can limit the extent to which evidence systems capture what is meaningful for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and communities. Service design and evaluation should therefore be undertaken in partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, with appropriate governance, cultural authority and co-design embedded from the outset.

Over the past 3 years, the Commission's Lived Experience Advisory Council has demonstrated the value of embedding lived experience within national governance. The Council has informed the Commission's monitoring, reporting and advice to government while contributing perspectives that have strengthened understanding of how national reforms are experienced by people navigating the system.

Building on this experience, the Commission is developing practical guidance to support governments and organisations to embed lived experience more effectively within policy development, governance and evaluation. This work recognises that meaningful engagement requires appropriate structures, capability, cultural safety and support for participants if it is to influence decision-making and improve outcomes.

Second Action Plan consultations provide practice wisdom and policy knowledge

To support development of the Second Action Plan, Department of Social Services facilitated a discussion with key data custodians and service stakeholders to explore data and research requirements for the Second Action Plan. The following themes emerged from the consultations:

- Australia has substantial data, research and evaluation activity relevant to family, domestic and sexual violence, but visibility, access, linkage and coordination remain challenging across agencies, jurisdictions and systems.
- Several participants raised the possibility of a structured mapping exercise. This would serve as a foundation for identifying existing datasets, evidence assets, linkage activity, research and evaluation work, evidence gaps and opportunities for harmonisation.
- Participants repeatedly raised the need for more consistent definitions, data items and collection approaches where appropriate to support impact measurement and change over time, recognising that some differences between sectors and uses may be necessary.
- Several participants identified opportunities to strengthen evaluation practice, including clearer requirements, adequate resourcing, better sharing of evaluation findings and routine synthesis of evaluation evidence.
- Participants cautioned against trying to measure too many outcomes and noted that measurement should be linked to Second Action Plan priorities as these become clearer. Monitoring should not focus only on prevalence. Participants raised possible measures relating to system performance, lived experience, safety, recovery, repeat offending and victimisation, accountability for people who use violence, service accessibility and children's experiences.

Turning evidence into stronger national monitoring and accountability

The Second Action Plan consultations reinforce the need for a more connected approach to evidence, measurement and learning. Better coordination of existing data, research and evaluation, alongside clearer measures of system performance and people's experiences, will strengthen

the ability to understand what is changing, where gaps remain and where governments need to act.

The Commission's *Monitoring and Reporting Framework* provides a mechanism to bring this evidence together and independently assess progress under the National Plan and Second Action Plan. It draws on multiple forms of evidence to look beyond individual activities and measures of prevalence and consider how effectively the system is working and improving over time.

Realising the full value of these national monitoring arrangements will require governments to support consistent, transparent reporting and ensure the Commission has the enduring institutional arrangements and access to information needed to independently assess progress.

This should include enabling the Commission to fully implement its *Monitoring and Reporting Framework*, supported by enduring institutional arrangements and appropriate information-gathering powers to provide timely and consistent access to information across governments and strengthen independent monitoring and accountability over the life of the plan.

RECOMMENDATION 6 *

Strengthen monitoring, accountability and continuous improvement across the National Plan.

Australian governments should strengthen national monitoring and accountability by ensuring they consistently provide publicly available responses in a timely way to significant findings and recommendations. This includes those arising from the Commission's Yearly Reports and the forthcoming mid-term review of the National Plan. Work should aim to improve transparency around progress and embed mechanisms to support continuous learning and system improvement across the National Plan.

This should include enabling the Commission to fully implement its *Monitoring and Reporting Framework*, supported by enduring institutional arrangements and appropriate information-gathering powers to provide timely and consistent access to information across governments and strengthen independent monitoring and accountability over the life of the plan.

PEOPLE WITH LIVED EXPERIENCE HELP US UNDERSTAND BOTH THE NATURE OF THE VIOLENCE AND ABUSE AND THE EFFECTIVENESS OF THE RESPONSES

People with lived experience provide critical insights into both the nature of domestic, family and sexual violence and the effectiveness of the systems designed to respond to it. This helps governments understand how violence is experienced, the barriers people face in achieving safety and recovery, and whether policies, services and reforms are reducing harm or unintentionally reinforcing it.

People with lived experience are essential to understanding the problem and designing the solutions

The National Plan recognises that some groups of people are disproportionately affected by domestic, family and sexual violence. These groups include Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, children and young people, people with disabilities, culturally and linguistically diverse communities, LGBTIQA+SB people, older women, people in regional and remote Australia, and people with temporary or insecure visa status.

Designing systems with and for these groups is how the system becomes more effective and equitable for everyone. Embedding lived experience perspectives in all aspects of policy and service design improves accessibility and ensures responses reflect the complexity of people's lives. It also reduces the need for people to navigate fragmented systems.

This approach means involving these communities in articulating the problem – not just in designing responses to it. People with lived experience provide unique insight into how violence is perpetrated, how coercive control and abuse are experienced, the barriers that prevent people from seeking safety, and how systems can unintentionally reinforce or compound harm.

For example, women have described how threats and harm to animals can form part of coercive control, and how fear for an animal's safety can also make it harder for women to leave violence. Where crisis accommodation and other supports cannot provide safe options for animals – which are experienced as part of their family – this can create an additional barrier to seeking safety.

Their expertise helps governments distinguish between the symptoms of violence and its underlying drivers, ensuring reforms address the causes of harm rather than only improving responses after violence has occurred.

Systems experience is one of the clearest indicators of system performance

The way people experience the domestic, family and sexual violence system is one of the clearest indicators of whether it is meeting their needs. While activity, investment and service outputs remain important measures of progress, they do not reveal whether people can access support easily, receive coordinated responses or experience safer outcomes.

Within the Commission's *Monitoring and Reporting Framework*, lived experience provides an important qualitative indicator of system performance. It offers insight into how policy, investment and service delivery translate into people's everyday experiences, including whether responses are coordinated, trauma informed, equitable and accessible. It also highlights where systems unintentionally create additional harm through fragmentation, repeated storytelling, inconsistent decision-making or barriers to support.

People with lived experience provide qualitative indicators of change that complement quantitative measures by revealing how reforms are experienced in practice. This is particularly useful in areas where outcome data remains limited or emerging. Together, lived experience provides critical intelligence about whether reforms are improving the way the system functions.

Lived expertise has been recognised and matured

Recognition of lived and living expertise continues to grow across the domestic, family and sexual violence system. Governments have increasingly embedded lived experience into consultations, governance arrangements, policy development and evaluation. This includes the consultations on the Second Action Plan and the development of new lived experience frameworks.

Importantly, how we understand and apply lived experience is maturing. Over the life of the National Plan, there has been growing recognition that lived experience is not a single perspective but encompasses different forms of expertise and intelligence.

The Commission's Lived Experience Advisory Council reports that the way the sector reports on its lived experience engagement varies greatly. Some initiatives set high standards for safety, recognition and influence, while other processes can feel inconsistent or tokenistic. Many domestic, family and sexual violence services, policies and programs have been designed without lived experience engagement.

People with direct lived experience provide essential insight into the realities of violence. They understand the drivers of violence and where systems fail. Others develop lived expertise through advocacy, leadership and sustained engagement with reform processes, bringing deeper understanding of systemic barriers and opportunities for reform. Equally important are the people who interact with the system but may never identify as advocates. Their experiences can provide valuable intelligence about how policies and services operate in practice.

Recognising these different forms of lived experience strengthens system design. Together, this helps governments identify problems, understand why they occur and develop responses that better reflect the realities of people's lives.

These developments represent an important shift towards more mature system governance. However, lived experience evidence consistently demonstrates that implementation remains uneven across jurisdictions and service settings, and that longstanding challenges identified in previous reporting periods continue to affect people's experience of the system.

Lived experience survey

The Commission's *Monitoring and Reporting Framework* included an activity to develop an annual lived experience survey. The survey aimed to add to the evidence base for people's experience of domestic, family and sexual violence services. It also sought to include lived experience expertise in systems improvement and governance activities.

A pilot survey was designed and led by the Commission's Lived Experience Advisory Council and shared with over 100 organisations. These included government agencies, peak bodies and service organisations with established lived experience advisory mechanisms in all states and territories. The aim was to test the approach and capture initial insights from advocates and their communities on recent service experience and experience of engagement mechanisms. The pilot was designed to test the survey approach and inform the development of a future annual survey. The annual survey will have a set of core or repeatable questions each year, with potential to add additional questions from other stakeholders as part of the Commission's engagement activities. Results of the pilot survey will be published in a full report by the Commission in the second half of 2026.

The survey was completed by 149 people with lived experience, comprising 110 women, 7 men and 9 non-binary, transgender or other persons (and 23 who did not answer the relevant question). Of these, 66 people had accessed domestic, family and sexual violence services in the past 12 months (49 more than 12 months ago), and 34 had not accessed any services.

Key insights from the pilot survey are set out below:

- Frontline workforces remain an essential source of information and referrals for people experiencing domestic, family and sexual violence. This includes health workers (26%), police (25%), lawyers/legal services (19%) and education providers (5%). However, 39% did not rely on any referral, using websites and self-directed sources instead.
- Only 8% of respondents could access all the services they needed at the time they needed them, with an additional 15% able to access most of the required services. Furthermore, 31% were not able to access any of the services they needed. Having said this, slightly more respondents felt that access to services was improving (28%), rather than declining (22%). The primary reasons for not being able to access services were long waiting times and not meeting eligibility criteria. In addition, 60% of respondents found it difficult to identify which support services would be right for them or their family.
- When asked for broader perceptions about the support available in communities, only 15% agreed that support systems are working well, and 19% agreed that different parts of the system work together effectively. Funding was seen as the most prominent issue needing priority in communities, predominantly for mental health services, free legal services, housing and homelessness services and family and children's services.

In relation to the development of lived experience expertise becoming embedded within the domestic, family and sexual violence system, 60 of the 149 survey respondents had been involved in a lived experience engagement. Overall, 83% rated their experience positively, particularly in relation to being treated with dignity, having clear communication, noticing a genuine effort to include diverse perspectives, and prioritising safety during the engagement. In addition, 50% of respondents felt that opportunities to contribute to decision-making processes have improved over the past 12 months, with only 10% feeling they have declined.

The next phase of reform is therefore not simply to hear more lived experience, but to embed it systemically within formalised service roles. This includes using lived experience as evidence of system performance and a mechanism for continuous learning and improvement. Governments can achieve this by including people with lived experience in the process to identify and articulate problems, as well as in the design, delivery, governance and evaluation of services and programs.

What lived experience tells us about experiences within the system

During 2026, the Commission undertook extensive engagement with people with lived and living experience of domestic, family and sexual violence to inform both this report and the development of the Second Action Plan.

These discussions included dedicated consultations with children and young people, women living with disabilities, people with lived experience of sexual violence, people with lived experience of the family law system, families bereaved by femicide, and members of the Commission's Lived Experience Advisory Council. This also included discussions with multicultural communities, LGBTIQA+SB communities, sex worker collectives and other representative organisations.

While each group described distinct experiences and priorities, there was striking consistency in the underlying messages. Across consultations, participants did not identify isolated service failures. Instead, they described persistent features of the current system that continue to undermine safety, recovery and confidence in Australia's response to domestic, family and sexual violence.

The key themes emerging from these consultations are outlined below.

People continue to carry the burden of navigating the system

Participants consistently described systems that require individuals to coordinate their own safety across multiple agencies, repeatedly disclose traumatic experiences, navigate inconsistent eligibility requirements and reconcile conflicting advice.

Fragmentation was identified across justice and family law, health, disability, child protection, housing and community services, with responsibility for coordination too often falling on those experiencing violence rather than the system itself.

A recurring theme was that people are often required to become experts in navigating complex systems simply to access the support or information they need. Participants described being referred between agencies, repeating their story and trying to identify who held responsibility for different aspects of their case. For families bereaved by femicide, this included seeking basic information about criminal proceedings but instead receiving generic referrals.

This increases trauma, delays access to support and undermines confidence in the system. Similar themes have been

> 'People say that you're the "expert in your own experience" but I've never had to do this before. I know so much more about the system now that I never did before, and that's why I help others.'
>
> **Participant**
>
> Attorney-General's lived experience Expert Advisory Group Second Action Plan consultation

consistently identified across lived experience reports and inquiries, including the Queensland Government's *Not Now, Not Ever* reforms, work by InTouch and recent lived experience research (Queensland Government, 2017; InTouch Multicultural Centre Against Family Violence, 2022; Malins & Caulfield, 2025).

Systems are not designed for complexity or intersectionality

Across all cohorts, there was a strong message that mainstream systems continue to assume relatively simple pathways through violence and recovery. Participants described experiences shaped by disabilities, culture, age, sexuality, migration status, geography, caring responsibilities and other intersecting factors that existing service models do not adequately accommodate. Women with disabilities, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, culturally and linguistically diverse communities, LGBTIQA+SB people, older women and children and young people described additional barriers created by systems that were not designed with their experiences in mind.

Systems continue to be designed around adults, with the needs of children and young people treated as secondary rather than requiring distinct responses that take into account their stage of life

Childhood and youth are distinct stages of life, not population cohorts. Children and young people may also experience disabilities, cultural and linguistic diversity, geographic isolation, diverse sexualities and gender identities, and other factors

> 'Only a limited number of people in our entire state can do forensic examinations. If that person is off sick, or away, that means getting on a plane for multiple hours, sometimes overnight, in the clothes you were assaulted in. Assuming you can afford that, you also need to explain it to others, find care for your family, take time off work. Where's the privacy?'
>
> **Participant**
>
> Second Action Plan consultation

> '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**
>
> Second Action Plan consultation with families bereaved by femicide

that shape their experiences of domestic, family and sexual violence. Systems therefore need to recognise both their developmental needs and the diversity of their experiences.

Across consultations, young people consistently described systems that remain designed around adult experiences, with the needs of children and young people often treated as secondary, considered only through the experiences of parents, or reliant on the involvement of a protective parent.

They highlighted that children and young people require responses tailored to their stage of development, including age-appropriate approaches to disclosure, evidence gathering and engagement.

Participants also emphasised that the impacts of domestic, family and sexual violence do not end with immediate crisis. Health impacts are often lifelong, requiring ongoing access to physical and mental health care, while legal, financial and support services need to recognise children and young people as individuals with distinct needs and rights.

Experiences of and exposure to domestic, family and sexual violence as a child or young person can have both immediate and lifelong negative effects on the health, wellbeing, development and life satisfaction of those who have experienced violence. Children and young people from families who have experienced or been exposed to domestic, family and sexual violence are often left to recover from their childhood in their adult years. Unaddressed trauma from navigating unhealthy and abusive family relationships may then be carried into their own relationships, often leading to unhealthy coping behaviours and the continuation of intergenerational cycles of violence.

Young people also described gaps in legislation and frontline responses, including inconsistent recognition within coercive control reforms. For example, emerging coercive control reforms continue to focus primarily on adult intimate partner relationships. This means children and young people are not consistently recognised as experiencing coercive control in their own right.

Other inconsistencies occurred when a child or young person was misidentified as the person using violence, or viewed as displaying challenging behaviour, rather than having their behaviour understood as a response to trauma or ongoing abuse.

Justice and family law systems can become sources of further harm

Participants consistently identified justice systems, particularly family law, as places where people often experience further trauma rather than protection. Common concerns included poor recognition of family violence risk, limited weight given to children's experiences, inadequate accountability for decision-makers,

> ‘The healing isn’t always linear. Even with access straightaway. That trauma can remanifest down the track. Important to have long-term service for survivors. Not just mental health but physical health as well.’
>
> **Participant**
>
> Youth Taskforce Second Action Plan Consultation

fragmented information sharing, and legal processes that prolong exposure to harm. Families bereaved by femicide similarly described failures across policing, justice and offender management that contributed to preventable deaths.

Earlier intervention opportunities continue to be missed

Rather than identifying a lack of crisis responses, participants pointed to repeated missed opportunities for earlier intervention. Health services, schools, sporting organisations, disability services, community organisations and other mainstream settings were consistently identified as places where violence could be recognised earlier if practitioners had stronger capability, clearer pathways and better coordination. Participants also argued that support should begin well before people reach crisis point.

Sexual violence requires greater visibility within national reform

Participants consistently argued that sexual violence remains subsumed within broader domestic and family violence reforms. They called for stronger national leadership, dedicated investment, improved data, greater workforce capability and clearer accountability for outcomes. Participants also emphasised the importance of recognising sexual violence occurring outside intimate partner and family relationships, including institutional and community settings.

These experiences are not always well captured within existing data collections, service systems or evaluation frameworks. They risk becoming less visible when considered only through a domestic and family violence lens.

Maintaining a distinct focus on sexual violence will remain essential to understanding its prevalence, strengthening prevention and improving responses, particularly as governments continue to implement the Second Action Plan, *National Strategy to Prevent and Respond to Child Sexual Abuse 2021–2030* and recommendations arising from recent inquiries into sexual violence.

Recovery requires long-term support, not short-term responses

Across consultations there was a consistent message that systems remain heavily oriented towards crisis response. Participants emphasised that recovery is a long-term process requiring stable housing, financial security, accessible mental health care, ongoing therapeutic support and opportunities to rebuild safety over time. Children and young people particularly highlighted the need for life-course approaches that recognise healing does not end when immediate risk subsides.

> ‘Many people from communities seek help first from trusted multicultural organisations, community leaders or faith leaders, rather than police or specialist family violence services. Current data often misses this early intervention work.’
>
> **Participant**
>
> Second Action Plan consultation with multicultural communities

People with lived experience should shape system design and accountability

Participants consistently argued that lived experience should be recognised as expertise throughout policy development, implementation, governance and evaluation. This extended beyond consultation to include shared decision-making, appropriately funded representative mechanisms, fair remuneration and stronger accountability for how governments respond to lived experience advice. Participants also stressed that success should ultimately be measured by improvements in safety and wellbeing, rather than the completion of activities or reforms.

Implications for the Second Action Plan

Collectively, these consultations demonstrate that Australia is not facing a shortage of insight into how the system can be improved. Across diverse communities, participants consistently identified many of the same barriers that have been raised in previous inquiries and reporting. The challenge for the next phase of reform is less about identifying new problems than embedding what we already know into the design, governance and continuous improvement of the national response.

Drawing on the experiences shared across the Commission's consultations, a mature national response would:

- coordinate services around people rather than organisational boundaries, reducing the need to repeatedly disclose experiences or navigate disconnected systems
- respond consistently regardless of where people live or which service they first approach, so that safety is not determined by geography, practitioner capability or organisational practice
- design for complexity, recognising diverse experiences of violence and intersecting forms of disadvantage
- identify and respond earlier, by strengthening capability across mainstream systems
- deliver justice that promotes safety, with child-centred, accountable and trauma-informed responses
- design systems around the needs of children and young people, with developmentally appropriate responses that recognise them as individuals with distinct rights, needs and experiences, including where a protective parent is not available
- recognise that healing extends beyond crisis, ensuring people can access long-term recovery, health and wellbeing supports through their lives
- keep sexual violence visible, through dedicated leadership, investment and accountability
- embed lived experience in governance, so people shape policy, implementation and system improvement.

CASE STUDY

Northern Territory Domestic and Family Violence Co-Responder Program

The Northern Territory Domestic and Family Violence (DFV) Co-Responder Program provides an example of an integrated, multi-agency approach designed to strengthen coordination and provide more holistic support to individuals and families.

Operating in Alice Springs and Palmerston, the model brings together police, child protection, specialist victim-survivor services and specialist services working with people who use violence. Teams work alongside one another, share information and review police DFV call-out data to identify opportunities for earlier intervention and connection to broader supports (Northern Territory Police, Fire and Emergency Services, 2025).

The model creates important structural conditions for integrated practice. However, bringing systems together does not automatically mean the people within them understand or respond to DFSV in the same way. Different agencies bring different statutory responsibilities, professional perspectives and practice frameworks.

Northern Territory coronial findings demonstrate why a shared DFSV foundation matters. In the 2024 inquests into the DFV-related deaths of 4 Aboriginal women, the Coroner identified fragmentation and siloing between agencies and made recommendations aimed at strengthening integrated responses and specialist DFSV capability, including delivery of *Prevent. Assist. Respond. Training* (PARt) across key parts of the Northern Territory response system (Northern Territory Coroners Court, 2024).

PARt is specialist, ongoing DFSV training developed in the Northern Territory for frontline responders, strengthening capability across prevention, assistance and response. Importantly, its learning is unapologetically wrapped around the voices and stories of victim-survivors, particularly Aboriginal women. Their stories do not simply illustrate professional knowledge: lived experience authority guides the learning, creating opportunities for practitioners to examine and transform professional assumptions, language and practice.

This matters because language is not neutral. What practitioners understand influences what they see, the questions they ask, how they recognise coercive control and risk, and ultimately the decisions they make.

This was demonstrated in the 2026 *Inquest into the death of Ralph Donald* (Northern Territory Coroners Court, 2026). The Coroner heard evidence from a police officer who, before undertaking PARt, recognised there was significance in information disclosed to him but did not understand what that significance was. After undertaking PARt, he recognised what had been described as coercive control and said that, faced with the same circumstances today, he would press harder, ask more questions and seek to

initiate a domestic violence order. The Coroner described this as 'very positive evidence of the impact of PARt'. The Northern Territory Police also reported variance between frontline responses by PARt-trained and non-PARt-trained members.

Together, these approaches demonstrate 2 dimensions of effective integration.

Co-Responder creates the structural architecture for services to work together and provide holistic support. PARt strengthens the people within and across those systems to prevent, assist and respond to DFSV from a shared foundation.

Systems are ultimately enacted by people. If structures change but the knowledge, assumptions and practice of the people within them do not, there is a risk that existing responses and outcomes are reproduced within new structures.

PARt is already undertaking this system-strengthening work in the Northern Territory and, to date, has been funded primarily through philanthropic investment. This raises an important question about how the practice infrastructure required for effective integration is sustainably resourced.

For Aboriginal women and their families, getting this right is not simply a measure of successful system integration. It can be a matter of safety and, ultimately, life.

CASE STUDY

The Orange Door – integrated, multidisciplinary response

A case study from The Orange Door in Victoria illustrates how integrated, multidisciplinary responses can improve system experience and outcomes for people experiencing family violence (Outcomes, Practice and Evidence Network, n.d.).

The case involved a woman with children experiencing ongoing family violence, including coercive and controlling behaviours, threats and harassment. The situation was assessed as high risk and required an immediate and coordinated system response.

Through The Orange Door model, a multidisciplinary team was convened, bringing together specialist family violence practitioners, child wellbeing workers, and services working with people using violence. This integrated approach enabled information sharing, shared risk assessment and coordinated decision-making across practitioners.

In practice, the response prioritised both immediate safety and longer-term stability. This included development of a safety plan, support to access crisis accommodation, legal protections, and practical supports tailored to the needs of the family. The team maintained continuous communication and joint accountability, ensuring that support was available at critical points of risk.

Importantly, the coordinated model reduced the burden on the person in need of support to navigate multiple services independently or repeatedly recount their experience. Instead, practitioners worked together to provide a consistent and streamlined response. The approach also maintained a focus on perpetrator accountability, including efforts to engage the person using violence and hold them responsible for their behaviour.

The outcomes of this approach included improved safety, increased confidence and a stronger sense of being heard and believed. Ongoing, coordinated support contributed to greater stability for the family and reduced the risk of further harm.

This example demonstrates how integrated service delivery, shared accountability and a whole-of-family approach can improve system responsiveness. It reflects key features of good system experience, including coordinated support, reduced fragmentation and responses that are tailored to the complexity of people's lives.

Together, these examples demonstrate that coordinated and integrated responses are achievable. Although implemented in different contexts, both models reduce fragmentation, improve continuity of support and better reflect the complexity of people's lives. They illustrate how system design can reduce the burden placed on people in need of support while strengthening safety and earlier intervention (Northern Territory Police, Fire and Emergency Services, 2025; Outcomes, Practice and Evidence Network, n.d.).

SYSTEMS
INTEGRATION

Leading the transition from fragmentation to an integrated national system

The systems experience chapter highlighted the impact that fragmented systems continue to have on people experiencing domestic, family and sexual violence. Despite significant reform, many people still navigate multiple services, repeat their story and coordinate support across disconnected systems.

These experiences are not simply the result of individual service gaps. They reflect the way Australia's domestic, family and sexual violence system has evolved over time through multiple sectors, jurisdictions and institutions with different responsibilities, funding arrangements and accountability mechanisms.

Improving system experience therefore requires more than strengthening individual services. It requires governments to deliberately design how the system functions as a whole.

Australia has made substantial progress in strengthening many parts of the system. However, people's experiences of domestic, family and sexual violence are not homogenous. People can experience coercive control without physical violence. Sexual violence can occur in contexts within and outside family and intimate partner relationships. Children, LGBTIQA+SB people, older women, people with disabilities, people from different cultural backgrounds and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people may experience violence in different ways and interact with different service systems.

These differences matter because they require different responses. A system designed around a single pathway or service cannot consistently meet people's needs. Instead, the national response must be capable of recognising different forms of violence, responding through multiple entry points, and coordinating support across health, justice and family law, housing, child protection, specialist services and other sectors.

Systems integration is how that complexity is managed. Rather than expecting people to navigate fragmented services, an integrated system connects the parts of government and the community sector around the needs of the person. This enables people to have more consistent experiences and better outcomes regardless of where they first seek help.

People may also need to interact with many different systems throughout their lives, including policing, courts, child protection, health, housing, education, specialist services and Aboriginal community-controlled organisations. Emerging harms, including technology-facilitated abuse, continue to expand this landscape.

Each system operates under different legislation, funding arrangements, professional cultures, information systems and accountability mechanisms. These challenges are compounded by Australia's federated system of government, where responsibility and decision-making for policy and service delivery is shared between Commonwealth, state and territory governments.

> 'I didn't need to fit into the system, I needed the system to respond to what was happening in my life.'
>
> **Participant**
>
> Second Action Plan consultation

The National Plan recognises the need for more coordinated and integrated systems and services (Department of Social Services, 2022). However, terms such as 'coordination', 'collaboration' and 'integration' are often used interchangeably despite representing different levels of system maturity.

International systems science research distinguishes between improving relationships between organisations and intentionally designing how an entire system functions (Tracy et al., 2023; Blake & Nobles, 2025). While Australia has invested in collaboration across sectors, for example, health–justice partnerships (Legal Aid NSW, 2026), comparatively less attention has been given to designing the overall architecture of the national domestic, family and sexual violence system.

From a system by default to a system by design

Successive reforms have strengthened important parts of the system, but often without an overarching framework that connects these reforms into a coherent whole. As a result, improvements within individual sectors do not always translate into better experiences for people moving between services or jurisdictions.

Building a nationally integrated system requires:

- clear national stewardship
- shared system architecture
- agreed approaches to integration
- mechanisms that enable governments to learn, adapt and improve over time.

These foundations allow governments to align reforms, connect investment and improve system performance across jurisdictions.

Practical enablers include:

- nationally consistent risk assessment approaches
- common standards
- cross-agency information sharing and linked data to inform policy and research
- adjacent workforce capability
- shared data definitions
- coordinated and flexible responses for high-risk cases
- standard referral pathways and warm handovers
- system-level feedback loops that inform policy, investment and continuous improvement.

Many of these foundations are now being established across Australia.

'System integration needs to be across ATO, financial systems, Family Tax Benefit, child support, delayed tax returns, and I can't get justice because I'll never have a final hearing. I've had to navigate tax lawyers, employment lawyers, everyone tells me I have to go to someone else.'

Participant

Family Law Second Action Plan consultation

Progress towards national systems integration

The Commission's 2025 Yearly Report to Parliament identified fragmentation across child protection, justice and family law, health services and systems as a significant barrier to delivering safe, coordinated responses for children and young people. We highlighted that unclear lines of accountability, disconnected systems and fragmented data limited governments' ability to respond effectively. To support a more integrated approach, the Commission identified key system enablers, including integrated governance, multi-agency coordination, comprehensive victim support services, sustainable investment, and a skilled and capable workforce (Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence Commission, 2025b).

Commonwealth, state and territory governments are progressively building the practical foundations required for a more integrated system.

The challenge is no longer understanding what an integrated system looks like. The challenge is providing the national leadership to intentionally design and sustain one.

'Every interaction a child or young person has with a system either contributes to violence or contributes to healing and this society has the power to choose which it will be.'

Participant

Second Action Plan consultation

Significant developments to build systems integration enablers

Consistent national risk assessment

Recommendation 13a of *Unlocking the prevention potential: Accelerating action to end domestic, family and sexual Violence* (2024) called for nationally consistent domestic and family violence risk assessment and management principles. In September 2024, National Cabinet agreed to develop national best-practice domestic and family violence risk assessment principles and a model best-practice risk assessment framework (the Framework). The Department of Social Services led development of the Framework in partnership with states, territories, relevant Commonwealth agencies and Australia's National Research Organisation for Women's Safety (ANROWS). The Framework provides a shared, evidence-based foundation for understanding domestic, family and sexual violence risk and sets out 11 actions for governments as the minimum requirements for national alignment. Jurisdictions, including the Commonwealth, will need to embed these actions in their frameworks and guidance, supported by policy and practice reform, workforce capability development, and stronger governance and information-sharing arrangements to improve perpetrator accountability and support safe, coordinated responses for victim-survivors.

In parallel with finalising the National Risk Assessment Framework, the Department of Social Services is progressing work to support a coordinated approach to Commonwealth alignment. This includes work to understand how relevant Commonwealth agencies and service settings currently identify, assess, and respond to domestic and family violence risk and to identify opportunities, barriers and priorities for alignment. This evidence will inform development of the Commonwealth Risk Alignment Strategy, providing an approach to support alignment with the National Risk Assessment Framework, across relevant Commonwealth settings (Department of Social Services, 2025f).

National Standards for Men's Behaviour Change Programs

In September 2024, National Cabinet agreed to deliver innovative new approaches to better identify high-risk perpetrators, share information about them across systems and state boundaries, and intervene earlier to stop violence escalating. As part of this, First Ministers agreed to develop National Standards for Men's Behaviour Change Programs. The Department of Social Services has engaged Monash University in consultation with states, territories and key stakeholders to develop the National Standards by the end of 2026 and Guidance for Contact with Affected Family Members and Final Report to be delivered in 2027. Monash University is partnering with No to Violence and Griffith University. The Department of Social Services is working in collaboration with states and territories to develop an Implementation Strategy to be delivered with the National Standards (Department of Social Services, 2025g).

National legal assistance reform

The National Access to Justice Partnership 2025–2030 commenced on 1 July 2025. It facilitates a $3.9 billion investment in long-term reforms that directly enable system integration across the legal service sector. This will improve data capability, embed workforce reforms and simplify funding streams (Attorney-General's Department, 2025).

National data development

AIHW, with funding from Department of Social Services, is developing a prototype data collection relating to government-funded specialist crisis family and domestic violence services for victim-survivors. The project is an opportunity for governments to agree which data is most meaningful for a future national data collection, and the best way to achieve this.

The project addresses several core national policy priority areas, including:

- creating nationally consistent family and domestic violence service data items, with harmonised definitions
- improving understanding of demand and unmet demand for family and domestic violence services
- increasing data on people experiencing family and domestic violence that may be linked to other data sources to provide insights into long-term outcomes (AIHW, 2026).

Linked data to inform policy and research

The Criminal Justice Data Asset is being developed by the ABS to create a longitudinal, person-level national criminal justice dataset. It integrates administrative data from state and territory criminal justice agencies, including information on police recorded offenders, criminal court defendants, and adult prisoners under corrective services. The asset provides approved policy analysts and researchers with access to de-identified, linked data to better understand criminal behaviour, recidivism and justice system outcomes. The ABS has conducted a privacy impact assessment to evaluate and mitigate privacy risks associated with linking sensitive criminal justice data. Data governance processes are being formalised to ensure secure access for approved users with strict protocols for de-identification, custodianship and legal compliance (Department of Social Services, 2025h).

Cross-government leadership

In February 2026, the Women and Women's Safety Ministerial Council met jointly with Community Services Ministers for the first time. Ministers agreed four shared national priorities:

- systems integration
- common risk assessment for children
- workforce capability
- investment in Aboriginal community-controlled organisations (Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, 2026).

The release of *Our Ways – Strong Ways – Our Voices* further reinforces that integrated responses must be designed alongside Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-controlled systems to deliver culturally safe pathways across prevention, early intervention, response and healing.

Workforce capability

Training and development of frontline domestic, family and sexual violence workforces have progressed and will continue as a priority under the Second Action Plan. Broader training of people in workplaces enables better awareness of the issues, including how to identify domestic, family and sexual violence and how to link people to services. We should enable all workforces to leverage every opportunity to engage with and support people experiencing violence.

People with lived experience continue to highlight the need for integration

Lived experience expertise continues to describe a system that remains difficult to navigate despite improvements in individual services.

Consistent themes emerging through the Commission's engagement over the past year include:

- repeated storytelling across multiple services
- repeated assessments for similar supports
- static risk assessments in one system that do not take into consideration updated assessments undertaken in another system that identifies increased risk
- limited information sharing between agencies
- support that varies depending on individual workers rather than consistent organisational practice.

These experiences reinforce that service integration should be something that people using the system experience – not simply a governance arrangement or policy setting.

Children and young people

Children and young people continue to experience additional barriers navigating the system.

Engagement undertaken by the Commission in partnership with ANROWS identified several recurring issues:

- systems are largely designed around adult service models
- systems assume a protective parent is accompanying the children or young people
- many supports require parental consent, even where safety concerns exist
- eligibility rules can prevent access to financial support
- existing responses do not always reflect the needs of First Nations and multicultural children and young people.

These findings reinforce earlier evidence that children and young people's rights and needs continue to be insufficiently recognised.

> 'Family violence trauma is intergenerational, and I think if we better support children and young people who are victim-survivors of family violence to prevent that cycle, that's what's actually going to prevent family violence from occurring in the first place.'
>
> **Vincent Shin**
>
> Voices Towards 2050 podcast series

A national workforce strategy remains a critical enabler

A coordinated national workforce strategy remains one of the most significant opportunities to strengthen systems integration.

While governments continue to invest in workforce capability, current efforts remain fragmented across sectors and jurisdictions.

A national workforce strategy is required to provide a shared framework for workforce planning, capability development, retention strategies (wellbeing, inclusion and diversity supports), career pathways and professional standards across both specialist and frontline workforces.

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Participants in Second Action Plan consultations focused on policing highlighted the importance of integrated models, including embedded workers, specialist units and stronger partnerships. These models support people experiencing violence while allowing police to focus on their core role.

RETENTION STRATEGIES

- Develop wellbeing, inclusion and diversity supports.
- Recognise the cultural load on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander workers, and other people that live and work within their communities, such as LGBTIQA+SB, and develop support strategies.
- Articulate career pathways.
- Develop a national workforce planning data system.

WORKFORCE DESIGN

- Undertake a workforce capability assessment of adjacent and specialist workforces to identify common core capabilities and distinguish specialist capabilities.
- Identify opportunities to increase adjacent workforce supply by conducting a capability gap analysis and identifying capability needs.
- Develop national training program to uplift core capabilities in adjacent and community workforces (building on efforts underway in health, education, police and justice).
- Undertake a workforce supply and demand assessment.

RECRUITMENT STRATEGIES

- Develop a workforce pipeline with long term funding for permanent roles.
- Build in responsiveness to longer term priorities and agility to address emerging issues.
- Remuneration reform tied to gender pay equity principles.
- Rural and remote allowances.

WORKFORCE CAPABILITY TRAINING

- Deliver capability training for existing and adjacent workforces especially health, education, justice/law and police.
- Provide support to workers to manage DFSV disclosures.
- Reduce compliance and administrative burden on adjacent workforces for mandatory training.
- Build community knowledge and capability through broader workplace capability training.
- Embed ongoing mutual capability development across systems – specialist orgs, 'mainstream' orgs, ACCOs multicultural organisations and more generalist providers.

Figure 5: Proposed elements of a National Workforce Strategy

CASE STUDY

Building sector capability for people experiencing violence from migrant and refugee backgrounds

Settlement Services International (SSI) is a national not-for-profit organisation whose purpose is to help create a more inclusive society in which everyone can meaningfully contribute to social, cultural, civic and economic life. SSI's DFSV Prevention and Response Group promotes culturally responsive, evidence-based and community-informed responses to improve safety, access, experiences and outcomes for individuals from migrant and refugee backgrounds.

SSI's capacity building approach strengthens the ability of services and practitioners to provide effective, culturally responsive support to women and children from migrant and refugee backgrounds experiencing violence. The approach recognises that services that do not specialise in working with migrants and refugees require support to respond to the complex intersection of migration experiences, visa insecurity, systemic barriers and cultural dynamics. It focuses on building sector capability and driving systemic change. The approach is grounded in the SSI model of culturally responsive domestic, family and sexual violence practice.

Through 4 interconnected strategies – collaborative practice support, sector training, communities of practice and advice on practice approaches – the SSI DFSV Prevention and Response Group works alongside specialist services, community organisations and government agencies to strengthen practice and improve accessibility for migrant and refugee communities.

The approach supports services to move beyond one-size-fits-all responses towards culturally responsive, trauma-informed and intersectional practice. As a result, practitioners report increased confidence in responding to people from diverse backgrounds, stronger partnerships and a greater understanding of the barriers migrant and refugee women and children face when disclosing violence and seeking support.

This highlights the importance of embedding cultural responsiveness as a core capability across specialist DFSV and related sectors. Continued investment in culturally responsive specialist DFSV expertise and sector capacity building initiatives is critical to strengthening workforce capability, enhancing service responses to migrant and refugee people, improving service accessibility, and supporting a more inclusive, equitable and responsive DFSV service system.

OUTCOMES

- increased workforce and service confidence and capability in responding to DFSV in migrant and refugee communities
- stronger collaboration across specialist DFSV, community and government sectors
- improved understanding of the intersection of DFSV, migration, culture and systemic barriers
- enhanced implementation of culturally responsive, trauma-informed and intersectional practice approaches.

Examples of systems integration across Australia

CASE STUDY

IPARVAN Framework – navigating the domestic violence system

The Integrated Prevention and Response to Violence, Abuse and Neglect (IPARVAN) Framework is an action under the National Plan. It provides guidance on the enhancements, development and implementation of system redesign and integrated service responses to violence, abuse and neglect for NSW Health and partner agencies. It aims to promote:

- increased service accessibility and an integrated patient journey
- holistic, collaborative care and enhanced service integration
- equitable and comprehensive responses across NSW, particularly addressing context-specific needs for vulnerable clients and families.

The final evaluation conducted by Nous Group shows that overall, progress has been made at all levels of the NSW Health system (NSW Health, 2022).

CASE STUDY

Safe at Home, McAuley

The Safe at Home trial is an early intervention family violence response supporting adult and child victim-survivors to remain safely connected to their home and community wherever possible. Developed with cross-sector and lived experience co-design, the trial is led by McAuley Community Services for Women, delivered in partnership with Meli, and funded by the Victorian Government.

Unlike traditional responses that often require victim-survivors to leave their homes to find safety, Safe at Home aims to prevent homelessness and disconnection from familiar communities. The model provides holistic support across the areas of life most impacted by family violence, including housing, finances, parenting, health, employment, education and community connection.

The trial provides coordinated, flexible and tailored support for women, children and people using violence. Early indications suggest the integrated, whole-of-household model is achieving its intended outcomes, with all women and children safely housed either in their home of origin or within the community of their choice. Nearly all children and young people remain engaged in education, and adult victim-survivors have maintained their employment.

Key features include:

- early and rapid responses before crises escalate
- flexible support for 2 years, recognising recovery is not linear
- practical assistance to strengthen safety and housing stability
- integrated cross-sector responses that reduce experiences of service fragmentation
- funded specialist legal and financial counselling partnerships that address financial abuse, debt and economic insecurity
- dedicated outreach case management for people using violence to promote engagement, accountability and behaviour change
- a children's practitioner providing direct and indirect support to children and young people, recognising their unique experiences and recovery journeys
- peer work, drawing on lived expertise to foster hope, trust, connection and wellbeing.

Emerging evidence indicates Safe at Home is improving safety, supporting long-term recovery while reducing the need for victim-survivors to leave their homes to achieve safety.

CASE STUDY

One Stop One Story Thriving Communities Australia – (The One Stop One Story Hub)

- OSOS Hub is a world-first cross-sector platform enabling frontline workers in corporate and community organisations to connect and refer their customers to a range of support through an innovative, streamlined system.
- Since its launch in 2021, over 7,000 referrals have been made from more than 20 partnering organisations, helping to reduce the multiple complex channels that can cause feelings of shame, stress, and re-traumatisation for those seeking support.
- The Hub enables people to only have to tell their story once, reducing potential for re-traumatisation.
- The Hub has won the Victorian Premier's Design Award (Thriving Communities).

These initiatives demonstrate that integrated approaches are already improving outcomes in many jurisdictions. Together they provide practical examples that can inform a more consistent national approach.

ADDRESSING PERSISTENT CHALLENGES AND EMERGING GAPS

The next stage of reform requires addressing both longstanding challenges and new responses.

The National Plan has strengthened Australia's response to domestic, family and sexual violence. As the system matures, the challenge is now ensuring the system can both resolve longstanding structural gaps and adapt to changing patterns of violence.

Evidence this year points to 2 distinct challenges.

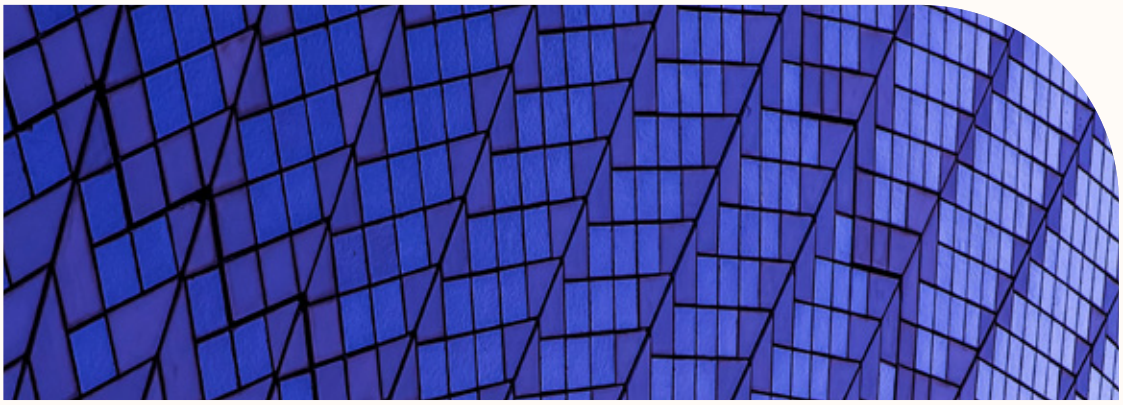
First, some issues remain persistent despite sustained reform effort. These have been raised by the Commission in previous Yearly Reports to Parliament, and in multiple previous inquiries such as the *Safe, Informed, Supported: Reforming Justice Responses to Sexual Violence Inquiry*, and in the *Report of the Rapid Review of Prevention Approaches*. They have also repeatedly been raised throughout the consultations the Commission has undertaken with lived experience advocates throughout our Second Action Plan consultations. This report highlights 2 such issues:

- the need for a justice and family law system that consistently delivers safety, accountability and trauma-informed responses for people experiencing violence
- the need to strengthen Australia's response to sexual violence as a distinct form of violence requiring sustained national attention.

Second, patterns of violence are emerging rapidly alongside technological advances that urgently require different forms of system response. Evidence through stakeholder and lived experience engagements this year identifies 3 priority areas:

- responding to technology-facilitated abuse and online harms
- identifying and intervening earlier with people at risk of using violence
- recognising and resourcing effective responses to the rights and needs of children and young people.

These persistent challenges and emerging gaps demonstrate that a mature system must both address enduring weaknesses and continually adapt as patterns of violence evolve.



Persistent system challenges

Justice and family law systems continue to enable and create harm

RECOMMENDATION 7 *

Build on existing justice and family law reforms to strengthen safety, accountability and recovery for individuals and families experiencing family, domestic and sexual violence. Ensure children's experiences, safety concerns and views are recognised and supported.

Family law and justice systems are continuing to cause harm for people and families experiencing violence through elongated proceedings that delay access to timely support. The Family Law Courts should be recognised and enabled to act as a family violence court, identifying risk early, protecting the safety of individuals and children and enabling access to confidential, therapeutic counselling and recovery.

The Attorney-General's Department, working with states and territories, including through the Standing Council on Attorneys-General, courts, relevant independent bodies, specialist services and people with lived experience, should lead a time-bound program of action across family law, child protection and related justice systems. The program should build on, rather than duplicate, existing reviews and reforms and include measurable actions.

*

'In this future, systems are not just reformed, they are transformed. They protect instead of punishing. They amplify voices instead of silencing them.'

Kyllie Cripps

Voices Towards 2050 podcast series

While significant reforms have been made to family law to address concerns that have been raised in repeated reviews (for example, reforms arising from the Australian Law Reform Commission's *Family Law for the Future* 2019 review and subsequent amendments to the *Family Law Act)*, lived experience evidence highlights that legal processes continue to perpetuate coercive control and abuse and practices that impede healing and recovery. People who have direct experience of family law processes describe a broad range of difficulties, including having to choose between accessing trauma treatment and protecting their legal position, while information already held across police, health, education and child protection is only newly being used to inform decisions affecting the safety of women and children. The next phase of reform should focus on ensuring justice and family law systems are designed, connected and accountable for improving safety outcomes, rather than creating further opportunities for system abuse.

Building on what we said last year

The Commission raised concerns about the family law system strongly in its 2025 Yearly Report. We highlighted the potential for family law processes to be used to continue abuse after separation, while also recognising significant reforms by the Federal Circuit and Family Court of Australia to improve safety, consistency and cultural responsiveness in matters involving family violence.

These reforms included:

- Lighthouse and the Evatt List to identify and manage risk
- training to strengthen understanding of family violence, coercive control and systems abuse
- Indigenous Family Liaison Officers
- stronger information sharing
- the Proactive Safety at Court and System Navigator Pilot
- work to improve identification of risk when matters are first filed.

In the 2025 Yearly Report to Parliament, the Commission recommended an independent audit of the family law system to identify and address opportunities for systems abuse. Similar concerns have also been identified through successive inquiries and reviews, including the Rapid Review of Prevention Approaches and the South Australian Royal Commission.

This year, our focus moves from identifying these problems to building on reforms already underway and addressing the remaining gaps. Significant legislative, policy and operational reforms provide a strong foundation. However, lived experience continues to identify circumstances in which legal, justice and family law processes can be used to continue coercive control, compound trauma and impede safety and recovery.

The Attorney-General's Department, working with states and territories, courts, relevant independent bodies, specialist services and people with lived experience, should lead a time-bound program of action across family law, child protection and related justice systems. The program should build on, rather than duplicate, existing reviews and reforms and include measurable actions to:

- **build on the Proactive Safety at Court and System Navigator Pilot** through nationally consistent approaches to identifying and reviewing changing risk, proactive safety planning, family court navigation, clear escalation pathways and assisted referral throughout proceedings
- **provide secure ongoing funding for Lighthouse, the Evatt List and Indigenous Family Liaison Officers,** and address gaps in access, including property-only matters and regional, rural, remote and circuit locations
- **ensure children's experiences, safety concerns and views are recognised and supported,** including through adequately funded Independent Children's Lawyers, specialist child and family expertise, opportunities for children to participate, age-appropriate information and individual safety planning
- **improve safe and timely sharing and use of family safety information** across family law, courts, police, child protection, health, education and other systems, while strengthening protections for sensitive therapeutic and counselling information
- **reduce the burden on people experiencing violence to find and disclose financial information in property proceedings,** through safe and proportionate access to relevant information held by government, financial, superannuation and regulatory bodies
- **ensure personal protection injunctions made by federal family courts are nationally recognised and enforceable by police,** so people are not required to go through separate state or territory proceedings to obtain substantially the same protection
- **make family law processes easier to understand and navigate** for people representing themselves, including through simpler forms, plain-language and accessible information, procedural guidance, navigation assistance, safe digital tools, interpreters and reasonable adjustments, while retaining human and non-digital support

'Culture is the biggest barrier to change – policing and justice systems continue to deny justice to women and children. Women and children's safety needs to be legally supported. We have literally set up dangerous systems as well as family and federal circuit courts. They are untouchable and unaccountable.'

Participant

Second Action Plan consultation

- **ensure people experiencing family violence have timely access to specialist legal assistance** and, where needed to participate safely and effectively, ongoing legal representation, supported by sustainable funding for Legal Aid, Family Advocacy and Support Services, Women's Legal Services, Family Violence Prevention Legal Services and community legal centres
- **identify and reduce the use of legal and administrative systems to continue abuse,** including litigation-facilitated, economic, administrative and technology-facilitated abuse that prolongs control, exhausts resources or undermines recovery
- **establish an independent mechanism to identify and address concerns about judicial conduct,** including consideration of a national or federal judicial commission or equivalent model, while preserving judicial independence and the role of appellate review
- **fund AIFS to undertake a contemporary longitudinal study of separating families,** including the longer-term outcomes for children and families where family violence or child sexual abuse is raised
- **establish clear outcome measures and regular public reporting** on whether justice system reforms are improving safety, wellbeing, economic security and recovery for women and children, informed by lived experience and reporting outcomes for priority cohorts.

Lived experience participants consistently described justice and family law outcomes as being unpredictable and heavily influenced by the individual decision-maker. Many reported that legal representatives adjusted their advice and strategy based on the judge assigned to the matter, creating a perception that similar cases could produce very different outcomes. These perceptions undermine confidence in the justice and family law system and reinforce the need for greater transparency, consistency and accountability.

Stakeholder and lived experience expertise tells us that despite sustained reform efforts, these challenges remain persistent. Addressing them will require continued national leadership, greater consistency across jurisdictions and stronger accountability for outcomes.

'Every single solicitor has told us it is about the judge who they are in front of: solicitors and barristers play this game about who the judge is and how they will respond. To my mind, that is corruption.'

Participant

Second Action Plan consultation

Sexual violence requires sustained national attention

RECOMMENDATION 8 *

Sexual violence must receive distinct and resourced priority within the National Plan.

Sexual violence requires targeted and sustained national attention, investment and reform. It remains an area in which we are seeing increasing prevalence and poor outcomes for people with living and lived experience across all types of sexual violence, all pillars of the National Plan and most reports of service and systems experience. While there is significant intersection between domestic, family and sexual violence, almost 60% of sexual assaults recorded by police occur in contexts outside family and intimate partner relationships (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2024). National reform should continue to address these distinct forms of violence and understand the different drivers, ensuring investment, policy, evidence and service responses remain visible alongside broader domestic and family violence reforms.

Sexual violence requires sustained national attention. There is significant intersection between domestic, family and sexual violence; however, sexual violence also occurs in many contexts beyond family and intimate partner relationships. National reform should continue to address these distinct forms of violence, ensuring investment, policy, evidence and service responses remain visible alongside broader domestic and family violence reforms.

A number of key policy areas are currently under consideration and provide an opportunity to address sexual violence. The Australian Government, working with the states and territories, is developing related family and child safety action plans concurrently, to ensure they are aligned and work together. This includes: the Second Action Plan under the *National Plan to End Violence against Women and Children 2022–2032*; 2 action plans under *Safe and Supported: the National Framework for Protecting*

*

‘For victims of sexual violence the fragmentation is very acute. Nobody holds the threads. Independent legal representation becomes the single point of contact and secures information.’

Participant

Second Action Plan consultation

Australia'sChildren 2021–2031 (the National Second Action Plan and the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Second Action Plan); the First Action Plan under *Our Ways – Strong Ways – Our Voices: National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Plan to End Family, Domestic and Sexual Violence 2026–2036*; and the Second Action Plan under the *National Strategy to Prevent and Respond to Child Sexual Abuse 2021–2030*.

Emerging issues

Building capability to respond to changing patterns of violence

While persistent gaps continue to require national attention, evidence also points to emerging challenges that will shape the next phase of reform. Violence is changing faster than many of the systems designed to respond to it. Sustaining progress under the National Plan will depend on building a system capable of anticipating emerging risks, identifying harm earlier and adapting as patterns of violence evolve.

The evidence highlights 2 areas where future system capability will be critical:

- responding to technology-facilitated abuse and online harms
- recognising and resourcing effective responses to the rights and needs of children and young people.

Building capability to respond to technology-facilitated abuse

Recognition of technology-facilitated abuse as embedded within broader patterns of domestic, family and sexual violence has strengthened. However, system responses remain inconsistent and are not keeping pace with the rapidly changing digital environment.

Digital environments are reshaping how violence occurs, including the increasing complexity, scale and persistence of harm. Frontline services increasingly describe technology-facilitated abuse as a routine feature of their work (Woodlock, 2020). Stakeholders report that technology-facilitated abuse is widespread, gendered and often occurs across multiple platforms and systems simultaneously, creating persistent and difficult-to-manage risks that undermine safety, privacy and autonomy (Flynn et al., 2024; Simpson et al., 2026). Capability remains uneven across sectors, with low confidence in identifying and responding to digital coercive control and limited support beyond crisis intervention.

People with lived experience describe managing complex risks with minimal system support. Online environments are intensifying harm through algorithm-driven exposure to misogynistic and extremist content, driving the normalisation of violence-supportive

> 'Specialist sexual violence workers burn out at an incredible rate and there's a high churn. It's extraordinarily difficult to get qualified people to do this work. It's heavy lifting on a daily basis.'
>
> **Participant**
>
> Second Action Plan consultation

attitudes (eSafety Commissioner, 2026). Users report experiencing harmful content even when they do not intentionally search for it (Cubitt & Morgan, 2024). Emerging technologies are enabling new forms of abuse, including deepfakes and image-based abuse, with image-based abuse estimated to be occurring at least once a week in schools (ABC News, 2025).

Current responses remain largely reactive, focused on content removal rather than prevention (Campo and Webster, 2025). While approaches such as Safety by Design and platform accountability show promise, they remain fragmented.

Alongside efforts to strengthen frontline and system responses, governments are increasingly pursuing reforms in the online environment to address technology-facilitated abuse. This includes the Australian Government's commitment to legislate a Digital Duty of Care for online services, aimed at requiring platforms to take reasonable steps to prevent foreseeable online harms, alongside other legislative and regulatory reforms targeting emerging forms of digital abuse. While these developments signal growing attention to the prevention of online harms, they remain at an early stage of implementation.

The system is not yet equipped to address the drivers of digital harm or provide consistent, preventative responses. Responses remain fragmented and do not yet constitute a coordinated, system-wide approach to early identification or prevention.

Building capability to recognise and respond effectively to the rights and needs of children and young people

Visibility of children and young people's experiences has increased, but system design remains largely centred on adults.

Since the 2025 Yearly Report, there has been renewed focus on engagement, including Commission-led roundtables with young people (see Box 10), co-convened with ANROWS. This has generated direct insight into system barriers and reform priorities. However, progress has been concentrated in consultation rather than structural change, with core recommendations on service models and targeted investment remaining outstanding.

As a result, there has been limited change to access, safety and recovery for children and young people, particularly those without parental support or at risk of exploitation.

Box 10: Children and young people's voices: findings from the Commission's roundtable

The Commission's Children and Young People Roundtable provided direct insight into how systems are experienced by those they are intended to support (Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence Commission, 2025a). Convened in partnership with ANROWS, the roundtable brought together young advocates with lived experience to speak directly with decision-makers.

Participants consistently described a system that is not designed for them. Children and young people face significant barriers to accessing support, including restrictive consent requirements, long waitlists and service gaps, particularly for those aged 15 to 18 and those experiencing violence without parental support.

Six interconnected priorities for reform emerged:

- accessible, age-appropriate support
- stronger education and prevention in schools and communities
- safe and suitable housing
- more respectful, trauma-informed policing
- meaningful inclusion in family law and justice processes
- system transformation grounded in co-design with children and young people.

Across these themes, participants emphasised the need to be recognised as having rights and their own needs, including the right to participate in decisions affecting their safety and wellbeing. This requires moving beyond consultation to embed their voices in system design, delivery and accountability.

Opportunities for the Second Action Plan

From the Commission's perspective, there is an important distinction between persistent challenges and emerging gaps. Persistent challenges require sustained national attention until they are resolved. Emerging gaps require the system to continually build new capability as patterns of violence evolve.

A mature domestic, family and sexual violence system must be capable of doing both. It must address longstanding structural weaknesses while remaining agile enough to anticipate new forms of harm, intervene earlier and adapt as evidence and community needs change. Building this adaptive capability will be essential to achieving the long-term outcomes of the National Plan.

PART 3

SUPPORTING MATERIALS

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DEFINITIONS, TERMINOLOGY AND ACRONYMS

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander (First Nations)	There are a wide range of nations, cultures and languages across mainland Australia and throughout the Torres Strait. 'Aboriginal' is a broad term that groups nations and custodians of mainland Australia and most of the islands, including Tasmania, K'gari, Palm Island, Mornington Island, Groote Eylandt, Bathurst and Melville Islands. 'Torres Strait Islander' is a broad term grouping the peoples of at least 274 small islands between the northern tip of Cape York in Queensland and the south-west coast of Papua New Guinea. Many Torres Strait Islander peoples live on the Australian mainland. There are also two Torres Strait Islander communities at Bamaga and Seisia, within the Northern Peninsula Area of Queensland (Australian Public Service Commission, 2025).
ANROWS (Australia's National Research Organisation for Women's Safety)	ANROWS was established as an initiative of Australia's first national plan (2010–2022) by the Australian Government and all state and territory governments. Its primary function is to build the evidence base that supports ending violence against women and children in Australia. ANROWS is embedded in the National Plan architecture and will continue to deliver and develop this function across the next decade under the National Plan for 2022–2032.
Culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD)	A term usually used in government policy in Australia. It means a person who has one, some or all the following characteristics or identities: • are from, or have a parent from, a country/ies other than Australia • have a diverse cultural background whose heritage/ancestry, or race, is from places other than England, Scotland, Ireland, or Wales • may speak other languages at home besides English, or • follow religions, traditions, values, and beliefs outside of the majority Christian and atheist beliefs in Australia.
Child sexual abuse	Child sexual abuse refers to sexual violence experienced by a person under the age of 16.

Coercive control	Coercive control is often defined as a pattern of controlling behaviour, used by a perpetrator to establish and maintain control over another person. Coercive control is almost always an underlying dynamic of family and domestic violence and intimate partner violence. Perpetrators use coercive control to deprive another person of liberty, autonomy and agency (Cortis and Bullen, 2015; ANROWS, 2021). The Commission adopts the definition of 'coercive control' by the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare.
Data	Data is information such as facts and numbers used as a basis for reasoning, discussion or calculation.
Domestic, family and sexual violence (or DFSV)	The Commission uses the definition of domestic, family and sexual violence in the *National Plan to End Violence against Women and Children 2022–2032* (the National Plan). Domestic violence refers to any behaviour within a past or current intimate relationship (including dates) that causes physical, sexual or psychological harm. Family violence is a broader term that captures violence perpetrated by parents (and guardians) against children, between other family members and in family-like settings. Sexual violence refers to sexual activity that happens where consent is not freely given or obtained, is withdrawn, or the person is unable to consent due to their age or other factors. It also occurs any time a person is forced, coerced or manipulated into any sexual/sexualised activity. Sexual violence can be non-physical and include unwanted sexualised comments, intrusive sexualised questions or sexual harassment. The Commission uses the term 'domestic, family and sexual violence' (or DFSV), however, this may be referred to as 'family, domestic and sexual violence' (or FDSV) in other contexts.

Economic abuse	Economic abuse is a form of domestic and family violence that involves controlling, exploiting or sabotaging a person's ability to acquire, use and maintain economic resources and threatens their economic security and self-sufficiency (Department of Social Services, 2022; Centre for Women's Economic Security, 2025). It can include restricting access to cash and bank accounts, restricting access to work or study, hiding financial information or assets, incurring debts in the victim-survivor's name, or manipulating systems to avoid or reduce Child Support payments (Centre for Women's Economic Safety, 2025; Parliament of the Commonwealth of Australia, 2021).
Financial abuse	Financial abuse is a subset of economic abuse that encompasses behaviour that affects a person's ability to acquire, use or maintain money or finances (Centre for Women's Economic Safety, 2025). While the terms financial abuse and economic abuse are sometimes used interchangeably, the term economic abuse will be used in this report as it recognises that the impacts of this abuse can extend beyond money or finances to domains such as housing, employment, healthcare and education (WLSA 2024).
Gender-based violence	The National Plan uses the terminology 'violence against women and children' to acknowledge the high prevalence of men's violence against women and children. Wherever possible, the Commission uses the term 'gender-based violence' to recognise the impact of domestic, family and sexual violence on people of all ages, genders, sex characteristics and sexualities. This language recognises gendered violence is primarily perpetrated by men against women, while recognising higher rates of domestic, family and sexual violence experienced by LGBTIQA+SB communities and other cohorts are underpinned by patriarchal norms.

Intersectionality	In the context of addressing gender-based violence, an intersectional approach recognises the way people experience gender and inequality can be different based on a range of other cultural, individual, historical, environmental or structural factors including (but not limited to) race, age, geographic location, sexual orientation, ability or class. This approach also recognises that the drivers, dynamics and impacts of violence women experience can be compounded and magnified by their experience of other forms of oppression and inequality, resulting in some groups of women experiencing higher rates and/or more severe forms of violence, or facing barriers to support and safety that other women do not experience. This definition has been adopted from the National Plan.
Intimate partner violence	Violent or intimidating behaviours perpetrated by current or former intimate partners, including cohabiting partner, boyfriend, girlfriend or date.
LGBTIQA+SB people	The term LGBTIQA+SB is used throughout this report to refer to people who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex, queer, asexual, sistergirls, brotherboys, or people otherwise diverse in gender, sex or sexual orientation. This definition has been drawn from the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare family, domestic and sexual violence glossary. The Commission recognises that language continues to evolve and can change over time.
Lived experience (or people who have experienced violence)	The Commission recognises and respects the terminology used by people who identify as victims and/or survivors of domestic, family and sexual violence (DFSV). The Commission recognises there are many perspectives of the experience of DFSV and in using the term 'people with lived experience' we seek to be inclusive of the breadth of experiences. The Commission also recognises there are many people who may have experienced domestic, family and sexual violence but do not identify with the terminology of victim-survivors.
Measure	A measure provides an objective and standardised quantification of the size, amount or degree of the change achieved. They provide a more granular detail of what has changed along with a specific measurement of progress.

Men's behaviour change programs (MBCPs)	MBCPs are designed for men who have used violence, coercion or control in their relationships with their partner, children or other family members. These programs aim to encourage men to take responsibility for their behaviour and provide them with the skills and tools necessary to change their behaviour and maintain respectful relationships. This definition has been adopted from No to Violence.
Monitoring	Monitoring is the regular collection and analysis of information to provide indicators of progress towards objectives. It includes monitoring inputs, activities, outputs and progress towards outcomes. Monitoring answers the question: 'What is going on?'
National Plan	Refers to the *National Plan to End Violence against Women and Children 2022–2032*. When the report refers to other national plans, this is outlined in the report.
Outcome	Outcomes represent a desired condition that should exist at the end of an activity, process or program. Outcomes should be specific enough to be measured. They are clear and unambiguous high-level statements that allow measurement of success.
People who use violence	The phrase 'people who use violence' refers to the individual who uses domestic, family and sexual violence to cause harm to another. People who use violence are sometimes referred to as 'perpetrators'. The term perpetrator aims to hold people who use violence accountable for their behaviour, and we respect the broad use of this term in the sector. The term can also be alienating and a barrier to seeking support for some people who use violence. The Commission chooses to use the term 'people who use violence' where possible.
Performance measure	Performance measurement is the process used to assess the efficiency and effectiveness of projects, programs and initiatives. It is a systematic approach to collecting and analysing how 'on track' a project/program/initiative is to achieve its desired outcomes, goals and objectives.

Sexual violence	Sexual violence refers to the occurrence, attempt or threat of sexual assault by a current or former intimate partner, known person or stranger, experienced by a person over the age of 16 who does not or cannot give consent. Can include sexual abuse, sexual assault and sexual harassment.
Specialist and non-specialist workforces	The National Plan and the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare categorise workforces who have roles in relation to domestic, family and sexual violence as: • specialist workers whose daily work involves responding to those who have experienced and/or used violence, as well as professionals who may work directly with these workers, such as trainers or specialist consultants in policy • non-specialist workers whose work may intersect with domestic, family and sexual violence as part of their wider role in the community, such as health professionals, police officers and teachers. The Commission has adopted this terminology while acknowledging that different categorisations and terminology are in use across the country (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2025).
Specialist Homelessness Service (SHS)	Assistance provided by a specialist homelessness agency to a client aimed at responding to or preventing homelessness. Includes accommodation provision, assistance to sustain housing, domestic/family violence services, mental health services, family/relationship assistance, disability services, drug/alcohol counselling, legal/financial services, immigration/cultural services, other specialist services and general assistance and support.
Systemic barriers	Policies, practices or procedures that result in unequal access or exclusion for some people (e.g. poverty, racism, a lack of culturally appropriate services).

Systems abuse	Systems abuse refers to the way that systems, such as legal, immigration, child support, and child protection systems, are weaponised/manipulated to harass, intimidate, discredit, threaten or otherwise exert control over a current or former partner (Australian Government, 2025; Douglas, 2017; Department of Social Services, 2022; Attorney-General's Department, 2025b, Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, 2024; Reeves, 2018). It can include making multiple legal applications in multiple systems, making false reports to child protection agencies, or applying for a protection order against someone (FCFCOA 2023; Reeves 2018).
Technology-facilitated abuse (or tech-based abuse)	Technology-facilitated abuse or 'tech-based abuse' refers to harmful actions carried out online or through digital technology. These include harassment, making threats, stalking and coercive or controlling behaviour. The Commission adopts the definition by the eSafety Commissioner.
Trauma-informed practice	The integration of an understanding of past and current experiences of violence and trauma in all aspects of service delivery. The goal of trauma-informed systems is to avoid re-traumatising individuals and support safety, choice and control to promote healing.
Women and men	The use of 'women' and 'men' in this report is inclusive of both cisgender and transgender women and men. Where we refer to information specific to cisgender, transgender and/or non-binary people, this is indicated in the report.
Victim-survivor	See '*lived experience*'.

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Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence Commission