

Submission to the Second Action Plan under the National Plan to End Violence against Women and Children 2028 - 2032



**Companion
Animal Network
Australia CAN**


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Executive Summary

Companion Animal Network Australia (CANA) welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the development of the Second Action Plan under the National Plan to End Violence against Women and Children.

As a national advocacy network for companion animal welfare, CANA represents organisations working every day to keep people and pets safely together through sheltering, fostering, veterinary care, community support and advocacy. With this in mind, CANA's contribution focuses on an important but often overlooked aspect of domestic and family violence (DFV): the role companion animals play in coercive control, victim safety, recovery and prevention.

Evidence consistently shows that perpetrators may threaten, injure or neglect companion animals to intimidate and control victim-survivors. Concern for a companion animal can delay a person's decision to leave an abusive relationship. Integrating companion animals into DFV policy, service design and recovery planning can help remove barriers to safety, strengthen early intervention and improve outcomes for families.

CANA recommends embedding a **One Welfare** approach throughout the Second Action Plan, **recognising that the wellbeing of people, animals and communities are interconnected.**

Summary of recommendations

- **Include companion animals in DFV risk assessment and safety planning**
Ensure companion animals are routinely considered in domestic and family violence risk assessment, safety planning and referral processes. Recognise their role in coercive control and the barriers they can create for victim-survivors seeking safety.
- **Expand pet-inclusive emergency and transitional accommodation**
Increase the availability of crisis, emergency and transitional accommodation that enables victim-survivors to remain safely with their companion animals wherever possible, supported by partnerships with animal welfare organisations.
- **Support integrated service responses**
Facilitate collaboration between the domestic and family violence, animal welfare, veterinary, housing and community services sectors to strengthen referral pathways and improve coordinated responses for victim-survivors with companion animals.
- **Improve national data collection**
Develop a nationally consistent approach to collecting data on the role of companion animals in domestic and family violence, including barriers to safety, service demand and outcomes.
- **Strengthen the evidence base**
Australia's National Research Organisation for Women's Safety (ANROWS) has consistently highlighted the importance of understanding patterns of coercive control and strengthening evidence-informed responses to domestic and family violence. Further consideration of the role of companion animals within this evidence base would support more integrated policy and service responses.
- **Support emergency boarding and foster programs**
Provide sustainable support for emergency boarding, foster care and related services that enable victim-survivors to reach safety while ensuring their companion animals are protected and cared for.

About CANA

Companion Animal Network Australia (formerly Animal Welfare League Australia Ltd) represents animal welfare organisations **Animal Welfare League Queensland (AWLQ), Dogs' Homes of Tasmania, Lort Smith Animal Hospital, Saving Animals From Euthanasia Inc. (SAFE Inc.), Sydney Dogs & Cats Home; and affiliate members ACT Rescue and Foster Inc. (ARF), Cherished Pets, Ginger Ninja Cat Rescue and Scruffer Lovers.**

In the financial year 2025-26 CANA members provided vital services to more than 50,000 animals, including rescue, shelter, rehoming, foster care, healthcare, and enrichment.

CANA is dedicated to protecting and strengthening the human-animal bond. With more than 31.6 million pets across the nation, 73 per cent of households share their lives with a companion animal.¹

Animal welfare organisations are already an important part of Australia's family violence response system. By providing emergency boarding, foster care, veterinary treatment and collaboration with domestic and family violence services, CANA members see firsthand how concern for pets can influence decisions about seeking safety. This practical experience provides CANA with a unique perspective on opportunities to strengthen the Government's response to domestic and family violence.

A One Welfare approach

CANA's submission is informed by a One Welfare approach. One Welfare recognises that the wellbeing of people, animals and communities is interconnected. Within the context of DFV, protecting companion animals can improve human safety, reduce trauma, support children's recovery and strengthen community resilience.

A One Welfare approach does not create a new service system. Rather, it strengthens existing systems by recognising that the wellbeing of people and their pets is interconnected. This perspective complements the priority areas which focus on prevention, early intervention, integrated service delivery and long-term recovery.

Priority Area 1: victim-survivors

Recommendation

Ensure no victim-survivor has to choose between personal safety and the safety of their pet.

Implementation

- Include pets in national guidance on domestic and family violence risk assessment and safety planning.
- Include pet-friendly solutions in emergency and transitional accommodation programs.
- Support partnerships between specialist domestic and family violence services and animal welfare organisations to improve access to temporary pet care where required.

Evidence

Research from Lucy's Project and RSPCA Australia demonstrates that concern for a pet (or other animals in a rural environment) can be a significant barrier to leaving violence. Pet-inclusive accommodation and support services help remove this barrier and improve access to safety.

¹ Pets in Australia: A National survey of pets and people; Animal Medicines Australia 2025.

Priority Area 2: Prevention and early intervention

Recommendation

Recognise animal abuse as an indicator of coercive control and a sign that earlier intervention is required.

Implementation

- Recognise the link between animal abuse and domestic and family violence within national policy and guidance.
- Support public education and information initiatives that recognise the important role pets play in the health and wellbeing of individuals and families, while improving understanding of the relationship between animal abuse and coercive control.
- Encourage consideration of animal abuse within existing domestic and family violence workforce resources and practice guidance.

Evidence

ANROWS' research on coercive control highlights the importance of recognising patterns of abusive behaviour. Lucy's Project has identified animal abuse as one of the tactics perpetrators use to exert power and control.

Priority Area 3: Children and young people

Recommendation

Recognise the important role pets can play in supporting children's safety, wellbeing and recovery from domestic and family violence.

Implementation

- Encourage services supporting children affected by DFV to recognise the role pets can play in children's recovery and emotional wellbeing.
- Support pet-inclusive accommodation options that enable children to remain safely with their pets where appropriate.
- Support education initiatives that foster empathy, respect for animals and recognition of the important role pets play in children's lives.

Evidence

Trauma-informed practice recognises that trusted relationships and continuity can support children's recovery. For many children, pets provide comfort, stability and emotional support during and after experiences of violence.

Priority Area 4: People who use violence

Recommendation

Recognise violence towards animals as a tactic of coercive control within responses to people who use violence.

Implementation

- Recognise abuse of pets and other animals within national policy, guidance and practice frameworks addressing coercive control.
- Encourage consideration of violence towards animals within perpetrator risk assessment and behaviour change approaches where appropriate.

Evidence

Research consistently demonstrates that violence towards animals can form part of broader patterns of coercive control and family violence.

Priority Area 5: System integration and workforce

Recommendation

Support integrated service responses that recognise the role of pets in domestic and family violence.

Implementation

- Facilitate collaboration and channels for communication between the domestic and family violence, animal welfare, veterinary, housing and community services sectors.
- Develop nationally consistent referral pathways between specialist domestic and family violence services and animal welfare organisations.
- Improve national data collection on the role of pets in domestic and family violence to strengthen evidence-informed policy and service planning.

Evidence

The consultation paper identifies integrated systems and coordinated service responses as essential to improving outcomes for victim-survivors. Recognising pets within these systems will strengthen collaboration, improve opportunities for early intervention and remove barriers to safety.

Conclusion

The Second Action Plan presents an important opportunity to consider a broad range of evidence and perspectives to strengthen Australia's response to domestic and family violence. CANA's recommendations are intended to contribute to that discussion by highlighting the often-overlooked role that pets can play in early intervention, victim safety, recovery and integrated service responses.

While these recommendations represent only one part of a broader national response, CANA believes they provide practical opportunities to strengthen existing systems and improve collaboration across sectors. These actions will ultimately help remove barriers that prevent victim-survivors from reaching safety.

CANA welcomes the opportunity to work with government, domestic and family violence services, community organisations and other stakeholders to support practical, evidence-based responses that improve outcomes for victim-survivors and their pets.



Contact:



www.australiacan.org.au

Resources used to compile CANA's submission

1. Australian Government (2026) National Plan to End Violence against Women and Children 2022–2032 and Second Action Plan Consultation Paper.
2. Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW).
3. Australia's National Research Organisation for Women's Safety (ANROWS).
4. Lucy's Project. National Roundtable recommendations on domestic and family violence perpetrated against people and animals (2025–2026 consultation materials).
5. RSPCA Australia.
6. Safe & Together Institute.