

FROM SURVIVING TO REBUILDING

Strengthening Australia's Response to Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence

A Submission to Inform the Second Action Plan under the National Plan to
End Violence against Women and Children 2022–2032

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The logo consists of the letters 'CBM.' written in a large, bold, black, handwritten script. The 'C' and 'B' are connected, and the 'M' is also connected to the 'B'. A period follows the 'M'.

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Foreword

Every week, I meet with women who have done the hardest thing imaginable; They've escaped domestic and family violence. Yet leaving violence is rarely the end of their journey.

For many, it is the beginning of years spent navigating family courts, criminal proceedings, child protection, housing insecurity, financial hardship and the ongoing impacts of trauma. Children who have already experienced violence continue to live with uncertainty, repeated assessments and prolonged legal processes while trying to regain a sense of safety.

Through my own lived experience and my work supporting women and children across New South Wales, I have seen firsthand that Australia has made significant progress in responding to domestic, family and sexual violence. Investments in prevention, crisis response and early intervention have saved lives and created stronger pathways to safety. However, there remains a significant gap between surviving violence and rebuilding a life.

At Cycle Breaker Mission, we describe this as the missing stage of Australia's response.

Recovery is not measured in weeks or months. It is often a journey that spans years. It involves rebuilding safety, financial independence, parenting confidence, emotional wellbeing, community connection and hope. Yet these are the very areas where many victim-survivors tell us support becomes fragmented or disappears altogether.

This submission has been informed by frontline service delivery, lived experience, research and the voices of women and children who have trusted us with their stories. It reflects what we see every day; systems that are working hard but too often operate in isolation, requiring victim-survivors to carry the burden of navigating complex processes while recovering from trauma. Our recommendations are practical, evidence informed and designed to build on the strong foundations already established through the National Plan to End Violence against Women and Children 2022–2032.

They call for a greater focus on recovery, rebuilding and long-term stability not as an alternative to prevention or crisis response, but as the next essential step in Australia's response to domestic, family and sexual violence.

Escaping violence saves lives. Rebuilding lives changes futures.

Thank you for the opportunity to contribute to the development of Australia's Second Action Plan.

[Redacted signature]

Cycle Breaker Mission

Executive Summary

Australia has made significant progress in responding to domestic, family and sexual violence through investments in prevention, early intervention, crisis response and greater recognition of coercive control. These reforms have strengthened pathways to safety and saved lives.

Cycle Breaker Mission welcomes this progress and strongly supports the direction of the National Plan to End Violence against Women and Children 2022–2032.

However, our frontline experience suggests that many women and children continue to face substantial barriers after escaping violence. Leaving an abusive relationship is often only the beginning of a long and complex recovery journey that can involve years of court proceedings, housing instability, financial hardship, trauma recovery and ongoing post-separation abuse.

Current service systems respond well to immediate crises but are less equipped to support long-term recovery and rebuilding.

This submission proposes that Australia's next phase of reform should strengthen recovery as a distinct and measurable stage of the National Plan.

Drawing on lived experience, frontline practice and current evidence, Cycle Breaker Mission presents ten recommendations that focus on:

- recognising recovery as a national priority;
- establishing specialist court navigation services;
- strengthening long-term recovery funding;
- recognising children as victim-survivors in their own right;
- improving responses to post-separation abuse;
- improving Family Court experiences;
- strengthening financial independence;
- investing in lived experience leadership;
- building workforce capability; and
- measuring long-term recovery outcomes.

A consistent theme throughout this submission is that systems should not only help people escape violence; they should also support them to rebuild.

We also highlight the importance of recognising trauma responses, reducing systems-induced harm, strengthening coordination across services and ensuring children are recognised as victim-survivors whose safety and wellbeing must remain central to decision-making.

Our recommendations are intended to complement existing reforms and contribute practical, achievable improvements informed by frontline experience.

By 2032, success should not be measured solely by the number of people who leave violence, but by the number who are able to recover, rebuild and thrive.

Australia has invested significantly in helping families survive violence.

The next challenge is ensuring they are supported to rebuild their lives.

About Cycle Breaker Mission

Cycle Breaker Mission is a lived experience-led Australian charity supporting women and children rebuilding their lives after domestic and family violence.

Our work is founded on the belief that escaping violence is only the beginning of recovery. Many victim-survivors continue to navigate years of family law proceedings, criminal justice processes, housing insecurity, financial hardship and the lasting impacts of trauma long after the immediate crisis has ended.

We provide trauma-informed, non-legal support that helps women and children move from surviving to rebuilding. Our services include court preparation and navigation, counselling, mentoring, advocacy, practical assistance, referrals and community support designed to reduce isolation and strengthen long-term recovery.

Alongside direct service delivery, Cycle Breaker Mission contributes to research, policy development and systems reform through lived experience leadership. We believe the voices of those who have navigated domestic and family violence should inform the design of the systems intended to support them.

This submission reflects the experiences shared with us by women and children, our frontline observations, current research and our commitment to building a response system that not only helps families escape violence, but also supports them to recover, rebuild and thrive.

Our vision is simple:

No woman or child should face recovery alone.

The Cycle Breaker Framework

ESCAPE	• Immediate safety • Police • Crisis accommodation • Legal protections • Emergency support
RECOVER	• Counselling • Mental health support • Psychological recovery • Children's recovery • Community support
REBUILD	• Court navigation • Housing • Employment • Financial independence • Parenting confidence
THRIVE	• Long-term wellbeing • Healthy relationships • Community connection • Hope • Opportunity

Guiding Principles

Safety is the beginning of recovery; not the end.
Recovery requires time, coordination and support.
Stability prevents future harm.
Children are victim-survivors.
Systems should work together.
Lived experience strengthens policy.

Australia's Progress

Cycle Breaker Mission acknowledges there has been progress in:

- Greater public awareness.
- Legislative reform.
- Coercive control recognition.
- Specialist service investment.
- Increased help-seeking.
- Improved workforce capability.

The Missing Stage

The Missing Stage: Recovery and Rebuilding

Australia has become increasingly effective at helping women and children escape violence. The next national challenge is ensuring they can recover, rebuild and thrive.

Frontline Challenges

Women frequently continue to experience:

- Legal challenges
- Financial challenges
- Psychological challenges
- Emotional challenges
- Parenting challenges
- Housing instability
- Court proceedings
- Systems abuse
- Post-separation coercive control
- Employment disruption
- Social isolation

Recovery often takes years rather than months.

Ten National Recommendations

Recommendation 1

Recognise Recovery as a National Priority

The Issue

Australia's response to domestic, family and sexual violence has rightly prioritised prevention, early intervention, crisis response and immediate safety. These investments have saved lives, strengthened pathways to support and improved outcomes for many victim-survivors. However, for many women and children, leaving violence is not the end of the journey. It is the beginning of a long and often complex process of recovery and rebuilding.

While crisis responses are essential, recovery outcomes are often less visible, less consistently measured and less comprehensively funded than immediate safety responses. Many victim-survivors continue to face significant challenges long after escaping violence, frequently navigating these issues with limited long-term support.

The Consultation Paper recognises prevention, early intervention, response and recovery and healing as interconnected domains requiring coordinated action across governments, services and communities.

Cycle Breaker Mission believes the next phase of national reform should strengthen recovery and rebuilding as a distinct and measurable component of Australia's response to domestic, family and sexual violence.

What We Are Seeing

Cycle Breaker Mission regularly supports women and children who have successfully escaped violence but continue to face years of instability while attempting to rebuild their lives. Common challenges include:

- Family Court proceedings.
- Criminal justice processes.
- Housing insecurity and homelessness risk.
- Financial abuse and economic instability.

- Psychological trauma and emotional recovery.
- Parenting challenges following violence and separation.
- Social isolation and loss of support networks.
- Employment disruption and financial disadvantage.
- Ongoing coercive control after separation.
- Fragmented systems requiring victim-survivors to coordinate multiple services while recovering from trauma.

For many families, recovery extends far beyond the period during which crisis supports are available.

Frontline Insight

Many women describe leaving violence as the beginning of a new struggle rather than the end of one.

Survivors frequently report that support is strongest during crisis and weakest during recovery.

Trauma Responses Are Often Misunderstood

Trauma responses can often look very different from what professionals expect. Victim-survivors may present as anxious, overwhelmed, emotional, highly vigilant or mistrustful of institutions and systems. Protective behaviours developed during periods of coercive control and fear may persist long after separation and can influence interactions with legal, health, education and child protection systems.

Cycle Breaker Mission observes that trauma responses are sometimes misunderstood or misinterpreted within professional settings. For example:

- A mother who repeatedly raises safety concerns may be labelled as "difficult", "high conflict", "controlling" or "unable to co-parent".
- Hypervigilance may be mistaken for paranoia or irrational fear.
- Emotional distress may be interpreted as instability.
- Reluctance to facilitate contact may be viewed as alienation rather than protection.
- Distrust of institutions may be interpreted as resistance to services rather than the result of previous negative experiences.

Yet these behaviours are often understandable responses to prolonged exposure to fear, coercive control, intimidation or violence. The challenge for professionals is not simply to assess behaviour in isolation, but to understand the context in which that behaviour developed.

Frontline Insight

Trauma responses do not always present in ways professionals expect.

Behaviours that appear irrational, resistant or disproportionate may in fact represent adaptive survival responses developed during periods of prolonged coercive control or abuse.

Institutional Betrayal and Systems-Induced Trauma

When trauma responses are misinterpreted as personality flaws, malicious intent or an unwillingness to cooperate, victim-survivors can experience a second layer of trauma through their interactions with institutions and systems.

This experience is sometimes referred to as institutional betrayal or systems-induced trauma. Victim-survivors may feel:

- disbelieved;
- blamed for raising concerns;
- punished for attempting to protect their children;
- pressured to minimise risk;
- unsupported by systems they expected would provide safety.

The consequences can include:

- increased anxiety;
- reduced trust in professionals;
- feelings of helplessness;
- disengagement from support services;
- reluctance to disclose future concerns;
- worsening mental health outcomes.

Why It Matters

Long-term recovery contributes directly to:

- reduced homelessness;
- improved mental health outcomes;
- improved child wellbeing;
- increased workforce participation;
- reduced re-victimisation;
- greater financial independence;

- stronger parenting outcomes;
- reduced intergenerational disadvantage.

Recovery outcomes should not be viewed solely as individual wellbeing measures. They represent significant social and economic benefits for families, communities and governments. Stable housing, financial security and community connection are not simply recovery outcomes. They are protective factors that strengthen long-term safety and reduce vulnerability to future harm.

Cycle Breaker Mission Position

Recovery should be recognised as a distinct and measurable component of Australia's response to domestic, family and sexual violence.

Safety is the beginning of recovery; not the end.

Escaping violence saves lives. Rebuilding lives changes futures.

Policy Recommendation

Cycle Breaker Mission recommends that the Second Action Plan establish a nationally coordinated Recovery and Rebuilding Framework that sits alongside prevention, early intervention and crisis response as a core pillar of Australia's response to domestic, family and sexual violence.

The framework should include measurable outcomes relating to:

- housing stability;
- financial independence;
- psychological wellbeing;
- child wellbeing and recovery;
- educational participation;
- employment participation;
- community connection;
- long-term safety;
- social inclusion and belonging.

The framework should explicitly recognise that recovery is not linear and may extend over many years.

Implementation Pathway

Commonwealth Government

- Develop a National Recovery and Rebuilding Outcomes Framework.

- Establish nationally consistent indicators for long-term recovery outcomes.
- Support integrated data collection across jurisdictions.
- Include recovery measures within future Action Plan reporting.

State and Territory Governments

- Embed recovery outcomes into funding agreements and service commissioning.
- Expand access to long-term trauma-informed recovery services.
- Support specialist programs addressing housing, financial recovery and social connection.

Service Providers

- Measure outcomes beyond immediate safety and crisis intervention.
- Incorporate recovery planning into service delivery models.
- Strengthen referral pathways between legal, health, housing, education and community sectors.
- Adopt trauma and violence-informed approaches across all service settings.

Workforce Development

- Improve understanding of trauma responses, coercive control and systems-induced trauma across legal, health, education and community sectors.
- Strengthen professional capability to distinguish trauma responses from perceived non-compliance or conflict behaviours.
- Increase access to specialist domestic and family violence expertise within mainstream systems.

Expected Outcomes

By 2032 Australia should be able to demonstrate:

- increased housing stability for victim-survivors;
- improved financial recovery outcomes;
- reduced repeat victimisation;
- improved mental health outcomes;
- improved educational outcomes for children exposed to violence;
- increased workforce participation;
- stronger community participation and connection;
- greater confidence and trust in institutions and support services;
- improved long-term wellbeing for women and children rebuilding after violence.

Success in 2032

Success will mean that women and children who escape violence are not left to rebuild alone. It will mean that recovery is recognised as a legitimate and essential stage of the journey, supported by coordinated systems that understand trauma, promote stability and create opportunities for long-term wellbeing. It will mean that Australia measures success not only by the number of people who leave violence, but by the number who are able to recover, rebuild and thrive.

Safety is the beginning of recovery; not the end. No woman or child should navigate recovery alone. Escaping violence saves lives. Rebuilding lives changes futures.

Recommendation 2

Establish Specialist Court Navigation Services

The Issue

For many victim-survivors, leaving violence is followed by years of engagement with multiple legal and administrative systems. Family law proceedings, criminal matters, Apprehended Domestic Violence Order (ADVO) applications, child protection involvement, tenancy disputes, migration matters and victims support applications often occur simultaneously. These systems are complex, intimidating and frequently operate independently of one another.

While legal representation plays a critical role in protecting rights and providing legal advice, many victim-survivors require additional support that falls outside the scope of legal services. This includes understanding court processes, preparing for hearings, coordinating referrals, understanding orders, managing documentation, navigating multiple agencies and coping with the emotional and practical impacts of legal proceedings.

The Consultation Paper identifies justice responses and improved system integration as critical priorities for the Second Action Plan and recognises the need for connected and trauma-informed services across sectors.

Cycle Breaker Mission believes court navigation support represents a significant and under-recognised gap within Australia's current response system.

What We Are Seeing

Women frequently report that court proceedings are among the most overwhelming, isolating and distressing stages of recovery. Many victim-survivors are required to navigate:

- Family Court proceedings;
- Criminal prosecutions;
- Domestic violence order applications;
- Child protection investigations;
- Police processes;
- Victims support applications;
- School and medical decision-making processes;
- Housing and tenancy disputes.

Often these systems require repeated disclosure of traumatic experiences to multiple professionals across different agencies and jurisdictions. Victim-survivors commonly report:

- confusion regarding legal terminology and court processes;
- uncertainty regarding expectations and court etiquette;
- difficulty understanding orders and legal outcomes;
- anxiety about seeing the person who used violence;
- fear of saying the wrong thing in court;
- difficulty coordinating appointments and documentation;
- challenges managing court attendance alongside parenting and employment responsibilities;
- emotional exhaustion from repeatedly recounting traumatic experiences.

For many survivors, navigating these systems becomes a full-time responsibility at precisely the time they are attempting to recover from trauma and rebuild their lives.

Frontline Insight

Many women describe court as one of the most frightening and isolating stages of recovery.

Survivors often report that they understand their lawyer's legal advice but still feel overwhelmed by the practical, emotional and procedural realities of navigating the system.

Financial Barriers to Accessing Justice

Cycle Breaker Mission observes that the financial cost of legal proceedings represents one of the most significant barriers to long-term safety and recovery for many victim-survivors. While some victim-survivors are eligible for legal assistance services, many do not meet eligibility criteria for ongoing representation yet remain unable to afford private legal fees, particularly in complex family law matters that may continue for several years. This challenge can be compounded by circumstances including:

- financial abuse and economic control during the relationship;
- loss of income associated with separation;
- sole parenting responsibilities;
- housing instability;
- legal disputes involving multiple jurisdictions and proceedings;
- limited access to savings or financial resources.

In some circumstances, victim-survivors may hold assets on paper, such as an interest in the former family home, while having little or no practical access to funds to pay for legal representation.

As a result, families often rely heavily on support from parents, siblings or extended family members who may contribute savings, take on debt or delay their own financial goals to assist with legal costs. Cycle Breaker Mission has observed situations where victim-survivors:

- exhaust personal savings;
- rely on credit cards or loans to fund proceedings;
- receive financial support from family members;
- discontinue legal representation due to financial constraints; or
- ultimately self-represent despite the complexity of proceedings.

Frontline Insight

Some victim-survivors describe legal proceedings as a race between achieving safety and exhausting financial resources.

The financial burden of prolonged proceedings can itself become a barrier to accessing justice.

Trauma and the Court Environment

Court environments are often highly stressful for victim-survivors. Formal procedures, adversarial processes, uncertainty, delays and repeated exposure to the person who used violence can trigger trauma responses and significantly affect an individual's ability to participate effectively in proceedings. Trauma can affect:

- memory and recall;
- concentration;
- decision-making;
- emotional regulation;
- communication;
- confidence in engaging with professionals.

Victim-survivors may appear disorganised, emotional, inconsistent or overwhelmed despite making genuine efforts to participate in proceedings.

Trauma-informed systems recognise these responses as understandable consequences of exposure to violence rather than indicators of credibility, motivation or capability.

Frontline Insight

Trauma does not stop at the courthouse doors.

Systems that expect victim-survivors to perform at their best while navigating fear, uncertainty and ongoing coercive control risk unintentionally creating further harm.

Why It Matters

Legal outcomes directly influence:

- safety;
- housing stability;
- financial security;
- parenting arrangements;
- child wellbeing;
- long-term recovery.

When victim-survivors disengage from legal processes because they are overwhelmed, confused, unsupported or financially unable to continue

representation, safety outcomes may be compromised. Court navigation support improves:

- engagement with legal processes;
- understanding of rights and responsibilities;
- confidence in decision-making;
- compliance with court processes;
- coordination across services;
- continuity of support throughout lengthy proceedings.

Importantly, court navigation services complement rather than replace legal representation.

Cycle Breaker Mission Position

Legal representation and court navigation are complementary but distinct forms of support.

A lawyer protects legal rights.

A court navigator helps victim-survivors navigate the system surrounding those rights.

No woman or child should face court alone.

Policy Recommendation

Cycle Breaker Mission recommends the establishment of nationally funded specialist, trauma-informed, non-legal court navigation services for victim-survivors of domestic, family and sexual violence.

Court navigation services should operate alongside legal services and provide practical, emotional and procedural support throughout a victim-survivor's legal journey.

Services should include:

- court preparation and education;
- referrals to specialist and mainstream services;
- emotional support before, during and after proceedings;
- system navigation across multiple agencies and jurisdictions;
- safety planning related to court attendance and legal processes;
- assistance understanding court processes and expectations;
- coordination between legal and non-legal supports;
- support with documentation and information gathering;

- assistance identifying and responding to systems abuse;
- referrals for counselling, housing, financial support and community services.

Support should be available regardless of whether an individual is legally represented, partially represented or self-represented.

Implementation Pathway

Commonwealth Government

- Recognise court navigation as a specialist support function within the domestic and family violence service system.
- Include court navigation within future National Plan funding frameworks.
- Develop national principles and minimum practice standards.

State and Territory Governments

- Pilot specialist court navigation services across metropolitan, regional and remote locations.
- Embed referral pathways between legal services, courts and specialist domestic violence services.
- Support co-location opportunities within courts where appropriate.

Courts and Justice Systems

- Strengthen partnerships between legal services and court navigators.
- Develop trauma-informed referral pathways for victim-survivors requiring additional support.
- Improve consistency in information provided to parties throughout proceedings.

Service Providers

- Develop specialist workforce capability in family law, domestic violence and trauma-informed practice.
- Establish clear practice boundaries between legal advice and court navigation support.
- Build integrated referral pathways across housing, health, counselling and financial services.

Expected Outcomes

By 2032 Australia should be able to demonstrate:

- improved engagement with legal processes;

- increased understanding of court procedures and outcomes;
- reduced anxiety associated with court participation;
- reduced rates of disengagement from proceedings due to financial or emotional barriers;
- improved coordination across systems;
- reduced service fragmentation;
- improved safety outcomes for women and children;
- increased confidence and trust in justice systems;
- improved long-term recovery outcomes.

Success in 2032

Success will mean that no victim-survivor is expected to navigate multiple legal systems alone while recovering from trauma. It will mean that court processes are not only legally fair but also practically accessible, financially realistic and trauma informed. It will mean that victim-survivors can focus their energy on protecting themselves and their children rather than trying to understand fragmented systems in moments of crisis. It will mean that access to justice is not determined by a person's financial resources or ability to navigate complex legal systems without support.

No woman or child should face court alone. Justice systems should not only deliver outcomes; they should support recovery. Legal representation protects rights. Court navigation protects participation. Access to justice should not depend on financial capacity.

Recommendation 3

Strengthen Long-Term Recovery Funding

The Issue

Australia has made significant investments in crisis response services, emergency accommodation, policing, legal responses and early intervention initiatives. These investments are critical and have saved lives. However, many victim-survivors continue to require support long after the immediate crisis has passed.

Domestic and family violence recovery is rarely measured in weeks or months. For many women and children, recovery unfolds over several years and often involves rebuilding multiple areas of life simultaneously, including housing, finances, parenting, health, education, employment and community connection. Despite this, funding models often prioritise immediate safety and short-term interventions rather than long-term recovery and rebuilding.

The Consultation Paper recognises recovery and healing as an essential component of Australia's response and highlights the importance of integrated systems and services that support victim-survivors across the life course.

Cycle Breaker Mission believes Australia's next opportunity is to invest in recovery with the same commitment that has been applied to crisis response.

What We Are Seeing

Women and children frequently continue to experience significant challenges long after violence has ended. Common ongoing needs include:

- trauma recovery;
- counselling and mental health support;
- rebuilding confidence and identity;
- parenting after violence;
- support for children experiencing trauma;
- rebuilding social and community connections;
- financial recovery;
- returning to education or employment;
- navigating court proceedings;
- overcoming isolation and loneliness.

Many survivors describe feeling that support decreases significantly once they are no longer considered to be "in crisis," despite recovery only just beginning.

Frontline Insight

Many women tell us that leaving violence was not the hardest part.

The hardest part was rebuilding afterwards while trying to navigate trauma, parenting, housing, finances and court processes largely on their own.

Recovery Is Not Linear

Recovery after domestic and family violence is rarely straightforward. Victim-survivors may experience periods of progress followed by setbacks triggered by:

- court proceedings;
- financial pressures;
- housing instability;
- child contact arrangements;
- ongoing coercive control;
- anniversaries or reminders of trauma;
- children's developmental milestones or disclosures.

Traditional service models do not always reflect the cyclical nature of recovery. Many survivors require support at different points over many years rather than intensive support over a short period. Recovery funding models should recognise that returning for support is often a sign of engagement and resilience rather than failure.

Frontline Insight

Recovery is not a straight line.

Survivors often move between periods of stability and periods of increased vulnerability as new challenges emerge.

Why It Matters

Long-term recovery support contributes directly to:

- improved mental health outcomes;
- improved child wellbeing;
- reduced social isolation;
- stronger parenting outcomes;
- improved educational outcomes for children;
- increased workforce participation;
- financial independence;
- stronger community connection;
- reduced re-victimisation.

Investing in recovery reduces demand on crisis systems, homelessness services, health services and justice systems over time. Recovery funding should therefore be understood not only as a social investment but also as an economic one.

The Missing Middle

Australia's domestic and family violence system is strongest at two points:

- crisis intervention; and
- legal and emergency responses.

There remains a significant gap between surviving violence and achieving long-term stability and wellbeing.

Cycle Breaker Mission describes this as the "missing middle" of recovery.

This stage includes:

- rebuilding confidence;
- learning to parent after trauma;
- restoring financial independence;
- reconnecting with community;
- creating new support networks;
- rebuilding identity and hope.

These are often the very factors that determine whether recovery is sustainable.

Cycle Breaker Mission Position

Escaping violence saves lives. Rebuilding lives changes futures.

Recovery should not depend on a victim-survivor's ability to navigate fragmented services or privately fund support over many years.

Policy Recommendation

Cycle Breaker Mission recommends the expansion of long-term recovery funding streams under the Second Action Plan to support victim-survivors and children beyond the crisis period. Funding should support:

- trauma-informed counselling;
- mentoring programs;
- peer support programs;
- parenting support after violence;
- children's therapeutic programs;

- community connection initiatives;
- practical recovery support;
- financial capability programs;
- education and employment pathways;
- long-term case coordination where required.

Programs should be flexible and responsive to changing needs over time.

Priority Areas for Investment

Mental Health

Access to long-term trauma-informed counselling/psychology for women and children remains essential to recovery. Support should be available beyond short funding cycles or limited session caps.

Mentoring

Mentoring programs provide practical guidance, encouragement and hope during recovery. Mentors can assist women rebuilding confidence, education pathways, employment participation and community connection.

Peer Support

Peer support reduces isolation and provides opportunities for survivors to connect with others who understand their experiences. For many survivors, peer support becomes one of the strongest predictors of long-term wellbeing.

Parenting Support

Many parents are required to navigate the impacts of trauma on both themselves and their children while rebuilding parenting confidence after violence. Trauma-informed parenting support can strengthen family relationships and improve child outcomes.

Community Programs

Community programs help rebuild belonging, identity and social connection. Recovery often occurs in relationship with others rather than in isolation.

Implementation Pathway

Commonwealth Government

- Develop dedicated recovery funding streams under the National Plan.

- Support longer funding cycles for recovery programs.
- Establish national recovery outcomes and indicators.

State and Territory Governments

- Expand access to community-based recovery programs.
- Support flexible referral pathways between specialist and mainstream services.
- Increase investment in children's recovery services.

Service Providers

- Develop integrated recovery pathways.
- Measure outcomes beyond crisis intervention.
- Offer flexible service models that recognise the changing nature of recovery.

Expected Outcomes

By 2032 Australia should be able to demonstrate:

- increased access to long-term counselling services;
- improved mental health outcomes;
- improved child wellbeing outcomes;
- increased social connection;
- improved parenting confidence;
- increased workforce participation;
- stronger financial independence;
- reduced social isolation;
- reduced re-victimisation;
- stronger long-term recovery outcomes.

Success in 2032

Success will mean that recovery support remains available long after the immediate crisis has ended. It will mean women and children can access support when they need it rather than only when funding models determine they qualify as being in crisis. It will mean recovery is recognised as an investment in future safety, wellbeing and opportunity. Most importantly, it will mean families are given the support they need not only to survive violence, but to build lives beyond it.

Recovery is not a destination. It is a process that requires time, stability and support. Support should not end when the crisis ends. Recovery is prevention. Escaping violence saves lives. Rebuilding lives changes futures.

Recommendation 4

Recognise Children as Victim-Survivors in Their Own Right

The Issue

Children who are exposed to domestic and family violence are not merely witnesses to violence occurring between adults. They experience violence directly through fear, instability, coercion, intimidation, disrupted attachment relationships and the ongoing impacts that violence has on their home environment, development and sense of safety.

Australia has made important progress in recognising the impacts of domestic and family violence on children. However, children continue to be viewed through the experiences of the adult victim-survivor rather than as victim-survivors with their own rights, experiences and recovery needs.

The Second Action Plan consultation paper identifies children and young people in their own right as a dedicated priority area and recognises the need for age-appropriate prevention, early intervention, response and recovery services tailored to children's developmental needs.

Cycle Breaker Mission strongly supports this focus and believes further work is required to embed children's voices, experiences and recovery needs across all systems.

What We Are Seeing

Children impacted by domestic and family violence often experience:

- anxiety and hypervigilance;
- sleep disturbances and nightmares;
- difficulties concentrating at school;
- emotional dysregulation;
- school refusal or disengagement;
- behavioural changes;
- developmental regression;
- parentification or caring responsibilities;

- loyalty conflicts between parents;
- fear regarding court proceedings or contact arrangements;
- ongoing stress associated with post-separation conflict and systems involvement.

Many children continue to experience the impacts of violence long after separation has occurred. For some children, the period following separation can involve:

- repeated court proceedings;
- multiple assessments and interviews;
- changes to schools and living arrangements;
- disrupted friendships and support networks;
- ongoing exposure to parental conflict;
- uncertainty regarding future arrangements.

Frontline Insight

For many children, leaving violence does not immediately restore a sense of safety.

Recovery often begins only once stability, predictability and emotional safety are re-established.

Children Experience Violence Differently

Children's trauma responses often differ significantly from adult trauma responses. Trauma may present as:

- aggression;
- withdrawal;
- perfectionism;
- emotional outbursts;
- difficulties with attention and learning;
- headaches or stomach pain without a medical explanation;
- risk-taking behaviours in adolescence;
- regression in younger children.

These behaviours can sometimes be misunderstood as behavioural problems rather than signs of distress.

Frontline Insight

Children's behaviour often tells the story that their words cannot yet express.

Safety and Parenting Quality Must Take Priority Over Family Structure

Children benefit from loving, safe and dependable relationships with parents and other significant adults. However, this should not be reduced to a general assumption that every child must maintain a relationship with both biological parents regardless of violence, abuse, coercive control or ongoing risk.

Cycle Breaker Mission is concerned about approaches that treat the presence of both a mother and father as inherently preferable, even where one parent has used violence or continues to cause fear, instability or psychological harm.

The critical question should not be: *Does the child have both parents in their life?*

The critical questions should be: *Is the relationship safe?*

Is the parent emotionally and practically capable of meeting the child's needs?

Does contact contribute positively to the child's wellbeing, stability and healthy development?

What safeguards are required to prevent further harm?

Australian families already take many forms, including single-parent families, blended families, kinship care families, adoptive families and families headed by same-sex parents. Research consistently demonstrates that parenting quality, family functioning and emotional security are stronger predictors of child wellbeing than family structure alone.

What the Research Shows

A systematic review and meta-analysis published in BMJ Global Health found that children raised by same-sex parents experience outcomes broadly comparable to those raised by heterosexual parents, with some outcomes favouring children raised in sexual minority-parent families.

The review concluded that parenting quality and family functioning are stronger predictors of child wellbeing than parental gender or sexual orientation.¹ Child

¹ Zhang Y, et al. (2023). Family outcome disparities between sexual minority and heterosexual families: a systematic review and meta-analysis. BMJ Global Health. <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC10016267/>

wellbeing is more strongly associated with family stability and relationship quality than family structure itself.² Research over several decades by the University of Cambridge confirms that what matters most is not the gender or number of parents but the quality of family relationships, emotional security and stability provided to children.³ La Trobe University similarly notes that evidence does not support the proposition that children require both a mother and a father to thrive. They suggest that what children require is:

- safety;
- stability;
- emotional security;
- responsive caregiving;
- supportive relationships.⁴

Exposure to Violence Is Not a Neutral Parenting Arrangement

The evidence is clear that children exposed to domestic violence and coercive control can experience significant emotional, behavioural, developmental and mental health consequences.

Research has associated exposure to domestic violence with increased:

- anxiety;
- depression;
- trauma symptoms;
- behavioural difficulties;
- emotional insecurity;
- social difficulties.⁵

A recent systematic review examining coercive control found adverse impacts on children's emotional wellbeing, family functioning and parent-child relationships. Children were frequently found to be co-victim-survivors rather than passive observers.⁶ Research examining children's experiences of coercive control found

² Manning WD, Fetto MN, Lamidi E. (2014). Child Well-Being in Same-Sex Parent Families. <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC4091994/>

³ Golombok S. (2020). I've spent decades studying how people build their families. Here's what I've learned matters most. <https://time.com/5899546/family-structures/>

⁴ La Trobe University (2017). Are children better off with a mother and father? <https://www.latrobe.edu.au/news/articles/2017/opinion/are-children-better-off>

⁵ Kitzmann KM, Gaylord NK, Holt AR, Kenny ED. (2003). Child witnesses to domestic violence: a meta-analytic review. <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC3887080/>

⁶ Xyrakis N, et al. (2023). Interparental Coercive Control and Child and Family Outcomes: A Systematic Review. <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/36573654/>

children often actively alter their behaviour in order to manage risk and maintain safety within the family environment.⁷

The Risk of Prioritising Contact Over Safety

In family law matters there can be pressure on protective parents to demonstrate support for the child's relationship with the other parent even where significant safety concerns remain unresolved.

This can create situations where:

- reluctance to facilitate contact is treated as hostility;
- protective parenting is reframed as gatekeeping or alienation;
- violence is treated as a past relationship issue rather than an ongoing parenting issue;
- the protective parent is expected to manage risks created by the parent using violence.

Cycle Breaker Mission recognises that maintaining relationships with both parents can be beneficial where this occurs safely and in the child's best interests. However, maintaining contact should never become an objective that overrides child safety.

A relationship that exposes a child to fear, coercion, intimidation, manipulation or ongoing conflict may cause more harm than the absence of that relationship.

The goal should not be preserving a particular family structure. The goal should be ensuring children are raised within relationships characterised by:

- safety;
- consistency;
- emotional availability;
- healthy boundaries;
- respect;
- stability;
- freedom from violence and coercion.

One safe, emotionally available and stable parent may provide a stronger developmental foundation than two parents where violence, coercion or chronic dysfunction remain present.

⁷ Shorey S, et al. (2023). Beyond "Witnessing": Children's Experiences of Coercive Control in Domestic Violence and Abuse. <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/15248380231156197>

Frontline Insight

Children do not benefit from having two parents if one parent's involvement repeatedly exposes them to fear, intimidation, instability or harm.

Safe parenting matters more than family structure.

Schools as Critical Points of Identification and Support

Schools are often one of the first places where children affected by violence seek support, either directly or indirectly. Teachers and school staff may observe:

- behavioural changes;
- emotional distress;
- attendance concerns;
- learning difficulties;
- changes in social relationships.

Cycle Breaker Mission believes schools require greater training, support and referral pathways to recognise and respond to domestic and family violence-related trauma.

Health Services as Early Intervention Opportunities

General practitioners, paediatricians, psychologists, school counsellors and emergency departments all represent important opportunities for earlier identification and intervention.

Strengthening trauma-informed capability across health systems can improve earlier access to support and recovery services.

Family Courts and Children's Experiences

Family law proceedings can have profound impacts on children. Many children experience:

- uncertainty regarding arrangements;
- repeated assessments and interviews;
- exposure to ongoing conflict;
- fear regarding contact arrangements;
- concerns about speaking openly about their experiences.

Children's voices should be heard in developmentally appropriate ways without placing responsibility for adult decisions onto children themselves.

Frontline Insight

Children should never be placed in the position of choosing between safety and loyalty.

Child Protection Responses

Child protection systems play an essential role in protecting children from harm. However, victim-survivor mothers can sometimes experience child protection involvement as punitive rather than supportive where responsibility for managing risk becomes disproportionately placed upon the protective parent rather than the person using violence. Strengthening perpetrator accountability alongside support for non-offending parents remains essential.

Cycle Breaker Mission Position

Children are not witnesses to domestic and family violence.

They are victim-survivors in their own right.

Children need safe parents, not contact at any cost.

Parenting quality matters more than family structure.

Policy Recommendation

Cycle Breaker Mission recommends that the Second Action Plan strengthen recognition of children as victim-survivors across all systems interacting with families affected by domestic and family violence.

Focus should be given to improving responses across:

- schools;
- family courts;
- health services;
- child protection systems.

This should include:

- trauma-informed education responses;
- specialist therapeutic support for children;
- improved understanding of children's experiences of coercive control;
- workforce training regarding trauma responses in children;
- reducing unnecessary duplication of assessments and interviews;
- strengthening perpetrator accountability approaches;
- improving guidance to distinguish protective parenting behaviours from deliberate relationship interference;
- ensuring parenting decisions prioritise safety, emotional wellbeing and healthy development over assumptions about family structure.

Expected Outcomes

By 2032 Australia should be able to demonstrate:

- earlier identification of children affected by violence;
- increased access to therapeutic support;
- improved educational outcomes;
- improved emotional wellbeing;
- stronger child safety outcomes;
- reduced intergenerational transmission of violence;
- improved coordination between education, health, courts and child protection systems.

Success in 2032

Success will mean that every child affected by domestic and family violence is recognised, heard and supported. It will mean that children no longer fall into the gaps between adult services, education systems, health systems and courts. Most importantly, it will mean Australia recognises that helping children recover from violence is one of the most powerful violence prevention strategies available to us.

Children are not witnesses to domestic and family violence. They are victim-survivors in their own right. Children need safe parents, not contact at any cost. Parenting quality matters more than family structure. Every child deserves safety, stability and the opportunity to thrive.

Recommendation 5

Strengthen Responses to Post-Separation Abuse

The Issue

For many victim-survivors, separation does not end abuse. Instead, separation often marks the beginning of a new phase in which control, intimidation and abuse continue through different mechanisms and systems. While physical proximity may decrease following separation, opportunities for coercion frequently remain through parenting arrangements, legal proceedings, financial relationships, technology and institutional systems.

The Consultation Paper recognises the growing impact of technology-facilitated abuse, financial abuse and the need for stronger responses to people who use violence across the life course.

Cycle Breaker Mission believes post-separation abuse remains one of the least understood and most underestimated forms of domestic and family violence within Australia's current response systems.

What We Are Seeing

Cycle Breaker Mission regularly supports women who report that abuse intensified following separation. Common experiences include:

- repeated court applications and litigation;
- excessive or unnecessary legal correspondence;
- misuse of complaints processes;
- financial manipulation and economic control;
- intimidation through parenting arrangements;
- repeated breaches of boundaries;
- surveillance and monitoring through technology;
- manipulation of professionals and institutions;
- attempts to undermine the victim-survivor's credibility;
- misuse of child protection, police or service systems;
- ongoing harassment disguised as co-parenting communication.

Many victim-survivors describe feeling that while the relationship ended, the abuse did not.

Frontline Insight

Many women describe separation not as the end of abuse, but as a transition from private abuse to systems abuse.

Understanding Post-Separation Abuse

Post-separation abuse refers to patterns of behaviour designed to continue control, intimidation or punishment after a relationship has ended.

The goal is often not reconciliation. The goal is continued power and control.

This may include:

- creating financial hardship;
- prolonging court proceedings;
- creating instability for children;
- maintaining unwanted contact;
- exhausting emotional resources;
- undermining confidence or credibility;
- forcing ongoing engagement through systems.

Unlike incident-based violence, these behaviours often occur across multiple systems and may appear legitimate when viewed in isolation. Their cumulative effect can be profound.

Systems Abuse

Systems abuse occurs when legal, administrative or institutional systems are used as tools to continue coercion and control. Examples may include:

- repeated court applications with little prospect of success;
- unnecessary requests for information or documentation;
- excessive complaints to schools or professionals;
- repeated reports to child protection agencies;
- strategic use of mediation processes;
- misuse of police reporting systems;
- attempts to manipulate professional opinions or assessments.

These actions can consume significant emotional, financial and practical resources.

Frontline Insight

Systems designed to provide protection can sometimes become tools through which abuse continues.

Litigation Abuse

Litigation abuse refers to the misuse of legal processes to intimidate, punish or maintain control over a former partner. This may involve:

- repeated applications;
- unnecessary adjournments;
- excessive disclosure requests;
- strategic delays;
- procedural complexity designed to overwhelm;
- repeated relitigation of issues already determined.

Litigation abuse can have significant impacts on:

- financial stability;
- mental health;
- parenting capacity;
- employment participation;
- recovery from trauma.

For victim-survivors who are self-represented or who lose legal representation due to financial pressures, these impacts can be particularly severe.

Frontline Insight

Some survivors describe legal proceedings as a continuation of coercive control conducted through lawyers, paperwork and court dates rather than threats and intimidation.

Financial Abuse

Financial abuse often continues long after separation. Examples include:

- withholding child support;
- refusing to contribute to agreed expenses;
- delaying property settlements;
- accumulating joint debt;
- hiding assets;
- controlling access to funds;
- using financial pressure to influence parenting decisions.

The Consultation Paper identifies financial abuse as an area that remains under-recognised within current service systems.

Financial abuse can delay recovery, increase housing insecurity and force victim-survivors to remain engaged with abusive former partners for extended periods.

Frontline Insight

Financial abuse does not end when a bank account is separated.

Economic control can continue for years through property settlements, child support disputes and ongoing financial obligations.

Technology-Facilitated Abuse

Technology has created new opportunities for post-separation abuse. Examples include:

- tracking devices;
- location sharing;
- monitoring applications;
- excessive communication through parenting apps;
- image-based abuse;
- social media harassment;
- impersonation or account access;
- monitoring children's devices to obtain information about the other parent.

The Consultation Paper identifies technology-facilitated abuse as an emerging and growing concern requiring stronger national responses.

Technology-facilitated abuse can create a persistent sense of surveillance and prevent victim-survivors from feeling safe even after separation.

Coercive Control Does Not End with Separation

Coercive control is fundamentally about power and domination. Separation may remove some opportunities for control while creating new ones.

Parenting arrangements, legal proceedings and shared responsibilities can provide ongoing opportunities for coercion where systems fail to recognise the broader pattern of behaviour. Understanding post-separation abuse requires moving beyond individual incidents and recognising patterns, intent and cumulative impacts.

Frontline Insight

When professionals assess incidents in isolation, they can miss the broader pattern of coercive control connecting them.

Why It Matters

Post-separation abuse can result in:

- prolonged trauma exposure;
- increased anxiety and hypervigilance;
- financial hardship;
- housing instability;
- poorer mental health outcomes;
- reduced workforce participation;
- negative impacts on children;
- reduced trust in systems and institutions.

Children may also become direct targets of coercive control or experience significant distress arising from ongoing conflict and instability.

Trauma Responses and Misidentification

Trauma responses arising from prolonged coercive control can sometimes be misunderstood by professionals. For example:

- repeated safety concerns may be viewed as hostility;
- hypervigilance may be mistaken for paranoia;
- emotional distress may be interpreted as instability;
- protective parenting behaviours may be reframed as gatekeeping or alienation.

When systems fail to recognise trauma and coercive control, victim-survivors can experience institutional betrayal and systems-induced trauma. This can lead to:

- loss of trust in professionals;
- withdrawal from support services;
- increased distress;
- reluctance to raise future concerns.

Frontline Insight

Trauma changes behaviour.

Systems that fail to recognise trauma risk becoming part of the harm rather than part of the healing.

Cycle Breaker Mission Position

Separation should end abuse, not change its form.

Systems should never become tools through which coercive control continues.

The absence of physical violence does not necessarily indicate the absence of risk.

Policy Recommendation

Cycle Breaker Mission recommends that the Second Action Plan explicitly recognise and strengthen responses to post-separation abuse, including:

- systems abuse;
- litigation abuse;
- financial abuse;
- technology-facilitated abuse;
- post-separation coercive control.

Responses should include improved recognition, earlier intervention and stronger coordination across systems.

Implementation Pathway

Commonwealth Government

- Recognise post-separation abuse as a national policy priority.

- Include measures of post-separation abuse within monitoring frameworks.
- Support research into prevalence and impacts.

Courts and Justice Systems

- Improve understanding of litigation abuse and systems abuse.
- Strengthen mechanisms for identifying repeated misuse of processes.
- Improve trauma-informed responses within family law proceedings.

Financial Institutions

- Improve responses to economic abuse and post-separation financial manipulation.
- Strengthen protections relating to joint debt and financial coercion.

Technology Sector

- Improve responses to stalking technologies and image-based abuse.
- Increase public awareness regarding technology safety following separation.

Service Providers

- Increase workforce capability regarding coercive control and post-separation abuse.
- Improve screening and risk assessment processes.
- Strengthen referral pathways across sectors.

Expected Outcomes

By 2032 Australia should be able to demonstrate:

- improved identification of post-separation abuse;
- improved responses across justice systems;
- reduced misuse of systems and institutions;
- improved financial recovery outcomes;
- improved technology safety outcomes;
- increased confidence in professional responses;
- improved safety and wellbeing outcomes for women and children.

Success in 2032

Success will mean that systems recognise that abuse does not always end when relationships end. It will mean professionals understand the many ways coercive control can continue after separation. It will mean victim-survivors are not required to repeatedly prove patterns of abuse that unfold across multiple systems over

many years. Most importantly, it will mean that systems designed to protect families can no longer be weaponised against them.

Separation should end abuse, not change its form. Systems should never become tools through which coercive control continues. The absence of physical violence does not mean the absence of risk. When systems see incidents in isolation, they risk missing the pattern.

Recommendation 6

Improve Family Court Experiences for Victim-Survivors and Children

The Issue

For many victim-survivors, the Family Court is one of the longest, most complex and emotionally demanding stages of recovery following domestic and family violence. While the family law system plays a critical role in determining parenting arrangements, property settlements and long-term safety outcomes, many victim-survivors report experiencing the court process itself as highly stressful, retraumatising and difficult to navigate.

Family violence matters frequently involve multiple systems operating simultaneously, including:

- Family Court proceedings;
- criminal proceedings;
- domestic violence orders;
- child protection involvement;
- police investigations;
- schools and health professionals;
- specialist domestic violence services.

These systems often operate independently, requiring victim-survivors to repeatedly explain their experiences and coordinate information across agencies while recovering from trauma.

Cycle Breaker Mission acknowledges the significant reforms already undertaken within the family law system to improve responses to family violence and child

safety. However, further improvements remain possible to ensure that processes are not only legally fair, but also trauma-informed, child-centred and practically accessible.

What We Are Seeing

Women frequently describe Family Court proceedings as one of the most overwhelming and isolating stages of recovery. Common experiences include:

- repeated retelling of traumatic experiences;
- multiple affidavits covering the same material;
- duplicate risk assessments across different agencies;
- conflicting advice from professionals;
- lengthy delays and uncertainty;
- ongoing exposure to the person who used violence;
- financial exhaustion due to legal costs;
- difficulty understanding court processes;
- fear of making mistakes that may affect outcomes;
- balancing court demands alongside parenting and employment responsibilities.

For many survivors, court becomes a second full-time job at precisely the moment they are attempting to rebuild their lives.

Frontline Insight

Many women tell us that escaping violence was easier than navigating the systems that followed.

Trauma and Family Court Participation

Trauma changes how people think, remember, communicate and respond to stress. Victim-survivors participating in court proceedings may experience:

- difficulties recalling dates or sequences of events;
- memory fragmentation;
- concentration difficulties;
- emotional dysregulation;
- heightened anxiety;
- sleep disruption;
- difficulties processing information quickly;
- fear responses when interacting with the person who used violence.

These responses can sometimes be misunderstood as inconsistency, evasiveness or unreliability rather than recognised as common effects of trauma.

Frontline Insight

Trauma responses do not always present in ways professionals expect.

A person experiencing trauma may appear emotional, disorganised or inconsistent while still providing truthful and accurate evidence.

The Risk of Misinterpreting Protective Behaviour

Cycle Breaker Mission frequently observes situations where trauma responses and protective parenting behaviours are misunderstood. For example:

- repeated safety concerns may be interpreted as hostility;
- hypervigilance may be viewed as paranoia;
- emotional distress may be interpreted as instability;
- reluctance to facilitate contact may be framed as gatekeeping or alienation rather than protection;
- mistrust of systems may be interpreted as non-compliance rather than previous negative experiences.

Yet these behaviours often emerge from prolonged exposure to fear, coercive control, intimidation or violence.

The challenge for professionals is not simply to assess behaviour in isolation, but to understand the context in which that behaviour developed.

Institutional Betrayal and Systems-Induced Trauma

When trauma responses are misunderstood or protective behaviours are interpreted as malicious intent, victim-survivors can experience a second layer of trauma through their interactions with systems and institutions. This experience is often described as:

- institutional betrayal; or
- systems-induced trauma.

Victim-survivors may feel:

- disbelieved;

- blamed for raising concerns;
- punished for attempting to protect their children;
- pressured to minimise risk;
- unsupported by systems they expected would provide safety.

This can contribute to:

- increased anxiety;
- loss of trust in professionals;
- feelings of helplessness;
- disengagement from services;
- reluctance to disclose future concerns.

Frontline Insight

Systems that fail to understand trauma risk becoming part of the harm rather than part of the healing.

Duplication Creates Additional Trauma

Victim-survivors often report repeatedly recounting traumatic experiences to:

- police;
- lawyers;
- family consultants;
- independent children's lawyers;
- child protection workers;
- psychologists;
- schools;
- support services;
- medical professionals.

While each agency may have legitimate information requirements, repeated disclosure can be exhausting and retraumatising. Better coordination and information sharing between systems has the potential to reduce duplication while maintaining procedural fairness and privacy protections.

Financial Barriers and Self-Represented Litigants

Family law proceedings can continue for months or years. Many victim-survivors face significant financial barriers to maintaining legal representation throughout proceedings. Contributing factors may include:

- financial abuse;
- housing costs following separation;
- sole parenting responsibilities;
- reduced workforce participation;
- limited access to savings or assets.

Some victim-survivors may technically hold assets, such as equity in a family home, while having no practical access to funds to pay legal fees. Cycle Breaker Mission has observed many families:

- exhausting savings;
- relying on loans or credit cards;
- receiving financial assistance from family members;
- accumulating significant debt;
- losing legal representation before proceedings conclude; or
- becoming self-represented despite the complexity of proceedings.

Frontline Insight

Some families describe family law proceedings as a race between reaching safety and running out of money.

Self-Represented Litigants Require Additional Support

Self-represented litigants often face significant disadvantages when navigating complex legal systems. This may include difficulties:

- understanding procedural requirements;
- preparing documents;
- interpreting orders;
- managing evidence;
- understanding legal terminology;
- navigating court expectations.

These challenges can be particularly significant for victim-survivors recovering from trauma. Improved practical support for self-represented litigants has the potential to improve participation, confidence and access to justice.

Why It Matters

Family Court outcomes influence:

- child safety;
- parenting arrangements;
- housing stability;
- financial security;
- recovery from trauma;
- long-term wellbeing.

Improving experiences within the Family Court system is therefore not simply a procedural issue. It is a public health issue, a child wellbeing issue and a violence prevention issue.

Cycle Breaker Mission Position

Justice systems should not only deliver outcomes—they should support recovery.

Trauma-informed systems improve both participation and outcomes.

No woman or child should be disadvantaged because they cannot afford legal representation.

Policy Recommendation

Cycle Breaker Mission recommends that the Second Action Plan support improvements to Family Court experiences through:

- trauma-informed approaches across all stages of proceedings;
- reduced duplication of disclosures, assessments and evidence gathering;
- improved information sharing between agencies and professionals;
- increased support for self-represented litigants;
- greater access to specialist domestic and family violence expertise;
- improved understanding of coercive control and post-separation abuse;
- stronger recognition of children's experiences and developmental needs.

Implementation Pathway

Family Courts

- Expand trauma-informed practice training.
- Increase understanding of coercive control and post-separation abuse.
- Improve consistency in risk assessment approaches.
- Strengthen child-centred decision-making.

Governments

- Invest in court navigation services.

- Improve legal assistance funding pathways.
- Support integrated information sharing arrangements.

Legal Assistance Services

- Expand support for self-represented litigants.
- Increase access to practical resources and education.
- Develop specialist domestic violence pathways.

Cross-Sector Systems

- Improve collaboration between courts, police, child protection, health and education sectors.
- Reduce duplication of assessments and information gathering where appropriate.
- Develop shared risk frameworks across systems.

Expected Outcomes

By 2032 Australia should be able to demonstrate:

- improved victim-survivor experiences of Family Court processes;
- reduced re-traumatisation associated with proceedings;
- improved access to justice for self-represented litigants;
- reduced duplication across systems;
- improved coordination between agencies;
- stronger child safety outcomes;
- improved confidence and trust in the family law system.

Success in 2032

Success will mean that victim-survivors no longer experience the family law system as another form of endurance after violence. It will mean that trauma is recognised and understood rather than misinterpreted. It will mean that children's experiences are heard and prioritised. Most importantly, it will mean that the justice system contributes to recovery and safety rather than inadvertently adding to trauma.

Trauma-informed systems improve justice outcomes. Repeating trauma should not be the price of accessing protection. Justice should be accessible regardless of financial capacity. Systems designed to protect families should not become another source of harm.

Recommendation 7

Build Financial Independence and Economic Security

The Issue

Financial abuse is one of the most common yet least visible forms of domestic and family violence. For many victim-survivors, abuse does not end when the relationship ends. Instead, the financial consequences of violence can continue for years through debt, disrupted employment, reduced earning capacity, delayed property settlements and ongoing economic control.

Financial independence is not simply an economic issue.

It is a safety issue.

It is a housing issue.

It is a child wellbeing issue.

It is a violence prevention issue.

The Consultation Paper recognises economic security, financial abuse and long-term recovery as critical components of preventing and responding to violence against women and children.

Cycle Breaker Mission believes financial independence should be recognised as one of the strongest protective factors against ongoing violence and future vulnerability.

What We Are Seeing

Women leaving violence frequently experience:

- interrupted employment histories;
- career sacrifices made during caregiving years;
- reduced superannuation balances;
- damaged credit histories;
- coerced debt;
- limited access to personal savings;

- financial dependence created through coercive control;
- delayed or disputed property settlements;
- housing insecurity;
- child support disputes;
- reduced workforce participation due to parenting responsibilities and court proceedings.

Many survivors leave violence with little more than immediate essentials while the person who used violence often retains greater access to assets, income and financial resources.

Frontline Insight

Many women leave violence with their lives but without financial security.

Economic recovery often takes significantly longer than physical recovery.

Financial Abuse Does Not End at Separation

Financial abuse frequently continues long after separation. Examples include:

- withholding child support;
- refusing to contribute to agreed expenses;
- delaying property settlements;
- concealing assets or income;
- accumulating joint debt;
- using financial hardship to pressure parenting decisions;
- refusing to comply with financial orders;
- using legal costs as a means of financial exhaustion.

These behaviours can prolong dependency and increase vulnerability to homelessness, poverty and ongoing coercion.

Frontline Insight

Financial abuse often changes form after separation but rarely disappears overnight.

Employment as a Protective Factor

Employment provides more than income. Employment contributes to:

- financial independence;
- confidence and identity;
- social connection;
- career progression;
- retirement security;
- long-term wellbeing.

However, domestic and family violence can significantly disrupt workforce participation. Victim-survivors may experience:

- job loss;
- reduced hours;
- career interruptions;
- missed promotions;
- difficulty attending work due to court or safety concerns;
- challenges balancing sole parenting responsibilities.

Supporting re-entry into education and employment should therefore be recognised as an essential recovery intervention rather than an optional economic outcome.

Financial Capability and Confidence

Many victim-survivors leave relationships having had limited involvement in household finances due to coercive control and economic abuse. Some survivors may need support with:

- budgeting;
- banking systems;
- understanding credit products;
- taxation;
- government supports;
- debt management;
- superannuation;
- financial planning.

Financial capability programs can significantly improve confidence and long-term financial resilience.

Banking Protections

Banks and financial institutions often become frontline responders to financial abuse. Victim-survivors may experience:

- coerced debt;
- joint accounts being misused;
- unauthorised transactions;
- pressure to act as guarantors;
- financial products being used to facilitate abuse.

Australia has made important progress in this area through industry responses to financial abuse. However, further opportunities remain to strengthen protections and improve consistency across institutions.

Frontline Insight

Financial products should never become tools of coercion and control.

Superannuation and Long-Term Economic Security

Domestic and family violence can have significant long-term impacts on retirement outcomes. Women affected by violence may experience:

- interrupted workforce participation;
- reduced superannuation contributions;
- lower lifetime earnings;
- delayed property settlements;
- increased reliance on social supports in later life.

These impacts can continue decades beyond the abusive relationship itself. Financial recovery policy should therefore include retirement security alongside immediate financial needs.

Housing Affordability and Economic Safety

Housing affordability remains one of the greatest barriers preventing women from leaving violence and one of the greatest challenges after separation. Many victim-survivors face:

- rental affordability pressures;

- housing shortages;
- mortgage stress;
- insecure housing arrangements;
- homelessness risk.

Stable housing is one of the strongest predictors of successful long-term recovery.

Housing should not be viewed solely as accommodation.

Housing is infrastructure for safety, healing and recovery.

Frontline Insight

Many women do not stay because they lack courage.

They stay because they fear homelessness, poverty and instability for their children.

Why It Matters

Economic independence contributes directly to:

- long-term safety;
- reduced vulnerability to future violence;
- improved mental health;
- improved child wellbeing;
- stronger housing outcomes;
- increased workforce participation;
- reduced social isolation;
- improved retirement outcomes.

Financial independence is one of the strongest protective factors available to victim-survivors rebuilding after violence.

Cycle Breaker Mission Position

Financial independence is violence prevention.

Economic security creates safety, choice and opportunity.

Recovery should include financial recovery.

Policy Recommendation

Cycle Breaker Mission recommends that the Second Action Plan strengthen financial independence initiatives for victim-survivors with particular focus on:

- employment participation;
- financial capability programs;
- banking protections;
- superannuation outcomes;
- housing affordability and housing stability.

Implementation Pathway

Employment

- Expand pathways back into education and employment.
- Increase access to flexible training and upskilling opportunities.
- Encourage trauma-informed workplace policies and practices.
- Improve employer understanding of domestic and family violence impacts.

Financial Capability

- Expand access to financial literacy and financial recovery programs.
- Support specialist financial counselling services.
- Improve awareness of available government supports and entitlements.

Banking Protections

- Strengthen responses to financial abuse within financial institutions.
- Improve processes relating to coerced debt and joint liabilities.
- Expand specialist domestic violence teams within banks.

Superannuation

- Improve access to information and support regarding superannuation entitlements.
- Explore opportunities to strengthen retirement outcomes for victim-survivors.
- Increase awareness regarding superannuation splitting processes.

Housing Affordability

- Expand access to affordable and long-term housing options.
- Strengthen pathways from crisis accommodation to stable housing.
- Recognise housing as a core component of violence prevention and recovery.

Expected Outcomes

By 2032 Australia should be able to demonstrate:

- increased workforce participation among victim-survivors;
- improved financial literacy and confidence;
- reduced impacts of financial abuse;
- improved housing stability;
- improved retirement outcomes;
- reduced economic vulnerability;
- increased long-term financial independence.

Success in 2032

Success will mean that women are no longer forced to choose between violence and poverty. It will mean that leaving violence does not automatically result in financial crisis. It will mean that financial recovery becomes a recognised and funded component of Australia's response to domestic and family violence.

Most importantly, it will mean that victim-survivors have genuine economic choices and opportunities to rebuild their lives. Financial independence is violence prevention. Economic security creates safety, choice and opportunity. Women should never have to choose between violence and homelessness. Recovery should include financial recovery.

Recommendation 8

Invest in Lived Experience Leadership

The Issue

Australia's response to domestic, family and sexual violence has increasingly recognised the importance of lived experience in shaping policy, services and reform. This represents significant progress. However, lived experience participation often remains limited to consultation processes, one-off engagements or voluntary contributions rather than being embedded as a permanent and valued component of leadership and decision-making. Too often, victim-survivors are invited to share experiences but not empowered to influence decisions. Their stories are heard, but their expertise is not always recognised.

Cycle Breaker Mission believes that lived experience is not simply a perspective to be consulted. It is a form of expertise.

The Consultation Paper recognises the importance of listening to victim-survivors and ensuring policies and services are informed by lived experience and community leadership.

The next phase of reform should move beyond consultation towards genuine co-design, leadership and decision-making.

What We Are Seeing

Women with lived experience are increasingly contributing to:

- advisory groups;
- policy consultations;
- research projects;
- service design;
- training and education;
- peer support programs;
- advocacy initiatives.

Despite this progress, barriers remain. Many lived experience contributors report:

- unpaid labour expectations;
- tokenistic consultation;
- limited influence over decisions;
- lack of ongoing opportunities;
- emotional burden associated with repeatedly recounting traumatic experiences;
- insufficient support structures.

Many individuals contribute significant expertise while balancing recovery, employment, caring responsibilities and financial pressures.

Frontline Insight

Lived experience should not be viewed as a story to collect.

It is expertise developed through navigating systems, identifying gaps and surviving experiences that policies are designed to address.

Why Lived Experience Matters

People with lived experience often identify system barriers long before they appear in formal evaluations or research findings. They bring insight into:

- unintended policy consequences;
- barriers to help-seeking;
- service accessibility;
- cultural safety;
- trauma-informed practice;
- system navigation challenges;
- emerging forms of abuse and coercive control.

Lived experience perspectives improve:

- policy design;
- service effectiveness;
- research quality;
- public trust;
- accountability.

International evidence increasingly supports the value of co-design and lived experience participation in improving outcomes across health, mental health and social service systems.

Moving Beyond Consultation

Cycle Breaker Mission believes Australia has an opportunity to move beyond asking: "*Have we consulted people with lived experience?*" towards asking: "*Are people with lived experience helping lead decisions?*"

There is an important difference between:

- consultation;
- participation;
- partnership; and
- leadership.

The goal should be leadership.

Frontline Insight

Nothing about us without us.

Recognising the Cost of Participation

Sharing experiences of violence can be emotionally demanding. Participation may involve:

- revisiting trauma;
- public speaking;
- media engagement;
- reading distressing material;
- contributing to emotionally challenging policy discussions.

Lived experience contributors should not be expected to absorb these costs personally. Best practice participation requires:

- payment for expertise;
- trauma-informed facilitation;
- psychological safety;
- clear boundaries;
- opportunities for debriefing and support.

Lived Experience as Workforce Development

Investing in lived experience leadership also creates employment pathways. Many victim-survivors possess valuable skills in:

- advocacy;
- mentoring;
- community engagement;
- research;
- governance;
- policy development;
- education and training.

Supporting these pathways benefits both individuals and the broader sector.

Why It Matters

Embedding lived experience leadership contributes to:

- stronger policy outcomes;
- improved service design;
- increased trust in institutions;
- improved accessibility;
- greater accountability;
- more effective prevention and response strategies.

Importantly, it also shifts the narrative from victimhood to leadership and contribution.

Cycle Breaker Mission Position

Lived experience is expertise.

Survivors should not only inform systems.

They should help lead them.

Nothing about victim-survivors should be designed without victim-survivors.

Policy Recommendation

Cycle Breaker Mission recommends that the Second Action Plan strengthen investment in lived experience leadership across all levels of policy, research and service delivery. Particular focus should be given to expanding:

- lived experience advisory groups;
- lived experience participation in research;
- governance and board positions;
- paid leadership and employment opportunities;
- co-design processes;
- peer workforce pathways;
- mentoring and leadership development programs.

Participation should be meaningful, supported and appropriately remunerated.

Priority Areas for Investment

Advisory Groups

Expand opportunities for lived experience representation across national, state and local advisory structures.

Participation should include genuine influence over decisions rather than symbolic representation.

Research Participation

Increase lived experience involvement in:

- study design;
- recruitment strategies;
- ethics processes;
- interpretation of findings;
- dissemination of results.

Research is strengthened when it reflects both evidence and lived realities.

Governance Roles

Increase opportunities for victim-survivors to participate in:

- boards;
- steering committees;
- governance structures;
- policy development bodies.

Decision-making bodies should better reflect the communities they serve.

Paid Leadership Positions

Create sustainable pathways into:

- advocacy roles;
- policy positions;
- peer workforce roles;
- research positions;
- community leadership opportunities.

Lived experience should be compensated as expertise rather than relied upon as voluntary labour.

Implementation Pathway

Commonwealth Government

- Develop national lived experience participation principles.
- Require meaningful lived experience involvement in National Plan implementation and evaluation.

- Support leadership development initiatives.

State and Territory Governments

- Expand funded lived experience advisory structures.
- Increase lived experience representation across commissions and advisory bodies.
- Support regional and culturally diverse participation.

Research Institutions

- Embed lived experience participation throughout research lifecycles.
- Develop fair remuneration frameworks.
- Strengthen trauma-informed engagement practices.

Service Providers

- Create pathways into governance and leadership roles.
- Develop peer workforce models.
- Support ongoing professional development.

Expected Outcomes

By 2032 Australia should be able to demonstrate:

- increased lived experience representation across leadership roles;
- stronger co-design practices;
- increased paid participation opportunities;
- improved policy and service outcomes;
- increased diversity of voices represented in decision-making;
- stronger trust between communities and institutions.

Success in 2032

Success will mean that lived experience expertise is valued alongside professional and academic expertise. It will mean that survivors are no longer invited into rooms simply to share stories but are invited to help shape decisions. It will mean that leadership pathways exist for those who wish to contribute beyond their own recovery journey.

Most importantly, it will mean Australia recognises that some of the most valuable expertise in preventing and responding to violence comes from those who have navigated the systems themselves. Lived experience is expertise. Nothing about victim-survivors should be designed without victim-survivors. Stories matter.

Expertise matters more. Survivors should not only inform systems. They should help lead them.

Recommendation 9

Strengthen Workforce Capability Across All Systems

The Issue

Domestic, family and sexual violence is not solely a specialist service issue. Victim-survivors interact with a wide range of professionals throughout their journey, including teachers, doctors, police, housing workers, court staff, faith leaders, employers and community organisations. For many women and children, these professionals become the first point of disclosure, the first source of support, or the first opportunity for intervention. The quality of these responses can significantly influence whether individuals seek further support, remain engaged with services and ultimately achieve safety and recovery.

The Consultation Paper identifies workforce capability and system integration as essential components of Australia's future response to domestic, family and sexual violence.

Cycle Breaker Mission believes that improving workforce capability across mainstream systems represents one of the greatest opportunities for early intervention, improved safety outcomes and long-term prevention.

What We Are Seeing

Many victim-survivors report both positive and negative experiences when seeking support from professionals outside specialist domestic violence services.

Common experiences include:

- disclosures being minimised or dismissed;
- coercive control not being recognised;
- trauma responses being misunderstood;
- victims being labelled as "high conflict" rather than traumatised;
- systems focusing on incidents rather than patterns of behaviour;
- children being viewed as witnesses rather than victim-survivors;

- responsibility being placed on protective parents rather than perpetrators;
- cultural or faith considerations being misunderstood;
- fragmented referrals and disconnected responses.

Many professionals want to help but report limited training, confidence or practical guidance in responding to domestic and family violence.

Frontline Insight

A single response from a trusted professional can influence whether a victim-survivor seeks help again or withdraws from support altogether.

Why Workforce Capability Matters

Domestic and family violence rarely presents as a single disclosure of physical violence. Victim-survivors may instead present with:

- anxiety;
- depression;
- chronic stress;
- financial hardship;
- parenting concerns;
- school attendance issues;
- housing instability;
- physical health complaints;
- workplace difficulties.

Without appropriate training, professionals may respond to symptoms without recognising the underlying cause. Improved workforce capability increases the likelihood of:

- earlier identification;
- safer responses;
- improved referrals;
- reduced re-traumatisation;
- stronger collaboration between systems.

Understanding Trauma and Coercive Control

Many systems have traditionally focused on incidents of physical violence rather than patterns of coercive control. However, coercive control may include:

- isolation;
- intimidation;
- surveillance;
- financial abuse;
- threats;
- technology-facilitated abuse;
- manipulation through children;
- systems abuse.

Professionals require training that enables them to identify patterns rather than isolated incidents.

Frontline Insight

When systems look only for bruises, they often miss the abuse occurring in plain sight.

Trauma Responses Are Frequently Misunderstood

Trauma responses can look very different from what professionals expect. Victim-survivors may appear:

- anxious;
- emotional;
- hypervigilant;
- inconsistent;
- overwhelmed;
- distrustful of systems.

Protective parenting behaviours may be interpreted as hostility or non-compliance.

Hypervigilance may be mistaken for paranoia.

Emotional distress may be interpreted as instability.

Yet these responses are often understandable adaptations to prolonged exposure to fear, coercive control and violence. When professionals misinterpret trauma responses, victim-survivors may experience institutional betrayal and systems-induced trauma.

Frontline Insight

Trauma changes behaviour.

Systems that fail to recognise trauma risk becoming part of the harm rather than part of the healing.

Workforce Groups Requiring Priority Investment

Teachers and Education Staff

Schools are often among the first places children disclose abuse or demonstrate signs of trauma. Training should include:

- recognising trauma responses;
- responding to disclosures;
- understanding coercive control;
- supporting children affected by violence;
- referral pathways.

Health Workers

General practitioners, emergency departments, paediatricians, psychologists, nurses and allied health professionals are often trusted disclosure points. Training should include:

- routine enquiry where appropriate;
- recognising non-physical indicators of abuse;
- responding safely to disclosures;
- referral pathways.

Police

Police responses can have a lasting impact on victim confidence in the justice system. Training should continue to strengthen:

- understanding of coercive control;
- trauma-informed interviewing;
- identifying primary aggressors;
- recognising post-separation abuse;
- cultural responsiveness.

Housing Staff

Housing insecurity remains one of the greatest barriers to leaving violence. Housing workers require increased capability regarding:

- risk assessment;
- safety planning;
- confidentiality;
- financial abuse;
- referral pathways.

Court Staff

Court staff often interact with victim-survivors during periods of significant distress. Training should include:

- trauma-informed communication;
- coercive control;
- post-separation abuse;
- safety planning;
- referral options.

Faith Communities

Faith communities often represent significant sources of support and belonging. However, survivors may also experience:

- pressure to remain in unsafe relationships;
- minimisation of abuse;
- misunderstanding of coercive control;
- spiritual manipulation.

Faith leaders and communities require support to recognise domestic and family violence and respond safely and appropriately.

Frontline Insight

Faith communities can become places of healing, safety and belonging—or places where survivors feel silenced and unsupported.

Why It Matters

Improved workforce capability contributes to:

- earlier intervention;
- improved identification;
- reduced re-traumatisation;
- improved referral pathways;
- stronger perpetrator accountability;
- improved child safety outcomes;
- increased trust in systems.

Workforce capability is therefore not simply a training issue.

It is a prevention strategy.

It is a safety strategy.

It is a recovery strategy.

Cycle Breaker Mission Position

Every professional who interacts with families affected by violence should have the skills to recognise abuse and respond safely.

Domestic and family violence is everyone's business, even when specialist services carry specialist responsibilities.

A trauma-informed workforce creates safer systems.

Policy Recommendation

Cycle Breaker Mission recommends that the Second Action Plan support significant investment in workforce capability across both specialist and mainstream systems. Priority workforce groups should include:

- teachers and education staff;
- health workers;
- police;
- housing staff;
- court staff;
- faith communities;
- child protection workers;
- financial institutions;
- employers and workplaces.

Training should include:

- coercive control;

- trauma and trauma responses;
- children's experiences of violence;
- financial abuse;
- post-separation abuse;
- systems abuse;
- technology-facilitated abuse;
- cultural safety;
- referral pathways and collaboration.

Implementation Pathway

Commonwealth Government

- Develop a national workforce capability framework.
- Establish minimum competencies across sectors.
- Support national training resources and standards.

State and Territory Governments

- Embed domestic and family violence capability requirements into workforce development strategies.
- Fund cross-sector training initiatives.
- Support regional and remote workforce capability.

Professional Bodies and Training Institutions

- Embed domestic and family violence content into undergraduate and postgraduate education.
- Require ongoing professional development in trauma-informed practice and coercive control.

Employers and Organisations

- Implement domestic and family violence workplace policies.
- Provide regular training and refresher programs.
- Develop clear referral pathways for staff and clients.

Expected Outcomes

By 2032 Australia should be able to demonstrate:

- earlier identification of domestic and family violence;
- increased confidence among professionals responding to disclosures;
- improved referral pathways;
- reduced re-traumatisation;

- improved child safety outcomes;
- increased trust in systems and institutions;
- stronger collaboration across sectors.

Success in 2032

Success will mean that a victim-survivor receives a safe and informed response regardless of which door they enter first. It will mean that teachers, doctors, police officers, court staff, housing workers and faith leaders all understand their role in recognising and responding to violence. Most importantly, it will mean that systems work together to create safety rather than unintentionally creating additional barriers to recovery.

A trauma-informed workforce creates safer systems. The first response matters. Domestic and family violence is everyone's business. Victim-survivors should receive a safe response no matter which door they walk through first.

Recommendation 10

Measure What Matters: From Outputs to Outcomes

The Issue

Australia has made significant progress in improving data collection, accountability and reporting across domestic, family and sexual violence services. However, many existing funding and reporting frameworks continue to focus heavily on outputs rather than outcomes. Services are often required to report measures such as:

- number of referrals;
- number of counselling sessions;
- number of court appearances;
- number of clients seen;
- number of programs delivered;
- number of training sessions completed.

While these measures are important for understanding activity and service demand, they do not necessarily tell us whether lives are improving. Counting services delivered is not the same as measuring recovery.

Cycle Breaker Mission believes Australia's next phase of reform should focus not only on what services do, but on what changes for the people they support.

The Consultation Paper highlights the importance of accountability, evidence and evaluation in informing future investment and reform.

What We Are Seeing

Many victim-survivors describe success differently from how systems currently measure it. Success is not always:

- obtaining an order;
- attending a program;
- completing counselling sessions;
- receiving a referral.

Success may instead look like:

- sleeping through the night for the first time in years;
- returning to work;
- moving into stable housing;
- a child returning to school;
- opening a bank account independently;
- attending court without panic;
- making decisions without fear;
- rebuilding friendships and community connection.

These outcomes often occur slowly and incrementally, but they represent profound changes in safety, wellbeing and recovery.

Frontline Insight

Recovery is not measured by how many appointments someone attends.

Recovery is measured by how much of their life they get back.

The Limits of Output-Based Measurement

Output measures can unintentionally create incentives that favour:

- short-term interventions;
- high client throughput;

- crisis responses;
- easily measurable activities.

This can disadvantage programs focused on:

- long-term recovery;
- mentoring;
- community connection;
- peer support;
- relationship-based interventions.

Some of the most meaningful changes in recovery are also the hardest to measure. For example:

- increased confidence;
- reduced fear;
- stronger parenting relationships;
- improved emotional wellbeing;
- renewed hope for the future.

These outcomes matter deeply to victim-survivors even if they do not fit neatly into traditional reporting frameworks.

Recovery Is a Long-Term Outcome

Recovery from domestic and family violence often occurs over years rather than months. A woman who secures housing today may still be navigating:

- financial recovery;
- family law proceedings;
- trauma symptoms;
- parenting challenges;
- rebuilding employment pathways.

Similarly, children may continue to experience impacts long after violence has ended. Short funding cycles and short evaluation periods may fail to capture these longer-term improvements.

Frontline Insight

Some of the most important outcomes appear long after a case file has been closed.

Measuring Stability

Cycle Breaker Mission believes stability should become a core national recovery measure. Indicators of stability may include:

- safe and secure housing;
- financial independence;
- community connection;
- educational participation;
- parenting confidence;
- emotional wellbeing;
- reduced crisis service use;
- improved trust in institutions.

Stability is not simply a recovery outcome. Stability is a protective factor that supports long-term safety and reduces vulnerability to future harm.

Measuring Safety Beyond Crisis

Safety should not only be measured by the absence of physical violence. Safety may also include:

- freedom from coercive control;
- freedom from fear;
- financial safety;
- emotional safety;
- digital safety;
- housing security;
- confidence navigating systems.

A person may no longer be experiencing physical violence while still living with significant fear, instability and ongoing abuse. Measuring safety more broadly provides a more accurate picture of recovery.

Measuring Housing Outcomes

Housing is one of the strongest predictors of successful recovery. Measures should include:

- housing stability;
- duration of housing security;
- transitions from crisis accommodation to long-term housing;
- reductions in homelessness risk;
- housing affordability.

Housing is not simply accommodation.

Housing is infrastructure for recovery.

Frontline Insight

Stability begins with knowing where you will sleep next month, not just tonight.

Measuring Employment and Economic Recovery

Economic recovery should be recognised as a key outcome of domestic and family violence responses. Measures could include:

- workforce participation;
- return to education;
- financial independence;
- reduced debt;
- improved financial confidence;
- superannuation recovery.

Financial independence strengthens safety, choice and long-term wellbeing.

Measuring Child Wellbeing

Children's outcomes should be measured independently rather than solely through parental outcomes. Potential indicators include:

- school attendance;
- educational engagement;
- emotional wellbeing;
- therapeutic support access;
- social participation;
- feelings of safety;
- developmental outcomes.

Children are victim-survivors in their own right and deserve to be recognised as such within national reporting frameworks.

Measuring Long-Term Recovery

Recovery measures should include:

- mental wellbeing;
- social connection;
- confidence and self-efficacy;
- parenting confidence;
- reduced social isolation;
- community participation;
- hope for the future.

These indicators may provide a more meaningful understanding of recovery than service outputs alone.

Frontline Insight

A successful outcome is not simply surviving violence.

A successful outcome is building a life that no longer revolves around it.

Why It Matters

Measuring outcomes rather than outputs allows governments and services to better understand:

- what works;
- where investment creates lasting change;
- which programs support long-term recovery;
- where service gaps remain.

This creates opportunities for:

- smarter investment;
- stronger accountability;
- improved policy development;
- better outcomes for families.

Cycle Breaker Mission Position

What gets measured gets funded.

What gets funded shapes the system.

If Australia wants recovery, we must measure recovery.

Policy Recommendation

Cycle Breaker Mission recommends that the Second Action Plan expand national measurement frameworks beyond service outputs to include long-term recovery outcomes. Priority outcome measures should include:

- stability;
- safety;
- housing security;
- employment participation;
- child wellbeing;
- long-term recovery.

Additional indicators should include:

- financial independence;
- community connection;
- educational participation;
- emotional wellbeing;
- reduced re-victimisation;
- confidence navigating systems.

Implementation Pathway

Commonwealth Government

- Develop a National Recovery Outcomes Framework.
- Establish nationally consistent recovery indicators.
- Include recovery measures within future National Plan reporting.

State and Territory Governments

- Embed outcome measures into funding agreements and commissioning models.
- Support longitudinal evaluation of recovery programs.
- Encourage innovation in measuring wellbeing and recovery outcomes.

Service Providers

- Measure outcomes alongside outputs.
- Include client-defined recovery goals.
- Incorporate lived experience perspectives into evaluation frameworks.

Researchers and Evaluation Bodies

- Develop validated measures of recovery and wellbeing.
- Strengthen longitudinal studies examining long-term outcomes.
- Ensure children's outcomes are measured independently.

Expected Outcomes

By 2032 Australia should be able to demonstrate:

- increased housing stability;
- improved financial independence;
- increased workforce participation;
- improved child wellbeing;
- stronger community connection;
- reduced re-victimisation;
- improved mental wellbeing;
- increased trust in institutions;
- stronger long-term recovery outcomes.

Success in 2032

Success will mean Australia no longer measures success solely by how many services were delivered or how many people passed through systems. Success will mean measuring whether women and children are safer, more stable and more connected than they were before. It will mean recognising that recovery is not simply surviving violence. Recovery is building a life beyond it.

Most importantly, it will mean Australia measures what victim-survivors themselves say matters most. What gets measured gets funded. If Australia wants recovery, we must measure recovery. Outputs count activity. Outcomes measure lives changed. Escaping violence saves lives. Rebuilding lives changes futures.

What Success Looks Like in 2032

By 2032:

- No woman navigates court alone.
- Every child receives support.
- Recovery services are available nationally.
- Financial abuse is routinely identified.
- Housing pathways exist for every victim-survivor.
- Services work together.
- Lived experience informs policy.

Conclusion

Australia has made significant progress in helping women and children escape violence.

The Second Action Plan provides an opportunity to invest with equal determination in helping them recover, rebuild and thrive.

Safety is not the finish line. Stability is. Recovery is. Hope is.

At Cycle Breaker Mission we believe every woman and every child deserves more than survival. They deserve the opportunity to rebuild their lives with dignity, stability, belonging and hope.

Escaping violence saves lives. Rebuilding lives changes futures.

Final Position of the Submission

The entire submission rests on four evidence-informed propositions:

Safety is the beginning of recovery, not the end.

Children are victim-survivors in their own right.

Parenting quality matters more than family structure.

Escaping violence saves lives. Rebuilding lives changes futures.

These principles are strongly supported by the National Plan, Australian evidence and international research and provide the foundation for Cycle Breaker Mission's recommendations for Australia's Second Action Plan.

Appendix - Bibliography

This bibliography is designed to support the recommendations contained throughout the submission while demonstrating that Cycle Breaker Mission's policy positions are informed by:

- Australian government policy;
- peer-reviewed research;
- Australian practice evidence;
- frontline observations;
- lived experience expertise.

Foundational policy documents

Australian Government Department of Social Services, *National Plan to End Violence against Women and Children 2022–2032*,
<https://www.dss.gov.au/system/files/resources/national-plan-end-violence-against-women-and-children-2022-2032.pdf>

Key relevance:

- National policy framework.
- Prevention, early intervention, response, recovery & healing framework.
- Shared national outcomes and implementation approach.

Department of Social Services, *Second Action Plan Consultation*,
<https://engage.dss.gov.au/second-action-plan/>

Key relevance:

- Consultation priorities.
- Recovery and healing focus.
- Workforce capability.
- Child wellbeing.
- Systems integration.

Australian National Research Organisation for Women's Safety (ANROWS),
Government Relations and National Plan Resources,
<https://www.anrows.org.au/resources/government-relations/>

Key relevance:

- National implementation framework.
- Evidence translation.
- Cross-sector reform priorities.

Recommendation 1

Recovery and Rebuilding as a National Priority, *National Plan to End Violence Against Women and Children*,

<https://www.dss.gov.au/system/files/resources/national-plan-end-violence-against-women-and-children-2022-2032.pdf>

Supports:

- Recovery and healing as a core domain.
- Whole-of-life responses.
- Long-term wellbeing outcomes.

ANROWS, *Second Action Plan Consultation Response*,

<https://www.anrows.org.au/news/second-action-plan-consultation/>

Supports:

- Long-term evidence-based approaches.
- Recovery investment.
- System integration.

Recommendation 2

Court Navigation Services National Legal Aid, *National Legal Aid welcomes consultation on the Second Action Plan*,

<https://nationallegalaid.org.au/news/national-legal-aid-welcomes-consultation-on-second-action-plan-to-end-violence-against-women-and-children>

Supports:

- Access to justice.
- System navigation.
- Legal support gaps.

McCormack M. (2025), *Endless litigation in family court as a method of post-separation abuse*,

<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/09649069.2025.2530882>

Supports:

- Litigation abuse.
- Family court misuse.
- Ongoing coercive control through legal systems.

Recommendation 3

Long-Term Recovery Funding, *National Plan to End Violence Against Women and Children*,

<https://www.dss.gov.au/system/files/resources/national-plan-end-violence-against-women-and-children-2022-2032.pdf>

Supports:

- Recovery and healing as a national objective.
- Long-term wellbeing outcomes.

ANROWS, *Second Action Plan Consultation Response*,

<https://www.anrows.org.au/news/second-action-plan-consultation/>

Supports:

- Sustained recovery investment.
- Longitudinal outcomes.
- Service integration.

Recommendation 4

Australian Institute of Family Studies (AIFS), *Children's Exposure to Domestic and Family Violence*,

<https://aifs.gov.au/resources/policy-and-practice-papers/childrens-exposure-domestic-and-family-violence>

Supports:

- Children's developmental impacts.
- Educational impacts.
- Mental health impacts.
- Homelessness risk.

Doroudchi A et al. (2023), *Psychological Complications of Children Exposed to*

Domestic Violence, <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC10213576/>

Supports:

- PTSD.
- Depression.
- Anxiety.
- Self-harm risk.
- Suicide risk.

Xyrakis N et al. (2024), *Interparental Coercive Control and Child and Family*

Outcomes: A Systematic Review,

<https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/36573654/>

Supports:

- Children as co-victim-survivors.
- Child wellbeing impacts.
- Family functioning impacts.

Australian National University, *Coercive Control Takes Significant Toll on Children*

<https://www.anu.edu.au/news/all-news/coercive-control-takes-significant-toll-on-children>

Supports:

- Children affected by coercive control.

- Child-focused responses.

Zhang Y et al. (2023), *Family Outcome Disparities Between Sexual Minority and Heterosexual Families*, <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC10016267/>

Supports:

- Parenting quality over family structure.
- Child outcomes in same-sex parent families.

Manning WD et al. (2014) *Child Wellbeing in Same-Sex Parent Families*
<https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC4091994/>

Supports:

- Family stability.
- Relationship quality.
- Child wellbeing.

Golombok, S, *I've Spent Decades Studying How People Build Their Families*,
<https://time.com/5899546/family-structures/>

Supports:

- Quality of relationships over family structure.

La Trobe University, *Are Children Better Off with a Mother and Father?*,
<https://www.latrobe.edu.au/news/articles/2017/opinion/are-children-better-off>

Supports:

- Family functioning over parental gender composition.

Recommendation 5

Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, *Coercive Control*,
<https://www.aihw.gov.au/family-domestic-and-sexual-violence/understanding-fdsv/coercive-control>

Supports:

- Definition of coercive control.
- Patterns of abuse.

Spearman KJ et al. (2023), *Post-Separation Abuse: A Literature Review Connecting Tactics*, <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC11114442/>

Supports:

- Post-separation abuse.
- Ongoing coercive control.
- Family court impacts.

McCormack M. (2025), *Endless Litigation in Family Court as a Method of Post-Separation Abuse*,

<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/09649069.2025.2530882>

Supports:

- Litigation abuse.
- Systems abuse.
- Family court weaponisation.

The Guardian (2026), *Sharp Rise in Domestic Abusers Using Finances for Coercion*,
<https://www.theguardian.com/society/2026/jul/09/domestic-abuse-technology-finances-control-uk-charities>

Supports:

- Economic abuse.
- Technology-facilitated abuse.
- Financial coercion.

Recommendation 6

Attorney-General's Department, *Children and Family Law*,
<https://www.ag.gov.au/families-and-marriage/children-and-family-law>

Supports:

- Best interests of the child framework.
- Safety considerations.

Federal Circuit and Family Court of Australia, *Family Violence Best Practice Principles*, <https://www.fcfcoa.gov.au/pubs/fl/fvbpp>

Supports:

- Trauma-informed court responses.
- Child safety considerations.

McCormack M. (2025), *Endless litigation in family court as a method of post-separation coercive control*,
<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/09649069.2025.2530882>

Supports:

- Court misuse.
- Coercive control through litigation.

Recommendation 7

National Plan to End Violence Against Women and Children,
<https://www.dss.gov.au/system/files/resources/national-plan-end-violence-against-women-and-children-2022-2032.pdf>

Supports:

- Economic security.
- Financial abuse responses.

The Guardian (2026), *Sharp rise in domestic abusers using finances for coercion, UK charities*

say, <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2026/jul/09/domestic-abuse-technology-finances-control-uk-charities>

Supports:

- Economic abuse.
- Financial products as abuse tools.

Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, *Mothers and Their Children*,

<https://www.aihw.gov.au/family-domestic-and-sexual-violence/population-groups/mothers-and-their-children>

Supports:

- Economic impacts of violence.
- Parenting and employment impacts.

Recommendation 8

ANROWS, <https://www.anrows.org.au/resources/government-relations/>

Supports:

- Victim-survivor participation.
- Co-design.
- Policy leadership.

DSS, *Second Action Plan Consultation*,

<https://engage.dss.gov.au/second-action-plan/>

Supports:

- Inclusion of lived experience voices in policy development.

Recommendation 9

Australian Institute of Family Studies, *What the Research Evidence Tells Us About Coercive Control*,

<https://aifs.gov.au/resources/policy-and-practice-papers/what-research-evidence-tells-us-about-coercive-control>

Supports:

- Workforce understanding of coercive control.
- Identification challenges.

Queensland Child Safety, *Impact of Domestic Violence on Children*,

<https://cspm.csyw.qld.gov.au/practice-kits/domestic-and-family-violence/impact-of-domestic-violence-on-children>

Supports:

- Education responses.
- Child wellbeing impacts.

Schools as a Safety Net (2022) <https://arxiv.org/abs/2206.14612>

Supports:

- Schools as disclosure points.
- Early intervention opportunities.

Recommendation 10

Measure What Matters, *National Plan to End Violence Against Women and Children*, <https://www.dss.gov.au/system/files/resources/national-plan-end-violence-against-women-and-children-2022-2032.pdf>

Supports:

- Accountability.
- Outcomes frameworks.
- Recovery and healing.

Boyer C et al. (2022), *Outcome Coding Choice in Randomized Trials of Programs to Reduce Violence*, <https://arxiv.org/abs/2204.12385>

Supports:

- Measuring outcomes rather than outputs.
- Evaluation design.