Submission: Second Action Plan (National Plan to End Violence Against Women and Children 2022–2032)

CatholicCare NT welcomes the opportunity to contribute to consultation on the Second Action Plan under the National Plan to End Violence Against Women and Children 2022–2032.

CatholicCare NT supports the National Plan's focus across prevention, early intervention, response, and recovery and healing. In the Northern Territory, these domains are deeply interconnected, particularly in remote and Aboriginal communities where service systems are thin, workforce capacity is constrained, and a small number of community-based services often carry multiple functions at once.

CatholicCare NT provides a broad range of general community services and a range of specialist services including the NO MORE Primary Prevention Program/Campaign, Remote Safe Houses, Mens Behaviour Change Programs, including urban remote and youth, crime victims counselling and childrens contact services.

A central issue for the Second Action Plan is the need to align national policy ambition with sustainable local delivery platforms. The consultation process in the NT has emphasised practical and systemic solutions, such as housing and poverty, stronger coordination across systems, and the importance of listening to frontline services, communities, and people with lived expertise. In that context, the next iteration of the National Plan must pay close attention to whether existing Commonwealth program settings are enabling or unintentionally reducing prevention and early intervention capacity on the ground.

We have included a case study on the NO MORE program at the end of the submission which demonstrates how our submission priorities integrate which accrual service delivery.

Priority Area 1: Victim-survivors – whole-of-society and life-course

Priority Area 1 emphasises a whole-of-society, life-course approach to prevention, early intervention, response, recovery and healing for victim-survivors from all communities and backgrounds.

For Northern Territory communities, this requires:

- Recognising that victim-survivors frequently seek help first from non-specialist services, including child and family services, financial wellbeing hubs, housing supports, health services, schools, youth programs, and community organisations.
- Ensuring these services have the capability, tools and supervision to respond safely and respectfully when violence is disclosed.
- Providing consistent, predictable support over time rather than short-term projects that start and stop.

In many remote Aboriginal communities, intimate partner violence, domestic and family violence, sexual violence, lateral violence and broader community violence may not be clearly differentiated in everyday

understanding. Violence can be experienced as part of a wider network of family, kinship and community conflict. Effective support for victim-survivors must therefore:

- Address the broader community context rather than focusing narrowly on one legal category of violence.
- Challenge the normalisation of jealousy, controlling behaviour and victim-blaming.
- Recognise that victim-survivors remain connected to family and community relationships that affect whether they feel safe to disclose, seek help or participate in prevention activities.
- Recognise that structures such as community courts while showing promise, do not have a strong victim lens.

CatholicCare NT's integrated child and family service platforms provide practical examples of this whole-of-society approach. In several remote communities, CatholicCare NT delivers child and family support, youth programs, financial wellbeing services, child care, housing assistance and family violence prevention through one trusted local presence. These platforms allow staff to respond to victim-survivors in ways that reflect local relationships and realities, rather than asking people to navigate multiple disconnected services that may not exist locally.

The Second Action Plan should explicitly recognise and resource these integrated platforms as key enablers of safe, sustained support for victim-survivors, particularly in thin-market and remote settings.

Priority Area 2: Prevention and early intervention

Priority Area 2 emphasises embedding prevention and early intervention where people live, work, learn and connect, addressing gendered drivers of violence as well as broader influences such as trauma, harmful substance use, gambling and adverse childhood experiences.

In the Northern Territory, this requires:

- Treating community-led prevention as core infrastructure, not discretionary add-on activity, recognising that effective prevention reduces the enormous long-term financial, human and social costs of violence to individuals, families, communities and the systems that support them.
- Providing secure and sustainable funding for programs such as NO MORE that are embedded in communities, built strong recognition and trust over time, demonstrated their ability to make a difference, and continued to evolve and reinvent themselves to remain current, relevant and responsive.
- Ensuring flexible funding for place-based models that combine family support, community development and violence prevention, rather than siloed program streams.

Over almost two decades, NO MORE has demonstrated the importance of sustained, community-led prevention. Awareness of NO MORE is approximately 94 per cent across the Northern Territory, and the program has deliberately shifted from awareness-raising to practical education, community-owned action and capacity-building.

NO MORE works with Elders, Traditional Owners, community leaders and local organisations to:

- Facilitate local conversations about behaviour, relationships, responsibility and community safety.
- Support communities to develop their own domestic and family violence action plans.

- Provide ongoing support and tools so that prevention is led by people who understand local language, culture and relationships.

This work is inherently preventive and place-based. It reaches people where they live, work, learn and connect – in communities, workplaces, schools, sporting clubs and local organisations – and helps them translate the National Plan's principles into practical actions in their own context.

The Second Action Plan should:

- Provide long-term, predictable funding for community-led prevention programs.
- Recognise that prevention is not achieved through one-off campaigns or education sessions, but through repeated engagement and reinforcement over many years.
- Ensure national funding rules do not unintentionally displace or dismantle existing prevention capability during program redesign.

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

Priority Area 3 centres children and young people's voices, rights and safety across prevention, early intervention, response and recovery, and includes young people who use violence.

CatholicCare NT's experience in remote communities reinforces the need to:

- Recognise children and young people as rights-holders and victim-survivors in their own right, not only in relation to adult victims or perpetrators.
- Provide age-appropriate, culturally safe education about respectful relationships, gender equality, online safety and harm.
- Offer practical support for young people who are using violence or who are at risk of doing so, including in intimate relationships.

In many remote communities, youth services, schools and community programs are the main points of contact for children and young people. CatholicCare NT has used integrated service models to:

- Embed respectful relationships and safety education into existing youth and family programs.
- Provide support to young people who use violence in ways that recognise their own trauma histories, exposure to violence, and family context.
- Work with families to strengthen communication, boundaries and safety.

The Second Action Plan should ensure that:

- Children and young people's prevention and early intervention needs are built into integrated child and family service platforms, not treated as separate or optional.
- Funding models support long-term youth-focused prevention and early intervention in remote communities, including programs that address online misogyny, harmful content and peer dynamics.
- Program design recognises the relationship between child safety, family functioning and broader community conflict, rather than treating these as separate issues.

Priority Area 4: People who use violence – behaviour change and accountability

Priority Area 4 focuses on people who use violence, emphasising earlier identification, multi-sector approaches to accountability and behaviour change across the life course. For the Northern Territory, particularly remote Aboriginal communities, this requires men's behaviour change work that is both gender-informed and trauma-informed, culturally grounded, and practically feasible in thin-market settings.

CatholicCare NT delivers men's behaviour change programs that:

- Are evidence-based, drawing on Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT) and Ziegler's model, which emphasise psychological flexibility, values-based behaviour and accountability.
- Address the gendered drivers of violence, including power, control and entitlement, while also recognising the impacts of trauma, loss, racism, poverty, substance use and incarceration in men's lives.
- Work with men in the context of their families and communities, acknowledging that many families choose to remain together and need safe, accountable support for change.

When first developed, these approaches raised questions about whether they were "gender-based enough". Over time, evidence and practice experience have demonstrated that programs which combine a gender lens with attention to trauma, values, responsibility and family context are more relevant and effective for many men, especially in remote and regional settings. They support men to:

- Take responsibility for their behaviour and its impacts on women, children and family members.
- Develop practical strategies for behaviour change that are grounded in their own values, culture and relationships.
- Engage in ongoing support rather than one-off interventions.

Consistency and predictability are critical. CatholicCare NT's men's behaviour change programs continued throughout COVID-19 disruptions and periods of unrest in some communities. This continuity has:

- Built trust and reliability, showing men and families that support will be there week after week.
- Allowed group relationships to deepen, with men supporting and challenging each other over time.
- Created a sense of shared strength and recovery, where men can see change occurring in themselves and their peers.

The Second Action Plan should:

- Support a diversity of men's behaviour change models, including programs for young men, fathers, whole families and community-based men's groups, alongside formal perpetrator interventions.
- Recognise that effective programs must be contemporary and responsive, not limited to one program model; they should remain evidence-based while evolving to reflect new insights about trauma, culture and context.
- Invest in co-designed and locally led men's programs in Aboriginal communities, with strong involvement from Elders, Traditional Owners and Aboriginal organisations.

- Ensure that national quality and risk frameworks for perpetrator interventions accommodate innovative, trauma-informed and culturally grounded models, while maintaining strong accountability and safety for women and children.

Priority Area 5: System integration and workforce

Priority Area 5 focuses on system integration and workforce: safe and effective prevention, early intervention, response and long-term recovery drawing on an integrated system and a connected, skilled workforce. In the Northern Territory, effective integration and workforce development depend on:

- Recognising integrated service hubs as system anchors in thin-market and remote contexts.
- Ensuring that Commonwealth program redesign processes, including the CaFS reform, explicitly assess and mitigate unintended impacts on prevention and early intervention capacity.
- Accounting for the higher costs and logistical challenges of operating in remote communities, including travel, recruitment, retention and supervision.

CaFS is proposed to replace five existing grant programs under the Families and Children (FaC) Activity, including the Specialist Family Violence Services (SFVS) stream. CatholicCare NT is concerned that narrowing the CaFS model may lead to:

- Removal or erosion of specialist family violence prevention and early intervention functions currently embedded in integrated child and family service platforms.
- Increased fragmentation between child and family services, family violence prevention, men's behaviour change and community development.
- Loss of trusted relationships and local capability during the transition between old and new program settings.

To avoid these outcomes, the Second Action Plan should:

- Explicitly recognise that in jurisdictions such as the Northern Territory, integrated and flexible community service models are often the only realistic infrastructure available to undertake prevention and early intervention work.
- Require Commonwealth agencies to use implementation feasibility tests in thin-market and remote settings when redesigning programs and determining funding recipients, including specific consideration of how changes will affect prevention, early intervention and men's behaviour change capacity.
- Support transitional or bridging arrangements where existing prevention or behaviour change activity is at risk of winding down before new arrangements are in place.

Align commissioning for the National Plan, Our Ways – Strong Ways – Our Voices, Safe and Supported and related national strategies so that communities experience a coordinated rather than fragmented service response.

Workforce capability is central. The Second Action Plan should invest in:

- Training, supervision and support for mainstream and generalist services to identify and respond to family, domestic and sexual violence.

- Local Aboriginal workforce development, including roles for Elders, Traditional Owners and community leaders in prevention, education and behaviour change work.
- Practical tools such as the NO MORE Domestic Violence Action Plan Builder, which helps organisations identify realistic actions, assign responsibility, monitor progress and strengthen their response over time.

Recommendations

CatholicCare NT recommends that the Second Action Plan:

Priority Area 1 – Victim-survivors: Explicitly recognise integrated child, family and community service platforms as key enablers of safe, sustained support for victim-survivors in remote and regional settings.

Priority Area 2 – Prevention and early intervention: Commit to long-term funding models that support community-led, culturally safe and place-based prevention approaches, especially in Aboriginal communities, including secure investment in programs such as NO MORE.

Priority Area 3 – Children and young people: Ensure prevention and early intervention for children and young people – including those who use violence – is embedded in integrated child and family service platforms and tailored to the realities of remote communities.

Priority Area 4 – People who use violence: Invest in diverse, contemporary men's behaviour change models that are evidence-based, gender-informed and trauma-informed, including programs for young men, fathers, families and community-based men's groups, and support their continuity and predictability in remote communities.

Priority Area 5 – System integration and workforce: Require Commonwealth program redesign processes, including CaFS reform, to assess and mitigate unintended impacts on prevention and early intervention capacity; support transitional arrangements; strengthen mainstream service capability; and align commissioning across the National Plan, Our Ways – Strong Ways – Our Voices, Safe and Supported and related strategies.

CatholicCare NT supports the development of a Second Action Plan that is practical, evidence-informed, and grounded in the realities of service delivery. The next phase of national action should not only set ambitious priorities but also ensure that the community-based platforms needed to deliver prevention, early intervention, men's behaviour change and victim-survivor support are protected and strengthened.

Without that alignment, there is a risk that local capacity will decline at the same time national expectations are increasing. With sustained funding, integrated service platforms, community-led prevention, contemporary behaviour change programs and a strengthened mainstream workforce, the Second Action Plan can make a tangible difference to the safety and wellbeing of women, children, families and communities across the Northern Territory and Australia.

Case Study - NO MORE

Consistency, community leadership and long-term social change.

Over almost two decades, NO MORE has demonstrated the importance of sustained, recognisable and community-led prevention. Awareness of NO MORE is now approximately 94 per cent across the Northern Territory. However, the program's work has not remained focused on awareness raising. Approximately ten years ago, NO MORE began a deliberate shift towards stronger community-led action, practical education and capacity-building.

This long-term consistency is one of the program's greatest strengths. Preventing violence is not achieved through a one-off campaign, a single education session or a short-term funding cycle. Nor should it be understood simply as a slow burn in which change will occur without continued effort. It requires deliberate repetition, education, engagement and reinforcement over many years.

Societal change takes time because it involves challenging and unpicking attitudes, cultural expectations, gender norms and behaviours that have been entrenched over generations and, in some cases, centuries. These norms continue to be reinforced through families, peer groups, institutions, media and online environments. The increasing influence of misogynistic online content, right-wing influencers and the "manosphere" presents an additional and rapidly evolving challenge, particularly for children and young people.

These influences do not affect every community in the same way. Prevention approaches must therefore avoid assuming that the same messages, tools or delivery models will be equally relevant across metropolitan, regional and remote settings.

In some remote Aboriginal communities, intimate partner violence, domestic and family violence, sexual violence, lateral violence and broader community violence may not be clearly differentiated in everyday community understanding. Violence can be experienced as part of a wider network of family, kinship and community conflict. Effective prevention and early intervention must therefore be able to address the broader community context rather than focusing narrowly on one category of violence in isolation.

This can include challenging the normalisation of jealousy and controlling behaviour, addressing victim-blaming, and responding to revenge or retaliation directed at victim-survivors. It also requires recognising that a person experiencing intimate partner or family violence may remain connected to broader family and community relationships that affect whether they feel safe to disclose, seek help or participate in prevention activities.

Approaches that separate intimate partner violence, sexual violence and community violence into disconnected program areas may make sense administratively, but they do not always reflect how violence is understood or experienced locally. Place-based prevention must be flexible enough to respond to the relationships between these forms of violence while maintaining a clear focus on the safety, dignity and rights of victim-survivors.

Education for children and young people is essential, but sustainable change cannot be achieved by placing responsibility on younger generations alone. In remote Aboriginal communities, Elders, Traditional Owners and other locally respected leaders are often best placed to guide conversations about behaviour,

relationships, responsibility and community safety. Their authority, knowledge and relationships give them a level of influence that an external worker or short-term visiting service cannot replicate.

This is where NO MORE's community development approach is particularly valuable. NO MORE works with the strengths, leadership and relationships that already exist within communities. It supports Elders, Traditional Owners, community leaders, local organisations and other trusted people to identify concerns, lead conversations and develop solutions that make sense within their own community. The role of NO MORE is not to enter communities with a predetermined answer. It is to provide education, practical tools, facilitation and ongoing support so that local people are increasingly equipped to lead the work themselves. This strengthens community ownership and ensures prevention messages are communicated by people who understand the local context, language, relationships and cultural authority.

This capacity-building approach is particularly important given the extreme costs of operating in remote communities, the shortage of skilled workers and the absence or limited availability of specialist services in many locations. Visiting services will continue to be needed, but they cannot provide the consistency or daily community influence required to create lasting change. Investment in local leadership and capability is therefore both a prevention strategy and a practical response to workforce and service shortages. It allows knowledge and action to remain within communities between visits, reduces reliance on external specialists and strengthens the ability of communities create their own solutions, and identify and respond to harmful attitudes and behaviours early.

Consistency must also be understood as a core part of effective practice. Trusted relationships, community confidence and local leadership can take years to develop but can be quickly lost when programs are interrupted, funding is withdrawn or experienced staff are no longer able to return. Governments should not fund community prevention as a succession of isolated projects. Long-term and predictable investment is needed to maintain relationships, repeat key messages, support local leaders and build on progress over time.

The next phase of NO MORE's work will continue this progression from awareness to practical action. This includes the development of an online Domestic Violence Action Plan Builder, which will help organisations identify realistic actions, assign responsibility, monitor progress and strengthen their response over time. NO MORE is also exploring further tools and resources for grassroots organisations, sporting clubs, businesses and industries such as construction. These resources are intended to help people and organisations outside the formal domestic and family violence service system understand the role they can play. They do not ask community members, employers or sporting organisations to become specialist services. Instead, they equip them to recognise harmful attitudes and behaviours, create safer organisational cultures, support appropriate responses and take practical action within their own sphere of influence.

The greatest opportunity for the Second Action Plan is to strengthen this broader prevention workforce: the Elders, Traditional Owners, parents, coaches, employers, teachers, community leaders, workers and peers who shape attitudes and behaviours every day. Specialist services remain essential, but ending violence will require far more people outside the formal system to be supported and equipped to contribute safely and effectively.

The Second Action Plan should therefore recognise that sustained prevention depends on:

- Consistent and repeated engagement over many years, rather than one-off campaigns or education sessions;
- Secure funding that protects trusted relationships and established community prevention infrastructure;
- Prevention approaches tailored to the different realities of metropolitan, regional and remote communities;
- Investment in Elders, Traditional Owners and other local leaders to guide education and community action;
- Flexible approaches that recognise the relationship between intimate partner violence, family violence, sexual violence, lateral violence and broader community conflict;
- Practical tools and resources, with ongoing implementation support for organisations and individuals outside the specialist service system; and
- Prevention strategies that respond to emerging online misogyny and harmful social influences without assuming those influences operate in the same way in every community.