

Consultation on the Australian Government's Second Action Plan (National Plan to End Violence against Women and Children 2022–2032)

Submission by National Council of Women of Queensland
to the Department of Social Services, Australian Government
30 July 2026

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QUEENSLAND

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Celebrating 120 Years



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National Council of Women Queensland

The National Council of Women of Queensland (**NCWQ**) is a not-for-profit umbrella organisation with broadly humanitarian and educational objectives. We work to improve conditions for women and their families in Queensland.

As a long-standing, non-partisan organisation that has advocated for the rights, safety, and wellbeing of women and girls across Queensland for over 120 years we are a ‘Constituent Council’ of the National Council of Women of Australia (**NCWA**).

NCWQ represents over thirty women's organisations in Queensland including:

- Queensland Rural Regional and Remote Women’s Network Inc (**RRR Women**)
- the Queensland Country Women’s Association (**QCWA**)
- Soroptimist International (including Soroptimist International Moreton North Inc (**SIMNI**))
- Zonta Club of Brisbane Inc
- Broken to Brilliant Inc
- Red Rose Foundation
- Maybanke Accommodation and Crisis Support Service (**Maybanke**)

Summary of Priority Areas Recommended by NCWQ for the Second Action Plan

- Increase Sustainable Funding
- Strengthen Accountability and Transparency
- Prioritise First Nations Leadership
- Improve CALD Responsive Systems
- Address the Unique Challenges Experienced by Rural, Regional and Remote Women and Children
- Accelerate Justice System Reform
- Invest in Prevention and Research
- Fund and Expand Available Housing
- Reshape Policing Responses to DFSV

1. Introduction

NCWQ welcomes the opportunity to make a submission to the Department of Social Services (**DSS**) to inform the development of the *Second Action Plan (2027–2032)* under the *National Plan to End Violence Against Women and Children 2022–2032*.

Our submission draws on:

- Community consultations via NCWQ member surveys
- Engagement with domestic, family and sexual violence frontline and specialist services, for example Maybanke, Broken to Brilliant and Micah Projects
- Insights from Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (**CALD**) and First Nations women in the “Women’s Ethnic Network” (as part of Ethnic Communities Council Queensland)
- Research and policy analysis
- Lived-experience perspectives shared from our NCWQ network

We acknowledge and support the Australian Government’s commitment to ending gender-based violence within a generation and recognise the scale and complexity of this national challenge.

This submission evaluates the achievements, progress and limitations of the First Action Plan (2023–2027) (**First Action Plan**); and further identifies NCWQ recommended priority areas required in the next phase, Second Action Plan (2022 – 2032) (**Second Action Plan**).

2. Achievements and Progress of the First Action Plan

The First Action Plan has successfully delivered:

- A unified national framework
 - Alignment of prevention, early intervention, response, and recovery efforts
 - Pilot programs demonstrating the effectiveness of basing welfare officers at police stations
 - Clearer accountability and responsibilities across jurisdictions
- all of which have provided a strong foundation for the Second Action Plan.

The First Action Plan has also contributed to:

- Heightened national attention on gender-based violence
- Increased media coverage
- Stronger community engagement
- Improved understanding of coercive control, technology-facilitated abuse, and sexual violence through education

As a result of this, Government has commenced implementing the First Plan ‘Ten Priority Actions’, including to:

- Expand workforce training across justice, health, education, and community sectors
- Improve trauma-informed and culturally safe policing and justice responses
- Increase investment in crisis, transitional, and long-term housing
- Strengthen prevention and response to sexual violence
- Establish the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Men’s Advisory Body.
- Co-design a First Nations Action Plan

3. Limitations of the First Action Plan

Despite the achievements and progress of the First Action Plan, which have demonstrated genuine commitment to systematic change, the First Action Plan has not achieved its intended outcomes in a number of areas:

3.1 No Measurable Reduction in Violence

The rates of violence against women have not decreased since the First Action Plan commenced.

3.2 Insufficient Funding for Frontline and Specialist Services

Specialist service providers consistently report:

- Long waitlists and long wait times (including for example, anecdotal reports of women waiting up to eight weeks to access help from specialist services) and an inability to help all those that need it which further compounds risk and distress, leaving women and children without timely access to safety and support. This problem is compounded by a lack of standardised data that captures the extent of unmet needs (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2026).

- Workforce shortages which continue to undermine the domestic and family violence sector and include an over-reliance on frontline charities that are operated largely by unpaid volunteers, many of whom are themselves victim-survivors. For example, most of the directors of [REDACTED] are themselves Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence (D^{FSV}) survivors who work full-time jobs and then devote their nights and weekends to supporting other women through the charity. They are assisted by a substantial team of unpaid volunteers who, while providing critical support to others, are simultaneously managing their own trauma. Not only does this model place an unfair burden on victim-survivors, but it is also not sustainable and highlights the urgent need for properly funded, professionally staffed services.
- Frontline worker burnout which is driven not only by the trauma and complexity of the violence experienced by women and children, but by the harmful systems they must access for help. Workers report that the greatest source of exhaustion is not the violence itself but the distress of being unable to keep victim-survivors safe within systems. This systemic dysfunction leaves frontline staff carrying the emotional burden of witnessing preventable harm while navigating processes that obstruct, rather than enable, safety.
- Insufficient availability of crisis, recovery and long-term housing which is one of the many reasons women and children stay in or return to domestic violence situations (Summers, 2022). Implementing rapid rehousing and flexible funding appear to be promising practices for increasing survivor housing stability (Klein et al, 2021) and fund and expand Safe at Home / Staying Home Leaving Violence programs nationally (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2024).
- Limited visibility across the sector, including lack of transparency as to service provider’s capabilities and inconsistent terminology across the sector. Frontline organisations report that referral pathways are often unclear, with services such as DVConnect and 1800Respect sometimes directing women to phone numbers or agencies that are unable to assist resulting in confusion for both workers and victim-survivors.

3.3 Slow Progress on Structural Reform

Key reforms such as national data integration, trauma-informed justice practices, workforce capability uplift, perpetrator intervention standards, and long-term housing pathways remain only partially implemented. These gaps continue to undermine system effectiveness and limit the impact of the First Action Plan.

3.4 Limited Evidence of Improved Outcomes for Victim-Survivors

There is currently no published evaluation demonstrating improved safety, wellbeing, or recovery outcomes for women and children. NCWQ members who are victim-survivors report that leaving an abusive partner does not end the violence. They report having attempted to heal themselves and their children while continuing to experience post-separation abuse that persists for years, and in some cases decades. They also report ongoing harm which frequently takes the form of legal and financial abuse, stalking, and the use of children as tools of coercion.

3.5 Persistent Inequities for First Nations Women

First Nations women continue to experience unacceptable and disproportionately high rates of violence¹. At the 2025 NCWQ Conference, women from diverse cultural backgrounds spoke powerfully about the challenges facing their communities and consistently emphasised the need to be genuinely consulted. As a priority, these women reported wanting their voices heard, their experiences recognised, and their perspectives embedded in policy design and implementation.

3.6 Gaps in CALD-Specific Responses

CALD women continue to face systemic barriers when experiencing domestic, family and sexual violence; such as language barriers, limited knowledge of Australian legal and support systems, and a lack of culturally safe services which combine to reduce access to timely and effective help. Many migrant and refugee women experience visa-related dependency and fear of deportation if they leave a violent partner who sponsors their visa (a fear that perpetrators frequently weaponise as a form of coercive control). This is further compounded by concerns that seeking help may result in child protection involvement or the removal of their children, particularly when navigating unfamiliar systems or facing cultural misunderstandings. Experiences of racism discrimination, community stigma and distrust of authorities intensify these challenges, leaving CALD women disproportionately vulnerable and under-supported within the current DFSV response system.

Malini Raj, Executive Director of the Australian Multicultural Women’s Alliance, spoke at the NCWA Mid-Term Conference in June 2026 about the systemic challenges facing CALD women. She noted that a lack of recognition for overseas qualifications is forcing around 340,000 women in Australia into roles well below their skill level, significantly reducing their earning potential and limiting their economic participation. In the context of domestic violence, this disadvantage becomes even more acute. Limited economic

¹ NCWQ acknowledges that we are not a First Nations organisation and do not claim expertise in the lived experiences of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

independence can severely restrict a woman’s ability to leave an abusive partner, making it harder to secure safety, stability, housing and long-term autonomy.

3.7 Inconsistency Across the Justice System

Many women experiencing domestic, family and sexual violence report feeling that the current Federal Circuit and Family Court of Australia processes do not effectively protect women and children in cases involving domestic and sexual violence. From their experiences, these women report the existing processes routinely override domestic violence evidence, misinterpret trauma and force children into unsafe contact arrangements due to inconsistent judicial discretion and the persistent “investigation gap” in child sexual abuse matters. Even within the Magellan List (intended as the Court’s most rigorous process for serious abuse cases) children have been placed with or ordered into unsupervised contact with ex-partners who may have been accused of violence or sexual harm.

Ria Wong, from the Brisbane Domestic Violence Service, expressed concern that in many cases she is aware of, the Family Court has overturned decisions made in the Magistrates Court, resulting in victim - survivors reporting Domestic Violence Orders being overturned leaving them feeling unsupported and unsafe.

At the Safety Discussion Panel of the 2025 NCWQ Conference Dr Brian Sullivan² reported on successful overseas programs targeting perpetrator accountability, intervention and rehabilitation; including a longer three-year trial conducted by the University of Bristol (Hester et al., 2020). He has since provided further guidance on the evaluation of programs designed to change men’s behaviour (Ovenden & Vlasis, 2020), the role of perpetrator accountability (Chung et al., 2020), and elements needed for quality batterer intervention programs (Morrison et al., 2016). His observations and comments suggest that structured, long-term interventions can be impactful when properly designed, implemented, resourced and evaluated.

3.8 Concerns about Police Responses

Frontline service providers observe that police responses can be slow, inconsistent across regions, and overly reliant on criminal thresholds rather than holistic safety assessments. Unenforced Domestic Violence Orders (**DVO**) leave women and children exposed to ongoing risk despite having formal protections in place; and there are concerns that police inaction may embolden DFSV perpetrators. These systemic shortcomings not only fail to protect women and children but can escalate risk, leaving victim-survivors without timely intervention or appropriate referrals.

² Former Lecturer at the University of Queensland/Senior Lecturer at CQU and former Board member/Acting CEO of the Red Dress Foundation, founder of SICURA-DV

These experiences were reflected by the Commission of Inquiry into Queensland Police Service Responses to Domestic and Family Violence (2022), which identified entrenched cultural issues such as sexism, misogyny and racism, inconsistent risk assessment, and a lack of trauma-informed practice. Accordingly, NCWQ has significant concerns regarding the capacity of Police Services to respond effectively and safely to demands associated with DFSV. Victim-survivors, including some of our own members, report being disbelieved, minimised, or blamed, and that protective actions are often undermined by inadequate understanding of coercive control and post-separation abuse.

3.9 Lack of Housing or Support to Stay in Their Own Homes

Frontline services report that even when women secure a DVO or are assessed as high-risk, there are often no viable housing pathways available, with waitlists for social housing stretching months or years. A severe shortage of safe, affordable housing continues to place women and children fleeing domestic and family violence at extreme risk. Crisis accommodation is routinely full, forcing victim-survivors to remain in dangerous homes, return to perpetrators, or endure prolonged stays in motels, cars, or overcrowded temporary arrangements. The lack of stable and affordable housing not only undermines safety but also disrupts children’s schooling, women’s employment, and their ability to recover from trauma.

In addition, even women fleeing DFSV do secure housing, it is fundamentally unjust that women and children are forced to flee, uprooting their lives and losing access to their support networks while simultaneously recovering from trauma, navigating police and legal processes, and engaging with DFSV service providers. Expecting these victim-survivors to start again in an unfamiliar location compounds harm and places the burden of disruption on victim-survivors rather than on the perpetrator.

Anne Baker, Manager of the Maybanke and a panellist at the 2025 NCWQ 120th Anniversary Conference, reported that although funding for crisis intervention has increased, a significant bottleneck remains due to the lack of affordable and accessible pathways out of crisis accommodation. She noted that women and their children are frequently forced to remain in crisis housing for extended periods, often three months or more, because there are no suitable long-term or transitional housing options available.

3.10 Lack of Financial Support for Women and Children Victim Survivors

Women and children fleeing domestic and family violence face acute financial insecurity, compounded by very low JobSeeker and Parenting Payments, forcing families to live in poverty and unable to secure safety, stability, or the basic resources needed to rebuild their lives. This is further intensified when ex-partners reportedly fail

to pay child support or weaponise the system by quitting their jobs, minimising their incomes, doing “cash jobs” or failing to submit tax returns to exert ongoing financial control.

Financial support available through the ‘Leaving Violence Program’ remains difficult for many women to access, with complex eligibility requirements and administrative barriers. Even when granted, the payment (reported as twelve weeks of support with up to \$5,155 provided) is inadequate to meet the immediate costs of securing safety for themselves and their children.

3.11 Impact of Living in Regional, Rural and Remote Areas

Women and children in rural, remote and regional communities face distinct and compounding barriers to safety, such as long distances and delay to access police, health services, legal assistance and specialist DFSV support which delays intervention and increasing risk. Isolation is a constant pressure for women and children living remotely and far from family, with limited social networks, and relying on small-town relationships that can be both protective and constraining. In close-knit communities where “everyone knows everyone,” victim-survivors may fear intruding on others, damaging relationships, or becoming the subject of rumours and misinformation spread by the perpetrator. With few neutral or confidential spaces to turn to, and limited services in local towns, women often have nowhere safe to seek advice or support. Even fleeing is harder when long distances, scarce transport options, and the visibility of leaving a small community make escape dangerous and logistically complex. These conditions create a unique environment where violence is compounded by geography, social dynamics and service scarcity.

These findings were supported by RRR Women’s survey 2025 which also identified that living in regional, rural and remote areas contributed to unique situations including; unreliable communication, limited access to technology, difficulty with travelling distances particularly after natural disasters for example roads are cut and take a long time to be repaired before they are able to be used again causing isolation and placing women and children at greater risk of DFV.

3.12 Collaborative Early Intervention and Preventative Initiatives

The First Action Plan has facilitated the alignment of early intervention and preventative initiatives however, more needs to be done to ensure collaborative learning, including:

- Scaling-up national prevention campaigns which foster positive, respectful relationships. In the 2025 Report by the Australian Human Rights Commission key findings included the critical role of families, friends, schools, communities, media and online environments each play in early intervention and prevention

(Hester et al., 2020). The earlier 2021 study reported by Our Watch, Respectful Relationship Education found that changing the culture in schools in the long term had significant impact arising from respectful relationships education to challenge gender stereotypes, developing a culture of equality among staff and students and supporting attitudes of change among students (Australian Human Rights Commission 2025). ANROWS compared a number of programs aiming to change the culture of violence. While most had similar goals, they varied in their approaches and outcomes (Rose and Coates, 2022).

- Supporting further research and national support for promising programs, such as the Premier of Queensland’s 2026 Domestic and Family Violence Prevention Month Event in May, where the HALT Program was identified as an example of proactive intervention. David Kramer, a mentor in the program to young men, spoke about the importance of providing positive role models for young men, challenging perceptions of masculinity and raising awareness about issues associated with domestic and family violence. He reported the program relied on funding from various sources including local councils. Innovative programs like this need funds to enable interventions to be evaluated and data collected to support wider use as an evidence based intervention. Pilot programs that have demonstrated positive outcomes must be retained, strengthened, and expanded, alongside longer-term initiatives that have built expertise and community trust. Ria Wong, Cluster Lead at the Brisbane Domestic Violence Service (Micah Projects) notes, frontline services are frustrated when successful pilot programs are discontinued despite clear evidence of their positive impact.
- Embedding compulsory, respectful relationships education in all schools in Australia and across all year levels (**RRE Framework**). Implementation of programs such as “Mind Matters” have been inconsistently funded throughout Australia and need to be prioritised with consistent long term funding to enable the cultural change. This takes time and needs bipartisan support as well as whole of community support. At the June 2026 NCWA Mid-Term Conference Dr Sanjughat Vas Dev from ‘Our Watch’ proposed that primary prevention is needed across settings of early childhood, primary and secondary schools, tertiary settings including university, TAFE and VET, workplaces, sports clubs and media. A consistent approach to prevention across the nation through the RRE Framework with sustained funding and oversight is a critical prevention strategy for reducing DFSV across generations.
- Funding successful community-led prevention initiatives. Jody Brown who was a speaker at the 2025 QCWA Conference in Cairns noted community-led

prevention initiatives particularly in regional and remote areas such as community-led Connection Programs can address issues of isolation. Ms Brown, who lives in rural Australia has first-hand experience of the isolation experienced by those on the land. At the launch of the Broken to Brilliant publication, ‘Violence to Victory’: Voices of Resilience from Domestic Abuse Survivors in Rural, Regional and Remote Australia, an Anthology compiled by K.C. Andrews, the authors spoke about the isolation in rural areas, higher rates of domestic violence and difficulty leaving the situation due to the isolation. As domestic abuse survivors, they were empowered by telling their stories and hoped in doing so they would assist others in a domestic and family violence situation to leave and make a better, safer life for themselves.

- Investing in early intervention programs for young people and families such as The Tripple P Positive Parenting Program and Kids Matter. Programs such as these need to be readily available and delivered consistently across the nation to create a foundation of respectful relationships. In order to achieve this, there will need to be commitment across all levels of government. Addis and Snowdon (2021) looked at evaluation of intervention programs over a decade. They called for preventative programs and further research (Rose & Coates 2022).
 - **Men’s Behaviour Change Programs (MBCPs)** are Australia’s most established perpetrator interventions. When delivered to high standards, with case management, partner contact and risk monitoring they improve perpetrator accountability, reduce physical violence and increase engagement with support services. Programs run by No to Violence, Relationships Australia and Uniting Care and other services, including ‘Your Future Story’, known as “YFS” show the effectiveness of coordinated multi-agency models.
 - **Caring Dads** provides structured intervention for fathers who use violence. Evaluations show improved parenting, reduced harm to children and greater accountability for violence against partners. Its strong partnership with child protection makes it particularly effective in DFSV cases involving children.
 - **U-Turn (Queensland)** combines DFSV behaviour-change work with alcohol and other drug treatment. This integrated model shows promising outcomes including reduced recidivism, better emotional regulation and stronger engagement with therapeutic supports — especially for perpetrators with co-occurring substance use issues.

- **Motivation for Change (Victoria)** is a culturally responsive program for men from CALD backgrounds. Evaluations show increased cultural safety, stronger engagement and improved understanding of coercive control. When paired with community-based accountability, it supports more effective behaviour change for CALD perpetrators.
- **Men’s Accommodation and Case Management Services (MACS)** provides short-term accommodation for men who use violence, allowing women and children to remain safely at home. Evaluations show reduced immediate risk, improved engagement with behaviour-change programs and better coordination with police and courts. This model aligns with the National Plan’s goal of keeping victim-survivors safely housed.
- **International Models and Programs** such as Respect PhD (UK), the Duluth Model (US) and Strength at Home (US) demonstrate the value of coordinated community responses, trauma-informed intervention and intensive case management. These models reduce high-risk behaviours and improve victim-survivor safety when implemented with fidelity.

4. Priority Areas for Second Action Plan

The First Action Plan established essential foundations, strengthened national coordination and initiated important reforms. In the NCWA 2025 National Survey, prevention of violence against women and girls was identified as the highest priority by member associates and affiliates. Yet, violence against women and children has not decreased and many structural barriers remain unaddressed.

To advance the Australian Government’s goal of ending violence against women and children it is necessary that the Second Action Plan must build on the foundations of the First Action Plan while addressing its gaps with urgency and ambition to prioritise areas that require strengthened action, investment and reform in the next phase. NCWQ urges caution against assuming that all existing initiatives from the First Action Plan should be replaced and instead contends that important work is already underway, and effective programs should not be discarded in the pursuit of new approaches.

Based on NCWQ research, engagement, advocacy and collective experience of our members we recommend that the priority areas for the Second Action Plan should be as follows:

4.1 Increase Sustainable Funding

- Substantially increase funding for frontline, specialist, and community-led services delivering prevention, crisis response and recovery initiatives
- Prioritise long-term funding cycles to ensure stability and workforce retention

4.2 Strengthen Accountability and Transparency

- Publish annual progress reports against the “Outcomes Framework”
- Introduce clear performance indicators for all jurisdictions
- Establish independent monitoring and evaluation mechanisms
- Require consistent national data collection and reporting

4.3 Prioritise First Nations Leadership

- Fully fund and expand the First Nations Action Plan
- Resource Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations to lead implementation
- Expand culturally safe perpetrator interventions and healing programs
- Ensure First Nations women’s voices are central to all decision-making

4.4 Improve CALD Responsive Systems

- Fund CALD-led organisations to deliver culturally safe services
- Strengthen visa protections and pathways to safety
- Expand interpreter access across all systems, as difficulties with communication present barriers for women of different cultural backgrounds and impacts their ability to access support services
- Develop national standards for culturally responsive practice

4.5 Address the Unique Challenges Experienced by Rural, Regional and Remote Women and Children

- Strategically consider the unique circumstances and challenges of living in rural, regional and remote communities when developing support strategies for victim-survivors of domestic, family and sexual violence

4.6 Accelerate Justice System Reform

- Introduce a new, specialist, child-safety-centred system which is grounded in trauma expertise, coercive control literacy with independent oversight
- Mandate trauma-informed, culturally safe practice across policing, magistrate courts, and corrections
- Expand specialist domestic and family violence courts

- Improve responses to sexual violence, including evidence collection and prosecution pathways
- Strengthen perpetrator accountability, intervention and rehabilitation programs

4.7 Invest in Prevention and Research

- Scale-up the promotion of national prevention campaigns
- Fund research into such promising programs
- Embed compulsory, respectful relationships education in all schools across all year levels
- Fund community-led prevention initiatives
- Invest in early intervention programs for young people and families

4.8 Fund and Expand Available Housing

- Implement rapid rehousing and flexible funding
- Increase crisis accommodation that is safe, culturally appropriate, disability-accessible, child-friendly and available immediately without long wait times
- Expand long-term social and affordable housing specifically allocated for DFSV victim-survivors, with fast-tracked access and no requirement to prove homelessness caused by violence
- Fund and expand Safe at Home/Staying Home leaving violence programs nationally; including perpetrator removal, security upgrades, legal protections and financial support to help women and children remain safely in their homes
- Embed a co-responder models in housing pathways, where specialist DFSV workers, cultural advisors, mental health clinicians and social workers work alongside housing staff to support victim-survivors
- Provide financial supports such as relocation assistance, emergency grants, rent subsidies, bond loans and debt relief for victim-survivors experiencing financial abuse
- Ensure housing responses are culturally safe, particularly for CALD and First Nations women, with community-led design and governance
- Improve housing access in regional and remote areas, including mobile outreach, crisis units and partnerships with local organisations
- Integrate housing with DFSV services, ensuring coordinated support between refuges, police, child protection, Centrelink, courts and trauma support services
- Embed trauma-informed practice across all housing services, including staff training and policies that avoid re-traumatisation
- Include lived-experience leadership in designing, evaluating and governing housing programs

- Collect and publicly report DFSV-related homelessness data to ensure transparency and accountability
- Guarantee child-centred housing responses, recognising children as victim-survivors with their own safety needs

4.9 Reshape Policing Responses to DFSV

- Mandate specialist DFSV training for all officers, with assessed competency in coercive control, trauma-informed practice, cultural safety, disability-informed responses and systems abuse
- Implement a co-responder model where DFSV specialists attend callouts with police where the DFSV specialists assesses risk and determines who is in need of protection
- Provide independent oversight and accountability, through an external body empowered to investigate complaints
- Utilise specialist DFSV units in every police district, staffed by trained officers and supported by multidisciplinary teams including welfare officers, social workers and cultural advisors
- Mandate victim-safety protocols, requiring private interviews, immediate risk assessments, child-centred practice, and strict limits on accepting perpetrator narratives
- Clear steps to prevent misidentification of victim-survivors as perpetrators, including review of cross-applications and scrutiny of mental-health-based claims made by abusers
- Mandatory documentation using consistent language and escalation of patterns of harm, ensuring repeated reports are linked and treated as escalating risk rather than isolated incidents for example across State and Territory borders
- Provide culturally safe, community-led policing for First Nations women, with First Nations-led training and partnerships
- Embed victim-survivor advocates in police stations to support victims and challenge harmful decision-making
- Collaborate with support services, ensuring victims are not left alone to navigate complex systems
- Prohibit weaponising mental health systems against victim-survivors, by preventing police from relying on unverified mental-health claims by perpetrators
- Require child-centred policing, recognising children as victims and escalating child-risk cases immediately
- Mandate attendance and action on DFSV reports, ending “too busy” responses and ensuring violence against women and children is treated as urgent

Conclusion

The First Action Plan has laid important groundwork, but the pace and scale of change are not yet sufficient to meet the goal of ending violence within a generation. Change takes time and a consistent approach across the Nation is needed. NCWQ considers that Dr Brian Sullivan has summed up this challenge when he says that DFSV is,

‘not only a legal issue, but a public health and human rights issue where safety, the freedom and dignity of women and children are under threat, now and in the future’.

As DSS develops the Second Action Plan, NCWQ urges a stronger, more ambitious, and more fully resourced approach that:

- Increases Sustainable Funding
- Strengthens Accountability and Transparency
- Prioritises First Nations Leadership
- Improves CALD Responsive Systems
- Addresses the Unique Challenges Experienced by Rural, Regional and Remote Women and Children
- Accelerates Justice System Reform
- Invests in Prevention and Research
- Funds and Expands Available Housing
- Reshapes Policing Responses to DFSV

As a peak organisation, NCWQ is thankful for the opportunity to provide feedback based on its 120 years+ advocacy for the rights, safety, and wellbeing of women and girls across Queensland; and looks forward to supporting the Australian Government with this very important work while contributing to further ongoing consultation and policy development in the area of women’s rights.

Note, Regarding Use of AI-Supported Writing Tools:

This submission (excluding the lived-experience stories contained in the Annexure) was drafted with the assistance of AI-supported writing tools. All analysis, content, and final wording were developed,

reviewed, and edited by the authors, members of the NCWQ Advocacy Hub in consultation with and approval of the NCWQ Management Committee.

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APPENDIX

NCWQ is deeply grateful to our members who have shared their lived experiences of domestic, family and sexual violence, including their interactions with support services, police and the judicial system.

The following women have chosen to speak out in the hope that their stories will drive meaningful change and improve outcomes for other women and children in the future.

Their accounts reflect their experiences and perceptions in their own words.

Their identities have been withheld to protect their safety and ensure they can share their stories without fear.

For more first-person experiences, please see the five books published by Broken to Brilliant which contain stories from about 50 victim-survivors:

- Broken to Brilliant (2016)
- Terror to Triumph (2018)
- Shattered to Shining (2019)
- Coerced to Courageous (2023)
- Violence to Victory (2026)

Lived Experience 1: A CALD Woman and System Abuse

I want you to understand who I was before violence reshaped my life. I am a woman from a culturally and racially marginalised background. I live with disabilities caused directly by my ex-husband's abuse. I have two degrees and I am completing a PhD. I was a deeply Christian woman. My husband was my first relationship. I have never smoked, rarely drunk alcohol, never touched illicit drugs.

I am telling you this because I need you to understand that anyone can be subjected to domestic, family and sexual violence. Violence does not discriminate. It can happen to women who are educated, devout, careful, responsible, and deeply committed to their families. It happened to me.

I was married to my ex-husband for almost twenty years. We have three children together. He was respected in our church, a missionary, a leader, the equivalent of a deacon. People admired him. They praised him. They told me how blessed I was to have him. I am telling you this because abusive men are not always obvious. They can be charming, respected, admired. They can hide behind religion, reputation and community standing.

Behind closed doors, my husband subjected me and my children to emotional, physical, verbal, sexual, spiritual, financial and social abuse. He used coercive control, isolation, stalking and post-separation abuse. He used our children as weapons, domestic violence by proxy, and he still does this today.

And he did not act alone. His abuse was enabled, reinforced and amplified by systems that were supposed to protect us: the Queensland Police Service, Queensland Health, Education Queensland, the Magistrates Court, the Federal Circuit and Family Court of Australia, Centrelink and the Mental Health Act. He had support from friends, family and private lawyers.

I need you to hear this clearly: the abuse I experienced from systems was a million times worse than anything my husband ever did to me. And the systems harmed my children. I lost count of the times I tried to leave. Each time, the systems sent me back.

The first time I fled

I drove three hours to a refuge with my children, then aged 2, 4 and 6. I was their primary caregiver. I was and still am a good mother. I did everything I could to protect them.

My husband emailed me, telling me he loved me, telling me to come home. I called a church elder to explain why I had fled. He berated me for “kidnapping the children.” He told me the congregation was upset with me.

A few days later, six armed police officers, three Queensland Police and three Federal Police, stormed the refuge with an emergency recovery order. They gave me ten minutes to pack my children’s belongings. They took my children from me. They handed my car to my husband so he could transport them.

The refuge workers apologised for not being able to keep me safe.

I later learned my husband had hired a lawyer and filed an affidavit full of lies: that I was psychotic, unfit, dangerous. The judge granted the order at an ex parte hearing. I wasn’t even there.

I left the refuge and went to my mother’s house. I cried constantly. I wanted to die. My husband rang me every day, calling me a selfish bitch, telling me to come home and look after the children because he had to work. I could hear my children crying in the background.

At court, I had a duty lawyer I met an hour before the hearing. My husband had the former president of the law society. The judge issued interim orders: the children were to live with him. I could see them for three hours a week, supervised.

The judge said the allegations were serious. I told him they were false. He didn’t believe me. I felt humiliated.

A lawyer told me it would cost a quarter of a million dollars to fight for my children, and I would likely lose. I didn’t have the money. My children needed me.

I felt defeated and I went back.

Crazy

One of the times I tried to leave him was so devastating that even now, years later, it deeply affects me. His abuse was escalating again. I was terrified of him. I had taken to sleeping in my children’s bedrooms with my mobile phone under my pillow, just in case. His drinking was getting worse too. He told me he wanted to give up alcohol and asked me to help him. He said if I saw him drinking, I should gently pull him up on it.

After two or three days without alcohol, he was irritable, tense, unpredictable. One night I saw him drinking after work. I tried to say something light, careful, safe: “Hey babe, didn’t you want to give up alcohol?” I was holding our newborn. I knew I had to choose every word with precision.

He exploded. He screamed at me to shut the fuck up. He called me a bitch. Then he kned me in the stomach. I fell to the ground, barely managing to keep our baby from hitting the floor. He told me to get up. That he didn't touch me. That I was faking. I eventually got up and ran into the bedroom and locked the door. He kicked it in, the force hitting me and leaving a huge hole. Our older children later told me that I had made that hole, due to my "anger issues". Their dad had told them that.

I called the police. I thought they would help me. I thought they would protect me. When they arrived, they spoke to him first. I could hear him fake crying, telling them that I had attacked him. He told them I was delusional, hallucinating abuse that wasn't happening. He told them he believed I had bipolar. He told them he loved me and was worried about the children because he didn't think they were safe with me. He told them I had kicked the door in during a manic episode.

I stood there listening to him rewrite reality, and I watched the police believe him. I heard one of the officers say to him, "My wife has mental health issues too, but the medication she's on helps her a lot."

I wasn't on any medication. I didn't have a mental illness. But they had already decided who I was. When the police finally spoke to me, I told them what happened and that I wanted to leave him. They told me the safest thing was for them to take me to hospital for treatment.

They took me to the emergency department. Two security guards stood at the end of my bed. A doctor came and asked, gently, if I knew why I was there. I said no. She said, "Because you are delusional." I was under an Involuntary Treatment Order.

I was taken to the locked psychiatric unit. I was kept there for about two months. They told me I had bipolar. They forced me to take medication. I had blood tests every day to prove I was taking it. I was placed in a shared ward with violent men. I had to share a bathroom with a man. None of the toilets or bathrooms had locks. The kitchen was infested with cockroaches. Men screamed that they were going to kill someone, and I was sure that someone was me. I was so scared and I cried everyday. I questioned myself, how did I get here?

I kept telling the doctors my husband was abusive. I gave them specific examples. I begged them to listen. But the more I spoke, the more it proved I was mentally ill. The longer they kept me. Eventually I learned to shut up.

The doctors kept telling me my husband was my carer. They told me they were going to send me back to him. That he loved me. When I finally went home, I had to do everything he told me to do. If I spoke back or defied him, he would call the hospital and

tell them I was manic. They would send me back for monitoring. I was sent back many times. I was terrified. I was told that if I tried to run away, the hospital would have the police find me and bring me back.

I lived in a nightmare where my abuser and the mental health system worked together to control me completely. There was no escape. I genuinely believed the only way out was suicide.

Years later, after I finally managed to escape for good, I saw a private psychiatrist. He was horrified. He told me I should never have been diagnosed with bipolar, especially not by a doctor who saw me once and was not my regular doctor. After seeing me regularly for several years, he told me clearly: I did not have bipolar. I never had a mental illness.

But the damage was already done. The bipolar medication had caused a life-threatening illness called DRESS syndrome. My organs shut down. I almost died. It left me with four lifelong, incurable autoimmune diseases, including Type 1 Diabetes and Graves' disease. I later developed thyroid cancer and breast cancer. I believe this was caused by the severe inflammation triggered by the medication.

When I think about it, I have no words to express the rage I feel about what I was subjected to. I now have a much lower quality of life and a shortened life expectancy. What makes me the most angry is the lack of consequences for my exhusband and all the so-called professionals who ruined my life. I have lost all trust in authority, especially the police, the courts and the medical system.

The last time I left

My husband's violence escalated. He punched my youngest child in the face, breaking a tooth. He threatened me: if I reported it, he would take the children, he would win, and he would get a domestic violence order against me.

I called the police. They said they were too busy and couldn't come out.

The next day, I took my son to the station. The detectives told me it was "just horseplay." They refused to act.

Child Safety told me that because one parent, me, was "willing and able," they would do nothing. They told me to take it to court.

When my son told his father we had gone to the police, my husband retaliated. A few days later, while I was making lunch for my children, the police knocked on the door. They handed me a domestic violence order, against me, applied for by my husband.

I asked if I could pack and leave with my children. They said yes. I packed. I left. He couldn't stop me. That was the last time. I never went back.

The DVO was eventually thrown out, but I spent months in court and thousands of dollars fighting it.

Lived-Experience 2: A Woman from a Regional Area

I married at the age of seventeen in a regional town. My partner and I took ten years to finally have a baby. During that time my partner worked away from home for weeks at a time and he started drinking heavily. In the early days I studied and worked part time to cover the living costs as his business was not paying him a wage yet. He would drink excessively and force himself on me. With the birth of a baby, things started to get worse. I had put on weight during the pregnancy and he became increasingly critical of my appearance stating if I did not lose weight he would leave. He was also intolerant to the cries of the baby. The cries were worse in the late afternoon which the clinic nurse put down to colic. I tried everything recommended but the baby still cried each afternoon around the same time. I was alarmed and frightened when he started shaking the baby violently and yelling at me to make it stop crying. The experience left me determined to leave and protect my baby. I was relieved when he did leave and the baby and I were able to move to the city to join my family. I was fortunate that I had graduated and was able to support myself. With the support of family I was able to further my studies. I had not shared my experience with anyone until I spoke to one of the Lecturers who was supportive. She helped me to gain courage and reinforced my decision to keep my child safe. I then decided to apply for a divorce. I was working so I was not eligible for legal aid. I was traumatised by the visit to the Legal Aide Office where I was made to feel embarrassed that I asked for support. Being turned away, I felt isolated and alone. I was unable to share what was happening with my friends as I did not want them to feel they had to choose. They were our friends not my friends. The experience of going to court was the worst I have experienced. I was expected to stand up before the court and remember what I had to say. I was so stressed my mind went blank, I could not find the words. With the support of my mother and encouragement from my legal council, I was finally successful, the divorce was granted. My ex-partner, the father of my child, did not appear in court that day. He made no claim stating through his lawyer that he did not wish to care for or have custody of our child. For that I was grateful. Years later when he had failed to pay any child support and he wrote cheques that were dishonoured, leaving me with the dishonour fee to pay I inquired about getting help to have him pay child support. I was advised not to try because he could make a claim against me and require me to support him and he could have a

claim against my superannuation. I chose not to fight that battle and raised my child on my own with the support of my family and friends.

Lived Experience 3; A Woman Navigating the Federal and Family Court of Australia

I didn't just survive domestic, family and sexual violence, I survived what happened when I walked into the Family Court and watched the same dynamics of coercion, minimisation and misogyny play out on an institutional scale. At my very first hearing, my ex-partner filled the gallery with his family and friends. His barrister held up the affidavit where I had disclosed rape and sneered, "This is another one of THOSE domestic violence cases, Your Honour." As he read my sexual assaults aloud sarcastically, the Judge crossed his arms, threw his head back, shook his head at me, and chortled and tutted while I sat there trying not to faint. The room began to spin. I ran to the bathroom and was sick.

That was the moment I realised I had escaped one abuser only to be handed to another, one with the full power of the Commonwealth behind him. Over the next year, I endured torturous, numerous, expensive, PTSD inducing hearings that cost me my full-time job and any sense of safety. My judge mocked coercive control, performed it theatrically, and then delivered exactly what my perpetrator had threatened would be my punishment for speaking out. He ordered me and my three children out of our home immediately and handed it to my abuser as an interim order, no cross-examination, no testing of evidence, no due process. He overrode the protection order that listed my children for their safety. He sent them back into danger.

He set me up to fail financially, forcing me to refinance with the same bank my ex-partner had used to run up revenge debt. He named the real estate agent I had to use, wrote my ex-partner's friends into the order as the buyers, and allowed the house to be sold under value. He even ordered that my rapist could contact me, contrary to the no-contact protection order, and required us to purchase a communication app to facilitate it. Every safeguard I had fought for was stripped away.

The legal abuse didn't end there. When I complained, the institution closed ranks exactly as my ex-partner's mates had done. The Chief Justice's office told me my judge was "a bit stressed" and had been relieved of some duties, and that my only option was to appeal, something they knew I could never afford while being forced into homelessness. Complaint after complaint disappeared into the same protective silence.

The greatest harm I suffered was not from my abuser, but from the judge who destroyed my family and from every institution that protected him. I watched the boys’ club operate at every level: socially, legally, judicially. My abuser’s friends discredited me, isolated me, and called me a liar. Then I walked into a courtroom and watched the exact same thing happen with robes and Commonwealth authority.

I have spoken about this publicly, in the Senate Inquiry into Financial Abuse, in the Hansard, in my writing, because what happened to me is not an isolated case. It is part of a documented, cross-continental pattern of judicial victim-blaming, minimisation of abuse, and decisions that place women and children in danger. My children and I were failed by a boys’ club that protected an abuser, and then by a bigger boys’ club that protected the judge who finished his work.

I tell my story because no woman should have to survive violence at home only to be abused again by the system designed to protect her. I want accountability, not just for myself, but for every woman and child harmed by legal misogyny and unchecked judicial power.

Lived Experience 4: A Woman's Perspective That 'Leaving Did Not Mean Safety'

Leaving domestic and family violence is often described as the point at which a victim-survivor becomes safe. My lived experience was very different.

I was prepared for leaving to be frightening and difficult. What I was not prepared for was the lack of support after I left. I did not expect the systems intended to protect and support victim-survivors to dismiss my need for help or create further barriers to safety and recovery.

After leaving, I was turned away from group support, denied Social Security payments because I was accused of lying, and unable to obtain secure housing. My private lawyer did not understand domestic violence and sent me into mediation with a perpetrator who had attempted to kill me through smothering and strangulation and was threatening to harm me and the children.

Despite the history of serious violence, threats, escalating behaviour and stalking, the children were required to spend time with their father every fortnight. I did not know where they were being taken, and he was not required to provide those details.

On one occasion, the children escaped from their father and telephoned me from a public phone box. They were frightened and wanted me to collect them or call the police. I could not send the police because neither the children nor I knew where they were. The fear and helplessness of that situation are difficult to describe.

Leaving did not immediately bring safety. Instead, separation exposed my children and me to further danger, homelessness, financial hardship, ongoing abuse and legal processes that did not understand domestic violence.

Homelessness and Housing Insecurity

Homelessness is a major consequence of leaving domestic and family violence.

Australian data show that 67% of women who permanently left a violent partner relied on friends or relatives for accommodation at some point. More than half, 55%, moved out of their home while their former partner remained.

I was one of these women.

My children and I spent five months living together in one room, with one suitcase each.

As I owned my own home, I was ineligible for transitional housing. Having my name connected to a property did not mean that my children and I had access to a safe place to live.

I could not secure a private rental because I had no recent rental history and no employment. With the permission of the court, I had left the city where the perpetrator lived to seek safety.

I was also unable to purchase a home in our new location because domestic violence had disrupted my employment and financial security.

The system treated home ownership as evidence that I did not need housing assistance. In reality, owning a home did not provide safe accommodation, financial independence or somewhere my children and I could live.

The Financial Cost of Leaving

Victim-survivors often carry the overwhelming financial cost of leaving domestic violence.

I had to pack up the family home and arrange for security guards to be present while the perpetrator collected his belongings. I paid for this myself.

I then transported our belongings approximately 5,000 kilometres interstate so that my children and I could reach safety.

I was responsible for all household bills, school fees, medical and pharmacy expenses, sporting costs and the everyday costs of raising the children.

The perpetrator declared bankruptcy and manipulated the system so that he paid between \$0 and \$20 per month in child support.

The March 2021 Parliamentary Inquiry into Family, Domestic and Sexual Violence found that victim-survivors frequently bear the costs of leaving the relationship, the family home and their community. These costs include relocation, travel, removal expenses, rental bonds, replacement furniture, safety upgrades, legal fees, medical expenses and lost income.

For me, these were not abstract costs. They were expenses I had to meet while trying to keep my children safe and rebuild our lives.

Domestic violence disrupted my employment and housing security, while the perpetrator was able to avoid much of the financial responsibility for his children.

Post-Separation Abuse

There is a widespread belief that once a victim-survivor leaves, the abuse stops.

My experience was that the abuse continued after separation and followed me even though I moved approximately 5,000 kilometres away.

The perpetrator attempted to use financial arrangements as another form of control. He wanted to negotiate a private child-support agreement. I chose to have child support managed through Services Australia because I believed a formal government system would provide greater accountability.

Despite this, he was able to arrange his financial affairs so that he paid only \$0 to \$20 per month to support his children.

The harassment was also psychological and deeply targeted.

The perpetrator had killed our pet ducks by hanging them. After we left, he sent two stuffed toy ducks through the mail to our redirected post office box so that they arrived at Christmas.

This was not an innocent gift. It was a deliberate reminder of violence, intended to frighten and retraumatise us and to demonstrate that he could still reach us.

Post-separation abuse continued through financial control, threats, intimidation, stalking, child-support avoidance, the use of the children to maintain control and targeted acts designed to revive fear and memories of violence.

These were not isolated incidents. They were part of a continuing pattern of coercion and abuse.

Family Law and Legal Responses

My private lawyer did not have an adequate understanding of domestic and family violence.

I was sent into mediation with a perpetrator who had attempted to kill me and was threatening to harm the children and me. The power imbalance, fear and coercion within the relationship were not adequately recognised.

Despite these risks, the children continued to have contact with their father every fortnight. I was expected to hand over my children to a person who had used serious violence and made threats of harm, without being told where they would be staying; these were the original court orders.

The incident in which the children escaped and telephoned me from a public phone box demonstrates how frightening and unsafe these arrangements were. I was expected to protect my children, yet I was not provided with the basic information needed to know where they were.

My private family lawyer did not adequately recognise the cumulative pattern of violence, coercive control or the dangers that continued after separation. I had to navigate mediation and parenting arrangements while living with fear for my own safety and the safety of my children.

The violence continued despite a violence restraining order. The perpetrator stalked us, stood over our beds at night, entered the property to leave Easter eggs and ultimately killed our pets.

It was not until a lawyer from Women's Legal Service took on my full case that I had representation from someone trained to understand domestic and family violence and prepare court orders that protected me and the children.

Police Responses and Breaches of the Violence Restraining Order

I reported 17 breaches of a violence restraining order.

When I attended the police station to report the breaches, the officer rolled his eyes and appeared unwilling to complete the necessary paperwork.

At that time, nobody had explained the importance of reporting every breach or how repeated breaches could demonstrate an escalating pattern of intimidation and danger.

My Executive Director drove me to the police station and remained outside to make sure the breaches were reported. I believe this was the only reason the officer did not send me away.

I was reporting breaches of an order intended to protect me, yet I was made to feel that I was creating unnecessary work. The officer's dismissive response added to my fear and isolation and reduced my confidence that the system would respond when I sought help.

There was also a failure to adequately address and investigate sexual abuse against the children and me.

Years later, there were further disclosures of sexual abuse. These disclosures demonstrated the seriousness of what had occurred and had significant, long-lasting impacts on the children.

Long-Term Health Consequences

The physical and psychological impacts of domestic violence do not end when the violence stops.

Research from the Australian Longitudinal Study on Women’s Health has shown that women who experience domestic violence can face long-term consequences, including anxiety, depression, post-traumatic stress symptoms, chronic illness and reduced physical health. These impacts can continue for decades and affect a survivor’s ability to work, parent, maintain relationships and live a fulfilling life.

During the abuse, I weighed 46 kilograms and was underweight for my height. This significant weight loss increased my risk of reduced bone density and loss of muscle mass. I now have osteopenia.

I also continue to experience a heightened startle response when exposed to particular triggers. These are ongoing post-traumatic stress symptoms caused by the violence.

I continue to carry the physical, psychological and financial impacts of the abuse. The costs of medical care, treatment, counselling, physiotherapy, medication and recovery are borne by the victim-survivor, even when the health problems were caused by the perpetrator’s violence.

There has been no compensation for the ongoing damage to my health, no support for the lasting psychological harm experienced by the children, and no meaningful mechanism through which the perpetrator has been held financially responsible for these consequences.

The Long-Term Reality of Leaving Violence

My lived experience shows that leaving domestic and family violence is not a single event. It is the beginning of a long process of trying to establish safety, secure housing, manage financial hardship, protect children, navigate legal systems and recover from trauma.

I was expected to prove my need for help, explain domestic violence to professionals, meet the costs of leaving, protect my children without knowing where they were and continue functioning while living with fear and trauma.

The violence affected every area of our lives: our housing, finances, health, education, relationships, sense of safety and ability to rebuild.

Conclusion

I left the relationship, but my children and I did not immediately escape the violence or its consequences.

Our experience shows how systems can fail to recognise the danger faced by victim-survivors during and after separation. The lack of informed support compounded the harm and made the journey to safety and recovery far more difficult.

The effects of domestic and family violence did not end when I left. They have remained in our health, our financial circumstances and the experiences carried by my children.

This is the reality of lived experience: leaving is a critical step, but it is not the end of the journey.