

Trustworthy Systems Prevent Violence

A Systems Perspective on the Second Action Plan (2027-2032)

Submission to the Australian Government Consultation on the Second Action Plan under the National Plan to End Violence against Women and Children 2022–2032

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Executive Summary

Australia has made significant progress in addressing family, domestic and sexual violence over the past decade. Governments have invested unprecedented resources, expanded specialist services, strengthened public awareness and developed a far stronger evidence base to guide policy and practice. These achievements should be recognised as important foundations upon which the Second Action Plan can build.

The challenge facing Australia is no longer simply understanding the problem. It is ensuring that the institutions responsible for preventing and responding to violence operate as a coordinated public system rather than a collection of individual services.

Victim-survivors rarely engage with a single agency. Their experiences commonly involve interactions across policing, health care, education, housing, child protection, financial institutions, workplaces, courts and community organisations. While these organisations often perform well individually, fragmentation between them continues to create unnecessary barriers, repeated trauma, inconsistent decision-making and missed opportunities for prevention.

This submission argues that **system integrity should be recognised as a violence prevention strategy**.

Public trust is not created solely through legislation or funding. It is built through transparent institutions, consistent decision-making, collaborative governance and systems that learn continuously from experience. When people have confidence that public institutions will respond fairly, consistently and effectively, they are more likely to seek assistance earlier, remain engaged with services and participate in prevention efforts.

Emerging technologies, including artificial intelligence, also present significant opportunities. Used appropriately, these technologies can strengthen risk identification, evidence management, service coordination and policy evaluation. However, technology must always enhance professional judgement rather than replace it. Ethical governance, transparency and accountability must remain central to implementation.

Accordingly, this submission recommends that the Second Action Plan move beyond strengthening individual services to strengthening the integrity of the public system itself through improved governance, collaborative commissioning, ethical technology adoption and nationally consistent principles for transparency and accountability.

Australia has an opportunity not only to expand services, but to build institutions that communities trust.

That should become one of the enduring legacies of the Second Action Plan.

Summary of Recommendations

This submission recommends that the Australian Government, in partnership with states and territories, prioritise the following reforms over the life of the Second Action Plan.

Recommendation 1

Recognise system integration as a core violence prevention strategy rather than solely an administrative objective.

Recommendation 2

Adopt outcome-focused commissioning models that reward collaboration between organisations rather than isolated program outputs.

Recommendation 3

Develop nationally consistent principles for evidence integrity, information governance and transparent decision-making across participating agencies.

Recommendation 4

Establish a National System Integrity Framework for human services to strengthen accountability, organisational learning and continuous improvement.

Recommendation 5

Support ethical adoption of artificial intelligence and emerging technologies to improve coordination, evaluation and practitioner decision support while preserving human judgement.

Recommendation 6

Invest in workforce capability through systems thinking, collaborative leadership, trauma-informed practice and digital capability.

Recommendation 7

Expand evaluation beyond service activity by measuring trust, collaboration, recovery, community confidence and long-term outcomes.

Recommendation 8

Strengthen community participation in commissioning and service design so that local communities help shape the responses intended to support them.

Introduction

Family, domestic and sexual violence represents one of Australia's most complex public policy challenges.

Its causes are multidimensional. Its impacts extend across generations. Its consequences reach far beyond the justice system into health, education, housing, employment, child protection and community wellbeing.

No single agency can solve this challenge.

For this reason, the effectiveness of Australia's response increasingly depends upon the quality of collaboration between institutions rather than the performance of individual organisations.

The National Plan appropriately recognises that ending violence requires coordinated action across governments, communities and sectors. The Second Action Plan presents an opportunity to strengthen not only the programs delivered under the National Plan but also the governance systems that connect them.

The central proposition of this submission is straightforward:

Trustworthy systems prevent violence.

Public trust encourages earlier help-seeking.

Integrated governance reduces fragmentation.

Transparent accountability strengthens confidence.

Effective commissioning improves local outcomes.

Ethical technology enables better decisions.

These are not administrative aspirations. They are essential components of violence prevention.

A Systems Perspective

Public policy often approaches violence through the lens of individual programs or individual agencies. While these remain essential, complex social challenges increasingly require a systems perspective.

Systems thinking recognises that outcomes emerge from relationships between organisations rather than from the performance of any single organisation alone.

Victim-survivors do not experience government through departmental structures. They experience it as one public system.

When information is transferred effectively, services collaborate, decisions are transparent and organisations share accountability, the system becomes easier to navigate and more capable of preventing harm.

Conversely, fragmented governance creates duplication, delays, repeated trauma and missed opportunities for early intervention.

Improving collaboration is therefore not merely an efficiency measure.

It is itself a prevention strategy.

The Second Action Plan should explicitly recognise governance, commissioning and institutional trust as strategic levers capable of improving safety alongside more traditional investments in frontline services.

Why Trust Matters

Trust is one of the least measured yet most important determinants of effective public services.

People experiencing violence frequently decide whether to disclose abuse, remain engaged with support services or participate in legal processes based upon whether they believe institutions will respond fairly, consistently and effectively.

Every interaction either strengthens or weakens that confidence.

Building trust therefore requires more than compassionate frontline practice.

It requires institutions capable of demonstrating integrity through transparent decision-making, effective coordination, reliable information management and meaningful accountability.

The strongest prevention systems are ultimately those that communities trust enough to use early.

This principle should underpin implementation of the Second Action Plan.