

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

Second Action Plan Recommendations

1. About NAPCAN

The National Association for Prevention of Child Abuse and Neglect (NAPCAN) is Australia's leading national organisation dedicated to the prevention of child abuse and neglect through advocacy, education, and community engagement.

We promote the message that child abuse is preventable by addressing the underlying social issues that lead to cycles of abuse, building community capability through evidence-based programs such as Love Bites and Safer Communities for Children, and leading the national conversation through National Child Protection Week.

Our work places the rights of the child at the centre. NAPCAN believes that children and young people are the experts on their own experiences and need to be included in decision-making spaces. As part of NAPCAN's commitment to giving children and young people a voice on issues that affect them, this submission has included contributions from members of the NAPCAN Youth Speak Out council (NYSO), a diverse group of 20 young people aged 13-25 from every state and territory of Australia. This submission is informed by NYSO's own varied experiences, the expertise of NAPCAN staff, and the perspectives of many young people across the country that we have spoken to, including young people with lived experience of abuse.

2. Executive Summary

This submission welcomes the development of the Second Action Plan under the *National Plan to End Violence against Women and Children 2022-2032* and supports its objective of ending gender-based violence within one generation. The Second Action Plan represents a critical opportunity to strengthen Australia's approach to prevention and to ensure that children and young people are recognised not only as witnesses to violence, but as victim-survivors in their own right.

The National Plan acknowledges that violence against women and children frequently occurs together, that childhood exposure to abuse and neglect can have lifelong consequences, and that early experiences of violence can contribute to future cycles of victimisation and perpetration. It also recognises prevention as the only means of stopping violence before it occurs. However, the current policy landscape continues to separate domestic and family violence, child abuse and neglect, child sexual abuse, harmful sexual behaviours, online exploitation, youth violence and institutional abuse across multiple frameworks, departments and jurisdictions. This fragmentation creates gaps in responsibility, funding, implementation and accountability.

This submission argues that The Second Action Plan cannot credibly seek to end violence against women and children unless it treats prevention of child abuse and neglect as one core national prevention priority rather than adjacent child-protection issues. Similarly, particular attention must be paid to regional, rural and remote communities.

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These communities experience distinct workforce, housing, transport, service-access and cross-border barriers and cannot be expected to implement metropolitan models with significantly fewer resources. Prevention and response measures must be place-based, community-led and designed around the actual capacity and circumstances of regional communities.

The Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse demonstrated that abuse is enabled not only by individual perpetrators, but by institutional cultures, inadequate safeguarding, failures to recognise warning signs, fragmented reporting systems, poor workforce capability and the absence of effective accountability. The lessons of the Royal Commission remain directly relevant to the Second Action Plan. Preventing violence requires action across the environments in which children live, learn, work, socialise and engage online, including families, schools, youth workplaces, sporting organisations, faith communities, residential care, digital platforms and justice systems.

While existing national frameworks recognise many of these issues, there is insufficient clarity about how the frameworks intersect, which level of government is responsible for implementation, and who is accountable when children fall between systems. Where responsibility is described as belonging to everyone but is explicitly assigned to no one, prevention is too easily deprioritised.

The nature and mechanisms of violence are also changing rapidly. Children are increasingly exposed to pornography, online grooming, image-based abuse, artificial intelligence, algorithmically promoted harmful content and peer cultures shaped by digital environments. Digital safety must therefore be understood as an aspect of primary prevention. Responsibility cannot be placed on children to identify, avoid and report harm created and enabled through adult-designed technologies and systems.

This submission supports the intent of the National Plan and recommends that the Second Action Plan establish a clearer and more comprehensive prevention agenda, supported by long-term investment, nationally consistent definitions, explicit government responsibilities, regional implementation strategies, workforce development and meaningful participation by children, young people, victim-survivors and community organisations.

While response, accountability, compensation and recovery remain essential, they occur after harm has already taken place. Without substantial investment in primary prevention, Australia will continue to intervene too late, children and families will continue to fall through gaps between systems, another generation will experience preventable trauma and disadvantage, and future inquiries will continue to identify recommendations that have already been made.

The National Plan describes a whole-of-society commitment to ending violence against women and children in one generation. The Second Action Plan must now convert these commitments into clear, practical and funded implementation. A significant risk is that child abuse and neglect will continue to be treated as the responsibility of separate child-protection or child sexual abuse frameworks, while the National Plan focuses more narrowly on adult intimate partner and gender-based violence. This would fail to recognise the extensive overlap between these forms of harm.

The diversity of experiences that exist in children, young people and adults' lives cannot be separated neatly into government portfolios. Individuals do not experience "domestic violence", "mental health challenges", "disability", "child-protection", "online safety", and "education" as separate policy systems.

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Individuals, particularly children and young people, experience one life. The Second Action Plan must therefore be structured around that reality.

3. Summary of Recommendations

1. Establish prevention of child abuse and neglect as a core, explicitly defined and funded national priority.
2. Create a dedicated, indexed and multi-year prevention funding stream for specialist, community-led and place-based organisations.
3. Recognise children and young people as a distinct priority population across prevention, early intervention, response, recovery and healing.
4. Establish nationally consistent, no-wrong-door pathways for children with intersecting violence, disability, mental-health, child-protection and harmful-behaviour needs.
5. Ensure that this plan is inexplicably linked to all plans such as Safe and Supported and Includes dedicated safeguarding, therapeutic and prevention measures for children in out-of-home care and residential care.
6. Establish digital safety as a formal prevention pillar supported by safety-by-design and cross-sector action.
7. Develop a nationally consistent grooming prevention and education framework centred on adult and institutional responsibility.
8. Require regional, rural and remote impact assessments and place-based implementation plans.
9. Establish a national workforce development and retention strategy, including regional housing, supervision, career pathways and incentives.
10. Publish a national map of intersecting plans, responsibilities, funding and accountability.
11. Strengthen child-centred justice and evidence processes, including specialist interviewing and role-specific judicial, legal and police training.
12. Establish nationally consistent cross-border protocols and shared public reporting.
13. Recognise social connection and third spaces as protective factors and fund community and youth-led prevention infrastructure.