

SUBMISSION ON THE SECOND ACTION PLAN

(National Plan to End Violence against
Women and Children 2022-2032)



Submission on the Section Action Plan on the National Plan to End Violence against Women and Children 2022-2032

Introduction

Women's Community Shelters (WCS) welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the development of the Second Action Plan 2027-2032 for the National Plan to End Violence against Women and Children 2022-2032.

The National Plan to End Violence against Women and Children 2023-2032 sets out a bold vision, signed off by all states and territories, to end gender-based violence in a generation. Now halfway through the National Plan, the Second Action Plan provides an opportunity for review of the National Plan to ensure increased focus on areas that were not considered in the First Action Plan. We welcome and thank the Government for this opportunity and the collaboration that has already occurred.

With over fifteen years' experience, creating more than thirty safe havens, and last year alone providing more than 68,229 nights of safety, Women's Community Shelters has firsthand, localised knowledge of the barriers and solutions to ending violence against women and children.

Housing is central, and essential, to ending gender-based violence. In the development of the Second Action Plan, we encourage the Government to consider the following:

1. Housing is essential to ending gender-based violence in a generation. It needs to remain a standalone priority in the Second Action Plan.
2. Housing is central to a holistic approach. The National Plan lays out the priorities for housing across the four domains. The First Action Plan addressed only two domains, the Second Action Plan must address all four.
3. Prevention in housing must be addressed. Progressing policy reform to improve access to housing must commence by explicitly linking domestic and family violence, gender equality, homelessness and housing policies and priorities.
4. Early intervention in housing, including the building of more social and affordable homes, must include measurable targets for housing women and children who have experienced domestic and family violence.
5. Response to the Department of Social Services Survey on the Second Action Plan. Recommendations include:
 - a. Invest in innovative, place-based projects that can be evaluated, measured and scaled across communities.
 - b. National data collection on critical markers to measure progress and change, as well as tracking investment in domestic and family violence

- c. Implementation of research, learnings and recommendation from domestic and family research, including in the upskilling and capacity building of the workforce on best-practice.
- d. National research, as part of the Australia National Research Agenda (ANRA) by ANROWS, to focus on sexual violence, including research into sexual violence as a form of coercive control in domestic and family violence.

About Women's Community Shelters

Women's Community Shelters has created more than thirty safe havens over fifteen years, where women and children experiencing domestic and family violence can access safe shelters and are supported to recovery and independence. Last year alone, WCS provided more than 68,229 safe bed nights, delivering comprehensive services that respond to the complex and diverse needs of women and children experiencing homelessness and domestic and family violence.

At WCS we believe that ending violence against women and children and addressing homelessness is possible with collective community action, specialised wraparound support and local, place-based solutions. A safe haven is not just a shelter, but a community that comes together to address violence in the community and to support women and children who have experienced violence.

We know that providing a safe home is central to a holistic approach and works across the domains of the National Plan – prevention, early intervention, response and recovery and healing.

Prevention: We educate students to prevent violence early, build capacity that activates communities to set up local shelters, and mobilise corporate philanthropic and housing partners to help deliver sustainable, innovative housing solutions. Our WCS Empowerment Programs transform communities from within to protect women and children across a spectrum of safety and support; from education and early intervention, to providing supported shelter, homewards properties and forever homes. We deliver primary prevention with Walk the Talk to educate, then activate high school students to understand healthy relationships and support their local shelter.

Early Intervention: Our community spaces Currawong Connect and Aurora Place Community Hub provide early intervention through specialised casework.

Response: We create community shelters for locally run crisis and transitional accommodation, and Meanwhile-Use with community partners for temporary housing, crisis and medium-term transitional accommodation.

Recovery: Our DFV-specialised Social and Affordable Forever Homes are the final move into independent living. Wraparound Support is woven into every WCS Safe Haven, including specialised DFV casework, counselling, healthcare and legal assistance and ongoing outreach car alongside every woman's individual journey to recovery and independence.

Housing is central, and essential, to ending gender-based violence.

Recommendation 1: Housing needs to remain a standalone priority.

The National Plan is unambiguous about the centrality of housing, from prevention through to recovery “safe, affordable, and accessible housing is key to ending violence against women and children.”¹ Housing is central to a holistic approach to preventing, responding and recovering from domestic and family violence.

However, in the consultation paper on the second action plan “Evidence to Action: Informing Direction for the Second Action Plan”² housing and crisis accommodation appear only as a sub-point under one recommendation area “violence against women and other forms of gender-based violence.” Under this, in considering where more work is needed, no recommendations for housing strategies are considered or recommended.

Women’s Community Shelters strong recommendation is that in the Second Action Plan **housing remains a clear, standalone priority.**

Unaffordable and insecure housing is one of the leading reasons why women are forced to stay in a violent relationship, to return to a violent relationship (increasing the risk and severity of threat) and the major barrier for victim-survivors to re-establish and recover after leaving a violent relationship.

Domestic and family violence is the main reason women and children leave their homes and is the leading cause of homelessness. In 2024-2025 40% of all Specialist Housing Services (SHS) clients had experienced domestic and family violence.³

In order to end violence against women and children, housing must remain a clear, standalone priority.

Recommendation 2: Housing is central to a holistic approach. The Second Action Plan should address, as stated in the National Plan, a housing strategy across all four domains.

The National Plan lays out the priorities for housing across the four domains. The First Action Plan addressed only two domains, we recommend that the Second Action Plan **restore housing as a four-domain action**, explicitly addressing prevention and early intervention, including policy reform and prioritisation of social and affordable housing for women.

Housing instability is a major barrier to safety and recovery for women and children who have experienced domestic and family violence. Without access to safe, secure, and affordable housing options, victim survivors often face the impossible choice between returning to a violent home or entering homelessness. Demand for crisis and transitional

¹ The National Plan to End Violence against Women and Children 2022-2032, p.58

² “Evidence to Action: Informing Direction for the Second Action Plan” May 2026

³ [FDSV summary - Australian Institute of Health and Welfare](#)

accommodation continues to far exceed capacity, leaving many women and their children in temporary or unsafe arrangements. Without stable housing, rebuilding safety, independence and wellbeing is near impossible. Ensuring that every woman and child has access to available safe and secure accommodation is essential to breaking the cycle of domestic and family violence.

As the housing crisis increases across Australia, and long-term underinvestment in social housing has resulted in social housing only making up 4 per cent of total housing stock,⁴ there is a significant “structural shortage”⁵ of housing for those who need it most. As *Homes for Australia: A National Plan* also states, there is also “a shortage of crisis and emergency accommodation” an issue that is “particularly acute for women seeking immediate safety and support.”⁶

At Women’s Community Shelters, we see this on the frontline. In the last few years, the following trends have emerged:

- More clients are presenting every year. The rate of supply does not meet demand. WCS recorded 2,355 unassisted clients in FY26, a 28% increase on FY25 and almost triple the FY23 figure. For every 1 client accommodated, 2.5 clients could not be supported.
- The complexity and severity of women presenting has increased, with more women presenting at ‘serious threat’ from homicide.
- The housing crisis is resulting in women requiring significant stays in shelters. In the last year, the average stay increased by over 2 weeks, from 9 weeks to 11 weeks.
- Private rentals continue to be the main exit pathway (46%) for clients, as the housing crisis worsens in Australia, securing safe exits have become increasingly difficult however WCS has increased safe exits, despite these challenges, by 10%.

Therefore, in the development of the Second Action Plan we encourage there to be a focus on the National Plan’s clear agenda for housing across Prevention, Early Intervention, Response and Recovery, and expansion to include measurable outcomes.

Specifically:

National Plan	First Action Plan	Second Action Plan Recommendation
Prevention: “Progressing policy reform to improve access to social and affordable housing”	Housing was narrowed only to focus on response/recovery.	Legislative and budgetary reform that incentivises the private sector to prioritise women’s (including older women at risk of homelessness) access to housing.

⁴ Homes for Australia: A National Plan, 2026. P.14

⁵ Homes for Australia: A National Plan, 2026. P.14

⁶ Homes for Australia: A National Plan, 2026. P.14

		Social and affordable housing reform that ensure women who have experienced domestic violence are fast-tracked on waiting lists. Working in line with the “Homes for Australia: A National Plan,” “Working for Women: A Strategy for Gender Equality” and “National Housing and Homelessness Plan” to ensure women and children who experience domestic and family violence are prioritised.
Early Intervention: “Build more social and affordable housing, including social housing properties for women and children”	Housing narrowed only to response/recovery.	Explicit, measurable targets as part of the Housing Australia Future Fund (HAFF). Create clear KPIs and measures that ensure the \$6 billion investment in housing is delivering housing for women and children – now and into the future. Continued federal investment in the supply and delivery of social housing, with a focus on women and children who are fleeing domestic and family violence and older women at risk of homelessness.

Recommendation 3: Therefore, WCS recommends the Second Action Plan **includes a focus on prevention in housing**. Progressing policy reform to improve access to housing must be undertaken by **explicitly linking domestic and family violence, gender equality, homelessness and housing policies, plans and priorities**.

Recommendation 4: WCS recommends the Second Action Plan **includes a focus on early intervention to build more social and affordable housing**. In order to achieve this, **measurable targets must be set in the supply of social and affordable housing** specifically for women and children who have experienced domestic and family violence; and older women at risk of homelessness.

WCS welcomes the significant investment by the Australian Government into the supply of social and affordable housing. In the development of the Second Action Plan, we encourage the Australian Government to integrate plans to address housing supply and to reduce domestic violence by creating measurable, specific targets. In so doing, we can begin to

understand where supply needs to be increased and track tangible outcomes into the investment of housing for women and children.

Domestic and family violence is the leading cause of homelessness, and housing is the main reason women choose to stay, or return to, a violent relationship. Therefore, we need to ensure that in the national conversation around the housing crisis, we do not lose sight of the gendered nature of this crisis and the intersection of housing and domestic and family violence.

Response to the Department of Social Services Survey on the Second Action Plan on the National Plan to End Violence against Women and Children 2022-2032.

Prevention

Q. What actions can governments, workplaces, industries, schools, families and individuals take to stop violence before it starts?

As the National Plan states, governments alone can't address or end violence against women and children, we all have a part to play in addressing, reducing and ultimately ending violence.

Governments, however, can foster innovation. If we are to achieve the goal of ending violence against women and children in a generation, then we will need creative, scalable solutions. The Second Action Plan has the opportunity to encourage federal, state and local governments to invest in innovative, place-based projects that can be evaluated, measured and scaled across communities.

At Women's Community Shelter's we believe that prevention is not just education, it's action. We work with communities not only to educate them on the prevalence of violence against women and children but invite them in to take meaningful action in ending gender-based violence in their communities. At Women's Community Shelters we run the Walk the Talk program, a powerful and social-change initiative to invite students to explore respectful relationships and awareness about domestic and family violence, as well as 'adopting' a local safe haven and running service-learning projects that offer practical support. In 2024-2025 WCS ran workshops in 36 schools to 3,652 students. This program shows how education can spark empathy, leadership and real-work change to ending gender-based violence.

Recommendation: Invest in innovative, place-based projects that can be evaluated, measured and scaled across communities.

Furthermore, significant investment is needed into frontline women's refuges, primary prevention as part of school curriculums (e.g. Walk The Talk program), funding for intervention services for males at risk of perpetrating violence (e.g. men's behaviour change programs adapted for primary prevention), and requirements for at-risk children (e.g.

children in out-of-home care, youth justice systems, or involved with child protection) to participate in education programs such as Walk The Talk.

Governments should review the Leaving Violence Payment program, as it was working well and the move to Telstra has reportedly created additional barriers for victim-survivors. Reducing silos between levels of government and agencies across the sector would improve collaboration and outcomes.

Violence prevention requires a whole-of-society response. Top-down approaches alone are unlikely to be sufficient. Governments have an important role in fostering innovation by providing funding streams for community-led, evidence-informed initiatives that can be tested, scaled and adapted across different communities. Greater transparency is also needed regarding DFV funding, expenditure and outcomes so progress can be better measured and understood.

Governments should continue to improve national data collection and consistency across jurisdictions. While DFV is largely legislated and recorded at a state level, a national dataset on key indicators would allow progress to be tracked over time. There is also significant investment in DFV research, but further focus is needed on translating evidence into practice through implementation support, workforce development and sector capacity-building.

All workplaces should provide mandatory education about DFV, including recognising signs of coercive control and non-physical violence. Workplaces should be encouraged to adopt DFV leave policies, provide resources for victim-survivors, and offer pathways to support for employees who may be at risk of using violence.

Education programs should be mandatory for students (e.g. Walk The Talk and Love Bites). These programs should focus not only on recognising violence, but also on healthy relationships, consent, respectful behaviour and help-seeking.

Programs such as Walk The Talk are particularly valuable because they move beyond awareness-raising and encourage action. Education alone is not enough; young people need practical, actionable strategies that empower them to intervene safely, seek support and contribute to safer communities.

The impacts of the above strategies will flow through to families and individuals by increasing awareness, reducing stigma and strengthening community accountability. Communities should be encouraged to speak up about concerning behaviours and actively support healthy, respectful relationships.

Services and support

Q. How can services and supports work better for people who have experienced, or are at risk of experiencing, family, domestic or sexual violence?

Services would work better if they had capacity for immediate intensive case management

and could provide continuity of care. For example, some services provide only a short period of intensive support before transferring clients to another service and case worker. Greater continuity would reduce retraumatisation and improve outcomes. Specialist services should also exist for groups that we know are at greater risk of experiencing DFV (for example, First Nations women, Culturally and Linguistically Diverse women, especially those with precarious visa status, women with intellectual disabilities).

The need for victim-survivors to access temporary accommodation prior to entering shelter or transitional housing should be reduced by increasing capacity in those systems through additional investment. Where temporary accommodation is required, it should be supported by case management and have fewer barriers to extending stays.

There is also a need for stronger collaboration between the DFV and sexual violence sectors. These issues sit along a continuum of violence against women, yet service systems can operate separately. Better integration would improve support pathways and address gaps in service responses.

General services need greater education about recognising and responding to DFV, particularly where there are intersecting forms of disadvantage. Health, housing and police services should include dedicated DFV specialist roles with ongoing professional development requirements.

More refined triage processes are needed when police respond to DFV incidents to ensure appropriately skilled officers attend. Services not specifically focused on DFV should still have staff trained in DFV and information available on-site (e.g. veterinary clinics, medical centres, Service NSW).

There is also a need to strengthen understanding and responses to sexual violence, both within and outside intimate partner relationships. Community knowledge remains limited and sexual violence can still be a taboo topic, reducing help-seeking and effective intervention.

Supporting children and young people

Q. How can communities and services best support children and young people to stay safe from violence?

Schools need to be well educated in domestic, family and sexual violence and effective responses. Services require dedicated funding to work specifically with children and young people, including funding for child and youth workers in every shelter.

Children accessing casework should be supported by workers with specialist DFV knowledge. They should also have access to age-appropriate resources that help them understand their experiences and develop safety plans.

Children involved in systems that increase their risk of experiencing or being exposed to DFV (e.g. family court, child protection, youth justice) should have access to DFV-informed support, including counselling and casework.

Programs such as Walk The Talk improve DFV literacy among children, teachers and the broader community. Their expansion would increase community awareness and create pathways for people to take action when they identify unsafe behaviours, rather than simply increasing awareness.

People who use violence

Q. What more can be done across the community to promote healthy, safe relationships and strengthen accountability for people who use violence?

Domestic, family and sexual violence is a whole of society problem that needs a whole of society solution. At Women's Community Shelters we work in and with community – schools, community organisations, charitable organisations, local leaders and funders to bring people into our community and our work. When establishing a safe haven in community we bring people and communities who have not traditionally been part of the sector, and who may hold harmful or apathetic views about women and children into the discussion about ending gender-based violence.

Communities should be supported to challenge behaviours of concern within their own networks. There should be a stronger culture of addressing harmful behaviour and recognising that silence can contribute to the continuation of violence.

Televised sports should use their platforms to educate viewers about DFV, including increased risks following major sporting losses. Remove gambling advertising from television and reduce the accessibility of alcohol home-delivery services.

Media has a responsibility to model healthy relationships and improve public understanding of coercive control and other non-physical forms of abuse.

Strengthening legal responses for victim-survivors who wish to pursue charges, while ensuring ongoing support and education for those who do not, is also important.

A whole-of-society approach is required. Preventing violence cannot be the responsibility of governments and specialist services alone. Broader community ownership and accountability are essential to achieving lasting cultural change.

Recovery and healing

Q. What would make the biggest difference in helping people and families to recover and heal after being affected by family, domestic and sexual violence?

The most important factor is quickly establishing stability for victim-survivors through access to housing, education, health services and financial security. Long wait times for these essential supports can significantly delay recovery. Without stable housing, many victim-survivors remain in a prolonged state of crisis, making healing and long-term recovery extremely difficult.

Housing responses should maintain a gendered lens, recognising that the causes of homelessness are often gendered. Domestic and family violence is a leading driver of homelessness for women and children, and housing policy should explicitly acknowledge and respond to this connection. Governments must ensure there is significant investment, with a

specific focus on women and children who have experienced domestic and family violence, across the housing continuum including crisis, transitional, social and affordable housing.

Recovery systems should also be informed by evidence and emerging research, with a stronger focus on translating learnings into practice improvements across services.

Access to support

Q. What makes it easier for people to access support or services related to family, domestic or sexual violence?

Having early intervention supports available with low barriers to entry is critical, including services that do not require police involvement and accept self-referrals.

Services that are not explicitly branded as DFV services but can provide support, such as drop-in centres, can help people seek assistance earlier. Services should be located in accessible, low-risk locations such as shopping centres and community hubs.

Quick access to safe devices and technology is important, particularly for victim-survivors experiencing technology-facilitated abuse.

Services should also be equipped to support concerned friends and family members, as they are often the first point of contact for someone experiencing violence.

Access pathways should focus not only on awareness but on enabling action. People are more likely to seek help when they are given clear, practical options and supported to take the next step safely.

Contact

Women's Community Shelters welcomes the opportunity to discuss this submission further and to contribute to ongoing consultation as the Second Action Plan is developed.

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