



Family Life's Submission to the Second Action Plan Consultation

National Plan to End Violence Against Women
& Children 2022-2032

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Executive Summary

Real safety means seeing the whole family. Centring women and children, bringing people who use violence into view and building effective systems for accountability, recovery and change.

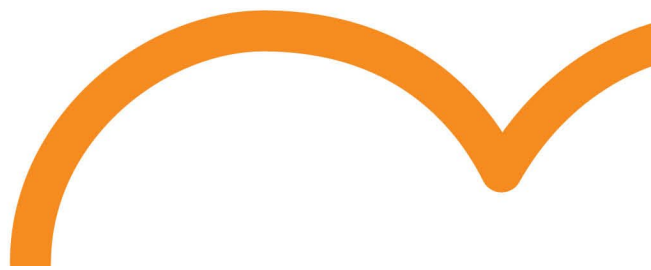
Family Life welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the development of the Second Action Plan under the National Plan to End Violence Against Women and Children 2022–2032. The National Plan rightly recognises that ending gender-based violence requires a whole-of-society effort across prevention, early intervention, response, recovery and healing.

Family Life's submission calls for the Second Action Plan to adopt an all-of-family, all-of-community model of safety. This means moving beyond crisis response alone and building a national system that can intervene earlier, support victim-survivors and children, bring people who use violence into view, and create sustainable pathways for safety, accountability, recovery and change.

Family Life strongly supports the recognition that violence against women and children is driven by gender inequality, power imbalance, rigid gender norms and social conditions that condone or minimise violence. Our Watch's 'Change the Story' framework clearly identifies gender inequality as the underlying condition for violence against women and highlights the need for action across the places where people live, work, learn and connect.

At the same time, Family Life submits that the Second Action Plan must more clearly address the complexity of perpetration and risk. Gendered drivers must remain central, but they are not the only factors shaping patterns of harm, escalation, recovery or change. Childhood trauma, mental health challenges, alcohol and other drug use, social isolation, loneliness, poverty, housing stress and disconnection from community can increase risk, reduce help-seeking and limit the capacity of individuals and families to move toward safety. Family Life believes that true family safety can only be achieved when all members of the family are supported.

If the national goal is to end violence in one generation, Australia must build credible, accessible and accountable pathways for people who use violence to change. At present, there are not enough pathways for people using violence to seek help early, remain connected to services, address the drivers of their behaviour, repair harm where appropriate and safe, and sustain long-term behavioural change. Access is also inequitable with limited available services for people using violence in regional and remote areas. This creates further risk for women and children.



Family Life recommends that the Second Action Plan prioritise:

1. An all-of-family, all-of-community model of safety.
2. A national approach to working with people who use violence, including earlier, flexible, more accessible and longer-term recovery pathways for change.
3. A child-centred system that recognises children as victim-survivors in their own right.
4. A stronger focus on fathers and fatherhood as a pathway to accountability, motivation and behavioural change.
5. Community-based models that reduce isolation and build protective networks around families.
6. Integrated responses to trauma, mental health, alcohol and other drug use, and social disconnection as reinforcing factors in violence and recovery.
7. Investment in evidence, workforce capability and outcomes measurement for practice with people using violence.

1. Family Life's Position - Safety requires an all-of-family, all-of-community approach

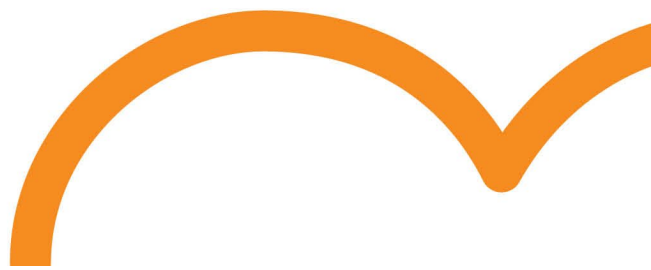
Family Life supports the National Plan's vision to end violence against women and children in one generation. However, achieving this requires a shift in how Australia understands and organises for safety.

Safety is not created only at the point of crisis. It is built through relationships, communities, services, aligned systems and opportunities for change. Women and children need immediate protection, specialist support, housing, legal assistance and recovery pathways. They also need systems that actively reduce the likelihood that the person using violence will continue, escalate, re-offend or transfer the harm into new relationships and family contexts.

An all-of-family, all-of-community model does not mean treating all family members as equally responsible for violence. It means understanding that violence occurs in relational, social and community contexts, and that safety planning must account for the needs, risks, behaviours and strengths of every person affected.

This model must be clear that:

- victim-survivor safety is the central organising principle;
- people who use violence must be visible to the service system and held accountable;
- children must be recognised as victim-survivors in their own right;



- families need support to recover from trauma and rebuild safety;
- communities have a role in interrupting isolation, challenging harmful norms and supporting change;
- systems must work together, not leave families to navigate fragmented and disconnected responses.

The National Plan already identifies prevention, early intervention, response, and recovery and healing as the four domains for action. The Second Action Plan should now strengthen the practical connections between these domains so that families are not moved from one disconnected service point to another, but are supported through coordinated, sustained and relational models of care.

2. Gendered drivers must remain central, alongside a more complete understanding of risk and recovery

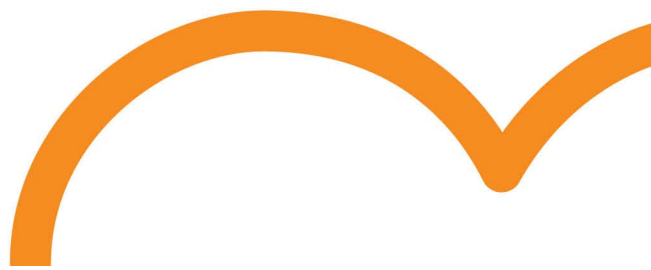
Family Life strongly acknowledges that violence against women and children has gendered drivers. Gender inequality, rigid gender norms, dominant forms of masculinity, men's control over decision-making, and cultures that condone or minimise violence are central to understanding and preventing violence against women.

The Second Action Plan must continue to invest in primary prevention that challenges gender inequality and harmful social norms across schools, workplaces, sporting clubs, media, faith communities, neighbourhoods and digital spaces.

However, Family Life also submits that national policy must be able to hold two truths at once:

1. Violence against women and children is gendered, patterned and deeply connected to inequality and power.
2. People who use violence are not a homogenous group, and pathways into, through and away from violence are shaped by multiple factors.

The consultation for the Second Action Plan explicitly recognises the need to address “substantive influences on perpetration and risk” such as harmful substance use, gambling and adverse childhood experience. Family Life strongly supports this emphasis and recommends that it be expanded into a clear national commitment to integrated, trauma-capable intervention.



Many people who use violence have histories of childhood trauma, disrupted attachment, exposure to family violence, mental health difficulties, alcohol and other drug use, social isolation, shame, unemployment, housing instability and poor emotional regulation. These factors do not excuse violence. They do, however, shape risk, help-seeking, engagement, accountability and the possibility of change.

A mature national approach must therefore insist on accountability while also creating conditions in which accountability is possible.

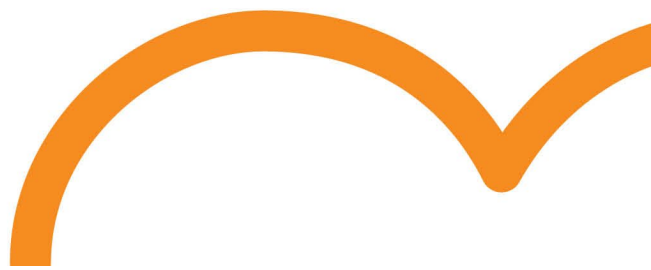
3. Working with people who use violence is essential to reducing risk and harm

Family Life submits that working effectively with people who use violence is not optional. It is one of the most direct ways to reduce risk and harm to women and children.

For too long, the service system has placed the greatest burden of safety on victim-survivors. Women and children are often required to leave homes, change routines, manage risk, navigate police and courts, protect children, and rebuild their lives. Meanwhile, the person using violence may remain poorly engaged, intermittently monitored, or entirely outside service systems. This is not a sufficient safety strategy.

Australia needs a stronger national architecture for engaging people who use violence earlier, more consistently and for longer because earlier accountability and behaviour change are among the most direct ways to improve the safety, wellbeing and recovery outcomes of women and children. This should include:

- clear pathways for voluntary help-seeking before crisis or police involvement;
- assertive outreach after police, court, child protection, family law or health system contact;
- specialist men's behaviour change programs that are integrated with victim-survivor support;
- father-focused interventions that address parenting, harm, accountability and children's safety;
- therapeutic responses that hold accountability and trauma recovery (specifically from childhood trauma and disrupted attachment) as joint and aligned goals;
- strengthen national capability to identify, assess and respond to coercive control;
- culturally safe and community-led responses for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families;
- tailored responses for young people using violence in the home or intimate relationships;
- integration with mental health, alcohol and other drug services;



- post-program support to sustain change over time;
- stronger data and outcome measurement focused on reduced harm, increased safety and changed behaviour.

The National Plan includes the principle that people who choose to use violence are held accountable. The Second Action Plan should give this principle practical force by building a national system where people using violence are not invisible, where services do not wait until risk escalates, and where accountability is connected to evidence-informed support for behavioural change.

Risk to all family members can only be managed when there are visibility and strong engagement measures, with a clear pathway into flexible support. Escalation of risk must look like a service response that steps towards the family, not away from the family.

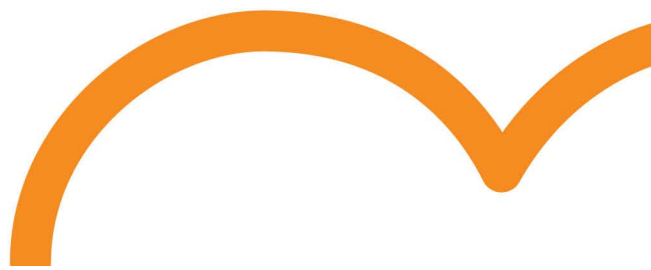
4. Children must be centred as victim-survivors in their own right

Family Life strongly supports the consultation priority focused on children and young people, in their own right.

Children are too often treated as witnesses to violence rather than as victim-survivors with their own experiences, voices, risks and recovery needs. This must change.

Family Life recommends that the Second Action Plan require all relevant systems to:

- recognise children as victim-survivors in their own right;
- include children's voices in risk assessment, safety planning and recovery planning in age-appropriate ways;
- provide specialist therapeutic support for children who have experienced family violence;
- strengthen child-centred practice in adult-focused services, including services for people using violence;
- develop family violence responses that understand the relationship between child safety, adult victim-survivor safety and perpetrator accountability;
- ensure that children are not made responsible for managing adult violence;
- address the needs of adolescents who use violence while recognising their own histories of victimisation, trauma or unmet developmental needs.



Centring children also strengthens perpetrator intervention. For many fathers who use violence, their children can be a powerful motivator for change. This must be approached carefully and safely, but it should not be overlooked.

5. Fatherhood is a critical opportunity for accountability and change

Family Life submits that the Second Action Plan should explicitly recognise fatherhood as a key opportunity for engagement, accountability, and change.

Many men who use violence also identify strongly as fathers. For some, concern about the impact of their behaviour on their children may be one of the few meaningful openings for reflection, responsibility and motivation. This does not mean assuming that fatherhood is protective in itself. Nor does it mean prioritising fathers' access to children over safety. Rather, it means using fatherhood as a structured opportunity to increase accountability for harm and support safer parenting.

Father-focused approaches should help men to understand:

- the impact of violence, coercion, fear and control on children;
- that children are harmed even when violence is directed at another parent;
- that being a safe father requires respect for the child's mother, or caregiver;
- that children's needs, voices and safety must be central;
- that repair requires behavioural change over time, not expressions of regret alone.

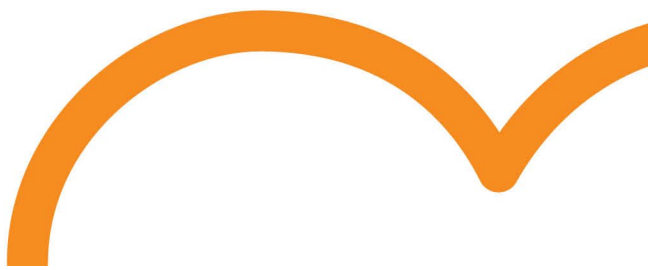
The Second Action Plan should invest in interventions that work with fathers who use violence across family services, child protection, family law, health, mental health, alcohol and other drug services, prisons, community corrections and men's behaviour change programs.

This is particularly important because systems often engage mothers as the default protective parent while failing to make fathers visible, responsible, and accountable. A child-centred approach must include direct work with fathers where it is safe to do so.

6. Community can be a protective force

Family Life strongly supports a broader community model of safety.

Violence is often sustained by isolation. People experiencing violence may be cut off from family, friends, employment, services, culture, community and informal support. People using violence may also be isolated, disconnected, ashamed, entrenched in harmful peer norms, or surrounded by people who minimise or excuse their behaviour.



Social isolation and loneliness can compound trauma, reduce help-seeking, increase stress, and weaken the protective relationships that might otherwise interrupt harm. Community is therefore not peripheral to safety. It is a core part of prevention, early intervention, response and recovery.

The Second Action Plan should invest in community-based models that:

- build safe informal networks around victim-survivors and children;
- equip community members to recognise warning signs and respond safely;
- support people using violence to seek help earlier;
- challenge norms that excuse, minimise or justify violence;
- create connection through neighbourhoods, schools, workplaces, sporting clubs, faith groups and cultural organisations;
- strengthen place-based partnerships between specialist services and universal services;
- reduce loneliness and isolation as risk factors for harm and barriers to recovery.

The National Plan already recognises that ending violence requires the community, industry and government to come together. The Second Action Plan should now translate this into practical, funded community models that make safety everyone's business.

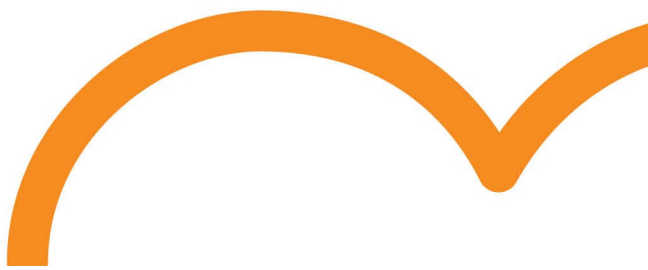
7. Trauma, mental health and alcohol and other drug use must be integrated into safety responses

Family Life recommends that the Second Action Plan strengthen integration between family violence, child and family services, mental health, alcohol and other drug services, housing, justice, and community supports.

Trauma, mental health concerns and alcohol and other drug use do not cause violence in a simple or deterministic way. Many people experience trauma, mental ill-health or substance use without using violence. However, these factors can increase risk, intensify harm, reduce emotional regulation, affect parenting, contribute to shame and avoidance, and make it harder for people to engage in change.

An effective national response must therefore avoid two extremes:

- excusing violence because of trauma, mental illness or substance use; or
- ignoring these factors and expecting behavioural change without addressing the conditions that sustain risk.



Family Life recommends trauma-capable, integrated responses that combine:

- safety and risk management;
- accountability for violence and control;
- therapeutic work on trauma and emotional regulation;
- alcohol and other drug treatment where needed;
- mental health support;
- parenting and fatherhood work;
- practical support for housing, employment and social connection;
- long-term follow-up and relapse prevention.

This is particularly important for people who are not yet ready or eligible for formal behaviour change programs, or who move in and out of multiple systems without any one service holding a complete picture of risk.

Family Life Recommendations for the Second Action Plan

Recommendation 1: Adopt an all-of-family, all-of-community model of safety

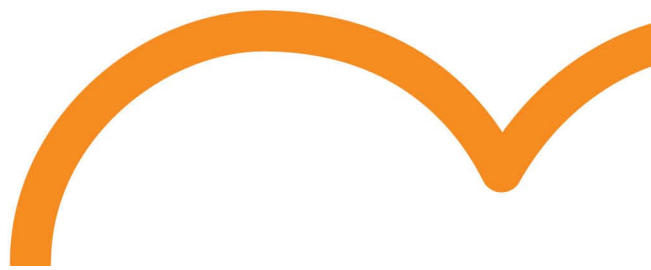
Develop a national framework that connects prevention, early intervention, response, recovery and healing through whole-family and community-based models that keep victim-survivor safety as the central priority, while bringing people who use violence into view through earlier engagement, accountability and pathways for change.

Recommendation 2: Build national pathways for people who use violence to change

Fund accessible, evidence-informed and long-term pathways for people using violence, including early help-seeking, assertive outreach, therapeutic intervention, men's behaviour change, father-focused programs, adolescent violence responses, post-program support and community-based accountability, with victim-survivor safety and reduced harm as the central measures of success.

Recommendation 3: Centre children as victim-survivors in their own right

Require child-centred risk assessment, safety planning, participation and therapeutic recovery support across all family violence systems, including adult-focused services and services working with people who use violence, so children are recognised as victim-survivors in their own right.



Recommendation 4: Invest in father-focused family violence interventions

Develop and scale interventions that work with fathers who use violence where it is safe to do so, with a focus on children's safety, support for the child's mother or caregiver, parenting accountability, repair and sustained behaviour change.

Recommendation 5: Strengthen community-based prevention and early intervention

Invest in place-based and community-led models that reduce isolation, strengthen protective informal networks, challenge harmful norms, support safe earlier help-seeking and make safety a shared community responsibility.

Recommendation 6: Integrate family violence responses with trauma, mental health and alcohol and other drug services

Strengthen cross-sector service pathways so family violence responses are connected with trauma, mental health, alcohol and other drug, housing, justice and community supports, ensuring that the broader factors shaping risk, recovery and engagement are addressed without diluting accountability for violence and control.

Recommendation 7: Build integrated practice models that hold the whole picture of risk

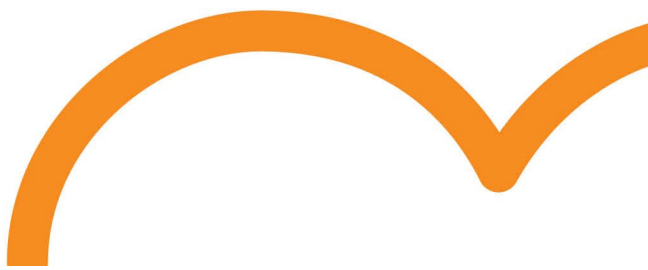
Create joint practice models, shared risk frameworks and funding arrangements that enable integrated work with people experiencing violence and people using violence, so safety, accountability, recovery and behaviour change are held together rather than managed through disconnected service responses.

Recommendation 8: Build workforce capability to work safely with complexity

Invest in specialist and cross-sector workforce development so practitioners can work safely across both victim-survivor and perpetrator practice, with capability in gendered violence, coercive control, trauma, child safety, mental health, substance use, adolescent violence, fatherhood, cultural safety, community connection, accountability and behaviour change.

Recommendation 9: Measure what matters

Develop national outcomes measures that track not only service activity, but changes in safety, behaviour, accountability, child wellbeing, community connection, sustained engagement and reduced re-use of violence over time.



Conclusion

The Second Action Plan is an opportunity to move from crisis response toward a more complete national safety system - one that brings people who use violence into view and builds safety around the whole family.

Family Life believes that ending violence against women and children requires Australia to hold firm to the evidence on gendered drivers while also responding to the full complexity of family violence, trauma, recovery, accountability and change.

We cannot create safety for women and children if people who use violence remain outside coordinated practice. We cannot end violence in one generation if children's voices remain peripheral. We cannot reduce harm if communities are not equipped to recognise risk, respond safely and support change.

An all-of-family, all-of-community model offers a practical and hopeful way forward. It does not dilute accountability. It strengthens it. It does not shift attention away from victim-survivors. It increases the likelihood that safety can be sustained. It does not excuse violence. It creates real pathways for accountability, recovery and change.

Family Life urges government to use the Second Action Plan to build a national approach that is gender-informed, trauma-capable, child-centred, community-connected, with the capacity to hold both sides of safety. This means strengthening support for victim-survivors and children while making people who use violence visible, accountable and engaged in change, with a clear focus on measurable, evidence-based reductions in risk and harm.

