

Consultation on the Second Action Plan (National Plan to End Violence against Women and Children 2022–2032)

Department of Social Services

31 July 2026

Introduction

BaptistCare is pleased to offer this contribution to the development of the Second Action Plan under the *National Plan to End Violence Against Women and Children 2022-2032*.

About BaptistCare

BaptistCare is a leading purpose-led care organisation. Guided by our Christian identity, we have been serving people and communities across Australia for more than 110 years. We help people find new ways to live better, through residential aged care, home care, retirement living, community services, disability support and housing.

Today, more than 70,000 customers and over 12,000 employees supported by close to 2,000 volunteers, are part of our communities of care across New South Wales, the ACT, Western Australia, Victoria, Tasmania and South Australia.

We provide family and domestic specific services to over 1,200 clients in New South Wales, Tasmania and Victoria, and collectively our community & housing support 26,000 clients – we know these services also support those experiencing FDV.

Our FDV specific services include targeted, trauma-informed therapeutic and case management support to people experiencing domestic and family violence, particularly women and children, as well as programs for people who want to stop being abusive in their relationships, particularly men.

Background

Violence against women and children is unacceptably high. While important progress has been achieved under the First Action Plan, a significant whole-of-society effort will be required to reach the goal – shared by all governments in Australia – to end gender-based violence by 2050.

BaptistCare is committed to playing our part to contribute to that effort. We offer our recommendations on the priority areas for the next action plan from our perspective as a large service provider embedded in communities in six states and territories across the country.

Summary of recommendations

BaptistCare recommends the Second National Action Plan commit to the following.

Priority Area 1: Victim-Survivors

- Intensify prevention efforts for those most at risk due to intersectional disadvantage. including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and children, women living with a disability, and people with housing instability.

Priority Area 2: Prevention and Early Intervention

- Invest in educational programs on healthy relationships.
- Use legislative and regulatory avenues to make online environments safer.
- Invest in improving the capacity of communities, including community leaders, to identify and respond to instances of family and domestic violence.
- Increase crisis accommodation with wraparound services for women and children.
- Increase crisis accommodation with wraparound services for older women.

- Increase the amount of social housing for victim-survivors of family and domestic violence.

Priority Area 3: Children and Young People in Their Own Right

- Invest in healing and recovery services for children and young people.

Priority Area 4: People who use violence

- Increase the supply and diversity of men's behaviour change programs.
- Invest in building the evidence base of what works for behaviour change programs for boys and men.
- Resource men's behaviour change programs to be better able to address needs related to substance abuse, histories of trauma and mental ill-health.
- Increase investment in crisis accommodation and social support services for perpetrators.
- Adequately account for and respond to women who use violence, many of whom are also victim-survivors.

Priority Area 5: System integration and workforce

- Build the capacity of intersecting social services to identify and support clients who are also experiencing family, sexual and domestic violence.
- Build the capacity of justice systems to tackle systems abuse in the family law system.
- Improve coordination between family law courts and child protection to work together to promote the safety of women and children.
- Increase specialist family and domestic violence workforce capability and resilience.
- Increase capacity in the general community services and housing workforce.
- Establish a DFSV National Workforce Development Strategy.
- Invest in a five-year Prevention Innovation Fund.

Priority Area 1: Victim-Survivors

The first priority area for consultation seeks views on priorities for victim-survivors of violence against women and children and other forms of gender-based violence including: strengthening a whole of society and life-course approach to prevention, early intervention, response, recovery and healing with a focus on victim-survivors from all communities and backgrounds.

Intersectional disadvantage and priority cohorts

Our service delivery experience reinforces the evidence base that women and children with intersecting forms of disadvantage are at greater risk of family and domestic violence and experience violence in distinct ways. Intersectional disadvantage is associated with being an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander person, living with a disability, experiencing housing instability, having a first language other than English, and being part of the LGBTIQ+ community.

We take this opportunity to reinforce the significance of understanding the groups most at risk, given these cohorts would benefit the most from greater preventative interventions under the Second Action Plan. In this section, we highlight three of the groups with intersecting disadvantage that are over-represented in our services. In the final section of this submission, we reinforce the significant value of enabling service providers working with these cohorts to better support prevention and early intervention efforts.

BaptistCare recommends the Second National Action Plan include a commitment to:

- Intensify prevention efforts for those most at risk due to intersectional disadvantage including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and children, women living with a disability, and people with housing instability.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and children

The rate of family and domestic violence amongst Aboriginal women and children remains well above the levels of the wider Australian community. This is well evidenced by research but also supported by the experience of our own community service programs. For instance, our specialist homelessness services, which is not a FDV specific service, rarely encounter an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander client who has not experienced family, sexual or domestic violence.

To this end, we flag our support for the separate action plan for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities [Our Ways – Strong Ways – Our Voices: National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Plan to End Family, Domestic and Sexual Violence 2026-2036](#).

We also note the particular need for funding parity for Aboriginal women and children based on the presentation of need, rather than funding being based on population dynamics.

Women living with a disability

Another cohort at greater risk of exposure to domestic violence are women living with a disability. A review of our caseload of victim-survivors revealed that 30% identified as having a disability. This is consistent with the significant evidence base showing women living with a disability are disproportionately affected by family, sexual and domestic violence. As such, efforts to reduce overall rates of harm should prioritise this cohort for prevention and early intervention.

People living with housing instability

Housing instability can be a factor that exacerbates risk of exposure to domestic violence by placing greater strain on the household and by limiting options for women and children to leave a situation of abuse.

Our organisation is a specialist homelessness service and Tier 1 community housing provider, through which we support over 1,600 tenants at 34 locations in almost 1,000 dwellings. As consistent with the wider evidence base, we find housing need is often associated with experiences of family and domestic violence, and we would support an approach which recognises the importance of 'general' housing and homelessness services in the support eco-system.

Priority Area 2: Prevention and Early Intervention

The second priority area for consultation seeks views on priorities for prevention and early intervention: embedding initiatives where people live, work, learn and connect to address the gendered drivers of this violence; address substantive influences on perpetration and risk such as harmful substance use, gambling, and adverse childhood experience; support attitudinal and behavioural change to prevent harm before it occurs; and to prevent escalation. It also requires collaboration and integration across sectors to strengthen primary prevention and early intervention approaches.

Fostering healthy relationships

The Second Action Plan is an opportunity to further embed healthy relationships in the cultural norms of our society.

BaptistCare supports the development of programs that educate and inspire men and boys to develop healthy relationships. Such programs establish clear norms on the behaviours, attitudes and consent expectations that underpin respectful and supportive relationships.

Social media platforms and other avenues for participating in online environments are introducing new avenues for unhealthy behaviours to be fostered and enacted. These environments require targeted interventions to reduce exposure to unhealthy behaviours and increase exposure to positive, healthy relationships norms. Specific interventions are also needed to ensure these are spaces in which woman and children can be safe from harm.

To support the strengthening of healthy relationship development, we recommend the plan seek to:

- Invest in educational programs on healthy relationships.
- Use legislative and regulatory avenues to make online environments safer.

The role of communities

BaptistCare is all about communities – communities where every person can live to their full potential. We seek to enrich lives through communities of care and this extends to supporting communities to better identify and respond to family and domestic violence. Working with whole communities can shift the dial on violence.

Our work in this space has included supporting the development of a prevention and intervention toolkit for leaders within the Baptist church movement. The [Safer Spaces Toolkit](#), published by Australian Baptist Ministries, is a resource that supports pastors and church leaders to build relationally healthy communities and address domestic abuse within their congregations.

We believe tailored resources for community groups such as churches are crucial resources for strengthening our collective ability to prevent family and domestic violence, to respond well to disclosures, and to accompany victim-survivors on their journey of healing.

For this reason, we recommend greater resourcing for communities so that everyday Australians strengthen our collective capacity to cultivate healthy relationships and to identify and respond to family and domestic violence around us.

We recommend the Second Action Plan:

- Invest in improving the capacity of communities, including community leaders, to identify and respond to instances of family and domestic violence.

The importance of housing

Crisis accommodation

There is not nearly enough crisis accommodation for women and children who leave a situation of violence. While there is great merit in increasing opportunities for victim-survivors to remain in the family home, crisis accommodation remains critically important. Safe houses are particularly important given the heightened risk of violence at the point of, and following, separation from the perpetrator.

Crisis accommodation is not just about having a safe place to sleep. It is also often a crucial moment in establishing a foundation for the healing journey by leaning on the support of professional wraparound services.

BaptistCare recommends the Second National Action Plan include a commitment to:

- Increase crisis accommodation with wraparound services for women and children.

We also want to highlight the particular importance of crisis housing options for older women. These women have particular needs and are less likely to feel safe living in crisis accommodation alongside family groups including those with teenagers. For this reason, BaptistCare recommends the Second National Action Plan seek to:

- Increase crisis accommodation with wraparound services for older women.

Social housing

The ability to find a safe and affordable home is transformational for people who have experienced family, sexual and domestic violence. We strongly urge all governments to further expand the size and diversity of social housing in the country including an expansion of housing specifically kept available for victim-survivors.

- Increase the amount of social housing for victim-survivors of family and domestic violence.

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

The third priority area for consultation seeks views on priorities for children and young people in their own right: centring children and young people's voices, rights, and safety across prevention, early intervention, response and recovery, and providing tailored, age and developmentally appropriate support for children and young people. This priority includes young people who use violence (in the home and/or in intimate partner relationships, including the use of sexual violence).

Focusing on children

BaptistCare welcomes the proposed focus on children and young people as victim-survivors in their own right. We have been concerned by the lack of funding for healing and recovery services for children or young people living with violence in the home. Currently this work is not funded unless children exhibit extreme behaviours. Instead, the mother or primary caregiver is supported with the expectation this will provide adequate parenting support to the children. However, this is inadequate, resulting in many children being left to find their own ways to deal with these traumatic experiences.

At BaptistCare, we self-fund recovery services for children. We want to ensure children are supported to heal and grow beyond their experience as victim-survivors and to reduce the likelihood these children accept or introduce violence in their adult relationships.

We recommend the Second Action Plan:

- Invest in healing and recovery services for children and young people.

Priority Area 4: People who use violence

The fourth priority area for consultation seeks views on priorities for people who use violence: advancing prevention, early intervention, response, and recovery and healing throughout the life course on both family and domestic violence and sexual violence, supporting earlier identification, and multi-sector approaches to accountability and behaviour change, for example (but not limited to) strengthening policing and justice sector responses.

Behaviour change programs for boys and men

BaptistCare offers behaviour change programs for men, including for men who are fathers. Our group work programs support men who want to stop being abusive within their family relationships, including supporting fathers to improve their relationships with children when there has been a history of violence.

We can attest to the positive outcomes of these programs and are dismayed there are not more opportunities for men to reflect on their behaviour in a safe and supportive environment. We also acknowledge there is much more to learn to improve the quality and capability of this service delivery area as a preventative and early intervention tool.

Given our service expertise, we agree with the recommendation of the Prevention Evidence Rapid Review and other studies to improve the supply and diversity men's behaviour change programs. We recommend the Second Action Plan:

- Increase the supply and diversity of men's behaviour change programs.
- Invest in building the evidence base of what works for behaviour change programs for boys and men.

Our experiences in delivering these services reinforce the evidence that men experiencing intersectional disadvantage are at greater risk of perpetrating violence in their home. Effective interventions are equipped to not just discuss behavioural issues but also support men to address issues in their life in order to create a stable foundation for the deep internal work required to develop new behavioural norms. We recommend the plan:

- Resource men's behaviour change programs to be better able to address needs related to substance abuse, histories of trauma and mental ill-health.

Crisis accommodation and supports for perpetrators

While perpetrators of violence must be held to account, their journey towards healthier relationships requires support beyond behaviour change programs. Importantly, many require case management support to deal with a range of issues that are exacerbating the risk of further violence. In particular, ensuring perpetrators can access crisis housing after being required to leave the family home can reduce their desire to attempt to re-enter the home, particularly if they have been excluded by police.

We recommend the Second Action Plan:

- Increase investment in crisis accommodation and social support services for perpetrators.

Women who use violence

While the focus of efforts must prioritise work to reduce the use of violence by men, there are also women who use violence against members of their household. Many of these women are also victim-survivors

themselves, resulting in complex trauma. Women in this situation must be supported to both recover from their experiences of violence and address their own use of violence to prevent further harm. Any plan working to prioritise prevention must adequately account for and respond to this cohort.

We recommend the Second Action Plan:

- Adequately account for and respond to women who use violence, many of whom are also victim-survivors.

Priority Area 5: System Integration and Workforce

The fifth priority area for consultation seeks views on priorities for system integration and workforce: safe and effective prevention, early intervention, response and long-term recovery including justice and health sector responses, drawing on an integrated system and a connected and capable workforce that utilises trauma and violence-informed approaches across multi-sector services and programs.

Targeting intersecting social services

There is great potential in using our understanding of the characteristics of a person with intersecting disadvantage who is at heightened risk of exposure to family and domestic violence to target and equip fellow social service delivery teams to better identify and respond to indicators of family and domestic violence amongst their clients.

As described above, a review of our caseload of victim-survivors revealed that 30% also identified as having a disability. This is consistent with the wider evidence indicating people living with a disability are disproportionately affected by this type of violence. This raises the value in prioritising capacity building among disability service providers to identify and respond to family, sexual or domestic violence amongst their clients.

A similar dynamic can be found in our homelessness services, which are often working with people who have also been impacted by FDV. For instance, it is very rare for our specialist homelessness services to work with an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander woman who hasn't experienced violence. Investing in the ability of homelessness practitioners to better identify, prevent or respond to victim/survivors can lead to significant improvements in response.

We recommend the Second Action Plan:

- Build the capacity of intersecting social services to identify and support clients who are also experiencing family, sexual and domestic violence.

Improving the response of the justice system

Another important area for attention under the next action plan is the justice system. Many clients receiving therapeutic support report that the perpetrator is using the family law system to continue to abuse them, with immense long term emotional, physical and financial consequences for the women who are trying to move forward and rebuild their lives. Some of tactics observed in using the justice system to extend abuse include: using the Federal Family Court to get around intervention orders issued by a state court; pressuring the victim-survivor to use a legally represented mediation process rather than a free family mediation process to inflict economic abuse; gaining access to legal aid and initiating court processes thereby leaving victim-survivors

ineligible for legal aid; delaying proceedings by not signing papers, asking for minor changes or not submitting paperwork; and lodging vexatious cross-orders to create a perception within the court that the victim-survivor is a hostile and unsafe parent.

In addition, courts do not always ensure their systems safely support victim-survivors to pursue justice. Examples include the Federal Family Court introducing a Parenting Order that causes the state child protection services to place significant pressure on the victim-survivor parent to keep their children safe; court set expectations that victim-survivor parents must complete parenting courses that are not equally imposed on the parent using violence; and poor safety planning for women and children who are required to attend court at the same time as the person using violence.

We recommend the Second Action Plan:

- Build the capacity of justice systems to tackle systems abuse in the family law system.
- Improve coordination between family law courts and child protection to work together to promote the safety of women and children.

Sector development

We recognise the significant need to expand and support specialist domestic, family and sexual violence service practitioners. This area of work is incredibly demanding and the level of vicarious trauma of our staff is high, particularly for those working with perpetrators. Greater investment in workforce development is needed, including supporting those with lived experience to enter the workforce, developing workforce capacity, and strengthening strategies to maintain self-care and avoid burnout.

Our organisation operates across multiple locations and jurisdictions, and we can attest to how challenging it can be to recruit and retain the right mix of staff across our various FDV programs including our behaviour change programs. As such, we support the recommendation of the Rapid Review of Prevention Approaches to establish a DFSV National Workforce Development Strategy.

As an organisation that has recently established a research and innovation department, we are committed to developing our understanding of the success of various interventions in a range of social and human services. We support the recommendation of the Rapid Review of Prevention Approaches to establish a five-year Prevention Innovation Fund to resource and evaluate innovative prevention efforts to understand, assess and share what works in an Australian context and at a community-based level.

We recommend the Second Action Plan:

- Increase specialist family and domestic violence workforce capability and resilience.
- Increase capacity in general community services and housing workforce.
- Establish a DFSV National Workforce Development Strategy.
- Invest in a five-year Prevention Innovation Fund.