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**Australian Catholic Religious
Against Trafficking in Humans**

Formal submission from ACRATH to the Consultation on Second Action Plan (National Plan to End Violence against Women and Children 2022-2032)

31 July 2026

ACRATH's mission is to eliminate human trafficking and the harm it causes, in Australia, the Asia Pacific region and globally. We advocate for systemic change to prevent exploitative practices and are members of the National Roundtable on Human Trafficking and Slavery. We work in collaboration with other organisations in Australia and the Pacific to support people at risk of modern slavery and human trafficking. We work with schools, healthcare providers, universities and community groups to increase awareness of modern slavery and human trafficking.

We support lived-experience leadership in the development of this Second Action Plan (National Plan to End Violence against Women and Children).

Our responses are informed by our experience walking with survivors of modern slavery and migrant workers, and our work awareness raising and working with frontline workers in healthcare and education.

Modern slavery is an umbrella term that describes a range of slavery and slavery like practices. It can be described as a person who is 'forced, tricked or trapped for someone else's gain or profit'. There are strong intersections between family and domestic violence and forms of modern slavery such as forced marriage, exit trafficking and domestic servitude. We support the integration of modern slavery understandings across family and domestic violence policies and services.

Modern slavery training and identification should be specifically named as a unique intersection in the second action plan, so that it is not missed if it does not meet criteria for intimate partner violence or if it is present in addition to family and domestic violence.

Priority Area 1: Victim-survivors

A strengthened understanding of modern slavery and how it co-occurs with FDV could improve support responses.

In 2026 ACRATH supported a healthcare and modern slavery project led by St Vincent's Health Australia. The project involved;

- implementing modern slavery questions into family and domestic violence (FDV) screening tools as a pilot project at St Vincent's Public Hospital in Melbourne,
- clinician training to better understand forms of modern slavery.

The adapted FDV screen tool to include modern slavery indicators has proven to be an effective way to build on related understandings and processes.



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This work has resulted in a significantly increased rate of Emergency Department identifications of patients who had experienced a form of modern slavery- many of whom had been misidentified as victim survivors of family and domestic violence and or homelessness. The clinician training has also led to better support for people needing specialised services, and fewer presentations to the health service.

In particular this co-occurrence of modern slavery and family violence in forms such as forced marriage, domestic servitude, exit trafficking or forced labour is a unique form of violence and as highlighted in the consultation paper, affects minority communities including recent migrant arrivals, people of CALD backgrounds and people living with disabilities.

In ACRATH's work, we have also observed the unique needs of migrant workers. Migrant workers, including those on no visa or short-term visas need to be able to access FDV support services that are responsive to their particular needs and vulnerabilities.

More widespread frontline awareness of the support available to people who have experienced forms of FDV in addition to modern slavery (e.g. Forced Marriage Specialist Support Program and the Support for Trafficked People Program) could lead to survivors being offered services to improve their long term wellbeing, healing and recovery. However these services also need to be strengthened so they are not time bound, visa dependent or tied to a criminal justice process.

Forced marriage, as a form of family violence and modern slavery is particularly not well understood. In Victoria, the policy environment exists to address this at a more systematic level as it is considered a statutory example of family violence. This could be replicated across states. Continuing community awareness of forced marriage, distinction to arranged marriage and the supports available could address some of the barriers to help seeking. Funding and/or providing culturally and faith sensitive, and community led education on this issue would also strengthen prevention efforts.

Priority Area 2: Prevention and early intervention

Education supports prevention. There needs to be sustained and integrated education about modern slavery at all levels including government, schools, workplaces, FDV and related services.

The various forms and indicators of modern slavery need to be understood and contextualised across frontline services. There needs to be more widely known that modern slavery is a crime in Australia, and there is help available. Training should be provided across FDV and related services.

ACRATH, through the Educating for Change project, offers free online training for university students in frontline professions including;

- Schools;
- social and community work;
- legal and criminal justice settings;
- University settings
- Healthcare settings.





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In addition, there are free online training modules for working healthcare professionals available on the ACRATH website, developed by St Vincent's Health Australia.

There is an opportunity to extend the reach of existing resources such as those mentioned above, or those developed by the Australian Federal Police, by requiring the completion of these or similar by frontline workers in healthcare, social work, policing, education etc

Priority Area 3: Children and young people in their own right

In our work we have seen that children are profoundly affected by the long-term wellbeing of a parent who has experienced modern slavery. **Support responses should acknowledge children's recovery needs and ensure they have access to appropriate services alongside their parents where required, and in addition to support for their parents as needed.**

Priority Area 5: System Integration and Workforce

ACRATH strongly supports a no-wrong-door approach in accessing modern slavery services.

This should be enabled through training and increased awareness of specialist modern slavery programs (e.g. Life Without Barriers Forced Marriage Specialist Support Program and Support for Trafficked People Program) across FDV, homelessness, disability, health, community, migration and other frontline services, particularly in rural and regional areas and among services supporting migrant workers or recent CALD arrivals and refugees.

Our work with St Vincent's Health Australia has demonstrated the importance of a more coordinated and connected system response, particularly for patients who experience co-occurring forms of violence such as FDV and modern slavery. Better coordination also supports the implementation of trauma informed care principles which are important for patients who have experienced FDV and modern slavery.

The St Vincent's Health Australia research illustrated the critical role of healthcare as a '*core need*' for survivors of modern slavery both during and after exiting the situation of exploitation. A national survey with survivors of modern slavery explored their interactions with health services. The survey revealed that **almost 80% of modern slavery survivors accessed a health service more than 5 times while being exploited**. And more than **90%** continue to seek healthcare **after** escaping their exploitation circumstances.

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