



Australian Government – Department of Social Services
Email: Secondactionplan@dss.gov.au

Dear Team,

Thank you for the opportunity to contribute to the development of the Second Action Plan under the National Plan to End Violence Against Women and Children 2022–2032.

As Commissioner for Children and Young People in Western Australia, I have a statutory responsibility under the Commissioner for Children and Young People Act 2006 (WA) to advocate for the views of children and young people to be heard in decision making that affects them.

In undertaking my responsibilities as the Commissioner for Children and Young People, I must also have regard for the *United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child* (the UNCRC) which upholds the right of all children and young people to be protected from harm, to be safe, feel safe and be respected wherever they are, and to participate in decision making that affects them.

In this regard, a successful the Second Action Plan under the National Plan to End Violence Against Women and Children 2022–2032 is critical. Evidence shows that exposure to family, domestic and sexual violence has profound and lifelong impacts on children's health, wellbeing, education, relationships and development.

Around 40% of Australians report exposure to domestic violence between parents during childhood, and experiences of violence in childhood are associated with poorer mental health and increased risk of future victimisation and violence.

The Second Action Plan should therefore prioritise prevention, early intervention, recovery and accountability initiatives that improve outcomes for children and young people now, not only in adulthood.

Evidence from my consultations with Children and Young People reveal that they want to feel safe, be listened to, have trusted adults they can turn to, and receive support when problems first emerge rather than after a crisis occurs.

Young people also report concerns about online harms, bullying, mental health, family violence and the lack of accessible support services in their communities. These findings align with national evidence that exposure to violence during childhood can have profound and lifelong impacts on health, education, emotional wellbeing and future relationships.

This submission addresses consultation *Priority Area 3 – Children and Young People in Their Own Right* under the following questions:

1. What would make the biggest difference to improving safety, recovery and wellbeing outcomes for children and young people affected by this violence?

The biggest difference would be providing early, sustained and child-centred therapeutic support rather than relying on crisis responses. Too many children only receive assistance when risks have escalated or when they enter the child protection system.

A stronger focus on trauma-informed counselling, specialist recovery services, stable housing, school-based supports and culturally safe healing programs would improve long-term outcomes and reduce the intergenerational impacts of violence.

Children should have direct access to support services regardless of whether a parent engages with services.

2. How can governments, services, education settings, families, communities and others better recognise and respond to children and young people experiencing violence or harm?

Governments should embed children's rights, voices and experiences into all responses to family, domestic and sexual violence.

Schools, health services, youth services and community organisations are often the first places where children disclose harm, yet many professionals report lacking the confidence or capability to respond effectively.

Investment is needed to strengthen workforce capability, improve cross-sector information sharing, and ensure children are routinely identified as clients in their own right rather than being recorded solely as dependants of adult victim-survivors.

Particular attention is required for Aboriginal children, children with disability, children in care, and children living in regional and remote communities who often experience additional barriers to support.

3. What approaches are most effective in supporting children and young people who are using violence or displaying harmful sexual behaviours to take accountability, change behaviours, and reduce harm?

Evidence demonstrates that many young people who use violence have themselves experienced trauma, violence, abuse or significant adversity.

Responses should therefore balance accountability with therapeutic intervention.

Effective approaches should focus on understanding the underlying drivers of behaviour, supporting emotional regulation, strengthening family relationships where safe, and providing specialised interventions before harmful behaviours become entrenched.

Investment in early intervention programs for adolescents displaying harmful sexual behaviours, coercive behaviours or family violence is critical if Australia is to prevent future perpetration and disrupt cycles of intergenerational violence.

4. How should the Second Action Plan respond to current or emerging forms of harm affecting children and young people, including technology-facilitated abuse, harmful online content, and violence within peer and dating relationships?

The Second Action Plan must respond to the rapid growth of technology-facilitated abuse affecting children and young people.

Young people are increasingly exposed to harmful online content, misogynistic influencers, image-based abuse, online exploitation, deepfakes and peer-to-peer abuse. These harms are shaping attitudes towards gender, consent and relationships from an early age.

Schools, parents and communities require greater support to respond to these issues, while children and young people need accessible digital literacy, respectful relationships and online safety education.

Prevention efforts should be guided by young people's lived experience of digital environments.

5. How can children and young people be meaningfully involved in shaping the policies, programs and services that affect them?

Children and young people should not simply be consulted once; they should be genuine partners in designing policies, programs and services that affect them.

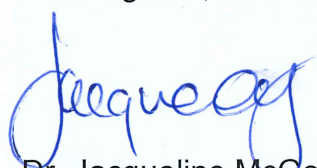
Child-focused consultations consistently demonstrates that young people want opportunities to contribute to decisions about their lives and communities.

The Second Action Plan should establish formal and ongoing mechanisms for engagement, including youth advisory groups, co-design processes and evaluation activities that seek direct feedback from children and young people.

Policies designed with children are more likely to meet their needs than policies designed for them.

In WA, the focus Second Action Plan should focus on the needs of children and young people in regional and remote communities. The family, domestic and sexual violence policies, programs and services should demonstrate how they improve outcomes for children and young people. Every action across prevention, early intervention, response, recovery and accountability should be assessed for its impact on children and young people.

Kind regards,



Dr. Jacqueline McGowan-Jones
Commissioner

 July 2026

References

1. Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW). *Children and Young People: Family, Domestic and Sexual Violence*. Updated 2026. Available at: <https://www.aihw.gov.au/family-domestic-and-sexual-violence/population-groups/children-and-young-people> [aihw.gov.au]
2. Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW). *Family, Domestic and Sexual Violence Summary*. Updated 2026. Available at: <https://www.aihw.gov.au/family-domestic-and-sexual-violence/resources/fdsv-summary> [aihw.gov.au]
3. Australian Child Maltreatment Study (ACMS). *Main Findings*. Available at: <https://www.acms.au/findings> [acms.au]
4. Australian Catholic University – Institute of Child Protection Studies. *Australian Child Maltreatment Study*. Available at: <https://www.acu.edu.au/about-acu/institutes-academies-and-centres/institute-of-child-protection-studies/our-research/current-projects/australian-child-maltreatment-study> [acu.edu.au]
5. Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA). *Respectful Relationships – Australian Curriculum*. Available at: <https://www.australiancurriculum.edu.au/curriculum-information/understand-this-curriculum-connection/respectful-relationships> [Australian...lum.edu.au]
6. Monash University / Australian Government. *Respectful Relationships Education in Australia: National Stocktake and Gap Analysis*. Available at: <https://www.education.gov.au/download/14670/respectful-relationships-education-australia-final-report/30516/respectful-relationships-education-australia-final-report/pdf> [education.gov.au]
7. Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence Commission. *Yearly Report to Parliament 2025*. Available at: <https://www.dfsvc.gov.au/yearly-report-2025> [dfsvc.gov.au]