



Consultation on the Second Action Plan

(National Plan to End Violence against Women and Children 2022-2032)

Submission by Domestic Violence Advocacy Australia Ltd

Domestic Violence Advocacy Australia would like to thank the incredible contributors who shared their experiences with us to help shine a light on the experiences of victim-survivors of DFSV. No names or identifying information are included to protect their privacy and keep them safe.

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Acknowledgment of Country

Domestic Violence Advocacy Australia acknowledges the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as the First Nations peoples of this country and the Traditional Custodians of the lands, waters and seas on which we live and work. We pay our deep respects to Elders past and present, and honour their enduring cultural, spiritual and custodial connections to Country.

We recognise that the violence experienced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples today cannot be separated from the ongoing impacts of colonisation, dispossession, forced child removal, systemic racism and intergenerational trauma. First Nations peoples are disproportionately harmed by family, domestic and sexual violence. They are over-represented in systems that respond after harm has occurred, rather than being resourced to prevent violence and support healing led by community.

Domestic Violence Advocacy Australia acknowledges that addressing family violence requires truth-telling, self-determination, and genuine partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. We are committed to advocating for responses that are culturally safe, community-led, trauma-informed and grounded in justice, recognising that the safety and wellbeing of First Nations peoples is inseparable from broader efforts to end domestic and family violence in Australia.

Who we are

This submission is prepared by Domestic Violence Advocacy Australia Ltd (DVAA).

DVAA aims to amplify the voices of those with lived experience of domestic, family and sexual violence, driving transformative change in policies, legislation and societal attitudes across Australia by uniting survivors, fostering an inclusive community of support, resilience, collective action and healing.

We lead change by advocating for the rights and needs of domestic, family and sexual violence victims by building a national movement that empowers sharing lived experiences to influence local, state, and national policies. Ensuring the experiences of victims shape safer and more compassionate communities with a focus on prevention and deterrents for perpetrators through survivor-led campaigns.

Introduction

Domestic Violence Advocacy Australia presents eight recommendations for consideration in the Second Action Plan.

This submission is intentionally focused in scope. Part A addresses prevention, early identification, access to support and long-term recovery. Part B examines the harm that can occur through legal proceedings after domestic, family and sexual violence, with particular attention to the Family Court responses.

The recommendations reflect lived-experience perspectives and aim to offer practical, cost-conscious actions that support prevention, early access to care, accountability and recovery.

DVAA acknowledges the breadth of the Department of Social Services consultation process and thanks the Department for considering this submission.

Recommendations:

1. Roll out an immediate, low-cost public awareness campaign that makes help-seeking information more visible across everyday community settings.

The campaign could use a clear message such as: “Violence will not go undetected. Help is available if you are experiencing violence, supporting someone else, or concerned about your own behaviour. The information should provide pathways to support for victim-survivors, family members and friends, as well as people who want help to change their behaviour. This campaign could act as a first step while more specialised and educational help-seeking information is co-designed with communities. Research should be built in from the beginning to test whether the campaign improves recognition, awareness, and early help-seeking, and to assess any unintended risks.

Make visible help-seeking information available across everyday community settings, particularly in places where people are more likely to view it safely and privately. The language, placement and design should be informed by the communities the information is intended to reach.

The information needs to do more than display a phone number. It should describe different forms of violence and coercive control in plain language, include carefully framed questions that help people recognise what may be happening, and provide clear pathways to appropriate support. This should include information for victim-survivors, family members and friends, as well as people who are concerned about their own behaviour and want help to change.

2. The current prevention models will not end Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence (DFSV) in a generation. DVAA recognises the significant role the Our Watch framework has played in shaping Australia’s prevention response. However, the ‘Our Watch model for prevention is “evidence-based” but does not prevent violence before it starts in marginalised communities. A gendered approach is not inclusive of older adults, children, young people, CALD, multicultural, faith and LGBTQIA+ communities. Whilst ‘Our Watch’ is evident, it excludes crucial communities identified in the 2024 Rapid Review. Caution is warranted when a country’s sole prevention strategy rests on the “evidence” and leaves no room for innovative solutions that could actually prevent DFSV in all communities.

Therefore, rather than requiring only evidence-based prevention programs, establish a partnership model that matches innovative thinkers, communities, and people with lived experience with researchers to co-design and test new help-seeking approaches through

small pilot programs. Evaluation should begin at the start of each pilot so that findings can be used to decide whether the program should continue, be refined, or be discontinued. The data should also be retained to inform future proposals and identify which elements require further development.

DVAA is concerned that reliance on a single predominantly gendered framework for prevention may not fully address violence across all relationships, age groups and community settings. Even Our Watch acknowledges that priority communities need their own prevention frameworks.

3. Recognise and fund trauma-informed, age-appropriate recovery and education for children and young people affected by family violence. Programs should be designed with children, young people, and communities; provide clear pathways to support; and be evaluated for both immediate recovery and longer-term prevention outcomes. We can not continue to burden children and young people to heal and recover on their own after experiencing violence in their home. True prevention for children and young people starts with support and excellent models of healthy behaviour, when all they know is violence in their home by someone who was supposed to love them and keep them safe. Recovery for children and young people with adverse childhood experiences due to family violence should be a national priority.
4. A national database of people who use violence to prevent further violence has long been debated. A reasonable approach would be to have a database that the person who uses violence can contribute to by way of the measures of rehabilitation. A factual history that can include minimal information, like an IVO has been served on this person for domestic and family violence. Additionally, an option for people using violence is to include the behaviour change programs and support they participated in to recover.

We need to be giving men and all people using violence a reduced shame approach to seeking help and support earlier on. There needs to be clear pathways to recovery for them to change the trajectory of their lives for the better and to become leaders by example for others to stop their violence before it starts. People who use violence need to be aware that their violence and their recovery are a choice.

5. DFSV is a national crisis. Healthy families is a bipartisan issue that does not have state boundaries. As funds become tighter and long-term funding for DFSV remains insecure, we need to avoid state-level duplication in prevention and early intervention programs. DFSV is a national issue and needs a national approach. A state-based approach continuously disadvantages victims of DFSV. Resources should never be going into mindless duplication. DFSV should fall under the jurisdiction of the AFP. Information should be easily shared, go beyond state lines, and Australia should develop a consistent response. These saved funds will allow resources to be directed to victims through state-based recovery response services.

These measures should include the AFP being responsible for the criminal aspects of DFSV, such as coercive control laws that would be recognised nationally. When proceedings are brought before the Federal Circuit and Family Court of Australia (FCFCOA) and the Family Court of Western Australia, there would be less confusion about state versus federal jurisdiction and lower costs for victims of DFSV who are seeking the right to live safely in their homes and communities. This is aside from the costs of each state making its own regulation related to coercive control. Resources from each state could be a shared effort based on best practices and not wasted on obvious duplication. Allowing the states the resources to effectively support the long-term healing and recovery of their constituents affected by DFSV.

6. In Australia, we have a family court system that is justice for the wealthy and continues to disadvantage people affected by DFSV. When an asset pool can not fund legal proceedings for parenting and financial matters, people who use violence are benefiting and not held to account for the harms they cause. Rarely are costs recovered for vexatious litigation or for drip-fed information to lawyers that depletes funds. Often, family court is an endurance challenge between victims of DFSV and people using violence. We recommend capped or fixed-price proceedings for marriage and de facto matters for lawyers and barristers. The harm caused by lengthy proceedings is evident every day under the watchful eye of the family court, and nothing is done about it. Legal aid eligibility is not sufficient for all cases; many low- to middle-class people have family law proceedings.
7. DFSV is core business of family court; to prevent system abuse it requires constant evaluation and a commitment to continuous improvement, particularly for the lives of children. An example would be the requirement of a certificate in family violence for judges, lawyers and barristers in FCFCOA and the Family Court of Western Australia. All courts in Australia have a top priority to prevent further harm, even more so the family court system that affects the lives of children so profoundly. Systems abuse monitoring should be standard practice. The immunity of a branch of government from causing further harm is an unacceptable practice.
8. We recommend discussion and consideration of the use of AI in court systems to screen cases and flag cases that could be affected by coercive control. AI for pattern recognition, with human oversight, could save funds and bring to the judiciary's attention patterns that judicial officers are known to be unable to see in cases involving DFSV. Resources are wasted on hours spent trying to prove to the judiciary patterns obviously lived through by the victims of DFSV, making family court further unsafe for victims. People using violence thrive in an environment that allows the playbook of their power and control to fester and be condoned under the watchful eye of the family court system in Australia. FCFCOA and the Family Court of Western Australia have a long way to go to earn back the trust of victims of DFSV.

PART A DISCUSSION

A.1 Visible help-seeking information and education about DFSV.

Help-seeking information is often treated as something simple: display a phone number, name a service and assume people will know what to do next.

DVAA heard from people with lived experience, community members and professionals that this information can play a much greater role than simply directing someone to a service. It should be visible, easy to recognise, safely placed and connected to support people can realistically access.

As part of its consultation, DVAA asked diverse community members informally whether they had seen public educational campaigns and help-seeking information about family, domestic and sexual violence. Many people said they rarely saw it. Among those who had, it was seen most often on social media, followed by public toilets and GP clinics. Workplaces and shopping centres did not feature in what was shared with DVAA.

These experiences are not presented as representative of the wider population. They do, however, raise an important practical question: is help-seeking information reaching people safely, privately and early enough? Is it visible across all priority communities, not only to those who use social media?

One person described the gap clearly:

“I think we need to be able to know where to go for support. Without the knowledge, there is no clear path.”

People consistently described visible information as more than a crisis referral tool. They connected it with earlier access to support, recognising violence sooner, long-term recovery, helping family and friends recognise warning signs and, ultimately, prevention.

One contributor said visible information could:

“Spark light bulb moments for victims and friends and family of victims.”

A person cannot seek help for behaviour they have not recognised or do not have the language to describe. This is particularly important where abuse involves coercive control, financial abuse, surveillance, isolation or systems abuse without physical assault.

As one contributor explained:

“It has little impact if you don’t identify as a victim of domestic ‘violence’. Sometimes there is no physical violence. The language needs to change.”

For this reason, public education and help-seeking information need to do more than provide a telephone number. They should describe different forms of family, domestic and sexual violence

and coercive control in clear, accessible language. Carefully framed questions may help someone recognise behaviours they had not previously identified as abuse and understand that support is available.

This could include questions such as:

- Does someone control your access to money?
- Do they monitor your phone or online activity?
- Have you become isolated from family or friends?
- Are children being used to threaten or control you?
- Is the legal system being used to continue abuse?

For some people, this may be the first time their experience has been named.

Visible information may also reduce shame and isolation. One contributor described it as:

“A visual reminder of what is not ok.”

Educational campaigns can also help relatives, friends and colleagues recognise warning signs and respond earlier. In turn, they can reinforce that family violence is not a private problem to be carried by the person experiencing it alone.

Public messaging can also speak to people using violence by making it clear that abusive behaviour is recognised, is not acceptable and that help to change is available.

A poster or telephone number alone will not prevent family, domestic or sexual violence. Visible, educational, and accessible information can, however, be a practical component of prevention, early identification, and timely access to support.

Safe placement and unintended risks

Visibility is not automatically safe.

People contributing to DVAA's consultation raised concerns about information being seen by a controlling partner. Material viewed on social media, found in a search history or noticed during an emotional reaction may lead to questioning, greater monitoring, restricted communication or further abuse.

One contributor who had lived through this risk explained:

“Yes — as a victim, while still with a perpetrator — it can be triggering and confronting not to react when you see these. Emotional responses can cause further abuse.”

Concerns were also raised about people using violence misusing the language contained in help-seeking material for image management, DARVO or systems abuse.

These concerns demonstrate why the location, language, design and intended audience of educational material all matter.

Information should appear across everyday community settings, with particular attention to places where someone may be more likely to access it privately. Public toilets may provide privacy for some people. GP clinics, hospitals, workplaces, schools, universities, public transport, community organisations and shopping centres may create other opportunities.

Digital information may be accessible for many people, but it may also be unsafe for someone whose phone or online activity is monitored.

No single location or message will be safe or effective for every community. Language, imagery, disability access, cultural context and service pathways may be understood differently across different groups.

Communities and people with lived experience should have an ongoing role in deciding where information appears, what it says and what risks need to be addressed. Co-design should begin before campaigns are developed and continue through their implementation and evaluation.

Information must connect to meaningful support

DVAA's position is not that visible information alone will prevent family, domestic or sexual violence. Knowing that help exists does not necessarily mean meaningful help will be available.

One contributor captured this concern:

“the places that people go to for help don’t actually help in the way needed.”

Another explained that the barriers to leaving or engaging with services may be greater than the support offered, particularly once post-separation abuse or Family Court proceedings begin.

The value of visible information cannot be separated from the safety, accessibility and capacity of the services behind it.

Information should clearly explain what a service provides, who can access it, how to contact it safely, and what may happen after disclosure. Sending someone from one telephone number to another is not the same as helping them.

Campaigns may lose trust if they encourage disclosure, but the services they promote cannot respond safely, effectively or in the way people were led to expect.

At the same time, service gaps do not remove the need for public education. People still need the language to recognise abuse and a place to begin.

Public education campaigns should also be evaluated regularly to determine whether they are reaching priority populations, improving recognition of family, domestic and sexual violence,

increasing safe help-seeking and reducing barriers to support. Evaluation should include people with lived experience and diverse communities so campaigns can be refined over time.

Visible information is part of the pathway. Services are what sit behind it. Both need to work.

DVAA therefore recommends increasing educational campaigns and the visibility of help-seeking information as part of the Second Action Plan to End Violence, alongside investment in safe, accessible and effective service responses. (See DVAA recommendation 1.)

A.2 Accessible and accountable pathways for people concerned about their own behaviour

Help-seeking information should include pathways for people concerned about their own behaviour and seeking support to change. Prevention cannot depend solely on victim-survivors recognising violence, reporting it, leaving safely and carrying responsibility for stopping it. People using violence need to be spoken to directly.

Information could ask whether a person controls their partner's money or communication, monitors devices, frightens them during disagreements, threatens them or their children, damages property or uses systems to maintain control. It could ask a simpler question: are you worried about the way you are behaving towards someone you say you care about?

The message must be clear. Violence and coercive control are choices. Responsibility remains with the person using them. A reduced-shame approach does not excuse abuse. It may create an opening for someone to recognise their behaviour and seek help before the harm escalates.

A person may know their anger, threats or control are becoming dangerous without describing themselves as someone who uses violence. A young person may repeat behaviour observed at home without having learned a different model.

When support is offered only after serious violence, criminal charges or court intervention, an earlier opportunity has already been lost. Pathways for people concerned about their behaviour must connect to specialist services that can assess risk, protect victim-survivors' safety, and provide behaviour-change support. The aim is not to soften accountability. It is to create another point where violence may be interrupted. (See DVAA recommendation 4.)

A.3 Building evidence through small, evaluated pilots

We recognise that there is not enough research yet to back the impact of educational campaigns and the visibility of help-seeking numbers accessible to all communities, that are co-designed for both victims, survivors and people using violence. People with lived experience largely supported the notion that research is needed on the impact of visible help-seeking information. This reflects interest in whether such information improves awareness, recognition, and early help-seeking, and whether its wording, placement, or design poses a risk.

However, there is a wider policy problem. An idea cannot receive support without evidence, but it cannot produce evidence without support. This creates a closed circle. New ideas cannot develop an evidence base without first being tested. Yet programs are often expected to produce evidence before funding or research support is available.

Exclusively funding established models such as Our Watch risks repeating familiar approaches and excluding community-led ideas before their value has been tested. A lack of research does not prove an idea lacks merit. It may mean the idea has never been given a fair trial, particularly as to how it is applied to marginalised communities.

DVAA supports a partnership model that brings communities, people with lived experience, people proposing new ideas, and researchers together to co-design small pilot programs.

Evaluation should begin with the pilot. Research could examine whether people noticed and understood the information, whether it helped them recognise coercive control, whether it led to earlier or safer help-seeking, and whether services were able to respond.

Not every pilot should continue. Some will work. Some will need to change. Some should stop.

A pilot that does not continue can still produce useful evidence. It may expose unsafe assumptions, ineffective language or gaps in service pathways. That knowledge should be retained rather than disappearing when short-term funding ends.

Small, evaluated pilots create room to test new ideas without requiring immediate large-scale investment. They allow creativity and accountability to sit in the same model. Therefore, DVAA recommends broadening research beyond the Our Watch model for the prevention of DFSV to ensure it is truly inclusive of all communities and co-designed by those communities. (See DVAA recommendation 2.)

A.4 Children and young people: recovery as priority

Children and young people who have lived with family violence need more than an immediate response. They need age-appropriate education, trauma-informed support and safe opportunities to learn that fear, violence and coercive control are not normal parts of relationships.

Children are often described as witnesses to family violence. That language can minimise their experience. They live within the fear, instability, financial control and disruption caused by violence. They may be threatened, used to control a parent or exposed to continuing abuse through parenting arrangements and legal proceedings. They are not standing outside the violence watching it happen. They are living through it.

DVAA considers recovery for children and young people to be part of prevention and deserving of immediate national priority. Early support can help children recognise healthy relationships, make sense of what happened and learn that the violence was not their fault. It can give them words for their experiences and clearer pathways to seek help.

People contributing to the consultation repeatedly connected prevention with early identification, access to support, and long-term recovery. One contribution called for children to be taught about family violence at school and provided with clearer advice and resources. Children should not have to wait until the effects of family violence appear later in life before meaningful help is offered.

Recovery should reflect the child or young person's age, circumstances, culture, disability, development and safety needs. Support may need to become available again as they grow older and make sense of earlier experiences in a new way.

Separation does not always end the violence. For many children and protective parents, post-separation abuse continues through parenting arrangements, financial control, repeated legal action and Family Court proceedings. Recovery cannot occur where systems intended to provide safety continue to expose children and families to coercion, instability or further harm.

By supporting children and young people to recover from family violence and recognise healthy relationships, the Second Action Plan would recognise healing as part of prevention and as a direct opportunity to interrupt intergenerational harm. (See DVAA recommendation 3.)

PART B DISCUSSION

B.1 Systems abuse within Family Court must be recognised for what it is

The Family Court must not become another place where violence continues. People who contributed to DVAA's consultation described entering the court system in the hope of securing safety and stability for themselves and their children, only to experience further harm through the process.

The Family Court is intended to provide a lawful pathway through separation, parenting disputes and financial matters. For victim-survivors and children affected by DFSV, what DVAA heard was that court processes can allow coercive control to continue after separation.

People described repeated applications, deliberate delay, unaffordable legal costs, false allegations, conflicting information across different courts and legal processes being used to wear the other person down.

One person described it as:

"Using the court process as secondary abuse."

Another said:

"Family court has impacted our family as much as the violence and abuse itself. It enabled further abuse just in a different setting."

These accounts should not be dismissed as disappointment with a court outcome. They describe processes that can preserve the same imbalance of control that existed within the relationship.

Separation does not always end violence. It may involve parenting arrangements, financial proceedings, legal correspondence, adjournments, and threats of further action.

One person described:

“Litigation abuse, lawyers exhausting me financially through sending pointless letters to the other party.”

A process can look neutral on paper and still operate unfairly in practice. The person with more money, greater confidence in the legal system or a greater willingness to prolong proceedings may be able to use the process itself as leverage.

Systems abuse was one of the strongest concerns raised through the experiences shared with DVAA about Family Court proceedings. People described repeated applications, deliberate delays, false statements in affidavits, financial exhaustion and allegations that reversed the roles of the victim-survivor and the person using violence.

These experiences are not presented as representative of every Family Court matter. They do show how strongly systems abuse featured in what people shared with DVAA and the different ways court processes may be used to continue abuse after separation.

As part of their experience, one person identified:

“My ex making false statements in affidavits.”

Others described different versions of events being presented across Family Court, intervention order and criminal proceedings.

One person said:

“Nobody cross-checks or fact-checks.”

A person may present one version of events in one court and a different version somewhere else. Each decision-maker may see only one part of the history. When information is divided across separate proceedings and systems, the wider pattern can be lost.

DVAA also heard that attempts to protect children or report continuing abuse can later be used against the person seeking help.

One person said:

“My protective parenting was used against me.”

A long history of reports does not automatically mean a person is misusing the system. It may mean the behaviour continued, the risk was not properly addressed or the person had to keep asking for help.

Coercive control is rarely visible through one incident alone. The Family Court needs greater capacity to identify patterns across time, proceedings, and systems. Without that broader view, conduct forming part of an ongoing campaign of control may be treated as a series of unrelated events rather than recognised for what it is.

B.2 Family violence knowledge cannot be optional

People contributing to DVAA's consultation repeatedly called for better family violence education across the Family Court system.

One person called for:

“Trauma-informed lawyers and judges. Education and training for all persons working in the family court, especially in coercive control.”

Family violence cases require specialist knowledge. Coercive control, financial abuse, systems abuse, post-separation violence, trauma responses and protective parenting are easily misread when separated from their context.

A person living with trauma may appear distressed, inconsistent or overly detailed. They may struggle to explain years of events in a neat order. They may also appear calm, articulate, organised and familiar with legal language. A person using violence may present in the same ways. Presentation is not proof. The person who appears composed is not automatically the safer parent. The person who is upset is not automatically unreliable.

Without proper training, reactive behaviour may be treated as equal to a continuing pattern of coercive control. Protective action may be reframed as obstruction. A victim-survivor may be disbelieved for appearing distressed, then have their experience diminished for appearing calm, capable or articulate. Neither presentation proves that abuse did or did not occur.

Professionals making decisions that shape the safety, recovery and future of victim-survivors and children need ongoing, specialised training and clear accountability. One short course does not meet that responsibility.

B.3 Children's safety cannot be lost inside the process

Children are often described as being at the centre of Family Court proceedings. Too often, their safety gets lost within the process.

One person said:

“Best interest of child not actually the court priority.”

Another called for:

“Listening to women and children and young people.”

People described fears that children would be removed from a protective parent, that reports of abuse would not be properly examined or that protective parenting would be used against them.

One person described:

“Child report writer and ICL not investigating child abuse, despite mountains of evidence.”

When proceedings continue for years, children live with that uncertainty for years. Interim arrangements may remain in place before serious concerns are properly tested. Children may face repeated assessments, changes to contact, conflict between parents and continuing legal action. The harm is not limited to the violence that occurred before the case began. The process itself can create further instability.

A system applying the best-interests principle must look at the original family violence, the continuing post-separation behaviour and the effect of prolonged proceedings on the child.

One person called for:

“A separate court for victim/survivors of DFV that is fast-tracked to allow parents and their children to return to a level of normalcy and prevent ongoing trauma and post-separation abuse.”

That could take the form of a specialist court, a specialist list or stronger case management. The goal is clear: identify family violence early, deal with it consistently and stop cases being prolonged without a proper reason.

B.4 Cost and delay can become part of the abuse

The cost of Family Court proceedings was a strong theme in DVAA's consultation. People described legal bills that had little relationship to their income or the value of the property in dispute. Every letter, affidavit, application and adjournment created another charge.

One person said:

“Victim survivors should not be expected to pay exorbitant legal costs to leave an abusive relationship. My legal fees are \$250K and counting, which is grossly disproportionate to the asset pool.”

Another said:

“It should not cost to escape violence!”

Cost is tied to safety. Financial exhaustion can force a person to accept an unsafe agreement, abandon a valid application, represent themselves in a difficult case or leave the process entirely. When one party knows that every letter or application will cost the other party money, unnecessary legal activity can become another form of pressure.

Delay creates similar harm. One person described being moved between divisions, having their file lost and waiting about a year and a half for a court date. During that time, the other person's control over the children increased, and their own contact with the children was restricted.

Another called for:

“Strict filing dates to not enable intentional delay tactics.”

Delay does not affect both parties in the same way. A person using violence may benefit from uncertainty, an existing interim arrangement, continuing financial control or ongoing contact. The victim-survivor may face rising legal fees, housing instability, reduced time with children and worsening trauma. Time can be used as leverage.

Cases involving family violence need active management from the beginning. Measures may include capped pricing, stronger filing controls, early judicial management, consequences for deliberate non-compliance and closer scrutiny of unnecessary correspondence. Victim-survivors should not be financially punished for trying to secure safety.

B.5 A call for a genuine commitment to continuous improvement, and the possibilities of artificial intelligence technology (AI) can support but not replace human judgement.

Systems abuse will not be fixed by one policy, one training course or one procedural change. As court processes change, the way those processes are misused may change too. Reform needs ongoing monitoring. Evaluation should ask whether the changes reduce delays, legal costs, and repeated litigation. It should examine whether victim-survivors are still being misidentified, whether children's safety concerns are investigated and whether new processes create fresh opportunities for control.

A systems-abuse monitoring function could examine patterns such as repeated filings, related proceedings across different courts, conflicting claims, deliberate non-disclosure and repeated failures to comply with orders. This is not about stopping legitimate cases from being heard. It is about recognising the difference between using the court to resolve a genuine dispute and using it to punish, exhaust, intimidate or maintain contact with another person. Procedural fairness is not defined as repeated opportunities to continue abuse through a different system.

DVAA also heard interest in whether artificial intelligence could help identify patterns of coercive control, conflicting evidence or systems abuse across large amounts of court material. There may be a limited place for that. Court files can contain years of affidavits, correspondence, applications, reports and orders. Technology may help organise material or flag patterns for closer review. The concerns raised were just as clear.

One person said:

“AI also doesn't have [a] holistic picture of the relationship dynamics.”

Another warned:

“It is not researched nor evidenced appropriately and cannot identify nuanced behaviour and could misidentify the victim.”

Coercive control cannot be identified by counting hostile words or isolated incidents. Context changes everything. A short message from a person using violence may carry a threat that is obvious within the relationship history and invisible to software. An angry response from a victim-survivor may follow years of fear, provocation and defensive behaviour.

AI should never decide credibility, make findings of fact or replace judicial judgement. At most, it could assist with screening or pattern recognition. Any flagged material would still need to be reviewed by a qualified person with specialist knowledge of family violence. Any use of AI should begin with a controlled pilot, independent evaluation, and clear safeguards for privacy, data security, transparency, bias mitigation, accountability, and the right to challenge an AI-assisted assessment.

The Family Court response cannot be judged only by the final order. It must also be judged by what happens to victim-survivors and children during the months or years before that order is made and after. A view of long-term recovery for all those affected by DFSV, particularly children and young people, should be given an opportunity to thrive as adults who are supported whilst breaking the cycles of intergenerational violence. Family Courts should be held to account as a DFSV response service that is trauma-informed, and that does no further harm. (See DVAA recommendations 3,4,5,6,7,8.)

Conclusion:

DVAA thanks every person who contributed their experience, insight and lived expertise to this submission. The recommendations put forward are intended to strengthen prevention, improve access to support, reduce further harm and support long-term recovery.

Ending violence in a generation will not be achieved by asking victim-survivors and children to keep surviving systems that fail to recognise what is happening. It will require action, accountability and a willingness to change the systems that allow violence to continue. The Second Action Plan should be where that commitment becomes practice.