

31 July 2026

Tanya Plibersek
Minister for Social Services
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2000

Via: [REDACTED]

Dear Minister,

RE: CONSULTATION ON THE SECOND ACTION PLAN (NATIONAL PLAN TO END VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN AND CHILDREN 2022-2032)

On behalf of the Australian Services Union (ASU), I thank you for the opportunity to provide a submission to this important inquiry into the second national action plan to end violence against women and children.

The Australian Services Union (ASU) is one of Australia's largest unions, representing more than 137,000 members across local government, community and disability services, public services, airlines, energy, call centres, legal, IT, and administration workers around the country. ASU members power every community, delivering essential services, every single day. We are proud to be a progressive, growing and member-led union.

The ASU is made up of the people who support our local communities. Whether it is at the local library, providing safe roads and pristine gardens, supporting community members experiencing homelessness, family violence or mental health crises, running schools or health services, delivering clear water and energy, responding to disasters, working in call centres, delivering reliable administration for organisations, or even keeping Australians flying – most Australians are bound to deal with ASU members almost every day.

This submission reflects a short survey of members who work in family, domestic and sexual violence, conducted in early July 2026. Their experience shows us that:

- A well supported workforce is key to ending violence against women and children,
- More and better funding is needed for programs,
- Recruitment, retention and pay issues must be urgently addressed, and
- Rates of violence cannot be reduced without addressing the structural issues and providing wrap around supports.

Our submission contains evidence from the ASU survey, and a number of corresponding recommendations to see a better supported workforce in the family, domestic and sexual violence sector. We primarily respond to consultation questions contained in the discussion paper under Priority 5 – System integration and Workforce.

Thank you once again for the opportunity to provide a submission to this important inquiry. If we can provide any further details, please don't hesitate to contact [REDACTED] National Policy and Advocacy Lead via [REDACTED]. The ASU would welcome the opportunity to appear for the committee.

Sincerely,

[REDACTED]

Australian Services Union



ASU Submission

Consultation on the second action plan (national plan to end violence against women and children 2022-2032)

Department of Social Services

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1. Introduction

The Australian Services Union (ASU) is one of Australia's largest unions, representing approximately 137,000 members. ASU members work in a wide variety of industries and occupations in both the private, public and community sectors.

In the family, domestic and sexual violence (FDSV) sector, ASU members work as support workers, social workers, youth workers, lawyers, financial councillors, advocates, specialist practitioners, educators, trainers, managers, CEOs and admin workers across a range of small, medium, large and specialist services. ASU members also work in a range of other specialist support services like, for example, homelessness supports, gambling, alcohol and other drug supports, and specialist supports for First Nations and people with disabilities. Often, members in those specialist services have deep cross over with the FDSV sector or work closely with people who have been subjected to FDSV.

The ASU is also a proudly progressive union, with values deeply embedded in feminism. Our membership is predominantly female. We call out FDSV for what it is – a manifestation of hatred against women. All rigid gender norms create a society that enables and normalises FDSV. We will never stop advocating for the rights and safety of women, both at work and in their homes.

We recognise the Government's work in implementing the First National Action plan, but more must be done. Women's lives are taken too regularly at the hands of men. Every person in Australia deserves safety, dignity and bodily autonomy. The current rates of violence are unacceptable.

ASU members care deeply about their clients. Their passion and expertise drive the outcomes funded programs seek to achieve, and their skills and experience must be respected. This submission is shaped by a survey of ASU members conducted in early July 2026. Members want to see an end to FDSV. The workforce must be supported to make that happen.

2. Experiences of the FDSV Workforce

The ASU FDSV membership includes both those who work directly in FDSV and those who provide wraparound services, or other community services where FDSV is relevant factor. For example, 54% of members responding to our survey said they worked in FDSV currently, and 35% said they work in a role that is not directly within FDSV but support people who have been subjected to family violence more broadly.

This workforce is varied, skilled and highly experienced: 39% of survey respondents said they have a bachelor's degree and 24% have a master's degree, and 58% have more than 5 years' experience in the sector. Nearly 10% had more than 20 years' experience in the sector. The overwhelming majority (89%) are women or non-binary. Sector workers have told the ASU they do not currently feel their experience is adequately valued, with one worker stating, "we have expertise, ... this work is complex and requires highly trained, skilled and qualified workers [which is not recognised]..."

2.1 Turnover is too high

Staff turnover has been a persistent issue for many years. A 2024 study of workers under the Social, Community, Homecare and Disability (SCHADS) Award found that over 2 in 5 (41%) of community sector workers planned to leave their current role in the next 12 months.¹ This is over 5 times higher than economy

¹ Australian Council of Social Services (ACOSS), "At the precipice: Australia's community sector through the cost of living crisis", 2023, accessed: <https://www.acoss.org.au/acoss-april-2023/>

wide turnover, measured by job mobility, which is currently 7.7%.² In our July 2026 survey, when asked if workers see themselves remaining in the sector in the next five years, nearly 46% answered no.

In addition to high workloads (see below), low pay at 41%, and not enough workplace/management support at 47% ranked as the most common reasons for wanting to leave. A lack of opportunity for career progression at 37% was the next most common reason.

Worker comments from our survey show that retention risk is not abstract. One respondent said committed workers accept reduced pay, leave and flexibility “to keep DV [organisations] afloat,” but are increasingly considering other work for their own and their families’ wellbeing. Another respondent directly linked staffing attraction, recruitment, retention and career longevity to “low pay, high expectations and stress”.

High turnover also affects the moral of staff that remain. When asked of the main challenges facing them at work, high turnover and a lack of workplace support were two of the most common answers.

2.2 Change in complexity of work and workloads

When asked about the primary challenges faced at work, the most common answer, selected by over 65% said the complexity of work increasing. It is now the norm for community sector workers to undertake many years of study. Workers are also required to adhere to far greater regulatory requirements. It takes time, skill and effort to adhere to regulations as well as meet record keeping obligations. This time often isn’t captured in funding. Technological advancements and their impact on work, where and how work is performed, practices such as trauma-informed care, and harm reduction methods, have all changed over recent years and have fundamentally changed the way the work is performed. One worker told the ASU that “10 years ago tech abuse wasn't really common, but now it's nearly every case...” when asked how work has changed. They also described tracking, humiliation, intimidation and justice-system limitations in responding to technology-related abuse.

This also reflects the fact that the needs of communities being served has become increasingly more complex. High workloads are also driven by intersecting issues with FDSV such as homelessness, discrimination, drug and alcohol addiction, and poverty, but also, there has been a huge increase in demand and community need. When asked if other intersecting factors are at play, like mental health, housing insecurity, disability or gambling, 52% of members said these factors are always at play; and 42% said they are play most of the time. A lack of appropriate wraparound services and referral pathways compounds this, with a majority of respondents naming this as one of the main challenges they face at work. One ASU member expressed a concern that “women are staying because there is no housing that is affordable, available or safe to go to”.

Recent figures from NSW show FDSV services have seen a 22% referral increase. Concurrently, 63% of these new referrals could not be met, and waitlists have doubled.³ When asked about whether FDSV workers see themselves leaving the sector, and why they might consider leaving, nearly 54% said that workloads remain too high. One member said demand “continues to exceed available resources,” creating long waitlists, high caseloads and limited capacity for ongoing trauma-informed support. Another said their work involves “multiple issues for each family at one time”, requiring more access to workplace support and more staff. Increased funding is needed to better meet the demands on FDSV services.

Recommendation 1: The Commonwealth Government must increase funding for FDSV services across the board, to meet the skyrocketing demands on services and their workforce.

² Australian Bureau of Statistics, ‘Job Mobility: February 2025’, accessed: <https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/labour/jobs/job-mobility/latest-release>

³ <https://www.dvns.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2026/01/Final-report-The-unmet-demand-crisis.pdf>

2.3 Occupational Health and Safety Issues

Vicarious trauma was a consistent theme raised by survey respondents across all questions. More than 50% of respondents said vicarious trauma was one of their main issues at work, the second most common answer. Workers described vicarious trauma and psychosocial risk as central workforce issues. One ASU member said the work carries “a huge emotional burden” and called for better pay, more funding to better resource the sector with more workers to lower individual caseloads so workers can have “more longevity in the work”. Better resourced funding allows for the employment of more workers. This means that the workloads are shared and that workers can have more dedicated time with clients. This in turn leads to better outcomes. Another described the risk of working with women facing serious danger as “genuinely terrifying” when workers are “not being provided with little or any resources or support”. Respondents also reported burnout due to systemic issues, unsustainably stressful workplace environments and a lack of time to recover from traumatic incidents due to high workloads.

More and better funding will help contribute to addressing the structural issues associated with vicarious trauma. However, employers need to do more to protect their psychological wellbeing of their workforce.

Recommendation 2: The Commonwealth Government must work with state and territory governments to better fund services to ensure psychological occupational health and safety standards are being met in the FDSV sector. This should include:

- a. Safe psychological workplace standards such as time for debriefing, access to appropriate counselling or EAP services, and adequate breaks,
- b. Training including training on how to process vicarious trauma, as well as implementing vicarious trauma procedures, and
- c. Enough funded time to deal with issues as they arise and achieve outcomes for clients.

2.4 Low Pay

Most FDSV workers are classified under the SCHADS Award, and notwithstanding specific state interventions and recent decisions of the Fair Work Commission, the pay under this Award can be as low as \$25.41 or just over \$50,200 per year for a full-time worker. Given the median rent cost in Australia is \$702 or \$36,500 per year,⁴ many FDSV workers are struggling to stay afloat financially.

Additionally, only 45% of respondents worked full-time, with the remainder working part-time, on fixed term contracts and casually. That means most FDSV workers are not taking home the low annual salary outlined under the SCHADS Award. More than 37% of survey respondents said insecure working hours is one of the main challenges faced at work. This issue cannot be separated from the fact that many workers are employed under short term program funding.

Despite being a highly skilled, trained, and knowledgeable workforce, nearly 1 in 3 (28.9%) community workers say they have borrowed money from family or friends to meet their basic living costs.⁵ More than half (55.2%) find it difficult to get ahead financially.⁶ Our recent survey of members for the Annual Wage Review found 13% skipped meal due to a shortage of money.

⁴ <https://www.forbes.com/advisor/au/property/average-rent-price-in-australia/>

⁵ Dr Natasha Cortis and Dr Megan Blaxland, UNSW Social Policy Research Centre, “Australia’s social and community services workforce: characterisation, classification and value”, 19 April 2024, accessed:

https://static1.squarespace.com/static/661f04b91fd6655ac8d468/t/664ee846f6e0332f1a2dbb3a/1716447307208/Final+report+for+ASU_19_April_2024.pdf

⁶ Ibid

This workforce is delivering literally lifesaving care and support to some of the most vulnerable in our communities. These workers are highly skilled and qualified. They deserve good pay, liveable wages and secure work recognising their skills and the value of their work.

Our survey respondents connected low pay directly to skill, risk and retention issues in the sector. One member described family violence support work as “highly skilled, emotionally demanding” work involving “complex situations and significant risk,” and said workers deserve better pay and recognition. Another said recognition from colleagues and clients is rewarding, but inadequate resources mean workers lack job security and “adequate financial recognition of the gruelling hours worked.”

The extremely high turnover in this sector is unsurprising given the poor pay and the unsustainable workloads. And without a supported, resourced and retained workforce, there is no real capacity to address increasing rates of FDSV.

As the final step in our gender-based undervaluation proceedings, the ASU has lodged our work value claim. This calls for a 35% pay rise for community workers, including the FDSV workforce. A pay rise along these lines, alongside secure work would be a significant step towards addressing turnover in this sector.

Recommendation 3: The Commonwealth Government must work alongside the ASU in work value proceedings before the Fair Work Commission to win better pay rises for the community sector, and fund pay rises that recognise the value of their work.

3. Government procurement must reinforce secure jobs

The government can improve outcomes for the FDSV sector by improving community sector funding mechanisms. While more funding will always be welcome and lead to improved outcomes, more strategically utilising existing funding to establish good employment conditions for workers will lead to better outcomes and well supported communities.

3.1 Secure jobs and minimum wage and condition standards

The ASU has been advocating for community sector funding, including FDSV funding to form part of the Albanese Government’s proposed Secure Australian Jobs Code. This is because significant government funds are spent on community services in Australia every year, yet this funding does not ensure good outcomes for workers in the sector. Funding issues contribute to poor workplace conditions, like under-classification, insecure work and low pay, ultimately impacting turnover.

Wrongful classification is all but ubiquitous in the community sector. 2024 research commissioned by the ASU, reviewing the classification of community sector workers under the SCHADS Award conservatively estimated that 66.7% of workers were under-classified on at least one of three measures.⁷

Despite recent reforms such as the Right to Disconnect, community workers undertake substantial unpaid work. It is estimated that 15% of work in the community sector is unpaid.⁸ Full-time workers in the community sector work on average 4.5 hours unpaid weekly, and part-time workers work on average 2.6 hours unpaid

⁷ Dr Natasha Cortis and Dr Megan Blaxland, UNSW Social Policy Research Centre, “Australia’s social and community services workforce: characterisation, classification and value”, 19 April 2024, page 24, 25 accessed: https://static1.squarespace.com/static/661f04b91fdda6655ac8d468/t/664ee846fbc0332f1a2dbb3a/1716447307208/Final+report+for+ASU_19_April_2024.pdf

⁸ Cortis, N. and Blaxland, M. (2022) Carrying the costs of the crisis: Australia’s community sector through the Delta outbreak. Sydney: ACOSS. <https://www.acoss.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/ACOSS-Full-2021-Report-v6.pdf>

weekly.⁹ For a full-time Level 4 worker under the SCHADS Award, this means a loss on average of over \$10,000 per year.¹⁰

Recommendation 4: The Commonwealth Government must include community sector funding in the imminent Secure Australian Jobs Code. The Code must ensure that all government funds that reach the community sector guarantee good, secure jobs paid in line with industrial conditions.

3.1.1 True cost of service

The process of competitive tendering can undermine the hard-fought industrial gains won by ASU members. A floor pricing mechanism should also be established in the tendering of community services. This would mean services are funded to a minimum level that accounts for award wages, minimum allowances and entitlements, over-time and time worked, and for other elements of work, like debriefing, time for administration work and professional development. Employers receiving Commonwealth funding bound by the SAJC should not be able to undermine this floor-price in tendering or in the payment of wages and entitlements.

Recommendation 5: The Department of Social Services (DSS) should establish processes as part of tendering to ensure that minimum wages and industrial conditions are funded and adhered to in service contracts.

3.1.2 Minimum funding terms of five years

The Government must also institute long-term funding of minimum five-year terms for all community services. This must extend to programs for families and children. Sector worker responses to the ASU survey reflect the urgency of this, with one respondent reporting that “short term and cyclical funding is wasting resources. I’m in my third role in five years that is ending due to not being re-funded”. Another worker stated that “we do it because it matters but it’s exhausting... My previous job ended in October 2025 because funding ended. This one ends in 4 weeks for the same reason”.

Longer term funding and long term employment will help to address many of the key barriers in bringing down rates of FDSV. For example, it will allow for:

- FDSV workers to develop deep relationships with clients and communities,
- Workers to refine their skills and improve service delivery,
- Continuity of service and support for clients and the community,
- Providers to trial pilots and expand successful programs,
- Practitioners and organisations alike to build trust with clients, notably to develop trust with those with complex needs, which is vital to quality service delivery,
- The capacity for providers to track outcomes over time,
- Practitioners to have job security, meaning overall increased rates of retention because they can develop skills, undertake training and deliver high quality services, and
- Financial security for small organisations, alongside larger organisations, guaranteeing specialist community knowledge and connection.

It will also provide certainty to a sector that has long been overlooked and ensure a vital social safety net for Australians with complex backgrounds and needs. Ahead of the 2022 election, Senator Jenny McAlister, as Shadow Assistant Minister for Communities and the Prevention of Family Violence, committed to five-year

⁹ Dr Natasha Cortis and Dr Megan Blaxland, UNSW Social Policy Research Centre, “Australia’s social and community services workforce: characterisation, classification and value”, 19 April 2024, page 24, 25 accessed: https://static1.squarespace.com/static/661f04b91fd6655ac8d468/t/664ee846f6e0332f1a2dbb3a/1716447307208/Final+report+for+ASU_19_April_2024.pdf

¹⁰ Calculated based on level 4.1 Classification under SCHADS Award, earning \$44.58 per hour

funding terms in community services. The ASU looks forward to working with the Government to fully implement this commitment.

Longer term funding cycles are necessary both for the clients ASU members in the community sector support, and for the workforce itself. Organisations who benefit from longer term funding must pass along the benefits of this security. Government procurement processes, such as the incoming Secure Australian Jobs Code, must ensure that longer term funding creates secure jobs with good conditions for workers.

Recommendation 6: The Commonwealth Government must establish long term funding of community sector funding of at least five years. Long term funding must also lead to long term, secure jobs.

3.2 No one should profit from women and children experiencing violence

As a matter of principle, for-profit organisations must not receive government community sector funding. This funding is there to uplift those who need additional supports; children and people with disabilities, people suffering with alcohol and other drug addiction, or women and children escaping family violence or being subjected to coercive control, amongst many others.

Profiteering off the back of those who need support is wrong.

For-profit organisations squeeze workers. They're more likely to misclassify workers, expect unpaid overtime and/or pay them incorrectly. These practices are wage theft. For an already overworked and undervalued workforce, it is wrong that workers' stolen wages would contribute to companies' bottom lines. Especially in the community sector.

The Government must have no role in supporting for-profit organisations in the community sector, and the ASU remains opposed to Telstra Health being awarded the Escaping Violence Program.

For-profit providers consistently have worse outcomes than not-for-profit providers. For example, in the early childhood education and care sector, for-profit providers are 36% more likely than not-for-profit providers to be failing to meet minimum standards.¹¹ By comparison, 28% of all not-for-profit providers are exceeding standards, whereas only 13% of for-profit providers exceed standards.¹² This pattern is replicated across community services.

The government must commit to contract only with not-for-profit providers; both for the benefit of the communities who rely on quality services but also to ensure the dignity of workers. This in turn assists with the retention of workers, further ensuring quality outcomes for the community.

Recommendation 7: The Government must commit to contract only to not-for-profit organisations in delivering FSDV and community services. For profit organisations should receive no government community funding.

3.3 Workforce planning is needed

Workers leaving the sector is extremely harmful for the clients and communities they serve. The skills, knowledge, rapport and tailored experience vanishes when workers leave the sector, and it can take years for

¹¹ Analysis of Australian Competition and Consumer Commission (ACCC) Childcare Inquiry Final Report, December 2023, accessed: https://www.accc.gov.au/system/files/childcare-inquiry-final%20report-december-2023_0.pdf

¹² French, M. & Meagher, G. (2025) "What is going wrong with childcare in Australia", for The Conversation, accessed: <https://www.sydney.edu.au/news-opinion/news/2025/03/19/what-is-going-wrong-with-childcare-in-australia.html>

it to be re-built. Not only do new workers have to learn the specific approaches of their new employer and the needs of their community, but they also must build trust with their clients which can take months or years. That is, if workers can be found in the first place, noting the issues with job security, low pay, and unstable funding.

The Department should proactively undertake workforce mapping and planning. The skills of the future should be assessed and the number of workers needed in specific communities and within specialist areas determined. This should be aligned to projected needs of the community. Workers should be trained to meet the needs outlined in this plan.

Pre-existing skills not currently recognised, such as lived experience, cultural connection, and language proficiency must receive the due recognition warranted. In the Fair Work Commission's Provisional Decision into gender-based undervaluation in the SCHADS Award, the ASU won better recognition of these skills. Skills based planning will also enable the Department to better understand community needs and align funding and contractual processes with this need.

As part of this, the DSS needs to better track the number of workers and the FTE funding supports. This will enable the Department to track outcomes. For example, the Government rightly identified the need for a funding increase to the 500 worker program, noting their increased experience would lead to a classification progression. Funding this progression will help retain these key workers.

This should be expanded and the experience applied across the community sector. As part of its reporting and bidding requirements, DSS should require the number of FTE, their classification and their work hours be reported. This would enable better understanding of the workplace outcomes of FDSV funding.

Recommendation 8: The DSS should undertake long term workforce planning, to outline community need for FDSV services and the number of workers required.

Recommendation 9: The DSS should make it a requirement of contracting that organisations report the number of workers they employ including the FTE. This would allow the Department to better track adherence to funding supporting minimum wages and conditions.

3.4 Reporting/administrative burden

Community workers already undertake substantial unpaid work, despite recent reforms such as the Right to Disconnect. In our July 2026 survey, reporting and administrative burden being too high was marked as a significant challenge facing the workforce, with just under 40% of respondents identifying this challenge. Union organisers have even reported that the administrative burden is so high for some FDSV organisations, they're now having to outsource the administration. This presents substantial risks for both the delivery of the services, and the ability of organisations to meet department reporting requirements. One respondent told the ASU there is "no funding or consideration" for support roles, that they support more than 200 staff across crisis response programs, and "there is no budget for administration that is essential to supporting everything that goes on around case management".

More must be done to ensure workers in the FDSV sector are paid for their time. There needs to be additional funding so workers can meet the demands of their job while also meeting administrative and reporting requirements on paid time.

The ASU cautions against turning solely to AI to bridge this gap. For-profit AI companies will have access to vast swathes of sensitive data about people in highly vulnerable situations. While AI companies say they have

safeguarding mechanisms, the risk is too great to hand over this data without protections. Extreme precaution must be taken when using AI in the FSDV sector.

Recommendation 10: The Commonwealth Government should be cautious about the use of AI in meeting workforce issues and high demand. AI should only be used as a last resort where there are extensive checks and balances in place.

4. Wrap around and intersectional services need better funding

Our members report consistently that services are not well integrated, making it more difficult for them to do their work, and meaning they have to spend more time navigating systems than delivering outcomes. For example, over 55% of respondents identified a lack of appropriate referral pathways for clients and a lack of wrap around support systems. One member told the ASU “everything is siloed and underfunded”. Another respondent to our survey said it is hard to work with other organisations because all services face “lack of funding, lack of staff, lack of services,” and “everything is at capacity, housing, legal, support work, counselling, all of it”.

Recommendation 11: The Commonwealth Government must fund specific specialist roles and identify pathways for referrals and integration with wrap around services.

Our survey asked members about their thoughts on some of the key issues raised in the consultation paper. A lack of well funded early intervention programs, and a lack of accountability in law enforcement institutions were two of the most common responses. Survey respondents in the sector told the ASU that greater funding and “more support needs to be directed into prevention, early intervention and respectful and healthy relationship education in schools”. They also reported on the importance of women’s specialist services being established by women and for women. Funding and support of independent specialist non-government services must continue.

Recommendation 12: The Commonwealth Government must continue to fund specialist FSDV non-for-profit and non-government services to meet the range of and unique nature of the needs of clients.

When asked if our members thought attitudes about women are becoming more extreme, nearly 80% said yes. Over 82% said harmful attitudes spread online about gender are contributing to this, and 77% said violent attitudes modelled to and replicated by young people. Social media companies must be more consistently held to account for their role in the harmful attitudes they allow about the roles of women.

Recommendation 13: the Commonwealth Government should expand the work they’re doing to hold social media companies to account for the harmful algorithms which promote hateful attitudes against girls and women.

Specialist support programs are needed. As are programs to support the drivers of family violence. There has been ample research about the connection between gambling harm, alcohol and other drugs, as well as the housing crisis and FSDV. Nationally, communities are suffering through inflation, putting extreme pressure on household budgets with many struggling to stay afloat. These situations are significant risk factors contributing to violence. They also make it so much more difficult for victim/survivors to be able to leave and get the support of ASU FSDV workers. One worker expressed their urgent concern for the sustainability of the sector under increased demand without additional funding, stating that “the DFV sector whether it’s shelters, legal supports or counselling are actually the last line of defence against severe violence. This last line of defence is crumbling under the weight of the influx of people who need support.”

Recommendation 14: The Commonwealth Government must increase funding for wrap around and support programs to address issues inter-related with FDSV like financial counselling, mental health support, alcohol and other drug, gambling and homelessness programs.

Recommendation 15: In recognition of the link between gambling harm and the unacceptable rates of FDSV, the Commonwealth Government must do more to tackle problem gambling including by banning all forms of gambling advertising.

The ASU also calls for urgent action to reduce the unacceptable rates of family and domestic violence that First Nations women are subject to. In Australia, First Nations women aged 15 and over were 33 times more likely to be hospitalised due to family violence than non-First Nations women. First Nations men were 27 times more likely than non-First Nations men to be hospitalised.¹³ These figures are particularly shocking considering the unacceptably high rates of family and domestic violence across the Australian community, broadly on which these statistics are based, and that First Nations people represent 3.8% of the Australian population. Urgent, emergency measures must be implemented.

These rates of violence are extreme and warrant a critical whole of government approach that is resourced, quickly rolled out and given high priority. Our members report that culturally appropriate care is not being given. For example, a First Nations member reported that care frameworks failed to recognise Aboriginal concepts of social and emotional wellbeing. The member was required to educate practitioners while seeking care. Another worker at a First Nations-led organisation told the ASU that “Indigenous-led practices and frameworks... would support more culturally responsive and effective service delivery”. A respondent working in a remote community emphasised the importance of recognising that approaches for non-Indigenous communities will not always work for First Nations communities.

The Albanese Government’s funding of First Nations-led community safety initiatives is a welcomed first step, but given the horrific scale of this issue, more must be done.

Recommendation 16: Specific and more funding must be allocated to First Nations specialist FDSV services. Urgent action is needed to address the unacceptable rates of FDSV in First Nations Communities.

5. Conclusion

Every single person in this country deserves to live with dignity and safety. The rates of violence against women and children are unacceptable and warrants urgent intervention. The FDSV workforce is key to reducing the unacceptably high rates of violence against women and children. However, the rates of turnover are far too high to provide meaningful supports. Turnover rates are driven by low pay, high workloads and complexity of work.

The government also can be doing more to support the efforts of the FDSV workers by leveraging existing arrangements. For example, no for-profit provider should be profiting off FDSV funding contracts. Funding contracts should be longer and outline specific expectations about meeting minimum industrial conditions.

Intersectional and inter-related issues like homelessness, gambling and mental health need to be addressed to lower rates of violence. Family violence is a far too common form of gambling harm, and more must be done. Social media companies must also be held to account for their platforms promotion of harmful attitudes towards women.

¹³ The Guardian Australia, Josh Nicholas, “Family violence: First Nations women 33 times more likely to hospitalised than non-Indigenous women”, 2 May 2024, accessed: <https://www.theguardian.com/news/ng-interactive/2024/may/02/family-violence-first-nations-women-33-times-more-likely-to-be-hospitalised-than-non-indigenous-women>

ASU members have shared how difficult it is for them to work in the FSDV sector. But they are dedicated and skilled. They need all government levers to be pulled so that rates of violence against women are reduced to zero.

6. Recommendations

Recommendation 1: The Commonwealth Government must increase funding for FSDV services across the board, to meet the skyrocketing demands on services and their workforce.

Recommendation 2: The Commonwealth Government must work with state and territory governments to better fund services to ensure psychological occupational health and safety standards are being met in the FSDV sector. This should include:

- a. Safe psychological workplace standards such as time for debriefing, access to appropriate counselling or EAP services, and adequate breaks,
- b. Training including training on how to process vicarious trauma, as well as implementing vicarious trauma procedures, and
- c. Enough funded time to deal with issues as they arise and achieve outcomes for clients.

Recommendation 3: The Commonwealth Government must work alongside the ASU in work value proceedings before the Fair Work Commission to win better payraises for the community sector, and fund pay rises that recognise the value of their work

Recommendation 4: The Commonwealth Government must include community sector funding in the imminent Secure Australian Jobs Code. The Code must ensure that all government funds that reach the community sector guarantee good, secure jobs paid in line with industrial conditions.

Recommendation 5: The Department of Social Services (DSS) should establish processes as part of tendering to ensure that minimum wages and industrial conditions are funded and adhered to in service contracts.

Recommendation 6: The Commonwealth Government must establish long term funding of community sector funding of at least five years. Long term funding must also lead to long term, secure jobs.

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Recommendation 8: The DSS should undertake long term workforce planning, to outline community need for FSDV services and the number of workers required.

Recommendation 9: The DSS should make it a requirement of contracting that organisations report the number of workers they employ including the FTE. This would allow the Department to better track adherence to funding supporting minimum wages and conditions.

Recommendation 10: The Commonwealth Government should be cautious about the use of AI in meeting workforce issues and high demand. AI should only be used as a last resort where there are extensive checks and balances in place.

Recommendation 11: The Commonwealth Government must fund specific specialist roles and identify pathways for referrals and integration with wrap around services.

Recommendation 12: The Commonwealth Government must continue to fund specialist FDSV non-for-profit and non-government services to meet the range of and unique nature of the needs of clients.

Recommendation 13: The Commonwealth Government should expand the work they're doing to hold social media companies to account for the harmful algorithms which promote hateful attitudes against women.

Recommendation 14: The Commonwealth Government must increase funding for wrap around and support programs to address issues inter-related with FDSV like financial counselling, mental health support, alcohol and other drug, gambling and homelessness programs.

Recommendation 15: In recognition of the link between gambling harm and the unacceptably rates of FDSV, the Commonwealth Government must do more to tackle problem gambling including by banning all forms of gambling advertising.

Recommendation 16: Specific and more funding must be allocated to First Nations specialist FDSV services. Urgent action is needed to address the unacceptable rates of FDSV in First Nations Communities.