



MELALEUCA AUSTRALIA

Submission to the Australian Government

National Plan to End Violence against Women and Children 2022–2032

Consultation Response on the Second Action Plan

A multicultural systems perspective from the Northern Territory



Preamble

Melaleuca Australia welcomes the Australian Government's continued commitment to ending domestic, family and sexual violence through the development of the Second Action Plan under the National Plan to End Violence against Women and Children 2022–2032.

We commend the Australian Government for undertaking this important consultation and for recognising the value of engaging with victim-survivors, communities and specialist organisations to strengthen Australia's collective response.

We appreciate the opportunity to contribute to the development of the Second Action Plan and offer this submission in the spirit of partnership and continuous improvement.

1. Why Melaleuca Australia's Input Matters

Effective responses to domestic, family and sexual violence begin with trust. People cannot seek help from services they do not know, do not understand, or do not believe will understand them. Prevention begins even earlier—with a sense of belonging, connection and safety within families and communities.

For almost thirty years, Melaleuca Australia has worked alongside multicultural communities in the Northern Territory to build that trust. It is from this position of trusted relationships, specialist expertise and community leadership that we make this submission.

Melaleuca Australia is the Northern Territory's specialist humanitarian and multicultural organisation, supporting migrants, refugees, humanitarian entrants and culturally and linguistically diverse communities to rebuild their lives, participate fully and realise their potential. Guided by our vision of a world where everyone belongs, we work at both operational and strategic levels: delivering direct services, coordinating systems, building community leadership, producing evidence and advising governments on the policies and structures needed for a cohesive and inclusive Northern Territory.

Today, Melaleuca delivers an integrated continuum of specialist services that few organisations in Australia provide. Nationally, we are one of five organisations contracted by the Australian Government to deliver the Humanitarian Settlement Program, supporting newly arrived refugees to establish safe, independent and connected lives in Australia. We are also one of eight specialist organisations funded to deliver the Program of Assistance for Survivors of Torture and Trauma, providing specialist recovery services for people who have experienced torture, persecution and conflict before arriving in Australia.

Melaleuca is also the specialist multicultural family services provider and the Refugee and Migrant Health Coordinator, supporting culturally and linguistically diverse individuals and families through prevention, early intervention, intensive family support and coordinated access to health care. We host the Refugee and Migrant Legal Service in partnership with Refugee Legal, auspice Multicultural Youth NT (MyNT) as the Territory's multicultural youth peak body, and co-designed and deliver the Northern Territory Government's Skilled Worker Engagement and Support Program, connecting skilled migrants before they arrive and supporting successful settlement, employment and long-term retention in the Territory.

Together, these services enable Melaleuca to walk alongside multicultural communities across the entire settlement journey—from pre-arrival engagement, humanitarian settlement and trauma recovery, through family support, health, legal assistance, employment, youth leadership and long-term community participation. This breadth of engagement has

established Melaleuca as one of the Northern Territory's most trusted organisations within multicultural communities.

That trust is central to this submission.

Every day, multicultural women, men, young people, families, community leaders and multicultural organisations seek Melaleuca's support because they know they will be heard, respected and understood. Our relationships extend beyond individual clients to established and emerging communities, faith leaders, multicultural organisations and grassroots community networks. These trusted relationships provide insights that are rarely captured through administrative data or mainstream service systems. Communities share not only their experiences of domestic, family and sexual violence, but also the barriers that prevent people from seeking help and the solutions they believe will make the greatest difference.

Melaleuca's role extends well beyond direct service delivery. We are widely recognised as a go-to organisation for multicultural matters in the Northern Territory, bringing together governments, service providers, community organisations, leaders and people with lived experience to improve policy, strengthen collaboration and influence reform. We sit on the Minister's Advisory Council on Multicultural Affairs and chair its Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence Subcommittee. We chair the Northern Territory Settlement Services Network, contribute advice to NT Health through multicultural health and domestic, family and sexual violence advisory structures, and provide specialist advice across health, education, child protection, policing, settlement and community services.

Our leadership also extends to social cohesion and human rights. Melaleuca champions a Northern Territory in which cultural diversity is understood as a strength and every person can participate with dignity, safety and belonging. We chair and co-convene the Northern Territory Human Rights Awards, work with institutions and communities to strengthen anti-racism and inclusion, and create practical opportunities for people from different backgrounds to meet, learn from one another and contribute to the Territory's shared civic life.

We also invest in evidence and strategic policy development. Melaleuca facilitates community-led consultations, partners with independent researchers and translates lived experience into practical recommendations for government and services. This includes the Building Belonging report, developed with Impact Institute from consultations with multicultural communities, organisations, leaders and young people across the Territory. The report identified recurring priorities including language access, service coordination, youth empowerment, community leadership, anti-racism and genuine multicultural participation in governance and planning. This research function ensures that our policy advice is grounded not only in service experience, but in the voices and aspirations of the communities we serve.

Through Mela Kulcha, our multicultural social enterprise, and a broad range of community leadership, cultural exchange and public education initiatives, we actively strengthen social cohesion. These initiatives create opportunities for culturally and linguistically diverse communities—particularly women and young people—to build confidence, celebrate culture, develop leadership and engage meaningfully with the wider community. They reflect our belief that belonging is not an abstract concept: it is built through everyday relationships, shared spaces, recognition, participation and the freedom to contribute without having to diminish one's identity.

Melaleuca also works to strengthen the capability of the broader service system. We deliver cultural humility, cultural inclusion and trauma-informed practice training across

government, community and non-government sectors, including frontline agencies such as the Northern Territory Police Force. By increasing cultural understanding and reducing unconscious bias, we help organisations create safer, more inclusive and more effective responses for multicultural communities. Lasting change requires not only supporting communities, but ensuring the systems around them are equipped to respond with respect, understanding and cultural safety.

The evidence presented in this submission therefore reflects more than almost three decades of direct service delivery. It draws on Melaleuca's role as the Territory's Refugee and Migrant Health Coordinator, specialist settlement and torture and trauma service, multicultural family service, community convener, social cohesion champion, research partner and strategic adviser. It is informed by our participation in the Minister's Advisory Council on Multicultural Affairs, our leadership of its Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence Subcommittee and the NT Human Rights Awards, our advice to health and other government systems, and our ongoing relationships with multicultural communities across the Territory. This combination of operational experience, community trust, research and systems leadership gives Melaleuca a distinctive view of where violence remains hidden, where systems are failing, and what must change.

2. The Northern Territory Context

The Northern Territory presents a unique environment for the implementation of Australia's National Plan to End Violence against Women and Children. While home to less than one per cent of Australia's population, it is one of the nation's most culturally and linguistically diverse and geographically dispersed jurisdictions. Alongside the world's oldest continuing cultures, the Territory is home to people from more than 160 countries, speaking over 100 languages and representing a broad range of migration pathways, including humanitarian entrants, skilled migrants, family migrants, international students and temporary visa holders.

The Northern Territory Government's *Development of a Multicultural Strategy for the Northern Territory* consultation paper provides a clear profile of the Territory's multicultural population. Drawing on the 2021 Census, it identifies the largest overseas-born populations as originating from the Philippines, England, India, New Zealand, Nepal, China, Indonesia, Vietnam, Sri Lanka and the United States. The Territory's most widely spoken languages other than English and Australian Indigenous languages include Greek, Nepali, Tagalog, Mandarin, Filipino, Malayalam, Vietnamese, Punjabi, Indonesian and Thai. These communities are well established and contribute significantly to the Territory's social, cultural and economic life.

This diversity is reflected across the broader population. The Northern Territory Anti-Discrimination Commission reports that the Territory has a population of approximately 265,500 people, of whom 30.8 per cent identify as Aboriginal, 21.8 per cent were born overseas and 32.7 per cent speak a language other than English at home. Approximately 60 per cent of residents live in Greater Darwin, while the remaining 40 per cent live across regional, remote and very remote communities. Together, these data demonstrate that multicultural communities are not a marginal population—they are a defining feature of the contemporary Northern Territory.

This diversity will continue to grow. The Northern Territory Government's *Workforce Development in the Northern Territory* consultation paper estimates that the Territory will require approximately 14,000 additional workers over the next five years to support economic growth and service delivery. It acknowledges that this demand cannot be met through local

workforce development alone and that interstate and international migration will play an important role in addressing workforce shortages.

Not all of these additional workers will be migrants. However, the scale of the projected workforce demand, together with the Territory's reliance on international migration, means the number of multicultural workers, partners, children and families living in the Northern Territory is expected to continue growing. The Territory is not simply attracting workers—it is building communities.

This demographic change presents significant opportunities. It also creates a clear responsibility to ensure that the systems supporting multicultural communities mature alongside population growth. Economic planning cannot be separated from the social infrastructure required to support settlement, health, housing, education, family safety, belonging and long-term retention. As the Territory intentionally builds a larger multicultural population, it must also intentionally build multicultural systems capable of meeting the needs of that population.

Growing Visibility, Limited Voice

The Northern Territory Government is reviewing the Multicultural Policy for the Northern Territory 2020–2025 and has consulted on the development of a new 10-year Multicultural Strategy and supporting three-year Action Plan. The proposed strategy recognises belonging, empowerment, safety, respect, diversity and inclusion as guiding principles. It also identifies equitable access to health and wellbeing services, sustainable language services and the prevention of domestic, family and sexual violence as areas for action.

These commitments are important. However, Melaleuca Australia's experience is that the policy architecture, specialist infrastructure and practical capability supporting multicultural communities have not yet developed at the same pace as the population. Significant gaps remain in whole-of-government coordination, language access, specialist multicultural services, community representation, research, data collection, workforce capability and accountability. There is also no dedicated multicultural health policy providing a coordinated framework for equitable access and culturally responsive health systems.

This creates an emerging policy paradox. As multicultural communities become increasingly visible within the Territory's population and workforce, their experiences can remain comparatively invisible within policy, service planning and administrative data. Population growth is occurring more rapidly than investment in the institutions, leadership and policy architecture needed to ensure multicultural communities are heard, represented and able to influence the systems that affect their lives.

Without strong and coordinated multicultural policy infrastructure, agencies receive limited guidance on how to design services that respond to different cultural, linguistic and migration experiences. Multicultural perspectives may therefore be inconsistently reflected in policy development, prevention initiatives, service design, workforce capability and system accountability. Emerging issues often become visible only when trusted community organisations, leaders or people with lived experience bring them forward.

As the Territory intentionally grows its workforce through interstate and international recruitment, it will also welcome more women, children and families from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. Some will experience domestic, family and sexual violence. Workforce growth must therefore be matched by investment in the social and policy

infrastructure that enables people to access safety, participate independently in decision-making and receive culturally responsive support.

Building a multicultural workforce must be accompanied by building multicultural systems.

Violence That Remains Hidden

The Northern Territory experiences the highest rates of domestic, family and sexual violence in Australia. The Northern Territory Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence Reduction Strategy 2025–2028 acknowledges that violence in the Territory has for too long been hidden, underreported and misunderstood, and sets out a program of reform to build a stronger, more accountable and integrated domestic, family and sexual violence service system.

Domestic, family and sexual violence exists within every community. Multicultural communities are no exception. However, Melaleuca Australia's experience is that violence affecting multicultural women and children frequently remains hidden from formal systems. Women may face additional barriers to recognising violence, disclosing it and engaging with services, including language, social isolation, financial dependence, visa-related misinformation used as coercive control, fear of authorities, unfamiliarity with Australian law, previous experiences of persecution or state violence, cultural shame and fear of losing family or community support.

The Territory's geography compounds these challenges. Large distances, dispersed populations, workforce shortages, housing pressures and limited specialist services outside major centres can all reduce access to safety and support. For migrants and refugees, these barriers may be further intensified by limited family networks, unfamiliar systems and experiences of torture, displacement, conflict or prolonged uncertainty.

Silence must never be interpreted as the absence of violence.

A low number of disclosures, police reports or service contacts does not establish a low level of domestic, family and sexual violence. It may instead indicate that victim-survivors do not know where to seek help, cannot communicate safely with services, fear the consequences of disclosure or do not trust that the system will understand and protect them. Violence that cannot be safely disclosed cannot be safely addressed.

Melaleuca Australia's experience indicates that domestic, family and sexual violence within multicultural communities is significantly under-represented in available evidence. This reflects two closely connected systemic issues.

First, multicultural communities are not consistently identifiable within administrative data. Migration pathway, visa status, interpreter use, country of birth, language spoken at home and other relevant indicators are not uniformly collected, connected or analysed. The absence of this data prevents governments from accurately understanding need, access, risk and outcomes.

Second, many victim-survivors never reach the point of formal disclosure. They may speak first to a friend, neighbour, lived experience supporter, faith leader or community leader. Others may present to settlement, family, health, housing or education services with concerns that appear unrelated to violence. Disclosure may emerge only after trust has developed over time.

The absence of formal reporting therefore does not demonstrate the absence of domestic, family and sexual violence. It demonstrates the need to strengthen the systems through which violence can be safely recognised, disclosed and addressed.

Trust Before Disclosure

Over almost three decades of working alongside migrant, refugee and multicultural communities in the Northern Territory, Melaleuca Australia has consistently observed that victim-survivors rarely disclose domestic, family and sexual violence through a direct series of questions or a single assessment. Disclosure is more commonly the result of trusted relationships developed over time through settlement support, health services, family services, torture and trauma recovery, employment, education, youth engagement and community participation.

Trust is not an outcome of service delivery; it is a prerequisite for disclosure.

Women disclose when they believe they are safe, understood and likely to be treated with dignity and respect. Many live with fears extending beyond the violence itself. People who use violence may exploit misinformation about immigration, visas, citizenship, child protection or Australian authorities to reinforce dependency and silence. Others fear shame, family separation, community repercussions or losing the only social networks available to them in Australia.

Trust is also collective and fragile. One culturally unsafe or dismissive institutional response can travel quickly through a close-knit community, reinforce existing fears and discourage other victim-survivors from seeking assistance. Conversely, respectful and effective responses build confidence in institutions and create safer pathways for others.

Trust should therefore be understood as essential infrastructure for prevention, early intervention, response and long-term recovery.

Building Systems for a Growing Community

The Second Action Plan presents an opportunity to strengthen Australia's response before existing gaps widen.

The Northern Territory is planning for an additional 14,000 workers over five years and recognises that interstate and international attraction will be necessary to meet workforce demand. The economic contribution expected from multicultural communities must be matched by a commitment to their safety, wellbeing, settlement and long-term belonging.

That means ensuring every woman and child can understand public information, contact emergency services, participate independently in government processes, access professional interpreters, retain employment while recovering from violence and receive support from systems that understand migration, culture, trauma and family context.

It also means recognising that apparent silence within multicultural communities does not establish that violence is absent. Silence may instead reflect fear, shame, language barriers, coercive control, mistrust, limited specialist pathways and systems that have not yet made it safe to speak.

As the Territory grows, the answer is not to wait for crisis demand or reported statistics to rise. It is to strengthen prevention, disclosure pathways, specialist multicultural responses, community partnerships, data collection and institutional capability now.

As Australia intentionally grows multicultural communities, it must intentionally grow the systems that enable them to be safe, heard and supported.

3. What We Are Seeing: Emerging Evidence from Multicultural Communities

Melaleuca Australia's observations are drawn from almost three decades of working alongside multicultural communities across settlement, refugee health, torture and trauma recovery, legal assistance, youth engagement, family services, community development and social connection.

The following themes do not represent isolated incidents. They are recurring patterns observed across communities, programs and years of engagement. Together, they provide important evidence about how domestic, family and sexual violence is experienced within multicultural communities and where Australia's response can be strengthened.

How Violence Becomes Visible

Many victim-survivors engage with settlement, health, education or community services for months, and sometimes years, before disclosing violence. Initial presentations are frequently associated with housing, employment, parenting, health or settlement challenges rather than safety concerns.

Many women do not initially identify controlling behaviours, coercive control, financial abuse, emotional abuse or sexual violence as forms of domestic and family violence. Instead, they describe stress, parenting concerns, family conflict or settlement challenges. It is often only through trusted conversations over time that they begin to understand and name their experiences.

Disclosure therefore occurs gradually. It is the outcome of trusted relationships developed through repeated contact with culturally safe workers who understand both migration experiences and the complexities of domestic, family and sexual violence.

Trust is not simply a desirable feature of service delivery. Rather, it is the mechanism through which violence becomes visible.

Victim-Survivors Navigate Multiple Layers of Harm

For many multicultural women, domestic, family and sexual violence is experienced alongside multiple forms of disadvantage.

Previous experiences of persecution, torture, displacement, racism, settlement stress, financial insecurity, social isolation and unfamiliarity with Australian systems frequently intersect with violence occurring within the home.

Women are also often torn between their own safety and deeply held cultural, family and community expectations. Many describe feelings of guilt associated with disclosing violence or leaving a relationship. They fear bringing shame upon their family, disappointing elders, disrupting family unity or losing the community, faith and cultural connections that provide identity and belonging.

Many also fear they will be blamed for the harm experienced by their children or that seeking help may result in child protection involvement. These fears significantly delay help-seeking and increase isolation.

Children experience profound loss as well. Beyond exposure to violence, they may lose family stability, relationships with parents or extended family, cultural connections, community belonging and the security of the life they have known.

Coercive Control Exploits Migration Experiences

Melaleuca consistently observes perpetrators using migration experiences as tools of coercive control.

Women report being told they will lose their visa, be deported, have their children removed, never see their family again or bring shame upon their community if they seek help.

These threats often continue long after they cease to have any legal basis. Their effectiveness lies not in immigration law, but in fear, misinformation, dependency and isolation.

Language Is a Safety Issue

Across the Northern Territory, Melaleuca Australia continues to advocate for the consistent use of professional interpreters across health, justice, child protection, education and community services. Despite improvements in awareness, interpreter use remains inconsistent.

Too often, family members are asked to interpret highly sensitive conversations. In some cases, children are expected to interpret for their parents, exposing them to adult issues they should never be required to carry while compromising privacy, safety and informed decision-making.

Professional interpreters are not simply translators of words. They enable people to understand their rights, communicate their experiences accurately, participate in decisions affecting their safety and exercise their agency.

When interpreters are not used, women are often unable to fully describe the violence they are experiencing or understand the options available to them. Their voice is diminished at the very moment it is needed most.

When systems fail to provide a professional interpreter, they risk silencing the very people they are trying to protect.

Culture Must Be Understood with Nuance

One of the strongest themes emerging from Melaleuca's work is that multicultural communities consistently reject the notion that violence defines their culture.

At the same time, culture cannot be ignored.

In some communities, traditional gender roles, family hierarchy, concepts of honour, silence surrounding sexual violence or beliefs that "this is how it has always been" can reinforce controlling behaviours or make violence more difficult to recognise or challenge.

Effective responses must therefore challenge harmful beliefs and behaviours without labelling culture itself as the cause of violence. Equally, they should recognise the many cultural strengths—including family, faith, community leadership and collective responsibility—that can become powerful protective factors in prevention, accountability and healing.

Communities Are Asking for Earlier Intervention

Across Melaleuca's work, multicultural young people, community leaders and frontline organisations consistently identify domestic, family and sexual violence as a growing concern.

Young people describe witnessing violence, navigating conflicting cultural expectations and wanting safe opportunities to discuss respectful relationships, consent and healthy family dynamics.

This is reinforced by evidence from the MYAN National Policy Alliance, co-convened in the Northern Territory by Melaleuca Australia and the MyNT Council. More than 530 multicultural young people participated in engagement activities across urban and regional communities, identifying family violence and intergenerational conflict as their highest policy priority, ahead of racism in schools and youth settlement in regional areas. These priorities were subsequently validated through a policy forum involving more than 60 organisational representatives from government, education, health, settlement and community organisations. The findings demonstrate that multicultural young people are calling for earlier, culturally responsive prevention that strengthens families, supports respectful relationships and creates safe opportunities to address violence before it escalates.

Community leaders consistently identify domestic and family violence as one of the most significant issues affecting their communities and continue to call for greater investment in culturally responsive prevention, family education and earlier intervention that is culturally safe.

This concern is reflected across the broader settlement sector. The Northern Territory Settlement Services Network, chaired by Melaleuca Australia and bringing together more than 20 Northern Territory community organisations and government departments involved in settlement and multicultural service delivery, has identified domestic and family violence as its highest sector priority for the past five consecutive years. This sustained focus reflects a shared recognition that domestic and family violence remains one of the most significant and persistent challenges affecting multicultural communities across the Northern Territory.

At the same time, community leaders describe becoming increasingly over-consulted and under-resourced. They are repeatedly invited to participate in consultations, advisory groups and research while balancing employment, family responsibilities and unpaid community leadership roles. Too often they contribute their knowledge without seeing how it has informed policy, service design or investment decisions.

Communities are seeking more than repeated consultation. They are calling for genuine partnership and stronger strategic representation that can translate community voice into coordinated advocacy, policy influence and sustained systems reform. Without effective representation, the culturally safe systems, services and prevention approaches needed to protect multicultural women and children in the Northern Territory will continue to remain underdeveloped. This creates a risk that the impacts of domestic and family violence are attributed to culture itself, rather than recognising the role that inaccessible services, limited cultural capability, language barriers and inadequate system design play in preventing effective prevention, early intervention and recovery.

There are currently no dedicated multicultural perpetrator behaviour change programs operating in the Northern Territory, limiting opportunities to work with men and families before violence escalates.

At the same time, demand for culturally responsive support continues to increase.

Melaleuca Australia's Intensive Family Services demand has more than doubled in size, supporting over 100 per cent more clients than in previous years while continuing to experience a growing waitlist. This growth reflects both increasing demand for culturally

responsive family support and growing recognition across the service system that multicultural families benefit from specialist organisations able to provide culturally safe, trauma-informed and settlement-informed responses.

Referral pathways are also changing. While Melaleuca routinely refers victim-survivors to specialist domestic, family and sexual violence services for risk assessment and specialist interventions, those same services are increasingly referring multicultural clients back to Melaleuca for ongoing case management, cultural support and long-term engagement.

This demonstrates that specialist multicultural organisations provide capabilities that complement, rather than duplicate, specialist domestic and family violence services. Trusted relationships, cultural knowledge, language access and sustained engagement with families are increasingly recognised as essential components of effective responses.

Increasingly, Melaleuca is also supporting clients with more complex presentations, where domestic, family and sexual violence intersects with migration, torture and trauma, settlement, housing insecurity, mental health, child wellbeing and legal issues. These presentations require longer-term engagement and coordinated responses across multiple service systems, reinforcing the importance of specialist multicultural organisations within the broader domestic, family and sexual violence service ecosystem.

Emerging Theme

Taken together, the evidence presented in this submission demonstrates a remarkable level of consistency. Across the Northern Territory, the same priorities, barriers and opportunities for reform continue to emerge from communities, specialist multicultural organisations, mainstream services and government.

Specialist multicultural organisations consistently identify domestic, family and sexual violence as one of the most significant and persistent issues affecting the communities they support. More significantly, the Northern Territory Settlement Services Network—bringing together specialist multicultural organisations, mainstream service providers and government agencies involved in settlement and multicultural service delivery—has identified domestic, family and sexual violence as its highest strategic priority for the past five consecutive years. Community leaders continue to advocate for earlier intervention, culturally responsive prevention, stronger partnerships and meaningful participation in decision-making. Through Melaleuca Australia's multicultural youth engagement, young people have independently identified domestic and family violence as the issue of greatest concern affecting their communities, reinforcing the priorities identified by community leaders and the broader service system. This priority has also been recognised by the Minister's Multicultural Advisory Council (MACMA), which has identified domestic and family violence as a strategic priority and established a dedicated working group to advise the Minister on this issue. Mainstream services increasingly recognise both the importance of culturally responsive practice and the limits of existing service models in responding to the complexity of migration, language, trauma and culture.

Collectively, these findings point to a clear direction for reform. Lasting change will depend on ensuring that multicultural communities are not only heard, but are meaningfully represented as policies are developed, services are designed and systems evolve.

This submission acknowledges the Northern Territory Government's commitment to developing a new Multicultural Strategy and its recognition of domestic, family and sexual violence as a priority issue affecting multicultural communities. Without meaningful

representation, the barriers experienced by multicultural women and children can remain only partially understood. This limits the effectiveness of prevention, early intervention, risk assessment, service responses and recovery pathways. It also creates a risk that domestic, family and sexual violence continues to be viewed primarily through a cultural lens, rather than recognising the role that inaccessible services, language barriers, limited cultural capability and underdeveloped system design play in shaping outcomes.

In practice, these broader policy & system functions increasingly fall to the small number of specialist multicultural organisations, alongside their primary responsibility for delivering frontline services.

Our recommendations on considering the Consultation Questions

Priority Area 1 – Victim-Survivors

Victim-survivors from culturally and linguistically diverse communities should expect the same opportunity to live safely, recover from violence and access justice as every other Australian. Achieving this requires more than ensuring services are available. It requires ensuring services are visible, culturally responsive, connected and trusted by the communities they are intended to serve.

Melaleuca Australia's experience demonstrates that, for many multicultural communities, safety begins long before a disclosure is made. Women rarely present to services identifying domestic, family and sexual violence as their primary concern. More commonly, they seek assistance with settlement, housing, employment, health, education or parenting. It is through trusted relationships developed over time that violence becomes visible and opportunities emerge to provide support before harm escalates.

Trust is therefore not simply a feature of good service delivery; it is the foundation upon which effective responses are built. Many multicultural women are simultaneously navigating settlement, language barriers, disrupted family networks, previous experiences of torture or trauma, unfamiliar legal systems and social isolation. These experiences can delay help-seeking, particularly where perpetrators reinforce fear through misinformation about visas, immigration status, child removal or interactions with Australian authorities. Women may also fear bringing shame upon their family, losing community connections or being blamed for disrupting family relationships. Building trust requires sustained engagement through organisations that understand these intersecting experiences and have established credibility within their communities.

For multicultural communities, recovery is also broader than immediate safety from violence. Leaving a violent relationship may involve losing family, faith communities, cultural identity, housing, financial security and social support. Children may experience the loss of extended family relationships, cultural connection and community belonging alongside exposure to violence. Recovery therefore requires long-term, coordinated responses that support healing, trauma recovery, family functioning, housing, legal assistance, health, education, employment and reconnection with community.

The Australian Government should recognise that specialist multicultural organisations are an essential component of Australia's domestic, family and sexual violence response system. Across the Northern Territory, mainstream specialist domestic and family violence services increasingly rely on organisations such as Melaleuca Australia to provide cultural knowledge, settlement expertise, language access, long-term engagement and trusted case management. These organisations do not duplicate specialist domestic and family violence services; they complement them by strengthening access, improving communication, supporting coordinated responses and helping victim-survivors remain engaged throughout their recovery.

Rather than expecting victim-survivors to navigate multiple disconnected services, the Second Action Plan should support integrated service systems that bring together specialist domestic and family violence services, settlement providers, specialist multicultural organisations, torture and trauma services, health, housing, education, legal assistance and child and family services. Victim-survivors should experience one coordinated system working around their needs rather than multiple disconnected services requiring them to repeatedly explain their circumstances.

Language must also be recognised as a safety issue rather than an administrative consideration. Professional interpreters should be consistently available across policing, health, justice, child protection and community services. Interpreter services enable victim-survivors to understand their rights, participate in safety planning and make informed decisions about their future. Family members and children should never be expected to interpret conversations involving domestic, family and sexual violence.

The Second Action Plan should also recognise the unique ways coercive control can manifest within multicultural communities. While coercive control is universal, perpetrators may exploit migration experiences by using misinformation relating to visas, immigration status, sponsorship, overseas family members or Australian legal systems to reinforce fear and dependency. Responses to coercive control should explicitly recognise these forms of abuse and ensure practitioners across all service systems have the capability to identify and respond appropriately.

Technology-facilitated abuse presents similar challenges. Digital surveillance, online intimidation, image-based abuse and monitoring through family or community networks can be particularly difficult for newly arrived migrants and refugees to recognise or escape. National responses should include culturally appropriate education, multilingual information and workforce capability to respond to these emerging forms of violence.

The Second Action Plan should also reaffirm that equitable access to safety is a national responsibility. While it is appropriate that states and territories invest according to their own demographic profiles and areas of greatest need, this should not result in smaller or emerging population groups becoming invisible within Australia's domestic, family and sexual violence system. The needs of multicultural communities should not be deprioritised simply because they represent a smaller proportion of a jurisdiction's population. The Australian Government has an important leadership role in ensuring that every jurisdiction maintains the capability to respond effectively to multicultural communities, regardless of their relative population size.

Every victim-survivor should be able to expect access to culturally safe and responsive services, qualified interpreters, specialist multicultural expertise and integrated pathways to support irrespective of where they live. Equity should not be determined by geography or

population size, but by need and the fundamental right of every person to access safety, protection and recovery.

Recommendations

- Recognise specialist multicultural organisations as core partners within Australia's domestic, family and sexual violence service system.
- Establish nationally consistent expectations for culturally responsive domestic, family and sexual violence services, while allowing jurisdictions flexibility in local delivery.
- Invest in long-term culturally responsive case coordination and recovery that extends beyond immediate crisis intervention.
- Establish a National Language Access Standard across government and government-funded domestic, family and sexual violence responses.
- Strengthen workforce capability to recognise and respond to migration-related coercive control, technology-facilitated abuse and other culturally specific manifestations of violence.
- Require meaningful partnerships between mainstream domestic and family violence services and specialist multicultural organisations as a core component of Commonwealth-funded initiatives.
- Improve national data collection relating to language, interpreter use, migration pathways and culturally relevant service outcomes to strengthen future policy and investment.
- Ensure multicultural victim-survivors can access culturally safe and equitable support regardless of the jurisdiction in which they live. National leadership should ensure that the needs of multicultural communities are not deprioritised simply because they represent a smaller proportion of a jurisdiction's population. Every Australian, regardless of where they live, should be able to expect access to culturally responsive services, interpreter support and specialist multicultural expertise when experiencing domestic, family and sexual violence.

Priority Area 2 – Prevention and Early Intervention

Preventing domestic, family and sexual violence requires moving beyond a system that primarily responds after harm has occurred. Prevention must begin much earlier by strengthening families, reducing isolation, building trust, promoting belonging and ensuring communities can access support before issues escalate into crisis.

For multicultural communities, prevention cannot be separated from the broader settlement experience. Many migrant and refugee families arrive in Australia after significant disruption, often following experiences of conflict, persecution or prolonged displacement. They are simultaneously adapting to unfamiliar legal systems, parenting expectations, education systems, employment pressures, language barriers and changing family dynamics. These pressures do not cause violence, but they can increase vulnerability where families are left to navigate these challenges without support.

The Second Action Plan should recognise settlement as a critical period for primary prevention and early intervention. Investing in families during this period strengthens protective factors, builds confidence in Australian systems and creates trusted pathways to seek help long before violence becomes entrenched.

Effective prevention should build upon the strengths that families bring with them. Families should not enter services with an assumption of deficit or dysfunction. Parents arrive with values, aspirations and protective cultural practices that have supported their families for generations. Prevention approaches should work alongside families to understand Australian laws, gender equality, respectful relationships and children's rights while recognising and preserving the positive aspects of cultural identity that foster resilience, belonging and care.

Programs that unintentionally position culture as the problem risk creating shame, disengagement and mistrust. Children should be supported to recognise harmful behaviours without being encouraged to associate those behaviours with their cultural identity. Likewise, parents should be engaged as partners in prevention rather than passive recipients of education. Supporting families to navigate cultural transition together strengthens relationships and reduces intergenerational conflict.

Community connection is itself a protective factor. Isolation increases vulnerability to violence, while belonging strengthens resilience. Community-led activities, cultural events, parenting programs, youth initiatives, peer support networks and opportunities for social participation all contribute to preventing violence by strengthening relationships, reducing loneliness and increasing opportunities for trusted conversations before crisis develops.

Community leaders also play a critical role in prevention. Across multicultural communities they are often the first people approached when concerns arise and are uniquely positioned to influence attitudes, challenge harmful behaviours and connect families with appropriate support. Prevention strategies should recognise community leaders as partners in Australia's prevention infrastructure and invest in their capability to undertake this role safely and effectively.

Schools represent another critical setting for prevention. Children and young people from multicultural backgrounds should learn about respectful relationships, consent, equality and safety within environments that also foster belonging, cultural pride and inclusion. Anti-racism, inclusion and violence prevention should be understood as complementary rather than separate agendas. Young people who feel respected, connected and valued are more likely to seek help early, develop healthy relationships and challenge harmful attitudes.

Prevention also requires service systems that do not assume a "default user". Mainstream programs designed around English-speaking, Australian-born populations can unintentionally exclude multicultural families. Prevention initiatives should be designed from the outset to be culturally responsive through multilingual communication, interpreter access, bicultural workers, culturally appropriate engagement methods and genuine partnerships with specialist multicultural organisations and community leaders.

Early intervention depends on trust. Families are significantly more likely to seek support through services they already know, including settlement organisations, multicultural organisations, health services, schools and community groups. These trusted entry points provide opportunities to identify concerns early, offer practical support and connect families with specialist services before risks escalate.

Finally, prevention should recognise that responsibility extends beyond specialist domestic and family violence services. Governments, education providers, employers, sporting organisations, faith communities, community organisations and digital platforms all have a role in creating environments that promote respect, inclusion, gender equality and belonging. Violence prevention should therefore be embedded across communities rather than confined to specialist services alone.

Recommendations

- Recognise settlement as a critical period for primary prevention and invest in culturally responsive family strengthening and early intervention.
- Build prevention initiatives around family strengths, cultural identity and belonging rather than deficit-based assumptions.
- Partner with parents to navigate cultural transition, Australian laws and respectful relationships while preserving the protective strengths of culture.
- Invest in community-led activities that reduce isolation, strengthen belonging and create trusted opportunities for early support.
- Recognise and resource multicultural community leaders as partners in violence prevention and early intervention.
- Embed respectful relationships, belonging and anti-racism initiatives within schools as complementary prevention strategies.
- Ensure all prevention initiatives are designed to be culturally responsive, multilingual and accessible rather than assuming a "default user".
- Strengthen trusted entry points through settlement, multicultural, health, education and community services so families receive support before violence escalates.
- Promote prevention as a shared responsibility across government, communities, education, workplaces, faith organisations and the broader community.

Priority Area 3 – Children and Young People

Children and young people from culturally and linguistically diverse communities experience domestic, family and sexual violence within the broader context of migration, settlement and identity formation. Many are adapting to a new country while navigating multiple cultural expectations, learning a new language, experiencing racism or discrimination, supporting parents through settlement and, in some cases, recovering from refugee or humanitarian experiences. Responses to children and young people should recognise these intersecting experiences rather than viewing violence in isolation.

Children should be recognised as individuals with their own rights, voices and support needs. They require opportunities to participate in decisions affecting them, receive age-appropriate information and access culturally safe services that understand their family, cultural and migration contexts. Responses should acknowledge that children often experience violence differently from adults and may require different pathways to healing and recovery.

The Second Action Plan should strengthen family-centred approaches that support children without unnecessarily separating them from their families or cultural identity. Parents who are themselves navigating settlement and adapting to Australian systems often require support alongside their children. Working with families to strengthen communication, build parenting confidence and understand Australian laws, respectful relationships and children's rights can prevent intergenerational conflict and create safer home environments. Early support should seek to keep families connected wherever it is safe and appropriate to do so.

Children should never feel that seeking help requires rejecting their family or culture. Harmful behaviours should be clearly identified and addressed, while recognising that every culture contains strengths that promote care, respect, connection and responsibility. Prevention and

recovery approaches should reinforce these strengths and help children maintain pride in their cultural identity while understanding their rights and personal safety.

Schools have a particularly important role in creating safe environments where children and young people develop healthy relationships and a sense of belonging. Education settings should foster inclusion, cultural safety, anti-racism and respectful relationships simultaneously. Children who feel accepted and connected within their school communities are more likely to seek support, disclose concerns and build healthy peer relationships.

For many multicultural children and young people, experiences of racism, discrimination and bullying intersect with violence experienced at home. These overlapping experiences often compound trauma, undermine self-worth and create significant barriers to seeking help. Children may suffer in silence, believing they do not belong either at school or at home, or fearing that disclosure will reinforce negative stereotypes about their family or culture. The Second Action Plan should recognise these intersecting vulnerabilities by ensuring that responses to domestic, family and sexual violence are informed by anti-racism, inclusion and wellbeing initiatives within schools. Addressing racism and bullying is therefore not separate from preventing violence—it is an important protective factor that strengthens belonging, encourages help-seeking and supports the wellbeing of children experiencing violence.

Young people also require safe opportunities to develop leadership, confidence and social connection beyond the classroom. Community participation, youth leadership initiatives, mentoring, sport, arts and cultural activities strengthen belonging, foster positive identity and reduce isolation. These protective factors contribute to healthy development and provide trusted adults and peers who can identify concerns early and connect young people with appropriate support.

Responses should also recognise the growing influence of digital environments in the lives of children and young people. Technology can facilitate abuse, coercion, harassment, image-based abuse and exploitation, but it also provides opportunities for education, connection and help-seeking. Multilingual and culturally relevant education should equip young people and parents to recognise online harms, understand digital safety and access support when needed.

Children and young people should not be expected to bridge language and cultural barriers within service systems. Too often, children become interpreters for parents during interactions with schools, health services or government agencies, placing them in inappropriate and sometimes harmful situations. Professional interpreter services and culturally responsive engagement should be standard practice to ensure children are protected from these responsibilities.

Meaningful participation by multicultural children and young people should inform the design, implementation and evaluation of policies and services that affect them. Their lived experience provides valuable insight into the barriers they face and the solutions most likely to strengthen safety, belonging and wellbeing. The voices of young people should be embedded within prevention, service design and policy development, ensuring that responses remain relevant to the changing realities of multicultural Australia.

Recommendations

- Recognise the unique and intersecting experiences of multicultural children and young people within domestic, family and sexual violence responses, including migration, settlement, racism and discrimination.
- Strengthen family-centred approaches that support both children and parents through settlement, cultural transition and changing family dynamics.
- Ensure children can access support without feeling they must reject their family, culture or identity.
- Enable multicultural young people to shape prevention and early intervention initiatives by investing in youth-led leadership and capacity-building through existing networks, including MYAN and jurisdictional multicultural youth structures, in collaboration with specialist settlement, torture and trauma services and multicultural organisations.
- Embed belonging, cultural inclusion, anti-racism, bullying prevention and respectful relationships education within school-based prevention initiatives.
- Recognise racism and bullying as intersecting factors that can compound the impacts of domestic, family and sexual violence and reduce children's willingness to seek help.
- Invest in youth leadership, mentoring, cultural participation and community connection as protective factors that strengthen resilience and belonging.
- Improve culturally responsive education on digital safety, technology-facilitated abuse and healthy relationships for children, young people and parents.
- Ensure professional interpreters are available so children are never required to interpret sensitive or traumatic conversations.
- Partner with multicultural children and young people in the design, implementation and evaluation of policies, programs and services that affect them.

Priority Area 4 – People Who Use Violence

Ending domestic, family and sexual violence requires a sustained commitment to preventing violence before it occurs, intervening early when concerning behaviours emerge and holding people who use violence accountable for their actions. Accountability should remain central to Australia's response, while recognising that lasting behaviour change is most likely when interventions are culturally responsive, trauma-informed and connected to the broader support systems surrounding individuals and families.

Violence is a choice. Cultural background, migration experiences or past trauma should never be accepted as explanations or justifications for abusive behaviour. At the same time, effective interventions must recognise the circumstances in which people live, communicate and engage with services. A culturally responsive approach does not diminish accountability; it increases the likelihood that accountability will be understood, accepted and translated into sustained behavioural change.

For many multicultural communities, awareness of Australian laws relating to domestic, family and sexual violence, coercive control, consent and gender equality cannot be assumed. Newly arrived migrants and refugees may come from legal and social systems that differ significantly from Australia's. Early education about rights, responsibilities and legal expectations should therefore form part of settlement and community orientation processes, ensuring that expectations are understood before harmful behaviours become entrenched.

Australia should also invest in community-based approaches that enable respectful conversations about violence before individuals enter the justice system. Many multicultural

communities are seeking opportunities to discuss changing gender roles, parenting, respectful relationships and Australian legal expectations in culturally safe environments. These conversations should never replace formal responses to violence but can play an important role in challenging harmful attitudes, strengthening community understanding and preventing violence before it occurs.

Behaviour change interventions should be developed specifically for multicultural communities and delivered by organisations with expertise in migration, settlement, language and cultural transition. While Aboriginal-led behaviour change programs are appropriately designed to respond to the unique needs and experiences of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, multicultural communities require responses that address the distinct realities of migration, refugee experiences, family reunification, language barriers, settlement pressures and changing cultural and family dynamics. These are different contexts requiring different expertise.

Every jurisdiction should therefore have access to specialist multicultural behaviour change interventions. Where dedicated programs are not viable because of population size, jurisdictions should establish formal partnerships and referral pathways that enable access to specialist multicultural expertise through regional, cross-jurisdictional or nationally coordinated models. Equity requires that all communities have access to responses designed for their circumstances, rather than assuming the needs of smaller population groups will be met through existing mainstream or other specialist programs.

Community leaders have an important role in reinforcing accountability. Across multicultural communities they are often trusted voices who can challenge harmful attitudes, encourage respectful relationships and support early help-seeking. Strengthening the capability of community leaders to recognise domestic, family and sexual violence, respond safely and facilitate referrals to specialist services can complement—but never replace—the role of police, courts and specialist domestic and family violence services.

Families should also be supported to understand Australian legal frameworks and healthy relationship expectations together. Prevention is strengthened when parents, young people and communities receive consistent messages about respect, equality and non-violence. Building shared understanding reduces confusion during settlement and helps prevent misinformation from being used to justify or conceal abusive behaviour.

Accountability should also extend to the institutions responsible for preventing and responding to domestic, family and sexual violence. Victim-survivors and families are more likely to seek help, remain engaged with services and participate in justice processes when they experience systems as culturally safe, respectful and free from discrimination. Experiences of racism, bias or cultural misunderstanding within schools, health services, policing, child protection, courts and the broader justice system can reinforce mistrust, discourage disclosure and undermine confidence in seeking protection. The Second Action Plan should therefore strengthen institutional accountability by embedding cultural responsiveness, anti-racism, interpreter access and culturally safe practice across all systems that interact with victim-survivors, children and people who use violence.

Institutions should also recognise that accountability is strengthened through genuine partnerships with multicultural communities rather than engagement only after problems emerge. Specialist multicultural organisations and trusted community leaders provide cultural insight, lived experience and established relationships that improve service design,

workforce capability and community confidence in Australian systems. Building these partnerships should be recognised as an essential element of an effective national response.

Responses to people who use violence should also recognise the increasing role of technology in coercive and controlling behaviour. Digital surveillance, online harassment, image-based abuse, location tracking and monitoring through electronic devices should be explicitly addressed within community education, behaviour change interventions and justice responses.

The Second Action Plan should continue to strengthen collaboration between justice systems, specialist domestic and family violence services, multicultural organisations, settlement providers and community organisations. No single sector can effectively address violence alone. Integrated responses improve risk assessment, strengthen accountability and provide more opportunities for individuals to engage in behaviour change while maintaining victim-survivor safety as the overriding priority.

Recommendations

- Maintain clear accountability that people who use violence are responsible for their behaviour regardless of cultural background, migration history or past trauma.
- Include education on Australian laws, respectful relationships, gender equality, consent and domestic, family and sexual violence within settlement and community orientation programs.
- Invest in community-based education that creates safe opportunities to discuss changing gender roles, parenting, respectful relationships and Australian legal expectations before violence occurs.
- Develop specialist multicultural behaviour change interventions that respond to the unique realities of migration, settlement, language and cultural transition.
- Ensure every jurisdiction has access to specialist multicultural behaviour change interventions. Specialist multicultural responses should not be assumed to be met through mainstream or Aboriginal-specific programs. While Aboriginal-led responses appropriately address the needs of Aboriginal communities, multicultural communities require specialist responses designed for their own circumstances.
- Strengthen the capability of multicultural community leaders to reinforce respectful relationships, challenge harmful attitudes and facilitate safe referral pathways.
- Support family and community education that promotes consistent understanding of Australian legal expectations while respecting and building upon the protective strengths of culture.
- Strengthen institutional accountability by embedding anti-racism, cultural responsiveness, interpreter access and culturally safe practice across policing, health, education, child protection, courts and other government-funded services responding to domestic, family and sexual violence.
- Require government agencies and funded services to demonstrate meaningful partnerships with specialist multicultural organisations and communities in the design and delivery of domestic, family and sexual violence responses.
- Address technology-facilitated abuse within behaviour change programs, justice responses and community education initiatives.



- Strengthen collaboration between justice, specialist domestic and family violence services, settlement providers and specialist multicultural organisations to improve accountability, coordinated responses and long-term community safety.

Priority Area 5 – System Integration, Workforce and Accountability

Ending domestic, family and sexual violence requires more than effective specialist services. It requires public systems that are intentionally designed to respond equitably to the diversity of the Australian community. For multicultural communities, safety is influenced not only by domestic and family violence services, but by every interaction with government, including health care, policing, emergency services, education, housing, employment, settlement, legal assistance and public communications. The Second Action Plan should recognise that preventing violence and supporting victim-survivors requires a whole-of-government approach in which every system considers its role in promoting safety, inclusion and equitable access.

For many multicultural victim-survivors, navigating government systems can be overwhelming. People are often required to engage with multiple agencies, repeat their story, understand unfamiliar systems and overcome language barriers while experiencing significant trauma. Service fragmentation, inconsistent interpreter access and poor coordination can delay support, increase the risk of disengagement and unintentionally reinforce the isolation created by violence. Greater integration across settlement, health, housing, education, employment, justice and specialist domestic and family violence services is essential to delivering coordinated responses centred on the needs of victim-survivors.

The Australian Government has an important leadership role in establishing nationally consistent expectations for culturally responsive practice. While jurisdictions should continue to design services that reflect local needs, all Australians should be able to expect that government-funded services are capable of responding effectively to multicultural communities. Equitable access should not depend on geography or the size of a multicultural population within a particular jurisdiction.

Building workforce capability is central to achieving this objective. Cultural responsiveness should be recognised as a core capability across policing, health, education, child protection, courts, emergency services, housing, employment services, settlement and specialist domestic and family violence services. This includes understanding migration pathways, refugee experiences, cultural transition, language access, family dynamics and the different ways coercive control may present within multicultural communities.

Specialist multicultural organisations should also be recognised as an essential part of Australia's domestic, family and sexual violence system. Their role extends beyond direct service delivery to include community engagement, cultural advice, secondary consultation, workforce development, system navigation and policy leadership. Sustainable investment in specialist multicultural capability strengthens the capacity of the entire service system.

Workplaces also have a critical role in supporting victim-survivors to remain safe, financially secure and connected to employment. The impacts of domestic, family and sexual violence frequently extend into the workplace through trauma, fatigue, disrupted sleep, injuries, court attendance, medical appointments, relocation, childcare responsibilities and ongoing safety concerns. Without supportive workplace practices, victim-survivors may experience declining

performance, absenteeism or job loss at precisely the time they most need financial independence and stability.

The Second Action Plan should encourage employers to recognise domestic, family and sexual violence as both a workplace issue and a workforce wellbeing issue. Consistent with employers' positive duties to provide psychologically and physically safe workplaces and to eliminate discrimination, harassment and victimisation, workplaces should be supported to implement trauma-informed policies that protect victim-survivors. This includes domestic and family violence leave, flexible working arrangements, workplace safety planning, confidential support pathways, culturally responsive manager training and practical workplace adjustments that enable people to remain safely employed while navigating recovery and legal processes.

Employers should also recognise that generic Employee Assistance Programs (EAPs) are not always equipped to respond effectively to multicultural employees experiencing domestic, family and sexual violence. Language barriers, migration experiences, refugee backgrounds, cultural expectations, intergenerational dynamics and experiences of torture or trauma may significantly influence a person's circumstances and recovery. Referral pathways should therefore extend beyond generic counselling services to include specialist domestic and family violence services, multicultural organisations and, where appropriate, specialist torture and trauma rehabilitation services across the FASSTT network. EAP providers should also be encouraged to strengthen their own cultural capability and establish formal partnerships with specialist multicultural and torture and trauma services to ensure employees receive culturally informed care when required.

The Second Action Plan should also recognise that seemingly routine government systems and administrative processes can unintentionally reinforce power imbalances experienced by victim-survivors. Many systems are designed around assumptions that every household has a single spokesperson, that people can communicate confidently in English, that information is equally accessible to all family members and that decision-making within households is shared. For many women experiencing domestic and family violence, particularly those from multicultural communities, these assumptions do not reflect reality.

The COVID-19 pandemic demonstrated how critical public information was frequently released first in English, leaving many multicultural communities dependent on family members or informal networks to interpret life-saving health advice. For women experiencing domestic and family violence, this could mean relying on the very person exercising control over them to explain government directions, health information or public safety messages.

Similarly, emergency services often depend upon callers being able to communicate effectively in English during moments of crisis. A woman who has been seriously assaulted, is bleeding, is caring for frightened children and calls an ambulance may find herself unable to explain what has happened because there is no immediate language support. The issue is not a lack of commitment by emergency responders. It is whether the system has been designed to provide equitable access to emergency assistance regardless of the language someone speaks.

Other national systems can unintentionally produce similar outcomes. Household-based government processes, forms available only in English, digital services that assume a single account holder or administrative arrangements that provide one response for an entire household can inadvertently reinforce coercive control by concentrating information, authority and participation in the hands of one person. For example, the Census plays a vital

role in informing national policy and investment, yet a household-based process conducted primarily in English may limit the ability of individuals experiencing domestic and family violence to understand the questions, participate independently or ensure their own circumstances are accurately represented where the primary English-speaking household member is also the person using violence.

When government systems are not designed to communicate effectively with multicultural communities, the responsibility does not disappear—it is transferred to trusted community leaders and lived experience supporters. Across Australia, these trusted individuals routinely spend countless unpaid hours interpreting government information, explaining policies, assisting families to navigate services, responding to crises and supporting people experiencing domestic and family violence. Many undertake this work after completing full-time employment, responding to calls late into the night because their communities have nowhere else to turn.

This informal support represents a significant but largely invisible contribution to Australia's social infrastructure. However, it should not become a substitute for accessible public systems. In some close-knit and collectivist communities, trusted community leaders and lived experience supporters may find themselves balancing competing responsibilities. They seek to protect victim-survivors while also maintaining community relationships and cohesion. Where accessible, culturally responsive formal services are lacking, fear of shame, stigma, community repercussions or retaliation can discourage referrals into formal systems. As a result, violence may remain within informal community networks, victim-survivors may not receive the specialist support they need, and the true prevalence of domestic, family and sexual violence within multicultural communities may remain under-recognised in national data and policy. This should not be interpreted as a failure of communities or their leaders. Rather, it reflects the consequences of systems that place too much responsibility on informal community structures instead of providing accessible, trusted and culturally responsive pathways into formal support.

Australia now has an opportunity to fundamentally improve language accessibility across government. In an era of artificial intelligence, real-time translation, multilingual digital platforms and speech recognition technologies, language should no longer be accepted as a routine barrier to accessing information or services. While accredited interpreters remain essential in legal, health and domestic and family violence settings, emerging technologies provide significant opportunities to improve everyday communication, emergency messaging, public information and access to government services. The Australian Government should adopt a "multilingual by design" approach to public administration, embedding language accessibility into policy, digital services and communications from the outset rather than treating translation as a secondary activity.

The Second Action Plan should encourage all Commonwealth agencies to apply a domestic, family and sexual violence and cultural inclusion lens when designing national policies, public communications, emergency responses and government services. This includes considering language accessibility, independent access to information, interpreter availability, privacy, individual agency and the unintended consequences that seemingly ordinary administrative systems may have for people experiencing violence. Small design decisions made at a national level can have profound impacts on safety, participation and inclusion.

Finally, achieving the objectives of the National Plan requires formal and ongoing strategic multicultural representation within domestic, family and sexual violence governance. While frontline services remain essential, sustainable reform also depends on mechanisms that

enable multicultural communities to contribute to policy development, implementation, evaluation and continuous system improvement. This capability should exist across every state and territory to ensure the National Plan is informed by the diversity of Australia's multicultural communities, regardless of jurisdiction.

Recommendation

- Strengthen integration between settlement, health, education, employment, housing, legal, child and family services and specialist domestic, family and sexual violence responses.
- Require every state and territory to establish and maintain formal strategic multicultural representation within domestic, family and sexual violence governance arrangements to ensure multicultural communities contribute to policy development, system design, implementation and evaluation.
- Establish nationally consistent expectations for culturally responsive practice across all government-funded domestic, family and sexual violence services.
- Recognise specialist multicultural organisations as essential partners in service delivery, workforce development, community engagement and system reform.
- Build cultural responsiveness as a core capability across policing, health, education, child protection, emergency services, employment services, courts, housing and specialist domestic and family violence services.
- Promote trauma-informed workplace responses that enable victim-survivors to remain safely employed through flexible work arrangements, domestic and family violence leave, workplace safety planning and supportive management practices.
- Strengthen employer capability to respond to multicultural victim-survivors, including culturally responsive leadership, referral pathways and partnerships with specialist multicultural and torture and trauma rehabilitation services.
- Encourage Employee Assistance Program providers to strengthen cultural capability and establish referral partnerships with specialist multicultural organisations and members of the FASSTT network.
- Invest in sustainable specialist multicultural capability across every jurisdiction to ensure equitable access regardless of population size.
- Adopt a "multilingual by design" approach to Commonwealth policy, public communications, digital services and emergency messaging, supported by artificial intelligence and emerging language technologies while maintaining appropriate safeguards for accuracy, privacy and safety.
- Establish nationally consistent expectations for interpreter access across all government-funded services responding to domestic, family and sexual violence.
- Apply a domestic, family and sexual violence impact assessment to the design of significant national policies, public communications, digital services and administrative systems to identify and reduce unintended barriers for victim-survivors.
- Recognise and reduce the hidden burden placed on trusted community leaders and lived experience supporters by designing government systems that communicate directly, safely and effectively with multicultural communities rather than relying on informal community networks to bridge systemic gaps.
- Strengthen national data collection relating to language, interpreter use, migration pathways and culturally relevant service outcomes to improve evidence and planning.

- Embed multicultural organisations and communities within national governance, policy development, implementation and evaluation of the National Plan.

Conclusion

Australia cannot achieve an equitable response to domestic, family and sexual violence while multicultural communities remain largely invisible within policy, research, funding and service design.

The Second Action Plan presents an opportunity to ensure multicultural communities are no longer an afterthought in Australia's response to domestic, family and sexual violence. As Australia's multicultural population continues to grow, so too must the systems, specialist capability and policy attention required to ensure every victim-survivor can access safety, justice and recovery regardless of language, culture or migration pathway.

The limited visibility of multicultural voices throughout this consultation process reinforces the need for stronger mechanisms to ensure multicultural communities are represented in national policy development. Communities cannot benefit fully from systems they have had little opportunity to help shape.

The Northern Territory is intentionally growing its multicultural population to support its economic and social future. Australia's response to domestic, family and sexual violence must grow with it.

Melaleuca Australia's experience is that violence within multicultural communities is real, but it is too often hidden by language barriers, migration experiences, fear, shame and systems that were never designed with multicultural communities in mind. Silence should never be mistaken for safety.

The challenge before Australia is not simply to respond when violence becomes visible. It is to build systems that make it safe to be seen, safe to be heard and safe to seek help.

A nation that intentionally builds multicultural communities must also intentionally build multicultural systems. Only then can every woman, every child and every family - regardless of language, culture or migration pathway - have an equitable opportunity to live free from violence and to truly belong.

That is the Australia Melaleuca envisions: *a world where everyone belongs.*



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