

Monash Council Submission to Second Action Plan Consultation

National Plan to End Violence against Women and Children 2022-2032

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Monash Council Context

The City of Monash is a culturally diverse municipality in the south-east suburbs of Melbourne. Monash is home to around 209,200 residents, making us one of the most populous municipalities in Victoria.

Monash Council has a long history of working towards greater gender equality, diversity, inclusion, and the prevention of family violence and all forms of violence against women. We promote gender equality in everything we do – from policies to the physical environment, our culture, council services, and community work.



Given the vast number of services that Monash Council provides to our community, from maternal, child and family health services, early childhood and childcare, youth services, community safety, aquatic and leisure services and recreation services, aged and community support, arts, festivals, and library services to name a few, we have a role in primary prevention, intervention, and response. Given Council is a large employer, we also have responsibilities to our staff.

We believe that local governments around the country are in a similar position, and this should be acknowledged under the National Plan to End Violence Against Women and Children.

In response to the questions in the consultation, we outline examples of some of the work that Council does already over the spectrum from primary prevention to response, and some actions that would assist this work further.

Prevention

1. What actions can governments, workplaces, industries, schools, families and individuals take to stop violence before it starts?

The National Plan focuses on Australian Government services and systems, and services state and territory governments deliver (Appendix 2: roles and responsibilities). However, there is considerable scope for local governments across the country to deliver a range of services that align with the National Plan, including primary prevention initiatives.

As the level of government closest to community, and a major local employer, local councils play a significant role in several primary prevention activities.

At Monash Council, this has included for many years work such as:

- Advocacy and awareness raising e.g. holding community and staff events for International Women's Day, International Day Against Homophobia, Biphobia, Intersex Discrimination and Transphobia (IDAHOBIT), and 16 Days of Activism Against Gender Based Violence;
- Providing free capacity building workshops and training for community and staff including Active Bystander Training, Responding to Disclosures Training;
- Applying a gender lens to all our work (now a legislative obligation in Victoria under the *Gender Equality Act 2020*) and ensuring that our policies, programs, and services are gender equitable and consider impacts on people experiencing family violence;
- Providing mandatory training for all our staff on Equality and Respect, including an understanding of Family Violence and the link to gender inequality as well as equal opportunity and anti-discrimination, preventing bullying, harassment, and sexual harassment;
- Our Councillors undertaking gender equity, family violence and primary prevention training themselves, and advocating to state government ministers that further funding and mandatory training is rolled out in this space across all councils;

- Funding community organisations working to promote gender equality through our Community Grants program, including asking each organisation applying for funding to outline the reach of their program by gender and focus on our priority cohorts, and whether their project has a gender equity focus;
- Acknowledging the work of community leaders in gender equity through our annual Inspirational Women's Leadership Award;
- Convening a Gender Equity Advisory Committee made up of community members, local organisations, and Councillors, that provide gender equity and primary prevention advice to Council;
- Providing advice and support to local businesses on gender equality and family violence, and including gender equity requirements into our procurement processes;
- Working in different settings with our community such as sports clubs, playgroups, and with faith-based organisations, to promote gender equality.

The Victorian government's *Gender Equality Act 2020* strengthened council's gender equity work. This legislative obligation to promote gender equality has created a significant change to the way that we think about our work in Victoria and embeds primary prevention in all areas in which we work. For example, through the *Gender Equality Act 2020* obligations we have included actions relating to gender equity and addressing historical gender imbalances in policies and services as varied as Council's:

- CCTV Policy
- Community Safety Framework
- Health and Wellbeing Plan;
- Financial Hardship Policy
- Library Collections Policy
- Leasing and Licencing Policy
- Plaques and Memorials Policy
- Playground and Playspace Strategy
- Procurement Policy
- Signage Design Standards
- Waste Service Charge

Whilst Monash Council has been proactive in funding gender equity and other diversity and inclusion roles on a permanent basis, much of the project work outside 'business as usual' has often only been made possible through short-term funding opportunities, largely from state government grants and partnerships. For example, our work was considerably strengthened - and the reach into community was broadened - through Victorian government Free From Violence Local Government Program funding between 2022-2025. Whilst welcomed, the short-term nature of funding in the primary prevention space is one of the biggest issues with sustainability of the work.

Even when funding via grants is available for longer periods (such as five years), an unintended consequence of the requirement to have fixed term contracts end after 2 years means that it is difficult to staff a project over a longer fixed term.

Recommended actions include:

- Recognition of the work that occurs in primary prevention through local councils across the country;
- Mandatory gender equality, family violence, equal opportunity and anti-discrimination, and prevention of bullying and sexual harassment training embedded in workplaces, alongside policies and guidelines;
- Introducing gender equality legislation across other states and territories, similar to the Victorian *Gender Equality Act 2020*, and as a result requiring a gender equality lens over all public policies, programs and services;
- Ensuring that the Action Plan continues to be intersectional in its approach, for example:
 - that it explicitly recognises elder abuse as part of the national response to family, domestic, sexual and gender-based violence, and aligns implementation with the *National Plan to End the Abuse and Mistreatment of Older People 2026–2036*; and
- When funding primary prevention initiatives, ensuring funding is available over a longer time frame to give culture change greater hope of being embedded and sustained over time.

Services and support

2. How can services and supports work better for people who have experienced, or are at risk of experiencing, family, domestic or sexual violence?

Some Council services work in or closely aligned to the response sector, and directly support people experiencing family, domestic or sexual violence.

For example, Monash Council's Maternal and Child Health (MCH) Service works directly with new parents, providing a schedule of 10 key 'Age and Stage' appointments for families including a home visit after birth. This is a critical time for family violence risk, and our staff are trained under the Multi Agency Risk Assessment and Management (MARAM) Framework.

Drawing on MCH practice and MARAM principles, **services can improve by:**

- **Embedding MARAM-aligned risk assessment and management**
Consistent use of MARAM ensures a shared understanding of risk, structured screening, and appropriate responses across services. This supports early identification and coordinated intervention.
- **Strengthening integrated service responses**
MCH services play a key role as a *universal service* with early and sustained contact. Strong referral pathways with family violence services, Child Protection, mental health, and community supports are critical for timely, coordinated care.

- **Prioritising trauma-informed and culturally safe practice**
MCH guidelines emphasise respectful, non-judgemental engagement. Services should recognise the impacts of trauma, ensure cultural safety (particularly for Aboriginal families), and tailor responses to diverse communities.
- **Improving continuity of care**
Trusting relationships (a cornerstone of MCH practice) increase disclosure. Continuity enables practitioners to monitor risk over time, consistent with MARAM's focus on dynamic risk.
- **Enhancing workforce capability**
Ongoing training in MARAM, including recognising coercive control and non-physical violence, ensures practitioners are confident in identification, documentation, and referral.
- **Flexible and accessible service delivery**
Outreach, home visiting, telehealth, and flexible appointment times help reduce barriers, particularly for those experiencing control or isolation.

Monash Council also supports older people, and the service system should better recognise that older victim-survivors may not present to specialist family violence services first. They may disclose to councils, libraries, neighbourhood houses, aged care providers, health services, legal services, banks, or trusted community works.

Therefore, actions focused on but not limited to older victim-survivors should include:

- Clear referral pathways between family violence, elder abuse, aged care, health, legal, financial counselling and community services.
- Specialist elder abuse capability within family violence systems.
- Training for non-specialist workforces to identify and respond to elder abuse safely.
- Service models that recognise financial abuse, psychological abuse, neglect, coercive control and misuse of decision-making authority.
- Practical support with housing, finances, legal issues, aged care navigation, and safety planning.

Council's Monash Youth Services provides free and confidential services to young people and the wider community including support workers, youth development and participation programs, events and workshops, and homelessness outreach to our wider community. Unfortunately, we have found that young people aged 16–25 who present to our service experiencing family violence often have limited support options. Their needs frequently fall between child or family focussed, or adult-specific services. Some young people are living independently, others are experiencing homelessness, and many remain in unsafe home environments. In our local area, there is a **clear need for services that can provide:**

- Youth-friendly, culturally safe, and LGBTIQ+ inclusive family violence-specific counselling; and
- Youth-specific case management for those who need to leave the family home due to violence.

Supporting children and young people

3. How can communities and services best support children and young people to stay safe from violence?

Local councils interact with children and young people from just after birth until age 25, firstly through Maternal Child Health visits just after birth, then via our various Youth Services Programs, our Active Monash programs including Learn to Swim, our libraries, and through partnerships with schools and other community organisations such as sports clubs.

From a Maternal Child Health perspective and aligned with MARAM actions include:

- **Keep the child at the centre of practice**
MARAM emphasises that children are victim survivors in their own right. MCH services should assess the direct impact of violence on children's safety, wellbeing, and development. We are mandatory reports so we must also act on any risk we form a belief that the child may be experiencing.
- **Early identification through universal services**
MCH nurses are uniquely positioned to observe and assess developmental, relational, and environmental indicators of harm during our Key Age and Stage Visits.
- **Strengthen protective parenting**
Supporting the non-offending parent (often the mother) improves outcomes for children. MCH guidelines emphasise building parental capacity and safety planning.
- **Information sharing for safety (MARAM Information Sharing Schemes)**
Appropriate sharing of risk-relevant information between services supports informed decision-making and coordinated protection.
- **Safe environments in community settings**
Schools, early childhood services, and community programs should be equipped to recognise signs of trauma and respond safely and consistently.
- **Child voice and participation**
Where appropriate, ensuring children's experiences are heard aligns with both child-safe principles and MARAM's recognition of children's lived experience.

Consideration should be given to implementing the MARAM Framework beyond Victoria.

From a broader perspective, we must **create genuinely child-safe organisations**. Communities must move beyond compliance and actively create cultures of safety. This includes actions such as:

- Embedding nationally consistent Child Safe Standards, Screening and Reporting Schemes across all sectors where children are involved.
- Strong leadership prioritising child safety.

- Clear behavioural expectations and supervision.
- Safe physical and online environments.

Working with Children Checks (WWCCs) remain important but are insufficient alone. They:

- Are point-in-time assessments identifying only known risks.
- Do not capture grooming or emerging behaviours.
- Differ across jurisdictions- nationally consistent approach required.

Screening should be understood as one safeguard, not a guarantee of safety.

Building capable, supported workforces

All adults working with children must be equipped to recognise and respond to harm. Key actions include:

- Nationally consistent, mandatory safeguarding training.
- Skills to identify early warning signs, including grooming and coercive control.
- Trauma-informed, child-centred practice.

Embed consistent body safety education

Children and families should be supported through:

- Developmentally appropriate body safety education from early childhood
- Teaching consent, boundaries, recognising unsafe behaviour, and help-seeking.
- Supporting parents to reinforce these messages at home

Current delivery is inconsistent, leaving gaps in children's ability to recognise and disclose harm themselves.

Strengthen early intervention

Communities are critical for identifying and responding to risk early. This requires:

- Investment in accessible, local support services
- Strong connections between governments, schools, health, and community services

The current system remains overly focused on crisis response.

Improve coordination across services

Better protection requires:

- Shared risk assessment approaches
- Timely, appropriate information sharing that is consistently utilised to a high standard.

Fragmentation across systems continues to limit effectiveness.

Ensure safe pathways for children to speak up

Children must be able to safely disclose concerns. Services should:

- Provide accessible reporting pathways.
- Ensure children know who to talk to
- Create environments where children feel heard and believed.
- Respond promptly to concerns.

What Needs to Change

To enable communities and services to protect children effectively:

- National consistency in safeguarding standards, obligations, screening and regulation.
- Reduced reliance on screening tools alone
- Increased investment in statutory and community services
- Sustainable workforce development

We also need to recognise the importance of respectful relationships education promoting respect across the life course. For example, for children and young people **actions could include:**

- Education that challenges ageism and promotes respectful relationships with older family members;
- Recognition that children and young people may witness abuse of grandparents or older relatives; and
- Support for young carers and families under stress, where caring responsibilities, financial pressure, or intergenerational conflict may increase risk.

People who use violence

4. What more can be done across the community to promote healthy, safe relationships and strengthen accountability for people who use violence?

Given the number of daily touchpoints with our community, councils have a range of tools to strengthen accountability for people who use violence. Some of these areas may not traditionally be seen as settings for this work. For example, our library team recently reviewed their Internet Use Policy to reflect fact that library computers must not be used to perpetrate any form of violence, including stalking, harassment, threats, coercive control, online hate, and image-based abuse. There are a range of consequences in the policy, from notification to relevant authorities to revoking access to facilities. This is particularly important given increasing anecdotal reports of increasing technology-facilitated abuse, including new issues relating to AI. For example, we have heard of AI being used to assist in the perpetration of violence, including weaponizing the language of counselling in order to gaslight victim-survivors.

Actions should include:

- Exploring all the tools available to governments of all levels to expand this work, including those that are not historically settings for this work. Requirements under the *Gender Equality Act 2020* have assisted in this work in Victoria.



Historically a lot of the work in primary prevention and response services has been undertaken by women and focused on women victim-survivors. Further investment and research in the Second Action Plan should focus on the best interventions for people who use violence.

This includes stronger attention to people who use violence against older people, including adult children, relatives, carers, partners and trusted others.

Actions should include:

- Targeted accountability approaches for perpetrators of abuse, including elder abuse.
- Behaviour change responses that address financial abuse, coercive control, intimidation, neglect and misuse of authority.
- Stronger safeguards around powers of attorney, supported decision-making and substitute decision-making.
- Responses that address contributing issues such as gambling, substance use, housing stress, financial dependence and carer stress, without excusing the abuse.

Our Youth Services team understands that schools are also reporting increasing concerns about harmful attitudes towards gender roles and growing engagement with the manosphere. There also continues to be a lack of inclusive sexual health education and resources for the LGBTIQ+ community.

Actions should include:

- Ongoing development and review of respectful relationships education programs; and
- Improving access to inclusive education to prevent sexual and gender-based violence.

As a workplace it is critical that policies, procedures, guidelines and training exists to support all staff and set an expectation of zero tolerance for gender-based violence.

Actions include:

- Presence and communication of policies such as Family Violence Support Policy, Positive Duty Framework, Preventing Sexual Harassment Policy and Procedure, Preventing Bullying and Harassment, and Equal Opportunity and Anti-Discrimination Policy.
- Ability to report incidents and risks in the workplace including through formal Grievance Policy and Procedure and Contact Officer programs.

Recovery and healing

5. What would make the biggest difference in helping people and families to recover and heal after being affected by family, domestic and sexual violence?

Recovery may look slightly different depending on a person's personal circumstances. For example, recovery for older victim-survivors should focus on restoring safety, dignity, autonomy, confidence and connection.

Actions should include:

- Trauma-informed counselling and recovery supports for older people.
- Social reconnection programs to reduce isolation after abuse.
- Legal, financial and housing support to rebuild independence.
- Recognition of the grief and complexity older people may experience when abuse is perpetrated by an adult child, partner, carer or trusted family member.
- Recovery pathways that are not solely digital and are accessible to people with mobility, language, cognitive or transport barriers.
- Support in navigating systems so that the mental load is reduced for victim survivors.

In the workplace it is important that people have knowledge that reports and/or disclosures will be handled discreetly and with due care and consideration. Having not just the entitlement to, but the understanding of and easy access to that entitlement, of leave including family violence leave is critical. Flexible work policies can also be of assistance.

Access to support

6. What makes it easier for people to access support or services related to family, domestic or sexual violence?

Monash Council is one of the most culturally diverse communities in Australia. Therefore, it is important that support and services are available in community languages and in a culturally safe way. For example, we developed simple posters for use in our community that build understanding of what constitutes family violence, and where to get support, and translated these into 10 of our community languages and Easy English.

Given that women from migrant and refugee backgrounds can be at greater risk of violence, we should also think about ensuring visa status is not a barrier to accessing supports including family violence programs.



Council is often seen as a trusted source of information, so we seek to raise awareness of supports and services in multiple places around the community, online on our website, and through communications with households through our newsletter that is delivered to every household in our municipality.

We also know that having safe third spaces that are local - such as libraries and neighbourhood houses - are critical places for people to find support or services. Given that people with disabilities are overrepresented in family violence statistics, it is crucial that these safe spaces are both physically accessible, and staff within them understanding how to respond to disclosures in a safe way.

Actions therefore include:

- Communicating key messages in different community languages, including in Easy English;
- Communication needs to use a variety of methods and channels to reach as many people in the community as possible;
- Reducing costs of programs and services and removing visa status as a barrier to entry;
- Ensuring physical and cultural accessibility when thinking about safe spaces.

For women accessing Maternal and Child Health (MCH) services, **key enablers include:**

- **Trusted universal entry points**
MCH services are often a first point of contact. Regular, non-judgemental contact increases opportunities for disclosure and engagement.
- **Safe and private environments for disclosure**
Consistent with MARAM guidance, access improves when individuals can speak confidentially without the presence of a perpetrator.
- **Clear, simple referral pathways**
Warm referrals, supported introductions, and follow-up improve engagement with specialist services.
- **Culturally appropriate and inclusive services**
Services must address barriers faced by Aboriginal families, culturally and linguistically diverse communities, people with disability, and LGBTQIA+ individuals through tailored approaches.
- **Reducing practical barriers**
Transport support, childcare, flexible hours, and low/no-cost services help overcome access challenges.
- **Building awareness and health literacy**
Providing information about family violence, rights, and available supports empowers individuals to seek help earlier.
- **Consistent, non-judgemental engagement**
MCH practice emphasises building trust over time. Feeling believed and supported is critical to ongoing engagement.

Constraints including staffing issues, funding and lack of support services can often hinder getting support. Referrals can often be slow and families do not always accept the support we offer and may disengage with services because of family violence.

For older people too, pathways into support must be accessible, trusted, and local. **Actions to enable this should include:**

- Face-to-face, phone-based and outreach options, not digital-only access.
- Information in community languages and accessible formats.
- Community-based entry points through councils, libraries, neighbourhood houses, seniors groups, health services, aged care providers and multicultural organisations.
- Stronger promotion of elder abuse support pathways, including 1800 ELDERHelp.
- Investment in local government's prevention and early intervention role, particularly through age-friendly communities, social connection, community education and trusted referral pathways.

Our young people often face long waitlists when accessing victim-survivor services. Whilst older people may prefer phone-based contact, for younger people engagement can be limited when services rely solely on private number phone calls. Expanding modes of engagement would support more effective connection with young people. **Actions should include:**

- Officering more accessible options such as text messaging or outreach appointments.

Summary of Recommended Actions

The above submission reflects some of the breadth of work that Monash Council does in the prevention, early intervention and response to family violence and all forms of violence against women.

Given the large number of recommendations, we also provide a summary of the key points in the table below.

Consultation Question	Recommended Action/s
1 (Prevention)	Incorporate recognition of the work that occurs in primary prevention through local councils across Australia..
1 (Prevention)	Embed mandatory gender equality, family violence, equal opportunity and anti-discrimination, and prevention of bullying and sexual harassment training in workplaces, alongside policies and guidelines.
1 (Prevention)	Introduce gender equality legislation and the requirement for Gender Impact Assessments across other states and territories to be in line with Victoria.
1 (Prevention)	Ensure that the Action Plan continues to be intersectional in its approach, for example that it explicitly recognises elder abuse as part of the national response to family, domestic, sexual and gender-based violence, and aligns implementation with the <i>National Plan to End the Abuse and Mistreatment of Older People 2026-2036</i> .

1 (Prevention)	When funding primary prevention initiatives, ensure this is available over a longer time frame to enable cultural change
2 (Services and Support)	For Maternal Child and Family Health: Embed MARAM-aligned risk assessment and management, strengthening integrated service responses, prioritising trauma-informed and culturally safe practice, improving continuity of care, enhancing workforce capability and flexible and service delivery.
2 (Services and Support)	For older victim survivors: Clear referral pathways between family violence, elder abuse, aged care, health, legal, financial counselling and community services; specialist elder abuse capability within family violence systems; training for non-specialist workforces to identify and respond to elder abuse safely; service models that recognise financial abuse, psychological abuse, neglect, coercive control and misuse of decision-making authority; practical support with housing, finances, legal issues, aged care navigation, and safety planning.
2 (Services and Support)	For younger people: youth-friendly, culturally safe, and LGBTIQ+ inclusive family violence-specific counselling; and youth-specific case management for those who need to leave the family home due to violence.
3 (Supporting children and young people)	To create genuinely child-safe organisations we must move beyond compliance and embed nationally consistent Standards, Screening and Reporting Schemes. Consider implementing the MARAM Framework beyond Victoria.
3 (Supporting children and young people)	Reduce reliance on screening tools alone, increase investment in statutory and community services, and sustainable workforce development.
3 (Supporting children and young people)	Promote respect across the life course including education that challenges ageism and promotes respectful relationships with older family members; recognition that children and young people may witness abuse of grandparents or older relatives; and support for young carers and families under stress.
4 (People who use violence)	Explore all the tools available to governments of all levels to expand this work, including those that are not historically settings for this work.
4 (People who use violence)	Further invest in research that focuses on the best interventions for people who use violence.
4 (People who use violence)	Create stronger safeguards around powers of attorney, supported decision-making and substitute decision-making.
4 (People who use violence)	Ongoing development and review of respectful relationships education programs and improving access to inclusive education to prevent sexual and gender-based violence.
4 (People who use violence)	Presence and communication of workplace policies and procedures that support prevention and inclusion; and Ability to report incidents and risks in the workplace including through formal Grievance Policy and Procedure and Contact Officer programs.

5 (Recovery and healing)	Recovery pathways that are not solely digital and are accessible to people with mobility, language, cognitive or transport barriers.
6 (Access to support)	Accessible communications including key messages in different community languages, including in Easy English; use a variety of methods and channels.
6 (Access to support)	Reduce the cost of support programs and services and remove visa status as a barrier to entry, along with considering transport support, childcare, flexible hours.
6 (Access to support)	Ensure physical and cultural accessibility when thinking about safe spaces and community-based entry points such as libraries, councils, neighbourhood houses, seniors' groups, health services, aged care providers and multicultural organisations.
6 (Access to support)	Invest in local government's prevention and early intervention roles.

Thank you for the opportunity to make a submission to this consultation on this critical Action Plan.

Contact Details

Any questions about this submission may be directed to Monash Council's Diversity Equity and Inclusion team:

[REDACTED]