

**Department of Social
Services Consultation
on the Second Action
Plan (National Plan to End
Violence against Women and
Children 2022–2032)**

July 2026

SUBMISSION



ACKNOWLEDGMENT OF COUNTRY

Community Industry Group acknowledges the traditional custodians of this land, and their Elders past, present and future. We acknowledge and respect their continuing culture, the world's oldest living culture, and the contribution they make to the life of this region and our country. We acknowledge that we live and work on Aboriginal land and recognise the strength, resilience and capacity of Aboriginal people.



About Community Industry Group

Community Industry Group (CI Group) is the peak body working for community services and organisations in southern NSW. We support community organisations, promote expertise and innovation in community development, foster industry development and advocate for social justice.

For 30 years, CI Group has taken a leadership role in the local community services sector. We regularly engage with those organisations, services, and individuals who work with individuals, families, and communities experiencing disadvantage and vulnerability. We also advocate on behalf of community organisations and vulnerable communities to raise awareness of the issues which are impacting service delivery and affecting the lives and outcomes of individuals, families and communities experiencing disadvantage.

The area within CI Group's footprint covers the southeastern region of NSW, from just south of Sydney in the north to the Victorian border. Our region is vast and diverse, from the large metropolitan Wollongong – NSW's third largest city – to smaller regional towns and geographically isolated villages. Our region includes large rural areas, coastal communities and vast high country and inland areas.

The experiences of our members can be as diverse as the region.

Our members include not-for-profit (NFP) service providers who deliver:

- Women's and Domestic Violence Support Services
- Homelessness Supports
- Child and Family Services
- Youth Services
- Disability Services
- Generalist Community / Neighbourhood Centre
- Residential Aged Care
- In-home supports, including CHSP and Home Care Packages

Introduction

Community Industry Group (CI Group) welcomes the opportunity to make a submission to the Department of Social Services consultation on the Second Action Plan (National Plan to End Violence against Women and Children 2022 – 2032).

This submission draws on direct consultation with our member organisations. These contributions are drawn from frontline practice and lived experience of the systems this consultation is examining

Domestic family and sexual violence impacts the health, wellbeing, mental health and future relationships for victim-survivors and for future generations and CI Group welcomes the Australian Government's commitment to making a difference for women, children and the Australian community.

CI group recognises the considerable effort which has gone into delivery of the first Action Plan, and congratulates government on the areas where progress has been made. Of particular note is the increase in community awareness and understanding, as well as the growing visibility of the issue. Increased visibility leads to increased reporting and interventions and thus, despite ongoing efforts to address the problem, violence against women and children continues at alarmingly high rates.

CI Group commends government's intention to continue to pursue the National Plan to End Violence against Women and Children through the development of the Second Action Plan. The first Action Plan has demonstrated that this is significant and complex challenge which requires a long-term, sustainably funded, national response which must include cross-government action and robust place-based, long-term services which support prevention, early intervention and long-term healing, particularly in regional, rural and remote areas.

Importantly, our members note that domestic, family and sexual violence (DFSV) cannot be regarded as a separate, stand-alone issue. A systems approach must be taken to recognise that DFSV is impacted by the broader context including housing, justice, employment, and health systems.

Many of our member services which operate across the region are well respected for delivering trauma informed specialist and universal services. However, most are oversubscribed, under-resourced and some have even been defunded, despite a rise in demand. Wait lists are long, and while victim-survivors wait, they wait in crisis, they wait in trauma and they wait in danger.

Our members have long advised what is needed to make a difference:



- Develop a long-term National Partnership Agreement between state and federal governments to ensure ongoing and sustainable funding for all specialist domestic, family and sexual violence services in regional, rural and remote areas.
- Invest significantly in early intervention and prevention services, including specialist services to provide culturally and ethically appropriate care to First Nations people, LGBTIQ+ community members, Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) communities and children and young people.
- Invest in evidence-based perpetrator programs aimed at long-term, sustained behaviour change.
- Invest in measures to address technology-facilitated abuse including location-tracking, image-based abuse, AI generated abuse and online coercion.
- Recognise the importance of a safe place to call home. Invest in crisis accommodation and support services for women and children escaping violence, as well as improving access to long-term, safe, affordable and appropriate housing.
- Recognise that FSDV is a systemic issue and improve integration within housing, police, education, mental health, child protection, family law and generalist community services.

Our ask is clear: what is needed is real funding certainty for frontline services; genuine centring of victim-survivors' - including children's - own voices; and a willingness to examine where existing systems (e.g. policing, courts, child protection, health) require reform.

Our response below summarises our member feedback across the five priority areas listed in the consultation, noting the existence of cross-over between areas:



Priority Area 1: Victim-Survivors

Members consistently described a system that is well-intentioned but structurally slow. Fragmentation across agencies, funding and workforce constraints, and policy design has created a system that, without immediate investment, may compound harm. To support victim-survivors, we recommend:

- Introduction of ‘navigator/key worker’ models which coordinate referrals, reduce retraumatisation, and maintain continuity of service.
- Introduce a genuine ‘no wrong door’ model which empowers key service providers e.g. police, housing, health, education to support victim-survivors to receive the services and supports they need.

“The “no wrong door” is an idealised government concept that doesn’t exist in practice; the system currently fits the person to the category, rather than the service to the person’s needs.”

- Introduce education for first responders and generalist community services to recognise and respond to coercive control and DFSV.
- Increase the value of the victim-survivors’ voice including their assessment of their own risk. No more should we hear of women who told others they feared being killed, but were not taken seriously, only to be being killed by their perpetrator.
- Cease the practice of removing children from mothers on “unsafe home” grounds. Direct support to the mother instead.
- Invest in crisis services and affordable housing options to address women and children functionally trapped in unsafe situations. No victim-survivors should be forced to remain “separated under one roof” with the person using violence.
- Increase investment in frontline specialist sexual assault services to meet rising demand. Women and children escaping violence should never encounter ‘waitlists’.
- Invest in dedicated IT/cyber-specialists to enable support services to assist women and children escape technology-enabled abuse.
- Increase access to trauma trained psychologists and counsellors for victim-survivors.

Priority Area 2: Prevention and Early Intervention

Ending violence against women and children in a generation requires sustained investment in changing the attitudes, behaviours and systems that drive violence -starting early, and reaching every community. To strengthen prevention and early intervention, we recommend:

- Embed age-appropriate respectful relationships and consent education as mandatory national curriculum, from primary through to senior secondary school, inclusive of diverse



genders, sexualities and relationship types, and delivered in mixed-gender settings, continuing beyond school into workplaces, sporting clubs and community life.

- Resource evidence-based prevention programs, such as NAPCAN's Lovebites beyond the current model of covering program materials, to include provision of trained facilitators to deliver them in every school.
- Develop a dedicated, trauma-informed program for children and young people who use violence, distinct from adult behaviour change programs, recognising this cohort are often also victim-survivors.
- Rebalance public messaging to offer people using violence clear, non-stigmatised pathways to seek help and change behaviour, supported by positive male role models.
- Invest in national research, funding and coordination to help men and boys disengage from harmful online "manosphere" influences, and ensure government has genuine control over content that reaches children and young people.
- Ensure system responses match prevention messaging. Consequences for repeat offending must be consistent and ensure perpetrators are held accountable,.
- Invest in community education to improve community understanding of DFSV including messaging specifically tailored to LGBTIQ+, First Nations, CALD communities and young people,.
- Recognise place-based community development as core prevention infrastructure.
- Improve how media shapes public understanding of DFSV, including by ensuring coverage centres victim-survivors and places responsibility for violence and change on the perpetrator, and by supporting online platforms to curb the spread of harmful "manosphere" content that normalises violence against women.

Priority Area 3: Children and Young People in Their Own Right

Children and young people are victim-survivors in their own right, not only witnesses to violence experienced by adults. Systems and services must recognise their distinct rights, needs and developmental stage. To centre children and young people, we recommend:

- Recognise children and young people as victim-survivors in their own right, not only as extensions of adult victim-survivors' experiences . This approach is consistent with research on the lasting impacts of childhood domestic and family violence and the need to recognise children's own safety and support needs (Barnardos Australia, *Truth is, the abuse never stopped*).
- Resource and support ongoing case management and family support that is not time limited. Enable the development of child-specific safety, case and recovery plans across



home, school, friendships, culture, sport and community, with genuine opportunities for children to be heard.

- Make courts and family law processes more child-focused and DFSV-informed, including expanded training for judicial officers and legal professionals in trauma-informed, evidence-based practice models (e.g. the Safe & Together™ Model).
- Enable young people to be assessed as capable of making decisions for themselves, so they can access services and participate in family law proceedings without being solely dependent on parental permission.
- Fund regional and remote outreach services, so access to support is not limited only to those who can travel.
- Child-on-child and sibling sexual harm is a significant, under-addressed area which requires dedicated focus. Without an effective response, a child who has caused harm may carry that forward into adulthood. This requires far more focused resourcing, research and sector-wide understanding - including better adult responses to children's harmful sexual behaviour and to children navigating harmful contexts more broadly. Responses must combine genuine care and compassion for the child who has caused harm with helping them understand the impact of their behaviour, so they can get back on track developmentally toward safe, healthy relationships.
- Invest in a dedicated, trauma-informed program for children and young people who use violence or display harmful sexual behaviours more broadly, with flexible therapeutic supports and meaningful involvement of children and young people in shaping the policies and services that affect them.

Local Case Study

A group of boys who publicly and widely-reportedly harassed women during a community safety event were never referred to any service to help them understand or change their behaviour.

- Invest in trauma recovery support for children, following successful models that offer unlimited, non-time-limited support.
- Strengthen protection from online harm, harmful sexualised content, technology-facilitated abuse and exploitation, and ensure government has genuine control over content accessible to children and young people.
- Continue to support programs that address emerging harms, such as non-fatal strangulation, deepfakes and online extortion.



Priority Area 4: People Who Use Violence

Ending violence requires a stronger understanding of people who use violence, and a coordinated, accountable system of earlier intervention, response and behaviour change. To strengthen responses to people who use violence, we recommend:

- Focus responsibility clearly with people who use violence, rather than making women and children responsible for avoiding harm.
- Design government-funded perpetrator programs, with voluntary entry points alongside mandated programs, so people can access support when concerning behaviours are first identified - rather than waiting for violence to escalate to serious harm or for court involvement. Destigmatise access to such programs.
- Strengthen earlier intervention through education, accountability and real consequences across legal systems, workplaces, sporting clubs and community institutions.
- Improve police and first responder capability to identify pattern-based violence rather than treating incidents in isolation.
- Replace blanket treatment exclusion criteria with individualised, appropriately skilled safety assessments, so people using violence can access health and behaviour-change services as part of accountability, not despite it.
- Ensure behaviour change programs are long-term, family-focused and accountable to victim-survivors. Include casework, counselling, trauma support, parenting support and post-program follow-up. Partner-accountability should be a required, structural mechanism built into every program.

"The best programs for offenders [of domestic violence] are ones that are accountable to the partners, and I'm not sure how many of them are actually really accountable to the partners. "

- Support and expand restorative justice as a genuine, evidence-aligned alternative to the criminal justice system, built around victim-survivors' own definitions of safety and accountability, including for children and young people who use violence. Locally, a service has piloted such a project which has built capacity and community readiness for real alternatives to the justice system for survivors of child sexual assault in the Illawarra region.
- Ensure responses to people who use violence are culturally safe without allowing culture to excuse violence.



Priority Area 5: System Integration and Workforce

People affected by violence must navigate multiple systems at once. Improving coordination, information sharing and workforce capability across these systems is critical to safety, continuity of care and recovery. To strengthen system integration and workforce capability, we recommend:

- Review legislation and improve national systems for capturing, flagging and sharing information about people who use violence and their patterns of abuse across support services and agencies. Explore a mechanism for support services to access information about a perpetrator's history of family violence to support accurate risk assessment while respecting privacy.
- Enable information-sharing between state and federal government services and agencies, to better support victim-survivors and to reduce re-traumatisation.
- Strengthen national workforce capability across specialist and universal services (health, housing, education, legal, income support and community services) through consistent training in coercive control, technology-facilitated abuse, pattern-based violence, child-inclusive practice, cultural safety and trauma-informed response.
- Improve workforce wellbeing through adequate pay, supervision, manageable workloads and specialist support.
- Strengthen DFSV training in all human services courses to enable staff on the ground to identify signs of abuse, undertake basic safety planning, and respond appropriately.
- Increase funding across prevention, early intervention, crisis response and long-term recovery. Protect place-based early intervention and family support programs from defunding so that long-standing well-respected providers are not lost to amalgamation or closure.



Final Input

This submission has been shaped throughout by one consistent message: real change requires government to look honestly at where its own systems and processes contribute to harm. Housing, children's safety, and equity for the most disadvantaged communities are not separate issues - addressing them is central to the Second Action Plan achieving lasting change.

Our final ask is clear: sustained, long-term and coordinated funding is needed across the service system - from prevention through to crisis response and long-term recovery - matched by a genuine willingness to reform the systems themselves.

CI Group looks forward to continuing to work with the Department of Social Services and the Australian Government to help realise these priorities under the Second Action Plan, and to ensuring the voices of our members - and the communities they work alongside every day - continue to shape this work.

CI Group sincerely thanks our members for their significant contributions. This submission would not be possible without their generosity in sharing what they experience on the ground.

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