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Submission:

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

July 2026

1. Introduction

This submission is informed by a roundtable hosted by Dr Sophie Scamps MP on 14 July 2026 with representatives from frontline domestic and family violence providers and community organisations in Mackellar.

Domestic and family violence remains a significant issue on the Northern Beaches. Latest NSW Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research data covering the period from April 2021 to March 2026 shows there were 593 reported incidents of intimidation, stalking and harassment, an increase of 11.7 per cent, and 239 apprehended violence order breach incidents, an increase of 29.9 per cent. These figures underscore the need for prevention and practical and accessible pathways to safety, support and recovery for families affected by domestic and family violence.

Roundtable attendees have drawn on their frontline experience supporting women and children fleeing domestic and family violence and delivering community prevention and intervention initiatives to inform the Second Action Plan under the *National Plan to End Violence against Women and Children 2022–2032*. The roundtable discussion addressed key focus areas of the Second Action Plan consultation, including:

- Prevention
- Services and Support
- Supporting Children and Young People
- People who use violence
- Recovery and healing

Providers stressed that domestic and family violence requires a whole-of-government and whole-of-community response that recognises social determinants, childhood trauma, alcohol, gambling, housing insecurity, online harms, service system fragmentation and funding shortfalls as intersecting drivers and risk factors.

Thank you to the following organisations who attended the roundtable and provided thoughtful contributions to the development of the Second Action Plan:

Lifeline Northern Beaches
Northern Beaches Women's Shelter
Women & Children First

Zonta Club Northern Beaches
Relationships Australia
Women's Resilience Centre

Dr Sophie Scamps MP
Federal Member for Mackellar

2. Prevention

Consultation question: *What actions should governments, workplaces, industries, schools, families and individuals take to stop violence before it starts?*

2.1 Embed respectful relationships education across the curriculum

Participants were clear that respectful relationships education should not be delivered as a one-off program. It should be embedded across the curriculum from primary through secondary school, including through age-appropriate education on safe relationships, emotional regulation, gender equality, consent, digital literacy and bystander action. The roundtable noted that current approaches are often fragmented and insufficiently evaluated, and that governments should invest in evidence-based, community-led respectful relationships programs, which have been proven to be the most effective.

2.2 Strengthen prevention and leadership across all levels of government

Prevention must start at the top. Participants proposed that every Member of Parliament should participate in annual awareness training on domestic and family violence prevention, including healthy relationships, workplace culture and the role of leadership in setting community norms. Participants want to see all levels of government working together and every government department to have a policy and accountability framework addressing domestic and family violence, with prevention embedded into auditing, workplace health and safety, funding agreements and service delivery expectations.

2.3 Address casual sexism and harmful gender norms

The Second Action Plan should explicitly address casual sexism as a precursor to more serious forms of disrespect, coercion and violence. Participants noted that while considerable work has been done to address casual racism, less systematic attention has been given to casual sexism in workplaces, schools, sporting clubs and community settings. Prevention should include practical tools for workplaces, sporting organisations, schools and community groups to call out sexism and model respectful behaviour.

2.4 Respond to online misogyny and the “manosphere”

Participants raised concern about online spaces that promote misogyny, rigid gender stereotypes and harmful ideas about male dominance and female submission. The Second Action Plan should include stronger digital literacy education for young people, stronger regulation of social media platforms, and coordinated action with other governments to hold technology companies accountable. However, participants also cautioned that regulation alone will not solve the problem. Governments must also address why these messages are attractive to some boys and young men, including loneliness, disconnection and disenfranchisement.

2.5 Engage boys and men without shame

Prevention must include men and boys as active participants in change. Participants emphasised that men’s voices need to be heard and that many non-violent men want to help but are unsure what role to play. Programs should equip men with practical bystander skills, mentoring opportunities and safe ways to challenge harmful behaviour. Participants pointed to

Mentoring Men, who have developed a training model on training bystanders. Male role models should be supported to work directly with boys and young men in schools, sporting clubs and community settings, including to unpack online content and relationship pressures in ways that are credible and non-shaming.

Participants identified the 17 to 25 age group as critical for prevention and early intervention, as young people are often entering or experiencing their first intimate relationships and beginning to understand how they should be treated and how they treat others. Supports should extend beyond adolescence into young adulthood, including relationship education, counselling, peer support, mentoring and targeted engagement through settings young people use.

2.6 Recognise intersecting drivers and risk factors of domestic and family violence

Participants cautioned against treating domestic and family violence as a singular issue only through a gender inequality lens, recommending the Second Action Plan should also recognise the role of childhood trauma, alcohol, drug use, gambling and social determinants. Participants specifically called for stronger regulation of online gambling and inducements, noting the relationship between gambling, alcohol and increased domestic and family violence risk.

2.7 Clarify national standards on physical punishment of children

The roundtable identified the inconsistency between messages that the physical punishment of children is unacceptable in schools and public settings but remains legally and socially tolerated in homes. Participants argued that governments should provide clear national leadership to end smacking children, like the UK has done, noting concerns that smacking can normalise violence in the home and contribute to later behavioural and relational harm.

3. Services and support

Consultation question: *How can services and supports work better for people who have experienced, or are at risk of experiencing, family, domestic or sexual violence?*

3.1 Fund services for the real duration of need

Participants were clear that current funding models do not match the reality of domestic and family violence recovery. Support is often time-limited, despite clients needing long-term assistance with safety, housing, trauma, parenting, employment, legal issues and financial independence. Refuges may formally be limited to short stays, but providers reported that these limits do not reflect the practicalities or complexity of clients' needs or the shortage of safe exit pathways.

3.2 Strengthen housing and transitional accommodation

Housing was identified as one of the most significant barriers to safety and recovery on the Northern Beaches of Sydney. Participants noted the lack of land and suitable properties for refuges and crisis accommodation, inadequate transitional accommodation, and rental subsidies that do not cover market rents on the Northern Beaches. The Second Action Plan should include place-based housing responses that reflect local rental markets, including increased crisis accommodation, transitional housing, long-term social and affordable housing, refuges that can house families, particularly with teenage boys, and flexible brokerage for victim-survivors and children.

3.3 Improve the Staying Home Leaving Violence model

Participants supported the intent of Staying Home Leaving Violence but noted that it must be accompanied by practical housing options for the person using violence. If a perpetrator is excluded from the home but has nowhere to go, this can create safety, enforcement and engagement challenges. Participants suggested exploring safe, accountable accommodation models for men who are required to leave the family home, with links to behaviour change supports, case management and monitoring.

3.4 Fund local, trusted community organisations

Community organisations are often best placed to reach people early, maintain trust and provide ongoing connection after crisis services end. Participants identified examples of promising local initiatives, including Lifeline's Connect Program at Warringah Mall and the presence of the Arise Foundation on the Northern Beaches, while noting that many such services are either newly established, underfunded or absent from long-term funding streams.

3.5 Build workforce capacity and prevent burnout

Participants highlighted workforce burnout across the sector. The Second Action Plan should include specific workforce measures, including secure funding, competitive pay, supervision, trauma-informed training, career pathways and investment in male social workers and practitioners working with men and boys. Without workforce investment, expanded policy ambition will not translate into improved service access.

3.6 Improve integration between specialist and mainstream services

Domestic and family violence must be treated as core business across health, mental health, education, housing, justice, child protection and employment services. Participants called for a whole-of-government strategy in which different portfolios are accountable for responding to family violence, rather than leaving responsibility primarily to specialist women's safety services.

Consultation question: *What makes it easier for people to access support or services related to family, domestic or sexual violence?*

3.7 Provide the right service at the right time

Access improves when people can receive support when they are ready or in need, rather than when a program has capacity or a referral window is open. Participants noted that many services are time-limited or unavailable, leaving women, children and families without support during and after crises. As an example, women are only allowed in refuges for 12 weeks, which is not long enough. The Second Action Plan should fund flexible, long-term support pathways that allow people to move in and out of services as their needs change.

3.8 Make services visible and reachable through community entry points

Services should be available in places people already go, including shopping centres, schools, workplaces, sporting clubs, libraries, health services and community hubs. Participants identified the value of outreach and community-based programs, including local examples such as the Lifeline Connect Program at Warringah Mall.

The Second Action Plan should fund bystander training, community mentoring, workplace education and local prevention programs so that individuals, families, clubs and community organisations can identify warning signs, respond safely and connect people to specialist support.

3.9 Ensure services are locally appropriate

National and state programs must be flexible enough to respond to local conditions. On the Northern Beaches of Sydney, for example, high rents and limited housing supply mean that standard subsidy programs, like Rent Choice Start Safely in NSW and short-term accommodation models are often inadequate. Place-based funding should allow local providers to tailor responses to housing markets, transport options, workforce availability and community demographics.

4. Supporting children and young people

Consultation question: *How can communities and services best support children and young people to stay safe from violence?*

4.1 Recognise children as victim-survivors in their own right

A strong theme from the roundtable was that children must not be treated merely as extensions of the mother. Children who experience domestic and family violence have their own safety, trauma, developmental, legal and recovery needs. Participants called for a rights-based approach that recognises children as individuals and ensures they have access to trusted, specialist support.

4.2 Establish dedicated children's trauma and recovery services

Participants identified a major gap in services for children affected by domestic and family violence. Funding often supports the mother on the assumption that children will be okay if the mother is supported, but providers stressed that children require their own trauma-informed services, including child case workers in refuges, funded children's groups, therapeutic programs, developmental support and recovery pathways.

4.3 Fund child-specific supports in refuges and community settings

The Second Action Plan should fund child case workers in each refuge and ensure children's programs are not dependent on ad hoc grants or unfunded goodwill. More funding is needed to support community organisations and refuges to support children. Participants noted that children's groups can be highly powerful because they help children understand that the violence was not their fault and that they are not alone.

4.4 Address adolescent violence in the home

Participants noted that there are 14-year-olds with apprehended domestic violence orders and very few services funded or willing to work with violent adolescents. The Second Action Plan should include a dedicated response to adolescent violence in the home, including therapeutic family-based interventions, specialist adolescent behaviour change programs, support for parents and carers, and clear referral pathways.

4.5 Ensure family law and child protection systems do not block recovery

Participants raised concern that children's therapy can be obstructed through family law dynamics, including where a father refuses consent for therapy. They also identified serious underfunding in child protection and child and youth mental health systems, with early intervention inadequately funded and children often only receiving intensive support after removal. The Second Action Plan should address these systemic barriers so that children can access timely care. Participants agreed that investment is needed in training judges and magistrates to build understanding of family and domestic violence.

5. People who use violence

Consultation question: *What more can be done across the community to promote healthy, safe relationships and strengthen accountability for people who use violence?*

5.1 Expand men's behaviour change programs

Participants identified significant waiting lists and insufficient availability of men's behaviour change programs in NSW, including limited services in metropolitan areas. They noted recent funding announcements but stressed that some providers have been unable to run programs due to lack of money. The Second Action Plan should commit to sustained national investment in men's behaviour change, with a focus on program quality, evaluation, accessibility and cultural suitability.

5.2 Engage men earlier and in places they already are

Men, particularly young men, often do not access traditional services. Participants noted that sport can be an important entry point but should not be the only pathway. Behaviour change and early intervention should also be connected to workplaces, health services, mental health support, community organisations, education settings and peer networks.

5.3 Link accountability with support

Participants emphasised the need to engage men "where they're at" rather than relying on shame-based messaging. Accountability must be firm, but it should be paired with practical support, trauma-informed intervention and opportunities for men to develop safe relationship skills. Participants identified programs such as Caring Dads as promising models for engaging fathers where child safety and parenting responsibilities can be used as motivators for change.

5.4 Focus system attention on the person causing harm

Participants expressed concern that many current systems place the burden on victim-survivors to manage safety, while insufficient attention is given to changing the behaviour of the person using violence. Safety Action Meetings and related processes should more actively ask what is being done to monitor, disrupt and change perpetrator behaviour, rather than focusing primarily on the victim-survivor's actions. It was also noted that while a great deal of investment of time and support may be provided to a victim leaving an abusive relationship, it was common for abusive behaviour to be repeated in the abuser's new relationships if not addressed.

5.5 Invest in evidence and research

Participants called for greater investment in research into domestic and family violence, including national studies and evaluation of behaviour change programs. They identified the need to learn from well-researched models, including international evidence such as the Mirabel Study, and to ensure Australia has a stronger evidence base for what works with men who use violence.

6. Recovery and healing

Consultation question: *What would make the biggest difference in helping people and families to recover and heal after being affected by family, domestic and sexual violence?*

6.1 Create a dedicated recovery funding stream

Participants were clear that recovery cannot be an afterthought. They noted that there is no recovery money under the National Plan at all and that new money is required, rather than reallocating funds from crisis response, prevention or other parts of the domestic and family violence system. Recovery should be recognised as a distinct phase requiring long-term investment.

6.2 Fund trauma recovery centres and local recovery pathways

Participants noted examples of nationally funded recovery programs, including the Illawarra Trauma Recovery Centre, and identified a need for equivalent recovery pathways in other communities. On the Northern Beaches, participants noted PHN pilots but raised concern that without ongoing funding, women have nowhere to go after initial support to work on trauma, employment, financial independence and rebuilding their lives.

6.3 Support whole-of-family healing

Recovery should include support for adult victim-survivors, children, adolescents and, where safe and appropriate, family members affected by violence. Participants called for a whole-of-family approach, recognising that violence can affect extended family systems and that family breakdown can create new safety risks, including where a perpetrator returns to live with an older parent. This also points to the need for a broader Family Safety Strategy that includes elder abuse.

6.4 Provide practical foundations for recovery

Healing is not possible without safety, housing, income, legal support and time. Cost of living pressures, lack of transitional accommodation, inadequate rental subsidies and the shortage of suitable refuge accommodation all undermine recovery. The Second Action Plan should align recovery funding with housing, income support, employment, mental health and legal assistance measures.

6.5 Invest in children's healing and repair

Participants repeatedly emphasised that children need dedicated healing, recovery and repair programs. Many children presenting to services have higher needs, including developmental needs and neurodivergence, which require additional specialist support. Recovery funding must therefore include child-specific therapeutic and developmental services, not only supports attached to the adult victim-survivor.

7. Key recommendations

The Second Action Plan should:

1. **Embed respectful relationships education across primary, secondary and young adult settings**, with robust evaluation and long-term funding for effective community-based programs
2. **Create a whole-of-government prevention framework**, requiring every department, workplace and funded service system to address domestic, family and sexual violence
3. **Strengthen action on online misogyny and harmful digital cultures**, including regulation of platforms, digital literacy and engagement with boys and young men
4. **Expand men's behaviour change and early intervention programs**, including programs linked to sport, workplaces, parenting, mental health and community organisations
5. **Strengthen regulation of online gambling and inducements**, noting the relationship between gambling, alcohol and increased domestic and family violence risk
6. **Recognise children as victim-survivors in their own right**, with dedicated funding for child case workers, trauma recovery, therapeutic groups and developmental support
7. **Establish specialist responses to adolescent violence in the home**, including family-based therapeutic interventions and clear referral pathways
8. **Create a dedicated recovery and healing funding stream**, including trauma recovery centres, long-term counselling, employment support, financial recovery and whole-of-family healing
9. **Develop a national family safety strategy** that includes elder abuse
10. **Address housing as a core safety issue**, by increasing crisis, appropriate transitional, social and affordable housing and ensuring subsidies reflect local rental markets
11. **Invest in the specialist and community workforce**, including secure funding, supervision, training, male practitioners and measures to reduce burnout
12. **Fund local, trusted community organisations to provide early intervention, outreach, bystander training and continuity of care**, recognising that community connection is central to prevention, access and recovery
13. **Increase investment in research into domestic and family violence**, including undertaking a national study of the Australian population and intimate relationships to inform policy, evidence-based prevention and interventions.

8. Conclusion

The Mackellar roundtable made clear that ending domestic and family violence against women and children requires more than awareness, short-term programs or fragmented service responses. It requires sustained investment, national leadership and coordinated action across all levels of government, alongside genuine partnership with frontline services and local communities.

Participants emphasised that prevention, including respectful relationships programs, must begin early, be embedded across schools, workplaces, sporting clubs, online spaces and community settings, and include men and boys as active participants in change. They also made clear that prevention cannot be separated from crisis response, housing, behaviour change, child protection, mental health, social determinants, recovery and justice system and gambling reform.

Importantly, roundtable attendees agreed that children must be recognised as victim-survivors in their own right, with dedicated funding for trauma-informed support, recovery and healing. People who use violence must be held accountable, and this should be paired with trauma-informed intervention and stronger, better-funded and evaluated behaviour change programs.

For the Second Action Plan to make a real difference, it must provide long-term, secure funding for specialist and community-based services, address housing as a core safety issue, invest in the workforce, expand recovery services, and ensure support is available when and where people need it.

Frontline providers in the electorate of Mackellar were clear: the solutions are known, but they require the resources to deliver them. The Second Action Plan should reflect the urgency of this task and commit to practical, measurable and properly funded reforms that help women and children live safely, recover fully and enable a future free from violence.