

Submission to:
Federal Department of social services -
Consultation on the Second Action Plan (National
Plan to End Violence against Women and
Children 2022–2032)
Submitted by:
Fighters Against Child Abuse Australia [FACAA]



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About Fighters Against Child Abuse Australia



We are a charity formed to empower survivors, to raise awareness and to bring justice back to our legal system.

Our vision is to see a world where child abuse is no longer a plight our children must face.

The core values which guide FACAA are:

Integrity above all.

Always show empathy and compassion.

Respect the journey, every survivor's path is different.

Never lose the passion that hardens your resolve.

FACAA has been working actively for the past 15 years to end child abuse within Australia. We run several programs all with our goal of ending child abuse in mind, such as survivor's healing programs, educational and legal reform programs, antidomestic violence programs, anti-bullying programs and a social media awareness campaign with over 135,000 followers on our main Facebook page alone, making it one of the most successful social media campaigns of its kind in Australia.

FACAA is a national organisation that has full deductible gift recipient status as a registered charity. We have volunteers and clients from every part of Australia, and we have members from all over the world.



Priority Area one

Victim Survivors

Question One: What service or system responses would make the biggest difference to victim-survivors' safety, wellbeing, healing and recovery?

There are many and some would need to be targeted at specific groups.

- Streamlining the judicial system, excluding finite details such as dates and times which can be affected by trauma – victim survivors currently wait for months to years for a case to be finalised, thus drawing out the “victim mode” stage for far too many people. Victim-survivors often take a while to fully understand what was perpetrated against them, a common tactic of defence attorneys is to force faster trials citing the rights of their client to a speedy trial which forces victim-survivors to state specific dates and times which is unrealistic considering the evolving nature of child abuse disclosures. We need to find a workable middle ground on this.
- Better allocation of support personnel and therapy dogs to aid in maintaining calm, having words, phrases, timelines etc explained to people who are basically shell-shocked and struggling to take it all in.
- A return to meaningful recognition payments as they were prior to the changes made in 2013 under Barry O’Farrell. The

current system is a joke which provides a pittance, particularly when compared to the amounts paid to victim-survivors of institutional abuse.

- A national roll out of the Staying Home Leaving Violence program which is currently only available in certain areas.
- Working closely with children and young people over a prolonged period to help them understand that they are not at fault and never were. This is one of the hardest things for young victim survivors to come to terms with. When not adequately addressed this adds to long lived feelings of guilt, embarrassment, humiliation, low self-worth and helplessness. Those feelings then develop into self-harming behaviours such as suicidal ideation, reckless behaviour, violent behaviour, addictions (this can be AOD or things such as gambling and shopping) and promiscuity.
- Abolishing the “no male child over 10 years old) rule that many shelters for women and children still have. This alone kept me personally trapped for many years longer than I should/could have been.
- Increasing the number of these shelters and including shelters for men and for men accompanied by children.
- Programs to give victim survivors a sense of self-efficacy, security and self-worth. This is why, since its inception, Fighters Against Child Abuse Australia has always included self-defence and martial arts classes – not to teach violence but to improve the way people see themselves and improve their confidence in what life has taught them is a dangerous place. As long as a victim survivor feels in any way responsible for or deserving of the abuse, they will subconsciously gravitate back to abusive relationships and situations.

Targeted programs for CALD victim survivors who may need information presented in their preferred language and by people who either are of their own culture or who have a deep understanding of that culture.

Question Two: What helps people access support earlier, and what barriers prevent people from seeking help or engaging with systems or services?

Many people are only too well aware of Police responses in their area not adequately ensuring their safety and confidentiality. All too often, Police responses can be dismissive, unbelieving or just simply failing to grasp the gravity of the situation. Their training must include the knowledge that, in most cases, people won't come to them until they are truly desperate – often when they fear for their life. Every district should have specially trained liaison officers, indeed where these are available, they are often a vital lifeline for people coming forward about the crimes committed against them. Better training at both the Academy level and as an ongoing program throughout their careers would help Police have a better grasp of what is needed. They are often overwhelmed in their jobs, so aiding them in knowing a clear pathway of response would assist all involved. Abusers often systematically remove their victim/s from links with family and friends. This makes knowing who to turn to extremely difficult, especially as most have been groomed into thinking that it is all their fault – so approaching a stranger with their “guilty secret” is made that much harder. Clear messaging needs to be made available at every level so that people already have that information before it is needed. Much more awareness and education is needed – far too many people still think that Domestic Violence is only physical for instance. Increasing

awareness of what services are available both locally and from Victims Services, the Victims Register etc is desperately needed along with what constitutes F&DV and sexual violence. Some women and men still believe that rape cannot occur in a marriage for example. We need relationship and violence education in all schools, that also provide ample opportunity for young people to engage in the conversations and to approach presenters privately should they wish to. If people are armed with the right information as common knowledge, rather than something they need to search for when in trouble, that would go a long way towards helping them to access those services earlier.

Question Three: What current or emerging issues should the Second Action Plan address, including in relation to coercive control and technology-facilitated abuse?

Keeping up with technology is difficult for many people, but in this context it is vital. Apps such as SnapChat allow users to see the location of others for instance. I have had several young female clients of high school age tell me that their boyfriend/girlfriend “always” checks via technology where they are, then asks who they are with and exactly how long they will be. Every one of these young girls expressed how good this was, as they viewed it as a sign that their boyfriend or girlfriend “really cares” about them. When questioned though, they did admit that they often felt like they had to rush to end a social outing and that they felt that they needed to avoid certain people so that their partner would not be angry with them. Cameras, recording devices and tracking devices are all now commonly used by abusers. They are available readily and inexpensively and are often very small, making them ideal to plant in areas where they will be unnoticed by their target. Social media

accounts, when not adequately secured, show where a person lives, works, frequents, who their friends are and so on. Social media users span every demographic, making it vital to use public awareness campaigns across all forms of media to educate people in how to better protect themselves online. As we know, abuse via technology can come from people unknown to their victim or from people close to them. While these technologies can be very worthwhile, people need to have a better understanding of how to protect themselves.

Question Four: What gaps remain in addressing the needs of diverse communities, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people?

As noted in the report, Police responses to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in general is inadequate. When dealing with First Nations People it is important to remember that there is no “one size fits all” in terms of cultural awareness training. Prior to colonisation, there were over 500 different language groups and cultures. Of course, there were some overlaps and similarities, but anyone working with subjects as delicate as F&DV and sexual abuse, which both bring very real shame on family groups and communities, must have a sound understanding of the local cultural considerations. It is also vital to remember that, especially in remote communities, English is not the first language, and literacy skills may be poor, especially in older adults but not limited to them. Stigma is also huge – Indigenous Australians for the most part are aware of the much-believed fallacy that abuse is “part of their culture” and so fear that seeking help could enhance that belief. For other CALD people, especially those newly arrived, awareness of our laws may be poor. I have spoken with many victim survivors who were unaware that certain things that they had become used to

actually constituted abuse, although this can be true across all people and include both victims and abusers. Poor use of the English language of course is another barrier, along with fear of being sent back to their country of origin. Victims may have been told that their visa will be revoked if they leave the abuser, and in many cases too the victim fears that the abuser will be sent back. Wanting the abuse to stop is different in many cases to wanting the abuser permanently removed, especially when that would mean leaving the traumatised victim/s alone in a strange new country, often with children to care for. All of this can lead into modern slavery, where victims are too afraid and unaware of where to turn to even try to break free. When these cases are reported by concerned third parties, Police who attend the location often only speak with the “head of the household”, as the victim is normally prevented from being able to say anything. It is vital that all members of the household are provided with a safe, confidential interview with an interpreter present at all times.



Priority Area two, prevention and early intervention

Question One: What would make the biggest difference in preventing and ultimately ending violence?

Ending child abuse – in an oversimplified nutshell. One key thing that we have always said at Fighters Against Child Abuse Australia is that we won't end child abuse until we end child abuse, and that holds true for all types of violence. Broken children become broken adults – the abused and the abusers. We know that early childhood trauma causes PTSD equivalent to that of soldiers on the front line of conflict, we know that

PTSD is often misdiagnosed as ADHD and ASD and so left untreated. We know that trauma is the gateway drug, that people will self-medicate with a range of substances and behaviours. Untreated and unsupported victim survivors of early childhood trauma experience poor educational outcomes, employment difficulties, self-harming behaviours, suicide, poor relationships, difficulty connecting with others, difficulty parenting, poverty, mental health issues and homelessness. We know all of these things and yet we continue to treat F&DV, child abuse as a stand alone and sexual violence as the epidemic that it really is. If terrorists injured, maimed, traumatised and killed as many people as abusers do on a daily basis in this country, there would be a huge response at all levels – from individuals to National Parliament. Several years ago at an inter-agency meeting, the then Minister for Corrective Services, responding to a question from our CEO Adam Washbourne, stated that over 90% of all adults currently incarcerated at that time were able to be proven as victim survivors of childhood abuse of some form. This is huge and not only is it killing and forever changing people every single day, it is costing an absolute fortune. We need to be putting more resources into both preventing child abuse, including F&DV, and working very closely and effectively – long term – with children who have already been impacted and their non-offending carers. This also means a major shake up of the out of home care system, as so many children go from the frying pan to the fire – removed from a toxic home and placed in a whole new toxic situation. Many children also are moved from placement to placement – I have spoken with people who experienced more than 30 foster homes – further embedding their belief that they are simply bad and worthless people. Many of these young people carry a vast store of unspent rage within them. That becomes a very real burden that they will eventually either turn on themselves or project it at others around them, often their own family members as adults. Too many people think and even say that once the abuse stops, the

whole thing is over with and victim survivors can then effortlessly move forward. This is far from the truth. Providing ten sessions of counselling and maybe a camera on the house just doesn't come close to fulfilling the needs of victim survivors. A big help in ending violence would also be harsher penalties and real programs for DV offenders. Some of these programs have extremely good outcomes. Not all people who use violence are beyond help, while some definitely are. We need to work harder on those who are simply responding to their own pain while also letting them know in no uncertain terms that violence is never okay. It is also vital that we get much better at detecting and responding to psychopathy and sociopathy. We are told that forensic psychological testing is always carried out, but in reality it takes very skilled professionals to do this effectively. By their very nature, these people know what to say and when to say it in order to avoid detection. They then serve their time, if any, and are released to simply do it all again. We often hear that a particular offender has been out of jail for x amount of time and "has not re-offended". In reality, it often takes people years to come forward about the abuse they have suffered.

Question Two: How can existing efforts to prevent violence be strengthened or built upon at the individual, community, organisational, institutional and societal levels?

We need to be really pushing awareness and education. Individuals need to strongly oppose violence in their friends, cohorts and themselves and this will only happen with a complete societal shift. Violence must be widely viewed as weak – not as a way to prove your strength, masculinity or point. It should be mocked and called out as evidence of a lack of strength and morals. Anger is real, it is a vital human

emotion, but we must teach safe ways to deal with anger that don't harm anyone. Helping people – all people – feel that they belong and a part of a community has been shown to be a good preventative measure. Unfortunately, the old look and feel of a community has largely been replaced with people too stressed about making enough money to survive to get to know even their closest neighbours, and people too locked into a screen to engage with people in real ways. Poverty is a real driver of abuse also. Financial strain is one of the major factors in F&DV. Providing safe, liveable community housing and a liveable income for those not working would make a huge difference in the lives of thousands of people and help to mitigate the prevalence of violence in homes. People also need to be empowered to do something if they suspect or know of someone being abused. This would involve them knowing how to spot violence and what they can do about it without putting themselves in danger. Once again, having Police that people know will treat the situation seriously would be a huge help. Governments at every level need to putting these issues at the front of their priorities, not something to get to later or just as a photo opportunity when a new centre finally gets opened. Online platforms need to stop relying solely on AI and key words to alert them to possible situations. It is almost impossible to actually speak to a human from an online platform in order to raise a concern, yet the AI system makes constant errors. Funding of programs such as Staying Home, Leaving Violence and smaller charity and community led initiatives is vital. Fighters Against Child Abuse Australia runs in-school bullying programs, court support, sporting and other interest programs for affected children and their families, advocacy and legislative review programs – all on donations alone and with all workers being voluntary. Aboriginal Health Services across the country provide F&DV support and homelessness services whilst being grossly underfunded, as do many locally based CALD organisations. Funding for these services must be a priority.

The problems are costing the nation a fortune, so anything that can rein that in must be taken seriously. No Australian is exempt from this scourge and yet successive governments have overlooked the seriousness of it when it comes time to prepare a budget.

Question Three: How can governments, communities, schools, workplaces, online platforms and others better support people to recognise and respond to harmful attitudes and behaviours?

A lot of this is in the way that we talk about things and the ways in which the media reports them. Without fail, when someone mentions a person being a victim of violence and sexual abuse, the victim blaming begins. “What was she wearing”, “wow his partner must have really done something bad for him to bash her like that”, “I bet it was a custody battle” and others are comments that we see all the time. Even our media, despite directions from the AFP, use terms such as “non-consensual sex”, “Sex with a minor” and “child pornography” thus downplaying and normalising the actual crimes committed. Far too many times I have even heard Magistrates claim that a rape was “not a violent crime”. All of things legitimise the acts of abuse. People need to be calling it out – always – not just looking the other way because they think that it isn’t their business. Child abuse and acts of violence, including sexual violence are everyone’s business. Volunteers and paid staff of all organisations, businesses etc need to be trauma informed and able to pick up on signs of abuse and then act on that information. It’s not enough to see something and then go home and say to your partner that you witnessed something disturbing, then ask what’s for dinner. This is the sticking point where most people fail. They either don’t know what to do about it or they

don't want to get involved. Education is key, community and whole of society awareness is key. Online influencers who promote violence in any form must be removed from their platforms permanently. Managers of Facebook groups etc need to know that they have a legal and moral obligation to remove comments that promote violence or otherwise cause harm and, if necessary, to block the offender. Schools can play a vital role in teaching all of this to children, including around bullying. Thousands of children are currently home schooled not because of any specific ideology of their parents, but because relentless bullying went unaddressed in mainstream schooling. Unfortunately, many of those children then become further isolated and are largely unseen should they also be experiencing violence in the home. Distance Education and Home-Schooling heads need to be monitoring this much more closely than they currently do. Overall, it is about educating people and empowering them with the right tools and knowledge to keep people safe.

Question Four: What prevention and early intervention approaches appear most promising or effective, and what is needed to strengthen or expand them?

Physical activity has been scientifically proven to aid in recovery from trauma, mental health issues and gaining self-worth. Self-defence and martial arts courses not only teach the obvious skills, but they also teach discipline. This is highly beneficial to both victim survivors and abusers or potential abusers. Anything from yoga or tai-chi through to running, weights training, boxing or wrestling can help, along with team sports and quieter pursuits such as horse riding and bushwalking. Schools can play a vital role in encouraging students to participate and in offering a wide range of activities

so that kids don't feel pressured to be "good at" something. Child protection charities such as Fighters Against Child Abuse Australia, Bravehearts and the like often have great ideas for worthwhile initiatives but lack the funding and wider awareness that would enable them to put those initiatives into place. Programs such as Love Bites and Shark Tank are remarkably effective but very sporadic and citycentric in their availability. DV offenders' programs offered while people are incarcerated are often quite beneficial, as are anger management programs. At the moment, offenders need to be serving a term of eighteen months or longer to automatically be asked to participate in these programs. They need to be actively recommended to all inmates, not only those who are serving time for a violent crime, no matter what length their sentence is.

Question Five: What emerging issues should the Second Action Plan address in relation to primary prevention and early intervention?

Alarming social trends have shown that an alarming number of people believe that children who report being abused might be lying, that it is okay for a person in a relationship to use violence against their partner, that rape is not possible in a committed relationship (ie that sexual intimacy is a person's "right" in this situation), that some people "deserve" to be assaulted and that there is no need for them to report anything if they witness abuse – if the victim wants intervention or support they will ask for it. It is horrifying to think that these views are still so widely held. This needs to be urgently addressed, as does the growing number of crimes committed with the assistance of various technologies.



Priority Level Three Children and young people in their own right

Question One: What would make the biggest difference in improving safety, recovery and wellbeing outcomes for children and young people affected by this violence?

For more people to actively engage with children and young people, to notice the signs of abuse, to believe any disclosures that they may hear and to take action. Children often feel unheard among adults, we need to be really listening. We need them to know who their “safe people” are, the ones that they can feel comfortable talking to about anything. Preventing abuse can be as simple as just chatting to them candidly about relationships, sexual intimacy, things they might have seen online, peer pressure and so on. Improving safety then flows from there, if a child knows there is someone that they can discuss these things with, they also know that they can raise concerns and make disclosures with that person. Children are often coerced into silence with threats of harm to themselves, their family and their pets. That is terrifying to anyone but particularly to a child. They need to know about body safety, safe people, actions they can take and so on as readily as they know the alphabet. Schools, parents and other caregivers can potentially play a very major role in this. Once a child has been identified as having suffered some form of abuse, they need to be interacted with as people in their own right. It is not good enough to simply ask a caregiver how the child is doing or

assume that they will be fine now that interventions have taken place. Children carry this trauma for a lifetime if grassroots, effective and long-lasting supports are not put into place. Often cases of F&DV where a child is not a primary victim concentrate all recovery efforts on the abused adult. This totally overlooks the simple fact that the child or children are also victims and as such require supports. We need to stop dismissing the emotions, needs and trauma impacts of children and young people and actually talk to them, listen to them, empathise with them and empower them to move forward in positive ways. This area is the number one issue of importance if we have any hope of ending violence in this country. These children must be built back up in holistic and effective ways, we need to help them deal with their emotions in safe ways and to understand that the abuser is the only person at fault, that nothing that they did warranted or invited the abuse in any way. Guilt and shame are the biggest things that linger with abused children and young people. I have spoken to victim survivors in their 60s who still feel the lingering shame and guilt of being abused as children, most of these people have experienced incarceration, self-harm, homelessness and addiction. Too often we hear the offhand remark that “kids are resilient” and “they’re only young, they’ll get over it/won’t remember it”. This attitude might be fine when it comes to the healing of a wrist broken during a soccer match, but it is far from helpful or true when it comes to healing the psyche. We need the voices of those with lived experience to be heard at every level. These are the thoughts, words and feelings that will guide better responses in a far better way than what any academic or text book could ever hope to do. In this, no one should be discounted – not those for whom English is not their first language, not those who live in rural and remote areas, not those living with disability, not those who have not had the benefit of a good education – no victim-survivor or group of victim-survivors should be left feeling voiceless and meaningless. That alone was the driver behind me

calling my book *Screaming In Silence*, because that is how we are often made to feel.

Question Two: How can governments, services, education settings, families, communities and others better recognise and respond to children and young people experiencing violence or harm?

Children and young people need to be able to feel that they are valued members of society. They need to not only feel heard but to actually be heard. Child protection agencies really need an overhaul – I have made mandatory reports of children in dire need of help, only to be told that a telephone conversation has been had with the primary carer and, based on that conversation, it has been decided that no intervention is necessary. I have also seen cases where children have been removed when all that was really needed was some support and education of the family. We need all people who commonly interact with children such as childcare workers, teachers and medical practitioners along with allied health professionals to be better trauma informed so that they can recognise the small signs that a child may give. Childcare workers and teachers often spend far more time with a child than their parent or caregiver does – these are the frontline in recognising and acting on abuse yet they often feel overwhelmed, out of their depth or simply helpless in the face of it. Law enforcement personnel need to look beyond just a kid out late at night or committing petty crimes and explore whether this might be a safety mechanism or survival response of a child in need of help. Children must be given all of the services and supports that would be offered to adult victim survivors, and for a longer period of time. As children grow older, their perspective and emotional responses to abuse that they suffered earlier change. Entering into a relationship as a teen is a prime

example of this as it often triggers memories of abuse and creates confusion, fear and embarrassment. We need a greater awareness of grooming behaviours, especially as perpetrators of CSA often groom the parents and caregivers first. We need tighter background checks that are not specific to individual states or territories but that are nationwide. A publicly accessible CSA offender database that is also nation wide is urgently needed. We know the faces and names of other criminals; they are splashed all over the media at every opportunity so just who are we protecting by keeping these ones a secret? Trauma awareness training and training in how to spot the signs of abuse are needed at every level, most importantly in law enforcement, childcare, schools, sporting and religious groups, community centres and health services.

Question Three: What approaches are most effective in supporting children and young people who are using violence or displaying harmful sexual behaviours to take accountability, change behaviours and reduce harm?

Children are sponges, they take in what they see and hear around them. Outside of a handful of quite rare mental health and developmental disorders such as RAD, children are normally simply mirroring what life has taught them are normal or effective behaviours. If dad consistently uses violence to get his own way and the child sees that this works for him, the child is more than likely to use violence in similar situations. Again, education is vital if children are ever going to be able to recognise that this is not acceptable behaviour and that no-one has a right to use violence against them either. Sexualised behaviours are another form of learned behaviour, this can stem from being sexually abused themselves or from witnessing sexual behaviours that are either consensual or not. Care must

be taken when dealing with these children to not make them feel further alienated or ashamed but to tactfully and empathetically discuss with them the reasons for their behaviour, why it is wrong, and what alternatives they can use. Some of the children seen displaying violence are children who have come to Australia from war-torn countries. For them violence was a day to day occurrence to which they had to become desensitised in order to survive. These children need specialised, targeted interventions as soon as they arrive, without waiting for them to display violence. Alienation, whether real or imagined, is a driving force for gang membership as often this is the only place where disenfranchised young people feel a sense of belonging. We need to build community strengths and awareness so that all children and young people feel welcomed, accepted and secure somewhere, even if that isn't at home. In this way they will still have somewhere that is welcoming and safe and so be much more likely to disclose what is going on for them. Early intervention is vital, programs such as The Benevolent Society's Brighter Futures proved this. In my local area, that program has recently had its funding withdrawn despite some very positive outcomes for young people exhibiting violence locally. While not condoning the behaviour, we need to be looking for the reasons behind it and making changes to those circumstances for that young person. It may simply be that the family needs some support, it may be that the child is experiencing abuse that they have not disclosed to anyone, or it may be that the drastic action of removing the child is needed.

Question Four: How should the Second Action Plan respond to current or emerging forms of harm affecting children and young people, including technology-facilitated abuse, harmful online content, and violence within peer and dating relationships?

The laws that exclude access to those under the age of sixteen to a select number of online platforms are a good first step, but prohibition has its limits and weaknesses. Children still need good adult role models and people who they can talk to openly and safely. Often small children are carrying some big emotions that they are simply not equipped to deal with alone and seeing things in their peer groups or online can often add to that in very detrimental ways. Having targeted programs in schools such as Love Bites, the Fighters Against Child Abuse Australia In Your Corner anti-bullying program and guest speakers and presenters rather than the familiar teachers can have a huge positive impact on children and young people. Education is key to reducing the harm caused by other factors, including education about what a healthy relationship looks and feels like. Children also need to be taught to embrace diversity in their peers, allowing for those who have disabilities or who are a little different in any way. The Second Action Plan could look at making it mandatory for all schools, both Public and Private, to include these educational programs as part of their standard curriculum. Community based groups and charities could be paid to deliver these programs so as to not add to the workload of educators, who are not in any case qualified to deliver such specific programs.

Question Five: How can children and young people be meaningfully involved in shaping the policies, programs and services that affect them?

Ask them. Formally and informally. Not just to tick a box but to learn from them. Ask them what has worked well for them, what might have been better, what supports and services they would like to see in their local area. Children and young people often have very clear ideas about what they need, it's just that often no-one bothers to really listen and respond to those ideas. They also need to then be kept updated and informed about the outcomes of these discussions or written surveys/submissions – if they feel that they have poured their all into it and simply been forgotten or dismissed then we have done more harm than good.



Priority Area four People who use violence Question One:

What would make the biggest difference in preventing and responding earlier to the use of violence?

Early and effective wrap around supports of children who have been impacted by violence and better understanding which perpetrators cannot be rehabilitated. Psychopaths and paedophiles cannot be rehabilitated – we know that from global peer-reviewed research. They know that what they are doing is wrong. That is grossly evident in the “street angel, house devil” term and the use of “generally of good character” defence often touted in court rooms. They are in simple terms the equivalent of the child who has been told no snacks before dinner who then sneaks cookies from the jar when alone in the kitchen. They know it is wrong, but when the opportunity arises the temptation is too great. One of the biggest things that victim survivors talk about is the fact that their abuser was not always abusive, there were good – even great – times. This compounds the feelings of guilt and poor self-worth in their victims and also shows clearly that they are capable of behaving in more controlled and acceptable ways. For those who can be rehabilitated, this means prolonged work being done on how to manage and control their anger, anxiety and depression – all of which often lead to offending. We must also increase whole of society awareness of what violence actually is – that it’s not just about physical abuse. We have to increase a sense of community and belonging as this will improve the feeling of a safe space for those who need help to escape violence and for those who feel that they may commit a violent offence and who want to work to avoid that eventuality. Victim survivors must always be believed and supported, not become the target of victim blaming or apathy. Those who want help to avoid acting in a violent manner should never be told to “just chill out” as one man told me a psychologist advised him. If they are actively seeking help, it is a sure sign that this is not just a one-off momentary feeling for them but rather that it has been building for some time and

requires urgent care and support. Even seemingly small things like Council “exercise parks” where various equipment and trails are provided for the no-cost use of the community make huge differences, as people experiencing overwhelming feelings can go and work out for a while, free of charge, at any hour and this has been scientifically proven to aid in de-escalating their feelings.

Question Two: How can services, families, communities, workplaces, institutions and others better recognise and respond safely to people using violence or at risk of using violence?

Of course, the safety of all individuals is always the over-riding concern and priority. We need communities, workplaces and institutions especially to be more aware of what services are available so that they can have a conversation with these people at an appropriate time and place and suggest those services to the individual. We also need more of those services, particularly addiction rehabilitation centres including those that can focus on all forms of addiction and those that provide a safe and secure setting for mothers to bring young children with them, as the lack of these services often is the only thing preventing people from agreeing to this form of assistance. Workplace education around code of conduct, bullying and harassment and so forth should be presented to employees in person, not as a document where people simply tick that they have read it regardless of whether or not they actually have. Often people are given a wake-up call about their behaviour at home when it is reinforced to them that this behaviour is not acceptable in other settings. It is a bit of a tightrope in that we must never condone or be seen to be condoning violence in any form, whilst also understanding that for many people, they just don't have the tools to better deal with their situations and emotions. We live in a fast-paced world too, one that virtually encourages reaction over response. We need to be calling violence out at every level, not laughing at rape jokes in the pub or typing "make me a sandwich" every time a female boasts about an achievement. This all requires a whole of society shift in how we deal with situations, and that will require major education and awareness campaigns that cover all forms of media and communication.

Question Three: What approaches are most effective in supporting people who use violence to take accountability, change behaviours, and reduce the use of violence, while focusing on victim-survivor safety?

One thing that definitely comes to mind as not working is the use of ankle monitors. These devices give victim-survivors a false sense of safety when in reality it only takes a roll of aluminium foil, easily purchased from any supermarket, to tamper with the signal and provide an abusive person with a window of opportunity. Approaches that do work, other than in the case of paedophiles of course (again, global peer-reviewed research clearly demonstrates this) include things such as Indigenous Men's Groups, whether at a simple Local Lands Council or Aboriginal Health Service level or bigger initiatives such as Kings Narrative in the Northern Territory have wonderful positive outcomes for men and boys who engage with them, as do the Women's Groups in the same pathways. Targeted anger management courses also are very beneficial but again, the person using or at risk of using violence must be willing and able to engage. Sometimes too, it may seem that a person is not willing to engage when a little further investigation might show that they lack things like reliable transport, so those needs must also be identified and addressed. Greater sentencing measures and improved focus on behavioural change programs whilst incarcerated are desperately needed for those cases where incarceration is warranted – and indeed this must be overhauled as far too often people simply walk free with no follow-up measures in place, or serve very inadequate sentences, thus proving to not be an adequate deterrent at all. Anger management programs that integrate some form of physical activity are by far the most effective in the long term. At a very basic, grassroots level, this includes things like the Men's Shed initiative. Often the community led, small initiatives and programs have the greatest outcomes but sadly with the least amount of people due to lack of funding and resources.

Question Four: How can governments and services, among others, strengthen culturally safe, accessible and evidence-informed responses for a range of communities and cohorts?

By urgently re-evaluating priorities and funding. People are dying and being sentenced to lifetimes of struggling to deal with the ripple effects of trauma, yet funding and resources allocation are still woefully lacking. Governments and others need to be sure that they are also gathering the correct information and this can only be done by effective communication with those who are or potentially could be impacted. This means speaking with immigrants and then really listening to their responses, the same with children and young people, elderly people, people of all genders and sexual orientations, Indigenous groups, charities, community services and law enforcement agencies.

Accessibility is key – especially in rural and remote areas where the nearest service might be 200km away and there is no or very little public transport available. This is another reason to also ensure that those communities have reliable access to internet and telephone services.



Priority Area five System integration and workforce

Question One: What would make the biggest difference in creating a more co-ordinated system response for people affected by violence against women and children and other forms of gender-based violence and people using violence?

We need services and systems to stop working in silos. The best responses are those that are holistic, wrap-around responses. We need every Australian to embrace the idea of every person being a mandatory reporter, on all forms of violence and we need a

legal system that can and does adequately respond to these cases. Often even workers in one community service are oblivious as to where to refer a person who moves to even the next town in order to escape violence or remove themselves from known triggers that may cause them to offend. Services often also seem to feel that they are in competition with each other, a feeling deepened by the need to show specific volume and outcomes in order to maintain funding. This can prevent them from contacting other services to walk beside them in the healing of a victim-survivor, for example a health service failing to reach out to a homelessness service on behalf of their client.

Question Two: What workplace capabilities, supports, or conditions are most needed to strengthen prevention, early intervention, response and recovery?

Team building/bonding to create a feeling of a safe place for individuals to be able to talk about issues at home and in the workplace. The provision of leave for those escaping violence and also for those attending residential rehabilitation, whether for addiction or for anger management or victim-survivor healing purposes. This leave should be provided in the same way and it would be should an employee be hospitalised for a physical issue. Designated staff who work with employee wellbeing, these should be people who show empathy, cultural awareness, integrity and an ability to uphold confidentiality. Every workplace must have a zero tolerance approach to violence, even down to jokes of a violent nature as what we laugh about or allow to go unhindered is what we are then perceived to be condoning.

Question Three: What approaches or models appear most effective in improving collaboration, coordination and information sharing across services, systems and programs?

Anything that encourages networking is a hugely beneficial. From small community based get togethers of relevant stakeholders, through to online forums and groups and large-scale conferences. The main obstacle with the large conferences is affordability. Even presenting at one of these often costs thousands of dollars, and it is even more expensive for people to attend. While it is good that some offer an online presence, this is nowhere near as beneficial as actually being there and building those vital relationships and memory slides with other people working towards similar goals. Ideally, government subsidising of at least some of these conferences would help to ensure that more services are aware of and willing to work with others. Targeted meetings that many communities hold where Police, specialist workers and court support staff come together to discuss specific local cases and needs are also very beneficial, but they are not offered in every area, as they should be. Government agencies and NGOs need to work together. At present, it is often the attitude of Government agencies that they are the “official” agency and as such the experts. Many of those involved in the NGOs and smaller community groups however are the ones with the real lived experience and so the greater knowledge.

Question Four: What supports do specialist and universal services need to provide inclusive, accessible and response services?

Largely this comes down to funding and for this they must start to be prioritised at every level of government. What we are dealing with is a much larger problem than terrorism or any other socio-political issue. In fact, it is essentially domestic terrorism. Services on the frontline of this battle need access to liveable, low-cost accommodation for their clients, they need to be able to staff 24/7 call lines and crisis support workers and be able to keep them safe along with their clients. They need the help of the community, to come together and take a stand against violence, which comes down to education and awareness campaigns, which of course must also be funded or at the very least heavily subsidised by governments. They need to be able to site their offices and services such as drop in centres and shelters in readily accessible areas and for those locations to be secure and safe places.

Question Five: What evidence, workforce or system gaps should the Second Action Plan prioritise to strengthen implementation and improve outcomes over time?

First and foremost, we need to re-evaluate existing legislation and consider honestly who we are protecting. While ever we have automatic suppression orders, inadequate sentencing, lax bail and parole conditions and allowances, we will continue to see lives and families torn apart by violence. We need to normalise seeking help for mental health and addiction issues as well as for those needing to escape violence, rather than punishing them for seeking help. Presently, many Indigenous women face the heartbreaking reality that if they seek help for any of these three things, they stand a very high chance of having their children removed from their care. We need all Australians to be empowered to take a real stand against violence, to call it out as a weakness – not a strength, and to know how to appropriately and safely report their experiences and suspicions, as well as how to have that conversation with a friend or relative – to reach out and respectfully ask if that person needs help in ways that won't later be used in court as “planting the idea” or leading a witness. We need legal proceedings that don't further traumatise victims by using victim blaming tactics, questioning the integrity of the victim in ways beyond what is necessary for a fair trial and forcing victims to face their abusers in a court room or waiting area of a courthouse. We need child specific support people for children and young people going through the legal process and we need to ensure that in all cases of F&DV, even where children have not been identified as primary victims, that those children are also listened to and supported in their own right. Several years ago, Fighters Against Child Abuse Australia introduced the Children's Champions program to provide children with their own support person in court. This was well received and later

implemented in some parts of NSW but fell by the wayside for no valid reason. We also have the only (that we are aware of) child specific court support dog, but organisations seem tepid in their willingness to utilise this support for young people, despite the evidence of the good work done by such support dogs. With the current trends in technology, it would also be nice to think that our governments prioritise safety over AI advancements in the workplace and do something about grossly flawed monitoring systems and the woeful lack of things like personal duress alarms that organisations can provide to victim survivors.

We at FACAA would like to thank the NSW Sentencing Council for taking the time to read our submission and we sincerely hope it was helpful and within the scope of the audit.

[REDACTED]