



Submission to the Second Action Plan under the National Plan to End Violence against Women and Children 2022 to 2032

Men & Co. Services submission on men's work, young men, prevention and early intervention

Introduction

Men & Co. Services welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the development of the Second Action Plan under the National Plan to End Violence against Women and Children 2022 to 2032. This submission is offered from our experience working directly with men, fathers, boys and young men, and is in partnership with The Centre for Women & Co. across Queensland.

Our core message is simple. If Australia is serious about ending domestic, family and sexual violence in one generation, the Second Action Plan must make a stronger and more practical investment in work with men and boys. This includes primary prevention, early intervention, behaviour change, fathering work, youth specific responses, and place-based community programs that create safe and credible pathways for men and young men to take responsibility before harm escalates.

Violence against women is overwhelmingly perpetrated by men and is driven by gender inequality, rigid gender norms, and systems that continue to reinforce these structures. While women and children require continued investment in safety, healing and recovery, ending violence requires sustained investment in the people who are most likely to use violence. Prevention cannot stop at supporting victim survivors; it must include changing the attitudes, beliefs and behaviours of men and boys before violence occurs and intervening early when harmful behaviours emerge.

About Men & Co. Services

Men & Co. Services is a specialist holistic men's service working alongside The Centre for Women & Co. to support safer families and communities. Our work includes responses for men who have used violence, fathers seeking to repair and strengthen relationships with their children, boys and young men navigating harmful ideas about



masculinity, and men who need support to build healthier relationships, accountability and emotional regulation.

Our programs sit within a broader safety system. We understand that prevention, early intervention and behaviour change with men and boys must never displace investment in victim survivor safety, specialist women's services, children's healing, housing, legal support or crisis response. Rather, effective work with men and boys must strengthen that system. It must be accountable, risk informed, trauma aware, connected to specialist domestic and family violence practice, and clear that responsibility for violence sits with the person using violence.

Why the Second Action Plan must invest in men's work and young men

The National Plan is built around prevention, early intervention, response, and recovery and healing. Men's work belongs across all four domains, but it is particularly urgent in prevention and early intervention. We need to stop waiting until harm has become entrenched before we offer meaningful support, challenge harmful attitudes, and create pathways for behaviour change.

This is what we hear from victim survivors and our frontline teams every day at The Centre for Women & Co.

The Australian Government has already recognised that boys and young men at risk of using violence need specific, therapeutic and strengths-based support. Many services, including Men & Co. Services and The Centre for Women & Co. have dedicated resources and time delivering trials, pilots and projects for boys and young men aged 12 to 18 who have experienced family and domestic violence and who are using, or at risk of using, family, domestic or sexual violence. The frontline is doing what is necessary, with little to no investment, now is the time that it becomes part of a longer-term national approach, not short-term trials.

In our local practice context, the need is clear. Frontline intake experience shows increasing contact from young people experiencing intimate partner violence, with ages getting younger and risk becoming more imminent. There are also significant gaps for adolescents and young people using violence or harmful behaviours towards a parent, particularly where mothers are both caring for their child and trying to stay safe. These families need support that is earlier, more specialised, more relational and more sustained than the current system allows.



We recognise that men's use of violence does not occur in isolation. It exists within broader social structures that continue to be reinforced. What we see in practice is consistent with the national evidence. Violence prevention work needs to address the gendered drivers of violence, including ideas of masculinity, entitlement, power, control, respect and accountability. It also needs to give men and young men real opportunities to learn different ways of relating before harm escalates. For boys and young men, this cannot rely on awareness raising alone. It requires trusted relationships, skilled workers, practical settings, family work, and enough time for change to take hold. Without this work, we leave the burden of preventing violence disproportionately with women rather than addressing those who perpetrate it.

What we are seeing in community

Across our work with men, boys, young people and families, we see several consistent issues that should shape the Second Action Plan.

- Too many boys and young men are exposed to violence, coercion, control and rigid gender norms before they have access to trusted adults who can help them make sense of what they are seeing and feeling.
- Many men want healthier relationships but have never been supported to understand the impact of gender inequality, coercive control or harmful masculine norms on themselves and others.
- Respectful relationships education is important, but it is not enough for young people already showing harmful behaviours or living with complex trauma.
- Prevention requires working across the life course, from childhood through adolescence, fatherhood and adulthood, rather than relying primarily on crisis intervention after harm has occurred.
- Adolescent violence in the home remains under resourced, particularly where mothers are trying to keep themselves and other children safe while also seeking help for a young person they love.
- Fatherhood also represents a significant opportunity for prevention and early intervention. Many men become more open to reflection, help-seeking and accountability when considering the impact of their behaviour on their children. Investing in fathering programs and parenting-focused interventions provides an important pathway for promoting child safety, strengthening healthy father-child relationships and supporting long-term behaviour change.
- Men often seek help through practical, familiar or non-stigmatising entry points, including fathering programs, community spaces, workplaces, sporting clubs



and peer-based settings. These settings provide important opportunities for earlier engagement before violence escalates.

- Short term or one-off interventions are not enough. Men and young men need consistent relationships, skilled facilitation, clear accountability and enough time to practise different behaviours.
- Increasing exposure to misogynistic online influencers, pornography and algorithm-driven content is reinforcing rigid ideas of masculinity, entitlement and control among some boys and young men. Prevention responses must evolve to address these emerging influences. Local programs showing what is possible

Through Men & Co. Services and The Centre for Women & Co., we have developed and delivered a number of local programs that show the value of community based, relational and practical prevention, early intervention and behaviour change with men and boys. These programs are not framed as silver bullets. Their value is that they create earlier, safer and more credible points of engagement with men and young men who may not otherwise come into contact with specialist support. They are also grounded in support and governance from The Centre for Women & Co. to ensure they are delivered safely and in line with practice standards.

Harness

Harness has provided a pathway for men to engage in structured support that is grounded in responsibility, safety and behaviour change. On construction sites, Harness Toolbox Talks support men to reflect on the impact of their choices, understand patterns of power and control, and develop safer ways to relate to partners, former partners, children and family members. Importantly, it operates from the understanding that men's change work must be connected to the safety and wellbeing of women and children, not separated from it. It also supports men where they are at, whether they are on the jobsite or after work, Harness team members are there to support them in that time of need.

Bro-Code

Bro-Code has created a practical and accessible way to work with boys and young men (12yrs to 17yrs) before harmful attitudes and behaviours become further entrenched. The program opens up conversations about masculinity, respect, relationships, consent, peer influence, online culture, emotional regulation and help seeking. It gives young men a space to talk honestly, be challenged safely, and build the skills they need to form healthier relationships. The youth worker meets participants at the gym, on the footy field or at school, again meeting them where they are at and reducing barriers for engagement.



Bob's Garage

Bob's Garage shows the importance of meeting men where they are. Community based, practical and familiar settings can reduce stigma and create openings for deeper conversations about mental health, fathering, relationships, isolation, accountability and change. For many men, a direct invitation into a formal domestic and family violence service is not the first step they will take. Spaces and programs like Bob's Garage create a safer bridge into support, while still holding a clear line that violence and controlling behaviour are never acceptable.

What needs to change

Australia has developed a strong system for responding to violence after it has occurred. The Second Action Plan should move beyond pilots and short-term activity and commit to a national architecture for prevention and early intervention with men and boys. This architecture should include specialist men's services, women's specialist services, child and youth services, schools, health, justice, child protection, sport, workplaces and community organisations.

In practice, this means investment in programs that can reach boys and young men before crisis, support fathers to parent safely, give men multiple entry points into help, and ensure behaviour change work is properly linked with risk management and victim survivor safety.

The Second Action Plan should fund these models as core prevention and early intervention infrastructure, not as short-term pilots or discretionary innovation projects. Prevention should not be viewed as separate from behaviour change, rather, they are interconnected parts of the same system that seeks to reduce men's use of violence across the lifespan.

This continuum should recognise that meaningful change rarely occurs through a single intervention. Men require multiple opportunities across different stages of life to challenge harmful beliefs, strengthen emotional literacy, develop healthy relationships and remain accountable for their behaviour.

MACS Recommendations

1. Recognise men's behaviour change as a core component of Australia's prevention system, ensuring investment spans primary prevention, early intervention and specialist behaviour change interventions.



2. Make boys and young men a clear priority in the Second Action Plan, including young people using violence in the home, young people using harmful behaviours in intimate relationships, and boys who have experienced family and domestic violence.
3. Fund long term early intervention programs for boys and young men aged 12 to 18 that include therapeutic support, mentoring, family work, safety planning and trauma informed practice.
4. Invest in initiatives that support boys and young men to critically examine gender, masculinity, relationships, consent, pornography, online misogyny and respectful relationships through sustained engagement rather than one-off education.
5. Scale community-based men's work that provides accessible entry points through fathering programs, practical community spaces, workplaces, sport, health and youth settings.
6. Invest in specialist men's services that are already connected to women's safety services and operate within clear accountability and risk management frameworks.
7. Embed specialist domestic, family and sexual violence workers in schools and youth services to support students, teachers and families in real time.
8. Strengthen responses to adolescent violence in the home, including support for mothers and carers who are victim survivors and support for young people to take responsibility safely.
9. Fund programs for long enough to build trust and measure impact. Short funding cycles make it difficult to retain skilled workers, evaluate outcomes, and build the relationships needed for behaviour change.
10. Invest in specialist wrap-around accommodation and support services for men who are using, or at risk of using, violence, providing safe housing alongside integrated behaviour change, case management, parenting support, mental health support, and risk management. These services should create consistent environments where accountability, responsibility, and non-violent relationship practices are reinforced daily, while reducing risk to women and children, supporting men to sustain change, and preventing homelessness, isolation, and further escalation of violence.
11. Develop sustainable funding pathways for community-based men's engagement models that provide low-barrier access before statutory or justice involvement occurs.
12. Develop a nationally coordinated "web of accountability" approach that strengthens collaboration between specialist men's services, women's services,



child-focused services, justice agencies, education, health and community organisations, ensuring consistent responses that prioritise the safety of women and children while supporting meaningful behaviour change in men.

13. Develop shared outcome measures for men's work that focus on safety, accountability, reduced harm, strengthened parenting, improved help seeking and changes in attitudes and behaviour. Measures should also include indicators such as increased safety, autonomy and freedom for women and children, respectful co-parenting relationships and sustained engagement in change processes
14. Ensure Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander led responses are resourced and centred, recognising the importance of self-determination, cultural authority, healing and community led prevention.
15. Maintain strong investment in specialist women's services, children's healing, housing, legal assistance and crisis response so that work with men and boys adds to safety rather than competing with it.
16. Support evaluation and longitudinal research into effective men's behaviour change and prevention approaches to strengthen the evidence base and inform future national policy.
17. Increase investment in workforce development for specialist men's practitioners to build a nationally consistent, evidence-informed workforce capable of delivering prevention, early intervention and behaviour change programs safely and effectively. This should include advanced capability in accountability-focused engagement, trauma-responsive practice, risk assessment, facilitation of challenging conversations, responding to minimisation and resistance, and maintaining a clear focus on victim-survivor safety.

Conclusion

Men & Co. Services, alongside The Centre for Women & Co. urges the Australian Government to use the Second Action Plan to make a stronger, clearer and more sustained commitment to men's work and young men. We cannot end violence against women and children without working seriously with the men and boys who are using violence, at risk of using violence, or being shaped by the same gendered norms that allow violence to continue.

We know from local practice that change is possible when men and young men are supported, heard, not shamed and engaged early, respectfully and with accountability. Harness, Bro-Code and Bob's Garage show that practical, relational and community based programs can open doors that the formal service system often cannot. With the



right investment, these approaches can help build safer families, safer communities and a stronger national prevention system.

The next five years are critical for us as a service, we started Men & Co. Services in 2020 and have been inundated with requests for support yet have not been able to meet the demand. The Second Action Plan should make prevention and early intervention with men and boy's part of Australia's core domestic, family and sexual violence infrastructure, not an optional extra. This includes recognising men's work as part of a coordinated system response, where accountability is reinforced across services, communities and institutions. Men require multiple opportunities throughout their lives to engage in reflection, develop healthier ways of relating, and access support before violence escalates. Creating these pathways is essential if Australia is to meaningfully reduce men's use of violence over time.

The Second Action Plan presents an opportunity to shift Australia's investment from predominantly responding to violence towards preventing it. By embedding work with men and boys across prevention, early intervention and behaviour change, Australia can build a more complete system, one that supports women and children while also addressing the source of gendered violence. This is about ensuring responsibility is matched with meaningful opportunities for accountability, change and safer futures.