



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



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Commissioner foreword

The Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence Commission (the Commission) welcomes the opportunity to provide a submission to the consultation on the Second Action Plan under the *National Plan to End Violence against Women and Children 2022–2032* (National Plan).

The Second Action Plan represents a critical opportunity to further strengthen our responses to domestic, family and sexual violence. Between June and August 2026, the Commission undertook a significant program of roundtables, consultations and targeted engagements with people with lived and living experience, sector leaders, researchers, government, partners and subject matter experts. I would like to extend my deep gratitude to the more than 310 people who generously shared their experiences, insights and knowledge to inform this process.

This submission identifies priority areas of focus for the Second Action Plan informed by these insights. It should be read alongside the analysis in the Commission's 2026 Yearly Report to Parliament when tabled. Both documents reinforce the need to prioritise early intervention, improve coordination across systems, direct investment towards approaches that achieve outcomes for people impacted by violence, and strengthen national monitoring, learning and accountability.

Alongside robust and consistent feedback, the Commission also gathered insight into the areas where there are differing perspectives on framing, approach and solutions. These insights are also provided for consideration.

Each consultation added depth and nuance to our understanding of what is working, what is not, and where gaps and opportunities remain. Observations made about persistent harm experienced through interactions with government systems must be given particular weight throughout the development of the Second Action Plan. The Commission acknowledges the constructive participation of representatives of key government systems throughout the consultation process. A strong commitment to continuous improvement will be vital to achieving the cultural and systemic change that service users and people with lived experience deserve.

The Commission will continue to reflect on these insights through its strategic advice to government and in public reports. We want the perspectives gathered through this process to be available not only to government, but to the services, advocates and communities who contributed to them.

The Commission looks forward to continuing to work in close partnership with government, services and communities as the Second Action Plan is developed and implemented.



Micaela Cronin
Commissioner
Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence Commission

Executive summary

The Second Action Plan under the *National Plan to End Violence against Women and Children 2022–2032* (National Plan) presents a powerful opportunity to set Australia’s strategic direction for the next five years.

The content of this submission is informed by more than 20 roundtables convened by the Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence Commission (the Commission) between June and August 2026, along with 16 additional roundtables attended by the Commissioner. These consultations brought together people with lived and living experience, sector leaders, researchers, government, partners and other subject matter experts.

There was striking consistency in consultation discussions, reflecting and adding to the depth of the evidence base underpinning our response to domestic, family and sexual violence (DFSVM). Across each priority discussed in this submission, overarching themes emerged:

- **Intervene earlier across service systems:** Far too many roundtable participants described instances of missed opportunities to prevent the escalation of violence, access support, and promote healing and recovery. There is a need to strengthen early intervention across the life course by investing in and building the capacity of service systems, as well as maintaining a clear focus on prevention in key settings and from an early age.
- **Strengthen accountability, transparency and governance:** Consultations reinforced the need for the Second Action Plan to operate as a living mechanism supported by measurable targets, regular public reporting and ongoing adaptation in response to evidence and feedback. Roundtable participants expressed a clear desire for improved accountability, particularly within systems that have an outsized impact on people’s lives and where independent oversight is limited. Lived experience must be embedded throughout policy development, governance and implementation.
- **Embed safety and continuous improvement in systems:** A core message emerging from consultations was the need to ensure that all systems, government and non-government, enable safety and prevent harm. Safety by Design principles provide an increasingly important framework to design systems that place safety at the centre. Accessible feedback mechanisms and proactive risk mitigation are important enablers for this process.
- **National leadership and improved collaboration:** Consultations highlighted that jurisdictions are at different stages of progressing reform within distinct policy environments. However, there are opportunities for improved collaboration and alignment across jurisdictions, while enabling flexibility for local implementation and recognising the important role played by states and territories in service delivery. Technology-facilitated abuse and online harms were specifically identified as areas where stronger national leadership and consistency is required.

The table below outlines the key priorities for the Second Action Plan emerging through the consultation process. The insights discussed in this submission should be read alongside the Commission's 2026 Yearly Report to Parliament when tabled.

Priority	Details
1.	Improved transparency and accountability at all levels There is a need to strengthen transparency, accountability and feedback mechanisms across service systems, including legal, justice, policing and government.
2.	Lived experience engagement must be ongoing, resourced and accountable Lived experience must be embedded as expertise alongside other sources of evidence and expertise throughout the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of the Second Action Plan. Governments should fund safe, ongoing and inclusive mechanisms that meaningfully influence decisions and outcomes.
3.	Sexual violence and abuse require sustained national action Sexual violence is a critical and under-addressed issue requiring a dedicated focus within the Second Action Plan.
4.	Take targeted and focused action in response to areas of ongoing concern • Reform to the family law system must prioritise safety, strengthen accountability and address the way that processes are weaponised by people using violence. • Police are often the first point of contact for people experiencing violence. Trauma-informed policing that responds to the needs of all those most in need of protection must be supported while addressing misidentification and harmful practices.
5.	Children and young people are rights-holders who want to break the cycle of violence Children and young people need dedicated, age-appropriate pathways and trauma-informed specialist service provision in all four domains. Our current systems incorrectly assume that there will always be a protective parent present, and do not recognise the unique needs of children and young people as separate but connected to their families. Mechanisms for ongoing youth participation are required, along with investment in prevention, recovery and support.
6.	Improve access to coordinated, inclusive and recovery-orientated support Governments must invest in culturally safe, accessible and community-led responses that meet the needs of populations disproportionately impacted by DFSV. Systems must be better integrated and easier to navigate. Recovery and healing are critical to addressing the impacts of DFSV and supporting long-term wellbeing. Funding approaches should be transparent, flexible, fit for purpose, meet the level of demand, and measure success based on outcomes for people impacted by violence.

Priority	Details
7.	Strengthen early intervention and prevention across the life course Opportunities for earlier intervention exist across service systems and are crucial to improving safety and preventing future harm. Governments must resource and build the capacity of these systems and at the same time hold them accountable for their roles in addressing DFSV. Prevention must begin early and continue across all stages of the life course.
8.	A comprehensive and strategic approach to ending men's violence is needed Governments must invest in evidence-based responses that hold people using violence accountable, address underlying drivers, and prevent the escalation or recurrence of harm.
9.	All systems, government and non-government, must enable safety and prevent harm Systems must be designed in ways that promote safety, trust and accountability. All system stewards must ensure that their systems are not enabling harm to occur, recognising what we know – that many government and broader systems, services and products can and are being weaponised. Governments must build stronger national consistency, clearer guidance and improved capability to address technology-facilitated abuse and online harms across a range of services and systems.

Table 1 Key priorities for the Second Action Plan

The submission concludes by identifying issues requiring further consideration, including:

- Intersections between housing strategy and DFSV reform
- Inclusive definitions of DFSV
- Balancing the need to scale services to meet demand while transforming systems in line with lived experience feedback
- An ongoing need to develop approaches to engaging with men and boys
- Persistent national conversations relating to the role of incarceration in response to DFSV; and
- Ongoing challenges associated with balancing the interests of rights-holders in developing responses.

Participants also identified specific opportunities, gaps and priorities, which will be explored further in the Commission's public reporting and strategic advice provided to government.

Introduction

The Second Action Plan under the *National Plan to End Violence against Women and Children 2022–2032* (National Plan) provides a crucial opportunity to set shared strategic direction for all of Australia for the next five years.

Australia now has a substantial and increasingly consistent evidence base about what needs to change to prevent and respond to domestic, family and sexual violence (DFSVM). There has been significant financial investment alongside considerable effort by governments, communities and service systems to strengthen implementation and drive positive change. The Second Action Plan will enable us to build on these foundations by ensuring that investment, activity and accountability are focused on delivering measurable improvements in safety, wellbeing and recovery from violence.

From June to August 2026, the Commission convened 20 roundtables with people with lived and living experience, sector leaders, researchers, government partners and subject matter experts. In addition, the Commissioner attended a further 16 roundtables led by Minister for Social Services the Hon Tanya Plibersek MP, Assistant Minister for Social Services and the Prevention of Family Violence the Hon Ged Kearney MP, Commonwealth Attorney-General the Hon Michelle Rowland MP and the Department of Social Services (DSS) (see **Appendix 1**). This submission identifies priority areas of focus for the Second Action Plan, informed by these insights.

About the Commission

The Commission was established in 2022 as a non-statutory executive agency, within DSS, to monitor and report on progress of the National Plan, ensure accountability and maintain a national focus on ending gender-based violence (GBV). The Commission is focused on practical and meaningful ways to measure progress towards the objectives outlined in the National Plan.¹

This submission is informed by the Commission's main objectives:

1. Promoting National Plan objectives to end GBV and monitoring impact.
2. Amplifying voices of people with lived and living experience for meaningful engagement in shaping policy design and service delivery.
3. Fostering collaboration and coordination across government and communities to enhance connection and reduce fragmentation to improve outcomes.
4. Providing strategic advice to inform strengthened policy and practice, and improved outcomes.²

Purpose

This submission identifies key themes emerging from more than 20 roundtables convened by the Commission and a further 16 roundtables that the Commissioner attended. The Commission acknowledges and thanks the more than 310 participants in these sessions who contributed their expertise, insights and experiences through these consultations.

While this submission identifies overarching themes, it does not seek to capture the full nuance, diversity and complexity of the discussions. The Commission intends to publish more detailed public reports to share these insights. The submission should be read alongside the Commission's 2026 Yearly Report to Parliament, which assesses progress made in achieving the objectives of the National Plan, when tabled.

About the consultations

Consultations convened by the Commission comprised a series of roundtables centred on specific areas of focus, including:

- Dedicated lived experience consultations including young people, people with experience of the family law system, families bereaved by femicide, and disability rights organisations; and
- Thematic roundtables focused on multicultural communities, LGBTIQ+SB communities, sex worker collectives, regulatory frameworks for essential services, and media standards.

Several of the roundtables were co-convened with lived experience and sector experts, as well as government partners. The Commission gratefully acknowledges the expertise, generosity and leadership of all participants who contributed to the consultation process. An additional session with First Nations organisations is scheduled for late August and will further inform the Commission's ongoing advice.

The DFSV Commissioner also participated in and co-facilitated a range of consultations led by the DSS and the Commonwealth Attorney General's Department (AGD). Consistent with the purpose of this submission, insights from these engagements are not reproduced here. However, references are included where relevant to highlight areas of alignment or divergence.

Governance, accountability and implementation

Throughout consultations, the Commission heard that implementation and governance of the Second Action Plan will be crucial to its success. The Second Action Plan must enable clear accountability, earlier intervention, improved system integration and a focus on achieving outcomes for people impacted by violence.

Strategic focus and agile delivery

In its 2025 Yearly Report to Parliament, the Commission highlighted a need for stronger implementation architecture to support delivery of the National Plan, including mechanisms that are responsive and adaptable to emerging evidence, lived experience feedback, and changing circumstances across jurisdictions.

To support this, the Commission called for the Second Action Plan to operate as a living mechanism supported by measurable targets, regular public reporting, and ongoing adaptation in response to evidence and emerging needs.³ A consistent theme across consultations, discussed further below, was that lived experience must be embedded throughout policy development, governance and implementation.

The Commission notes work currently being led by the Women and Women's Safety Ministerial Council (WWSMC) to strengthen national coordination, accountability and reporting for the Second Action Plan, while maintaining flexibility for jurisdictions to respond to local priorities and circumstances. Federal Commissioners and Ambassadors participating in the consultation process also stressed the need for:

- A sharper focus on a small number of high-impact outcomes, supported by clear alignment across national strategies, action plans and funding arrangements;⁴ and
- Robust and independent monitoring and accountability mechanisms, underpinned by human rights frameworks, to strengthen oversight, drive implementation and measure progress.⁵

Transparency and accountability can be further strengthened under the Second Action Plan by clearly articulating the outcome, measurement, owners and reporting mechanisms associated with all activities. As a whole-of-government plan, it should also enable coordinated action across portfolios including education, health, housing, immigration, justice and social security – each of which touch on an important aspect of recovery and healing for people impacted by DFSV. The February 2026 joint meeting of WWSMC and Community Services Ministers reflects a growing focus on increased coordination and alignment across portfolios.⁶

Improving coordination and identifying areas for Commonwealth leadership

Consultations highlighted that jurisdictions are at different stages of progressing reform within distinct policy environments. We note that this is particularly evident for South Australia, who have a significant program of work following their recent Royal Commission into DFSV. The Second Action Plan must strike a balance between national leadership and coordination, as well as the flexibility to accommodate different jurisdictional contexts and priorities.

The Commission notes that several significant national initiatives are currently underway, including the National Family and Domestic Violence Risk Assessment Framework, National Model of Care, National Standards for Men's Behaviour Change programs, and an audit of government systems being led by Office for Women within the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet.⁷ Throughout the consultation process, participants have called for stronger national leadership and consistency in specific areas, including responses to technology-facilitated abuse (TFA) and online harms.

Consideration must be given to coordinating and reinforcing actions under related action plans, including:

- The First Action Plan under *Our Ways – Strong Ways – Our Voices: National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Plan to End Family, Domestic and Sexual Violence 2026–2036* (*Our Ways – Strong Ways – Our Voices*)
- The Second Action Plan under *Safe and Supported: The National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children 2021–2031* (*Safe and Supported*)
- The Second Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Action Plan under *Safe and Supported*; and
- The Second Action Plan under the *National Strategy to Prevent and Respond to Child Sexual Abuse 2021–2030* (*CSA strategy*).

For example, insights relating to sexual violence and children and young people discussed below may require mutually reinforcing actions across each of these strategies. Similarly, the needs and priorities of First Nations communities must be reflected in the Second Action Plan, while also reinforcing the importance of self-determination under *Our Ways – Strong Ways – Our Voices*.

More broadly, there are clear points of intersection between policy settings relating to modern slavery and DFSV that should be considered as part of the Second Action Plan development process. There is an opportunity for improved alignment between the Second Action Plan and the forthcoming National Action Plan to Combat Modern Slavery.

Key priorities for the Second Action Plan: intent, investment, accountability

The Second Action Plan presents an opportunity to clearly articulate national intent and to define outcomes and the specific actions required to achieve them.

At its core, the Second Action Plan should define a clear and ambitious intent, outline intended investment and clearly allocate specific responsibility for delivery. Transparent investment commitments should support a balance between funding sustainability while enabling innovation, ensuring services can meet current demand while responding to emerging risks and opportunities. Accountability, funding and implementation mechanisms should focus on meaningful outcomes.⁸ Lived experience must be embedded systematically in this work and across all activities, and the needs, experiences and perspectives of priority populations should be centred.

This section outlines the priorities, risks and opportunities identified by roundtable participants. Many of these insights align with observations in previous Commission reports. Both demonstrate and bring depth to the strength and consistency of the evidence base. The Commission will continue to analyse and engage with the insights emerging from these consultations through its ongoing strategic advice function.

PRIORITY AREA 1.

Improved transparency and accountability at all levels

Accountability for government systems emerged as a key theme in consultations. This was particularly pronounced in the context of the legal and justice system where decisions have an outsized impact on people's lives and independent oversight is limited.⁹ Concerns were also raised about sexual violence occurring in institutional settings.¹⁰

Preventing and addressing the harms caused in these settings is predominantly the responsibility of the system rather than individuals. Priority Area 9 calls for Safety by Design principles to be applied in government and non-government service systems. These principles clearly allocate responsibility for understanding, assessing and addressing harm to the service provider, rather than the end user.¹¹ Like all other priorities to end GBV, this harm is best addressed by preventing it before it occurs by establishing clear processes which maximise clarity, transparency and fairness.

At the Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Children (MMIWC) Roundtable, participants expressed grave concerns about the persistent lack of access to justice for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and families seeking accountability.¹² This observation was reinforced at other lived experience roundtables, where participants highlighted that it is the system which is ultimately responsible for holding people using violence to account.

Transparency emerged as an important theme closely linked to accountability throughout consultations. Roundtable participants highlighted a need for improved transparency across a variety of settings, including police and justice systems.¹³ This extended to a need for transparent government action in response to lived experience testimony and public inquiries that identify systemic responses causing or amplifying harm.¹⁴ Some participants called for independent complaints mechanisms to be established within family law processes.¹⁵

Participants also identified need for improved transparency around funding arrangements, as discussed further in Priority Area 6.¹⁶ Concerns were raised by lived experience participants about whether funded initiatives achieved tangible outcomes in practice.¹⁷ Public reporting, benchmarking and scorecard approaches were proposed as potential tools to improve transparency.¹⁸

PRIORITY AREA 2.

Lived experience engagement must be ongoing, resourced and accountable

The knowledge, insights and expertise of people with lived and living experience must be embedded as a core feature of how the Second Action Plan is designed, implemented, governed and evaluated.¹⁹ There is a clear opportunity to establish and extend funded and enduring mechanisms that support lived experience leadership across all National Plan domains.

A key theme emerging from consultations with people with lived and living experience was that people who experience DFSV are experts in their own lives and their experiences of systems, and that their expertise should be valued in efforts to improve those systems.²⁰ This extends to recognising the unique and specific insights and expertise of children and young people.²¹ There are opportunities for embedding lived experience in governance structures, ensuring paid participation and establishing independent lived experience advisory mechanisms.²²

Embedding influential leadership should be supported by an investment in resources and training, so that more people with lived experience of DFSV can build their knowledge and skills for advocacy work.²³ It is also critical to build the capability and systems of organisations and institutions to be able to engage effectively and equitably with people who are sharing their insights from their personal experiences.

Children and young people were consistently identified as a priority cohort and important partners in reform.²⁴ There is a strong support for an ongoing advisory mechanism for children and young people, with deliberate expansion to children under the age of 18 and diverse cohorts.²⁵ Additional policy focus on harms specifically affecting children is also required, with Lived Experience Advisory Council members identifying Intrafamilial Child Sexual Abuse (IFCSA) and child-on-child sexual abuse, particularly intrafamilial and sibling sexual abuse, as areas of particular concern.²⁶ However, it is important to note that while child-on-child sexual abuse is rising, adults remain the predominant cohort using violence against children.²⁷

Consultations with people with lived experience highlighted specific challenges that need to be addressed:

- Experiences of institutional harm and fragmented service responses continue to undermine trust in systems and services.²⁸ This includes concerns about inaccurate records, loss of context, privacy breaches and information held by services being shared without consent.²⁹
- Needing to repeatedly tell their stories across multiple services and jurisdictions, though differing perspectives emerged regarding the best approach for addressing this issue.³⁰
- A need for national guidance, safeguards and increased system capability in response to the growing use of technology to exert coercive control, surveillance, exploitation and abuse.³¹
- The importance of system reform focused on root causes rather than individualised responses.³²

People who experience DFSV should be recognised as experts in their own lives and supported to make informed decisions about their own safety, wellbeing and recovery.³³ Effective responses should support autonomy, dignity, choice, access to information and practical support.³⁴ This should be underpinned by culturally safe, community-led and trauma-informed approaches to engagement and co-design.³⁵

There were calls for more coordinated, transparent and accountable systems that prioritise safety and wellbeing, and respond to the interconnected nature of violence.³⁶ Case managers, system navigators and peer navigators can play an important role in reducing the burden on people who are trying to find safety.³⁷

Participants consistently described safety, prevention and recovery as interconnected priorities requiring longer-term policy focus.³⁸ Education, community awareness and cultural change are critical complements to service responses.³⁹ A key message from participants is that there are multiple pathways to safety and recovery.⁴⁰ However, healing is enabled through sustained investment in housing, health, economic security and life-long access to activities and support that promote healing.⁴¹

PRIORITY AREA 3.

Sexual violence and abuse require sustained national action

Sexual violence is a critical and under-addressed issue requiring a dedicated focus within the Second Action Plan.⁴² Sexual violence experienced across the life course must be recognised as a specific national priority, with dedicated policy attention, funding, accountability mechanisms, workforce investment and data collection, rather than being addressed solely through broader domestic and family violence frameworks.⁴³ Accountability across institutions and systems needs significant strengthening, particularly in relation to police, courts, governments, aged care, prisons and other institutional settings where sexual violence occurs or responses are inadequate.⁴⁴

As noted above, there is opportunity to create mutually reinforcing actions across plans, particularly Safe and Supported and the CSA strategy. Consultations identified a range of opportunities, including establishing a distinct sexual violence stream with dedicated funding, workforce development, accountability measures and improved data collection.⁴⁵ There were calls for better recognition of violence occurring in aged care and other institutional settings, as well as workplaces.⁴⁶ Workforce sustainability was identified as a core challenge given the high levels of burnout, insecure funding arrangements and the need for long-term investment in specialist workforces, including legal, advocacy and sexual violence services.⁴⁷

Government accountability in service design, funding and evaluation was a central theme.⁴⁸ Roundtable participants called for greater transparency, accountability and independent oversight across police, justice and other systems that respond to people impacted by sexual violence.⁴⁹

Areas of need identified in the roundtable focused on sexual violence aligned with priorities identified in broader sessions.⁵⁰ These included a need for:

- Urgent action to address the harm experienced by people engaging with police and justice responses, particularly marginalised and overrepresented groups.⁵¹
- Recognising lived experience as a form of expertise that should directly shape reform, supported by fair remuneration and inclusive governance structures.⁵²
- Stronger investment in prevention, early intervention and integrated support systems.⁵³
- Investment in specialist and mainstream service capacity to enable safe and effective responses.⁵⁴
- Long-term support including access to safe housing, income security and community-led supports, and ensuring affordable, accessible counselling and recovery services.⁵⁵
- Stronger outcomes measurement and more coordinated responses across sectors.⁵⁶

PRIORITY AREA 4.

Take targeted and focused action in response to areas of ongoing concern

Consultations identified two specific areas of ongoing concern: the family law system and police responses to DFSV. Many of the issues discussed in this section are already the focus of government and institutional action. The Commission acknowledges the constructive input provided by roundtable participants representing police and the family law system.

The discussion in this section is informed by lived experience. It raises issues of serious and ongoing systemic harm that must be given due weight. It is vital that government deeply considers the concerns raised by people with lived and living experience of these systems to continually improve and prevent harm.

A. The family law system is often experienced as a source and a site of harm

The family law system was consistently identified as a significant barrier to safety for women and children experiencing family violence.⁵⁷ Roundtable participants told the Commission that rather than enhancing safety and protection, the family law system continues to cause further harm to people, including children, impacted by violence.⁵⁸ They described a culture that often minimises family violence, misunderstands coercive control and trauma, and places insufficient weight on the experiences of people impacted by DFSV – including adults, predominantly women, and children and young people.⁵⁹ Elements of court processes were described as re-traumatising, including repeatedly recounting traumatic experiences, lengthy cross-examinations, and experiences of intimidation.⁶⁰

Participants expressed strong concerns that children's rights, safety, voices and experiences are not consistently recognised or prioritised within family law processes, exposing them to ongoing safety risk.⁶¹ The influence of Independent Children's Lawyers (ICLs) and family report writers was also identified as an issue, particularly where family reports and expert assessments are given greater weight than evidence provided by professionals with long-standing connections to children and families.⁶² There was a view that children's needs are frequently misunderstood or dismissed, with inadequate recognition of how disability, developmental conditions and mental health concerns affect children's wellbeing and safety.⁶³

There is an opportunity to amplify children's voices in decisions that impact them.⁶⁴ This is a clear message emerging from both the Youth Taskforce and reflected in broader lived experience engagement. Areas of opportunity for empowerment include age-appropriate information sharing and responsive feedback mechanisms enabling children to share how family law decisions have impacted their safety.⁶⁵

Consistent with the discussion above, a perceived lack of accountability across the family law system was identified as a key contributor to poor outcomes.⁶⁶ Participants spoke about decision-makers and institutions exercising significant influence over family law decisions operating with limited oversight or accountability.⁶⁷ They felt that greater scrutiny is needed where decisions result in harm.⁶⁸ This requires a shift from focusing on performance metrics to safety outcomes,⁶⁹ as well as the ability to swiftly review or suspend orders where safety concerns emerge.⁷⁰

B. Strengthening police responses to DFSV

Roundtable participants reinforced that police and criminal justice system responses continue to fail many people who experience DFSV, with concerns about inconsistent practice, poor investigations, misidentification, retraumatisation, lack of oversight and barriers to accessing justice.⁷¹ Consultations reinforced persistent issues relating to the police and criminal justice response to DFSV:

- Concerns were raised regarding the profound and ongoing impacts of misidentification and over-policing, as well as broader negative experiences with police, which have significant implications for accountability for people using violence.⁷²
- A lack of responsiveness to concerns, cohorts or crime types, including reports made by protective parents, young people or sex workers.⁷³
- Evidentiary processes that retraumatise, as well as disclosure and interview settings that are not designed for children.⁷⁴
- Coercive control offence frameworks that do not recognise the nuances relevant to diverse communities, including First Nations women and girls, children and young people, and multicultural communities.⁷⁵
- Concerns relating to the treatment and safety of trans women in custody.⁷⁶
- Police environments and infrastructure that are often experienced as intimidating spaces that compound trauma.⁷⁷
- The impact of the criminalisation of sex work, and corresponding stigma and discrimination, on the safety and wellbeing of sex workers and other marginalised communities.⁷⁸

There was a clear view that stronger safeguards, oversight and system reform are required.⁷⁹ This was particularly pronounced during the MMIWC Roundtable, where participants observed a gap between reform commitments and practices on the ground.⁸⁰

Police are experiencing growing and increasingly complex DFSV demand.⁸¹ This is driven by increased public awareness and reporting, recidivist offending and the absence of other 24/7 crisis responses, with police often the only available service in remote and regional areas.⁸² Government and community expectations that police now respond to patterns of coercive control, TFA, financial abuse and systems abuse are also adding complexity, including in the context of gathering and storing digital evidence.⁸³

Police participating in roundtables stressed a need to clarify the scope of policing within the broader DFSV sector.⁸⁴ There was a consistent view that police are best placed to focus on immediate safety, risk, accountability for people using violence, protection orders and criminal investigations.⁸⁵ Police stressed the value and importance of integrated models, including embedded workers, multi-agency responses, specialist policing units and stronger partnerships to support the broader needs of people impacted by DFSV.⁸⁶

Police also highlighted a need to:

- Focus on prevention and early intervention to reduce harm within the community and long-term service demand, particularly for children experiencing violence, abuse and exploitation.⁸⁷
- Address gaps in interventions for people using violence.⁸⁸
- Identify opportunities to engage with children in out-of-home care, residential settings and complex family contexts who may experience significant risk but may not want police interventions.⁸⁹
- Increase system integration through embedded service delivery models.⁹⁰

PRIORITY AREA 5.

Children and young people are rights-holders who want to break the cycle of violence

There is a growing understanding that children and young people are not simply exposed to DFSV, but that their experiences must be recognised in their own right, and needs identified and responded to appropriately. The Commission convened a Youth Taskforce to provide advice to the Australian Government on the development of the Second Action Plan. The Taskforce provided invaluable and specific insights.

Education is a vital element of prevention, as discussed below at Priority Area 7.⁹¹ Nationally consistent and age-appropriate education on respectful and healthy relationships is required throughout education sites, starting from early years.⁹² Education must keep pace with emerging forms and deepening understanding of patterns of violence, such as coercive control and TFA.⁹³ It must also be complemented with education for parents, teachers, community leaders and the wider Australian community.⁹⁴

There is an urgent need for accessible, age-appropriate services for children and young people impacted by DFSV.⁹⁵ Children and young people are currently navigating a system that is not designed or resourced to meet their needs. These needs include:

- Being kept informed and given choice in the processes and responses that affect them
- Police responses that are considerate of their experiences, provide safe environments and use age-appropriate and trauma-informed language
- Long-term healing and recovery approaches, which can contribute to prevention by interrupting the cycle of violence – including access to counselling, not just case management; and
- Action to address barriers to access critical infrastructure in rural, remote and regional areas.⁹⁶

There was strong support for focused and enduring capability building to enable age-appropriate responses across police, justice, health and other service systems, including specialist services specifically designed for – and with – children and young people.⁹⁷

PRIORITY AREA 6.

Improve access to coordinated, inclusive and recovery-orientated support

A. Co-design and collaborate to deliver interventions that meet the needs of people most impacted and least served

Consultations reinforced a clear need for specialist, community-led and culturally safe responses, including whole-of-family approaches for First Nations communities.⁹⁸ Responses must better reflect the diverse ways violence is experienced and the barriers different communities face in accessing support, particularly for groups that experience disproportionate impacts of DFSV or face significant barriers, including women and girls with disability, migrant and multicultural communities, First Nations communities and LGBTIQ+SB communities.⁹⁹ In the context of sexual violence, particular consideration should be given to the needs of older women, women with disability, First Nations women, culturally and linguistically diverse communities, LGBTIQ+SB people, criminalised women, migrant women and sex workers.¹⁰⁰

Service systems must also consider how to respond to additional needs and barriers faced by people at different stages of the life course. Consultations highlighted the importance of recognising childhood, youth and ageing as stages of the life course rather than discrete population groups. These stages intersect with culture, disability, gender, sexuality, location and other factors to shape how violence is experienced and how people access support. Responses must be capable of recognising and responding to these intersecting experiences throughout a person's life, including by recognising the cumulative impacts of violence across a life course.

Efforts must be made at a policy level to ensure that definitions of DFSV consider the distinct forms and patterns of violence experienced by specific groups. This includes forms of violence that are currently considered through distinct policy frameworks, such as modern slavery. This is also relevant to data, research and evidence gathering, where roundtable participants identified significant gaps.

It is important to acknowledge the accounts of discrimination experienced by certain cohorts across service systems, including policing, health care, courts and DFSV sector organisations, raised during consultations.¹⁰¹ Some of these experiences occurred in workplace settings, reinforcing the additional load carried by those from diverse backgrounds and communities working within the service system.¹⁰²

Roundtable participants highlighted specific priorities relevant to their experiences. Examples include:

- **Disability** – action to address the real impact of ableism, significant accessibility and inclusion gaps, including shortages of accessible crisis accommodation and limited housing options.¹⁰³
- **LGBTIQ+SB** – increased focus on forms of violence that are often overlooked, including TFA, denial of gender-affirming care, family-of-origin violence, violence affecting trans and gender diverse people, exclusion from refuges, misidentification of people using violence and the needs of older people not always considered in the context of elder abuse.¹⁰⁴
- **Migrant and multicultural communities** – recognition of cross-cultural practice as a specialised professional skill with commensurate funding.¹⁰⁵

A clear message for government is that community-led responses are often better positioned to engage people early, build trust, reduce stigma and support long-term recovery.¹⁰⁶ Participants also stressed the harm caused by inappropriate and unsafe systemic responses.¹⁰⁷ There was strong support for concrete, measurable action under the Second Action Plan, including investment in specialist services and broader sector capability building.¹⁰⁸

B. Build systems that are easier to navigate, joined up and better placed to respond

Service systems are fragmented, placing responsibility for navigation and coordination on people experiencing violence.¹⁰⁹ Many roundtable participants observed that negotiating multiple services, systems and eligibility requirements remain a significant burden for people experiencing DFSV.¹¹⁰ Stronger coordination, accountability and information-sharing is required, particularly for people with complex and intersecting support needs.¹¹¹ As discussed above, children and young people require dedicated pathways and specialist responses across all parts of the system.¹¹²

Stronger partnerships between specialist and mainstream services, that are appropriately resourced and embedded, are needed to improve system capability and consistency, particularly for the priority populations identified above.¹¹³ Such partnerships can be enabled through funding models that support longer-term relationship building. LGBTIQ+SB communities highlighted a need for national collaboration between specialist services to enable their expertise and practice to be shared across jurisdictions.¹¹⁴ Multicultural communities called for cultural specialisation to be embedded in mainstream and specialist DFSV services through strong co-creation and collaboration models.¹¹⁵ Police stressed the value of supported partnership models and multi-agency service delivery that allows police to focus on immediate safety risks while ensuring access to broader support and service responses.¹¹⁶

C. Recognise recovery and healing as long-term priorities, and opportunities for prevention

Sustained and long-term support is vital to recovery and healing. Consultations reinforced the ongoing impacts of DFSV on health, education, employment, relationships, identity and wellbeing.¹¹⁷ Given the breadth of these needs, recovery should be understood as a whole-of-system responsibility.¹¹⁸ Clear priorities emerging from consultations included safe and affordable housing, economic security, employment opportunities, therapeutic support, community connection and legal assistance.¹¹⁹ Disability-responsive approaches and sustained investment for children in housing, education and social services were also identified as key priorities.¹²⁰

The need for healing and recovery extends to families bereaved by femicide. Roundtable participants identified needs including:

- A contact person and case manager equipped to advocate for the family with services, including trauma support and counselling
- Awareness raising with workplaces to build knowledge about supporting impacted employees; and
- Notification regarding prison release dates.¹²¹

D. Flexible funding and investment in specialist services

Funding and commissioning settings are critical drivers of service quality, sustainability and system effectiveness. Short-term and narrowly prescribed funding arrangements were seen as limiting collaboration and reducing organisations' ability to respond to community needs, and contributing to workforce instability and burnout. Funding models should focus on long-term outcomes, transparency and system integrity, as well as supporting sustainability, collaboration and specialist expertise.¹²²

Specific opportunities identified include:

- Increased funding transparency and sustainability, particularly in the context of addressing violence in First Nations communities.¹²³
- Clear visibility as to whether investment is reaching Aboriginal Community-Controlled Organisations, Indigenous social enterprises and other frontline services.¹²⁴
- Stronger oversight, greater transparency and improved coordination between jurisdictions regarding how investments achieve outcomes identified as important enablers of system-wide reform.
- Greater investment in specialist capability to strengthen responses for diverse communities. For example, sex worker collectives noted the significant DFSV-related support currently provided by peer organisations despite a lack of direct government funding.¹²⁵
- Enabling more coordinated approaches to strengthen collaboration and system impact while preserving the contribution of smaller specialist organisations. Examples were provided of collaborative funding models that enable smaller organisations to collaborate and work collectively, such as among women's health services in Victoria.
- Place-based and cohort-based approaches, particularly for priority populations.

It is important to stress that additional investment alone will not meet the challenge identified in consultations. Genuine reform is required to service design and delivery, including a renewed focus on outcomes rather than service metrics.

PRIORITY AREA 7.

Strengthen early intervention and prevention across the life course

A. Early intervention across systems

The importance of early intervention emerged as a key theme across consultations. Participants stressed the missed opportunities for earlier intervention arising across service systems prior to crisis. There was a perceived gap between the prevalence of DFSV and its relevance to sectors outside the DFSV workforce. Lasting reform requires intervening much earlier through education, parenting support, healthcare, community institutions and cultural change.¹²⁶ Police participants highlighted a concerning gap in interventions for people using violence, creating an ongoing cycle of violence escalation.¹²⁷

Early intervention is crucial to reducing violence before harm escalates and improving long-term safety outcomes.¹²⁸ Families bereaved by femicide described a pattern of escalating risk and missed opportunity across multiple systems.¹²⁹ Roundtable participants identified opportunities for early intervention arising in multiple settings, such as schools, healthcare providers, workplaces, community organisations, gyms, pharmacies, banks, and broader communities.¹³⁰

B. Prevention from an early age

Addressing the underlying drivers of violence and intervening before harm escalates emerged as a key priority for the Second Action Plan. Roundtable participants emphasised that prevention must begin in childhood and be sustained throughout the life course. Lived experience representatives stressed a need for prevention initiatives across childhood and adolescence, including through education about healthy relationships, coercive control, TFA, pornography, boundaries and abuse.¹³¹ Participants in the Disability Representative Organisations Forum identified a specific need for education around body autonomy, particularly in care settings, for women and girls with disability.¹³²

People who have experienced DFSV spoke powerfully about their belief that education is critical for cultural change and reducing violence.¹³³ There was a strong appetite for co-designed and accessible prevention-focused education for children and young people, supported by appropriate service and system referrals.¹³⁴ However, effective prevention also requires action at an individual, community and system level.¹³⁵ Media organisations can also play an important role in challenging harmful behaviours and social norms, particularly among men and boys.¹³⁶

PRIORITY AREA 8.

A comprehensive and strategic approach to ending men's violence is needed

A comprehensive and strategic approach to ending men's violence requires governments to invest in evidence-based responses that hold people who use violence to account, address the underlying drivers of their behaviour and prevent the escalation or recurrence of harm. The Commission notes that work is already underway at a national level to increase coordination and consistency in the response to people using violence, including National Cabinet's commitment to establish national standards for men's behaviour change programs.¹³⁷

Specific concerns were raised in consultations about the ability of the justice system to hold people using violence to account. While the justice system has an important role to play, participants were clear that accountability cannot rely on criminal justice responses alone. The ongoing stigmatisation of sex workers as witnesses to court proceedings and the failure of justice systems to achieve accountability for homicide perpetrated against First Nations women and sex workers were raised as key concerns.¹³⁸ Participants emphasised the importance of identifying and responding to the use of violence across multiple system and service settings.

Roundtable participants consistently linked accountability with prevention, healing and recovery.¹³⁹ Accountability and healing can become competing objectives but should be seen as mutually reinforcing elements of an effective response. Opportunities include improved practice across justice systems and courts, greater consistency in responses to people using violence and exploration of community-led approaches such as restorative justice where appropriate.

Addressing harmful behaviours in children and young people requires nuanced responses. The Youth Taskforce stressed that responses to a child or young person using violence should address underlying trauma and family dynamics while maintaining accountability and prioritising rehabilitation and safety.¹⁴⁰ They also emphasised the need to tailor accountability to the needs of people who have experienced violence, ensuring a shared investment in outcomes for both the person using violence and those impacted.¹⁴¹

PRIORITY AREA 9.

All systems, government and non-government, must enable safety and prevent harm

A. Systems must be designed to promote safety, trust and accountability

People experiencing DFSV often encounter harm from systems intended to support them, including family law, disability support and institutional settings, highlighting the need for stronger safeguards and accountability mechanisms.¹⁴² Consultations highlighted experiences of people being disbelieved, misidentified, judged or harmed by systems that lacked understanding of trauma, coercive control and grooming behaviour, or diverse lived experiences.¹⁴³ The Commission heard about interactions with the National Disability Insurance Agency, Services Australia and other government systems that are at times creating or exacerbating safety risks.¹⁴⁴

The weaponisation of systems is a persistent challenge, with people using violence exploiting system gaps, policies and processes to perpetuate patterns of coercive control. Tactics identified during roundtables include:

- Exploiting information gaps between agencies¹⁴⁵
- Extending and prolonging court processes,¹⁴⁶ and
- Leveraging financial systems and other essential services to cause harm, including through compromising account security.¹⁴⁷

Addressing these challenges requires institutional and cultural change within businesses and service providers, as well as capacity building.¹⁴⁸ Training must be meaningfully implemented and accompanied by accountability for improved service delivery. Justice and industry responses to DFSV require a meaningful and leadership-driven cultural commitment to transformation assessed according to outcomes for system users.¹⁴⁹

Regulatory action through enforceable standards, guidance, compliance activities, and industry engagement has driven significant improvements in industry responses to DFSV within essential services.¹⁵⁰ Regulatory frameworks can set enforceable minimum standards and enable early intervention to address systemic issues and reduce harm.¹⁵¹ Regulatory staff participating in roundtables highlighted the value of lived experience expertise and partnerships with specialist DFV organisations in improving industry practice and guiding standards.¹⁵² From a workplace perspective, the introduction of the positive duty to eliminate, as far as possible, workplace sexual harassment, sex discrimination and sexist conduct emerged as an important regulatory milestone.¹⁵³ This reinforces the importance of anti-discrimination laws as a legal framework to prevent and respond to DFSV.

Safety by Design continues to be applied across sectors as an important prevention mechanism.¹⁵⁴ Nonetheless, business processes, procedures and systems can place customers impacted by DFSV at additional risk.¹⁵⁵ Key areas of concern include:

- Gaps arising from failures to consider how systems interact
- Complexities arising from managing joint accounts
- Privacy breaches, which can give rise to life-threatening risk
- Trade-offs between friction to improve security and challenges in accessing services; and
- Risks associated with outsourced service providers, including debt collection agencies, contact centres, and other third parties.¹⁵⁶

Regulatory frameworks focused on the behaviour of individual actors may miss opportunities to identify systemic issues.¹⁵⁷ This is particularly relevant in the context of the legal profession, given the strong desire for improved courtroom practice emerging from consultations.¹⁵⁸

Regulatory frameworks also emerged as relevant tools during the Media Standards Roundtable, where participants stressed that improving reporting standards relating to DFSV requires coordinated action across the broader media ecosystem, including media organisations, regulators, governments, specialist organisations and people with lived experience.¹⁵⁹ Effective regulation, accountability, accessible complaints mechanisms and meaningful consequences for breaches were identified as important tools. There was strong interest in collaborative, system-wide approaches that support more consistent, trauma-informed and responsible reporting.¹⁶⁰

B. Online environments and emerging technologies must be made safer by design

Technology-facilitated abuse (TFA) has been an increasing systemic risk for some time now, and continues to outpace legislative frameworks and capability.¹⁶¹ Concerns relating to TFA were raised throughout the consultations, including:

- Rapidly evolving online harms such as image-based abuse, stalking through tracking devices, online grooming, surveillance through digital accounts, voice cloning, identity fraud, Artificial Intelligence (AI)-generated content, cyber abuse and algorithm-driven misogyny.¹⁶²
- Challenges relating to the collection, management and storage of digital evidence by police.¹⁶³
- Unique harms that particular cohorts, such as children, young people and LGBTIQ+SB communities, are vulnerable to online.¹⁶⁴
- Concerns that the implementation of the social media ban for children under 16 may have a negative impact on prevention efforts, including access to safe platforms for support and information, while also recognising the need for age-appropriate access, and safe and accountable technology.¹⁶⁵

There is a clear case for stronger national consistency, clearer industry guidance and improved capability in responding to TFA and online harms across a range of services and systems.¹⁶⁶ Two themes were particularly consistent:

- The need for stronger accountability for technology platforms, corporations and developers,¹⁶⁷ and
- Greater investment in Safety by Design approaches that embed safety, prevention and accountability into digital products from the outset.¹⁶⁸

Roundtable participants highlighted concerns relating to the broader use of technology. Some participants observed that the benefits and risks of technology were not experienced equally across communities. While some communities face digital exclusion, others experience heightened risks due to extensive digital connectivity.¹⁶⁹ Concerns were raised about the use of AI in service delivery – an issue that requires further community discussion.¹⁷⁰ Regulatory staff highlighted the harm caused by internal technological system failures.¹⁷¹ The range and variety of these concerns reinforces the growing application of digital technology in experiences of DFSV.

Issues requiring further consideration

The consultation process has made visible that there are a range of issues that warrant further consideration in the development of the Second Action Plan and related policy activity. Further discussion and consideration is required, including in mechanisms beyond the Second Action Plan development process.

The role and intersection of housing strategy with DFSV reform

Housing was a significant matter of concern across a range of consultations and has been a priority identified in the Commission's prior consultations and engagements. The Commission shares the concern that the availability of safe and affordable housing as a factor in DFSV must be addressed as an ongoing priority in national and state-based policies.

Defining the scope of DFSV

There were a range of views expressed by stakeholders as to the focus of the Second Action Plan, particularly an inherent tension between the existing focus on DFSV, and a more expansive focus on GBV. Some raised concerns that the current definitional scope negatively impacts on some of people and cohorts who currently face the greatest barriers to safety. Others highlighted the importance of defining DFSV broadly enough to capture abuse by carers and support workers, as well as violence occurring in supported accommodation settings.¹⁷²

Scaling services while transforming systems

There is a divergence of views among people with lived experience, systems and systems actors on what is needed to improve system responses and outcomes, and different approaches to diagnosing the most urgent and important priorities. There is a clear need for funding commensurate to service demand. However, people with lived experience stressed a need for system transformation and new approaches. Policymakers must respond to both imperatives.

Developing approaches to engaging with men and boys

There is an ongoing national debate about approaches to working with men and boys in a way which acknowledges complexity of experience, gendered norms and intersectionality. Multicultural communities and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities name racism, colonisation and increased risk of incarceration as unique and materially different contexts from which to commence a conversation about GBV.

A persistent national conversation on the role of incarceration in response to DFSV

There are a range of community and stakeholder perspectives on the role of bail laws and criminal and civil penalties for people convicted of DFSV offences. Some members of the community are strongly committed to increased criminal sanctions for DFSV. However, there has been emerging evidence of satisfactory outcomes for people who have experienced violence achieved via restorative justice models, particularly young people. Certain communities are disproportionately represented in carceral systems, with community impacts extending beyond the individual.

Balancing the interests of rights-holders

Genuine challenges arise in balancing the interests of rights-holders across different aspects of the DFSV system. Improving system integration can amplify the risk of privacy breaches. Meeting community expectations and ensuring accountability for people using violence can conflict with legal protections guaranteed under criminal law. Introducing friction into systems and product design can impact on the ability of people experiencing vulnerability to access essential services. It is important that these implications are transparently and intentionally addressed as responses are developed. People with lived experience can play a particularly important role in identifying potential gaps and unintended consequences.

Conclusion

The Second Action Plan is an important point in the life of the National Plan. This submission outlines a range of priorities, opportunities and risks requiring consideration. Many of these issues have been raised previously through lived experience testimony, inquiries and reports. It is now incumbent upon governments to listen to the concerns and perspectives raised through consultation, to build on past successes and to set a strategic direction for the next five years. However, the success of the Second Action Plan will depend on its implementation. The Commission looks forward to continuing to work with governments to develop and implement the Second Action Plan.

Appendix 1: Second Action Plan roundtables

Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence Commission-led roundtables

Below is a list of Commission-led roundtables undertaken or scheduled to inform the development of the Second Action Plan. Several roundtables were delivered in partnership with lived experience and other sector experts.

Date	Roundtable
9 June 2026	Lived Experience Advisory Council Meeting
11 June 2026	Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Children Roundtable
17 June 2026	Federal Commissioners and Ambassadors
23 June 2026	Children and Young People Taskforce Forum 1
2 July 2026	Children and Young People Taskforce Forum 2
9 July 2026	Disability Representative Organisations Forum
10 July 2026	Children and Young People Taskforce Forum 3
21 July 2026	Australian New Zealand Policing Advisory Agency (ANZPAA) Roundtable
23 July 2026	Children and Young People Taskforce Forum 4
24 July 2026	Migrant and Multicultural Communities Consultation
27 July 2026	Lived Experience Second Action Plan Consultation 1
28 July 2026	LGBTIQA+SB Communities Consultation 1
29 July 2026	Family Law Lived Experience Consultation
30 July 2026	Lived Experience Second Action Plan Consultation 2
31 July 2026	Commonwealth Attorney-General's Department Expert Advisory Group
3 August 2026	Sex Worker Collectives Consultation
4 August 2026	Families Bereaved by Femicide Consultation
5 August 2026	Media Standards Roundtable
5 August 2026	Regulators Consultation
6 August 2026	LGBTIQA+SB Communities Consultation 2
28 August 2026 (future engagement)	First Nations Communities Consultation

Other consultations and engagements

Below is a list of other consultations, roundtables and engagements undertaken by the Commission during the consultation process.

Date	Engagement
29 May 2026	Joint launch of the consultation process with the Minister for Social Services
5 June 2026	Connected services for victim-survivors
10 June 2026	General themed
11 June 2026	Strengthening accountability and responsibility for people using violence
12 June 2026	General themed
17 June 2026	Sexual Violence through the Life Course
18 June 2026	Second Action Plan Consultation Roundtable – Tasmania
3 July 2026	Consultation
7 July 2026	Second Action Plan Consultation – Young People and Regional, Rural and Remote
14 July 2026	Family Law System Roundtable
20 July 2026	Online engagement
21 July 2026	Second Action Plan Consultation
22 July 2026	Second Action Plan Consultation
31 July 2026	Consultation with the Attorney-General and Minister for Social Services
7 August 2026	Roundtable with the Minister for Social Services and Attorney-General
12 August 2026	Roundtable with the Prime Minister
19 August 2026 (future engagement)	Digital public infrastructure

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