



Canberra Rape Crisis Centre Submission: *National Plan to End Violence Against Women and Children 2022-2032 – Second Action Plan*

About the Canberra Rape Crisis Centre

The Canberra Rape Crisis Centre (CRCC) is a not for profit organisation and the only specialist organisation delivering support for victim survivors of sexual violence in the ACT. For 50 years, we have believed, supported and walked alongside victim-survivors. Our services are available for anyone who has experienced any form of sexual violence, whether recently or in the past. We provide free trauma-informed crisis counselling, advocacy and therapeutic support for people who have experienced sexual violence and their supporters.

Introduction

CRCC welcomes the opportunity to provide a submission to the consultation on the Second Action Plan of the *National Plan to End Violence against Women and Children 2022-2032* (National Plan). We recognise and value the federal government's ongoing commitment to preventing and reducing sexual violence and support the development of a Second Action Plan that drives meaningful and measurable action.

We acknowledge and appreciate opportunities to contribute to the consultation process led by the Department of Social Services and the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, including through roundtables hosted by Minister Plibersek and Minister Gallagher. As the ACT's only specialist sexual violence service, CRCC brings 50 years of practical expertise and a deep understanding of victim-survivors and their journey of healing.

The Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence Commission's 2025 yearly report highlighted that although the National Plan identifies sexual violence as a priority, the level of investment, leadership and reform has not yet matched the scale of the issue (Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence Commission, 2025). As such, this submission emphasises the need for sexual violence to be placed at the forefront of the Second Action Plan. Without dedicated visibility, funding and accountability, there is a risk sexual violence will continue to be overlooked within national policy.

CRCC also supports the submission made by the National Association of Services Against Sexual Violence (NASASV). As the peak body for specialist sexual violence organisations in Australia, NASASV has an important role in advocating for the needs of the sexual violence sector and recommends sexual violence is prioritised in the Second Action Plan. In particular, we support funding NASASV to inform sexual violence policy, programs, legislation, research and investment, a funding uplift for specialist sexual violence services and a focus on the prevention of sexual violence.

Feedback

1. Differentiation between sexual violence and family and domestic violence

Sexual violence can occur within family and domestic violence contexts, but it also occurs across a broad range of relationships, settings and life stages. The need to differentiate sexual violence from family and domestic violence was highlighted in Australia's National Research Organisation for Women's Safety (ANROWS) consultation paper on the Second Action Plan to the National Plan (ANROWS, 2026). Both forms of violence require different responses, which must be reflected in the Second Action Plan.

There are clear intersections between sexual violence and family and domestic violence - both forms of violence are rooted in patterns of power and control, disproportionately impact women and can have significant and long-lasting impacts on victim-survivors' physical and mental wellbeing. However, available data indicates that only one-third of sexual violence occurs within family and domestic violence situations (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2024); and the rest occurs in other relationships and settings including workplaces, sporting groups, nursing homes, group homes, disability and aged care support providers, daycares, schools and community or religious groups.

The specialist sexual violence sector is different from the family and domestic violence sector because it responds to the diverse contexts, relationships and settings in which sexual violence occurs across a person's lifetime and involves different types of support that victim-survivors may require.

While family and domestic violence services are oriented towards immediacy and crisis support, particularly at times of separation, specialist sexual violence services often assist clients with incidents that occurred in the past, and there is often a delay between incident and disclosure. The nature of risk also differs, with family and domestic violence services often focused on safety planning to prevent homicide, while specialist sexual violence services frequently respond to the significant psychological impacts of sexual violence, including suicidal ideation and risk of self-harm behaviours.

For these reasons, it is crucial that the distinction between sexual violence and family and domestic violence is embedded in the Second Action Plan, noting the different service responses related to these forms of harm. Collapsing sexual violence into family and domestic violence risks

creating a critical system gap. The need for a stronger focus on sexual violence was recognised in the rapid review on prevention approaches, *Unlocking the Prevention Potential: accelerating action to end domestic, family and sexual violence*, prepared for the federal government (Campbell E et al, 2024). The review found that sexual violence had not received adequate attention in the national policy landscape and recommended governments prioritise further work to recognise the full range of sexual violence, including where it occurs outside family and domestic violence contexts (recommendation 15).

In addition, CRCC supports NASASV's recommendation to adopt the term 'family and domestic violence and sexual violence' rather than relying on the broader term 'family, domestic and sexual violence'. This will support the recognition and understanding of the distinct differences between the types of violence.

As the ANROWS consultation paper highlighted, a stronger understanding of what sexual violence looks like in all its forms is needed. Sexual violence exists on a continuum of harmful behaviours, ranging from acts that are often dismissed or normalised to other forms of serious sexual offending. When these behaviours are normalised, minimised or excused, they reinforce attitudes of misogyny, entitlement and power over others, creating an environment in which more severe forms of sexual violence are enabled. Recognising the continuum of sexually violent behaviours is therefore critical to preventing violence before it escalates, and this should be reflected in the Second Action Plan.

Recommendation 1: Sexual violence must be considered across all relevant actions in the Second Action Plan, including where actions do not expressly refer to sexual violence, to ensure the specific needs of victim-survivors are not overlooked.

Recommendation 2: Adopt consistent terminology that refers to 'family and domestic violence and sexual violence', rather than 'family, domestic and sexual violence' to better recognise the distinct service systems, expertise and responses required.

2. Adequate funding for specialist sexual violence services nationwide

Specialist sexual violence services require adequate and long-term funding models to be sustainable, yet we remain critically underfunded across Australia. Hundreds of services lack the necessary funding to meet rising demand and deliver timely, trauma-informed support to all victim-survivors. These services respond and support all victim-survivors of sexual violence including children, adult survivors of child sexual abuse women, men, children, people who identify as gender diverse, as well as children who had used problematic and harmful sexual behaviors (PHSB). Findings from the *Lifetime Price of Harm: Economic Costs of Sexual Violence and the Case for Timely Intervention in Australia* report indicate that the specialist sector is underfunded by approximately \$80 million annually, leaving around 23,000 people with unmet need each year (Perks and Gilchrist, 2025).

Resources must reflect the true prevalence and impact of sexual violence, which is widespread and under-reported. Nationally, 1 in 5 women and 1 in 16 men have experienced sexual violence since the age of 15 (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2023). Child sexual abuse affects more than 1 in 3 girls and 1 in 5 boys (Haslam et al, 2023). People living with a disability, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, LGBTQIA+ people and people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds can experience higher prevalence rates and unique barriers in accessing support services. Despite prevalence remaining persistent since 2016 and increasing since 2012 (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2023), sexual violence continues to lack dedicated focus in national policy.

Most victim-survivors seek support from sexual violence services rather than engaging with the legal system. We know that 92% of women who experienced sexual violence by a male did not report their most recent incident to the police (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2023). This reinforces the importance of recommendation 1 of the Australian Law reform Commission's (ALRC) report, *Safe, Informed, Supported: Reforming Justice Responses to Sexual Violence*, which called on governments to fund sexual violence services to deliver safer, informed and supported services (Australian Law reform Commission, 2025). Similarly, the Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence Commission's 2025 yearly report to Parliament highlighted that reform efforts must extend beyond the justice system to address the full range of settings where sexual violence occurs (Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence Commission, 2025). The report recommends the Second Action includes dedicated actions and investments to progress sexual violence reforms outside the scope of the ALRC report, including strengthening specialist capacity (recommendation 29).

While the National Plan set the overarching policy framework, the *First Action Plan 2023-27* (First Action Plan) fails to reflect the severity and scale of sexual violence. This strategic oversight has direct funding implications for the specialist sector.

In relation to our local context, the statistics on sexual violence in the ACT are concerning. A recent health survey in Canberra showed that 2 in 5 women who responded had experienced sexual violence (Women's Health Matters, 2025). Last year alone, CRCC supported over 5,400 clients and delivered 13,000 crisis contacts. As the ACT's only specialist sexual violence service, we require adequate and long-term funding to deliver the support victim-survivors need and deserve.

CRCC welcomed the ACT Government's 2026-27 Budget announcement, which committed an additional \$8.7 million to CRCC and averted a projected 60% budget cut over the next four years, as non-ongoing funding was set to end. However, our baseline funding remains insufficient. Financial modelling indicates that we require ongoing annual funding of \$10 million to operate a 24-hour crisis organisation delivering prevention, response and support services to victim-survivors, their loved ones and professionals in the ACT. Like most sexual violence services, CRCC is already delivering services across the four pillars of the National Plan, but current funding does not enable us to meet demand.

Recommendation: 3: Commit to adequate and long-term funding for NASASV and specialist sexual violence services, to ensure NASASV can contribute specialist expertise to national sexual violence reforms and specialist services can meet demand and deliver timely trauma informed support to victim-survivors.

3. Prevention of sexual violence

The Second Action Plan must prioritise the prevention of sexual violence across the four pillars of the National Plan. The rapid review, *Unlocking the Prevention Potential*, recognised that specialist services are not just response services, they are a critical component of prevention (Campbell E et al, 2024). Recovery and healing supports do more than respond to violence, they help prevent ongoing and future harm. As NASASV's submission highlighted, specialist sexual violence services deliver tertiary prevention (prevention within service delivery). Tertiary prevention, delivered by specialist services to victim survivors and others impacted by sexual violence, improve health outcomes and interrupt intergenerational cycles. Adequate funding to specialist services will ensure the sexual violence sector can meet its full prevention capacity.

Funding should also enable specialist services to expand activities that match the needs of local communities. In the ACT, CRCC designs and delivers education and training programs in schools, community organisations and government agencies to raise awareness of sexual violence and address the drivers of gender-based violence. With sustained investment, specialist services can expand their prevention work and strengthen community capacity to recognise, prevent and respond to sexual violence.

Recommendation 4: Prioritise dedicated investment in sexual violence prevention through specialist sexual violence services across the four pillars of the National Plan.

4. Whole of system accountability

The National Plan recognises that eliminating family and domestic violence and sexual violence requires a whole-of-system response. For the Second Action Plan to translate this commitment into meaningful change, it must clearly identify who is responsible for delivering each action. The Activities Addendum to the First Action Plan categories actions across a broad range of systems including education, media, health, family, domestic and sexual violence services, policy, legislation, perpetrator interventions, justice, workplaces, housing, women's services, research, welfare, police and child protection. This reflects the reality that family and domestic violence and sexual violence is shaped by and experienced across multiple systems. However, broad system involvement must be matched by clear implementation responsibility and outcomes accountability.

The *National Strategy to Prevent and Respond to Child Sexual Abuse 2021-2030* includes a Commonwealth Government department lead against each measure of the First National Action Plan. This approach recognises that whole-of-system reform must be supported by whole-of-government accountability. CRCC recommends a similar approach is adopted in the Second Action Plan, with each action identifying a lead Minister or department, as well as any contributing portfolios or service systems.

Responsibility for eliminating sexual violence cannot sit solely with the Department of Social Services or with under-resourced specialist services. The drivers and impacts of violence are shaped by various systems and each of these systems have a role in preventing and responding to sexual violence. Therefore, the Second Action Plan should require all relevant portfolios to use their policy, legislative, funding and regulatory levers to contribute to the national goal of ending violence against women and children.

Recommendation 5: Strengthen whole-of-system accountability in the Second Action Plan by identifying a lead minister, department or agency for each action, as well as contributing portfolios and service systems.

5. Children and young people

Child sexual abuse is a significant issue in Australia. More than 1 in 4 children experience child sexual abuse (Haslam et al., 2023). Among children who experienced child sexual abuse, 78% experience it more than once and 11% experience it more than 50 times (Haslam et al, 2023).

Despite the prevalence of child sexual abuse, a number of concerning opinions exist in society. The *Australian Child Sexual Abuse Attitudes, Knowledge and Response Study* revealed that 40% of participants thought older children have a responsibility to actively resist sexual advances made by adults and almost 1 in 3 may disbelieve a child's disclosure (National Centre for Action on Child Sexual Abuse, 2024). Disclosure of child sexual abuse is often delayed, complex and can be shaped by fear, shame or concerns about not being believed. The *Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse* found that it takes on average 23.9 years for victim-survivors to disclose child sexual abuse, and some victim-survivors never disclose (Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse, 2017).

Young people across Australia are also experiencing alarming rates of sexual violence. The *Personal Safety Survey* found that people aged 18-24 are more likely than any other age group to have experienced sexual violence and sexual harassment (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2023). The *National Student Safety Survey* found that 1 in 20 university students have been sexually assaulted since starting university and 1 in 6 sexually harassed (National Student Safety Survey, 2021).

For these reasons, CRCC welcomes the identification of children and young people as a priority area in the ANROWS consultation paper. Child sexual abuse occurring outside a family and domestic violence context was outside the scope of the ANROWS paper. This remains a critical and distinct area of policy, practice and reform requiring dedicated responses. Sexual violence perpetrated against children below the age of consent is child sexual abuse. Although these issues are interrelated, the Commonwealth's child sexual abuse response is covered by the *National Strategy to Prevent and Respond to Child Sexual Abuse 2021-2030*. CRCC encourages stronger alignment between the Second Action Plan of the

National Strategy and the National Plan. While child sexual abuse requires a dedicated focus in national policy, responses should be aligned with broader efforts to prevent and respond to sexual violence, recognising child sexual abuse requires coordinated action. CRCC, like many sexual violence services across Australia, have supported children as clients in their own right for decades, recognising that children have distinct experiences and needs.

Technology-facilitated sexual abuse has significant impacts on children and young people. Image-based abuse, exposure to violent pornography and AI-generated imagery are increasingly shaping young people's experiences of sexual violence. In 2024-25, the Australian Centre to Counter Child Exploitation received 82,764 reports of online child sexual exploitation, equating to an average of 226 reports per day (Australian Centre to Counter Child Exploitation, viewed July 2026). These figures highlight the urgent need for responses to address online and technology-enabled sexual violence.

Recommendation 12 of the rapid review, *Unlocking the Prevention Potential*, recognised that prevention and response approaches must continue to evolve to meet the changing environment, particularly online and among children and young people (Campbell E et al, 2024).

The eSafety Commissioner has observed that children and young people are seeing pornography at younger ages than past generations, using it to learn about sex often years before they are sexually active (eSafety Commissioner, 2023). Evidence shows that nearly half of boys have seen pornography by the age of 13 and nearly half of girls by the age of 15 (Our Watch, 2020). This is concerning given the normalisation of violence in pornography. Research shows that 45% of videos on Pornhub include at least one act of aggression (Children's Commissioner, 2023). The Second Action Plan must respond to these emerging risks through community awareness, education, specialist prevention initiatives and stronger online safety responses. This aligns with the rapid review, *Unlocking the Prevention Potential* which recommends continued efforts to give young people literacy on pornography (Campbell E et al, 2024).

Recommendation 6: Strengthen alignment between the Second Action Plan and the *National Strategy to Prevent and Respond to Child Sexual Abuse 2021-2030*, while ensuring child sexual abuse continues to be clearly recognised as a distinct form of sexual violence requiring dedicated actions.

Recommendation 7: Include dedicated actions addressing the influence of technology-facilitated sexual abuse and violent pornography on children and young people, including investment in age-appropriate education and specialist sexual violence prevention programs.

6. Technology-facilitated sexual abuse

Technology-facilitated sexual abuse is an increasingly common and rapidly evolving form of sexual violence. It includes image-based abuse, online sexual harassment, cyberstalking, online grooming, sexual extortion, the non-consensual creation or sharing of intimate images, and the use of artificial intelligence to generate or alter sexualised images. These behaviours are not separate from sexual

violence; they are part of the continuum of non-consensual sexual behaviours and must be addressed as sexual violence issues in the Second Action Plan.

The eSafety Commissioner's report, *Technology-facilitated abuse: family, domestic and sexual violence* (eSafety Commissioner, 2023) revealed there is a high rate of technology-facilitated abuse in Australia and ongoing under-reporting. In 2022-2023, the eSafety Commissioner handled 9,060 image-based abuse reports, representing a 117% increase on the previous year. In 2022, a representative national survey of 4,562 Australians aged 18 years and over found 1 in 4 had experienced image-based abuse (Powell et al, 2022).

Greater responsibility must be placed on technology companies and digital platforms to prevent and respond to technology-facilitated sexual abuse rather than the onus being placed on the individual experiencing the abuse (Campo & Webster, 2025). Recommendation 18 of the rapid review, *Unlocking the Prevention Potential*, called for the ongoing support to the eSafety Commission to work with the technology industry and government on improving policies, practice, transparency and accountability for an increasingly complex and hazardous online environment (Campbell E et al, 2024). National harmonisation of laws is also required to ensure consistent responses for victim-survivors and consistent penalties for perpetrators and technology companies.

CRCC notes cultural change is needed in how police, justice agencies and broader systems respond to technology-facilitated abuse. These forms of sexual violence are often minimised or treated as less serious, despite their significant and ongoing impacts to victim-survivors. The Second Action Plan must recognise technology-facilitated abuse as a serious form of sexual violence, not standalone technology issues to ensure victim-survivors receive trauma-informed support and access to protection and justice.

Recommendation 8: The Second Action Plan must recognise technology-facilitated sexual abuse as a form of sexual violence and embed it across prevention, early intervention, response and recovery actions.

Recommendation 9: Governments must strengthen regulation and accountability for technology companies, digital platforms, dating apps, pornography providers and other online services, to prevent abuse, respond quickly to reports, remove harmful content and improve transparency about safety practices.

7. Building a stronger evidence base on sexual violence

As NASASV's submission highlights, there are significant data limitations that affect how accurately sexual violence can be understood. Australia does not have one consistent national definition of sexual violence used across all jurisdictions. A lack of consistent data sets limits our ability to understand

prevalence, identify trends and compare data over time. For example, technology-facilitated sexual abuse is not consistently defined, measured or tracked across jurisdictions. This makes it difficult to monitor prevalence, identify emerging risks, evaluate responses and ensure policy and service systems keep pace with changing forms of harm.

While the Australian Bureau of Statistics, *Personal Safety Survey* is the primary national source of prevalence data on sexual violence, it has important limitations. The survey measures experiences of sexual violence since the age of 15, meaning it does not capture the full prevalence of child sexual abuse. It also reports some forms of sexual violence in limited ways, including by focusing on the most recent incident and, in some measures, on male perpetration against women. Further, the survey does not adequately capture emerging forms of sexual violence, including technology-facilitated sexual abuse. These limitations mean that national prevalence data does not fully reflect the scale, diversity or complexity of sexual violence experienced across Australia.

Recommendation 10: The Second Action Plan must continue efforts to improve national research and data on sexual violence, including child sexual abuse and technology-facilitated abuse.

Summary of Recommendations

Recommendation 1: Sexual violence must be considered across all relevant actions in the Second Action Plan, including where actions do not expressly refer to sexual violence, to ensure the specific needs of victim-survivors are not overlooked.

Recommendation 2: Adopt consistent terminology that refers to ‘family and domestic violence and sexual violence’, rather than ‘family, domestic and sexual violence’ to better recognise the distinct service systems, expertise and responses required.

Recommendation 3: Commit to adequate and long-term funding for NASASV and specialist sexual violence services, to ensure NASASV can contribute specialist expertise to national sexual violence reforms and specialist services can meet demand and deliver timely trauma informed support to victim-survivors.

Recommendation 4: Prioritise dedicated investment in sexual violence prevention through specialist sexual violence services across the four pillars of the National Plan.

Recommendation 5: Strengthen whole-of-system accountability in the Second Action Plan by identifying a lead minister, department or agency for each action, as well as contributing portfolios and service systems.

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Recommendation 10: The Second Action Plan must continue efforts to improve national research and data on sexual violence, including child sexual abuse and technology-facilitated abuse.

Conclusion

CRCC welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the development of the Second Action Plan under the National Plan. CRCC strongly supports a Second Action Plan that provides clear national leadership, accountability and investment to prevent and respond to sexual violence in all its forms.

To build a community free from sexual violence, we need an adequately resourced sector, whole-of-system accountability, dedicated attention to children and young people, action on technology-facilitated sexual abuse and improved data collection. These areas are critical to ensuring national commitment translate into tangible improvements for victim-survivors, specialist services and communities.

CRCC remains committed to working alongside the government, other services and the broader community to ensure victim-survivors are able to access timely trauma-informed support services. We continue to highlight the need for adequate and stable funding to continue to meet increasing complexity and demand for our frontline services.

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