



Building Safety, Equality and Hope

Submission to the Australian Government on the Second Action Plan (2022–2032)

National Plan to End Violence Against Women and Children 2022–2032

Prepared by:

Central Coast Domestic Violence Committee

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Introduction

The Central Coast Domestic Violence Committee welcomes the opportunity to provide a submission to the development of the Second Action Plan under the National Plan to End Violence Against Women and Children 2022–2032.

The Committee represents organisations, practitioners and stakeholders committed to improving responses to domestic, family and sexual violence across the Central Coast region of New South Wales. Our submission is informed by the experience of frontline services supporting women, children and families, and by the realities faced by communities experiencing increasing demand, housing pressures and service constraints and most importantly the voices of those with lived experience.

The Committee acknowledges the significant work undertaken through the initiation phase of the National Plan. However, the continuing prevalence and impact of violence against women and children demonstrates that Australia must now move beyond incremental improvement towards deeper structural reform.

Women and children cannot wait a generation for safety.

While ending violence may be a generational ambition, creating safety must be an immediate responsibility.

The Second Action Plan provides an opportunity to strengthen Australia's response by recognising that domestic and family violence is not solely a justice or crisis-services issue. It is also shaped by housing policy, economic security, gender inequality, access to services, community infrastructure and the capacity of systems to respond effectively.

The Committee believes that ending violence requires a whole-of-government commitment to creating the conditions in which women and children can live safely, independently and with dignity.

Executive Summary

The Central Coast Domestic Violence Committee strongly supports the National Plan's vision of ending violence against women and children.

However, achieving this vision requires governments to recognise that violence is preventable and that prevention requires more than responding after harm has occurred.

Women experiencing violence often face impossible choices. Many cannot leave because there is nowhere safe and affordable to go. Many experience economic abuse that limits their independence. Many children experience ongoing trauma because appropriate supports are unavailable or delayed.

The Committee recommends that the Second Action Plan prioritise:

1. Housing as a fundamental safety measure, recognising that safe, affordable housing is essential for women and children escaping violence.
2. Long-term sustainable funding for specialist services, ensuring frontline organisations can provide timely, trauma-informed support.
3. Women's economic security as violence prevention, including stronger income support, employment pathways and responses to financial abuse.
4. Recognition of children as victim-survivors in their own right, with dedicated recovery supports.
5. Greater investment in primary prevention, addressing gender inequality and the attitudes, behaviours and structures that enable violence.
6. A stronger regional response, ensuring communities outside metropolitan areas receive equitable access to services.
7. Improved accountability for perpetrators, while ensuring resources for perpetrator responses do not reduce investment in victim-survivor services.
8. Transparent measurement of outcomes, including safety, recovery, housing stability and wellbeing.

The Committee believes the Second Action Plan must move Australia from managing violence towards preventing and ultimately ending it.

Gender Equality Must Remain at the Centre of Prevention

The Committee supports the National Plan's recognition that gender inequality is a key driver of violence against women.

Violence does not occur in isolation. It is influenced by broader social conditions, including unequal access to economic opportunity, harmful gender stereotypes, rigid expectations about relationships and unequal distribution of power.

Prevention therefore requires long-term investment in changing the conditions that allow violence to occur.

Governments should continue to invest in:

- respectful relationships education;
- community-based prevention programs;
- workplace gender equality initiatives;
- programs challenging harmful attitudes and behaviours;
- engaging men and boys in prevention; and
- addressing emerging forms of misogyny and online harm.

Prevention funding should be regarded as essential social infrastructure, not a discretionary initiative.

The question for governments is not whether prevention is valuable. The question is whether Australia is prepared to invest at the scale required.

Safety Requires a Home: Housing is Violence Prevention

For many women and children, the greatest barrier to leaving violence is not the absence of courage—it is the absence of safe housing.

Women escaping violence should not be forced to choose between remaining in an unsafe relationship and homelessness.

Housing is not simply a homelessness response. It is a violence prevention strategy.

The Committee urges governments to recognise safe housing as essential safety infrastructure.

The Second Action Plan should include:

- significant investment in crisis accommodation;
- expansion of transitional and social housing;
- dedicated pathways into permanent housing for victim-survivors;
- improved rental assistance and financial supports;
- priority access mechanisms for women and children escaping violence; and
- regional housing investment reflecting local need.

The current system often requires women to leave their homes, communities, employment and children's networks, while perpetrators frequently remain connected to the family home.

Reducing the "cost of leaving" must become a central policy objective.

A woman escaping violence should not lose her safety, security and future because the systems designed to support her cannot respond.

Economic Security is Violence Prevention

Economic abuse is one of the most common forms of coercive control.

Many victim-survivors leave relationships with limited financial resources, debt, disrupted employment histories and reduced access to economic opportunity.

Financial independence is one of the strongest protective factors against returning to violence.

The Second Action Plan should strengthen women's economic security through:

- adequate income support;
- emergency financial assistance;
- affordable childcare;
- employment and training pathways;
- support for women rebuilding careers after violence;
- recognition of financial abuse in policy and service responses; and
- stronger protections against economic exploitation.

Governments should recognise that economic policy is also safety policy.

A woman cannot build a safe future without the resources to sustain it.

Specialist Services Must Be Funded as Essential Infrastructure

Specialist domestic, family and sexual violence services are central to Australia's response. These services provide expertise that cannot be replicated by generalist systems. However, many specialist organisations continue to operate under increasing demand, workforce shortages and uncertain funding arrangements.

The Committee recommends:

- multi-year funding agreements;
- funding models reflecting increasing demand and population growth;
- investment in workforce development;
- improved remuneration and retention strategies;
- professional supervision and wellbeing supports; and
- increased access to specialist services in regional communities.

Short-term funding cycles undermine service stability and make workforce retention increasingly difficult.

Governments should recognise that specialist services are not temporary crisis responses—they are essential community infrastructure.

Children Are Victim-Survivors

Children exposed to domestic and family violence are not merely witnesses.

They experience violence directly.

Exposure to coercive control, fear and instability can have lifelong impacts on children's development, health, education and relationships.

The Second Action Plan must strengthen recognition of children as victim-survivors in their own right.

Priority actions should include:

- increased access to trauma-informed therapeutic support;
- dedicated children's domestic violence workers;
- stronger partnerships with schools and early childhood services;
- early intervention programs; and
- support for adolescents experiencing family violence.

Ending intergenerational cycles of violence requires investing in children's recovery, safety and hope.

Regional Australia Must Not Be an Afterthought

The Central Coast experience demonstrates the importance of ensuring national policy reflects regional realities.

Regional communities often experience:

- higher service access barriers;
- workforce shortages;
- limited specialist availability;
- transport challenges;
- housing pressures; and
- rapidly increasing demand.

Regional women should not receive reduced access to safety because of geography.

Funding models should recognise regional disadvantage, population growth and service delivery challenges.

The Committee recommends that the Second Action Plan establish stronger regional equity measures, ensuring women and children outside metropolitan areas have access to timely, specialist and culturally appropriate support.

Accountability, Justice and System Reform

Victim-survivors must be able to trust that systems designed to protect them will respond effectively.

The Committee supports continued improvement in:

- trauma-informed policing;
- specialist courts;
- responses to coercive control;
- recognition of technology-facilitated abuse;
- legal assistance; and
- perpetrator accountability.

Perpetrators must be held responsible for their actions.

However, investment in perpetrator interventions must never occur at the expense of services supporting victim-survivors.

The safety, dignity and recovery of women and children must remain the central priority.

Priority Recommendations

The Central Coast Domestic Violence Committee recommends that the Second Action Plan:

1. Establish a national commitment to safe housing pathways for women and children escaping violence.
 2. Increase investment in social and affordable housing.
 3. Provide long-term funding certainty for specialist services.
 4. Develop a national specialist domestic violence workforce strategy.
 5. Recognise economic security as a core violence prevention strategy.
 6. Strengthen responses to economic abuse and coercive control.
 7. Expand prevention programs addressing gender inequality.
 8. Recognise children as victim-survivors in their own right.
 9. Increase therapeutic supports for children affected by violence.
 10. Improve regional access to specialist services.
 11. Embed lived experience in policy development and evaluation.
 12. Strengthen accountability measures and transparent reporting.
 13. Ensure all reforms are inclusive of Aboriginal women, women with disability, culturally diverse women, migrant women and other communities experiencing additional barriers.
 14. Measure success through improved safety, recovery and wellbeing outcomes—not only service activity.
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Conclusion

The Central Coast Domestic Violence Committee believes Australia has the knowledge, evidence and capacity required to significantly reduce violence against women and children.

The challenge before governments is not whether change is possible.

It is whether governments are prepared to invest at the scale required.

The success of the Second Action Plan should not ultimately be measured by the number of strategies published or programs funded.

It should be measured by the number of women who no longer have to choose between violence and homelessness, the number of children who grow up free from fear, and the number of communities where equality is reflected not only in policy but in everyday life.

Every woman deserves the freedom to build her future without fear.

Every child deserves to grow up knowing that home is a place of safety, not violence.

Achieving that vision is not beyond Australia's reach.

It is a matter of national choice, sustained commitment and collective courage.

The Central Coast Domestic Violence Committee urges all governments to seize the opportunity presented by the Second Action Plan to build a safer, more equal Australia—for this generation and the next.

Again, thank you for the opportunity to submit to the review.

Kind regards,

[Redacted signature]

[Redacted name]

Central Coast Domestic Violence Committee

Central Coast, NSW.