

Full submission:

**Submission to inform the Second
Action Plans under the National Plan
to End Violence Against Women and
Children and the National Strategy
to Prevent and Respond to Child
Sexual Abuse**

August 2026

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We acknowledge the Traditional Custodians of all the lands on which Jesuit Social Services operates and pay respect to their Elders past and present. We express our gratitude for their love and care of people, community, land and all life.

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Jesuit Social Services:

Who we are and what we do

Jesuit Social Services is a social change organisation. For almost 50 years we have been delivering support services and advocating for improved policies, legislation and resources to achieve a just society where all people can thrive. We are a national organisation with a significant footprint in Victoria, New South Wales and the Northern Territory, where we work with some of the most marginalised individuals and communities.

We began in 1977 supporting people in contact with the criminal justice system, and offer a range of programs working with people involved with the justice system which aim to reduce criminal offending. Over time, we have expanded our services to include programs across a range of other areas including prevention of violence; education, training and employment; mental health and suicide prevention; settlement and community building; and climate and ecological justice.

Research, advocacy and policy are coordinated across all program and major interest areas of Jesuit Social Services. Our advocacy is grounded in the knowledge, expertise and experiences of program staff and participants, as well as academic research and evidence.

We seek to influence policies, practices, legislation and budget investment to positively influence people's lives and improve approaches to address long term social challenges. We do this by working collaboratively with governments, business and the community sector to build coalitions and alliances around key issues, and building strong relationships with key decision-makers and the community.

Our work with men who use violence and cause harm to others led us, in 2017, to establish The Men's Project, which works in partnership to promote healthy relationships and prevent violence, abuse and harm. The Men's Project aims to build care, connection, accountability and hope, so people and communities are safe and can flourish. The Men's Project's focus areas are:

- Men's violence prevention: Working with men, boys and those who influence their lives to prevent the use of violence and harm, with a focus on masculinities, restrictive and harmful gender norms, and the broader factors that shape healthy behaviour and relationships.
- Child sexual abuse prevention: Working with young people and adults of all genders to prevent the use of child sexual abuse and harmful sexual behaviours, encourage help-seeking and support them to lead positive lives.

Executive summary

Jesuit Social Services welcomes the opportunity to inform the Second Action Plans under the *National Plan to End Violence against Women and Children 2022–2032* (the National Plan) and the *National Strategy to Prevent and Respond to Child Sexual Abuse 2021–2030* (the National Strategy). We are making a combined submission to inform both Action Plans because data, research and our practice experience show that family and sexual violence and child sexual abuse are deeply interconnected – not least because men make up the vast majority of people who use family and sexual violence against adults and who sexually abuse children.

Our submission focuses on issues where Jesuit Social Services has specific expertise to offer – in particular, violence prevention and early intervention with men and boys, including child sexual abuse prevention and early intervention. We recognise that other organisations and experts are better placed to comment on critical issues such as support for victim-survivors, but we do echo calls for increased and ongoing funding for specialist family and sexual violence response services.

Through the lens of violence prevention work with men and boys, our central proposition is that – across both Action Plans – Australia must maintain strong primary prevention efforts while building the missing early intervention, response and healing capacity needed to act earlier, respond effectively and reduce the recurrence of violence and abuse.

Efforts must remain grounded in victim-survivor and child safety, gender equality, intersectionality, First Nations self-determination and compassionate accountability. By compassionate accountability, we mean engaging people with dignity, care and curiosity while remaining clear about safety, responsibility and the impacts of harm. Effective practice with those who cause harm recognises and manages the pull to collude: recognising experiences and needs without reinforcing blame, entitlement or minimising harm, and choosing when and how to challenge in ways most likely to support responsibility and sustained change.

Our submission focuses on the policy settings and system changes required to scale up work with men and boys across the violence prevention continuum, while also highlighting gaps and examples of promising practice from our work and experience. We argue that, to make meaningful and lasting progress towards ending family and sexual violence and child sexual abuse, the Second Action Plans must commit governments to:

- Build the system architecture necessary to expand, coordinate and enhance the effectiveness of work with men and boys, including building the evidence base and capabilities of workforces;
- Prevent and respond to online harms;
- Maintain and strengthen primary prevention and continue to innovate and refine the approach;
- Invest in healing and recovery for children and young people who have experienced family violence and child abuse;
- Scale up early intervention with men and boys at higher risk of using violence or showing earlier signs of causing harm; and
- Expand options for responding to people who use violence.

Because the Second Action Plans will be national in scope, the recommendations in our submission are directed at all governments – unless otherwise specified. However, we also emphasise the important leadership role that the Federal Government must play in driving

systemic reforms, for example, in coordinating efforts, setting standards and driving workforce development. In some policy areas – in particular, preventing and responding to online harms – the Federal Government holds the key policy and regulatory levers and must take strong action.

1. Context and key concepts

A coordinated approach to end family and sexual violence and child sexual abuse

Despite the important intersections between family and sexual violence and child sexual abuse, policy, funding, research and service development remain fragmented across national frameworks, government portfolios and jurisdictions. This contributes to gaps and duplication, inconsistent service pathways, missed opportunities for earlier intervention and unclear responsibility for cross-cutting issues. The coordinated process to develop the Second Action Plans must flow into coordinated governance and implementation across social services, health, education, child safety, justice, communications and Attorney-General's portfolios, and across Commonwealth, state and territory governments. Coordination can also support shared learning, multidisciplinary research and practice development.

Coordination must not dilute the distinct implementation focus required for sexual violence, including its particular dynamics, specialist expertise and service pathways.

Violence prevention work with men and boys

Family and sexual violence and child sexual abuse are overwhelmingly perpetrated by men and boys, and the prevalence of men's violence is alarmingly high. Around one-third of adult men in Australia report having used intimate partner violence, and one in five Australian adult men report having sexual feelings towards and/or having sexually offended against children. Even though government investment has been overwhelmingly directed towards crisis response and criminal justice system interventions, the vast majority of men who use violence never have contact with the criminal justice system or receive any kind of specialist intervention.

The research and data clearly demonstrate that our failure to prevent, intervene early in, respond effectively to, and support healing and recovery from men's violence is putting women, children and other victim-survivors at risk. While there has been increased emphasis in policy and media discourse in recent years on the importance of engaging men and boys in violence prevention, and there are pockets of promising practice, current prevention and early intervention efforts with men and boys are fragmented, underfunded and delivered at nowhere near the scale required to address the magnitude of the problem. The Second Action Plans must therefore scale up work with men and boys across the violence prevention continuum – from primary prevention to early intervention, response and recovery.

This must include transforming masculinities, which means challenging restrictive and harmful expectations about what it means to be a man, and the behaviours, cultures and systems that reinforce them and opening up more diverse ways for men and boys to live and relate—ways that value care, consent, connection, shared responsibility and accountability, and contribute to safety and freedom from violence, gender equality, respectful relationships and wellbeing. Transforming masculinities does not mean that masculinity, men or boys are inherently harmful, or that one narrow model of the “good man” should replace another.

While we often refer to “men and boys” when discussing shared gendered influences and a life-course approach, boys are children, not younger versions of adult men. Policies and interventions involving boys must be child-centred and developmentally appropriate, recognise their rights and capacity for change, and avoid automatically applying adult labels or intervention models. This is particularly the case for those children and young who come

contact with the criminal justice system – many of whom have themselves experienced victimisation and not received the care they need to heal and recover.

To understand, and respond effectively to, the diverse experiences both of people at greater risk of experiencing violence and of people who use, or are at greater risk of using, the Second Action Plans should also require all actions to be designed, implemented and evaluated through an intersectional lens. This includes resourcing community-led violence prevention approaches.

Scaling up prevention work with men and boys also requires reframing the public narrative – recognising that the same gendered expectations that can contribute to poor health for men and boys also shape relationships, caregiving, attitudes to equality, and use of violence. We need to build a positive vision for men that promotes models of masculinity grounded in care, connection and wellbeing, while remaining clear about power, responsibility and harm.

Recommendation 1: Governments should establish formal cross-plan, cross-portfolio and intergovernmental coordination and accountability arrangements for the National Plan and National Strategy, while preserving their distinct mandates and establishing a clear interface with the self-determined governance of *Our Ways – Strong Ways – Our Voices*.

Recommendation 2: Governments should embed an intersectional approach across all actions in the Second Action Plans, and strengthen and resource community-led, self-determined and locally responsive violence prevention approaches and programs.

Recommendation 3: The Federal Government should build on the Australian Institute of Family Studies' work to define healthy masculinities by funding and evaluating a long-term national public engagement and narrative change program for men and boys. The program should develop a positive, inclusive vision centred on care and 'caring manhood' – supporting men and boys to care for themselves and others, share responsibility, build respectful relationships and contribute to safety, gender equality and wellbeing. It should counter misogynistic and anti-equality narratives and connect public messaging with practical opportunities for learning, help-seeking and action.

Recommendation 4: The Federal Government should incentivise states and territories to implement evidence-based approaches to youth justice that are consistent with human rights, child rights and Closing the Gap targets, including through financial incentives and penalties.

2. Build the system architecture, workforce capability and evidence base to strengthen violence prevention work with men and boys

There is a growing recognition in public policy of the importance of engaging men and boys in violence prevention, but this recognition is not matched by the resourcing and infrastructure needed to effectively address the scale of the challenge. Embedding effective violence prevention work with men and boys across the continuum requires a systemic, national approach – coordinating and strengthening capacity across the many organisations and workforces that regularly engage with men and boys but lack the mandate, capacity and resourcing to contribute to safe, accountable and effective violence prevention work.

This systemic approach should be underpinned by coordinated governance for the National Plan and National Strategy and supported by an integrated implementation, monitoring and evaluation framework for the Second Action Plans to promote accountability. Each significant Action Plan commitment should identify a lead government and portfolio, delivery partners, dedicated funding, milestones and timeframes, intended outcomes and measures, public reporting arrangements and independent oversight.

It also requires dedicated infrastructure to expand, coordinate and enhance the effectiveness of work with men and boys: a national coordination mechanism, shared practice standards, a national policy framework, workforce capability-building, investment in evidence, and sustainable resourcing. This should build on work already under way, including the pilot of a national MenEngage network and work to discern the “practice elements” of safe, accountable and effective violence prevention work with men and boys being led by Jesuit Social Services and Our Watch in partnership.

Building workforce capability for violence prevention work with men and boys is a critical component of driving practice change. The small number of men who engage with specialist family violence or justice services and the small size of the specialist workforce working with men and boys means that, to achieve a meaningful reduction in men’s violence, we need to build violence prevention capability across a range of workforces who engage with men and boys in other services and settings – including those who can positively influence men and boys in universal and community settings (such as schools and sports clubs), those engaging with men and boys at higher risk points in their lives (such as health, settlement and employment services), and those working with men and boys at higher risk of using violence (such as substance use and child and family services).

Our vision is that relevant workforces interacting with men and boys should be equipped—in ways proportionate to their role and setting—to challenge restrictive and harmful gender norms, build protective factors against violence and apply compassionate accountability. This means building enough trust to engage; recognising and managing the pull to collude; validating experiences and needs without reinforcing blame, entitlement or minimising harm; and choosing when and how to challenge in ways most likely to support safety, responsibility and change. Workforces should also be able to respond safely when concerns emerge, including by activating earlier pathways to help, with specialist services retaining responsibility for risk and needs assessment and more intensive therapeutic or behaviour-change interventions.

Key workforces—including school staff, health workers, psychologists and social workers—also need greater capability to recognise and respond appropriately to indicators that a child or young person may be engaging in harmful sexual behaviours, or that an adult may be perpetrating or at risk of perpetrating child sexual abuse. Core violence and child sexual abuse prevention capabilities should be embedded in relevant pre-service qualifications and adequately resourced through ongoing professional development, supervision, reflective practice and specialist consultation or coaching.

Finally, the evidence base underpinning violence prevention work needs strengthening to build confidence about what works, for whom, in what circumstances, and how effects can be sustained over time. This requires investment in more rigorous evaluation and research. Key research needed includes: a national perpetration survey; research into the drivers, dynamics and pathways to perpetration (including the role of online environments); longitudinal and intersectional masculinities research; and research into the risk and protective factors for child sexual abuse perpetration and victimisation.

Recommendation 5: Governments should take a national, systemic approach to drive the systems and practice change necessary to embed effective violence prevention work with men and boys across the continuum from primary prevention to early intervention, response and recovery. This involves coordinating, aligning, strengthening and resourcing violence prevention capacity across the many organisations and workforces that regularly interact with men and boys.

Recommendation 6: Governments should create and resource the infrastructure needed to embed and advance work with men and boys across the violence prevention continuum. This

should be underpinned by coordinated governance for the National Plan and National Strategy and supported by an integrated implementation, monitoring and evaluation framework for the Second Action Plans. The infrastructure needed to expand and enhance violence prevention work with men and boys includes:

- a national coordination mechanism;
- shared practice standards;
- a national framework with which organisations working with men and boys should align their systems, policies and practice;
- organisational and workforce capacity-building;
- investment in evaluation and research to build the evidence base; and
- mechanisms for knowledge sharing and collaboration.

Recommendation 7: Governments should adopt a broad definition of the “prevention” workforce – including those who work with men and boys who are using or at risk of using violence – and ensure this workforce is equipped to contribute to violence prevention by challenging restrictive and harmful gender norms, building protective factors, applying compassionate accountability, recognising and managing collusive dynamics, and responding and referring safely. Funding models should be reformed to match expanded role expectations and support professional development, alongside immediate investment in priority activities to build workforce capacity.

Recommendation 8: Governments should build the capability of workforces working with both adults and children (including health workers, psychologists and social workers) to prevent and intervene earlier in child sexual abuse, including in particular, capability to identify indicators that a child or young person may be engaging in harmful sexual behaviours and indicators that an adult may be perpetrating or at risk of perpetrating child sexual abuse, and to respond to each appropriately.

Recommendation 9: Governments should work with professional bodies to ensure core violence prevention (including child abuse prevention) capabilities are embedded in curricula for a range of relevant qualifications and supported and operationalised through in-service professional development (including training, supervision support and coaching, reflective practice and secondary consultation). Professional development for workforces with a role in family violence and child abuse prevention and response should be better sequenced and coordinated.

Recommendation 10: The Federal Government should commission the development of an evidence framework for the prevention of family and sexual violence and child abuse across the continuum. The framework should include standards of evidence and be supported by funding for more rigorous and long-term evaluation.

Summary of recommendations 11–14: In these recommendations we call on Governments and/or research organisations, such as ANROWS and the National Centre for Action on Child Sexual Abuse, to engage further with the sector to identify and develop research priorities to ensure the family and sexual violence and child sexual abuse research agenda. Research priorities under the Second Action Plans should include: a national perpetration survey; research into the drivers, dynamics and pathways to perpetration (including the role of online environments); longitudinal and intersectional masculinities research; and research into the risk and protective factors for child sexual abuse perpetration and victimisation.

3. Prevent and respond to online harms

The 'online' and 'offline' worlds are not separate – online environments are an integral part of modern life – but technology companies, services and products have often escaped obligations to meet safety standards that apply to physical products and services. This is despite the fact that online environments and technological tools can cause, facilitate and amplify family and sexual violence, child sexual abuse and harmful sexual behaviours. For example:

- Online child sexual exploitation and abuse is rife, with evidence pointing to continued increases in online grooming, the use of Generative AI to facilitate the creation and distribution of child sexual abuse material (CSAM) at scale, and continued gaps in the action of major technology platforms to address known risks.
- The widespread availability of online pornography is contributing to the increase in harmful sexual behaviours among young people.
- Algorithmic recommender systems push hateful and extreme content that is shaping attitudes and behaviours that can lead to violence.

Children and young people are frequently early adopters of new technologies, posing challenges for legislative frameworks which are often playing catch up. This has been evident in delayed Federal Government responses to AI technologies such as 'nudify' apps, which were only banned after numerous reports of these apps being used to create AI-generated sexual exploitation material of students in Australian schools; and children's easy access to online pornography, with age verification requirements for pornography websites only recently coming into force and their effectiveness still unproven.

The Second Action Plans must have a strong focus on addressing the technological, behavioural and social factors that contribute to online harms, including online harmful sexual behaviours and CSAM; as well as the way in which online environments and technologies act as tools and amplifiers of family and sexual violence. This requires coordinated action across Federal Government agencies, given legislative, regulatory and programmatic levers sit in different portfolios – chief among them communications, but also education, social services and the Attorney-General's portfolio.

A critical underpinning of safer online environments will be an effective digital duty of care, which the Government has committed to legislate. The duty of care must require technology companies to adopt 'safety by design' and take greater responsibility for preventing, detecting, deterring and disrupting online harms that occur on – or are facilitated by – their platforms. A specific focus on algorithmic recommender systems is required, given they have been shown to push harmful content to children and young people, yet operate without any transparency or oversight. Separate to the duty of care, the Federal Government must strengthen the regulation of online pornography, in particular to address the widespread availability of pornography that depicts sexual violence and incest or child abuse themes.

The Second Action Plans should also include actions to equip children, young people, parents, carers and workforces to safely navigate online environments; update justice system responses to online harmful sexual behaviours; and support initiatives seeking to disrupt harmful online behaviour and support help seeking.

Summary of recommendations 15–17: In these recommendations, we call for the Second Action Plans to have a strong focus on addressing online harms, underpinned by a well-designed and appropriately enforced digital duty of care which strengthens the accountability of the technology industry for the harms occurring on, facilitated by, and directly caused by,

their products and services – in particular online child sexual exploitation and abuse, and the promotion of violent and harmful content by algorithmic recommender systems.

Summary of recommendations 18–23: In these recommendations we call on governments to take a range of additional actions to prevent and address online harms, including:

- strengthening regulation of online pornography;
- reforming police and criminal justice responses to online harmful sexual behaviours;
- supporting online interventions that disrupt and deter harmful online behaviour, such as the Child Sexual Abuse Material (CSAM) Deterrence Centre; and
- providing support to young people concerned about their sexual thoughts and behaviours, for example through *What's ok? Australia* (see recommendation 37).

4. Maintain and strengthen primary prevention and continue to innovate and refine the approach

To achieve meaningful, long-term change at a population level, the Second Action Plans must build on the gains already made in building the infrastructure and evidence base for effective prevention practice – including the critical national leadership role played by Our Watch and efforts under way to embed masculinities work into all prevention efforts. At the same time, they must continue to be refined and evolve to respond to emerging evidence, contemporary challenges and what works to engage men and boys and prevent violence and harm.

Population-level approaches remain essential, but we should not accept that those who are resistant, disengaged or least reached by current efforts are simply beyond prevention. Some may also be experiencing greater complexity or showing attitudes, behaviours or circumstances associated with elevated risk of harm. Primary prevention should test more tailored, relational and sustained approaches for these audiences and settings. Where elevated risk or early signs of harm emerge, universal prevention should connect directly to more intensive early intervention – so response and justice systems do not become the first point of meaningful contact.

Respectful relationships education (RRE) is a foundational pillar of primary prevention. Realising the vision of the new National RRE Framework requires sustained investment in professional development for teachers and school staff, including training in masculinities work with boys and young men – such as the Modelling Respect and Equality (MoRE) in Schools program. The national RRE curriculum must also be reviewed and updated more frequently.

Primary prevention should start earlier, including through embedding RRE in early childhood settings and investing in evidence-informed prevention programs that work with fathers. Prevention efforts in non-school settings, such as workplaces and sports clubs, should be scaled up and extended to new settings where young people can be reached.

Prevention programs must keep pace with contemporary challenges facing young people, including the impacts of pornography and other online harms, such as digital surveillance and image-based abuse; support boys and young men to cope with rejection; and address the persistence of homophobic and transphobic attitudes among boys and men. To address anti-LGBTQIA+ prejudice, governments must also commit funding to expand LGBTQIA+-led education, violence prevention and workforce capacity-building.

Because in-person interventions alone cannot achieve the reach and scale required, these interventions must be complemented by evidence-based digital tools that equip parents, teachers and other influential people in young men's lives to support them to identify

behaviours of concern and have confident conversations on sensitive topics, including masculinities, sexuality, online safety and violence.

Recommendation 25: Governments should invest in testing more tailored, relational and sustained primary prevention approaches for audiences and settings who are resistant, disengaged or least reached by current efforts. Where elevated risk or early signs of harm emerge, universal prevention should connect directly to more intensive early intervention – so response and justice systems do not become the first point of meaningful contact.

Summary of recommendations 26–31: In these recommendations, we call on governments to strengthen primary prevention efforts by:

- embedding content in RRE and other primary prevention initiatives that supports staff to address restrictive and harmful gender norms, contemporary challenges impacting young people (including harmful online influences), and homophobia and transphobia;
- supporting implementation of RRE and other primary prevention initiatives through professional development, including building skills and knowledge of staff to effectively engage boys and men, for example through rolling out the Modelling Respect and Equality (MoRE) program;
- starting prevention earlier, including by incorporating RRE into early childhood settings and by targeting new and young fathers, and scaling up prevention efforts in non-school settings; and
- investing in digital tools and resources to support and scale prevention and early intervention efforts.

5. Invest in healing and recovery for children and young people who have experienced family violence and child abuse

Understandings of the prevalence of children's experiences of violence and abuse have evolved substantially in recent years. The 2023 Australian Child Maltreatment Study described child maltreatment in Australia as 'endemic', with children experiencing high rates of physical, sexual and emotional abuse of children and childhood exposure to family and sexual violence, which can have profound and long-term impacts on their lives. Addressing the harms of victimisation, and supporting young victim-survivors to recover and heal, is not only essential for supporting their long-term health and wellbeing, but also represents a crucial opportunity to intervene earlier to disrupt intergenerational cycles of violence, and set young people on a path to living safer, happier lives.

Yet despite the scale and impacts of violence against children, the current service response for children and young people is severely lacking. In addition to a shortage of specialist healing and recovery supports specifically designed for children and young people, adjacent systems that regularly encounter children and young people who have experienced violence – such as child protection, mental health, substance use and homelessness services – often fall short in their efforts to respond to the needs of these children.

Summary of recommendations 32–34: In these recommendations we call on governments to design, coordinate and fully fund dedicated, multi-sector responses for children and young people who have experienced violence or abuse. This should include:

- mapping current demand and capability gaps across all relevant sectors; establishing robust mechanisms to measure and monitor service demand, access and completion; setting clear targets for service access and publicly reporting on progress;

- building the capability of the health, social services, legal and justice workforces to deliver joined-up, child-centred, trauma-informed and culturally safe responses; and
- making a substantial investment in targeted, developmentally appropriate therapeutic services to support children's long-term healing and recovery.

6. Scale up early intervention with men and boys at higher risk of using violence or showing early signs of causing harm

There is a significant disconnect between the prevalence of men's violence and the focus of policy and investment. Population-level prevention work is essential but often struggles to reach and engage higher risk cohorts of boys and men, while government investment remains directed overwhelmingly to the small number of people using violence who come into contact with police and the criminal justice system.

There is a critical need for greater investment in early intervention with boys and men – particularly young men – who are showing early signs of violence or are exposed to risk factors such as violent victimisation, disengagement from education, and high levels of adherence to restrictive and harmful gender norms. The increasing prevalence of harmful sexual behaviours among children and young people also points to the need for earlier intervention with those concerned about their sexual thoughts, behaviours or use of pornography. To address this gap, we need a systemic approach to early intervention that targets boys and young men exposed to risk factors or showing early signs of harmful behaviours, including problematic sexual thoughts or pornography use.

Universal and frontline settings—such as schools, health and social services—regularly identify at-risk individuals and families, but currently lack the capacity, training and referral pathways to intervene effectively. Connected early intervention pathways should be established so concerns are noticed early, risks are triaged, and people are connected with appropriate, coordinated supports before more intensive intervention is needed. Governments should pilot and evaluate place-based approaches that aim to connect prevention and early intervention across universal and community settings (such as schools) with clear service pathways and specialist support, in places where the gaps are greatest.

Accessible digital platforms – including anonymous online early intervention services such as *What's ok? Australia*, which targets young people concerned about their sexual thoughts or behaviours – can intercept harmful trajectories before justice involvement becomes necessary, and have an important role to play in the early intervention 'system'. Crucially, investment in awareness, screening, disclosure, deterrence, help-seeking or referral must be paired with investment in services to respond to increased demand.

The systemic approach should be complemented by scaled-up investment in targeted programs working directly with boys and men at higher risk of, or showing early signs of, using violence. This includes scaling up programs like *Change Makers* and adapting and expanding this model to other cohorts and settings; investing in community strengthening initiatives in communities less likely to seek help from specialist services; and expanding access to restorative interventions that interrupt escalation into the criminal justice system.

Recommendation 35: Governments should pilot and evaluate an intensive place-based early intervention initiative in a small number of local government areas that would work at both the system and community levels – for example, with police, child and family services, schools, health services and local community groups. The pilots would target at-risk young people and families and seek to strengthen protective factors and reduce risk factors for use of violence.

Each pilot would be adapted to the unique contexts and strengths of the particular place and community.

Recommendation 36: Governments should build accessible pathways to earlier help for boys and men who have experienced violence, are concerned about their own behaviour, or are showing early signs of violence or other harm. Accessible pathways should include anonymous and low-barrier ways to seek help, assessment and triage, brief intervention, therapeutic and behaviour-change support, and clear referral and escalation pathways. Parents, peers and frontline workers should be equipped to offer support and activate these pathways. Efforts to encourage help-seeking should be backed by investment in increased service capacity.

Summary of recommendations 37–38: The Federal Government should commit to fully funding the national roll-out and evaluation of *What's ok? Australia*, an anonymous online early intervention service for children and young people at risk of engaging in harmful sexual behaviours, accompanied by increased investment in therapeutic services to respond to increased demand.

Summary of recommendations 39–41: In these recommendations, we call on governments to scale up investment in promising early intervention programs that work directly with boys and young men, such as *Change Makers*, and adapt and evaluate these programs in other settings where we can reach boys and young men at higher risk of using violence, for example in flexible learning schools, residential out-of-home care, and with young fathers exposed to risk factors for use of violence. We also recommend governments to invest in community strengthening initiatives in communities less likely to seek help from specialist services, and expand access to restorative interventions for young people that interrupt escalation into the criminal justice system.

7. Expand options for responding to people who use violence

The failure to respond effectively and at scale to people using violence compromises the safety of women, children and other victim-survivors. Options for responding to people who use violence remain largely limited to Men's Behaviour Change Programs, yet No to Violence estimates that less than 3% of the estimated 2.5 million men using domestic and family violence in Australia receive any form of behaviour change intervention. Research also suggests these programs are not suitable for all people who use violence.

There is a critical need to expand options beyond this model. This includes investment in evidence-based programs for fathers who have used violence and expansion of access to restorative justice responses that foster accountability and promote long-term safety. There is also an opportunity to recognise and leverage opportunities for violence prevention in existing programs and interventions that are not specific to, but engage with, men who have used violence. For example, we see an opportunity to scale up integrated responses for men exiting prison, such as the Maribyrnong Community Residential Facility model, which is showing promise in promoting desistance from violence. This model could also be adapted to provide specialised, supported housing for young people involved in the criminal justice system to disrupt offending trajectories.

The Federal Government should also address the gap in prevention-focused therapeutic programs for adults perpetrating or at risk of perpetrating child sexual abuse offences, especially people who commit CSAM offences and adults with sexual thoughts towards children (complementing the brief, anonymous support available through *Stop It Now! Australia*). Drawing on successful international models, these should ideally be available to both detected and undetected/at-risk individuals across community and correctional settings.

Interventions must be responsive to diversity and local context, including through genuine investment in the self-determination and capacity of Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations (ACCOs) to design, lead and govern services tailored to their communities.

Compassionate accountability should also guide responses to people using violence: services should recognise trauma, disadvantage and other needs without treating them as excuses, and combine clear boundaries, risk management and consequences with support for responsibility, behaviour change and safer lives.

Summary of recommendations 42–45: In these recommendations, we call on governments to expand, diversify and scale the suite of evidence-based responses for people who use or are at risk of using violence or committing child sexual abuse offences. This should include:

- targeted programs for fathers who use violence;
- restorative justice pathways that enable the safe resetting of relationships;
- scaling and adapting transitional supported housing models for people exiting prison who have been convicted of violent offences;
- interventions responsive to diversity and local context, including through investment in ACCOs; and
- in-depth therapeutic programs for individuals engaging with CSAM or with sexual thoughts towards children.

1. Context and key concepts

1.1 Our approach to this submission

Jesuit Social Services welcomes the opportunity to inform the Second Action Plan under the National Plan and the Second Action Plan under the National Strategy. In addition to making this submission, we have participated in a range of national roundtable consultations informing the development of both Action Plans.

Our submission also seeks to contribute to the implementation of *Our Ways – Strong Ways – Our Voices: National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Plan to End Family, Domestic and Sexual Violence 2026– 2036* – see, in particular, sections 6.4 and 7.3 of this submission.

Our submission is informed by the experience of our staff and participants, and brings together Jesuit Social Services' practice and research expertise from our work in The Men's Project and related programs and projects, in particular:

- our research, including our Man Box and Adolescent Man Box studies exploring the association between adherence to restrictive and harmful masculine norms (the 'Man Box rules') and the attitudes and behaviours of men and boys;
- our nearly 50 years of practice experience working with boys and men and our work designing and delivering prevention and early intervention programs to reduce men's violence;
- our research and practice expertise in the use of online platforms to prevent and respond to harmful behaviours (in particular, violence and abuse), including our early intervention work to stop child sexual abuse and our partnership with the University of Tasmania to deliver the Child Sexual Abuse Material (CSAM) Deterrence Centre; and
- our national leadership in men's violence prevention, including via our partnership with Our Watch which is focused on strengthening practice and coordination at a national level.

This submission also draws on Jesuit Social Services' broader experience working with children, young people and families; people involved in and leaving the justice system; and communities experiencing entrenched disadvantage, including through place-based work and partnerships with First Nations organisations.

Our submission does not claim to be comprehensive. It focuses on issues where Jesuit Social Services has specific expertise to offer—in particular, violence prevention and early intervention work with men and boys, alongside child sexual abuse prevention and early intervention.

We recognise that other organisations and experts are better placed to comment on critical issues such as support for victim-survivors of family and sexual violence, but we do echo calls for increased and ongoing funding for specialist family and sexual violence response services, including legal and housing support. In all our work through The Men's Project, we are committed to remaining accountable to, and working in solidarity with, victim-survivors of men's violence, women's organisations and LGBTIQ+ advocates and organisations.

1.2 A note on terminology

This submission draws on several related but distinct policy and practice fields. For the purposes of this submission, we use family and sexual violence to refer to all forms of domestic and family violence, including sexual violence in family contexts, as well as sexual violence outside family contexts. Our use of the term includes violence against women, children and LGBTIQ+ people.

While child sexual abuse is a form of sexual violence and can be a form of family violence, we sometimes refer to it separately for clarity, reflecting its distinct national framework and specialist prevention, safeguarding and service requirements. We use problematic and harmful sexual behaviours, rather than child sexual abuse, when referring to these behaviours among children and young people.

We use men's violence prevention or violence prevention work with men and boys to describe our practice focus. We discuss gendered drivers throughout the submission, and generally use gender-based violence prevention where it is the established language of a framework, report or joint project.

1.3 A coordinated approach to ending family and sexual violence and child sexual abuse

The two Second Action Plans should be purposefully coordinated, but not merged. They should recognise important intersections between family and sexual violence and child sexual abuse while preserving the distinct mandates, specialist expertise and service responses required under each framework, alongside the self-determined governance of *Our Ways – Strong Ways – Our Voices*.

The Second Action Plans should recognise these connections without collapsing the distinct purposes of each national framework. A coordinated approach is needed so that related policy efforts reinforce each other, while preserving the specific focus, expertise and governance required for family and sexual violence, child sexual abuse, and First Nations-led responses.

We are making a combined submission to inform both the National Plan and the National Strategy because data, research and our practice experience show that family and sexual violence and child sexual abuse are deeply interconnected. For example:

- Men make up the vast majority of people who use family and sexual violence against adults and those who sexually abuse children – highlighting the need to foreground prevention, early intervention and behaviour change work with men and boys if we are to end all forms of violence against women and children;
- Childhood victimisation, including child sexual abuse and exposure to family violence, is associated with increased risks of later victimisation and, for some people, later use of violence. Most child victim-survivors do not go on to use violence. Supporting the safety, healing and recovery of children and young people is essential to mitigate the often long-term impacts of abuse and can also contribute to reducing revictimisation and interrupting intergenerational patterns of harm;
- Many of the same universal, targeted and statutory systems – including schools, health services, child and family services and justice agencies – encounter children and adults who experience, use, or are at risk of experiencing or using different forms of violence and abuse. This highlights the need for clearer roles, shared core capabilities, coordinated practice, effective referral pathways, and access to specialist advice, without diluting the distinct expertise of family violence, sexual violence and child sexual abuse services;
- Online environments increasingly generate, facilitate and amplify family and sexual violence, child sexual abuse and harmful sexual behaviours, while also offering opportunities for prevention, disruption and early help. Effective action requires coordinated regulatory, technological, educational, law enforcement and service responses;
- Problematic and harmful sexual behaviours among children and young people represent a significant concern. Recent Australian evidence indicates that, among contemporary

younger cohorts, child sexual abuse by adolescents is more common than abuse by adults.¹ Exposure to pornography has been identified as one possible contributing pathway for some young people, alongside other individual, relational and environmental factors.

Despite these intersections, policy, funding, research and service development remain fragmented across national frameworks, government portfolios and jurisdictions. This contributes to gaps and duplication, inconsistent service pathways, missed opportunities for earlier intervention and unclear responsibility for cross-cutting issues. The coordinated process to develop the Second Action Plans must flow into coordinated governance and implementation across social services, health, education, child safety, justice, communications and Attorney-General's portfolios, and across Commonwealth, state and territory governments. For example, many of the legislative and regulatory levers needed to address online harms sit outside social services portfolios.

Coordination should support shared learning without assuming that the drivers, pathways or interventions are identical. It should also support multidisciplinary research and practice development. For example, while the gendered drivers of family and sexual violence, including restrictive and harmful gender norms, are now well established, the role of gender and masculinities in perpetration of child sexual abuse is less well understood.

Coordination must not dilute the distinct implementation focus required for sexual violence, including its particular dynamics, specialist expertise and service pathways.

Recommendation 1: Governments should establish formal cross-plan, cross-portfolio and intergovernmental coordination and accountability arrangements for the National Plan and National Strategy, while preserving their distinct mandates and establishing a clear interface with the self-determined governance of *Our Ways – Strong Ways – Our Voices*.

1.4 The prevalence of men's violence

The vast majority of people who use family and sexual violence and commit child sexual abuse offences are male. In 2023–24, around four in five (79%) family violence offenders proceeded against by police were male,² and research suggests that between 88% and 98% of perpetrators of sexual violence, including child sexual abuse, are male.³

Research also shows that a substantial proportion of men have perpetrated violence against a partner. Jesuit Social Services' 2024 Man Box research, completed in partnership with Respect Victoria, showed 28% of surveyed men aged 18–45 reported they had perpetrated at least one form of sexual or physical violence against a current or former partner.⁴ Similarly, recent data from the Ten to Men study reveals that approximately 35% of Australian men aged 18–65 report

¹ Mathews, B. et al (2024). Child sexual abuse by different classes and types of perpetrator: Prevalence and trends from an Australian national survey. *Child Abuse & Neglect*, Vol. 147. [\[Weblink\]](#)

² Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (2025). *Who uses violence?* [\[Weblink\]](#)

³ Proeve, M. et al (2016). *Evidence and Frameworks for Understanding Perpetrators of Institutional Child Sexual Abuse: A report commissioned and funded by the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse*. University of Adelaide. [\[Weblink\]](#). See also: Mathews, B. et al (2024). Child sexual abuse by different classes and types of perpetrator: Prevalence and trends from an Australian national survey. *Child Abuse & Neglect*, Vol. 147. [\[Weblink\]](#); Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (2026). *Sexual violence*. [\[Weblink\]](#)

⁴ The Men's Project & Flood, M. (2024). *The Man Box 2024: Re-examining what it means to be a man in Australia*. Melbourne: Jesuit Social Services. [\[Weblink\]](#)

using intimate partner violence in their lifetime;⁵ that is, approximately 2.5 million men. When violence against other family members is included, the scale becomes even more stark.

Research into the prevalence of child sexual abuse perpetration undertaken by Jesuit Social Services and the University of New South Wales also reveals alarmingly high levels of child sexual abuse perpetration. The prevalence study found that one in five Australian men aged 18–65 reported sexual feelings towards children and/or have sexually offended against children.⁶

Despite the scale of violence and abuse indicated by these studies, only a small proportion of people using violence or causing sexual harm have contact with the criminal justice system or receive specialist intervention. AIHW analysis indicates that police are contacted in only one in three family violence–related physical assaults by a male and one in seven family violence–related sexual assaults by a male.⁷ In Victoria in 2023–24, just 10% of the 51,000 adults using family violence who were referred to The Orange Door received a service response. No to Violence estimates that less than 3% of the estimated 2.5 million men using family violence in Australia receive any form of behaviour change intervention.

Many men and boys who use violence have themselves experienced violence, often in childhood. We know from our own program data and experience that a high proportion of people involved with the criminal justice system are themselves victims of family violence and/or child abuse. In 2023–24, 74% of participants in Jesuit Social Services' adult justice programs and 53% of participants in our youth justice programs reported being a victim–survivor of family violence at some stage in their lives, with the vast majority reporting exposure to violence in childhood. However, while experiences of violence can shape people's risks, needs and pathways into harm, they do not determine later use of violence or diminish responsibility for it.

1.5 Working with men and boys to transform masculinities across the violence continuum

The research and data clearly demonstrate that our failure to prevent, intervene early in, respond effectively to, and support healing and recovery from men's violence is putting women, children and other victim–survivors at risk. While there has been increased emphasis in policy and media discourse in recent years on the importance of engaging men and boys in violence prevention, and there are pockets of promising practice, current prevention and early intervention efforts with men and boys are fragmented, underfunded and delivered at nowhere near the scale required to address the magnitude of the problem.

Jesuit Social Services' Man Box and Adolescent Man Box research examines the degree to which men and adolescent boys subscribe to a set of stereotypical masculine norms (the Man Box and Adolescent Man Box rules) (see Box 1). These studies show that men and boys who adhere most strongly to rigid rules about masculinity are more likely to condone and use violence against people of all genders. This highlights the importance of prevention work with boys and men across a range of settings that supports them to understand the harms caused

⁵ O'Donnell K. et al (2025). *The use of intimate partner violence among Australian men. Ten to Men: The Australian Longitudinal Study on Male Health*. Insights No. 3 – Chapter 1. [\[Weblink\]](#)

⁶ University of New South Wales Australian Human Rights Institute and Jesuit Social Services (2023). *Identifying and understanding child sexual offending behaviours and attitudes among Australian men*. [\[Weblink\]](#)

⁷ Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (2026). *FDV reported to police*. [\[Weblink\]](#). There are a range of reasons for low rates of reporting to police, including the limited trust that many victim–survivors have in the police and justice systems.

by adherence to restrictive masculine norms and to detach from these norms, and promotes diverse and healthy alternatives.

Box 1: The Man Box and Adolescent Man Box

Jesuit Social Services' Man Box (2024) and Adolescent Man Box (2025) studies have made a critical contribution to the evidence on the association between adherence to masculine stereotypes (the 'Man Box rules') and the behaviours of men and boys.

Our Man Box research⁸ – completed in partnership with Respect Victoria – found that living up to the pressures of being a “real man” causes harm to men and those around them, particularly women. The study showed that adherence to restrictive masculine norms is associated with increased risk of perpetration of family violence and poor mental health. For example, compared with those who least endorsed the Man Box rules, the men who most strongly agreed with the rules were:

- 17 times more likely to have hit their partner;
- nine times more likely to blame a woman for making a man hit her; and
- six times more likely to have forced a partner to do something sexual that is degrading or humiliating.

They were also much more likely than men who least endorsed the Man Box rules to have thoughts of suicide nearly every day (8x more likely); exhibit signs of problem gambling (6x more likely); and binge drink (twice as likely).

Our Adolescent Man Box research⁹ provides the first national evidence linking endorsement of restrictive gender norms to poor mental health, violence, harassment, help seeking and online harms among adolescents. This landmark research – based on a survey of 1,400 young people aged 14–18 years – found that around 60 per cent of boys and 60 per cent of girls think most people in Australia expect teenage boys to be manly, confident and strong at all times.

The research also found an association between personal agreement with the need to be manly and a range of harmful behaviours. Of boys who most strongly agree with the need to conform to restrictive masculine norms:

- 39% had engaged in bullying, physical violence or sexual harassment in the past month;
- 35% said if someone rejects them, they usually try to get back at them;
- 42% believe that it's normal to continually check who their partner is communicating with on social media;
- 27% said their friends would probably use AI to create fake nude images of people they know (a serious form of image-based abuse); and
- 82% see harmful acts (such as non-consensual acts, physical aggression and choking) happening to a female when watching pornography.

Boys with the strongest adherence to restrictive masculine norms were also more likely to have experienced violence themselves and have poorer mental health, and were less likely to seek support.

The Man Box and Adolescent Man Box studies also show that homophobic and transphobic attitudes are prevalent among men and adolescent boys. For example, 48% of boys in the Adolescent Man Box study agreed that being thought of as gay makes a teenage boy seem like

⁸ The Men's Project & Flood, M. (2024). *The Man Box 2024: Re-examining what it means to be a man in Australia*. Melbourne: Jesuit Social Services. [[Weblink](#)]

⁹ The Men's Project (2025). *The Adolescent Man Box: Findings from a survey with Australian adolescents aged 14–18 years*, Jesuit Social Services: Melbourne. [[Weblink](#)].

less of a man (compared with 26% of girls), and 39% of 18–30 year olds and 43% of 31–45 year olds in the Man Box study agreed that “a transgender man is not a ‘real man’”.

If we want to end family and sexual violence and child sexual abuse, the Second Action Plans must scale up work with men and boys that transforms masculinities: challenging restrictive and harmful gender norms and building attitudes, behaviours and relationships that support safety, equality and wellbeing. (See Box 2.)

Box 2: What we mean by transforming masculinities

Transforming masculinities means challenging restrictive and harmful expectations about what it means to be a man, and the behaviours, cultures and systems that reinforce them. It means opening up more diverse ways for men and boys to live and relate—ways that value care, consent, connection, shared responsibility and accountability, and contribute to safety and freedom from violence, gender equality, respectful relationships and wellbeing.

We use *masculinities* in the plural to recognise that there is no single way to be a man and that experiences and expressions of manhood vary across age, culture, race, class, sexuality, disability and place.

Transforming masculinities does not mean that masculinity, men or boys are inherently harmful, or that one narrow model of the “good man” should replace another.

Terms such as *healthy*, *positive* and *caring masculinities* also appear in our work and across the sector. We use them selectively as accessible, strengths-based descriptions of aspects of the change sought, rather than as fixed or interchangeable concepts. Caring masculinities places particular emphasis on care, connection and shared responsibility. Healthy and positive masculinities can help name alternatives to harmful or restrictive norms, but can also be vague or imply a simple divide between “good” and “bad” masculinity. These terms should not obscure a focus on safety, gender equality, power, consent or accountability.

Transforming masculinities describes the broader process of change. Safety and freedom from violence, gender equality, respectful relationships and wellbeing are the outcomes it should contribute to. Individual people, workforces and programs can contribute to this transformation, but responsibility for change also sits with organisations, institutions, cultures and systems.

This work is needed across settings where men and boys can be reached, including settings where there are boys and men who are using, or at higher risk of using, violence and other harmful behaviours. This means we need to embed men’s violence prevention capability across the continuum. (See Box 3).

Box 3: The violence prevention practice continuum

Violence prevention occurs in complex, multi-system environments. Our Watch’s *Men in Focus National Consultation Report* identified a need to move beyond siloed understandings of prevention.¹⁰

Primary prevention, early intervention, response and recovery are distinct parts of the system and should remain so. At the same time, as illustrated in **Figure 1**, prevention practice approaches in service settings are not necessarily confined to one part of the continuum. Schools, workplaces, community organisations, health and social services, and justice settings

¹⁰ Our Watch and Varley C. (2024). *Strengthening national approaches to addressing masculinities and working with men and boys to prevent gender-based violence*. National consultation report: Men and masculinities in primary prevention project. [[Weblink](#)]

can each contribute to different prevention outcomes, depending on who they reach, the purpose of the work and the capability of the workforce. The task is not to re-label all activity as primary prevention, but to define and resource the contribution each setting can safely and effectively make.

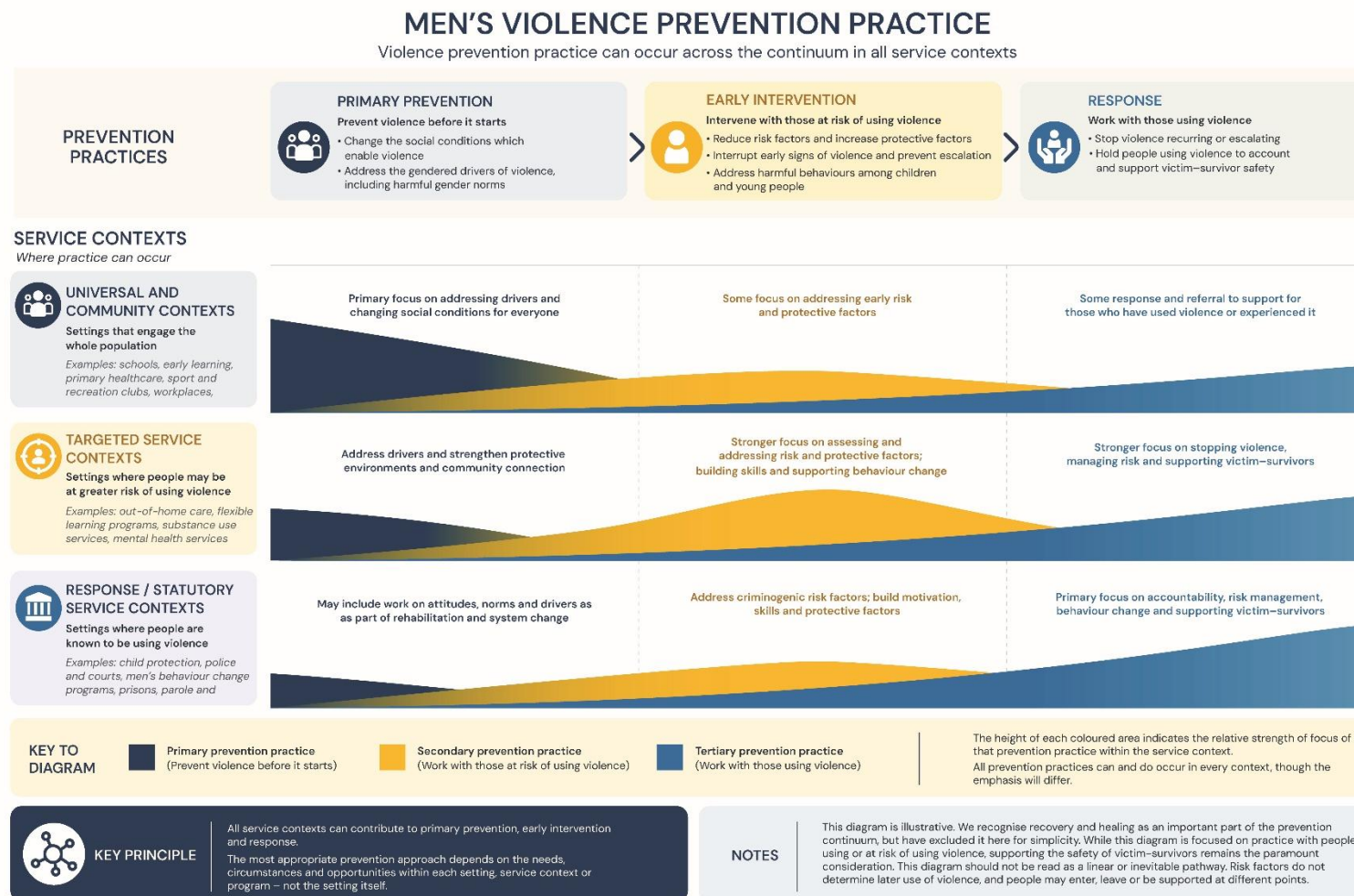
For example:

- Programs labelled as “response”, “rehabilitation” or reintegration” and/or delivered in response, rehabilitation or reintegration service contexts (such as child and family services and justice settings) may generate outcomes relevant to prevention, such as fostering accountability, building empathy, promoting emotional regulation, and strengthening social support.
- Primary prevention aims to stop before violence occurs by addressing underlying drivers and enabling conditions. Early intervention works where elevated risk or early signs of harm are present to prevent escalation. The two may operate in some of the same settings and use some shared practice techniques, such as challenging harmful gender norms, connecting with values and building motivation for change.

The scale of the prevention work required to end violence against women, children and LGBTIQ+ communities means we need to broaden our understanding of who constitutes the “prevention” workforce to include relevant workforces who can influence men and boys across the continuum, and equip them to contribute to violence prevention in ways that are proportionate to their role and setting and supported by specialist advice and referral pathways. (See Section 2.)

Dedicated primary prevention work remains essential. In this submission, we use “violence prevention” as an umbrella term when discussing prevention across the continuum, while distinguishing between primary prevention, early intervention and response and recovery where the nature of the intervention is important.

Figure 1: Men's violence prevention practice continuum*



* This diagram is illustrative. We recognise recovery and healing as an important part of the prevention continuum, but have excluded it here for simplicity. While this diagram is focused on practice with people using or at risk of using violence, supporting the safety of victim-survivors remains the paramount consideration. This diagram should not be read as a linear or inevitable pathway. Risk factors do not determine later use of violence, and people may enter, leave or be supported at different points.

1.6 Boys are children: the need for developmentally informed approaches

Throughout this submission, we often refer to “men and boys”. This is useful when discussing the gendered expectations and systems that shape people across the life course, and the need to engage both adults and children in preventing violence. But the phrase must not blur a fundamental distinction: boys are children, not younger versions of adult men.

Boys have rights to safety, care, education, development and participation. Their emotional, relational, cognitive and sexual development is ongoing, and adults, families, schools, communities and services retain responsibility for creating safe conditions and responding when concerns arise. Boys are not a homogeneous group. They may experience gendered privilege in some contexts and violence, racism, poverty, disability, homophobia or other forms of exclusion in others. Some boys may be experiencing harm while also using harmful behaviour. These experiences should shape how we respond, but they do not make later violence inevitable or remove responsibility.

Violence and harm prevention work should engage boys as whole children with strengths, agency, needs and capacity for change – not primarily as risks or future perpetrators. It should help them build care, consent, connection, emotional literacy, help-seeking, non-violent problem-solving skills and respectful relationships, while challenging restrictive and harmful gender norms. Responsibility for change should not be placed on boys alone: the adults, institutions, cultures and systems around them must also create the conditions, guidance and support that make safer choices and relationships possible.

When boys use violence or cause sexual or other harm, their status as children does not lessen the seriousness or impact of that harm. Victim-survivor safety, recognition of harm and accountability remain central. But responses should be developmentally appropriate, proportionate, culturally safe, trauma and violence informed, and responsive to disability and neurodivergence. Accountability for children should help them understand the impact of their behaviour, take responsibility, repair harm where safe and possible, build skills and change behaviour. It should avoid unnecessary shame, exclusion and criminalisation that can entrench harm.

For this reason, we use “men and boys” when referring to shared gendered norms, a life-course approach or the broader systems that influence them. Where age and developmental stage affect policy or practice, we refer separately to children and young people—including boys—and adult men, specify age ranges, and avoid automatically applying adult perpetrator models or labels to children.

We use terms such as “children and young people who use violence or cause harm” rather than automatically applying adult perpetrator labels. When referring to sexual behaviours among children and young people, we use “problematic and harmful sexual behaviours” as a developmentally informed description of behaviours across a spectrum of concern and harm.

1.7 An inclusive and intersectional approach to men’s violence prevention

The Second Action Plans should require all actions to be designed, implemented and evaluated through an intersectional lens, recognising how gender intersects with racism, colonisation, disability, sexuality, gender identity, economic inequality, geography and other forms of power, privilege and exclusion. This is necessary to understand, and respond effectively to, the diverse experiences both of people at greater risk of experiencing violence and of people who use, or are at greater risk of using, violence.

Responsiveness to the socio-political context in which men and boys live – and the different ways in which they may experience power and privilege, oppression and discrimination – is

core to the design of Jesuit Social Services' programs (see, for example, case study 7). So too is acknowledging and responding to the diverse needs and experiences of women, girls and LGBTIQA+ communities.

The Plans must also recognise, strengthen and resource community-led, strengths-based and culturally responsive violence prevention approaches. This must include dedicated, long-term resourcing for First Nations self-determined and community-controlled approaches, alongside locally led approaches developed by culturally diverse and other communities. Jesuit Social Services is committed to supporting community-led approaches that are responsive to local context.

Jesuit Social Services is also working with LGBTIQA+ organisations to strengthen the inclusion of gendered violence against trans women and trans feminine people in our prevention programs.

Recommendation 2: Governments should embed an intersectional approach across all actions in the Second Action Plans, and strengthen and resource community-led, self-determined and locally responsive violence prevention approaches and programs.

1.8 Reframing the narrative on men and boys and catalysing systems change

Men's health, gender equality and violence prevention are connected, but should not be conflated. Men's health and wellbeing matter in their own right. At the same time, the gendered expectations that can harm men and boys can also shape relationships, caregiving, attitudes to equality, and use of violence. Work with men and boys should focus on transforming restrictive and harmful gender norms that perpetuate inequality, violence, and poor health outcomes. It should promote models of masculinity grounded in care, connection and wellbeing, while remaining clear about power, responsibility and harm.

The Australian Institute of Family Studies is undertaking important work to clarify how healthy masculinities are defined and measured, and what this means for policy, services and programs. This provides a strong foundation for a broader positive vision for men and boys. We believe this vision should centre care and caring manhood: supporting men and boys to care for themselves and others, share care and responsibility, build respectful relationships, and contribute to safety, gender equality and wellbeing. This should widen the range of valued ways to be a man, rather than prescribe a single ideal.

We see a role for governments in engaging individuals, communities, and the private and public sectors to build a positive vision for men and boys that moves away from a deficit focus, defuses the perception that men and boys are "under attack", and counters the harmful, misogynist narratives peddled by manosphere and related influencers. Building and realising this vision will require collaboration across health, education, business, unions, sport, media, technology, faith, cultural and community sectors, alongside specialist family and sexual violence organisations. Jesuit Social Services is currently working with [Equimundo](#) – one of the world's leading organisations working with men and boys for gender equality, care and violence prevention – to explore opportunities to progress this approach in Australia.

An important part of this narrative shift is compassionate accountability. This means engaging men and boys with dignity, care and curiosity while remaining clear about safety, responsibility and the impacts of harm. Effective relational work creates a pull to collude. The task is to recognise and manage that pull: validating experiences and needs without reinforcing blame, entitlement or minimisation, and choosing when and how to challenge in ways most likely to support responsibility and change. At times, this may mean not challenging every part of a person's account immediately, in order to preserve engagement and create the conditions for

deeper responsibility and change. It never means reinforcing victim-blaming or entitlement, ignoring risk, excusing harm or compromising victim-survivor or child safety. Reflective practice, supervision and specialist consultation are essential to supporting workers to navigate these judgements.

Compassionate accountability also applies to children and young people who use violence or cause harm. Responses must protect victim-survivors and support accountability and repair, while recognising children's developmental needs, experiences of victimisation and capacity for change. However, several states and territories that claim to prioritise ending violence against women and children and supporting victim-survivors have introduced punitive youth justice policies which are increasing the criminalisation and incarceration of children and young people – predominantly boys – who are, as highlighted above, more often than not themselves victim-survivors of violence. Too often these children have been invisible to, or failed by, systems that do not recognise or respond to their needs and have not received the care they needed to heal and recover from violence and harm. Punitive youth justice policies do not address the underlying drivers of offending but rather reinforce intergenerational cycles of violence.

We call on the Federal Government to incentivise states and territories to implement evidence-based youth justice legislation, policy and programs that are consistent with human rights, child rights and Closing the Gap targets, including through financial incentives and penalties.¹¹

Recommendation 3: The Federal Government should build on the Australian Institute of Family Studies' work to define healthy masculinities by funding and evaluating a long-term national public engagement and narrative change program for men and boys. The program should develop a positive, inclusive vision centred on care and 'caring manhood' – supporting men and boys to care for themselves and others, share responsibility, build respectful relationships and contribute to safety, gender equality and wellbeing. It should counter misogynistic and anti-equality narratives and connect public messaging with practical opportunities for learning, help-seeking and action.

Recommendation 4: The Federal Government should incentivise states and territories to implement evidence-based approaches to youth justice that are consistent with human rights, child rights and Closing the Gap targets, including through financial incentives and penalties.

¹¹ For further detail on recommendations for national leadership in youth justice reform, see Jesuit Social Services (2026). *Australia's Youth Justice and Incarceration Inquiry: A submission from Jesuit Social Services*. [[Weblink](#)]

2. Build the system architecture, workforce capability and evidence base to strengthen violence prevention work with men and boys

Jesuit Social Services welcomes the increased emphasis in recent public policy discourse on the importance of engaging men and boys in violence prevention. However, there is a mismatch between this recognition and the level of resourcing and infrastructure dedicated to expanding and strengthening this work.

To make a real and lasting difference to the safety and wellbeing of victim-survivors, violence prevention work with men and boys must be embedded, strengthened and scaled up across the violence prevention continuum. While there are examples of promising practice in violence prevention work with men and boys across the country, these efforts are fragmented and underfunded – often with insecure one-off funding that does not provide an opportunity to extend or scale up, nor to invest in the impact evaluation necessary to assess change.

Driving the policy and practice change necessary to embed effective violence prevention work with men and boys across the continuum requires a systemic approach at the national level. A systemic approach involves coordinating, aligning and strengthening violence prevention capacity across the many agencies, services and organisations that regularly interact with men and boys, but whose workforces are not currently equipped or resourced to do this work. It should be underpinned by coordinated governance for the National Plan and the National Strategy, and supported by an integrated implementation, monitoring and evaluation framework for the Second Action Plans.

We can draw lessons from the systemic approach taken to building family violence risk management and response capability across the service system, for example, the rollout of the Multi-Agency Risk Assessment and Management Framework (MARAM) in Victoria, and the approach taken to creating child safe organisations across Australia. Both involve system-wide obligations and practice standards with which organisations must align their systems, policies, practices and tools, and require organisations to ensure their workforces have the capability, tools and support they need to acquit their obligations.

Building workforce capability for violence prevention work with men and boys is a critical component of driving practice change. The small number of men who engage with specialist family violence or justice services and the small size of the specialist workforce working with men and boys means that, to achieve a meaningful reduction in men's violence, we need to build capability for effective prevention work across a range of workforces who engage with men and boys in other services and settings.

Evidence underpinning prevention approaches also varies significantly. While a number of programs and approaches show promising results, the evidence base would benefit from further strengthening to build confidence about what works, for whom, in what circumstances, and how effects can be sustained over time. Strengthening the evidence base through investment in rigorous evaluation and research would also support greater consistency and transparency in decisions about investment and practice across the violence prevention continuum.

The infrastructure needed to expand, coordinate and enhance the effectiveness of work with men and boys described in this section is not supplementary to the substantive commitments sought in the Second Action Plans. It is the machinery required to implement them consistently, safely and at scale.

Recommendation 5: Governments should take a national, systemic approach to drive the systems and practice change necessary to embed effective violence prevention work with men and boys across the continuum from primary prevention to early intervention to response and recovery. This involves coordinating, aligning, strengthening and resourcing violence prevention capacity across the many organisations and workforces that regularly interact with men and boys.

2.1 Create and resource the infrastructure needed to embed and advance work with men and boys across the violence prevention continuum

The system architecture for violence prevention work with men and boys across the continuum should be underpinned by **coordinated governance** (cross-plan, cross-portfolio and intergovernmental) and supported by an **integrated implementation, monitoring and evaluation framework** for the Second Action Plans to promote accountability.

This framework should, for each significant Action Plan commitment, identify lead agencies and portfolio responsibilities, delivery partners, dedicated funding, delivery milestones and timeframes, and agreed outcomes and measures. It should be supported by **public reporting** requirements and a mechanism for **independent oversight** and course correction.

Building on the findings of the *Our Watch Men in Focus National Consultation Report*¹² and our own research and practice experience, Jesuit Social Services considers that key elements of the infrastructure needed to embed a systemic approach to violence prevention work with men and boys across the continuum should include:

- Recognition of **whole-of-community responsibility** for preventing violence and promoting healthy masculinities among men and boys, including across government(s), the private sector and the broader community;
- A funded **national coordination function** (with nested statewide and regional coordination) within the broader violence prevention architecture – not a separate national ‘men’s sector’ – to support coordinated advice, workforce guidance, collective learning, quality development, communications, research translation and links across primary prevention, early intervention, specialist response, child sexual abuse prevention and men’s health and wellbeing;
- **Shared practice standards** for violence prevention work with men and boys informed by identification of effective practice techniques linked to measurable outcomes, to underpin program evaluation and workforce capability-building;
- A **national framework** for violence prevention work with men and boys setting out expectations with which organisations working with men and boys should align their systems, policies and practice;

¹² Our Watch and Varley C. (2024). *Strengthening national approaches to addressing masculinities and working with men and boys to prevent gender-based violence*. National consultation report: Men and masculinities in primary prevention project. [[Weblink](#)]

- **Organisational and workforce capability-building** including training, supervision and support—to enable safe, accountable and reflective practice (see section 2.2 below);
- Investment in **strengthening the evidence base, including evaluation and research**, to identify, refine and support implementation of effective practice, and inform investment (see sections 2.3 and 2.4);
- Funded mechanisms to support **collective learning, knowledge sharing and collaboration**;
- **Adequate and sustainable resourcing** to support the efforts above, including five-year minimum funding agreements.

The national coordination function should complement rather than duplicate or displace the roles of Our Watch, ANROWS, the National Centre for Action against Child Sexual Abuse, specialist family and sexual violence peaks and First Nations governance. Its precise role and interfaces should be agreed through collaboration and co-design, including at the state and regional levels. Governance and operation should include clear accountability to victim-survivors, women's and specialist family and sexual violence services, First Nations leadership and governance, and LGBTIQ+ organisations.

There is an opportunity to build on the work of Jesuit Social Services in partnership with Our Watch and other organisations working in men's violence prevention to pilot a MenEngage network in Australia.¹³ This work is still in the implementation phase, and will require evaluation to assess if it is fit-for-purpose in the Australian context and to determine next steps.

We are also partnering with Our Watch on a project to discern “practice elements” and discrete techniques for safe, accountable and effective violence prevention practice with men and boys and addressing masculinities. This work arose from recognition that, despite the growth in program delivery, the evidence base for effective techniques for violence prevention remains limited, and that ground-up, practice-based evidence is needed that identifies the operational elements of programs that effectively engage men and boys and contribute to measurable reductions in gender-based violence.

Examples of practice elements for violence prevention programs targeting men and boys, might include, for example, empathy development, emotional literacy-building, clarifying values or bystander activation. Discrete techniques might include perspective-taking activities where participants imagine the experience of an abuse survivor or using scenarios to practise being an active bystander. A series of practitioner guides will be developed as part of this project.

We see the practice elements work as foundational for both informing the design, evaluation and funding criteria for interventions working with men and boys, and informing the development of shared practice standards for practitioners engaging with men and boys, which should in turn inform priorities for workforce capability-building.

The Our Watch *Men in Focus National Consultation Report* makes a range of other recommendations for strengthening national approaches to violence prevention and masculinities work with men and boys which need resourcing to progress. These include identifying mechanisms to share practice knowledge and support collaboration.¹⁴

¹³ MenEngage Alliance is the largest international network of organisations working with men and boys on gender justice from an intersectional feminist perspective: MenEngage Alliance [[Weblink](#)]

¹⁴ Our Watch and Varley C. (2024). *Strengthening national approaches to addressing masculinities and working with men and boys to prevent gender-based violence*. National consultation report: Men and masculinities in primary prevention project. [[Weblink](#)]

Recommendation 6: Governments should create and resource the infrastructure needed to embed and advance work with men and boys across the violence prevention continuum. This should be underpinned by coordinated governance for the National Plan and National Strategy and supported by an integrated implementation, monitoring and evaluation framework for the Second Action Plans. The infrastructure needed to expand and enhance violence prevention work with men and boys includes:

- a national coordination mechanism;
- shared practice standards;
- a national policy framework;
- organisational and workforce capacity-building;
- investment in evaluation and research; and
- mechanisms for knowledge sharing and collaboration.

2.2 Build violence prevention capability across the continuum

2.2.1 Embed and resource violence prevention capability across the continuum

Only a small proportion of men and boys who use or are at risk of using violence come to the attention of specialist services and/or the criminal justice system, and the specialist workforce working with men and boys to prevent, intervene earlier and respond to violence is small.

But men and boys regularly interact with a range of organisations and services which could play a stronger role in violence prevention. We need to broaden our understanding of who constitutes the prevention workforce and equip relevant workforces—in ways proportionate to their role and setting—to contribute safely and effectively, supported by specialist advice, referral pathways and service capacity.

This means building capability for effective prevention work across a range of workforces including:

- those with the ability to positively influence men and boys in universal and community settings (such as schools, sports clubs, places of worship and workplaces, especially male-dominated workplaces);
- those engaging with men at critical and higher risk points in their lives – for example, job loss, housing loss, relationship breakdown or birth of a child (such as healthcare, housing, settlement and employment services);
- those engaging with men and boys who may be exposed to risk factors for use of violence (for example, in targeted service contexts such as child and family services, mental health and substance use services);
- those working with men and boys in specialist response, crisis and statutory services (such as child protection, out-of-home care and the criminal justice system).

Similar to the tiered approach taken to operationalising the MARAM Framework in Victoria, we need to map the opportunities and responsibilities for violence prevention across workforces interacting with men and boys in different settings and service contexts, and identify the capabilities needed by practitioners working in various roles and with different cohorts (e.g. children and young people or diverse communities) in these contexts.

Workforce roles in violence prevention should correspond to function and contact with men and boys:

- community influencers and leaders model, educate and challenge harmful and restrictive gender norms and help build protective factors;
- frontline universal and targeted workforces notice concerns, ask and respond safely, build protective factors and activate referral and earlier-help pathways;
- specialist practitioners assess risk and need and deliver intensive therapeutic, behaviour change or other specialist interventions; and
- organisational and system leaders provide policy, supervision, data, funding, governance and accountability.

The identified capabilities for each part of the workforce should build on the practice elements work that is currently under way to identify effective practice techniques for violence prevention work with men and boys (see section 2.1) and incorporate prevention knowledge and skills that are applicable to workforces across the continuum.

Our vision is that relevant workforces interacting with men and boys should be equipped—in ways proportionate to their role and setting—to challenge restrictive and harmful gender norms, build protective factors against violence and apply compassionate accountability.

This means building enough trust to engage; recognising and actively managing the pull to collude; validating experiences and needs without reinforcing blame, entitlement or minimisation; and choosing when and how to challenge in ways most likely to support safety, responsibility and change. At times, effective engagement may require pacing or deferring a challenge, but never ignoring risk, excusing harm or compromising victim-survivor or child safety. Workforces should also respond safely when concerns emerge, including by activating earlier-help pathways, while specialist services retain responsibility for risk and needs assessment and more intensive therapeutic or behaviour-change interventions.

Enabling these workforces to focus on violence prevention will also require reform of funding models to match expanded role expectations. Even if workers have the necessary skills, we cannot expect already strained workforces to incorporate violence prevention into their work without additional resourcing. The current commissioning reforms for child and family services being led by the Department of Social Services present an opportunity to support and resource key organisations and workforces to embed violence prevention as a core part of their work.

2.2.2 Build child sexual abuse prevention capability

Our work with people who have engaged or are at risk of engaging in child sexual abuse offending indicates that workforces working with both children and adults also need increased capability related to child sexual abuse prevention and early intervention. This applies to a diverse range of workforce and professions – for example, all staff and volunteers working in child-related organisations, including schools, as well as health workers, psychologists and social workers.

In addition to capability to respond to disclosures of child sexual abuse, talk to children about unsafe experiences and provide a quality response, these workforces also need to be able to:

- identify and respond to the indicators or warning signs that a child or young person may be engaging in harmful sexual behaviours (including among children at higher risk such as

children in out-of-home care and children living with intellectual or cognitive disability and neurodiversity¹⁵);

- identify and respond to the indicators or warning signs that an adult may be perpetrating child sexual abuse; and
- respond to a disclosure that someone is concerned about their sexual thoughts or behaviour towards children, and make appropriate referrals.

2.2.3 Embed violence prevention in pre-service qualifications, as well as in-service professional development

Given the breadth and diversity of settings and roles in which these violence prevention capabilities are needed, the most effective way to ensure that all relevant workforces have the foundational knowledge and skills required – including prevention and early intervention work with men and boys and child sexual abuse prevention – is to embed this content into the core curriculum for a broad range of pre-service qualifications delivered by tertiary and vocational institutions, including education, medicine, nursing, psychology, social work and youth work.

Currently, coverage of family and sexual violence in tertiary and vocational curricula varies widely by discipline, is uncommon in undergraduate degrees, is often elective rather than compulsory, and tends to focus on risk assessment and response. For example, recent research found that only two universities nationwide taught pre-service teachers how to deliver respectful relationships education.¹⁶ Governments should work with relevant professional bodies and incentivise universities to embed foundational training in family and sexual violence (including child abuse) prevention, early intervention, response and recovery into a range of relevant university and vocational curricula.

It is important to note that, while embedding foundational knowledge and skills into tertiary and vocational curricula is *necessary*, it is not *sufficient* to enable workers to operationalise this knowledge in practice. The complexity of family and sexual violence and our evolving understanding of the dynamics of, and pathways to, perpetration mean that ongoing in-service professional development is also necessary. In addition, discipline-specific university and vocational training also may not reach all people with a role to play in violence prevention e.g. community, faith and workplace leaders.

Ongoing professional development needs to be resourced and should include:

- training to build the violence prevention capability of people who can influence men and boys (for example, Jesuit Social Services' Modelling Respect and Equality (MoRE) program)
- ongoing supervision and support, including reflective practice, coaching and, where appropriate, secondary consultation with specialist practitioners;
- provision of practice resources and practical tools; and
- opportunities to learn from and share practice knowledge with peers.

¹⁵ See Tyler, M. et al. (2025). *What's ok? Australia Scoping Study: Development of a national online early intervention service addressing problematic and harmful sexual behaviour of young people*. Jesuit Social Services. [\[Weblink\]](#)

¹⁶ Pfitzner, N. et al (2022). *Respectful Relationships Education in Australia: National Stocktake and Gap Analysis of Respectful Relationships Education Material and Resources Final Report*. [\[Weblink\]](#)

2.2.4 Coordinate and sequence workforce training

There are also opportunities for a more integrated approach to workforce capability-building across the violence prevention continuum. The current approach to building workforce capability in violence “prevention” and “response” is siloed and fragmented. For example, every year in Victoria, a wide range of professionals undertake “response” training in the identification, assessment and management of family violence risk, as part of their obligations under the MARAM Framework. Many of these workforces also have an important role to play in prevention and some – such as child, youth and family services workers or teachers – will also participate in some form of “prevention” training, for example, in promoting transformation of restrictive and harmful gender norms with their participants or students. However, “prevention” training for many workforces is superficial, coverage across workforces is patchy, and practitioners are often left to “join the dots” between prevention and response themselves. When child abuse prevention and response training is added to the mix, the picture becomes even more fragmented and complex for practitioners.

While recognising that different capabilities are required to deliver different types of training and that workforces have distinct legal obligations related to child abuse and family violence, there are opportunities to better integrate – or at least coordinate and sequence – the development and delivery of family and sexual violence and child abuse “prevention” and “response” training initiatives for key workforces.

Recommendation 7: Governments should adopt a broad definition of the “prevention” workforce – including those who work with men and boys who are using or at risk of using violence – and ensure this workforce is equipped to contribute to violence prevention by challenging restrictive and harmful gender norms, building protective factors, applying compassionate accountability, recognising and managing collusive dynamics, and responding and referring safely. Funding models should be reformed to match expanded role expectations and support professional development, alongside immediate investment in priority activities to build workforce capacity.

Recommendation 8: Governments should build the capability of workforces working with both adults and children (including teachers, health workers, psychologists and social workers) to prevent and intervene earlier in child sexual abuse, including in particular, capability to identify indicators that a child or young person may be engaging in harmful sexual behaviours and indicators that an adult may be perpetrating or at risk of perpetrating child sexual abuse, and how to respond to each appropriately.

Recommendation 9: The Federal Government should work with professional bodies to ensure core violence prevention (including child abuse prevention) capabilities are embedded in curricula for a range of relevant qualifications and supported and operationalised through in-service professional development (including training, supervision support and coaching, reflective practice and secondary consultation). Professional development for workforces with a role in family violence and child abuse prevention and response should be better sequenced and coordinated.

2.3 Strengthen the quality of the evidence base for violence prevention by investing in more rigorous evaluation

Building on the work under way to identify “practice elements” to inform the development of practice standards for violence prevention work with men and boys (see section 2.1), there is an opportunity to further strengthen evaluation and evidence generation across the prevention continuum. This should include a proportionate and fit-for-purpose approach to evaluation, recognising that different prevention approaches, stages of development and implementation

contexts will require different forms of evidence. This will require evaluation to be appropriately resourced, including funding that allows programs to undertake longitudinal and, where appropriate, experimental or quasi-experimental evaluation over the timeframes needed to assess sustained outcomes.

For more established programs that are sufficiently mature and resourced, rigorous experimental or quasi-experimental designs, including randomised controlled trials, can provide valuable evidence of causal impact. For other approaches, longitudinal, mixed-methods, implementation and other evaluation approaches may be more appropriate for understanding effectiveness, mechanisms of change, implementation and sustained outcomes.

Evaluation should be fully and separately funded as part of program investment, including the costs of independent evaluation, longitudinal follow-up and data collection where appropriate. It should not be imposed as an unfunded requirement on providers.

A stronger and more diverse evidence base will enable the sector and governments to make increasingly informed decisions about investment, identify and refine effective practice, and build knowledge about the approaches most likely to contribute to sustained reductions in violence. There are already examples of rigorous evaluation demonstrating what is possible, including the randomised controlled trial of Coaching Boys into Men,¹⁷ which has informed Jesuit Social Services' adaptation of the program as Active Respect.

Recommendation 10: The Federal Government should commission the development of an evidence framework for the prevention of family and sexual violence and child abuse across the continuum. The framework should include standards of evidence and be supported by funding for more rigorous and long-term evaluation. The framework could:

- provide a consistent way of assessing the evidence used and generated;
- identify validated measures that could be used for assessing the impact of violence prevention initiatives;
- offer shared language for the way we think and communicate about evidence as it pertains to prevention and early intervention;
- promote a shared understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of different evidence claims; and
- clearly articulate the evidence requirements for programs and initiatives across the continuum of work to prevent violence against women, children and LGBTIQ+ people.

2.4 Invest in research to increase our understanding of violence perpetration and masculinities and inform the design of effective interventions

Through our practice and our own research, we have identified four connected research priorities that should be progressed as part of the Second Action Plans: a national perpetration survey; research into the drivers, dynamics and pathways to perpetration (including the role of online environments); longitudinal and intersectional masculinities research; and research into the risk and protective factors for child sexual abuse perpetration and victimisation.

We would welcome the opportunity to engage further with governments and research organisations such as ANROWS and the National Centre for Action against Child Sexual Abuse

¹⁷ Miller, E et al (2012). "Coaching boys into men": A cluster-randomized controlled trial of a dating violence prevention program. *Journal of adolescent health*, 51(5), 431–438. [\[Weblink\]](#)

to further develop these research priorities and contribute to and/or partner on the research. We recommend further sector consultation be undertaken to ensure the research agenda is informed by questions and issues emerging from practice.

We also call for dedicated funding for child sexual abuse prevention research. We understand that, while the National Centre for Action against Child Sexual Abuse was initially allocated a research budget and ran grant rounds, there is currently no dedicated funding for child sexual abuse prevention research (which we are advised is outside the scope of ANROWS' research priorities).

Funding for research should include resourcing to support the translation of evidence into practice. This is distinct from simply publishing or disseminating research. It means funded work to turn evidence into practical tools and guidance, workforce development, implementation support, adaptable program models, and rapid design, testing and refinement. Large scale quantitative studies should also be complemented by more targeted qualitative research to inform practical interventions.

For example, the research approach for the Tech Respect project – being delivered by Jesuit Social Services in partnership with the Australian National University and Sequire Consulting and funded by the Office of the e-Safety Commissioner – which involves targeted focus group research with young people, parents, teachers, and other influencers of young people, was specifically designed to inform the development of practical resources to address technology-facilitated stalking among young people.

Recommendation 11: Governments and/or research organisations, such as ANROWS and the National Centre for Action on Child Sexual Abuse, should engage further with the sector to identify and develop research priorities. The family and sexual violence and child sexual abuse research agenda(s) must be informed by questions and issues emerging from practice, and sector organisations should have the opportunity to contribute to and/or partner on research.

Recommendation 12: The Federal Government should commit dedicated funding for child sexual abuse prevention research on an ongoing basis.

Recommendation 13: Governments should ensure research funding committed under the Second Action Plans includes resourcing to support the translation of evidence into practice, and include targeted research to inform the rapid design, testing and evaluation of practical interventions.

2.4.1 A long-term national perpetration survey

There is a critical need to improve our understanding of the perpetration of all forms of violence. Australia has, for some time, collected data on domestic, family and sexual violence victimisation through the Personal Safety Survey. A new nationally representative, population-based survey, implemented regularly, on the use of domestic, family and sexual violence and all forms of violence against children is considered the most promising mechanism for collecting and analysing data of the scale, depth and breadth needed to truly understand perpetration.¹⁸ By enabling a deeper analysis of the drivers, pathways, dynamics and patterns of perpetration, as well as changes over time, a long-term national survey would significantly enhance our understanding of opportunities for prevention and intervention, and support evidence-based program design and impact evaluation.

¹⁸ See, for example, Respect Victoria (2024). *Inquiry into capturing data on family violence perpetrators in Victoria: Respect Victoria submission*. [[Weblink](#)]

2.4.2 Research into the drivers, dynamics and pathways into violence, including the role of online environments

In addition to a national perpetration survey, there is a need for more focused research into the drivers and dynamics of perpetration to identify intervention opportunities and inform the design of effective interventions targeting different actors, for example: young people, parents and technology companies. This includes research exploring the interplay between the gendered drivers and reinforcing factors for use of violence and individual and environmental risk and protective factors, including online environments. For example:

- the relationship between adherence to harmful and restrictive gender norms and other gendered drivers and reinforcing factors for use of violence;
- the relationship between different patterns and characteristics of pornography use and the perpetration of family and sexual violence and child sexual abuse (see also recommendation 22 in section 3.4 regarding the need for research into use of algorithmic recommender systems on pornography websites);
- the role of online platforms in driving harmful behaviours among young people, including the use of digital tools to actively exploit young people (e.g. to self-produce child sexual abuse material) and the role of content creators (e.g. manosphere and anti-LGBTIQA+ influencers) in driving young people's behaviours;
- motivational, contextual and relational factors driving young people's use of image-based abuse and technology-facilitated abuse (e.g. digital surveillance); and
- the role of parents and peers in influencing young people's attitudes and behaviours, including the enablers of and barriers to intervention by parents and peers (e.g. bystander action) and how they can be supported.

2.4.3 Intersectional and longitudinal masculinities research

Jesuit Social Services' Man Box and Adolescent Man Box research has made an important contribution to our understanding of the link between men's and boys' adherence to restrictive masculine norms and their use of violence and other harmful behaviours. But more research is needed to expand and deepen our understanding of the ways in which restrictive gender norms influence attitudes and behaviours, to support the design of effective interventions. For example, we see a need for:

- an intersectional lens on masculinities research, exploring how the gendered drivers of violence intersect with other forms of oppression, such as racism and anti-LGBTIQA+ prejudice, and the experiences of men and boys from marginalised and under-researched communities (e.g. First Nations, migrant and LGBTIQA+ communities); and
- longitudinal and qualitative research to deepen our understanding of changes in adherence to the "Man Box rules" over time, including repeating the Man Box and Adolescent Man Box surveys every five years to understand changes in attitudes and behaviours over time and support impact measurement of interventions, and qualitative research to explore why some masculine norms are shifting (e.g. emotional restriction) and others are persisting (e.g. homophobia and transphobia).

2.4.4 Research into the risk and protective factors for child sexual abuse perpetration and victimisation

There is a need for continued development of the evidence base on the risk and protective factors for child sexual abuse perpetration and victimisation to enhance our capacity to

identify effective prevention opportunities, disrupt abuse, and support help-seeking among victims and offenders/potential offenders

Research priorities include:

- whether the same risk and protective factors that apply to detected child sexual abuse offenders (with whom most research has been conducted) apply to those who are undetected and the broader at-risk population who have not yet offended (e.g. those with sexual thoughts towards children) in order to either validate or adapt existing frameworks for prevention and early intervention;
- the role of masculine norms in driving child sexual abuse, building on existing research into the association between adherence to masculine norms and use of other forms of violence;
- the role of community attitudes towards perpetrators/potential perpetrators of child sexual abuse and legislative contexts (e.g. mandatory reporting) in enabling or discouraging help-seeking among people engaging in or at risk of perpetrating child sexual abuse, to identify needs and appropriate intervention opportunities (e.g. anonymous in-depth therapeutic interventions; and
- how best to intervene to prevent harm to children and young people at greater risk of being victimised through online sexual exploitation, such as young people with disabilities and LGBTIQ+ young people.

Recommendation 14: Research priorities under the Second Action Plans should include:

- a long-term national perpetration survey;
- research into the drivers, dynamics and pathways to perpetration (including the role of online environments);
- intersectional and longitudinal masculinities research; and
- research into the risk and protective factors for child sexual abuse perpetration and victimisation.

3. Prevent and respond to online harms

Australia has been at the forefront of international efforts to improve online safety, beginning with the establishment of the Office of the Children's eSafety Commissioner in 2015 (now the eSafety Commissioner). However, the harms associated with the online world continue to evolve along with technology itself.

Given the potential scale and severity of harms associated with the online environment, the next set of Action Plans under both the National Strategy and the National Plan must have a strong focus on online harms, and address the technological, behavioural and social factors that contribute to online harm. Action by governments to address online harms must also be underpinned by a well-designed and appropriately enforced digital duty of care that increases the accountability of technology companies for online harms.

Children and young people are frequently early adopters of new technologies while also being more vulnerable to many of the harms the online environment can pose. As a result, regulatory and legislative frameworks aimed at preventing online harms are often playing catch up. This has been evident in delayed Federal Government responses to AI technologies such as 'nudify' apps, which were only banned after numerous reports of these apps being used to create AI-generated sexual exploitation material of students in Australian schools;¹⁹ and to addressing children's easy access to online pornography, with age verification requirements for pornography websites only recently coming into force, and their effectiveness still unproven. Many online harms remain poorly addressed by current regulation.

The digital duty of care, which the Government has committed to legislate, has the potential to shift the behaviour of technology companies so they take greater responsibility for preventing, detecting, deterring and disrupting online harms that occur on – or are facilitated by – their platforms. This will rely, however, on the duty of care being designed effectively and the eSafety Commissioner having sufficient powers and resources to enforce it.

In this section we make recommendations with respect to what the digital duty of care should capture to make platforms and products safer. We also recommend non-legislative actions for inclusion in the Second Action Plans that can ensure young people and the adults in their lives are supported to safely navigate online environments; and early intervention/ diversion programs aimed at young people and adults already engaging in, or at risk of, harmful online behaviours.

The actions proposed in this section fall into three connected areas:

- making platforms and products safer and more accountable through the digital duty of care;
- equipping children, young people, parents, carers and workforces to navigate online environments; and
- interrupting harmful behaviour, providing earlier help and using proportionate responses where harm occurs.

¹⁹ See, for example, [reporting from SBS](#) in June 2025, with the Government [announcing](#) the ban in September 2025.

3.1 Design an effective digital duty of care

Governments around the world are grappling with the growing prevalence of technology-facilitated harms. This includes online sexual exploitation and abuse, especially of children and young people; online harmful sexual behaviour, such as nonconsensual sharing of intimate images; the normalisation of digital surveillance (see case study 3); the widespread accessibility of harmful pornography and CSAM; and the popularity of influencers who espouse misogynistic, homophobic and transphobic views (e.g. those who are part of the ‘manosphere’).

Technology-facilitated abuse encompasses a range of behaviours including monitoring and stalking a victim's whereabouts in real time, remotely accessing and controlling their digital devices, and repeatedly sending abusive or threatening messages. Practices that have become normalised among young people – including location tracking and the sharing of intimate images – can be weaponised as tools of control, coercion and abuse. New products and features that enable technology-facilitated abuse are regularly rolled out by major technology companies with little consideration of the risks they pose. Research confirms that young people and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are disproportionately affected by image-based abuse, which is associated with serious psychological harms including anxiety, depression and suicidal ideation.²⁰

Online environments pose a particular risk for the exploitation of children and young people when they allow for the mixing of children and adults, and where moderation of content and communication between users is lax. Social media, gaming sites and other digital platforms are being used by organised criminals to recruit and exploit vulnerable young people, with interactions often moved to other platforms with less rigorous moderation and safety features like Discord or Signal after the initial contact. The phenomenon of ‘sadistic online exploitation’ (SOE), which typically involves young males who target, groom and exploit vulnerable young people, especially young girls, is also receiving increasing attention from law enforcement.²¹

Given this wide range of harms, the digital duty of care must have strong requirements for technology companies to be much more proactive in understanding and addressing where their products and services can be used to do harm – such as deploying tools that allow (and incentivise) tracking of other users; unmoderated chat features where children and young people might be targeted by adults grooming them for sexual purposes or recruiting them to engage in criminal activity; and recommender algorithms that promote harmful and extreme content, shaping the views of vulnerable children and young people. Public outcry has led to some improvements – for example, following [reports of children seeing sexually explicit content and being groomed](#) on Roblox, the site introduced a ‘[trusted connections](#)’ feature that limits in-game connections only to people the child also knows in the real world. This demonstrates the importance of safety by design, where user safety and rights are placed at the centre of the design and development of online products and services, rather than retrofitting safety features after serious harm has already occurred. The duty of care must ensure safety by design is a requirement, not an option.

Online child sexual exploitation and abuse is rife, with evidence pointing to continued increases in online grooming, the use of Generative AI to facilitate the creation and distribution of CSAM at scale, and continued gaps in the action of major technology platforms to address known risks.²² The duty of care must strengthen requirements for industry to prevent, detect, deter

²⁰ Flynn, A. (2022). *Preventing image-based abuse in Australia: The role of bystanders*. AIC. [\[Weblink\]](#)

²¹ Australian Federal Police (2025). Media release: New Taskforce to target decentralised online crime network exploiting Australian youth. [\[Weblink\]](#)

²² WeProtect Global Alliance (2025). *Global Threat Assessment 2025*. [\[Weblink\]](#)

and disrupt child sexual exploitation and abuse. Such obligations are currently captured through industry codes, but periodic transparency reports from the eSafety Commissioner continue to show a significant gap in major technology companies' efforts to detect and prevent child sexual exploitation and abuse. The most [recent report](#), published in February this year, specifically highlights concerns around the lack of action by industry to:

- proactively detect new child sexual abuse and exploitation images and videos,
- stop live online child sexual abuse and exploitation from occurring in video calls; and
- take steps against the sexual extortion of children and adults.

The report reveals that major companies continue to leave popular video calling services unmonitored for live-streamed abuse, despite using detection tools on their other platforms; and are failing to implement proactive detection, such as language analysis technology, to detect sexual extortion.²³ This demonstrates the need to strengthen obligations on technology companies to address online child sexual exploitation and abuse, including to deploy proven detection tools and proactively screen for CSAM.

The design of technological tools and services and their impact on offline behaviours must also be captured under the digital duty of care. This includes an explicit focus on the way platforms are designed to increase engagement through 'attention hacking' features like infinite scroll, short form videos, autoplay, and push notifications. Such features have been shown to disrupt sleep and increase attentional issues,²⁴ with some research showing social media may displace more prosocial and developmentally appropriate activities.²⁵ When designing new products and features, technology companies must be mindful of the developmental needs of the children and young people who are using their services, and prohibited from deploying products and services that are designed to disrupt or exploit developmental vulnerabilities.

The Federal Government must ensure there is appropriate oversight to assess compliance with and enforce the duty of care, informed by ongoing research into harms associated with digital platforms, services and products (see section 2.4.2). The risks and harms captured by the duty of care must not be defined solely by industry, but by independent research and experts in areas including child and adolescent development; radicalisation; criminology and psychology; and sexual violence. The legislation must also be flexible so that it can capture as-yet-unforeseen harms, with strong penalties and enforcement options for the regulator, including powers to meaningfully restrict access to platforms that refuse to comply.

Recommendations 15: The Federal Government should ensure the Second Action Plans have a strong focus on addressing online harms, underpinned by a well-designed and appropriately enforced digital duty of care which strengthens the accountability of the technology industry for the harms occurring on, facilitated by, and directly caused by, their products and services. The duty of care should:

²³ eSafety Commissioner (2026). *Period notice Report 2: A snapshot of eSafety's findings*. [\[Weblink\]](#); Scanlan, J. (2026). Big tech companies are still failing to tackle child abuse material online. *The Conversation*. [\[Weblink\]](#)

²⁴ See: Mona, A. et al. (2026). Short video addiction and its impact on cognitive functioning in adolescents and youth: a systematic review. *International Journal of Adolescence and Youth*, 31(1). [\[Weblink\]](#); American Psychological Association (2024). *Potential risks of content, features and functions: a closer look at the science behind how social media affects youth*. [\[Weblink\]](#)

²⁵ Burnell, K. (2025). The effects of social media restriction: Meta-analytic evidence from randomized controlled trials. *SSM – Mental Health*, Vol.7. [\[Weblink\]](#)

- mandate safety by design
- be informed by independent research and expertise in areas including child and adolescent development; radicalisation; criminology and psychology; and sexual violence
- include an explicit focus on preventing technology-facilitated abuse, including harms associated with tracking and surveillance
- require stronger protections on products and services aimed at children to prevent them being used by adults to target or exploit vulnerable children and young people
- strengthen requirements for platforms to prevent, detect, deter and disrupt child sexual abuse and exploitation on their platforms, including through the use of deterrence messaging which signposts users to help services in Australia (see Recommendation 23 for more detail)
- require action to address the role of digital products and services in disrupting sleep, increasing attentional issues, and impacting normal developmental processes and tasks
- address harms associated with algorithmic recommender systems (see Recommendation 17 for more detail).

Recommendation 16: The Federal Government must strengthen the enforcement powers of the eSafety Commissioner and appropriately resource the eSafety Commissioner to ensure compliance with Australia's online safety framework and the digital duty of care, including expanding powers to deal with sites that refuse to comply (e.g. through domain and ISP-level blocking).

See also Recommendation 22 regarding the need for research on the utilisation of algorithmic recommender systems on pornography websites to inform application of the digital duty of care on these platforms.

3.2 Regulate the use of algorithmic recommender systems

For many adolescents, their online experiences play a key role in shaping their ideas about gender, masculinity and intimate relationships. In our Adolescent Man Box research, 39% of boys reported that media (including social media, video games and pornography) has a big impact on their ideas about how teenage boys should behave.²⁶ Boys who most strongly agree with the "Man Box rules" were more likely than other boys to report forming their ideas about masculinity online.

The proliferation of online content reinforcing restrictive and harmful gender stereotypes, and the influence and reach of high-profile "alpha male" online personalities, suggests some young men are searching for a sense of identity, connection and belonging, however destructive the dynamics. This content can lead to real-world harms, particularly where it promotes and reinforces concepts such as hypermasculinity, which was identified by University of Melbourne researchers as a pathway to harmful sexual behaviour;²⁷ or contributes to online hate, which the independent review of the Online Safety Act recognised "has the potential to cause significant harm to individuals and impact community safety more broadly."²⁸

²⁶ The Men's Project (2025). *The Adolescent Man Box: Findings from a survey with Australian adolescents aged 14-18 years*. Jesuit Social Services: Melbourne. [\[Weblink\]](#).

²⁷ McKibbin, G. et al. (2023). Pathways to Onset of Harmful Sexual Behavior. *Victims & Offenders*, 19(5). [\[Weblink\]](#)

²⁸ Rickard, D. (2024). Report of the Statutory Review of the *Online Safety Act 2021*. [\[Weblink\]](#)

Algorithmic recommender systems on popular platforms like YouTube, TikTok and Instagram actively amplify misogynistic, violent and anti-LGBTIQA+ content.²⁹ This reflects the business models of these sites, which are geared around increasing engagement and time spent on the platform with the aim of increasing advertising revenue. Content that is more extreme, negative and inflammatory drives higher engagement – and this content is increasingly shaping ideas, attitudes and ultimately behaviours. The Online Safety Act review recognised that using recommender algorithms to drive engagement can “create an incentive to promote content that may be harmful but attention-grabbing, amplifying mis/disinformation, extremist views and reinforcing perspectives the user may already be aligned with, creating echo-chambers”.³⁰

Despite the potential harms of algorithmically-driven content, the eSafety Commissioner’s existing powers do not extend to imposing proactive obligations on platforms to detect and disrupt algorithmic harm. The digital duty of care must have a strong focus on addressing the risks of algorithmic recommender systems – a lack of strong action in this area risks undermining other commitments under the Second Action Plans.

As a baseline, the digital duty of care should prohibit the use of algorithmic recommender systems for users under the age of 16 across all platforms, including YouTube.³¹ For users over the age of 16, algorithmically recommended content should be an ‘opt in’ feature, rather than a default. Currently, the option to ‘opt out’ of algorithmically recommended content is often either unavailable or time limited. For example, Instagram currently only allows users to ‘snooze suggested posts’ for 30 days, after which time the app reverts to ‘suggesting’ content in the user’s home feed.

In practice, prohibiting recommender algorithms on social media platforms would mean these platforms revert to a form where users see content shared by their friends and people they have actively chosen to follow, not whatever content the algorithm has deemed will generate the highest level of engagement. Importantly, it would support governments’ efforts to reduce violence and abuse by limiting the spread of content that promotes hateful or violent behaviours and attitudes.

The duty of care should also require that platforms prevent their recommender systems from promoting content that normalises or promotes violence, hateful content, or illegal material. Platforms should instead be required to actively suppress such content, to prevent it from contributing to radicalisation, formation of harmful views, or normalisation of violence, which can contribute to motivating online or offline attacks.

Children and young people should also be supported to build their critical media and digital literacy skills, with this content embedded in school-based programs such as respectful relationships education. This should enable children and young people to understand the incentives of digital creators and manipulation tactics they may employ; and the way algorithms shape their online experiences and the content they see. The Government must also invest in

²⁹ Regehr, K. et al. (2025). Normalizing toxicity: the role of recommender algorithms for young people’s mental health and social wellbeing. *Front Psychol.* [Weblink]; Reset Australia (2022). *Algorithms as a weapon against women: how YouTube lures boys and young men into the ‘manosphere’*. Sydney: Reset Australia. [Weblink]

³⁰ Rickard, D. (2024). *Report of the Statutory Review of the Online Safety Act 2021.* [Weblink]

³¹ Teach Us Consent’s [Fix Our Feeds](#) campaign has called for a similar ban for all users under 18, however we have recommended 16 to align with the age limit for the social media ban. Platforms that come under the social media age rules are already required to satisfy themselves that users are above 16, so new requirements prohibiting recommender algorithms would not require the collection of any additional personal information of users.

initiatives that counter harmful online influences and narratives that contribute to the normalisation of violence and abuse; and equip parents and carers to support children and young people to critically navigate information they come across online in order to have safe, positive online experiences. See section 4.5 for more detail on digital tools and resources to support prevention and early intervention efforts.

Recommendation 17: The Federal Government must recognise and address harms associated with algorithmic recommender systems and their role in amplifying misogynistic, violent and anti-LGBTIQ+ content which can contribute to the formation of harmful attitudes and behaviours. As part of the digital duty of care, the Federal Government should:

- ban the use of algorithmic recommender systems for all users under 16 across social media and other online platforms. For all other users, it should be a requirement that algorithmically recommended content is an 'opt in' feature, rather than a default.
- require that platforms prevent their recommender systems from promoting content that normalises or promotes violence, hateful content, or illegal material; and instead actively suppress such content.

3.3 Review criminal justice responses to online harmful sexual behaviours among young people

Technological advancements have changed the way people conduct their intimate relationships, with dating apps frequently used to meet romantic or sexual partners, and consensual sharing of sexual images ('sexting') now common among adults and young people alike.³² New technologies also create new opportunities and tools for engaging in sexual violence and harmful sexual behaviours.

Online harmful sexual behaviours among young people span a wide range of behaviours and levels of seriousness – including:

- sharing intimate images with a romantic partner (which are defined as CSAM if they depict a person under 18, even if they are created and shared consensually),
- image-based abuse (e.g. non-consensual sharing of intimate images or the creation of sexually explicit deepfakes),
- intentionally viewing CSAM, and
- filming and sharing egregious abuse.

Research from the Tasmanian Law Reform Institute (TLRI) in 2025 found that the legality of sharing intimate images is poorly understood by young people.³³ It is also behaviour with the potential for rapid escalation in seriousness. TLRI researchers heard reports of young people who had initially consensually shared their intimate images; then, after the relationship ended on poor terms, proceeded to maliciously share each other's images. This means a young person with no offending history could engage in behaviour that very quickly leads to multiple serious, indictable offences. The Second Action Plans must recognise and respond to these risks – both of a rapid escalation in online harmful sexual behaviours; and of justice system-led responses

³² Madigan S. et al. (2018). Prevalence of Multiple Forms of Sexting Behavior Among Youth: A Systematic Review and Meta-analysis. *JAMA Pediatr.* 172(4). [\[Weblink\]](#)

³³ Tasmania Law Reform Institute (2026). *An Evaluation of Youth Justice System Responses to Allegations of Sexual Offending by Young People* (Research Paper No 10, January 2026). [\[Weblink\]](#)

entrenching young people in that system, rather than supporting desistance from harmful behaviour.

The complexity and breadth of online harmful sexual behaviours create challenges for the police and justice systems, as well as for specialist support services, to respond in a way that provides meaningful support to victim-survivors, supports desistance from harmful behaviours, and ensures children and young people don't become entrenched in the criminal justice system. A range of interventions to meet the needs of the young people involved are required. This includes:

- embedding content on tech-facilitated harm in existing high-quality universal programs such as respectful relationships education;
- investing in services like Jesuit Social Services' *What's ok? Australia* where young people can receive anonymous support if they are worried about their sexual thoughts and behaviours; and
- in-depth therapeutic support for children and young people engaging in harmful behaviours.

Governments must also ensure that efforts to increase help-seeking among young people with problematic and harmful sexual behaviours are accompanied by increased investment in therapeutic services to ensure demand can be met. (See section 6.2 for more detail).

Australian Institute of Criminology research on sexual offending proceeded against by police in 2023–24 shows that young people are most commonly proceeded against for CSAM offences (42%), and that CSAM offences involve a much higher proportion of girls as offenders compared to other sexual offences.³⁴ While the volume of formal charges for CSAM-related offences amongst young people is low in absolute terms, instances which involve a formal charge represent only a small fraction of behaviour that would constitute a technical breach of the law. In the 7th National Survey of Australian Secondary Students and Sexual Health 2021 conducted by La Trobe University, 87% of young people reported some engagement in sending or receiving sexually explicit text messages.³⁵

We recommend that as part of the Second Action Plans, governments commit to a national process to examine and update laws around the creation, sharing and viewing of intimate images by young people. Laws governing CSAM offences in Australia were predominantly designed for adult offenders, not for a context in which young people are consensually creating and sharing intimate images of themselves. Nor do current state or federal legal frameworks reflect the variation in potential seriousness of offences related to CSAM – which captures material such as written text (e.g. a text message) through to recordings of egregious child sexual abuse.

Updating legislation should consider the degree to which engaging in this behaviour is in some instances developmentally typical. It should also explore the potential expansion of 'protected admission' models currently in place in jurisdictions. For example:

- In NSW, SA and WA a child can make an admission for the purpose of accessing diversion, with protections designed to prevent that admission from later being used as evidence in court.

³⁴ Sullivan, T. (2026). *Sexual offending in Australia 2023–24*. Statistical Report no. 60. Canberra: Australian Institute of Criminology. [\[Weblink\]](#)

³⁵ Power, J. et al. (2022). *The 7th National Survey of Australian Secondary Students and Sexual Health 2021*. The Australian Research Centre in Sex, Health and Society, La Trobe University. [\[Weblink\]](#)

- Under the [Victorian model](#), police can adopt an educative response rather than a criminal justice response to young people who engage in consensual 'sexting' provided four criteria are met, including that there is no threat, fear, coercion, or sharing of the image; and the teens involved are not more than two years apart in age.

Work is also required to establish best-practice responses for police to different forms of harmful sexual behaviours, recognising they range in severity/seriousness and the importance of responses which support desistance from the harmful behaviour without creating stigma/shame for the young people involved.

Police serve as the gatekeepers of the criminal justice system and hold substantial discretionary powers. In responding to allegations of youth sexual offending, researchers point to the need for police to adopt a nuanced approach which "can attend to the complexities of sexual offending by young people and associated harms."³⁶ For example, the response to a 15-year-old deliberately viewing CSAM that depicts a much younger child should be different from the response to two 15-year-olds who have shared intimate images between each other.

Investigations into alleged sexual offending by young people can also be complex, requiring cooperation between state and federal police (with the Australian Federal Police (AFP) also having jurisdiction in relation to CSAM offences), and involvement of other agencies e.g. schools, child protection. The impacts on families of both victim-survivors and young people who are alleged to have perpetrated harm are also significant: there can be stigma and shame around the disclosure of this kind of abuse/behaviour; labelling of young people as 'sex offenders' when they have been engaging in what is otherwise considered developmentally typical behaviour; the potential for grave and far-reaching impacts on victim-survivors; and a risk of entrenching young people in the justice system.

Evidence shows that young people who receive an intervention for harmful sexual behaviours are far less likely to engage in further harmful behaviours as they get older.³⁷ Anecdotal evidence gathered by the TLRI highlights the positive impact of 'disruptions' conducted by the AFP, which are undertaken using AFP powers to caution. These disruptions involve AFP officers visiting the home of a young person who they detect has committed an offence, such as viewing or sharing CSAM. These visits also have the benefit of engaging with the family, and provide an opportunity to understand the context in which the behaviour was occurring and to involve child protection or make a referral to specialist services if deemed appropriate. This recognises that families and the broader service system play a critical role in increasing safety, strengthening protective factors, and supporting the young person to take responsibility for their behaviour and develop more respectful, safe and healthy ways of relating to others.

Other diversionary approaches, such as cautions and group conferencing, can also result in more positive outcomes for both victim-survivors and young people engaging in harmful sexual behaviours, but these approaches are not deployed with consistency or in line with a guiding framework. This highlights the need for evidence-based procedures and protocols, and for police to receive training and guidance on best practice responses to reports that a young person has been engaged in harmful sexual behaviours, with a suite of early intervention and diversion options available depending on the circumstances.

Recommendation 18: The Federal Government should lead a national process, working with state and territory governments, to examine and update laws around the creation, sharing and

³⁶ Price, S. et al. (2026). Exploring police use of diversion for sexual offences. *Policing: An International Journal*. 49(3). [\[Weblink\]](#)

³⁷ Cale, J. et al. (2025). A quasi-experimental evaluation of a specialized treatment service for youth adjudicated for sexual offences in Queensland. *Journal of Criminal Justice*. [\[Weblink\]](#)

viewing of intimate images by young people. The updates should result in greater certainty around the application of the law, defences that may apply and eligibility for diversion; reflect the usage of new technologies; and avoid entrenching young people in the criminal justice system.

Recommendation 19: Coming out of this national process, all governments should establish consistent, evidence-based procedures, protocols and training for police to respond to reports of harmful sexual behaviours, informed by:

- the factors currently shaping police use of diversion (including jurisdiction, Indigenous status, and offence type);
- the demonstrated benefits and risks of diversionary pathways such as restorative justice conferencing and therapeutic treatment, relative to formal prosecution; and
- best-practice, trauma-informed responses that support both victims and young people who have engaged in harmful sexual behaviour, and that are shown to reduce harmful behaviour.

Recommendation 20: All governments should increase the availability of early intervention and diversion options for young people involved in online harmful sexual behaviours, with a focus on diversionary and restorative options (e.g. cautions; group conferences; Australian Federal Police ‘disruptions’ or diversions; referral to specialist services).

See also Recommendations 37 and 38 in section 6.2 regarding investment in early intervention services for young people who are concerned about their sexual thoughts or behaviours.

3.4 Strengthen regulation of online pornography, including by reviewing and enforcing classification rules for adult content

An increasing body of evidence links early exposure to pornography with harmful sexual behaviour displayed by young people.³⁸ Pornography is readily available online and the majority (94%) of children now access or are exposed to pornography before the age of 14.³⁹ Early exposure to pornography can impact young people’s development, their understanding of healthy relationships, and their attitudes and behaviours, and for some young people plays a role in the pathway to harmful sexual behaviour.⁴⁰ Professionals in this field are observing that children and young people who do not appear to have high levels of childhood trauma or adversity are displaying harmful sexual behaviours due to viewing pornography.⁴¹ As outlined in section 6.2, there are also concerns that exposure to pornography may escalate to accessing child sexual abuse material (CSAM) and to violent sexual behaviour.⁴²

³⁸ McKibbin, G. et al. (2023). Pathways to Onset of Harmful Sexual Behavior. *Victims & Offenders*, 19(5). [\[Weblink\]](#)

³⁹ Martellozzo, E. et al. (2016). “I wasn’t sure it was normal to watch it...”: A quantitative and qualitative examination of the impact of online pornography on the values, attitudes, beliefs and behaviours of children and young people. Middlesex University, NSPCC, OCC. [\[Weblink\]](#)

⁴⁰ McKibbin, G. et al. (2023). Pathways to Onset of Harmful Sexual Behavior. *Victims & Offenders*, 19(5). [\[Weblink\]](#)

⁴¹ McKibbin, G. et al. (2022). Clusters of risk associated with problematic and harmful sexual behaviour onset for children and young people: opportunities for early intervention. *Journal of Sexual Aggression*, 30:1–12. [\[Weblink\]](#)

⁴² Nurmi, J. et al. (2024). Investing child sexual abuse material availability, searches and users on the anonymous Tor network for a public health intervention strategy. *Scientific Reports*, 14(1):7849. [\[Weblink\]](#)

While Australia has taken steps to reduce children's access to online pornography (through the introduction of online safety codes overseen by the eSafety Commissioner, which require age verification for websites and platforms that host adult content), the efficacy of these measures has not yet been established. Their impact on preventing children's access to pornography must be evaluated and options to strengthen age restrictions explored – for example through the introduction of device-based age restrictions.

Separate to children's access to pornography, mainstream pornography websites commonly accessed by Australians host large amounts of content with incest or child sexual abuse themes, or depicting sexual violence (e.g. rape, strangulation). For example, research from Vera-Gray et al. found that one in eight titles shown to first-time users on the first page of mainstream porn sites describe sexual activity that constitutes sexual violence⁴³; and Gane et al. analysed self-assigned tags from videos on a popular legal pornography website and found that of the 145 most used tags on this site, 15 were categorised as being indicative of possible CSAM or "barely legal" content, i.e. "incestual" or "underage".⁴⁴ The tags had received over 5.65 million hits. This has real-world impacts, through the normalisation of harmful and violent sexual practices including the sexualisation of children. For example, research suggests that pornography is helping to drive "increased awareness and willingness to engage in strangulation, as well as young people's belief that it is a safe practice"⁴⁵. This is despite recognition of the dangers of strangulation (including short- and long-term injuries such as brain clots, stroke, acquired brain injury (ABI), and death), and strangulation as a high-risk indicator of escalation of family violence.⁴⁶

Responding to this evidence, the UK has recently banned pornography that depicts strangulation. At present, this response could not be replicated in Australia, as such content is technically already prohibited under Australia's classification guidelines: under the current rules for X18+ content (i.e. content that depicts actual sexual intercourse), there can be "No depiction of violence, sexual violence, sexualised violence or coercion". Further, "fetishes such as body piercing, application of substances such as candle wax, 'golden showers', bondage, spanking or fisting are not permitted".⁴⁷ However, these rules are not enforced. As part of the Online Content Scheme, the eSafety Commissioner has powers to order the takedown of content that would be Refused Classification (RC) under the Classification guidelines, including content that depicts sexual violence or fetishes as outlined above. The eSafety Commissioner has historically focused enforcement action on the most egregious/harmful types of content – CSAM and extremely violent or abhorrent content (e.g. terrorist content) – in part due to the sheer volume of online content that breaches the classification guidelines.

The Online Safety Act review found the classification framework is not suited to responding to illegal and harmful online content and recommended the Online Safety Act be decoupled from the Classification Scheme, with new definitions of illegal and age-restricted content to be specified in the Act itself (Recommendations 29–31). The Government response only 'noted' these recommendations, stating "further consideration will be given to decoupling the Act and

⁴³ Vera-Gray, F. et al. (2021). Sexual violence as a sexual script in mainstream online pornography, *The British Journal of Criminology*, 61(5). [\[Weblink\]](#)

⁴⁴ Gane, G. et al. (2023). Blurring the lines: the vague boundary between mainstream and deviant internet pornography tags for at-risk viewers. *Journal of Sexual Aggression*, 31(3). [\[Weblink\]](#)

⁴⁵ Sharman, L. (2024). Prevalence of Sexual Strangulation/Choking Among Australian 18–35 Year-Olds. *Archives of Sexual Behavior*, Vol.54. [\[Weblink\]](#)

⁴⁶ Sexual Assault Services Victoria. *Non-fatal Strangulation – Fact sheet*. [\[Weblink\]](#)

⁴⁷ *Guidelines for the Classification of Films 2012*. [\[Weblink\]](#)

the Scheme following implementation of the planned reforms of the Act and the Scheme”.⁴⁸ No timeframe for the next phase of reforms nor plan for the treatment of adult or restricted content has been put forward.

Given the harms associated with violent pornography and the inadequacy of the current approach to regulating online pornography, the Federal Government should make updating the classification and regulation of online pornography a high priority. Updated classification rules should reflect evidence of harm, and provide meaningful levers for the eSafety Commissioner to regulate the availability of this content online. Consideration should also be given to aligning Australia’s classification rules for pornographic content with like-minded countries such as the United Kingdom where possible, so that enforcement efforts can be aligned.

The Federal Government should also consider the operation of pornography websites themselves. Algorithms on pornography websites play a key role in promoting certain content, and in some cases “appear to be driving escalation to more violent material, inducing high levels of sexual dysfunction in consumers and creating appetites for viewing [CSAM]”.⁴⁹ The use of recommender systems on adult websites mirrors developments on mainstream platforms such as YouTube and Netflix, and have streamlined navigation through vast libraries of content while shaping user habits and increasing platform retention rates.⁵⁰ Despite the potential impact of these recommender systems, including the way they may be shaping Australians’ attitudes towards sexual violence and child sexual abuse, there is no transparency around how they are operating (e.g. the kinds of pornographic content they are pushing, or what behavioural indicators they respond to) and a complete absence of regulation to minimise the associated risks and harms. A better understanding of these factors is required to support application of the digital duty of care in relation to pornography websites.

Recommendation 21: The Federal Government should strengthen regulation of online pornography, including by updating classification guidelines for pornographic content and enforcing compliance with the updated guidelines by pornography websites accessed by Australians. In updating the classification rules, the Government should:

- Ensure updated rules reflect evidence around what kinds of pornography are harmful (e.g. where research has established links with the normalisation of violence, such as pornography with incest themes, strangulation).
- Investigate the benefits of aligning Australia’s classification of pornographic content with like-minded countries such as the United Kingdom, to support more effective enforcement.

Recommendation 22: The Federal Government should commission research on the utilisation of algorithmic recommender systems on pornography websites, including the content they promote; user behavioural flags they respond to; and their role in pornography escalation (i.e. consumption of more extreme/violent forms of pornography), to inform application of the digital duty of care on adult websites. (See Recommendation 15 for further recommendations relating to the duty of care.)

⁴⁸ Australian Government (2026). *Government Response to the Independent Review of the Online Safety Act 2021*. [\[Weblink\]](#)

⁴⁹ Sharpe, M. et al. (2021) Problematic Pornography Use: Legal and Health Policy Considerations. *Curr Addict Rep* 8, 556–567. [\[Weblink\]](#)

⁵⁰ Adler, A. (2024). *Arousal by Algorithm*. NYU School of Law, Public Law Research Paper No. 24–41. [\[Weblink\]](#)

3.5 Strengthen obligations on platforms to disrupt and deter access to harmful and illegal material including child sexual abuse material

Online platforms offer crucial opportunities to prevent child sexual abuse offending on a large scale, by disrupting the availability of illegal and seriously harmful content, including CSAM, and directing individuals to local intervention and support services. For example, some pornography sites are using ‘deterrence messaging’ to direct users who search for illegal child-related sexual content to early intervention services, such as Stop It Now! (See section 7.4 for more information on *Stop It Now! Australia*).⁵¹ Such practices could be more widely adopted to prevent child sexual exploitation and abuse, as well as other online harms.

In the context of CSAM, a deterrence message is triggered when a user takes an action on a platform that indicates they may be seeking to access CSAM. There are a range of triggers that can be configured depending on the platform. These include: a user entering a search term related to CSAM; attempting to access a blocked URL known to host CSAM; or completing a concerning financial transaction. The trigger and the response are always behaviour-based and platform-specific — not a blanket message shown to all users, but a targeted intervention triggered when someone's behaviour on that platform matches a pattern of concern.

Evaluations of deterrence messaging look for outcomes such as whether someone clicks through to a support service listed in the message (like Stop It Now!), or whether they continue searching for similar harmful material in the same session. The evidence base is genuinely promising. Randomised controlled trials have found that participants who received warning messages were significantly less likely to proceed to attempt to access websites containing harmful sexual material.⁵² A trial of deterrence messaging on Pornhub found that 82% of users served the reThink chatbot warning did not search for CSAM again in that session.⁵³

Case study 1: Child Sexual Abuse Material (CSAM) Deterrence Centre

The CSAM Deterrence Centre is a collaboration between Jesuit Social Services and the University of Tasmania, and its core model involves working directly with technology companies to design, implement and evaluate online warning messages that appear at the point where someone is attempting to engage in harmful behaviour online. We work with each technology partner to tailor the triggers to their specific context: the approach is collaborative and adaptable rather than one-size-fits-all.

The Centre works with a broad range of industry partners – including pornography companies, internet service providers, finance, education providers, hospitality/free Wi-Fi providers, Crimestoppers, members of the It's On Us Business Coalition and the Technology Coalition – to understand their specific user experience and deployment context. We then use that understanding to design messages that are clear and impactful. These messages seek to disrupt harmful behaviour patterns while also signposting users to support services.

Initiatives such as the CSAM Deterrence Centre play an important role by supporting partnerships between academics, practitioners and industry to implement and evaluate deterrence messaging. The CSAM Deterrence Centre is currently reliant on philanthropic funding, and reliable ongoing funding is required to support the effort.

⁵¹ Scanlan, J. et al. (2024), *reThink Chatbot Evaluation*, University of Tasmania. [\[Weblink\]](#)

⁵² Prichard, J. et al. (2024). The effect of therapeutic and deterrent messages on Internet users attempting to access ‘barely legal’ pornography. *Child Abuse & Neglect*. Vol. 155. [\[Weblink\]](#)

⁵³ Scanlan, J. et al. (2024). The Relationship Between a CSAM Warning Messaging Chatbot and User Behavior on Pornhub. *Victims & Offenders*, 21(3). [\[Weblink\]](#)

Despite evidence of their effectiveness, digital platforms and other parts of the digital ecosystem are not currently required to employ deterrence messaging to disrupt illegal or harmful activity. The online safety industry codes governing CSAM specify ‘nudging techniques targeted at deterring end-users from engaging with such materials’ as an ‘example of investment that may be made’, rather than a requirement. This means platforms and other technology providers are not required to adopt deterrence messaging, despite it being a proven, low-cost approach to disrupt users accessing CSAM.

There is also an opportunity to work with platforms to trial deterrence messaging – intervening at the point of harmful intent, before harm occurs – in the context of other online harms, for example digital surveillance, image-based abuse and sexual exploitation. In the case of sexual exploitation, this could involve scripts known to be used by criminals early in the process triggering a message to both the perpetrator and intended victim, providing warnings and/or directions to Australian-based supports. Dating apps are a prime example of where deterrence messaging and pop-up support messages could be applied, given the use of dating apps to identify and access children for the purposes of sexual abuse;⁵⁴ as sites of potential blackmail; and to address concerns around sexual predators moving communication with potential victims to other apps with fewer safety features.⁵⁵

The digital duty of care should include a requirement for platforms to invest in deterrence messaging, and test and trial deterrence messaging and pop-up support messages to address a range of online harms.

The Government should also legislate to mandate compliance with the [Australia Online Dating Code of Conduct](#), given the potential dangers associated with dating apps and services and the fact that compliance with the code is currently voluntary.

Recommendation 23: The Federal Government should support and expand online deterrence initiatives to disrupt online child sexual abuse and other online harms, and direct users to local support services (such as Stop It Now! Australia), including by:

- Strengthening requirements on digital industry to test, trial and employ deterrence messaging for CSAM and other forms of online harms through the digital duty of care. (See Recommendation 15 for further recommendations relating to the duty of care)
- Directly supporting initiatives such as the CSAM Deterrence Centre that enable partnerships between the technology industry and prevention experts.
- Developing and piloting online deterrence initiatives and pop-up support messages in the context of a broader range of technology-facilitated violence and abuse – for example digital surveillance, image-based abuse, sexual exploitation.

Recommendation 24: The Federal Government should mandate compliance with the Australian Online Dating Code of Conduct for dating apps and services operating in Australia.

⁵⁴ Childlight Global Child Safety Institute (2025). *Dating apps: experts urge stronger regulation to protect against child sex offenders*. [\[Weblink\]](#)

⁵⁵ Pooley, E. et al. (2020). *Mobile dating applications and sexual and violent offending*. Australian Institute of Criminology. [\[Weblink\]](#)

4. Strengthen primary prevention and continue to innovate and refine the approach

Rates of violence against women, children and LGBTIQ+ people in Australia remain unacceptably high. It is, however, encouraging to see that there has been a downward trend in rates of women's experiences of most forms of violence since 2016.⁵⁶ It is notable that the jurisdiction which has recorded decreases across the most forms of violence is Victoria, which – since the 2015 Victorian Royal Commission into Family Violence – has made substantial investments in ending violence against women, children and LGBTIQ+ people across the violence prevention continuum.

While it is not possible to attribute the decrease in violence in Victoria to any particular program or initiative, it suggests that the comprehensive approach taken in Victoria, including its nation-leading investment in primary prevention initiatives across a range of settings, such as schools, sports clubs, and at the local community level (through local government and the network of women's health services in particular), is making an impact.

The impact of primary prevention work in Victoria has been bolstered by the national leadership, infrastructure and support provided by Our Watch. (Victorian policy and practice have, in turn, informed the national approach.) For example, Our Watch has provided national leadership in building the evidence base for, and coordinating, prevention work focused on engaging men and boys and transforming masculinities, and in spearheading innovation in prevention, such as *The Line* campaign for young people. Our Watch has also played a critical role in the development of prevention practice, especially in jurisdictions where this work is less advanced.

To achieve meaningful, long-term change across the population, the evidence-based approach articulated in Australia's national primary prevention framework, *Change the Story*, needs to be delivered in full, supported by sustained, long-term investment and rigorously evaluated, alongside well-resourced early intervention, response and recovery/healing interventions. This includes scaling prevention initiatives that are already working or showing promise across a range of settings. At the same time, prevention approaches must continue to be refined and evolve to respond to emerging evidence about contemporary challenges and what works to engage men and boys and prevent violence and harm.

The Second Action Plans must build on the gains already made in building the infrastructure and evidence base for effective primary prevention practice. This includes embedding masculinities work into all primary prevention efforts. Rather than conceptualising violence prevention work with men and boys as an 'add-on' to prevention work, all prevention work benefits from improving understandings of how to engage men and boys and transform masculinities. The Action Plans must embed an intersectional approach to prevention – including fully funding *Changing with Pride*, the forthcoming national framework to prevent gender-based violence against LGBTIQ+ people and communities.

⁵⁶ Australia's National Research Organisation for Women's Safety (ANROWS) (2026). *Evidence to action: informing direction for the Second Action Plan – Consultation Paper in support of the National Plan to End Violence against Women and Children 2022–2032*. [\[Weblink\]](#)

Population-level approaches remain essential, but we should not accept that those who are resistant, disengaged or least reached by current efforts are simply beyond prevention. Some may also be experiencing greater complexity or showing attitudes, behaviours or circumstances associated with elevated risk of harm. Primary prevention should test more tailored, relational and sustained approaches for these audiences and settings. Reaching these people or audiences will require relational, non-deficit approaches that build enough trust for honest challenge, rather than treating resistance as a reason to disengage or defaulting to immediate correction in ways that close down engagement. Where elevated risk or early signs of harm emerge, universal prevention should connect directly to more intensive early intervention – so response and justice systems do not become the first point of meaningful contact.

Recommendation 25: Governments should invest in testing more tailored, relational and sustained primary prevention approaches for audiences and settings who are resistant, disengaged or least reached by current efforts. Where elevated risk or early signs of harm emerge, universal prevention should connect directly to more intensive early intervention – so response and justice systems do not become the first point of meaningful contact.

4.1 Invest in professional development for school staff to support the national implementation of respectful relationships education

Respectful relationships education (RRE) is a foundational pillar of violence prevention, reaching children through a universal platform during a formative period when gender and relationship norms and attitudes are being formed.

The release of the National Respectful Relationships Education Framework this year is a positive step towards embedding a whole-school approach to RRE nationally, but realisation of its vision requires sustained investment.⁵⁷ This includes investment in professional development for teachers and other school staff, which has been identified as a key implementation gap.⁵⁸

As outlined in Box 1, our Man Box and Adolescent Man Box research found an association between adherence to masculine stereotypes (the ‘Man Box rules’) and harmful behaviours among men and boys, including a greater risk of use of violence. These findings underscore the importance of:

- embedding content on the harms caused by adherence to restrictive masculine norms and healthier alternatives in the National RRE Framework, curricula in each jurisdiction and implementation arrangements;
- ensuring professional development for teachers and school staff includes training and support to build knowledge and skills to effectively engage boys and young men; challenge harmful and restrictive gender norms; model equality, care and respectful relationships; recognise emerging concerns; and access appropriate guidance and specialist support.

⁵⁷ Implementation of the Framework is supported by funding under the Consent and Respectful Relationships Education (CRRE) Schedule to the Federation Funding Agreement until the end of the 2028 school year.

⁵⁸ Pfitzner, N. et al (2023). *Delivery of Respectful Relationships Education in Australian Schools: Rapid Review Final Report*. Monash University and Deakin University. Victoria, Australia. [[Weblink](#)]; Moor, I. et al (2026). *The 3rd Australian survey of teachers of relationships and sexuality education: understanding training and support needs*. Melbourne; The Australian Research Centre in Sex, Health and Society, La Trobe University. [[Weblink](#)]

Jesuit Social Services' Modelling Respect and Equality (MoRE) in Schools program (case study 2) empowers school staff to be agents of cultural transformation – challenging rigid gender roles, promoting respect and equality, and cultivating a more inclusive vision of masculinity.

Case study 2: Modelling Respect and Equality (MoRE) in Schools

The Men's Project's Modelling Respect and Equality (MoRE) in Schools program empowers primary and secondary school staff to challenge limiting and harmful stereotypes, promote respect and equality towards women, and cultivate a more inclusive vision of masculinity.

The program supports participants to develop greater awareness of masculine norms and their impact, learn how to model and promote positive change, and recognise and challenge problematic attitudes and behaviours.

Two staff members from each participating school (MoRE Champions) attend an intensive two-day training, where they reflect, build skills, and develop action plans tailored to their school context. Staff from Jesuit Social Services' The Men's Project team then support schools for a full semester, providing tailored consultation during the co-design phase to support the effective implementation of their action plan.

Since it began in 2022, MoRE has engaged nearly 400 participants spanning 178 schools across Victoria. An [evaluation of MoRE](#) found significant change in participants' knowledge, confidence and motivation to bring about change among the men and boys they worked with.

"It's really clear that these sessions aren't about judging men or speaking negatively about men. In fact, it's about stripping things back and exploring the root causes behind men's... behaviours that harm others in the community." – School Head of Wellbeing and Learning

"You walked out of there thinking, we can do this, we can get this done." – School staff member

Jesuit Social Services is currently funded by the Victorian Government to deliver MoRE in 240 schools across Victoria from 2025 to 2028.⁵⁹ We have also been providing advice and short training workshops ("Unpacking the Adolescent Man Box") to a range of schools in NSW. However, despite high demand, there is currently no funding to roll out the more comprehensive MoRE in Schools program in NSW.

As part of continuing to embed RRE across Australian primary and secondary schools, we recommend expanding professional development for school staff nationally to equip them with the knowledge and skills they need to effectively deliver respectful relationships education and sexuality education. This should include expanding delivery of MoRE in Schools, starting in NSW where there is readiness and significant unmet demand.

Recommendation 26: Governments should embed masculinities content in the national Respectful Relationships Education (RRE) curriculum, jurisdictional curricula and implementation arrangements, and invest in professional development for school staff, including to build knowledge and skills to effectively engage boys and young men and transform masculinities, for example by rolling out the Modelling Respect and Equality (MoRE) in Schools program nationally.

⁵⁹ The evaluation of the MoRE in Schools roll-out will map outcomes against both the Victorian and National RRE Frameworks.

4.2 Ensure prevention programs, including respectful relationships education, respond to contemporary challenges impacting young people and address the persistence of homophobia and transphobia

Prevention programs, including RRE, must continue to evolve to respond to emerging challenges, and should be regularly reviewed and updated to identify and redress any gaps and workforce development needs.

For example, our Adolescent Man Box research suggests that today's adolescent boys need greater support to navigate a range of contemporary challenges, including mitigating the harms of pornography and online influences, coping with rejection, and preventing and addressing digital surveillance, image-based abuse and coercive control. Case study 3 highlights the importance of education for young people to manage risks associated with location-tracking and technology-facilitated abuse.

Our research also shows that homophobic and transphobic attitudes are prevalent and persistent among boys and men in Australia, are deeply embedded in dominant masculine norms and are associated with harmful behaviours. Our Man Box and Adolescent Man Box research found high levels of endorsement of "Man Box" rules related to homophobia and transphobia, compared with other rules, and that these rules appear to be more persistent than other rules (such as emotional restriction) over time.⁶⁰

Content responding to all these challenges needs to be integrated into existing prevention programs, including RRE and sexuality education, and reinforced through digital resources and support for parents and carers (see section 4.5). RRE should also have an explicit focus on building young people's critical media and digital literacy skills – including their understandings of the incentives of digital creators and manipulation tactics they may employ, and the way algorithms shape their online experiences and the content they see. Critical media and digital literacy can be an important protective factor against hateful or violent content that children and young people frequently encounter online.

The rapid pace of change, especially in online environments and digital technologies, means that the National RRE Framework, jurisdictional curricula and implementation arrangements (including workforce development) need more regular review and updating than a six-year cycle allows.

LGBTIQA+ organisations should also be funded to collaborate with mainstream organisations to integrate content that addresses anti-LGBTIQA+ prejudice, homophobia and transphobia – especially transmisogyny – into existing violence prevention programs and to increase the reach of their education, violence prevention and workforce capacity-building activities – for example, Zoe Belle Gender Collective's Transfemme violence prevention work.

Case study 3: Tackling the normalisation of digital surveillance among young people

Location-sharing tools such as Snap Maps, Find My, Google Maps and Life360 have become embedded in many young people's everyday social interactions. They can support connection with friends and family, help coordinate activities and, within intimate partner relationships, be experienced as a sign of trust and closeness. However, these same capabilities can also be used to facilitate surveillance and controlling behaviour. For young people in particular, it may

⁶⁰ The Men's Project & Flood, M. (2024). *The Man Box 2024: Re-examining what it means to be a man in Australia*. Melbourne: Jesuit Social Services. [[Weblink](#)]; The Men's Project (2025). *The Adolescent Man Box: Findings from a survey with Australian adolescents aged 14–18 years*, Jesuit Social Services: Melbourne. [[Weblink](#)].

not always be clear when location sharing has shifted from a consensual and practical activity to a form of monitoring or control.

Jesuit Social Services is partnering with the Australian National University () and Sequire Consulting () to deliver the Tech Respect project. Tech Respect has been funded by the Office of the eSafety Commissioner, as part of the Preventing Tech-based Abuse of Women Grants Program, and aims to develop resources to address technology-facilitated stalking among young people aged 16 to 24.

Preliminary findings from focus group research show that location-sharing is normalised and expected among young people. Every one of the 52 young people involved in the research was using location-sharing and most of the young people found the distinction between caring and controlling location-sharing behaviours difficult to identify with confidence.

Similarly, a significant proportion of boys (and girls) surveyed in Jesuit Social Services' Adolescent Man Box research showed a tolerance for technology-facilitated surveillance. This research also found that boys who strongly endorsed the restrictive masculine norms of the Adolescent Man Box were more likely than other boys to agree that tracking or monitoring a partner is normal. For example, 35% of boys who most strongly agreed with restrictive masculine norms believed that if a teenage boy has a girlfriend, he should know where she is all the time; 52% believed it's okay to send multiple messages or calls when their partner isn't responding immediately or when they are frustrated with them; and 42% believed it's normal to continually check who their partner is communicating with on social media.

These research findings highlight the importance of education for young people on how to use location-tracking features in safe and respectful ways, how to identify and manage the risks of technology-facilitated abuse, and how to identify coercive and controlling behaviours.

In terms of promising practice, preliminary findings from our Active Respect project, funded by the Federal Government, which is working with sports coaches to promote respectful behaviour among adolescent boys' towards girls (see case study 4), suggest the program is helping boys to understand that certain non-physical forms of abuse (such as constantly contacting a romantic partner via phone/text or social media to find out who they are with, where they are, and what they are doing) do constitute abuse.

Recommendation 27: The Federal Government should increase the frequency of review of the national RRE curriculum to ensure RRE programs, alongside other prevention programs, respond to contemporary challenges impacting young people. These challenges include mitigating the harms of pornography and online influences (including through an explicit focus on building young people's critical media and digital literacy skills), coping with rejection, and preventing and addressing digital surveillance, image-based abuse and coercive control, as well as addressing homophobic and transphobic attitudes among boys and men.

Recommendation 28: Governments should commit to funding LGBTIQ+ organisations to collaborate with mainstream organisations to integrate content that addresses anti-LGBTIQ+ prejudice, homophobia and transphobia – especially transmisogyny – into existing violence prevention programs and to increase the reach of their education, violence prevention and workforce capacity-building activities.

4.3 Start prevention earlier, including by incorporating respectful relationships education into early childhood settings and by targeting fathers

Brain science and behavioural research show that children form attitudes and behaviours related to gender and relationships from a very early age, well before they start school.⁶¹ To be most effective, prevention should start earlier, including through age-appropriate respectful relationships education in early childhood settings. We welcome the Victorian Government's current roll-out of respectful relationships training for early childhood educators. The Second Action Plans should ensure learnings are captured from this initiative to inform the introduction of respectful relationships education in early childhood settings across Australia.

There is also a significant gap in prevention programs targeting fathers, especially new and young fathers. The transition to fatherhood is an ideal window for prevention because men are likely to be motivated to be "good dads" and more receptive to alternative models of masculinity. While some prevention programs targeting fathers exist, few have been rigorously evaluated. Investment is needed in high quality evaluation of existing Australian programs and in adapting and testing international prevention models with the strongest evidence, such as Supporting Father Involvement/Parents as Partners and Bandebereho – group-based programs which have demonstrated promising results but not been tested in the Australian context.

As an example, Jesuit Social Services is partnering with Western Sydney Wanderers and academic partners to deliver the "Shoulder to Shoulder" program, funded as part of the NSW Government's Game on for Change initiative. Shoulder to Shoulder is a 10-week program that will engage adolescent boys in years 7–10 (aged ~12–16 years) and their father or father figure. Taking a strengths-based approach, the program will incorporate practical football-based training sessions and targeted father-son education sessions promoting positive expressions of masculinity, strong family relationships, healthy lifestyle behaviours, and domestic, family and sexual violence awareness.

Recommendation 29: Governments should start prevention earlier, including by (1) incorporating RRE into early learning settings, drawing on learnings from the current roll-out respectful relationships training for early childhood educators in Victoria; and (2) investing in evidence-informed prevention programs targeting fathers.

4.4 Scale up prevention efforts that promote respectful relationships and healthy masculinities in non-school settings

While schools provide a critical foundation for prevention, mutually reinforcing prevention initiatives are needed across multiple settings – and with a range of people who can influence young people's behaviours – to reinforce key messages, and continue to build young people's knowledge and skills to engage in respectful relationships and detach from harmful and restrictive gender norms.

Our practice expertise and research suggest that engaging role models – such as sports coaches and community leaders – to demonstrate healthy and positive alternatives to rigid and outdated masculine norms is a crucial strategy to reduce violence, improve outcomes for men and boys and promote cultural and attitudinal change.

⁶¹ See, for example: Halim, M. et al (2017). Gender Attitudes in Early Childhood: Behavioral Consequences and Cognitive Antecedents. *Child Dev.* 88(3):882–899. [[Weblink](#)]

For example, Jesuit Social Services works with sports clubs to address restrictive masculine norms that drive harmful behaviours and build inclusive environments. This includes delivering the Active Respect program – funded by the Federal Government as part of the Healthy MaTE initiative (case study 4). There are also important opportunities to engage with and influence adult men, including through workplace settings – especially in male-dominated industries like the construction industry (case study 5).

Recommendation 30: Governments should scale up existing prevention programs in non-school settings, including sports clubs and workplaces, and expand to other in-person settings where young people can be reached, such as youth recreation programs and activities.

Case study 4: Active Respect – Working with football coaches to promote safe and respectful behaviour

Funded as part of the Department of Social Services' Healthy MaTE initiative, Jesuit Social Services is partnering with Football Victoria and The Y to pilot Active Respect.

Active Respect is designed to equip school-aged boys with the skills to prevent violence through positive role modelling and healthier behaviours – on and off the pitch. In 2025 and 2026, we are partnering with 30 Victorian football clubs to provide six months of free training and support to coaches and team members, to build stronger peer relationships and foster respectful, inclusive behaviour.

Drawing on our Man Box research, the training explores the pressures boys and men face to conform to certain behaviours, how these pressures affect mental health, and their links to issues like sexual harassment and violence against women.

Active Respect is showing promising early results including increased understanding among boys who participated in the program of what constitutes intimate partner violence or abuse and increased confidence to respond as a bystander to abusive or disrespectful behaviours towards girls, relative to a control group. Coaches feel more confident talking to boys on a range of topics related violence and abuse against women and girls. Teams have also reported becoming more respectful, more emotionally regulated after losses, and better at collaborating.

Case study 5: Supporting safety and wellbeing in the construction industry

Rigid adherence to stereotypical ideas about what it means to be a man is prevalent in male-dominated industries. The construction sector has been identified as one of the highest occupational risk sectors in Australia,⁶² where women are at particular risk of experiencing gendered violence in the workplace. This often drives women to resign from their jobs, with women leaving the construction industry 38% faster than men.⁶³ Data also show that young construction workers more than twice as likely to die by suicide than other young Australian men.⁶⁴

The Men's Project delivers evidence-based programs for the construction sector that challenge harmful and restrictive gender norms in order to improve wellbeing, behaviour and safety. We engage with organisations to identify and address beliefs and behaviours which may lead to

⁶² Ross, V, Caton, N, Gullestrup, J and Kloves, K. (2020). A Longitudinal Assessment of Two Suicide Prevention Training Programs for the Construction Industry. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*. [[Weblink](#)]

⁶³ Victoria Government (2019). *Victoria's Women in Construction Strategy*. [[Weblink](#)]

⁶⁴ SafeWork NSW (2022). *Findings Report: Mental Health in Construction 2022*. [[Weblink](#)]

poor mental health and suicidality, alcohol and drug abuse, workplace bullying, sexual harassment, low female workforce participation, risk taking behaviour, and absenteeism.

For example, in Victoria, The Men's Project has partnered with ICON Construction to deliver a whole-of-organisation approach to Inclusion, Equality and Safety through tiered training and support for leaders, project managers, site managers, other key influencers, contractors, and onsite staff.

The partnership aims to generate positive cultural change towards inclusion, gender equality and safety (including violence and harm reduction). The partnership project incorporates: intensive two-day training for leadership; establishment of a network of "site champions" who receive training in bystander intervention to influence their peers; regular toolbox talks to reinforce key messaging; and a video series that introduces key concepts.

Over the twelve months from July 2024 to August 2025, 4,500 participants were engaged in program activities across four ICON work sites. Initial evaluation findings indicate an increase among workplace leaders and site champions (n=84) in: awareness of social pressures and harmful behaviours related to restrictive masculine norms; commitment to cultural change; and confidence using intervention strategies.

4.5 Invest in digital tools and resources to support and scale prevention and early intervention efforts

A well-informed prevention approach needs to consider the seminal role that digital technology and media play in the lives of most people, and especially young people, including in the construction of violence-supportive attitudes. The proliferation of online content reinforcing harmful gender stereotypes far surpasses the reach of an approach which relies on in-person program delivery (no matter how effective) to counter this influence.

Digital technologies can effectively reach individuals accessing online content across a spectrum, from those engaging with misogynistic influencers to those consuming content that shows, promotes or instructs people to engage in violent acts. Further, online spaces can be anonymous, which can help to overcome the stigma that may otherwise prevent help-seeking. The rapid development of new technologies, also provides new opportunities to influence people's behaviour. This includes the use of strategically placed pop-up warnings and interactive chat bots. Digital and online tools can be accessed or disseminated across the country, including to remote or difficult-to-reach areas.

Our Adolescent Man Box research showed that parents and carers are a key source of support and influence on adolescent boys' beliefs and behaviours.⁶⁵ Yet parents often lack a deep understanding of how children and young people experience the online world and the kinds of content they encounter online, and are under-supported in identifying behaviours of concern and navigating conversations about sensitive topics such as coping with rejection, violence, harmful pornography use, image-based abuse, masculinities, sexuality and navigating boundaries in digital spaces.

There are several ways in which digital approaches to prevention and early intervention can supplement in-person efforts to achieve impact, reach and scale in violence prevention:

- digital tools which can be widely disseminated to build the capability of people who are well positioned to engage with men and boys, to help them confidently foster discussions that

⁶⁵ *The Adolescent Man Box: Findings from a survey with Australian adolescents aged 14–18 years*, Jesuit Social Services: Melbourne, p 19. [\[Weblink\]](#).

prevent violence – this includes resources for professionals such as teachers, social workers, sports coaches and workplace leaders, as well as resources for parents, carers and other influential adults to support young people to manage the pressures they face and safely navigate online spaces;

- online tools which interrupt problematic or illegal online engagement and support people to access help (see sections 3.3 and 3.5);
- supporting help-seeking, especially among young people, who may be more likely to turn to online resources (including AI) than professionals such as teachers, doctors or counsellors⁶⁶ (see also section 4.2);
- countering negative influences or narratives (e.g. harmful manosphere content), for example through social media campaigns that promote a positive and diverse vision of masculinity, such as Respect Victoria's "What kind of a man do you want to be?" campaign. (See section 3.2 for more detail on countering harmful online influences or narratives)

Digital tools to build and support the capacity of workforces and parents could include a range of different resources, such as podcasts, videos and conversation guides, and should be preceded by rigorous trialling and evaluation of teaching and learning approaches. The resources should aim to help workforces and parents to discuss sensitive topics, such as online safety, harmful pornography use, image-based abuse, digital surveillance, masculinities, sexuality and consent. For example, Jesuit Social Services is currently partnering with Our Watch to develop new materials for *The Line* campaign targeting influencers in young people's lives with content addressing sexual violence, hypersexuality and location-sharing.

Parents and carers also need to be better equipped to support children and young people to critically navigate information they encounter online; to identify the signs that a child may be experiencing online harm; and about the technological tools that are available to prevent online harm (e.g. parental controls; device-based blocks).

Engaging content can be tailored to specific age groups and cohorts, and tools can be accompanied by advice and strategies for parents, teachers and other professionals who feel less confident with the material or with conversations about gender norms and violence prevention, or who are concerned about resistance.

Recommendation 31: Recognising that in-person interventions struggle to achieve the reach and scale required, governments should invest in digital tools to support critical workforces and parents to confidently foster discussions with men and boys about gender norms and use of violence, support help-seeking and counter negative influences. The tools should be developed with the input of appropriately qualified organisations and based on evidence. They should be open source and widely disseminated.

⁶⁶ See for example, in the context of online child sexual victimisation: Cubitt, T. et al (2026). *Prevalence and disclosure of AI and non-AI online child sexual victimisation: Findings from a national study of Australian adolescents*. Adelaide University. [[Weblink](#)]

5. Invest in healing and recovery for children and young people who have experienced family violence and child abuse

Recent research has substantially increased our understanding of the prevalence of children's experiences of violence and abuse. The Australian Child Maltreatment Study found that child maltreatment is 'endemic' in Australia, with children experiencing high rates of physical, sexual and emotional abuse of children and childhood exposure to family and sexual violence. The study found that, among Australian young people aged 16–24 years old, 44% grew up in a household where there is domestic and family violence, and 62% of the Australian population had experienced at least one type of child maltreatment.⁶⁷

Research shows that the impacts of experiencing violence in childhood can be long-term and profound, and include impacts on child development, mental health and substance use problems, impacts on engagement in education and school performance, homelessness, and increased risk of contact with the criminal justice system.⁶⁸

The impacts of childhood victimisation also include an increased risk of future victimisation and perpetration of violence. Childhood trauma does not inevitably lead to subsequent offending, nor are we excusing the use of violence, but we know from research⁶⁹ and from our own programs⁷⁰ that many people who use violence are themselves victim-survivors.

As the 2024 report of the Federal Government's Rapid Review of Prevention Approaches (the Rapid Review) recommended, we must do more to leverage all prevention touchpoints across early intervention, response and recovery.⁷¹ Addressing the harms of victimisation, and supporting young victim-survivors to recover and heal, is not only essential for supporting improved health and wellbeing, but also represents a crucial opportunity to intervene earlier to disrupt intergenerational cycles of violence, and set young people on a path to living safer, happier lives.

While there are a small number of specialist programs to support children and young people who have experienced violence and abuse, the current service response is nowhere near sufficient to match the scale of the problem. Adjacent systems such as child protection, mental health and substance use, youth justice and homelessness often fall short in their efforts to

⁶⁷ Mathews, B. et al (2023). The Australian Child Maltreatment Study National prevalence and associated health outcomes of child abuse and neglect. *Medical Journal of Australia* 218:6. [\[Weblink\]](#)

⁶⁸ See, for example, Campo, M. (2015). *Children's exposure to domestic and family violence: Key issues and responses*. Australian Institute of Family Studies. [\[Weblink\]](#)

⁶⁹ Fitz-Gibbon, K., Meyer, S., Maher, J., & Roberts, S. (2022). *Adolescent family violence in Australia: A national study of prevalence, history of childhood victimisation and impacts*. Research report, 15/2022. ANROWS. [\[Weblink\]](#)

⁷⁰ See section 1.3 of this submission.

⁷¹ Rapid Review Expert Panel (2024). *Unlocking the Prevention Potential: Accelerating action to end domestic, family and sexual violence – Report of the Rapid Review of Prevention Approaches*, Recommendation 4. [\[Weblink\]](#)

respond to the needs of children and young people who have been victims of violence or abuse, sometimes leading to further harm.

There is an urgent need to significantly scale up therapeutic, healing and recovery supports for young victim-survivors of violence and abuse. Children's healing and recovery are essential in their own right. The Federal Government must play a leadership role in designing, coordinating and fully funding a range of services for children and young people who have experienced violence and abuse to address significant existing service gaps.

5.1 Map current demand for and gaps in support services for children and young people who have experienced violence and abuse

We welcome the work being led by the Department of Social Services, with sector experts and stakeholders, to identify gaps in supports for children and young people who have experienced or witnessed family, domestic and sexual violence, to inform the design and implementation of new and revised initiatives and interventions, and the commissioning of a Landscape Review of the service needs of children and young people with lived experience of family and domestic violence.⁷²

As part of this work, there is a need to develop mechanisms to measure and monitor service demand among children and young people who have experienced family violence or child abuse, and the extent to which this demand is being met. This includes monitoring waitlists and wait times for children and young people who have been referred to, or sought help from, services intended to keep them safe and support their recovery – such as The Orange Door in Victoria. Governments should commit to targets and report on progress.

Mapping of current service responses and gaps should include not only specialist services, such as child-specific counselling, but also explore the extent to which other services with a role in supporting children's healing and recovery – such as child and family services and mental health – have the capability, resourcing and scope to provide a therapeutic, trauma-informed and joined-up response to meet the needs of children and young people who have experienced violence and abuse and/or make appropriate referrals.

This work should not delay investment in service gaps and unmet demand that are already well established.

Recommendation 32: Governments should map demand for and gaps (including capability gaps) in support services for children and young people who have experienced abuse, across a range of services with a role in supporting children's healing and recovery. This should include development of mechanisms to measure and monitor service demand, access and completion, and commitment to and reporting on progress against targets.

5.2 Strengthen service system capacity to support children and young people who have experienced family violence and child abuse

Research shows that young victim-survivors' experience of violence is often masked by other presenting issues such as mental health problems or substance misuse.⁷³ For example,

⁷² Australian Government Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet, Office for Women (2026). *Rapid review of prevention approaches: Australian Government implementation update – 20 February 2026* [Weblink]

⁷³ See, for example, Meyer, S. et al. (2023). *Missing Figures: The hidden role of domestic and family violence in youth suicide – Current State of Knowledge Report*. Griffith University: Brisbane, pp 23–24. [Weblink]

practitioners from Jesuit Social Services' suicide bereavement support service, *Support After Suicide*, report that in many cases of suicide deaths by young people who have been victims of family violence and abuse, the young people had long histories of mental health or alcohol and other drug (AOD) service contact before their deaths, and often disclosed their experience of violence during contact with mental health or AOD services, rather than within specialist family violence service systems.

This common history of service contact among children and young people who have experienced violence indicates both an ongoing failure to provide adequate support for healing and recovery and potential missed opportunities for early intervention.

There is a clear need to build the capability of services and workforces across the health, social services and legal and justice sectors to deliver a joined-up approach to supporting children and families who have experienced or are experiencing violence. This includes building capability to identify and assess children and young people who have experienced violence, and to deliver a coordinated and holistic, child- and young person-centred, violence- and trauma-informed, and culturally safe response that meets their needs, including support for healing and recovery.

As outlined in section 2.2.4, these workforces often already receive family violence and child abuse "response" training, and any training related to supporting healing and recovery should be coordinated with existing training.

Recommendation 33: Governments should build the capability of services and workforces across the health, social services and legal and justice sectors to deliver a joined-up, child- and young person-centred, violence- and trauma-informed, and culturally safe response that meets the needs of children and young people who have experienced violence.

5.3 Make a substantial additional investment in targeted support services for children and young people who have experienced violence and abuse

The Rapid Review recommended that states and territories develop "tailored and developmentally appropriate, as well as youth-specific and informed, service responses for child sexual abuse, children and young people who have experienced family violence, young people using violence at home, and young people using and/or experiencing violence in intimate relationships, drawing on available evidence and practice frameworks available through ANROWS".⁷⁴

While there has been some investment in support for children and young people following this recommendation,⁷⁵ it is fragmented and insufficient relative to need. In most cases, it appears to be focused on responding to children's immediate needs and does not extend to therapeutic support for long-term healing and recovery.

The recent announcement of the new national information and referral service to assist victims and survivors of child sexual abuse is welcome. However, helplines must be backed by service capacity. Governments need to make a substantial investment in targeted, child- and young person-centred, developmentally appropriate, trauma-informed, culturally safe support

⁷⁴ Rapid Review Expert Panel (2024). *Unlocking the Prevention Potential: Accelerating action to end domestic, family and sexual violence – Report of the Rapid Review of Prevention Approaches*, Recommendation 5. [[Weblink](#)]

⁷⁵ Rapid review of prevention approaches: Australian Government, state and territory collective response – 28 November 2025 [[Weblink](#)]

services for children and young people who have experienced all forms of family violence and child abuse, with a focus on healing and recovery. This should draw on the findings of the mapping work identified in recommendation 32 above, and could include art and play therapy, counselling, group programs, outreach, cultural activities, advocacy and wraparound family support.

This should form part of the broader earlier-help pathway described in section 6.1, with information and referral backed by timely access to therapeutic, healing and recovery support.

Recommendation 34: Governments should make a substantial investment in targeted, developmentally appropriate, therapeutic services for children and young people who have experienced all forms of family violence and child abuse to support their long-term healing and recovery.

6. Scale up early intervention with boys and men at higher risk of using violence or showing early signs of causing harm

There is a disconnect between the prevalence of perpetration of violence against women and children and our policy and investment focus. Over the last decade, there has been a welcome increase in the focus on population-level prevention work. This work is essential – and remains underfunded – but often struggles to reach and engage higher risk cohorts of boys and young men. At the same time, as outlined in section 1.3, many boys and men who have experienced violence or are at risk of using violence do not receive any kind of service response unless and until they come into contact with the criminal justice system. Yet, government investment remains directed overwhelmingly to the small number of people using violence who do have contact with police and the criminal justice system.

Figure 2: Opportunities to intervene earlier with men and boys

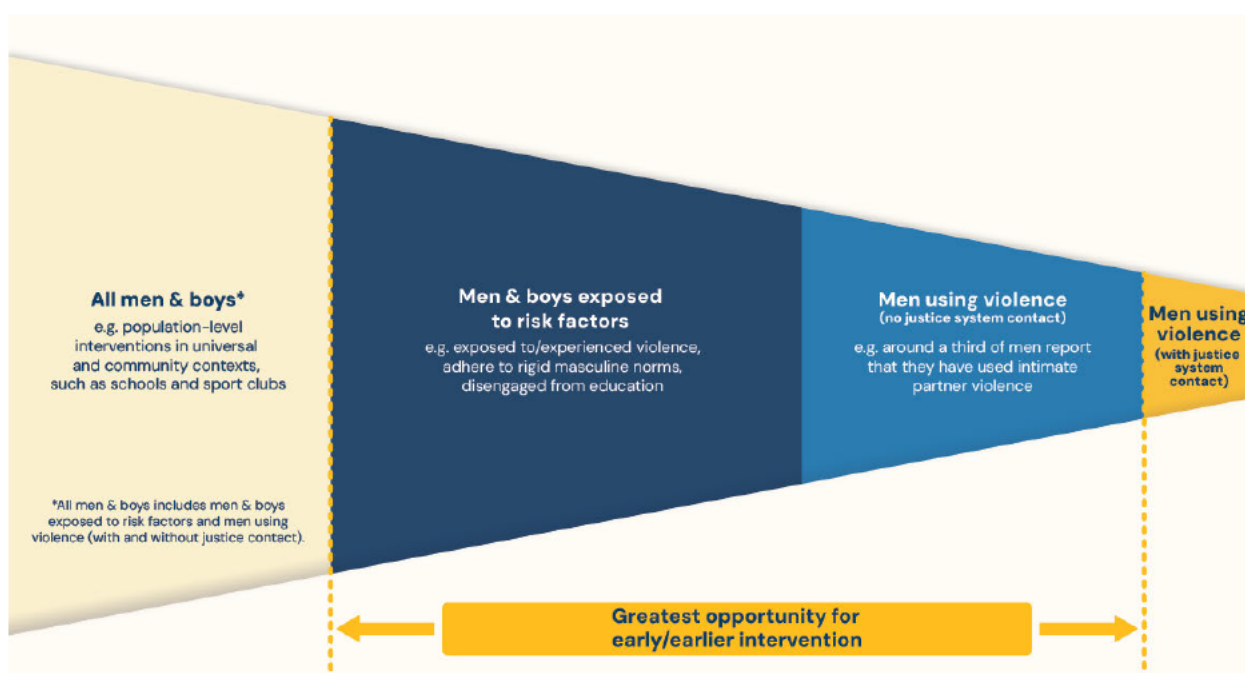


Figure 2 highlights the major gap between efforts focused on primary prevention and responses to violence. There is a critical need for greater investment in early intervention with boys and men – particularly young men – who are showing early signs of violence or are exposed to risk factors that make them more likely to use violence, including experience of violent victimisation, disengagement from education and high levels of adherence to harmful gendered attitudes or behaviours.⁷⁶ The increasing prevalence of harmful sexual behaviours

⁷⁶ The Adolescent Man Box research shows that adolescent boys who strongly agree with restrictive masculine norms are far more likely than their peers to cause harm to others. Nearly two in five boys (39%) with the strongest agreement reported that they had used bullying, physical violence or sexual harassment in the past month: The Men's Project (2025). *The Adolescent Man Box: Findings from a*

among children and young people also points to the need for earlier intervention with boys and young men who are concerned about their sexual thoughts and behaviours and/or their use of pornography (see section 6.2).

While there are pockets of promising practice, current early intervention efforts are fragmented and lack the necessary breadth and intensity. There is an opportunity to take a more systemic approach to early intervention: identifying and leveraging intervention points – via service systems, communities and technologies – where we can identify boys and men at elevated risk of using violence or showing early signs of causing harm and change their trajectories before they come into contact with the specialist family violence response and justice systems.

For example, universal services like schools often identify concerns early but lack the capacity, specialist skills or system pathways to respond effectively. Health and social services agencies (such as mental health, substance use, and child and family services) regularly encounter people using or at higher risk of using violence, who might otherwise never seek help or be held accountable, but may not have the capability, resourcing or mandate to intervene. Community development/strengthening programs also offer an important opportunity to support people who may be at risk of using or experiencing violence (see case study 6.4).

Taken together, these opportunities should form a connected pathway to earlier help: concerns are noticed or interrupted; people have safe and accessible ways to seek help; needs and risks are assessed and triaged; brief, therapeutic or behaviour-change support is available; referral or escalation occurs safely where required; and support and accountability are sustained over time. Different workforces should contribute in ways proportionate to their role, with specialist services available when more intensive intervention is needed. These pathways should be accessible and non-stigmatising while remaining clear about emerging harm, responsibility and safety. As an example, **Figure 3** illustrates how schools can be engaged across the prevention continuum, including their role in early intervention.

Place-based approaches offer a useful mechanism for better integrating or coordinating early intervention efforts. We recommend governments pilot and evaluate an intensive place-based early intervention initiative in a small number of local government areas that would work at both the system and community levels – for example, with police, child and family services, schools, health services and local community groups. The pilots would target at-risk young people and families and seek to strengthen protective factors and reduce risk factors for use of violence. Each pilot would be adapted to the unique contexts and strengths of the particular place and community, and focus on building capabilities within the community.

The pilots could draw lessons from, and build on, the prevention and early intervention saturation model currently being piloted in Ballarat, [Respect Ballarat](#). The added value of these pilots should be their ability to connect prevention and early intervention across universal and community settings, such as schools, with clear and coordinated service pathways and specialist support, in places where the gaps are greatest.

Successfully leveraging broader opportunities for early intervention will also require capability-building of services and workforces outside the specialist family violence/child abuse and criminal justice systems (see section 2) and reforms to information-sharing, as well as use of digital tools and technologies to support early intervention (including help-seeking) at scale (section 4.5).

survey with Australian adolescents aged 14–18 years, Jesuit Social Services: Melbourne, p 19. [\[Weblink\]](#). See also Center for Disease Control, *Risk and Protective Factors: Youth Violence Prevention*. [\[Weblink\]](#)

Governments should not invest in awareness, screening, disclosure, deterrence, help-seeking or referral without also funding the services that will receive and respond to the resulting demand. No new doorway to help should lead nowhere.

Recommendation 35: Governments should pilot and evaluate an intensive place-based early intervention initiative in a small number of local government areas that would work at both the system and community levels – for example, with police, child and family services, schools, health services and local community groups. The pilots would target at-risk young people and families and seek to strengthen protective factors and reduce risk factors for use of violence. Each pilot would be adapted to the unique contexts and strengths of the particular place and community.

Figure 3: Engaging schools in violence prevention: A tiered approach



6.1 Build accessible pathways to earlier help, backed by service capacity

Earlier help must be easier to access for boys and men who have experienced violence, are concerned about their own behaviour, or are showing early signs of violence or other harm. This includes formal help from services and professionals and informal help from parents, family members, peers and other trusted people.

Jesuit Social Services' Man Box and Adolescent Man Box research shows that significant numbers of men and adolescent boys agree with Man Box rules related to self-sufficiency and stoicism (for example, that men should figure out their personal problems on their own without asking others for help) and are reluctant to seek help.⁷⁷ For example, over one-third of adolescent boys surveyed for the Adolescent Man Box study reported they had not sought any support for an emotional or personal issue in the past six months. Some boys, particularly those who strongly endorsed the Adolescent Man Box rules, reported being unable to show vulnerability with friends.

Building accessible pathways to earlier help involves more than encouraging disclosure: the people and settings around men and boys need practical guidance to notice concerns, engage with them safely, build protective factors, offer an initial response and connect people to appropriate support. Accessible pathways should include anonymous and low-barrier ways to seek help, assessment and triage, brief intervention, therapeutic and behaviour change support, and clear referral and escalation where needs or risks are more serious. Parents, peers and frontline workers should be equipped to offer support and activate these pathways without being expected to take on specialist roles.

While parents play an important role as a source of help, young people are likely to turn to peers or online sources. Online environments therefore offer possible entry points into the broader earlier-help pathway, including through pop-up messages, information about available services and messages that direct young people to further resources in response to concerning online behaviours. (See also sections 3.5 and 4.5.)

It is also essential that efforts to encourage help-seeking are backed by investment in service capacity – beyond helplines – to respond to increased demand for support.

Recommendation 36: Governments should build accessible pathways to earlier help for boys and men who have experienced violence, are concerned about their own behaviour, or are showing early signs of violence or other harm. Accessible pathways should include anonymous and low-barrier ways to seek help, assessment and triage, brief intervention, therapeutic and behaviour-change support, and clear referral and escalation pathways. Parents, peers and frontline workers should be equipped to offer support and activate these pathways. Efforts to encourage help-seeking should be backed by investment in increased service capacity.

⁷⁷ The Men's Project & Flood, M. (2024). *The Man Box 2024: Re-examining what it means to be a man in Australia*. Melbourne: Jesuit Social Services. [\[Weblink\]](#); The Men's Project (2025). *The Adolescent Man Box: Findings from a survey with Australian adolescents aged 14–18 years*, Jesuit Social Services: Melbourne. [\[Weblink\]](#).

6.2 Invest in early intervention services for young people who are concerned about their sexual thoughts or behaviours and/or use of pornography, as well as parents, carers and professionals

Experts in the field agree that problematic and harmful sexual behaviours among young people are a significant and growing problem, and that an increased preventative response is required, especially for children and young people at risk of engaging in such behaviours.⁷⁸

The Australian Child Maltreatment Study found that child sexual abuse by adolescents has increased, and that "in contemporary Australia, it is more common for child sexual abuse to be inflicted by an adolescent than an adult".⁷⁹ While determining the true prevalence of harmful sexual behaviours remains challenging, partly due to varying definitions about what constitutes harmful sexual behaviours, as well as the fact much of this behaviour is never disclosed, Jesuit Social Services' practitioners and our stakeholders working in education, law enforcement and specialist services are also reporting an increase.

There is significant unmet need related to young people concerned about their sexual thoughts and behaviours, including pornography use, as well as their parents and other adults in their lives.⁸⁰ For some young people, pornography use has been identified as a contributing factor in the development of harmful sexual behaviours.⁸¹ There are also concerns that exposure to pornography may escalate to accessing child sexual abuse material (CSAM), with one study finding 65% of CSAM users first saw the material when they were children themselves.⁸²

Young people themselves describe desperately needing help to manage their use of pornography and child sexual abuse material. Research indicates that young people often do not know where to get help for their harmful sexual behaviour or their use of pornography. Lack of available services, stigma and fear of legal consequences were identified as barriers to help-seeking.⁸³

Jesuit Social Services has collaborated with academics, practitioners and young people to co-design a new, first-of-its-kind online early intervention service for children and young people at risk of engaging in harmful sexual behaviours called *What's ok? Australia*. The What's ok? Australia [website](#) – which was co-designed with young people – was launched in July 2026 with philanthropic funding. In the second half of 2026, we will launch an anonymous helpline, including live chat and phone support for young people seeking information, guidance or advice. We are currently seeking government funding to support the full roll out and evaluation.

⁷⁸ Mathews, B. et al. (2024). Child sexual abuse by different classes and types of perpetrator: Prevalence and trends from an Australian national survey. *Child Abuse and Neglect*, Vol. 147. [\[Weblink\]](#)

⁷⁹ Mathews, B. et al. (2024). Child sexual abuse by different classes and types of perpetrator: Prevalence and trends from an Australian national survey. *Child Abuse and Neglect*, Vol. 147. [\[Weblink\]](#)

⁸⁰ Haslam, D. et al. (2023). *The prevalence and impact of child maltreatment in Australia: Findings from the Australian Child Maltreatment Study: Brief Report*. Australian Child Maltreatment Study, QUT. [\[Weblink\]](#)

⁸¹ McKibbin, G. et al (2023). Pathways to Onset of Harmful Sexual Behavior. *Victims & Offenders*, 19(5): 739–777. [\[Weblink\]](#)

⁸² Nurmi, J. et al (2024). Investigating child sexual abuse material availability, searches and users on the anonymous Tor network for a public health intervention strategy. *Scientific Reports*, 14(1):7849. [\[Weblink\]](#)

⁸³ Tyler, M. et al. (2025). *What's ok? Australia Scoping Study: Development of a national online early intervention service addressing problematic and harmful sexual behaviour of young people*. Jesuit Social Services. [\[Weblink\]](#)

Case study 6: What's ok? Australia – An anonymous helpline and online resources for young people concerned about their sexual thoughts or behaviours

What's ok? Australia is a new service delivered by Jesuit Social Services which provides young people aged 13–21 years who are worried about their own or someone else's sexual thoughts and behaviours with free, safe and anonymous support to prevent harmful sexual behaviours and help them lead respectful, responsible and fulfilling lives.

What's ok? Australia arose from Jesuit Social Services' work delivering *Stop It Now! Australia* – a new national helpline funded by the Federal Government for adults concerned about their or other's sexual thoughts or behaviours towards children – and findings from the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse, which identified a gap in prevention services in Australia that work with children and young people who are worried about their sexual thoughts or behaviours before harm is caused.

What's ok? Australia comes from seven years of work in collaboration with the University of Melbourne on the Worried About Sex and Pornography Project (WASAPP).⁸⁴ WASAPP undertook a comprehensive program of research and consultation to co-design an online early intervention service for young people who have engaged in or are at risk of engaging in such behaviours. This included a systematic review, interviews with young people and national and international experts, and expert workshops and consultations, to strengthen understanding of the pathways to problematic and harmful sexual behaviour and inform effective intervention responses.

What's ok? Australia builds on the experience of online early intervention services for young people concerned about their sexual thoughts and behaviours developed in other countries, including SHORE in the UK and What's OK? in the US. Initial evaluations have shown demand for these services is strong and growing, with a substantial number of contacts from young people in Australia.⁸⁵

"I feel like if I had of gotten told a little bit earlier, I feel like then the behaviour wouldn't have happened." – Young person interviewed for service scoping study who has displayed problematic or harmful sexual behaviour

To ensure all young people and parents, carers and professionals concerned about problematic and harmful sexual behaviours can access *What's ok? Australia*, a full national roll out and evaluation should be funded under the Second Action Plans.

Efforts to increase help-seeking, including investment in helplines, must be accompanied by increased investment in services with capacity to offer intensive, long-term behaviour change and therapeutic support to ensure increased demand can be met, especially among children and young people engaging in harmful or inappropriate sexual behaviour online, such as viewing CSAM.⁸⁶ *What's ok? Australia* should operate as an accessible entry point into a broader

⁸⁴ Tyler, M. et al. (2025). *What's ok? Australia Scoping Study: Development of a national online early intervention service addressing problematic and harmful sexual behaviour of young people*. Jesuit Social Services. [\[Weblink\]](#)

⁸⁵ The pilot evaluation of SHORE found that, outside of the UK, Australia was the fourth highest country to access the service.

⁸⁶ For more information about Inform Young People, see Gannoni, A. et al. (2023). *Preventing child sexual abuse material offending: An international review of initiatives*. Research Report 28, Australian Institute of Criminology, pp 32–33. [\[Weblink\]](#)

pathway of assessment, therapeutic support and safe referral, rather than as a stand-alone information or helpline response.

In addition, while the rate of sexual re-offending among young people who have perpetrated sexual offences is typically low, there is a small subset that continue to engage in sexually abusive behaviour over time.⁸⁷ The severity and potential harm associated with persistent sexual offending within this subgroup highlights the importance of specialised treatment programs to mitigate future risk – and timely, specialist interventions are effective. A recent Queensland study found young people proceeded against for sexual offences who received treatment at a specialised service had reduced sexual recidivism of 78%–90%.⁸⁸

Recommendation 37: The Federal Government should commit to fully funding the national roll-out and evaluation of *What's ok? Australia*, an anonymous online early intervention service for children and young people at risk of engaging in harmful sexual behaviours.

Recommendation 38: Governments should ensure efforts to increase help-seeking among children and young people with problematic and harmful sexual behaviours are accompanied by increased investment in therapeutic services to ensure increased demand can be met, especially among children and young people engaging in harmful behaviours online.

See section 3.3 and recommendations 18–20 regarding the need to review criminal justice responses to online harmful sexual behaviours among young people.

6.3 Scale up investment in promising early intervention programs targeting at-risk boys and young men and adapt and expand to other cohorts and settings

It is encouraging that the Federal Government has recognised the need for early intervention with adolescents through a modest investment in early intervention trials focused on engaging at risk young men and adolescent boys at twelve trial sites across Australia. Similarly, we welcome the Victorian Government's recent extension of funding for Jesuit Social Services to deliver the Change Makers program in a small number of secondary schools for another four years to 2030 (via the National Funding Agreement) (case study 7).

However, current investment in early intervention initiatives targeting boys and young men is nowhere near sufficient to match the scale of the problem. According to research, around a third of men report that they have used intimate partner violence.⁸⁹ Research also tells us that boys who use violence are more likely to use family violence as adults.⁹⁰

Case study 7: Early intervention with at-risk boys through Change Makers

Jesuit Social Services' Change Makers program aims to empower boys and young men who are using or at risk of using violence or other harmful behaviours with the knowledge, skills and confidence to live safer, healthier lives.

⁸⁷ Cale, J. et al. (2025). A quasi-experimental evaluation of a specialized treatment service for youth adjudicated for sexual offences in Queensland. *Journal of Criminal Justice*, Vol.99. [\[Weblink\]](#)

⁸⁸ Cale, J. et al. (2025). A quasi-experimental evaluation of a specialized treatment service for youth adjudicated for sexual offences in Queensland. *Journal of Criminal Justice*, Vol.99. [\[Weblink\]](#)

⁸⁹ See section 1.3 of this submission.

⁹⁰ Boxall, H., Pooley, K. and Lawler, S. (2021). Do violent teens become violent adults? Links between juvenile and adult domestic and family violence. *Trends and issues in crime and criminal justice*, No. 641, December 2021. Australian Institute of Criminology. [\[Weblink\]](#)

Change Makers focuses on increasing protective factors like attendance at school, healthy relationships, association with pro-social peers, connection to a caring adult, help-seeking, and non-violent problem-solving skills. It also aims to decrease risk factors for violence like antisocial beliefs and attitudes, with a focus on harmful gendered beliefs.

The program partners with mainstream and specialist secondary schools and community organisations to deliver a group-based program with young people aged 12 to 25 over an 8 to 16 week period. It also strengthens the capacity of partner organisation staff – who have an ongoing relationship with the young people – to work with young people to prevent violence.

Change Makers complements the Respectful Relationships Education curriculum with a higher intensity intervention for young men and boys at greater risk of using violence, and those who are disengaged from school.

Responsiveness to the socio-political contexts in which young people live is core to the design of the program. By acknowledging that harm is learned, shaped and sustained across relational, cultural and structural systems, Change Makers is designed to recognise and respond to the complexity of young people's lives and the deep inequalities that can exist between groups.

To date, delivery of Change Makers has focused on secondary schools in Melbourne's north western and south eastern suburbs where most of the participants identify a cultural background other than "Australian", including a high proportion of boys of Middle Eastern and Pasifika backgrounds, as well as boys of African background. Change Makers is designed to be delivered across multicultural groups, and involves engagement of community and cultural partners, where appropriate. Facilitators come from culturally diverse backgrounds.

Interim evaluation findings show significant improvements in participants' emotional literacy, empathy for others, non-violent problem-solving skills, help-seeking behaviours, and understanding of gender norms and societal pressures related to masculinities. Program impacts also include stronger social connections and behavioural changes for participants, including a reduction in absenteeism and behavioural incidents at school.

"A couple months ago, I used to get in fights with my cousins and other people, but now I learned like, calm down, it's not always about fighting people, you can talk it out, see their opinion." – Student, Change Makers participant

"[The program helped with] thinking about if your actions are leading you towards who you want to be or away [from who you want to be]." – Student, Change Makers participant

There is a clear need both to scale up existing initiatives demonstrating promising practice – such as Change Makers – and to expand investment in early intervention to trial and evaluate approaches with other cohorts and in settings where we can reach boys and young men at higher risk of using violence. Key opportunities to reach at-risk cohorts include flexible learning schools, residential out-of-home care, and young fathers exposed to risk factors for use of violence.

Recognising that many young people who use or are at risk of using violence have themselves experienced violence, early intervention approaches should pair therapeutic and behaviour change support. Interventions should be relational, strengths-based, trauma- and violence-informed, culturally responsive, and tailored to the unique experiences and context of the boys and young men participating.

Recommendation 39: Governments should scale up investment in promising early intervention programs targeting at-risk boys and young men, such as Change Makers, and adapt and evaluate these programs in settings where we can reach boys and young men at higher risk of

using violence, for example in flexible learning schools, residential out-of-home care, and with young fathers exposed to risk factors for use of violence.

6.4 Invest in community strengthening as early intervention

Jesuit Social Services' team in Western Sydney points to a glaring gap in early intervention programs for adolescent boys and girls aged 12–18 that provide a safe space where young people can raise issues and concerns, and facilitators can address harmful attitudes and behaviours, and which provide a soft entry point for referrals to specialist services.

Currently there are no funded programs in the Mount Druitt area that offer community connection and support for adolescent boys without a “problem” focus (that is, focused on a young person’s substance use, gambling, contact with the justice system etc). While the Girls’ Group run by Jesuit Social Services in partnership with the Salvation Army Youth Program is partially funded by the NSW Department of Communities and Justice (case study 8), the equivalent program for boys (delivered by the Salvation Army) is unfunded.

Case study 8: Early intervention through community connection in Western Sydney

In the most recent edition of Jesuit Social Services’ *Dropping Off the Edge* report (2021), the suburbs of Willmot, Bidwill, Hebersham and Emerton in Mount Druitt in Western Sydney ranked among the ten most disadvantaged locations in New South Wales. In Willmot, family violence, prison admissions and juvenile convictions and were more than 2.5 times the NSW average.⁹¹ Social housing continues to form a significant proportion of dwellings and, while it provides affordability and security of tenure, it has also been shown to be linked with stigma, poor housing conditions, and poor perceived safety. Mount Druitt also has a high proportion of Aboriginal residents.

Jesuit Social Services has been operating in Mount Druitt since 2008, using a place-based, community development approach to support community members to develop local solutions to local problems. As part of this we deliver the Willmot Community Hub, a thriving community centre which offers a range of youth, educational, health, social and cultural activities, including a weekly community breakfast. Together with our partners, we also deliver a Girls’ Group, a Men’s Group, and Women’s and Men’s Indigenous Art Therapy Groups. Over 65% of people who engage with our services are Aboriginal.

These programs offer community connection and long-term support, with time and focus given to building relationships and trust. Whereas community members may be distrustful of formal services and not seek help from a family violence support service or attend a family violence-specific support group, they will attend a community breakfast, join a local community group or participate in activities at the community hub.

Our Groups provide a safe space where young people and adults can raise issues and concerns, and staff or volunteers can address harmful attitudes and behaviours. They also offer a soft entry point for referrals to specialist services, for example where a participant is identified as being at risk of using or experiencing violence.

For instance, Girls’ Group brings together 40 to 50 girls aged 12–17 from the local area on a weekly basis to learn, reflect and connect in safe and supportive environment. Sessions include a mix of education and soft skills on topics relevant to young people, such as mental health, consent, relationships, identity and self-confidence, alongside fun and entertainment. The

⁹¹ Tanton, R. et al (2021). *Dropping off the Edge 2021: Persistent and multilayered disadvantage in Australia*, Jesuit Social Services: Melbourne [[Weblink](#)]

program is youth-led, with facilitators creating an open, inclusive and judgement-free space where questions are encouraged.

Registrations for Girls' Group have quadrupled in 12 months, highlighting local girls' appetite for connection and belonging.

"We talk about things that really matter – like depression, anxiety, stress, and how to recognise and speak up about situations that aren't okay. It's really good that we learn about it, because some people don't get that kind of education at school or home." – Girls' Group participant

Group program participants often go on to engage in other community activities, for example volunteering at the community breakfast or getting involved in advocacy.

Our work in Western Sydney demonstrates the value of taking a community strengthening approach to early intervention and the importance of adaptation to local context. Taking a place-based approach is critical to these programs' success. This involves co-design with the community, guidance from and facilitation by cultural leaders, and partnerships with specialist services in the local area to enable reciprocal referrals.

Recommendation 40: Governments should invest in place-based community strengthening initiatives that offer community connection and long-term support, co-designed with local communities, as a form of early intervention – especially among communities that may be reluctant to seek help from specialist family violence services.

6.5 Invest in restorative responses for young people who use violence

Young people who use violence in the home or at school are increasingly attracting a legal response, with applications for intervention orders increasingly being used against children. A recent report by Victoria Legal Aid (VLA), for example, found a huge increase in the use of Family Violence Intervention Orders (FVIOs) and Personal Safety Intervention Orders (PSIOs) against children in Victoria in the last five years. At least half of FVIOs are made against young people who have experienced family violence themselves and they are often made against the wishes of the family. A high proportion of the young people subject to FVIOs are living with disability.⁹²

These children and young people need support, not court intervention. Intervention orders can have serious impacts on young people, including exclusion from their school or home, restricted access to supports and services (such as disability support), and escalation into the criminal justice system, since breaches attract criminal penalties.

There is a substantial gap in therapeutic and restorative options for young people who use violence, including those against whom an intervention order has been made or is at risk of being made. While there are a small number of therapeutic and behaviour change programs targeting young people who use violence,⁹³ coverage is patchy across jurisdictions, and the scale of service delivery is insufficient relative to need. As noted in section 6.4 above, our team in Western Sydney has highlighted the lack of support services for young men in general, including those using or at risk of using violence.

⁹² Victoria Legal Aid (2025). *Feeling supported, not stuck: Rethinking intervention orders for children and young people*. [\[Weblink\]](#)

⁹³ See No to Violence National Directory of Services [\[Weblink\]](#) and Centre for Excellence in Child and Family Welfare Adolescent Violence in the Home (AVITH) service map [\[Weblink\]](#).

There is also a gap in restorative justice options for young people who use violence.⁹⁴ This represents a missed opportunity to intervene early and offer a therapeutic and restorative response that can support healing of all parties, prevent further violence, address the root causes of conflict and violent behaviour, keep young people engaged in school, and divert them from the criminal justice system.

Research indicates that the potential benefits of restorative justice for victim-survivors of gendered violence include participation and voice, validation, offender accountability, relationship repair, and access to flexible, trauma-informed justice that can be adapted to their needs.⁹⁵

Jesuit Social Services has successfully piloted a restorative group conferencing program for young people subject to a Family Violence Intervention Order – RESTORE (case study 9). However, despite positive evaluation outcomes and a clear and increasing need, RESTORE has never received government funding.

Case study 9: RESTORE – Restorative group conferencing for young people using violence

Restorative practice is a proven method for curtailing young people's disengagement from school and reducing involvement with the criminal justice system. Restorative group conferencing and restorative practice more broadly have been shown to be effective in reducing recidivism, and in improving outcomes for victim-survivors, children who have caused harm, and their families and communities.⁹⁶

Restorative practice is a holistic process that recognises the relational impacts of offending, is grounded in community, and promotes the rights of the victim-survivor, of the child who has caused harm, and of their broader family and community.

From 2018–2022, Jesuit Social Services piloted RESTORE – a Family Group Conferencing program for young people subject to a family violence intervention order – at the Melbourne Children's Court, with funding from philanthropy.

An independent evaluation of the pilot found RESTORE filled a significant gap in the service system, and responded to families' desire for an approach to adolescent family violence that addressed the problem in a positive way.

The pilot contributed to a range of positive outcomes for the young people and families who participated, including a reduction in the young person's use of violence, and positive effects on their engagement with school, substance use and mental health issues. Of the 15 participating families, only one young person breached their Family Violence Intervention Order during the period of the program.

The evaluation recommended continuing funding for RESTORE, as well as ongoing investment in options for families experiencing adolescent family violence, including court-based, pre-court

⁹⁴ For example, intervention orders made against adolescents are outside the scope of restorative justice options currently available in Victoria.

⁹⁵ Lawler, S. (2025). Victim-survivors' reflections on best practice in restorative justice for domestic, family and sexual violence, *Trends & issues in crime and criminal justice* no. 720. Canberra: Australian Institute of Criminology. [\[Weblink\]](#)

⁹⁶ Strang, H. et al (2013). 'Restorative Justice Conferencing (RJC) Using Face-to-Face Meetings of Offenders and Victims: Effects on Offender Recidivism and Victim Satisfaction. A Systematic Review', *Campbell Systematic Reviews*; Bonett, R., Lloyd, C., & Ogloff, J. (2022). *Group Conferencing Effects on Youth Recidivism and Elements of Effective Conferences*. Centre for Forensic Behavioural Science, Swinburne University of Technology, Melbourne Australia.

and early intervention options for families to be able to access tailored integrated therapeutic restorative programs such as RESTORE.

"I know that my relationship with my mum has gotten a lot better. It's improved just so much, as well as the relationship with the rest of my family. That was kind of another [reason for doing] RESTORE – it was making those connections again." – Young person, RESTORE pilot participant

While the RESTORE pilot was focused on young people subject to FVIOs, we recommend restorative justice options be made available for all young people both subject to and at risk of any intervention order being made (including both FVIOs and PSIOs). There is also an opportunity to expand the use of restorative justice approaches with young people who engage in online sexual offending (see recommendation 20).

Recommendation 41: Governments should invest in therapeutic and restorative options for children and young people who use violence, including those subject to or at risk of intervention orders, to address conflict and harm, support healing, address young people's underlying needs, and avoid entrenching young people in the justice system.

7. Expand options for responding to people who use violence

The failure to respond effectively to people using violence at the necessary scale is putting women, children and other victim-survivors at risk. Options for responding to people who use violence are still largely limited to Men's Behaviour Change Programs (MBCPs). However, MBCPs only reach a very small number of men: No to Violence estimates that less than 3% of the estimated 2.5 million men using domestic and family violence in Australia receive any form of behaviour change intervention. Research also suggests MBCPs are not suitable for all people who use violence and vary in their effectiveness.⁹⁷ While there has been an increase in the number of perpetrator interventions available in the last decade (at least in Victoria), these are mostly limited to small pilots and programs targeting specific cohorts of men.⁹⁸

Given that most people who use violence will never engage with an MBCP, and that the motivating factors and dynamics of family and sexual violence are diverse and complex, there is a critical need to expand options for responding to people who use violence beyond MBCPs. This includes reaching more men who use violence with targeted, evidence-based programs – including programs for fathers who use violence and therapeutic programs for adults perpetrating or at risk of perpetrating child sexual abuse offences people who commit CSAM offences – as well as recognising and leveraging opportunities for violence prevention in existing programs and interventions that are not specific to, but engage with, men who have used violence, including men exiting prison or involved with the criminal justice system.

Interventions must be responsive to diversity and local context, including through genuine investment in the self-determination and capacity of Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations (ACCOs) to design, lead and govern services tailored to their communities.

Compassionate accountability should guide responses to people using violence: services should recognise trauma, disadvantage and other needs without treating them as excuses, and combine clear boundaries, risk management and consequences with support for responsibility, behaviour change and safer lives.

Further, every time a person who uses violence interacts with the service system, there is an opportunity to intervene and influence behaviour change. As highlighted in section 6 (in relation to early intervention), with appropriate training, increased information-sharing and improved coordination, the many agencies and services that interact with people using violence could work together with the justice system and specialist family violence agencies to create a “web of accountability” centred on keeping victim-survivors safe.⁹⁹

⁹⁷ Helps, N. et al (2025). *The role of men's behaviour change programs in addressing men's use of domestic, family and sexual violence: An evidence brief* (ANROWS Insights, 01/2025). ANROWS. [\[Weblink\]](#)

⁹⁸ Family Violence Reform Implementation Monitor (2023). *Monitoring Victoria's family violence reforms: Service response for perpetrators and people using violence within the family*. [\[Weblink\]](#)

⁹⁹ Australia's National Research Organisation for Women's Safety (ANROWS). (2020). *Improving accountability: The role of perpetrator intervention systems: Key findings and future directions* (Research to policy and practice, 20/2020). Sydney: ANROWS. [\[Weblink\]](#); Victorian Government (2020). “Perpetrators and people who use violence” in *Family Violence Rolling Action Plan: 2020–2023*. [\[Weblink\]](#)

7.1 Expand the suite of programmatic responses to adults who use violence, including investing in fathering programs and restorative approaches

As highlighted in section 4.3, new fatherhood offers a crucial opportunity for intervention because, for many men, the desire to be a better father is a powerful motivator for change. During this time, men are actively reflecting on their roles, are receptive to new parenting skills, and are in closer routine contact with health services than they are likely to be at any other point in their adult lives.¹⁰⁰ Pregnancy/new parenthood is also a high risk time for the onset or escalation of family violence, making effective intervention at this time with men using or at risk of using violence essential for women's and children's safety.

We see a significant opportunity to invest in evidence-based fathering programs for men who use family violence, such as Caring Dads, which is currently delivered in some parts of Victoria and Western Australia and with a small number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. At the same time, we must continue to test and rigorously evaluate other fathering programs in the Australian context and with diverse communities to improve our understanding of what works.

We also see an opportunity to expand access to restorative justice responses for people who use violence and to continue to evaluate the outcomes and effectiveness of restorative programs in the context of family and sexual violence. There are currently a small number of restorative justice programs around Australia engaging with adult victim-survivors and perpetrators of family and sexual violence.

A recent evaluation of one such restorative justice program in the ACT found a range of positive outcomes, including that persons harmed felt safer as a result of participating in the program and that participation was an integral part of their recovery journey, supporting them to move on from the violence and its impact. Persons responsible felt committed to not offending again and understood how their actions affected people, and adult participants had a lower rate of reoffending.¹⁰¹

Recommendation 42: Governments should expand the suite of programmatic responses to people who use violence, including investing in: (1) effective programs that work with fathers who have used violence; and (2) restorative approaches that can support men to be accountable for and change their behaviour and help them reset relationships in a safe way.

See also case study 9 and recommendation 41 regarding the need for investment in restorative options for young people who have used violence, such as the RESTORE program.

7.2 Scale up integrated service responses for men exiting prison that promote desistance from violence

People who use violence who come into contact with the criminal justice system and/or specialist family violence services are often experiencing a range of additional challenges, such as homelessness or risk of homelessness, mental health and substance use issues, acquired

¹⁰⁰ Chung, D. et al (2020). *Fathering programs in the context of domestic and family violence*. Child Family Community Australian Paper No. 56, Australian Institute of Family Studies. [\[Weblink\]](#)

¹⁰¹ Lawler, S. et al (2025). *Restorative justice conferencing for domestic and family violence and sexual violence: Evaluation of Phase Three of the ACT Restorative Justice Scheme*. AIC Research Reports 33, Canberra: Australian Institute of Criminology. [\[Weblink\]](#)

brain injury, and exclusion from employment and education, and may have a disability. As noted earlier in this submission, people who use violence are also often themselves victims of violence and abuse.

To be most effective in promoting desistance from violence, perpetrator interventions need to address the broader needs of people who use violence. For example, research into perpetrator engagement in behaviour change programs indicates that perpetrators without suitable accommodation are often not able to engage productively with behaviour change work or with expectations of accountability.¹⁰² But there is a gap in the availability of integrated service responses for people using violence that can provide holistic support that is responsive to participants' needs with a view to improving behaviour change outcomes.

In particular, we see an opportunity to scale up integrated service responses for people convicted of family violence offences who are exiting prison. For example, the Maribyrnong Community Residential Facility (MCRF) operated by Jesuit Social Services is an award-winning reintegration program which provides temporary accommodation and wraparound support to men leaving prison in Melbourne, and which has been shown to reduce recidivism (see case study 10).

Case study 10: Maribyrnong Community Residential Facility – Transitional housing and support for men exiting prison

Jesuit Social Services operates the Maribyrnong Community Residential Facility (MCRF), which provides temporary accommodation and wraparound support to adult men leaving prison in Melbourne who would otherwise face or be at risk of homelessness. Since opening in 2020, more than 340 men have used MCRF to transition into long-term housing and employment.

Residents agree to a code of conduct, which includes agreeing to engage with support services while living at the facility. Residents stay at the facility for 6 to 9 months while they develop the skills and strategies to successfully move into independent accommodation in the community.

MCRF provides an opportunity for individuals to address a range of issues that have contributed to their offending. With safe, secure accommodation and wraparound support, individuals can participate in education, training and paid employment; address their mental health and substance use issues; and reconnect and rebuild relationships with families, partners and children in a safe way.

For men with histories of using family violence, MCRF aligns with best practice principles of keeping the user of violence in view, increasing the safety of the victim survivors and holding the user of violence accountable for their actions. Case managers discuss the legal consequences of participants' use of family violence with them, as well as the harm their use of violence has caused their partners, children and families.

MCRF supports men to take accountability, change their behaviour, and put in place strategies to reset relationships with their families in a safe and supported way. Although MCRF is not explicitly focused on violence prevention, staff report that the material, practical and psychosocial support provided through MCRF underpins behaviour change.

A 2022 evaluation conducted by the Victorian Department of Justice and Community Safety found that residents were 30% less likely to return to prison than those leaving prison without similar housing and support.

¹⁰² Australia's National Research Organisation for Women's Safety (ANROWS). (2020). *Improving accountability: The role of perpetrator intervention systems: Key findings and future directions* (Research to policy and practice, 20/2020). Sydney: ANROWS. [[Weblink](#)]

MCRF was awarded the 2025 Community Corrections Award by the International Corrections and Prisons Association and a bronze award at the 2025 Australian Crime and Violence Prevention Awards.

Although MCRF is not explicitly focused on violence prevention, staff report that the material, practical and psychosocial support provided through MCRF underpins behaviour change. We recommend the MCRF model be expanded to support more men exiting prison, and that the model be adapted to develop and implement supported housing options for young people involved with the criminal justice system. Providing safe and stable accommodation will reduce the risk of reoffending and provide a foundation for men and boys to build a new life, address their health and mental health needs, gain employment or enrol in education or training, re-establish family and social connections, and secure appropriate long-term housing – ultimately leading to safer communities.

While there may be value in trialling approaches to working with people convicted of family and sexual violence offences during their incarceration, with the goal of preventing re-offending, “hypermasculine and hostile”¹⁰³ prison cultures present considerable challenges for therapeutic efforts aimed at addressing the risk factors for offending. The evidence of effectiveness of behaviour change programs conducted in prisons is mixed.¹⁰⁴

Unless and until prisons are transformed into more rehabilitative environments, we see more promising opportunities to prevent reoffending and promote behaviour change in the context of reintegration and rehabilitation programs for people leaving prison, like MCRF.

Recommendation 43: Governments should commit to scaling up integrated service responses for men exiting prison that promote desistance from violence, including expanding the successful Maribyrnong Community Residential Facility model to support more men exiting prison, and adapting this model to provide supported housing for young people involved with the criminal justice system.

7.3 Design and adapt interventions for people using violence that are responsive to diversity and local context, including investing in Aboriginal community-led organisations and programs

Expanding options for responding to people who use violence must include the design and adaptation of interventions for diverse populations that are responsive to local culture and context. In the Northern Territory, for example, Aboriginal men make up the vast majority of men in prison, and the majority of these men have been incarcerated for domestic and family violence-related offences. They also have higher recidivism rates than non-Aboriginal men.¹⁰⁵

Yet, while some rehabilitation and behaviour change programs are available for men involved with the criminal justice system in the Northern Territory, few are designed and delivered by and for Aboriginal men, address the systemic drivers of violence for Aboriginal men, including

¹⁰³ Ware, J., & Galouzis, J. (2019). Impact of prison climate on individuals with sexual convictions: Desistance and rehabilitation, in Blagden, N et al (eds.) (2019) *Sexual Crime and the Experience of Imprisonment*, London, UK: Palgrave MacMillan, pp35–60, cited in Day, A (2020) “At a crossroads? Offender rehabilitation in Australian prisons,” *Psychiatry, Psychology and Law* 27:6, 939–949. [Weblink], p. 942

¹⁰⁴ Jesuit Social Services (2024). *Perspectives on prevention of gender-based violence: Identifying and disrupting pathways to violence*. [Weblink], pp 34–37.

¹⁰⁵ Northern Territory Government (2018). *Pathways to the Northern Territory Aboriginal Justice Agreement*. [Weblink]

histories of child removal, racism and cultural loss, and respond holistically to the complex issues they face, including mental ill-health, substance use and suicidal distress.

The Partnership Agreement on Closing the Gap recognises that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander self-determination is key to achieving changes in the lives of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Priority Reform 2 in the National Agreement on Closing the Gap affirms that community control is an act of self-determination, and that community-controlled services lead to better outcomes for First Nations people. Yet, many Aboriginal community-controlled organisations (ACCOs) remain underfunded or face challenges as they grow, limiting their ability to provide culturally safe, responsive and innovative services.¹⁰⁶ In practice, government commissioning approaches tend to favour larger, mainstream organisations over small, local, community-led organisations and initiatives.

For example, Strong Men Talk and Alkupitja Atnerre are two complementary programs in central Australia working with justice-involved Aboriginal adult and young men respectively. They are designed and delivered by Aboriginal men with cultural authority in their communities, with whom Jesuit Social Services partners (see case study 11). Emerging evidence suggests that these programs are reducing recidivism and creating safer families and communities, but they receive limited, short-term funding.

Governments should provide long-term, flexible funding that recognises the existing cultural authority, expertise and relationships of grassroots ACCOs and programs. This will require reform of rigid, competitive commissioning approaches that disadvantage smaller, emerging organisations. It should also include resourcing for organisational strengthening on terms defined by ACCOs themselves – for example, staff training and professional development, organisational infrastructure, and data and evaluation capability – where ACCOs identify these as priorities. It could include resourcing for smaller ACCOs to partner with established organisations (larger ACCOs and/or mainstream organisations), where this is invited and led by the ACCO.

Since 2007, Jesuit Social Services has been invited to collaborate with several ACCOs and communities on a range of projects. Our experience and relationships in the NT show there is significant demand from small and emerging ACCOs for capacity- and capability-building support. ACCOs want access to staff training, professional development, organisational infrastructure, and data and evaluation capability, as well as support to navigate complex bureaucratic systems and requirements for government funding.

Additional funding for Aboriginal-led initiatives like Strong Men Talk and Alkupitja Atnerre would enable them to consolidate and expand by training more facilitators and mentors (including those with lived experience of the justice system), documenting their service models and evaluating outcomes and impact. It would also enable them to work towards building an ecosystem of supports for Aboriginal men and young men at all stages of their experience with the justice system, including earlier intervention to divert them from contact with the justice system, at court, during custody, prior to their release and post-release.

¹⁰⁶ Liddle C. et al (2024). *Family Matters: Report 2024*. SNAICC – National Voice for our Children. [\[Weblink\]](#)

Case study 11: Strengthening cultural connection for Aboriginal adult and young men to create safer families and communities in Central Australia

Strong Men Talk

Designed and developed by a local Arrernte man recognised as an Elder in his community, Strong Men Talk is a 6 week one-on-one counselling and group work program that works with Aboriginal men involved with the criminal justice system in Central Australia.

Strong Men Talk is based in Aboriginal law and customs. Using narrative therapy as a tool and tapping into participants' obligations as Aboriginal men, Strong Men Talk takes a strengths-based approach – recognising participants' cultural knowledge, strengths and skills as a foundation to reinforce their sense of identity and self-worth and allow them to rewrite their story.

Alkupitja Atnerre On Country Learning Program

Delivered by Yeyerkete Aboriginal Corporation, Alkupitja Atnerre On Country Learning Program works with young men aged 10–18 years old who are involved with or at risk of involvement with the criminal justice system and/or disengaged or disengaging from education.

The program involves Aboriginal mentors with cultural authority supporting young Aboriginal men to: connect to culture, make healthy choices, stay at school or find employment, prevent offending or re-offending, and improve connection to services. The program incorporates three main components: on-country cultural camps; individual casework outreach support; and education and life skills workshops.

Key elements of effective work with Aboriginal men

Both Strong Men Talk and Alkupitja Atnerre aim to create safer families and communities and reduce the likelihood of re-offending and reincarceration by creating a safe, non-punitive environment for participants and emphasising connection to culture, language and Country as protective factors.

The leaders of Strong Men Talk and Alkupitja Atnerre, Terry and Kenny Braun, have identified the following as important features of effective programs for Aboriginal men:

- Designed by and for Aboriginal men
- Delivered by Aboriginal men with cultural authority
- Focus on strengthening connection to culture, language and Country as protective factors
- Recognise and reinforce participants' cultural knowledge, strengths and skills
- Connect men with strong cultural mentors who can share their story and begin to build trusting relationships.

Recommendation 44: Governments should invest in the design and adaptation of interventions for people using violence that are responsive to diversity and local context. In line with the commitment to self-determination for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples under Closing the Gap, this must include resourcing to support ACCOs to scale up, including reform of government commissioning processes to support smaller, community-led initiatives and investing in strengthening ACCOs' capacity to design, lead, deliver and govern services and programs that meet the needs of their communities, for example through partnerships with established organisations.

7.4 Trial and evaluate prevention-focused therapeutic programs for people who commit child sexual abuse material offences and people with sexual thoughts towards children

Jesuit Social Services has recently been funded by the federal government to roll out Australia's first national child sexual abuse prevention helpline, *Stop it Now! Australia*. *Stop it Now!* is a free, anonymous service for adults concerned about their sexual thoughts or behaviours towards children. It is focused on acute risk management and offers brief psychoeducation and action-based support and advice. Where required and beneficial, the service will point callers towards more in-depth therapeutic and behaviour change support. However, currently there are limited options for structured, in-depth psychological intervention for people perpetrating or at risk of perpetrating child sexual abuse in Australia. Most programs or individualised intervention options operate within a tertiary prevention context, targeting people only once they have been legally detected or convicted of child sexual abuse offences.

Brief anonymous support through *Stop It Now! Australia* should connect people, where required, to funded, structured and more intensive therapeutic intervention. In particular, there is a gap in in-depth therapeutic programs specifically tailored for people who perpetrate child sexual abuse material (CSAM) offences (but not contact offences) and adults with sexual thoughts towards children. Evidence shows that programs designed for people who commit contact offences are not suitable for people with CSAM offences who have no history of contact offences, due to differences in their psychological profiles and criminogenic needs. Placing them in contact offending programs can also increase (re-)offending risk through "deviance training" (learning new offending pathways from others).¹⁰⁷

There are several international prevention programs designed for people who commit CSAM offences and/or people with sexual thoughts towards children that could be adapted and trialled in an Australian context. *Talking for Change*, for example, is a Canadian service that – like *Stop it Now! Australia* – offers an anonymous helpline and chat support for people concerned about their attraction to children, using CSAM, or engaging in online or offline offending against children. In addition – unlike *Stop It Now! Australia* – it offers free, in-person therapy, with a focus on prevention work with people concerned about their potential to offend, rather than current offending behaviours. Following an initial feasibility study,¹⁰⁸ *Talking for Change* has been funded by the Canadian Government for five years with a randomised controlled trial evaluation of the group therapy component included.

Other international programs targeting adults who perpetrate CSAM offences which are showing promising results include *Prevent It* (Sweden) – a free, online therapist-assisted cognitive behavioural therapy intervention for people with undetected CSAM offences which has been shown to significantly reduce CSAM use; *Inform Plus* (UK) – an in-person group work program for people detected for CSAM offences; and the *Coping with Child Exploitation Material Use Program (CEM-COPE Program)* – an Australian-designed and piloted in-person group program for people detected for CSAM offences.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁷ Henshaw, M. et al (2020). Enhancing evidence-based treatment of child sexual abuse material offenders: The development of the CEM-COPE Program. *Trends & issues in crime and criminal justice* no. 607. Canberra: Australian Institute of Criminology. [\[Weblink\]](#)

¹⁰⁸ Stephens, S. et al (2026). A Feasibility Study of a Canadian Child Sexual Abuse Perpetration Prevention Program. *Sexual Abuse*. [\[Weblink\]](#)

¹⁰⁹ Gannoni, A. et al (2023). *Preventing child sexual abuse material offending: An international review of initiatives*. Research Report 28, Australian Institute of Criminology. [\[Weblink\]](#)

Research indicates that a proportion of men who have sexual thoughts towards children are motivated to access help. For example, the child sexual abuse perpetration study undertaken by Jesuit Social Services and the University of New South Wales found that one-third of men who have thoughts towards children were motivated to access help.¹¹⁰ Promising programs targeting adults who experience sexual attraction towards children include *Stand Strong, Walk Tall* (New Zealand), which has been shown to reduce risk factors for and increase protective factors against future harmful sexual behaviour.¹¹¹

Interventions for undetected cohorts would require mechanisms to retain anonymity, in line with best practice guidelines for child sexual abuse prevention service development, given mandatory reporting laws and fear of criminal consequences are significant barriers to help-seeking.¹¹²

Recommendation 45: Governments should develop (as necessary), trial and evaluate prevention-focused, in-depth therapeutic programs specifically tailored for (1) adults with or at risk of child sexual abuse material offences; and (2) adults with sexual thoughts or attraction towards children. These programs would complement Stop it Now! Australia, and should ideally be available to both detected and undetected/at-risk individuals across community and correctional settings. They should draw on evidence from similar programs delivered internationally, such as *Talking for Change* (Canada), *Prevent It* (Sweden), *Inform Plus* (UK), the CEM-COPE Program, and *Stand Strong, Walk Tall* (NZ).

¹¹⁰ University of New South Wales Australian Human Rights Institute and Jesuit Social Services (2023). *Identifying and understanding child sexual offending behaviours and attitudes among Australian men*. [\[Weblink\]](#)

¹¹¹ Christofferson, S. et al (2024). *Stand Strong, Walk Tall: Prehabilitation for a better future – A sexual abuse prevention project. Phase two: Pilot delivery & evaluation*. Ministry of Social Development. [\[Weblink\]](#)

¹¹² Gannoni, A. et al (2024). Guiding principles for developing initiatives to prevent child sexual abuse material offending. *Trends & issues in crime and criminal justice* no. 696. Canberra: Australian Institute of Criminology. [\[Weblink\]](#)