



Consultation on the Second Action Plan of the National Plan to End Violence Against Women and Children 2022-2032

Submission by Lucy's Project

July 2026

Acknowledgement of Country

Lucy's Project was founded on the land of the Widjabul Wia-bal people of the Bundjalung Nation in the Northern Rivers of New South Wales. We acknowledge the continuing connection to Country of First Nations Peoples and pay our respects to Elders past and present. We value the knowledge and ways of knowing of First Nations people and stand in solidarity with First Nations people in the ongoing struggle for justice.

Acknowledgement of Victim-Survivors

Lucy's Project acknowledges the strength, resistance and resilience of people and animals who experience domestic and family violence. We recognise the trauma that is inflicted when people and animals witness their loved ones being harmed, and the immense grief and loss they feel when their loved ones are killed. We advocate for the right to safety of all human and animal victim-survivors of domestic and family violence.

Lucy's Project

Lucy's Project is a national organisation working to create a future where every person and animal across Australia is safe and can live free from domestic and family violence (DFV).

Lucy's Project's work is delivered through its CARE approach:

Collaboration to bring together survivors, policymakers, researchers, leaders and practitioners across sectors to promote coordinated and holistic responses to people and animals experiencing DFV.

Advocacy to drive legislative, policy and program changes that strengthen protections and supports for people and animals and improve accountability for people who use violence.

Research to ensure evidence-based policy reform and practice, amplify the voices of people with lived expertise and experience, and to highlight data and research gaps.

Education to increase community awareness and capability of practitioners across sectors to recognise and respond to violence perpetrated against people and animals.

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Introduction

Lucy's Project welcomes the opportunity to provide input into the Second Action Plan under the *National Plan to End Violence against Women and Children 2022-2032*. This is a critical opportunity to address systems and service gaps to ensure that women, children and animals can access the support they need to be safe and to heal and recover together.

The *National Plan* includes 'animal abuse' in a list of behaviours that perpetrators may use as part of coercive control and acknowledges that 'pet owners' face additional barriers to accessing emergency accommodation. However, there has been a lack of funded initiatives under the *National Plan* that are specifically designed and implemented to address the unique barriers faced by people with animals and animals experiencing DFV.

This submission is informed by:

- International and Australian research on DFV against people and animals
- The lived expertise and experience of victim-survivors who have experienced a person or multiple people using violence against them and their animals
- Recommendations from the *National Roundtable on Domestic and Family Violence Perpetrated against People and Animals* convened by Lucy's Project in 2025

Lucy's Project recommends that the Second Action Plan recognise women and children with animals as a priority cohort and include initiatives to prevent DFV, provide early support, and respond to this cohort and their animals as an integral part of each action under the plan. This is essential to achieve the long-term outcomes for the National Plan.

1. Systems and institutions should effectively support and protect people with animals who are impacted by gender-based violence.
2. Services and prevention programs should be effective, culturally responsive, intersectional and accessible for people with animals.
3. Community attitudes and beliefs should condemn all forms of gendered violence, including animal abuse as a form of violence against women with animals.
4. People who choose to use violence should be accountable for their actions and stop their violent, coercive and abusive behaviours against people and animals.
5. Children and young people should be safe in all settings and effectively supported by systems and services to find safety and heal and recover with their animals.
6. Women with animals should be safe and respected in all settings and experience economic, social, political and cultural equality.

Overview of the issues

73% of Australian households live with animals and many people regard animals as family members (Animal Medicines Australia, 2025). Perpetrators of DFV often threaten, harm, and kill animals to control and intimidate women and children (Australian Institute of Family Studies, 2024). Violence is perpetrated against companion animals (known as 'pets'), assistance, farmed and wild animals. In NSW, 55% of DFV and community workers said clients have disclosed that the perpetrator killed an animal or animals in the context of DFV (Domestic Violence NSW, 2020). Research has found that "more severe domestic abuse and animal abuse within the household should be markers of a high-risk environment for domestic homicide" (Diemer et al., 2024).

Women's Legal Services Australia (2024) has stated that: "Clients of Women's Legal Services frequently report intentional animal abuse as a form of sexual, domestic and family violence, whereby abusers exploit the close emotional bond shared by them, their children, and their animals, to inflict significant harm upon our clients. Clients have disclosed various abuse, torture, and death of their animals at the hands of abusers."

DFV perpetrated against animals can include physical, sexual, emotional, psychological, verbal abuse and neglect. People often delay leaving, or do not leave, a violent partner due to concerns for the safety and wellbeing of their animals (AIFS, 2024). 86% of NSW DFV and community workers said their clients expressed concern for their animals or disclosed animals experiencing violence to them, and 48% said their clients delayed leaving a perpetrator by more than a year due to fear or threat of an animal being harmed (DVNSW, 2020). People and animals face barriers to accessing the supports they need to be safe, such as animal-inclusive accommodation (AIFS, 2024).

People with animals experiencing DFV may also experience other intersecting barriers to accessing the supports they require to be safe. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, LGBTQI+ people, people living in rural areas, and households with children aged under 18 years are more likely than other Australians to live with companion animals (Animal Medicines Australia, 2022). People with disability can be subjected to DFV perpetrated concurrently against them and their assistance animals. The 2024 *Report of the Rapid Review of Prevention Approaches* included a case study of a woman with disability whose partner committed sexual assault and forced her to have sex with him by repeatedly harming her assistance dog.

The *National Risk Assessment Principles for DFV* recognise that "cruelty and harm directed to pets and other animals can indicate risk of future or more severe violence" (ANROWS, 2018). The *National Principles to Address Coercive Control in Family and Domestic Violence* recognise that "a perpetrator may harm animals, particularly when a victim-survivor has a strong emotional connection to a pet or when the animal has a service or support role for the person" (Commonwealth of Australia, 2023).

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Voices of People with Lived Expertise and Experience

The following experiences are shared with the informed consent of the participants.

Each person generously shared their time with Lucy's Project to help policy makers, practitioners, and parliamentarians better understand the lived realities of family violence when animals are part of the family.

Their stories and insights are shared to ensure people with lived expertise and experience are listened to in national conversations about reform, to recognise their advocacy for systems change, and to honour their beloved animals who have been harmed and killed.

Pseudonyms have been used instead of real names for this submission.

Ellis*

Can you tell us about your own and your animals' experiences of family violence?

We had a dog called Milo*. My son named him. Milo* was my son's dog. He got him for his birthday when he was about 10 or 11.

He was the most beautiful dog you can possibly imagine. He was a Staffy cross Ridgeback. He was huge, but he was the gentlest little soul. He was a genuine part of our family.

My daughter was only about two, maybe younger, and he would play with her in the most gentle ways. When they were playing, he would get down to where she was. He would not stand up tall. He would come down to her level because she was sitting or crawling, and he would play with her there.

When he wanted your attention, he did not bark. He would just come up and sniff at you, like, "Give me some attention." He was adorable. My son would take him out walking. Milo* was one of those animals who was part of the family but never needed any kind of training. He was an amazing, amazing family member. He was divine.

He was removed eventually, and she was charged.

My perpetrator was extreme. If you were talking about family and domestic violence, she perpetrated all the tick boxes of domestic violence. Milo* was just one example of one of our animals affected by domestic violence. There were a number of them.

Even after I left, she murdered some of our animals. She broke into our home and killed them. While we were in a relationship, she did that a number of times. I did not know at the time, but I found out some of the stories later.

With Milo*, the main thing was neglect.

We were in a rental property and the roof collapsed because of mould, so we had to go and stay at my parents' house, about five or ten minutes away. I was working full-time, and her job was to go and feed Milo*, look after him and take him for a walk. My parents lived in an apartment building, and Milo* was not allowed in the building, so we had to leave him at the house. It was only meant to be for two weeks. She was supposed to go there twice a day. My son's school was around the corner, so it was part of the routine. It was a very easy thing to do.

When I went back to the house we were renting, Milo* was gone. There was a note on the door from the RSPCA. I rang them. My ex was charged with neglect and cruelty to animals.

When Milo* was removed, I wanted him back. The RSPCA said they were happy to give Milo* back to me, but that I had to pay for all the fees. I was leaving domestic violence and my ex was stealing all my money out of my account, I just couldn't afford it. I was really, really upset about it. I remember crying to the woman at the RSPCA and she said she would keep me updated on what happens with Milo* and make sure to find him a really good family, and she did. She sent me photos of him with his new family.

My son was devastated. He had lost his best friend and his family.

I still think about Milo* all the time, even now, 16 years later.

But that was just one animal's example.

She killed a dog of mine once because she said he was getting more attention from me than she was. I was not even with her at the time. It was another period where I had left.

She killed my son's guinea pigs. My son had this guinea pig and my ex froze him to death. It was because my son loved him. She told him that he'd done it, that he had left his guinea pig out in the middle of the night outside. I think about the impact that has on him that he thinks he killed that animal and the trauma that would create for him. Sometimes it was purely for her own enjoyment to hurt them. Other times it was abuse behaviour towards us.

Once my son had a rabbit, and he was in love with this rabbit. We came home, and she said he had died. Then she tipped him out and said, "This must have been what killed him." A dessert spoon with a long handle fell out. It was a tiny, tiny rabbit. The handle was probably 15 centimetres long. It was not until years later that I spoke to a vet and asked, "Is that even possible?" The vet said no. Someone had put it there.

There are lots of those kinds of stories.

After I left, that behaviour continued. She was breaking into my house and doing things. We moved far away because we thought that would be enough to stop her from turning up at the property and stealing things, but it did not work. She kept turning up.

My daughter was about six or seven and really wanted a pet, so we got rabbits. We thought rabbits would be a good starting point to teach her how to look after an animal. We had a huge enclosure, about 25 metres, with a little house. One day we could not find them. We

thought maybe they had somehow run away. We searched and searched. We spoke to neighbours. We could not find them.

Months later, a friend who had been living in a granny flat on our property told me he needed to tell me something. He said he watched her kill our rabbits and that he was so shocked and traumatised that he didn't want to talk about it, that he didn't feel like he could.

There are lots of stories of different animals. They were very much used. I am a soft soul, and they were all used. Early in the relationship, I had a dog called Teak*. He disappeared one day, and he had never disappeared before. She did not like having animals around because it meant the attention was not on her.

My daughter is obsessed with animals. She had a dog at her mum's house, and her mum broke its legs because my daughter liked it so much. There were different versions of it. Killing animals because it brought her some kind of sick pleasure. Killing them because we were giving them too much attention, because she was not getting attention.

I have had a lot of tears about it over the years.

My kids were just devastated. It caused them loss, constant loss.

How can services and systems improve the safety and recovery of people with animals?

The RSPCA worker knew. She recognised that my ex was a perpetrator. She saw the warning signs, but there was no way for her to action what she was seeing. But she still took me aside and said something and that was really powerful. Someone recognising the domestic violence so that you're not the only person seeing it, that it's real.

If only the RSPCA worker had an avenue of reporting and an avenue of making contact with service providers or police... We have all these systems in place with the police where we have high risk perpetrators where that's recognised, but we aren't bringing animals into that picture. We aren't bringing the rest of the family into the picture.

The other part of that is that I had nowhere, even if I did have that money, I had nowhere to have him. I was going to have to get a rental property and I lived in a city, so I couldn't afford much and he was a big guy. It's all those steps that create barriers to leaving.

Animal abuse should be considered evidence of family violence.

My ex has just gone on to have more and more animals, so there's no consequence for her actions. She abused and neglected the first animal she got.

There needs to be a reporting process for those service providers who are not working directly with victim-survivor, they could be part of recognising and addressing domestic violence.

If an RSPCA worker recognises that there's animal abuse, then that should be considered evidence of family violence and should be utilised. The report should go directly to police to assess and investigate for domestic violence.

If our systems recognised it and had a way to report to each other, we'd be much more effective at addressing crimes and we'd be protecting a lot more families. If there is a charge made in relation to animal abuse, then there should be an investigation into domestic violence that is automatically initiated as part of that process.

If someone has charges for domestic violence, you can find out somehow. That system should include animal abuse because we know that it's a risk factor for family violence.

We need to change our laws so that we recognise that animals are victims of family and domestic violence. If we have a reporting system for children, we should have it for animals as well.

One of the challenges I see is that we don't take violence and abuse of animals very seriously. People are constantly being allowed to continue having animals even after being charged with crimes against animals.

For some people, the animals keep them alive. Animals are who they tell everything to.

Animals are just part of my family. We don't value how much animals give to someone's life enough in our systems and in our laws. That's not right, because most of us feel like they're part of our families.

Suicide rates after leaving domestic violence are very high and animals are definitely a protective factor. For children, when they don't quite understand what's going on, their animal might be the person they talk to.

There should be some supports out there for animals. You know, services will often put animals down because they've got aggressive behaviour or they're a risk because of their fear. We should be funding that support for animals so that they can recover. We don't put

humans down because they've got poor behaviours after being in domestic violence. Why do we do it to animals?

We should have a lot more supports for someone who has an animal, like crisis accommodation and veterinary care. If an animal needs treatment after leaving domestic violence, how can someone afford that if they're struggling to find housing and to manage the relationship with the perpetrator?

Violet*

Can you tell us about your own and your animals' experiences of family violence?

What I loved about my animals was that their love was all encompassing and they were always there. Regardless of what went on, they still wanted to be with me. Being in a place where there was not a lot of love, they created that love and that safe place. It was like a softness in all the hardness. It is really hard to explain what animals mean, especially in that kind of environment. Lots of people have a close affiliation with animals, but when you are going through pretty much daily violence, it's a different and stronger connection.

I don't actually remember all the names of my animals, especially my birds because so many of them were killed. It's really hard talking about animals. I can talk about anything else but get me talking about animals and I always get choked up. As a child, I had a fluffy cat. My poor cat ran away because of all the abuse, and we never knew what happened. That was pretty devastating. I've had birds, cats and dogs. I attempted to have mice but wasn't allowed. I would talk to bugs in the tree, these really pretty little bugs. I really loved butterflies, and there were often butterflies around. So really, it didn't even just have to be my pets. It was broader than my pets.

When I was younger, the form of discipline was to hit the animal, rub their face in whatever they had done, or rub their face in their food if they did not eat it. You feel it's not normal, but you don't know that it's not normal behaviour. In family violence, it can be squeezing their faces too hard and calling it love. "Oh, they're so wonderful," but you're like "That's hurting them, stop!" It was much harder to put my finger on it with him.

With my ex, there was lots of coercive control and more covert behaviour. It was things like brushing the cats too hard. It was confusing because at one level he would express how much he loved them, yet at another level it was almost like they were a weapon to use against me. It was not always obvious. I remember him brushing them and me saying, "You're hurting them." He would say, "No, I just have to get this mat out." And I was like, "No, you're actually hurting them!"

I've seen animals used in so many ways to control people and exert power. If you did not comply, something really bad would happen. Later in life, you only need the threat of it because you've already experienced the worst of it. I cannot cope with seeing an animal hurt at all. The thought of any animal being injured or hurt is really, really distressing for me.

When the bushfires happened and that koala came across the screen, that image came up for me. I still can't watch that footage because I hadn't remembered just how bad it was. These were young boys, maybe teenagers or late primary school age, using violence against animals. When I was younger, I saw people hurt animals to show power. I was very little, and it was very traumatising to watch. I saw animals have their limbs broken and set on fire.

The worst part is being a child. You think, I should have done something to help, I should have saved them. But you literally are a child, what can you do to someone who's bigger and stronger and who's also threatening violence to you? When I was younger, my brother threatened my birds. He was very jealous of me and that had been set up in the family dynamic. He did experience horrific violence. I remember him threatening my birds and snapping my bird's neck. I could never work out why my birds kept dying. Everyone used to tell me they only last six months.

We need to understand how important the relationships between children and young people and animals are. The connection is so strong and so powerful.

How can services and systems improve the safety and recovery of people with animals?

So many people don't leave because they don't want to leave their animals. It was pretty devastating when I was thinking that I need to leave but I can't have my animals.

There need to be more places that can keep people and animals together. We've changed some of the rental laws which is really important, but I'm sure there's still people getting rejected for their animals. Any service that provides housing for people should provide room for animals.

For a lot of people, their animals are their children. For a lot of people, they are their lifeline.

With a disability, an animal is even more important. While my cat can't fetch things for me, she's told me that I've left the stove on, I've left a light on, or I've left a window open. We think only dogs can do that, but cats can do that as well. For people with disability, an animal is even more important because sometimes you don't have capacity to do stuff and some of them can do it for you. Some of them can be with you when you don't have that capacity to move, or you're not having a great day physically.

I'd love to see what they have in New Zealand here. Somewhere people can take their animals and know they're safe and that their animals are being supported through the trauma they've experienced as well. We don't recognise trauma for animals, and I'd like to see that happen.

I found out that animals are not listed as victims of violence on AVOs and I'd like to see that change. Animals are victims of violence as well. It should be known how many people and animals have been affected by a perpetrator.

Police need to know the signs of abuse in animals. I don't know if they've really picked that up as a clue, especially around coercive control.

RSPCA and places like that need to have more authority to criminalise what's happening and jail people if necessary.

Systems and services need to intervene earlier, as soon as there's a sign of any kind of animal abuse.

I remember my brother used to use a magnifying glass to burn ants. If he was given help at that point, the whole family system might have been uncovered. If people are hurting animals, we need to ask why are they hurting them? What's happening for them? Especially if they're young people. Maybe they're modelling what has been modelled to them.

We should include animals in every system and policy and build them into everything that we do. When people present at hospital, we should ask about animals. Because we know it's the first sign of lethality if people are hurting animals, so being more preventative and aware early on makes a huge difference to the outcomes that could happen.

There needs to be attitudinal and cultural change. Some people have never had animals so it's hard for them to understand. There could be advertising that embraces how important animals are to people and talk about domestic and family violence in a trauma-informed way.

Therapy with your animals would be really important, especially for kids and young people. You could voice your feelings through the animal. Something where that relationship is really acknowledged would be really good. The healing of both together.



We need education in schools. Schools are doing a lot to bring in mandatory education about domestic and family violence, sexual assault and healthy relationships. We have to bring animals into that.

Sarah*

Can you tell us about your own and your animals' experiences of family violence?

I have had three animals impacted by family violence across my life.

I had my dog growing up. His name was Boots*, and he was my childhood best friend. Later, when I was with my ex, I had a dog called Daisy* and a cockatiel called Remy*.

I have one really clear memory from when I was a child. My father had bipolar and mental health issues and drug and alcohol issues. When he would get angry, sometimes he would kick our dog.

I've got a very clear memory of when he kicked Boots* down the stairs. I remember being really distraught. I heard the howl. I was probably about nine years old at the time. Boots* was getting a little bit older and a little bit arthritic at the time. After he was kicked down the stairs, his arthritis started really playing up, and he walked with a limp after that.

Back then, in the late 70s or 80s, you didn't take your dog to the vet. That was probably the one I remember most from childhood. I could never understand why my father took out his anger like that. Looking back, I can see that family violence was part of his life, and the ripple was on my mum, myself, my brother and, unfortunately, my beautiful dog Boots*. Boots* had black fur and four white feet. That is why he was called Boots*. He was a rescue dog. My dad found him in the factory where he worked and brought him home one day. Boots* had a pretty tough life.

Fast forwarding to my relationship with my ex... One night, he came home about a month after my birthday and presented me with a puppy. This was Daisy*. She was a Maltese cross Shih Tzu.

I was eight months pregnant at the time, and I really did not want to have a baby and a puppy, but so be it. I grew to love Daisy* very much.

When my ex would get really angry and start kicking off, being aggressive towards me, Daisy* would hide. She was smart. She would hide from him.

One time we were having a massive argument, and he was being really verbally and physically abusive towards me. He stormed out of the house and then came back in

saying, “Where’s Daisy*? I want Daisy*.” I was terrified he was going to harm her because I knew that he had actually killed his previous partner’s dog. So I knew he had that in him.

Luckily for Daisy*, she hid so well. She must have only been about 6 months old. He couldn’t find her. She came out after he’d gone, and she gave me the best cuddles after that.

Even after I finally left my ex, Daisy* was very nervous, very wary around men. If men raised their voices, she would shake and go hide. She had witnessed the violence as well.

I also had Remy*, my hand-reared cockatiel. He would sit on my shoulder or sit next to me when he wanted me to scratch him under his chin. He was very friendly. Unfortunately, when I left my ex, I couldn’t carry his cage. A friend had come to pick me up and I had to leave my bird behind. I was so distraught having to leave him for a couple of days, but I was too scared to go back to the house. It was a safety issue. I went back a couple of days later and unfortunately the bird became really aggressive. I had to give him away to someone else. I was really distraught because Remy* was my little buddy.

It was one of the reasons I stayed a bit longer, because I had nowhere to go with pets.

When I left my ex and I couldn’t take my dog with me, I had to foster her out through a friendship circle. Daisy* was maybe 7, 8 months old. When Daisy* came back to me months later, it took us a while to rebuild our bond. I carried all the guilt when I think about when I had to leave her behind as well.

I’m very lucky that I had a village of help and support. I couch surfed for three months, going to different friends’ and friends of friends’ houses. I’m very grateful for them taking me in as well as my son who was 6 months old, but they didn’t have the capacity to take in my bird or my dog.

People don’t realise how attached you are to your animals when you’re living with domestic violence. They’re your safety and your therapy. You can give the animal a cuddle and for that moment in time, you forget about all the chaos going on in your life. You’re connected to that animal. Because I didn’t have any family or friends at that point that I could be honest with, she was my therapy dog.

Animals are also a witness of the violence. They get impacted by the violence they hear and see.

I love all animals. I think they make the world a better place. I've got a cat and fish at the moment. Animals calm you down. When I come close to my fish, they think I'm feeding them so they're all very happy to see me when I wake up in the morning.

Animals settle our nervous system. They give you something to get up and care for. Whatever's going on in your life may be chaotic, but if you have an animal relying on you, it gives you purpose and moments of positive connection and joy in life again.

How can services and systems improve the safety and recovery of people with animals?

There should be refuges that are inclusive of animals and that recognise the bond that animals and people have. There's a lot of anxiety for the care of the animal and a lot of guilt as well. You feel like you have to abandon the animal when they've been such a support to you.

If the person who's been impacted by the domestic violence, child and animal can't be housed together, there should be some way they could still be connected. Whether it's getting together for play dates, visits in the park or even a video chat so they still have that animal in their lives.

There should be an awareness campaign about the impact of violence on animals so that perpetrators know their violence does impact on the animals and the ways in which it does. Maybe some narrative stories. It would also depend on the perpetrator to reflect and do some restorative practice work. It would be lovely to see, wouldn't it? Them apologising to their animals. Imagine that!

Unfortunately, there is a very fractured system. Often the police don't take the statement on board or miss the animal part of the statement. When statements are being made about family violence, the animal should be included like a child. They really are fur, feather, hoof and scale babies!

There needs to be the political willpower to make some investment in this space. People do stay because of their animals. I know I stayed because I didn't know where I could go with my animals.

We know that when perpetrators harm animals, they can go on to use even more lethal behaviours. There's a real correlation between animal cruelty and violence against humans.

Education campaigns through schools, jails or community campaigns would be really worthwhile. I know that the rehabilitation of some perpetrators can happen.

Sophie*

Can you tell us about your own and your animals' experiences of family violence?

When I left family violence, we had a lot of pets. Our dog was beautiful. We got her as a puppy, and she was born within a couple of months of my youngest son. They were very close. They were inseparable. When we moved out, he kept her.

My youngest son was deeply, deeply impacted by that. It affected his self-worth. He became quite depressed. It's been years and it still affects him today.

On top of all the anxiety and stress, it created a very deep level of sadness because the children didn't get to see our dog much. After we left, she was used to manipulate the kids into spending time with their dad. He would say they could spend time with her if they spent time with him. It was deeply harmful psychologically.

There were other aspects to it as well. He was really cruel and he didn't take care of her properly. When we were living on the same property, she would sometimes come to us and I would feed her because I knew she was hungry. Her stomach would be growling. It was about control. He would not feed her because he did not want to, and because he knew it caused us distress.

The children were aware this was happening. It was really distressing for them to experience cruelty to her and feel powerless about that. After we left, he would not let her come and live with us.

She was a beautiful, really intelligent dog. If she loved you, it was wholehearted. She was really good friends with our beautiful cat. Our cat was so strongly bonded to us. She just wanted to be wherever we were and doing whatever we were doing. A really sweet, gentle soul. We also had horses, chickens and ducks.

The animals were one of the factors that made it really difficult to leave.

I left multiple times.

The horses would still be there, and I would have to sneak back when he was at work or at night when he was sleeping to make sure they were fed, had water, and knew that we loved them.

It was incredibly stressful trying to work out when he was there and when he was not there, so I could go and care for them, and to find places where they could be until we got long-term housing. It was a very difficult thing for us.

My daughter is particularly bonded with the horses. She's loved horses her whole life. The horses were a really significant part of her life. They were where she went when she was sad or distressed. They were her mainstay, her connection and her support. It was really important that we found somewhere for them. It was not until we found someone who could help us with the horses that we could actually leave properly.

Because we had to move into town, we could not have the horses with us anymore. We had to drive to different places where they were kept, and we had to split them up.

We also had to rehome most of our chickens and ducks. The children had grown up with them, looked after them and spent time with them. There are so many baby photos of them wandering around with their favourite chicken or duck under their arm, or driving around in little pedal cars with the chickens sitting next to them.

The kids love them. The animals were a really big part of their world. That was a big factor in whether we could actually leave or not leave.

When we finally left, having to coordinate all of those things was a really big transition. Luckily I knew a lot of people, so it helped us to find places for them. It was a big change having to let go of all those familiar parts of our family.

It was really hard for all of the children in different ways. I saw the effects it had on them. They became more depressed, and their whole world became much smaller.

When you are isolated from loved ones, family and friends because of abuse and coercive control, pets become even more essential. Those relationships are enduring and sustaining. They can be the only sustaining relationships you have in the hard times with domestic violence.

I do not think I would have survived as a child without my relationships with my pets. I understand how strong those relationships were for my children, and I could see how losing their pets and losing contact with our dog impacted them.

How can services and systems improve the safety and recovery of people with animals?

I wish I had known about Lucy's Project back then. I think more information needs to be out there for survivors, so people know there are organisations that can help with rehoming pets or keeping pets safe until people find suitable accommodation. It is an ongoing issue for people trying to find accommodation where they can have their pets.

It is a big issue that keeps people staying in unsafe relationships longer than they want to, and longer than is safe, because they don't see any alternatives and they don't know where to turn to for that support.

I know there's been changes to the law where landlords aren't allowed to refuse you because of having pets, but I don't think that always works. There's still a lot of discrimination around people with pets.

So many people are homeless with their pets because they won't accept accommodation where they can't have their pets. They don't want to give their pets up. Their pets are too important to them, their family. There aren't enough refuges that can assist by taking in pets at the same time.

I also want there to be a safe space and a therapeutic space for pets that either need temporary accommodation or who no longer have homes.

We need wraparound services to provide holistic healing and casework to support whatever assistance people need for all aspects of life. We need to really be collaboratively taking care of women and children and pets.

We need to educate police on family violence. It needs to be a huge part of their training. A lot of victims are wary about accessing help from police and the court system, including the family courts, need a lot more training on identifying the true perpetrators.

We need to educate through the school system as well. We need education so everyone is aware of what coercive control is, including the harm and neglect of animals. Systems need to recognise the deep impact of coercive control.

National Roundtable on Domestic and Family Violence Perpetrated against People and Animals

In 2025, Lucy's Project organised and convened a national roundtable to collaboratively develop recommendations for policy, program and legislative change to improve the safety and wellbeing of people and animals experiencing DFV across Australia.

The roundtable was held across three sessions in Melbourne, Sydney and online in October and November 2025. It brought together survivors, researchers, advocates and practitioners across the DFV, homelessness, community, animal welfare and veterinary sectors. More than 100 people from over 80 organisations across Australia participated.

The roundtable discussions were focused on the following topics:

1. What has been achieved across Australia in the past 5 years?
2. What is the future we want to create in the next 5 years and beyond?
3. What legislative changes and legal supports could improve the safety and wellbeing of people and animals experiencing DFV?
4. What policy and program changes could improve the safety and wellbeing of people and animals experiencing DFV?
5. What are the data and research gaps in relation to DFV perpetrated against people with animals and animals?
6. How can we prevent and end DFV perpetrated against people with animals and animals?

This submission sets out the findings and recommendations from the national roundtable that are relevant to the consultation questions.

Lucy's Project will release the roundtable report and launch a *National Roadmap to Prevent and End Family Violence against People and Animals* in August 2026 at Australian Parliament House.

The report and roadmap will be made available on the Lucy's Project website at www.lucysproject.com.

Organisations that participated in the National Roundtable

Academic and Research Institutions

- Australia's National Research Organisation for Women's Safety
- Australian Institute of Family Studies
- Deakin University
- Griffith University
- James Cook University
- RMIT University
- Southern Cross University
- University of Canterbury
- University of Melbourne
- University of New South Wales

Animal Welfare and Veterinary Sector

- Animal Management in Rural and Remote Indigenous Communities
- Animal Welfare League NSW
- Australian Veterinary Association
- Cat Protection Society NSW
- Cherished Pets
- Companion Animal Network Australia
- Don't Forget My Pet
- Getting to Zero
- Lort Smith Animal Hospital
- Lost Dogs Home
- Meraki Services
- Paws and Recover
- PetRescue
- Pets in the Park
- RSPCA ACT
- RSPCA Australia
- RSPCA NSW
- RSPCA QLD
- RSPCA VIC
- RSPCA WA

- Safe Pets Safe Families
- Second Chance Animal Rescue
- Sydney Dogs and Cats Home
- Veterinary and Community Care

Community and Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence Sector

- Aboriginal Women and Children's Crisis Service
- Australian Local Government Association
- Australian Multicultural Women's Alliance
- Beryl Women's Refuge
- Centre Against Violence
- Domestic Violence NSW
- DV Connect QLD
- Embolden SA
- Engender Equality TAS
- FAMS
- Federation of Ethnic Communities' Councils of Australia
- Foodbank SA & NT
- Full Stop Australia
- FVREE
- Hope and Heal
- Illawarra Women's Trauma Recovery Centre
- Immigrant Women's SpeakOut Association
- Immigration Advice and Rights Centre
- Law Institute of Victoria
- Legal Aid NSW
- LGBTQ Domestic Violence Awareness Foundation
- Local Government Association NT
- Local Government NSW
- Mary's House
- Municipal Association of Victoria
- National Women's Safety Alliance
- Ngarrunga Refuge and Link Wentworth
- No To Violence
- NSW Police

- Older Women's Network
- People with Disability Australia
- Plus Community
- Relationships Australia
- Safe and Equal VIC
- Safe Steps
- Stepping Out
- Sydney Women's Counselling Centre
- The Salvation Army
- The Women's Cottage
- WESNET
- Women with Disabilities Australia
- Women's Community Shelters
- Women's Legal Service NSW
- Women's Legal Services Australia
- Women's Legal Services QLD
- Women's Safety Services SA

Corporate and Philanthropic

- Commonwealth Bank of Australia
- Mookeye and Momot Consulting
- Petstock Foundation
- White & Case Law Firm

Please note:

Individuals and representatives from the organisations listed contributed their insights which have informed the findings and recommendations from the National Roundtable.

The participation of the individuals does not mean that the organisations they represented, or work for, have endorsed the recommendations in the roundtable report.

Responses to the Consultation Questions

Lucy's Project's responses to the consultation questions are based on:

- The lived expertise and experience of victim-survivors who have experienced a person or multiple people using violence against them and their animals
- Recommendations from the *National Roundtable on Domestic and Family Violence Perpetrated against People and Animals* convened by Lucy's Project in 2025

In recognition that the *National Plan to End Violence against Women and Children 2022-2032* is a joint Australian, state and territory government initiative and that the Action Plan will detail specific Commonwealth, state and territory government actions and investment, this submission makes recommendations for all levels of government.

Priority Area 1: Victim-Survivors

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

Leadership of people with lived expertise and experience

National Roundtable Finding:

- People with animals who have experienced DFV understand the specific system and service gaps that need to be addressed and should be listened to.

National Roundtable Recommendation:

- Embed the leadership of people with lived experience and expertise throughout design, implementation, governance, monitoring and evaluation of policies and programs for people and animals experiencing DFV.

Animal-inclusive accommodation and housing

National Roundtable Finding:

- There is a significant lack of animal-inclusive emergency, crisis and transitional accommodation and long-term housing that will accommodate people and animals experiencing DFV together across Australia.

National Roundtable Recommendations:

- Increase funding for animal-inclusive emergency, crisis and transitional accommodation for people and animals experiencing DFV. This funding could cover modifications to existing accommodation and the construction of new accommodation, as well as the costs of food, veterinary care, and transport.
- Review public, community and affordable housing strategies and policies to ensure that housing is animal-inclusive and enable people with animals and animals to find safe long-term housing together.

Insights from people with lived expertise:

*Sarah**

- “People do stay because of their animals. I know I stayed because I didn’t know where I could go with my animals.”

- “There should be refuges that are inclusive of animals and that recognise the bond that animals and people have. There’s a lot of anxiety for the care of the animal and a lot of guilt as well. You feel like you have to abandon the animal when they’ve been such a support to you.”
- “If the person who’s been impacted by the domestic violence, child and animal can’t be housed together, there should be some way they could still be connected. Whether it’s getting together for play dates, visits in the park or even a video chat so they still have that animal in their lives.”
- “Animals settle our nervous system. They give you something to get up and care for. Whatever’s going on in your life may be chaotic, but if you have an animal relying on you, it gives you purpose and moments of positive connection and joy in life again.”

*Violet**

- “So many people don’t leave because they don’t want to leave their animals. It was pretty devastating when I was thinking that I need to leave but I can’t have my animals.”
- “Any service that provides housing for people should provide room for animals.”

*Sophie**

- “It is an ongoing issue for people trying to find accommodation where they can have their pets... It is a big issue that keeps people staying in unsafe relationships longer than they want to, and longer than is safe, because they don’t see any alternatives and they don’t know where to turn to for that support.”
- “So many people are homeless with their pets because they won’t accept accommodation where they can’t have their pets. They don’t want to give their pets up. Their pets are too important to them, their family. There aren’t enough refuges that can assist by taking in pets at the same time.”
- “We need wraparound services to provide holistic healing and casework to support whatever assistance people need for all aspects of life. We need to really be collaboratively taking care of women and children and pets.”

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

Crisis accommodation and care for animals

National Roundtable Finding:

- Animal welfare organisations are under-resourced and are operating at or beyond capacity to support animals who have been surrendered or abandoned, and this limits their capacity to support animals experiencing crises like DFV.

National Roundtable Recommendation:

- Fund animal welfare organisations to provide emergency and crisis accommodation and to coordinate foster care for animals experiencing and impacted by DFV so that they are cared for until they can be safely reunited with their family members.

Insights from people with lived expertise:

*Sophie**

- “I also want there to be a safe space and a therapeutic space for pets that either need temporary accommodation or who no longer have homes.”

*Violet**

- “I’d love to see what they have in New Zealand here. Somewhere people can take their animals and know they’re safe and that their animals are being supported through the trauma they’ve experienced as well. We don’t recognise trauma for animals, and I’d like to see that happen.”

*Ellis**

- “There should be some supports out there for animals. You know, services will often put animals down because they’ve got aggressive behaviour or they’re a risk because of their fear. We should be funding that support for animals so that they can recover. We don’t put humans down because they’ve got poor behaviours after being in domestic violence. Why do we do it to animals?
We should have a lot more supports for someone who has an animal, like crisis accommodation and veterinary care. If an animal needs treatment after leaving domestic violence, how can someone afford that if they’re struggling to find housing and to manage the relationship with the perpetrator?”

Animal-inclusive rental housing

National Roundtable Finding:

- Residential tenancy laws vary across Australia. People with animals continue to face discrimination and barriers to accessing rental housing, including at the application stage.

National Roundtable Recommendation:

- Further reform residential tenancy laws to prevent discrimination against people with animals and to make it easier for people with animals experiencing DFV to find a safe rental home.

Insights from people with lived expertise:

*Sophie**

- “I know there’s been changes to the law where landlords aren’t allowed to refuse you because of having pets, but I don’t think that always works. There’s still a lot of discrimination around people with pets.”

*Violet**

- “There need to be more places that can keep people and animals together. We’ve changed some of the rental laws which is really important, but I’m sure there’s still people getting rejected for their animals.”

What current or emerging issues should the Second Action Plan address, including in relation to coercive control?

Animal victim-survivors of DFV

National Roundtable Findings:

- Animals are not recognised as victim-survivors of DFV in their own right. Under DFV laws across Australia, violence against animals is viewed as a form of DFV against human victim-survivors.
- Animals are classified as property under the law. This enables people using family violence to perpetrate systems abuse and exert power and control over human and animal victim-survivors by claiming ownership of an animal.
- People who use violence may be registered as the owner of an animal or listed on the microchip of the animal, reflecting a dynamic of power and control.

- Without evidence of legal ownership, a human victim-survivor may be exposed to civil or criminal liability if they take an animal or animals with them. This is the case even if they are concerned for the safety of their animal or animals.
- People who use violence may harm farmed and wild animals as part of DFV, including by withholding food, shelter and water. However, farmed and wild animals are often overlooked in DFV legislation and law enforcement responses.
- Legal definitions of assistance animals vary across jurisdictions and can be narrow in scope. This can mean a lack of protection for people with disability with assistance animals who do not meet the legal definitions in their jurisdiction.

National Roundtable Recommendations:

- Recognise animals as sentient beings and acknowledge in legislation that animals are victim-survivors of DFV in their own right.
- Amend DFV legislation to enable local courts to make family violence orders for animals as protected parties and victim-survivors of DFV in their own right, and to determine ownership of animals.
- Amend legislation and policy relating to microchipping and registration to enable the person listed as the owner of an animal on a microchip or the registry to be changed where there is evidence that the animal is being subjected to, or impacted by, DFV and the listed owner is the person using DFV against the animal or their family members.

Insights from people with lived expertise:

*Ellis**

- “We need to change our laws so that we recognise that animals are victims of family and domestic violence.”

*Violet**

- “I found out that animals are not listed as victims of violence on AVOs and I’d like to see that change. Animals are victims of violence as well.”

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

People with animals from diverse communities

National Roundtable Finding:

- Research indicates First Nations people, people with disability and LGBTIQ+ people, people in rural and regional areas and families with children are even more likely than other Australian families to live with animals.

National Roundtable Recommendation:

- Ensure availability and accessibility of culturally responsive and trauma-informed services for First Nations people, people with disability, LGBTIQ+ people, people from migrant and refugee backgrounds and people in rural and regional areas with animals, including children and young people and older women.

Insights from people with lived expertise:

*Violet**

- “With a disability, an animal is even more important. While my cat can’t fetch things for me, she’s told me that I’ve left the stove on, I’ve left a light on, or I’ve left a window open. We think only dogs can do that, but cats can do that as well. For people with disability, an animal is even more important because sometimes you don’t have capacity to do stuff and some of them can do it for you. Some of them can be with you when you don’t have that capacity to move, or you’re not having a great day physically.”

People with large companion and farmed animals

National Roundtable Finding:

- Women and children living with large companion and farmed animals in outer metropolitan, rural, regional and remote areas face significant additional barriers to accessing accommodation for them and their animals.

National Roundtable Recommendation:

- Fund support for people with large companion and farmed animals in rural, regional and remote areas to access accommodation for them and their animals as well as food, veterinary care and transportation.

Insights from people with lived expertise:

*Sophie**

- “The animals were one of the factors that made it really difficult to leave.

I left multiple times.

The horses would still be there, and I would have to sneak back when he was at work or at night when he was sleeping to make sure they were fed, had water, and knew that we loved them.

It was incredibly stressful trying to work out when he was there and when he was not there, so I could go and care for them, and to find places where they could be until we got long-term housing. It was a very difficult thing for us.

My daughter is particularly bonded with the horses. She’s loved horses her whole life. The horses were a really significant part of her life. They were where she went when she was sad or distressed. They were her mainstay, her connection and her support. It was really important that we found somewhere for them. It was not until we found someone who could help us with the horses that we could actually leave properly.

Because we had to move into town, we could not have the horses with us anymore. We had to drive to different places where they were kept, and we had to split them up.

We also had to rehome most of our chickens and ducks. The children had grown up with them, looked after them and spent time with them. There are so many baby photos of them wandering around with their favourite chicken or duck under their arm, or driving around in little pedal cars with the chickens sitting next to them.

The kids love them. The animals were a really big part of their world. That was a big factor in whether we could actually leave or not leave.”

Priority Area 2: Prevention and early intervention

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

Animal-inclusive intake, risk assessment and safety planning

National Roundtable Findings:

- Intake, risk assessment, risk management and safety planning tools used by DFV, homelessness and community services do not always include questions about animals, or threats and harm to animals.
- Neglect and threats to neglect animals is a significant form of violence against animals in DFV contexts, including against companion and farmed animals, but this is often overlooked in service and law enforcement responses.

National Roundtable Recommendation:

- Ensure intake, risk assessment and safety planning tools and frameworks include questions about companion, farmed, wild and assistance animals, and harm, threats to harm, and neglect of animals.

Insights from people with lived expertise:

*Sarah**

- “We know that when perpetrators harm animals, they can go on to use even more lethal behaviours. There’s a real correlation between animal cruelty and violence against humans.

*Violet**

- “Systems and services need to intervene earlier, as soon as there’s a sign of any kind of animal abuse.”

Animal-inclusive respectful relationships education

National Roundtable Findings:

- Societal values and attitudes towards animals shape how animals are treated. The normalisation of violence against animals contributes to a lack of accountability for the use of violence against animals.
- The primary prevention of DFV against animals would require a long-term, systemic approach that addresses the underlying drivers of violence.
- There are opportunities to embed recognition of animals as sentient beings who deserve to live free from violence within existing primary prevention of gender-based violence and DFV initiatives.
- Respectful relationships education could include education around consent and respectful relationships with animals and foster people's empathy and compassion towards animals.
- There is a need for more research to understand how the underlying drivers and reinforcing factors of gender based violence relate to the drivers and reinforcing factors of violence against animals.

National Roundtable Recommendation:

- Resource the inclusion of animal welfare education and education to foster empathy and compassion towards animals, into respectful relationships programs across early childhood, schools, universities, vocational education and workplaces.

Insights from people with lived expertise:

*Violet**

- “We need education in schools. Schools are doing a lot to bring in mandatory education about domestic and family violence, sexual assault and healthy relationships. We have to bring animals into that.”

*Sophie**

- “We need to educate through the school system as well. We need education so everyone is aware of what coercive control is, including the harm and neglect of animals. Systems need to recognise the deep impact of coercive control.”

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

Community education on DFV against people and animals

National Roundtable Finding:

- There is generally a lack of community awareness and understanding of the link between DFV perpetrated against people and animals.

National Roundtable Recommendations:

- Promote community education and media reporting to increase understanding of:
 - animals as family members and victim-survivors of DFV in their own right
 - DFV perpetrated against people with animals and animals
 - the legal protections and support services available for people and animals

Insights from people with lived expertise:

*Sarah**

- “There should be an awareness campaign about the impact of violence on animals so that perpetrators know their violence does impact on the animals and the ways in which it does.”
- “Education campaigns through schools, jails or community campaigns would be really worthwhile. I know that the rehabilitation of some perpetrators can happen”

*Violet**

- “There needs to be attitudinal and cultural change. Some people have never had animals so it’s hard for them to understand. There could be advertising that embraces how important animals are to people and talk about domestic and family violence in a trauma-informed way.”

*Sophie**

- “More information needs to be out there for survivors, so people know there are organisations that can help with rehoming pets or keeping pets safe until people find suitable accommodation.”

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

The 'One Welfare' approach

National Roundtable Finding:

- The understanding that the safety and wellbeing of people and animals is deeply interconnected, as reflected in the 'One Welfare' approach, could be integrated into primary prevention of gender-based violence and DFV frameworks.

National Roundtable Recommendation:

- Adopt a 'One Welfare' approach across departments to recognise that the safety and wellbeing of people and animals is interconnected.

Priority Area 3: Children and young people in their own right

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

Children and young people's relationships with animals

National Roundtable Findings:

- People and animals who are experiencing DFV have close and significant relationships. Enabling human and animal victim-survivors to maintain their connection supports their safety, wellbeing, healing and recovery. This is especially important for children and young people and older women for whom animals may be their primary source of companionship, emotional support and connection.
- There is a lack of research on the relationships between children and young people and animals, the impact of animal abuse on children and young people, and the role of animals in supporting the healing and recovery of children and young people.

National Roundtable Recommendation:

- Fund DFV and animal welfare services to support people and animals to heal and recover from DFV, and to maintain their relationship if they are temporarily unable to be housed together. These support services should be available and accessible to children and young people and older women.
- Commission research to address research gaps on the relationships between children and young people and animals experiencing DFV.

Insights from people with lived expertise:

*Ellis**

- “For some people, the animals keep them alive. Animals are who they tell everything to.”
- “Suicide rates after leaving domestic violence are very high and animals are definitely a protective factor. For children, when they don't quite understand what's going on, their animal might be the person they talk to.”

*Violet**

- “The worst part is being a child. You think, I should have done something to help, I should have saved them. But you literally are a child, what can you do to someone who’s bigger and stronger and who’s also threatening violence to you?”
- “We need to understand how important the relationships between children and young people and animals are. The connection is so strong and so powerful.”
- “Therapy with your animals would be really important, especially for kids and young people. You could voice your feelings through the animal. Something where that relationship is really acknowledged would be really good. The healing of both together.”

*Sophie**

- “The children were aware this was happening. It was really distressing for them to experience cruelty to her [the family dog] and feel powerless about that.”
- “The kids love them. The animals were a really big part of their world. That was a big factor in whether we could actually leave or not leave.

When we finally left, having to coordinate all of those things was a really big transition. Luckily I knew a lot of people, so it helped us to find places for them. It was a big change having to let go of all those familiar parts of our family.

It was really hard for all of the children in different ways. I saw the effects it had on them. They became more depressed, and their whole world became much smaller.

When you are isolated from loved ones, family and friends because of abuse and coercive control, pets become even more essential. Those relationships are enduring and sustaining. They can be the only sustaining relationships you have in the hard times with domestic violence.

I do not think I would have survived as a child without my relationships with my pets. I understand how strong those relationships were for my children, and I could see how losing their pets and losing contact with our dog impacted them.”

Priority Area 4: People who use violence

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

Information sharing between police and animal welfare law enforcement agencies

National Roundtable Finding:

- There are significant inconsistencies across jurisdictions regarding information sharing between police and animal welfare enforcement agencies. This means that critical information about whether a person has previously been alleged, or found to have used violence against people and animals is not shared between agencies.

National Roundtable Recommendations:

- Establish a framework for information sharing and cross-reporting about DFV and animal abuse between police and animal welfare law enforcement authorities.
- Investigate potential establishment of a national database to enable reporting and information sharing about DFV perpetrated against people and animals across all jurisdictions.

Insights from people with lived expertise:

*Ellis**

- “The RSPCA worker knew. She recognised that my ex was a perpetrator. She saw the warning signs, but there was no way for her to action what she was seeing. But she still took me aside and said something and that was really powerful. Someone recognising the domestic violence so that you’re not the only person seeing it, that it’s real.

If only the RSPCA worker had an avenue of reporting and an avenue of making contact with service providers or police... We have all these systems in place with the police where we have high risk perpetrators where that’s recognised, but we aren’t bringing animals into that picture. We aren’t bringing the rest of the family into the picture.”

Accountability and behaviour change for people who use violence against animals

National Roundtable Finding:

- People who use violence against animals should be held accountable and supported to change their behaviour.

National Roundtable Recommendation:

- Fund and resource behaviour change programs for people who use DFV to address violence against animals, including harm, threats to harm, and neglect of animals.

Insights from people with lived expertise:

*Violet**

- “I remember my brother used to use a magnifying glass to burn ants. If he was given help at that point, the whole family system might have been uncovered. If people are hurting animals, we need to ask why are they hurting them? What’s happening for them? Especially if they’re young people. Maybe they’re modelling what has been modelled to them.”

*Sarah**

- “There should be an awareness campaign about the impact of violence on animals so that perpetrators know their violence does impact on the animals and the ways in which it does. Maybe some narrative stories. It would also depend on the perpetrator to reflect and do some restorative practice work. It would be lovely to see, wouldn’t it? Them apologising to their animals. Imagine that!”
- “Education campaigns through schools, jails or community campaigns would be really worthwhile. I know that the rehabilitation of some perpetrators can happen”

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

Reporting of DFV against animals

National Roundtable Finding:

- There were a range of different views on whether mandatory or permissive reporting schemes should be introduced. For example, whether social workers should be required or supported to report animal abuse, and whether veterinarians should be required or supported to report DFV against people.

National Roundtable Recommendation:

- Consult with stakeholders about how to support practitioners across the DFV, community, homelessness, veterinary and animal welfare sectors to report DFV against people and animals, and to investigate whether to introduce a framework for permissive or mandatory reporting of DFV against people and animals.

Insights from people with lived expertise:

*Ellis**

- “There needs to be a reporting process for those service providers who are not working directly with victim-survivor, they could be part of recognising and addressing domestic violence.

If an RSPCA worker recognises that there's animal abuse, then that should be considered evidence of family violence and should be utilised. The report should go directly to police to assess and investigate for domestic violence.

If our systems recognised it and had a way to report to each other, we'd be much more effective at addressing crimes and we'd be protecting a lot more families. If there is a charge made in relation to animal abuse, then there should be an investigation into domestic violence that is automatically initiated as part of that process.

If someone has charges for domestic violence, you can find out somehow. That system should include animal abuse because we know that it's a risk factor for family violence.

We need to change our laws so that we recognise that animals are victims of family and domestic violence. If we have a reporting system for children, we should have it for animals as well."

Data collection on DFV against animals

National Roundtable Finding:

- There is no system for identifying and collecting data on complaints and charges of animal abuse made by police or animal welfare law enforcement agencies that are DFV related.

National Roundtable Recommendation:

- Introduce a system or code for police and animal welfare law enforcement agencies to collect data on complaints and charges of animal abuse that are DFV related.

Insights from people with lived expertise:

*Ellis**

- "Animal abuse should be considered evidence of family violence. My ex has just gone on to have more and more animals, so there's no consequence for her actions. She abused and neglected the first animal she got..."

One of the challenges I see is that we don't take violence and abuse of animals very seriously. People are constantly being allowed to continue having animals even after being charged with crimes against animals."

*Violet**

- "It should be known how many people and animals have been affected by a perpetrator."

Priority Area 5: System Integration and Workforce

What would make the biggest difference in creating a more coordinated and connected system response for people affected by violence and people using violence?

Referral pathways and cross-sector collaboration

National Roundtable Findings:

- DFV, homelessness and community service practitioners often do not know or have access to information about services where they can refer people with animals for animal-inclusive accommodation and housing, or their animals.
- There is a lack of cross-sector collaboration between DFV, homelessness, community, animal welfare, veterinary services and the police.

National Roundtable Recommendations:

- Establish and maintain a national or state/territory directory of services that will support people with animals and animals, including animal-inclusive DFV refuges.
- Fund and support cross-sector collaboration between DFV, homelessness, community, animal welfare, veterinary services and police, including networks and communities of practice.

National Collaboration to Prevent and End Family Violence against People and Animals

Lucy's Project established the National Collaboration in May 2026. It is an interdisciplinary, cross-sector network of survivors, researchers, policymakers, advocates, and practitioners across the DFSV, homelessness, community, animal welfare and veterinary sectors.

The National Collaboration's objectives include:

- Coordinate national advocacy for funding, policy, legislative and practice change.
- Create space for collective learning, discussion and collaboration.
- Enable sharing of information, research, knowledge and expertise.
- Promote shared understanding of key issues and potential solutions.
- Highlight emerging and better practices and models across sectors.
- Raise awareness of the links between violence against people and animals.
- Amplify the voices and experiences of human and animal victim-survivors.
- Support accountability for people who use violence against humans and animals.

What workforce capabilities, supports, or conditions are most needed to strengthen prevention, early intervention, response and recovery?

Workforce capabilities across sectors

National Roundtable Findings:

- DFV, homelessness and community service practitioners are not trained to recognise or respond to DFV against animals.
- Veterinarians, local council rangers, animal management officers and animal welfare inspectors, are not trained to recognise or respond to DFV.
- Police, lawyers and judicial officers need to be trained on the intersection of DFV perpetrated against people and animals. This limits their ability to respond to complex cases involving DFV perpetrated against people and animals.
- Social and health workers may include client or patient disclosure of animal abuse in case notes but are generally not required to record the disclosure of animal abuse in a data collection system nor to report animal abuse to any authority.

National Roundtable Recommendation:

- Provide education and training for practitioners across the DFV, homelessness, community, health, child and family, disability, aged care, legal, law enforcement, animal welfare, veterinary and animal management sectors on how to recognise and respond to people and animals experiencing DFV. This training should include how to refer people and animals for support and how to record evidence of DFV against people and animals.
- Introduce mandatory education and training for police and lawyers and to provide access to education and training for judicial officers on DFV perpetrated against people and animals.
- Provide practice guidance and training for social and health workers on how to record disclosures of animal abuse in data collection systems and how to report animal abuse.
- Universities, vocational education providers and professional associations to embed recognition of animals as sentient beings and victim-survivors of DFV in their own right into education and professional development across social work, veterinary science and law.

Insights from people with lived expertise:

*Violet**

- “When people present at hospital, we should ask about animals. Because we know it’s the first sign of lethality if people are hurting animals, so being more preventative and aware early on makes a huge difference to the outcomes.”
- “Police need to know the signs of abuse in animals. I don’t know if they’ve really picked that up as a clue, especially around coercive control.”

*Sophie**

- “We need to educate police on family violence. It needs to be a huge part of their training. A lot of victims are wary about accessing help from police and the court system, including the family courts, need a lot more training on identifying the true perpetrators.”

*Sarah**

- “Unfortunately, there is a very fractured system. Often the police don’t take the statement on board or miss the animal part of the statement. When statements are being made about family violence, the animal should be included like a child.”

Lucy's Project's Education Program

In 2024-2025, Lucy's Project delivered 24 education sessions to 691 practitioners working in the DFV, homelessness, community, animal welfare, veterinary and local government sectors. This program was funded by the NSW Government.

The education sessions covered:

- 'Understanding DFV Perpetrated against People and Animals'
- 'Providing Animal-Inclusive Intake, Risk Assessment and Safety Planning'
- 'Implementing Animal-Inclusive Practice and Supporting Recovery and Healing'
- 'Legal Considerations for Human and Animal Victim-Survivors'

Over 90% of participants who completed the feedback survey reported that they have a better understanding of animal-inclusive intake, risk assessment and safety planning and feel more confident in having conversations with clients about their animals.

Participant testimonials:

- *"Another fantastic training from Lucy's Project with accurate, up-to-date, evidence based information, with progressive ideas and strategies for structural change."*
- *"The practical steps for supporting people to safely leave with animals was incredibly valuable and touched on lots of points I hadn't thought about before."*

Participants also stated that they would update their intake, risk assessment and safety planning processes and make changes to their practices as a result of the knowledge they had gained through the education sessions.

In addition to these education sessions, Lucy's Project presented to over 1000 participants at webinars, forums and conferences in 2024-2025. Participants included practitioners working across police, DFV, child and family, community, legal assistance, court advocacy, animal welfare and veterinary services, and local councils.

On-demand education sessions are available on the Lucy's Project website:

<https://lucysproject.com/education/>

Lucy's Project's Conference Program

Lucy's Project has organised conferences over the years to increase understanding of DFV perpetrated against people and animals.

The most recent conference was held online in 2024 and brought together people working across the DFV, community, homelessness, veterinary and animal welfare sectors.

Speakers included 33 researchers and practitioners from Australia, Aotearoa New Zealand, Canada and the USA. 150 people registered for the conference and at least 115 people attended each session.

Participants reported:

- The Conference increased my understanding of emerging and better practices in supporting people and animals experiencing family violence - 95%
- The Conference increased my understanding of the different ways human/animal services and law enforcement can support people and animals - 91%
- The Conference increased my understanding of how the safety of people and animals is interconnected and why it's important to enable people and animals to recover and heal together - 91%
- The Conference provided ideas for actions that I can apply in my workplace - 95%

Participants said they would take actions based on ideas gained at the conference:

- Advocate for policy and practice changes to improve the safety of people and animals experiencing family violence.
- Review and update intake forms and safety planning and referral processes to include animals at an early stage.
- Develop an emergency boarding and foster support program and expand outreach activities.
- Develop a research project and apply for research funding, drawing on ideas from and connections made at the conference.
- Explore how veterinary staff can be supported to identify, respond and refer people experiencing family violence.
- Share information with colleagues about recent and upcoming changes to legislation relevant to people and animals experiencing family violence.

A report on the 2024 Conference is available on the Lucy's Project website:

<https://lucysproject.com/2024-conference-report/>

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

Data and information sharing across sectors

National Roundtable Finding:

- Data collected in the DFV, health, homelessness, community, animal management, animal welfare sectors and police about DFV perpetrated against people and animals is not integrated nor shared across systems.
- Privacy legislation creates actual or perceived barriers to data and information sharing between agencies and departments.

National Roundtable Recommendation:

- Review privacy legislation and guidelines to facilitate data and information sharing across sectors and service systems where safe and appropriate with the purpose of improving responses to human and animal victim-survivors of DFV.

What supports do specialist and universal services need to provide inclusive, accessible and responsive services?

Funding and cross-sector support

National Roundtable Recommendations:

- Increase funding for animal-inclusive emergency, crisis and transitional accommodation for people and animals experiencing DFV.
- Fund animal welfare organisations to provide emergency and crisis accommodation and to coordinate foster care for animals experiencing and impacted by DFV.
- Ensure availability and accessibility of culturally responsive and trauma-informed services for First Nations people, people with disability, LGBTIQ+ people, people from migrant and refugee backgrounds and people in rural, regional and remote areas with animals, including children and young people and older women.
- Deliver guidance and support for services across sectors to update organisational policies, procedures and practices to recognise and respond to DFV against people and animals.

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

Data and research gaps

National Roundtable Findings:

- There is a lack of prevalence and incidence data in Australia on DFV perpetrated against animals and animal abuse as part of DFV perpetrated against humans.
- There are many critical research gaps including the impact of DFV on animal victim-survivors and responses that support animals to be safe and heal and recover, and the nature and extent of perpetration of DFV against companion, assistance, farmed and wild animals, and animals of different species.
- Data collection relating to DFV perpetrated against animals and animal abuse as part of DFV perpetrated against humans tends to be ad hoc, fragmented or limited to individual organisation or service provider level data.
- People with animals are often turned away from services, or decline to access a service, because they cannot be accommodated together with their animals. However, the number of people with animals and animals experiencing DFV who cannot access accommodation and other supports is not being systematically captured in Australia.
- Animal welfare, animal management and veterinary services generally do not have requirements or systems to capture data, record evidence, or make reports relating to animals impacted by DFV.
- The national Personal Safety Survey includes threats to harm or harm to pets under the broad category of 'emotional abuse'. There is no specific and separate category of 'animal abuse'.

National Roundtable Recommendations:

- Review and update data collection and reporting systems to capture data on the prevalence and incidence of DFV perpetrated against animals and animal abuse as part of DFV perpetrated against humans.
- Commission research on DFV perpetrated against animals and animal abuse perpetrated as a part of DFV against humans to improve prevention, early support and response strategies.
- Include a question in the national Personal Safety Survey about animal abuse as a specific and separate form of violence.

- Introduce a requirement and provide adequate funding for DFV, animal welfare and animal management services to collect data on:
 - the number of people with animals and animals who were supported,
 - the number of people with animals who were turned away or who declined a service because the service was unable to support their animals,
 - reports and disclosures of DFV perpetrated against animals.

Conclusion

Lucy's Project's submission is grounded in the recognition that:

- Every person and animal has the right to be safe from domestic and family violence.
- The safety, wellbeing and recovery of people and animals is interconnected.
- People and animals should be supported to be safe and heal and recover together.

For many people, animals are family members.

*“Animals are just part of my family. We don't value how much animals give to someone's life enough in our systems and in our laws. That's not right, because most of us feel like they're part of our families.” – Ellis**

*“People don't realise how attached you are to your animals when you're living with domestic violence. They're your safety and your therapy. You can give the animal a cuddle and for that moment in time, you forget about all the chaos going on in your life. You're connected to that animal.” – Sarah**

“What I loved about my animals was that their love was all encompassing and they were always there. Regardless of what went on, they still wanted to be with me. Being in a place where there was not a lot of love, they created that love and that safe place. It was like a softness in all the hardness.

*It is really hard to explain what animals mean, especially in that kind of environment. Lots of people have a close affiliation with animals, but when you are going through pretty much daily violence, it's a different and stronger connection.” – Violet**

Respecting and valuing the relationships that people have with their animals is key to providing client-centred and trauma-informed care.

Animals should also be recognised as victim-survivors of DFV in their own right.

Systems and services should respond to people and animals together, rather than expecting victim-survivors to navigate separate and disconnected systems.

*“We should include animals in every system and policy and build them into everything that we do.” – Violet**