

Submission Name: Second Action Plan under Australia's *National Plan to End Violence against Women and Children 2022–2032 (the National Plan)*.

Submission jointly contributed by:

Australian Multicultural Women's Alliance

National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Women's Alliance

The National Rural Women's Coalition

The Working with Women Alliance

Submission endorsed by:

Women with Disabilities Australia



Acknowledgements

The National Rural Women's Coalition (NRWC), The Working with Women Alliance (WwWA), the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Women's Alliance (NATSIWA), Women with Disabilities Australia (WwWDA) and the Australian Multicultural Women's Alliance (AMWA) acknowledge the Traditional Owners of the land on which we work and live. We pay our respects to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elders past, present and future. We value Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories, cultures, and knowledge. We extend our respect to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women who for thousands of years have preserved the culture and practices of their communities on Country. This land was never surrendered, and we acknowledge that it always was and always will be Aboriginal land. We acknowledge that Australian governments have been complicit in the entrenched disadvantage, intergenerational trauma and ongoing institutional racism faced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. We recognise that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people must lead the design and delivery of services that affect them for better life outcomes to be achieved.

About NRWC

The National Rural Women's Coalition (NRWC) is a grass roots organisation, established in 2002, that provides a collaborative, powerful national voice for women living in rural, regional, and remote Australia. We are a coalition of five peak rural alliances comprising the Australian Local Government Women's Association, Australian Women in Agriculture, National Rural Health Alliance, Women in Seafood Australasia and Transport Women Australia Limited. For over 20 years, we have worked to ensure better social, economic, and environmental outcomes for women in rural townships, in rural communities and in primary production throughout Australia.

About WwWA

The Working with Women Alliance (WwWA) represents two key portfolios: National Women's Safety (NWS) and National Women's Equality (NWE). The WwWA connects the critical areas of gender-based violence prevention and the advancement of women's economic equality and leadership, bridging these important policy fields for greater impact. We work with members and stakeholders, including the Australian Government, to provide expertise and advice on gender equality and women's safety.

About AMWA

The Australian Multicultural Women's Alliance (AMWA) is led by the Federation of Ethnic Communities' Councils of Australia (FECCA), the national peak body representing Australians from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds in partnership with Settlement



Services International (SSI) and Media Diversity Australia (MDA). The Australian Multicultural Women's Alliance is the national voice for multicultural women. AMWA advocates for gender equity, representation, and inclusion across all facets of Australian society. Our work is informed by lived experiences, community insights, and evidence-based research to ensure that systemic barriers are addressed, and opportunities for women are unlocked. As an intersectional alliance, we aim to empower women from all multicultural backgrounds to thrive and contribute fully to Australia's prosperity.

About NATSIWA

The National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Women's Alliance (NATSIWA) is the national peak body representing the voices, leadership and lived experiences of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women across Australia. As one of the Australian Government-funded National Women's Alliances, NATSIWA advocates for policies and reforms that advance gender equality, cultural safety and self-determination, ensuring Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women's perspectives are reflected in national decision-making through community-led engagement, evidence-based advocacy and strategic partnerships.

Women With Disabilities Australia

Women with Disabilities Australia (WWDA) is the national representative organisation run by and for women, girls and gender-diverse people with disabilities. WWDA works to promote and advance the human rights, safety and wellbeing of women, girls, and gender-diverse people with disabilities in all of their diversity. As a National Women's Alliance, WWDA represents and advocates for the interests of women, girls and gender-diverse people with disabilities to inform government policies and programs in advancing gender equality in Australia. WWDA has a particular focus on decision-making and agency, participation and leadership, prevention of all forms of violence, sexual and reproductive health and rights, and economic security and social protection.



Executive Summary

The National Women's Alliances (NWA) represent women and children who are most at risk of experiencing gender-based violence. The NWA includes the Australian Multicultural Women's Alliance, the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Women's Alliance, the Working with Women Alliance, the National Rural Women's Coalition and Women with Disabilities Australia. Collectively the NWA represents First Nations women, multicultural and migrant women, and rural, regional and remote women, who find it most difficult to access mainstream services. The NWA recommend the Second Action Plan commits to sustainable and adequate funding for both existing specialist services and new, targeted community models to address violence against women and children in underserved communities. This includes finding innovative ways to deliver services in rural and remote areas, improving access for migrant women prevented by their visa status from accessing services in Australia, and increasing long-term funding to Aboriginal Controlled Organisations to design and deliver culturally appropriate services across prevention, specialist domestic, family or sexual violence (DFSV) as well as legal, housing and justice support. The NWA's policy recommendations are listed below:

Recommendations

- Ongoing, sustainable funding for specialist violence response services and settlement organisations working on DFSV, rather than short-term grants or pilot programs.
- Support for integrated, culturally safe healing and recovery pathways for First Nations and multicultural women that improve access to housing, health care, mental health services, legal assistance, financial counselling, education, employment and community support
- Development of community-embedded, wholistic DFSV, legal, health and social services in rural and remote areas
- Address gaps in family violence provisions for pending partner visa applicants, international students and temporary skilled migrants
- Increase long-term investment in Aboriginal-led prevention initiatives that strengthen culture, identity, leadership, respectful relationships and community wellbeing.
- Fund at least one specialist multicultural DFSV service in each state and territory.
- Increase investment in crisis and public housing in priority areas across regional, rural and remote Australia
- Funding to establish new ECEC centres in identified 'childcare deserts' in rural and remote areas.
- Specific funding allocation to ensure culturally safe First Nations ECEC centres in key locations across rural, regional and remote Australia.

- Fund multicultural and faith-based organisations to deliver inclusive mentoring, social connection and family support programs, including childcare
- Support for DFSV practitioners to be introduced in police forces across rural, regional and remote areas where wrap-around services are less available
- Partner with trusted multicultural organisations to deliver community-informed, culturally responsive behaviour change and prevention programs for men and boys.
- Require all Commonwealth portfolios to develop actions to end violence against women and children.
- Provide long-term, sustainable investment that strengthens the capability, workforce and leadership of Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations.
- Develop National Cultural Safety Standards for the gender-based violence sector in their approaches towards multicultural women, drawing on established First Nations approaches.
- Inclusion of ethnicity, visa status, language, country of birth and migration pathway collection in AIHW's pilot national DFV data set.
- Ensure sexual violence is treated as a distinct priority in the Second Action Plan,
- Support a dedicated disability-led DRO-based violence working group (please refer to Women With Disability Australia's Submission)

Priority Area 1: Victim-Survivors

The NWA recommend the Second Action Plan commits to sustainable and adequate funding for specialist and community services to provide high-quality responses to all women and children experiencing violence. The NWA notes that despite a public commitment to end violence against women, existing services are chronically underfunded and limited in their capacity to meet demand.

Additionally, the NWA call for recovery and healing, and wholistic service provision to be recognised as essential components of a comprehensive response to family, domestic and sexual violence. Women experiencing violence continue to navigate the long-term impacts of trauma while also experiencing housing instability, financial insecurity, justice involvement, poor health, child protection intervention and limited access to culturally safe services. These interconnected issues can significantly affect a woman's ability to recover and rebuild her life, highlighting the need for coordinated, person-centred responses.

Barriers to access both in direct DFSV service provision and the various intersecting services and programs are more pronounced for multicultural and migrant women, women living in regional, rural and remote areas, and First Nations Women. This makes one-size-fits-all service provision much less likely to be effective. Culturally and geographically targeted programs are critical to meet the unique needs of these women and their families, who face heightened disadvantage.

Specific barriers for multicultural, rural and First Nations women include:

Multicultural and migrant women

Multicultural, migrant and refugee women in Australia face compounding disadvantages rooted in racism, migration status, language barriers, and cultural exclusion. Addressing violence against women in these communities cannot be addressed through gender-neutral or monocultural policy frameworks alone.

When it comes to support service provision, many migrant women and their children are not eligible for family violence support due to their visa status. This includes pending partner visa applicants, international students and temporary skilled migrants. Improving access to specialist supports regardless of visa category is a critical step to ensure better access to services for migrant women.

Rural, regional and remote women

Rural, regional and remote women are at significantly higher risk of experiencing violence. Hospitalisation from DFSV is significantly higher in rural and remote areas, and state-level data shows the prevalence of DFSV is higher outside of metropolitan areas.

There are systemic and social barriers to effective policy responses to DFSV in rural and remote areas. These include privacy and confidentiality concerns, physical isolation from services, as well as lack of housing, transport, childcare and other essential services. These barriers are caused by the geographical and financial limitations that affect service provision outside metropolitan areas. This includes funding models that rely too heavily on population data, don't accurately reflect the true cost of delivering services outside of metropolitan areas, and don't aim to provide full geographic service coverage.

First Nations women

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women continue to experience disproportionately high rates of family, domestic and sexual violence and remain overrepresented across many of the social and economic factors that increase vulnerability to violence. Housing insecurity, financial hardship, intergenerational trauma, racism, child protection involvement, justice system contact, poor health outcomes and unequal access to culturally safe services continue to affect safety, recovery and long-term wellbeing. These challenges are often compounded in regional, rural and remote communities.

Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations play a critical role in supporting healing through culturally safe, trauma-informed and community-led approaches. Their ability to provide holistic support that reflects cultural identity, community relationships and local knowledge strengthens engagement and contributes to improved long-term outcomes. The Second Action Plan should support the continued expansion and sustainability of Aboriginal-led healing initiatives that are designed by and for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

Recommendations

1. Ongoing, sustainable funding for specialist violence response services, rather than short-term grants or pilot programs.
2. Support for integrated, culturally safe healing and recovery pathways for First Nations and multicultural women that improve access to housing, health care, mental health services, legal assistance, financial counselling, education, employment and community support
3. Development of community-embedded, wholistic DFSV, legal, health and social services in rural and remote areas

4. Address gaps in family violence provisions for pending partner visa applicants, international students and temporary skilled migrants
5. Ensure access to specialist domestic, family and sexual violence services, legal assistance, Medicare, income support and safe housing regardless of visa category while visa matters are resolved; embed trauma- and violence-informed immigration processes, including interpreter access and reduced evidentiary burdens; and recognise migration status as a structural determinant of vulnerability within implementation of the Second Action Plan.

Priority Area 2: Prevention and early intervention

The NWA note that prevention strategies are not confined to DFSV programs. Factors contributing to violence against women include access to safe housing, economic participation, migration status, health status including drug and alcohol intake, natural disasters and weather events and marital status, among others. Government systems either reduce risk or create new opportunities for perpetrators to continue abuse. Systems involving payments, debts, compliance, digital identity, migration status, child support, taxation, housing access, privacy, information sharing and complaints pathways can be weaponised to control, threaten, impoverish, locate or re-traumatise victim-survivors. Commonwealth responsibility across disability, housing, social security, migration, taxation, child support, health, education, justice and digital and gambling regulation should therefore be treated as part of the prevention architecture of the National Plan, not as separate policy agendas.

Specific barriers for multicultural, rural and First Nations Women include:

Rural, regional and remote women

Lack of appropriate housing to support women leaving DFSV situations is a critical concern in rural and remote areas. According to Homelessness Australia, domestic and family violence is the leading cause of homelessness for women, with 45% of all women and girls seeking homelessness assistance identifying family and domestic violence as a cause.ⁱ This issue is more pronounced in rural and remote areas where rental accommodation is expensive and limited, and where there is less public housing available.ⁱⁱ

Multicultural and migrant women

Structural and socioeconomic conditions that increase multicultural women's vulnerability to gender-based violence include barriers to employment, skills recognition and economic

participation. Settlement, multicultural and migrant organisations are critical to facilitating early access to safety, trusted information and culturally responsive services.

Prevention also requires addressing the structural conditions that shape women's vulnerability before violence occurs. Economic participation, recognition of overseas qualifications, meaningful employment, affordable childcare and leadership opportunities are protective factors that strengthen women's independence, reduce financial dependence on perpetrators and improve long-term safety. For migrant women, barriers to skills recognition, employer expectations of local experience and underemployment undermine these protective factors despite high levels of education and professional experience. Embedding economic participation within the prevention framework is therefore essential to reducing vulnerability to gender-based violence

First Nations women

Housing insecurity, financial hardship, intergenerational trauma, racism, child protection involvement, justice system contact, poor health outcomes and unequal access to culturally safe services continue to affect safety, recovery and long-term wellbeing of First Nations women. These challenges are often compounded in regional, rural and remote communities where workforce shortages, fragmented service systems and limited service availability reduce access to support.

Recommendations

1. Increase long-term investment in Aboriginal-led prevention initiatives that strengthen culture, identity, leadership, respectful relationships and community wellbeing.
2. Expand Aboriginal Liaison Officer and Indigenous Family Liaison Officer positions across mainstream services, policing, courts and justice agencies, prioritising regional, rural and remote Australia.
3. Fund at least one specialist multicultural DFSV service in each state and territory, whilst recognising settlement and multicultural organisations as essential prevention infrastructure.
4. Strengthen economic protective factors by expanding investment in skills recognition for women in feminised professions, improving access to affordable childcare, supporting culturally responsive employment pathways, and addressing barriers such as employer requirements for local experience.
5. Increase investment in crisis and public housing in priority areas across regional, rural and remote Australia

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

The NWA note that children's safety is closely related to the safety of their mothers, and best practice service provision will consider the safety and recovery of children alongside their mothers. One of the biggest barriers preventing survivors of domestic violence from leaving abusive partners is the financial ability to support themselves and their children. Victim-survivors need affordable, flexible, and reliable childcare, housing, and transportation to create a pathway to safety and stability for themselves and their children. Without access to childcare, survivors are unable to look for work, attend job interviews, or go to work or school. Additionally, high-quality childcare can protect children who might be experiencing violence at home, by improving access to support services, reducing contact with perpetrators and offering the opportunity for strengthening emotional wellbeing.ⁱⁱⁱ Specific issues related to protecting and providing support to children arise in different communities, including accessibility and appropriateness of services.

Specific barriers for multicultural, rural and First Nations Women include:

Rural, regional and remote women

Women living in rural, regional and remote Australia do not have consistent access to early childhood education and care (ECEC). An estimated 1.1 million Australians living in rural Australia do not have access to ECEC (and effectively live in 'childcare deserts').^{iv} Underperforming ECEC centres are more common in lower socio-economic and rural, regional and remote areas in comparison to the inner-city.^v While new policies guaranteeing access to three days of childcare are positive, they do not address the problem of access. This represents a significant structural barrier to supporting rural, regional and remote women and children experiencing or at risk of violence.

Multicultural and migrant women

Culturally responsive family, community and faith-based supports that promote safety, belonging, positive role models and long-term wellbeing, while recognising the impacts of intergenerational trauma and family violence are needed to support multicultural and migrant children experiencing or at risk of violence. In addition to the need for culturally appropriate family-based programs and support, visa related concerns relating to children are critical. Both statutory and non-statutory contexts disproportionately punish multicultural mothers making decisions within contexts of visa dependency, cultural pressure and overlapping systemic demands.

First Nations women

Specific factors that must be considered for First Nations women and their children is the influence of fear of child removal in reporting family violence. Australian Institute of Health and Welfare data showed that when First Nations women report violence, just under half (49%) agreed that decisions about the custody of children would be fair. Family violence is also the primary driver of First Nations children into out-of-home care, and 88% of Aboriginal children in care have experienced family violence. The health and wellbeing of First Nations children depends upon the safety and resilience of First Nations women and families, and policy responses must consider this, rather than addressing children's safety in isolation.

Recommendations

1. Funding to establish new ECEC centres in identified 'childcare deserts' in rural and remote areas.
2. Specific funding allocation to ensure culturally safe First Nations ECEC centres in key locations across rural, regional and remote Australia.
3. Fund multicultural and faith-based organisations to deliver inclusive mentoring, social connection and family support programs, including childcare

Priority Area 4: People who use violence

Intervention approaches to reduce violent behaviours in men, and justice responses for perpetrators, must be designed to accommodate the diverse needs of women across Australia experiencing violence. Assuming a one size fits all, monocultural and urban centric approach will continue to mean First Nations, multicultural and migrant women and rural and remote women are poorly served by Commonwealth investment.

Across all groups of women, the use of technology to control women is an emerging area of violence used by perpetrators that must be considered across justice system responses including the courts, policing, and legislative protection. Reliance on technology to provide services, especially in remote areas is problematic in the context of the emergence of digital coercive control. Perpetrators may withhold access to technology or be monitoring their victim's online activities.

Specific barriers for multicultural, rural and First Nations Women include:

Migrant and multicultural women

For multicultural and migrant women, responses targeted to those who use violence must be both culturally responsive to the diverse forms of coercive control experienced by multicultural

women. For example, victim-survivors on a temporary visa may be dependent on a violent partner for residency and may not disclose violence due to the fear they may be deported.

Additionally, policies and programs focused on intervention must be community-informed and address violence without reinforcing racism or exclusion. Intervention and behaviour change responses should also recognise that, for some migrant and refugee communities, experiences of conflict, forced displacement, persecution and intergenerational trauma can shape family dynamics, help-seeking behaviours and pathways into violence. These factors provide important context for effective intervention but must never diminish individual responsibility or accountability for the use of violence. At the same time, governments should ensure that violence perpetrated by individuals is not used to stigmatise entire cultural, migrant or refugee communities. Policy, public messaging and funded interventions should actively avoid reinforcing racism, stereotypes or collective blame, recognising that these responses undermine trust, discourage victim-survivors from seeking help and reduce community engagement with prevention and accountability initiatives.

Rural, regional and remote women

People who live in regional and remote communities face structural and social barriers to accessing justice, with access to fewer services than their metropolitan counterparts. Courts and tribunals do not sit in regional and remote communities as regularly as they do in cities and increasingly rely on digital solutions. In some areas, access to police may be a challenge - many rural and remote areas have no local police station and significant staff shortages have been reported in many jurisdictions.^{vi} While technology can support access to legal services remotely, unreliable or expensive phone and internet connections are still a barrier. Travelling to access services adds significant cost or, in other cases may simply mean women experiencing violence do not access the justice system at all.

Additionally, rural, regional and remote women are more likely to face barriers engaging with police and authorities for reasons related to privacy, the existence of 'boys club' culture in small towns and lack of specialist trained local police officers. Women in small communities may be less likely to report violence because they may be known to the health worker or police officer.

First Nations women People who use violence in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities often have their own histories of intergenerational trauma, dispossession, racism, family violence, incarceration, substance misuse and unresolved grief. While these experiences may increase the risk of using violence, they do not excuse or justify abusive behaviour. Effective responses must hold people who use violence accountable while providing culturally safe, trauma-informed, community-led behaviour change programs that address the underlying

causes of violence. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander-led approaches are critical to supporting lasting behavioural change, strengthening families and communities, and preventing the continuation of violence across generations.

Recommendations

1. Invest in culturally safe, trauma-informed behaviour change programs for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander men and boys, delivered through Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations and grounded in self-determination.
2. Support for DFSV practitioners to be introduced in police forces across rural, regional and remote areas where wrap-around services are less available
3. Partner with trusted multicultural organisations to deliver community-informed, culturally responsive behaviour change and prevention programs for men and boys, recognising the impacts of displacement and intergenerational trauma while maintaining clear accountability for the use of violence.
4. Support community-led prevention that promotes positive masculinities and gender equality and avoids stigmatisation of communities.

Priority Area 5: System Integration and Workforce

Lack of service integration, under-funding and a siloed policy approach are critical issues that should be addressed by the Second Action Plan. Violence against women and children is shaped by decisions across housing, disability, social security, employment, education, health, justice, migration, taxation, digital systems, child support and public administration. Therefore, the Second Action Plan must establish a genuinely whole-of-government approach to ending violence against women and children. Additionally, targeted, community-based approaches are needed to reach diverse women including First Nations, rural and remote, and multicultural and migrant women. In these cases, an even greater level of coordination, innovation and reliance on existing community services is needed.

Specific barriers for multicultural, rural and remote, and First Nations women include:

Rural and remote women

Short-term funding arrangements, competition for funding, siloed services, as well as persistent gaps in service provision all create barriers to providing adequate services in rural, regional and remote areas. DFSV service provision for rural regional and remote women requires a different approach to metropolitan areas. Siloed services, that although may refer to each other and work together, are not viable in rural areas because it is not financially sustainable for individual services to all provide full-service coverage in these areas. NRWC supports the development of

innovative, integrated service models that look to co-locate various service providers together and share staff and resources across areas, to provide better services closer to home.

Migrant and multicultural women

Structural racism is a cross-cutting driver of inequitable outcomes, including experiencing violence for multicultural and migrant women. System integration improvements should focus on improving national data collection across the gender-based violence system, including routinely capturing and reporting disaggregated data on ethnicity, visa status, country of birth, language, disability and migration pathway. This will strengthen evidence, accountability and long-term system reform.

Trusted multicultural organisations also play an essential role as community navigators, bridging the gap between disclosure and access to specialist support. Investment in community navigation models would enable trusted organisations to provide culturally responsive information, safety planning, supported referrals and ongoing system navigation, ensuring women are not lost between mainstream services. Community navigation should be recognised as core prevention and early intervention infrastructure rather than an unfunded expectation placed on multicultural organisations

First Nations Women

For First Nations women, embedding Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leadership, cultural authority and shared decision-making across implementation and evaluation is critical. Data ownership is also an essential consideration to inform service provision for First Nations women. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples have the right to govern the collection, ownership, interpretation, access and application of data relating to their peoples and communities. The Second Action Plan should ensure that monitoring, evaluation and reporting processes uphold Indigenous Data Sovereignty principles and support Aboriginal-led governance of information that affects Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women.

Recommendations

1. Require all Commonwealth portfolios to develop actions to end violence against women and children.
2. Provide long-term, sustainable investment that strengthens the capability, workforce and leadership of Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations.
3. Develop National Cultural Safety Standards for the gender-based violence sector, drawing on established First Nations approaches.
4. Fund implementation of the National Anti-Racism Framework to strengthen culturally safe, equitable responses for multicultural women experiencing violence

5. Invest in trusted community navigator models delivered through multicultural organisations to strengthen culturally responsive pathways into specialist domestic, family and sexual violence services.
6. Inclusion of ethnicity, visa status, language, country of birth and migration pathway collection in AIHW's pilot national DFV data set

End notes

ⁱ Homelessness Australia. (2024). *International Women's Day 2024 briefing paper*. <https://homelessnessaustralia.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2024/03/IWD-2024-3.pdf>

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^{iv} Hurley, P., Matthews, H., & Pennicuik, S. (2022). *Deserts and oases: How accessible is childcare?* Victoria University. <https://www.vu.edu.au/sites/default/files/how-accessible-is-childcare-report.pdf>

^v Graesser H, Sore R, Rogers J, Cole D, Hegde S. Early Childhood Caries in Victorian Preschoolers: A Cross-Sectional Study. *Int Dent J*. 2022 Jun;72(3):381-391. doi: 10.1016/j.identj.2021.05.013. Epub 2021 Jul 8. PMID: 34247833; PMCID: PMC9275113.

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