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Consultation on the Second Action Plan

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

Prepared By:



Date:

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OARS Community Transitions



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Acknowledgement of Country

OARS Community Transitions (OARS CT) recognises this country's considerable natural and cultural heritage, including thousands of years of traditional ownership by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People. We acknowledge that as an organisation we operate on many different lands of varying Traditional Ownership. We acknowledge the great diversity in language, cultures, and histories of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, and respect and honour Elders past, present and future.

Inclusion and Diversity

OARS CT is responsive to the needs of our diverse community and provides all individuals with a welcoming, inclusive environment.

We aim to provide services that are free from bias, discrimination and avoids stereotyping and mistaken assumptions about people on the basis of their sex, marital status, sexual orientation, gender history, health status, race, nationality, colour or ethnic origin, age, religious or political conviction, impairment or disability and family responsibility of family status.

Terminology

This submission uses the term 'perpetrator' to denote people using violence, and 'victim' to denote victim/survivors.

This document uses the language 'Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander' when referring generally to First Nations peoples and communities across Australia. When 'Aboriginal' is used we refer specifically to the Traditional Custodians of the land on which we operate from in South Australia where we operate from the Kurna (Adelaide Plains), Nawu (Port Lincoln), Boandik (Mt Gambier), Nukunu and Bangarla (Port Augusta), Meru (Berri). Community Transitions also deliver services on Noonga land in Western Australia.

Abbreviations

AIC	Australian Institute of Criminology
ACCO	Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisation
AFV	Adolescent Family Violence
AOD	Alcohol and Other Drugs
ARC	Adelaide Remand Centre
CAA	Courts Administration Authority
CoSA	Circles of Support and Accountability
CRJ	Centre for Restorative Justice
CT	Community Transitions
DBTM	Don't Become That Man
DCS	Department for Correctional Services
DCP	Department for Child Protection
DFSV	Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence
DFV	Domestic, Family Violence
DV	Domestic Violence
DV-PRP	Domestic Violence – Perpetrator Response Pilot
DVAPP	Domestic Violence Abuse Prevention Program
FV	Family Violence
IO	Intervention Order
ISG	Information Sharing Guidelines
LGBTIQA+	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Intersex, Queer/Questioning, Asexual
OARS	Offenders Aid and Rehabilitation Services
OARS CT	OARS Community Transitions
OFW	Office For Women
PHS	Perpetrator Housing Service
RJ	Restorative Justice
RP	Restorative Practice
TOFT	Time Out For Treatment

Introduction

This response has been prepared by [REDACTED] on behalf of OARS Community Transitions (OARS CT) in relation to the development of the Second Action Plan under Australia's *National Plan to End Violence against Women and Children 2022–2032*.

OARS Community Transitions

OARS Community Transitions (OARS CT) is a South Australian not-for-profit organisation established in 1886. For more than 135 years, OARS CT has supported people, families and communities affected by criminal justice involvement, social disadvantage, trauma and complex life circumstances. Our work is grounded in a commitment to community safety, social inclusion, rehabilitation and the prevention of harm and victimisation.

OARS CT delivers person-centred, trauma-informed services funded by state and federal governments across South Australia and Western Australia. These services include accommodation and case management, reintegration and throughcare, alcohol and other drug counselling, psychosocial supports, gambling counselling, employment-related referrals, restorative justice programs, perpetrator intervention, and domestic and family violence counselling. Across these programs, OARS CT works with people in custody, people on remand, people subject to court or correctional orders, people transitioning back into the community, people at risk of offending, and families affected by complex needs.

OARS CT has a long history of delivering programs that support accountability, behaviour change and safer relationships for people who use violence. In 2020, OARS CT commenced delivery of the 'Don't Become That Man' service, an early intervention response for men using controlling, coercive or violent behaviours. The service supports men to recognise their behaviour, take responsibility for harm, engage in counselling and reduce risk, with the primary aim of improving safety outcomes for women and children. Although the program was defunded in June 2021, OARS CT welcomed its recommencement in July 2024. Demand for this service continues to exceed current capacity, demonstrating the need for sustained investment in early intervention and perpetrator accountability responses.

OARS CT also delivers accommodation-based responses that increase victim-survivor safety by providing an alternative place for men who use violence to stay, reducing the likelihood that women and children are forced to leave their homes. This work is undertaken in close collaboration with SAPOL, Corrections and specialist women's services. OARS CT further delivers 'Time Out For Treatment', an intensive 12-week therapeutic community model for men using domestic and family violence, alongside remand-focused treatment readiness and throughcare supports that continue following release into the community.

OARS CT has also delivered court-mandated abuse prevention programming on behalf of the Courts Administration Authority (CAA), working within legislative and diversionary court mechanisms to support accountability, risk reduction and behaviour change.

In October 2023, OARS CT launched Women's Hive, a gender-responsive reintegration service for women involved in, or exiting, the criminal justice system. Women's Hive provides a safe, welcoming and empowering space where women can access practical, emotional and therapeutic support, reconnect with community, rebuild self-agency and strengthen their sense of purpose. The service is holistic and trauma-informed, recognising that women's pathways into the justice system are often shaped by violence, poverty, homelessness, substance use, mental ill-health and family disruption.

This work is particularly important in the context of domestic, family and sexual violence (DFSV). Many women involved in the criminal justice system have experienced significant trauma, including as victim-survivors of DFSV, childhood sexual abuse and other forms of interpersonal violence. Effective reintegration and rehabilitation for women must therefore be gender-responsive, relational, strengths-based and focused on safety, healing, self-worth and empowerment. Through both group-based and individual supports, Women's Hive assists women to address immediate needs while building foundations for recovery, stability and long-term desistance from offending.

Statement Of Purpose

Enhancing Community Wellbeing by Preventing and Reducing Harm and Victimisation from Criminal Offending

Preliminary Statement

OARS Community Transitions (OARS CT) welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the development of the Second Action Plan under Australia's *National Plan to End Violence against Women and Children 2022-2032*. As a South Australian not-for-profit organisation delivering domestic, family and sexual violence (DFSV) services to both victim-survivors and people who use violence, OARS CT brings more than 135 years of experience supporting individuals, families and communities affected by trauma, disadvantage and criminal justice involvement. Our submission is informed by frontline practice, partnerships across the DFSV sector, and the experiences of the people we support through justice, housing, counselling, reintegration and community-based services.

Violence against women remains one of Australia's most serious and persistent social challenges. Domestic, family and sexual violence causes profound and lasting harm to women, children, families and communities, while imposing significant social and economic costs. Although women and children remain disproportionately affected, effective responses must recognise the diverse experiences of all victim-survivors and ensure support is accessible, inclusive and responsive.

OARS CT strongly supports a national response that places victim-survivor safety, voice and wellbeing at its centre. However, sustainable reductions in violence cannot be achieved solely through crisis responses and victim support. Preventing future harm requires equal attention to the individuals who use violence, including early intervention, accountability and evidence-informed opportunities for behaviour change¹. A system that focuses only on responding after violence has occurred or relies on victim-survivors to manage their own safety, cannot deliver the long-term change required to end violence against women and children.

Working with people who use violence is not an alternative to supporting victim-survivors; it is a critical component of improving victim safety. Effective perpetrator interventions can reduce the risk of repeat violence, challenge attitudes and behaviours that sustain abuse, and create safer outcomes for current and future partners, children and families. These responses must be trauma-informed, culturally responsive, appropriately resourced, and delivered within robust accountability frameworks that maintain the safety of victim-survivors as the overriding priority².

OARS CT advocates for a comprehensive approach that spans prevention, early intervention, response, recovery and healing. This includes strengthening specialist victim-survivor services, expanding perpetrator interventions, improving service integration and information sharing, increasing access to safe housing and support pathways, investing in Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations and culturally led responses, and ensuring workforce sustainability across metropolitan, regional and remote communities. Addressing both the immediate impacts and

¹ Centre for Innovative Justice (2015), *Opportunities for Early Intervention: Bringing Perpetrators of Family Violence into View*

² Rose, D. (2014), "Prisons won't fix family violence: Batty", *The Age*, 26 October 2014.

underlying drivers of violence is essential to disrupting cycles of abuse and reducing intergenerational harm.

As South Australia progresses significant reforms, including the implementation of coercive control legislation, opportunities exist to strengthen accountability for those who use violence while creating safer pathways for women and children to remain connected to their homes, families and communities. Responses must be coordinated, evidence-informed and centred on the lived experiences of victim-survivors.

OARS CT also recognises the significant alignment between family violence prevention and restorative justice principles³, both of which emphasise accountability, acknowledgement of harm, victim-centred practice⁴, and the collective responsibility of individuals, communities and systems to prevent future violence.⁵

Through programs such as the Centre for Restorative Justice and Don't Become That Man, OARS CT has seen the value of approaches that support accountability, behaviour change and long-term healing while maintaining a clear focus on victim safety.

Reducing domestic, family and sexual violence requires a balanced and coordinated response that supports victim-survivors, holds people who use violence accountable, and addresses the social conditions that enable abuse. OARS CT welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the Second Action Plan and remains committed to working alongside governments, communities and sector partners to build a safer Australia for women, children and all people affected by violence.

As a member of Embolden Alliance SA, OARS Community Transitions endorses and supports the Alliance's submission to the Second Action Plan consultation. OARS CT also refers the Australian Government to the attached submissions previously provided by OARS Community Transitions and the Centre for Restorative Justice to the South Australian Royal Commission into Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence, which further outline our expertise, evidence base and recommendations for reform.

³ Pranis, K. (2002), "Restorative Values and Confronting Family Violence", in *Restorative Justice and Family Violence*, Cambridge University Press

⁴ Achilles, M. & Zehr, H. (2000), "Restorative Justice for Crime Victims: The Promise, the Challenge", in Bazemore, G. & Schiff, M. (eds), *Restorative and Community Justice: Cultivating Common Ground for Victims, Communities and Offenders*, Anderson Publishing.

⁵ Pranis, K. (2021), "Restorative Justice, Social Justice, and the Empowerment of Marginalized Populations", in Bazemore, G. & Schiff, M. (eds), *Restorative and Community Justice: Cultivating Common Ground for Victims, Communities and Offenders*, Anderson Publishing.

1. Prevention

What actions can governments, workplaces, industries, schools, families and individuals take to stop violence before it starts?

OARS CT supports the implementation of long-term primary prevention campaigns, which aim to address the underlying social conditions that produce and drive violence against women and children. Research shows that dominant masculine norms associated with sexist attitudes/behaviours drives violence against women, with primary prevention aiming to subvert these harmful norms and embed healthier alternatives⁶. Additionally, violence against children has been justified and normalised as an appropriate disciplinary response at times⁷, which should also be addressed in primary prevention initiatives. Numerous stakeholders have a role to play in maximising the impact of primary prevention measures, including Commonwealth, state/territory and local governments, as well as those working in key settings and sectors⁸.

Promoting awareness of unhealthy masculinity and harmful parenting/caregiving approaches through social marketing campaigns represents one possible action in primary prevention campaigns. However, awareness-raising must be coupled with other social interventions to establish real change⁹. OARS CT supports the work of agencies including Our WATCH and Australia's National Research Organisation for Women's Safety (ANROWS) in research, advocacy and interventions aimed at primary prevention of violence against women and children. We also support prevention-focused recommendations from South Australia's recent Royal Commission into Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence (SA Royal Commission into DFSV herein), including community-wide education campaigns; relationships and sexuality education in schools; legislative changes designed to ban the use of corporal punishment by parents/caregivers; implementing evidenced-based parenting education programs; and community-based prevention responses modelled on programs such as the Ballarat and Our Town initiatives¹⁰.

As an organisation that works with both perpetrators and victim-survivors of DFSV, OARS CT supports violence prevention through direct client engagement, attending to early warning signs of DFSV, in addition to actively challenging gender norms that may be used to justify harm. Our trained Domestic and Family Violence Counsellors are available for case consultation by non-specialist staff (e.g. case managers, AOD counsellors) with internal collaboration leading to strengthened service response across our programs. Yet we also recognise the role our organisation plays in preventing gendered harm and violence amongst employees, working to cultivate a workplace culture that prioritises

⁶Keleher, H., Macquire, E., Partridge, E. & Henderson, K. (2021). *Change the story: A shared framework for the primary prevention of violence against women and their children in Australia* (2nd ed.). Our Watch. <https://assets.ourwatch.org.au/assets/Key-frameworks/Change-the-story-Our-Watch-AA.pdf>

⁷Fitz-Gibbon, K. (2025). *Silence and inaction: Children and young people's experiences of violence and systemic failure in South Australia*. Report prepared for the South Australian Royal Commission into Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence. <https://www.royalcommissiondfsv.sa.gov.au/publications/silence-and-inaction-paper>

⁸Keleher, H., Macquire, E., Partridge, E. & Henderson, K. (2021).

⁹Keleher, H., Macquire, E., Partridge, E. & Henderson, K. (2021).

¹⁰Government of South Australia. (2025). *With courage: South Australia's vision beyond violence*. South Australian Royal Commission into Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence. https://www.royalcommissiondfsv.sa.gov.au/data/assets/pdf_file/0006/1174695/With-Courage-Report.pdf

gender equality. This is supported through leadership behaviours, organisational practices, policies and communication strategies, with progress measured against key indicators that also contribute to our compliance with the *Workplace Gender Equality Act 2012*.

OARS Community Transitions views Prevention across the spectrum, inclusive of Primary, Secondary and Tertiary Prevention, as defined by Brantingham & Faust (1975)¹¹. While much of the work we undertake working with people who use violence/perpetrators tends to come within the tertiary prevention space, all aspects of *Crime Prevention* should be considered in the discussion on prevention of DFSV across our communities – while they may not place neatly into the Action Plan, they should not be dismissed.

Primary Crime Prevention: focuses on identifying and changing social and environmental conditions that create opportunities for crime, with the aim of prevention crime before it occurs

Secondary Crime Prevention: focuses on the early identification of individuals or groups at risk of offending and intervening to prevent them from becoming offenders

Tertiary Crime Prevention: focuses on people who have already offended and seeks to prevent reoffending through rehabilitation, treatment, or other interventions.

Consider for example, men prior to their release from prison as a secondary crime prevention opportunity: While there is little research currently detailing the full extent of domestic/family violence among those *returning home from prison*, what is understood anecdotally is sufficient cause for concern. The impacts of the criminal justice system, collateral consequences of offending, and in turn incarceration can severely impact on the intimate family relationship. Regardless of the offending type that led to the imprisonment, the risk factors are often compounded by the impacts of incarceration, particularly the psychological impact of the period in custody away from family.

The psychological consequences of incarceration can represent significant hindrances to successful reintegration and return to the family, following incarceration. ‘To survive in an often-brutal environment, prisoners may develop hyper-masculinity, which glorifies force and domination in relation with others.’¹² These implications can interfere with the transition from prison to home, impeding the ex-offender’s successful reintegration, compromising the safety of the family.

Evidence suggests that the separation caused by imprisonment can heighten the stress that often contributes to family and intimate partner violence. Thus, failure to address domestic violence during prisoner re-entry can place victims of domestic violence in continued danger and increase the re-entering individual’s risk of returning to prison.¹³ In a qualitative study focused on men returning home, some ex-inmates believed violence against women was justified to gain control in the relationship¹⁴.

¹¹ Brantingham, P. J., & Faust, F. L. (1976). *A Conceptual Model of Crime Prevention*. “Crime & Delinquency”, 22(3), 284-296.

¹² Haney, C. (2001). *The psychological impact of incarceration: Implications for post-prison adjustment*. Santa Cruz, CA: University of California

¹³ Vera Institute of Justice, “Working Toward Preventing Domestic Violence When Men Return from Prison”, www.vera.org

¹⁴ Hairston, C. F., & Oliver, W. (2006). *Safe return: Domestic violence and prisoner reentry: Experiences of Black women and men*. New York: Vera Institute of Justice. Retrieved October 19, 2007 from

Violence against intimate partners is both a tactic to suppress woman's voices and a way to vent frustration¹⁵

The period immediately prior to and following release from custody represents a critical transition point at which prevention strategies can be effectively applied. Prevention efforts can support families by enhancing protective factors, including stable housing, employment, education, health, and social support networks, while addressing risk factors that may contribute to family stress, social disadvantage, or reoffending during the reintegration process.

While prevention efforts are essential to reducing future violence, they must be complemented by accessible and responsive support systems that enable individuals and families to seek help when violence occurs or risks emerge.

2. Access to support

What makes it easier for people to access support or services related to family, domestic or sexual violence?

OARS CT has observed that both DFSV victim-survivors and perpetrators may experience challenges in accessing services. For example, LGBTIQ+ people experiencing or using violence may not fit traditional service models, particularly where accommodation models are designed around heterosexual family violence. People with disability, including NDIS participants, can also be viewed as too complex for some services, particularly where there are concerns around tenancy, communication, behaviour or independent living. Additionally, First Nations clients and those from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds encounter access barriers where DFSV services have few translated resources, poor access to interpreters, and there is an absence of specialist case consultation and/or workers with relevant cultural background. People living in regional, rural and remote communities also face additional barriers in accessing services due to distance from established supports, lack of transport and limited local services. Finally, for those presenting with multiple and intersecting needs, their experience of DFSV has sometimes been sidelined by other 'immediate' concerns such as homelessness, psychosocial disability and substance use.

OARS CT supports recommendations made by the SA Royal Commission into DFSV, which acknowledges that tailored responses are required to address the unique needs of selected client cohorts¹⁶. Broadly speaking, service access may be enhanced by developing programs through co-design with representatives from client groups; ensuring program materials utilise person-centred and culturally responsive communication; and increasing workforce capability to adequately respond to specific client cohorts through specialist training. Of course, additional resourcing will be required to

¹⁵ Jewkes (2002) Reentry and the Marital/Partner Relationship, [www. https://aspe.hhs.gov/legacy-page/incarceration-family-review-research-promising-approaches-serving-fathers-families-reentry-and-maritalpartner-relationship-146376](https://aspe.hhs.gov/legacy-page/incarceration-family-review-research-promising-approaches-serving-fathers-families-reentry-and-maritalpartner-relationship-146376)

¹⁶Government of South Australia. (2025).

progress service innovation and workforce development, particularly for smaller non-government organisations that experience resourcing barriers.

Furthermore, as we have observed, social disadvantage, discrimination, poverty, poor mental health, substance misuse, housing instability and justice system involvement may also intersect with DFSV, making our clients more vulnerable yet less able to access support. We therefore echo Recommendation 18 from the recent Royal Commission into DFSV, which advocates for the South Australian government to design, implement and resource an integrated response model, through which individuals and families with complex needs can access supports based on a holistic needs assessment¹⁷. We also support continued development of the South Australia Family Safety Framework to provide broader multi-agency responses to high-risk and complex-risk cases, as captured in Recommendation 19.

OARS CT would also like to underscore structural barriers to service access, such as citizenship status, poverty and housing insecurity, which directly impact help-seeking behaviours. As the SA Royal Commission into DFSV revealed, CALD victim-survivors may be reluctant to engage with supports where the person experiencing violence may be dependent on the person or people using violence for Australian residency¹⁸. ANROWS research publications also highlight that economic abuse reduces women's financial independence and limits their ability to access DFSV services¹⁹; with housing concerns also limiting victim-survivors' ability to seek help, leave violence and consistently engage with DFV services²⁰. These material conditions must also be addressed to improve service access for DFSV victim-survivors, with substantial investment made into legal, housing and social infrastructure to support both access and sustained client engagement.

For many victim-survivors of domestic and family violence, safety is not simply a matter of leaving a violent relationship. Instead, they are often forced to choose between ongoing exposure to violence and the very real prospect of poverty, housing insecurity, homelessness and financial hardship. Research has shown that financial dependence, lack of affordable housing, and concerns about supporting children are significant barriers to leaving abusive relationships²¹. Many victim-survivors remain in, return to, or struggle to permanently leave violent situations because the economic consequences of separation can be severe and long-lasting. Effective responses to domestic and family violence must therefore address not only physical safety but also the structural barriers that prevent victim-survivors from achieving financial security, stable housing and long-term wellbeing.

While religious affiliation is declining in Australia²², faith leaders and faith communities continue to represent an important pathway to support, particularly for individuals and families who may be

¹⁷Government of South Australia. (2025).

¹⁸Government of South Australia. (2025).

¹⁹Cortis, N., & Bullen, J. (2016). Domestic violence and women's economic security: Building Australia's capacity for prevention and redress: Final report. ANROWS Horizons, 05/2016. <https://www.anrows.org.au/publication/domestic-violence-and-womens-economic-security-building-australias-capacity-for-prevention-and-redress-final-report/>

²⁰Australia's National Research Organisation for Women's Safety. (2019). Domestic and family violence, housing insecurity and homelessness: Research synthesis (2nd Ed.). ANROWS Insights, 07/2019. <https://www.anrows.org.au/publication/domestic-and-family-violence-housing-insecurity-and-homelessness-research-synthesis/>

²¹Summers, A. (2022). *The choice: Violence or poverty: Domestic violence and its consequences in Australia today*. University of Technology Sydney. <https://www.violenceorpoverty.com>

²²Australian Bureau of Statistics. (2022). *Religious affiliation in Australia*

reluctant to engage with formal service systems. Faith leaders are often trusted members of the community and may be among the first people approached when individuals experience personal, relational or family difficulties. As a result, they can play an important role in facilitating access to professional supports, including domestic and family violence, mental health, housing, financial and family services, while also providing ongoing pastoral care, social connection and practical assistance. Research by Sarah Wendt²³ and colleagues highlights the importance of equipping faith leaders to respond safely to domestic and family violence and fostering collaboration between faith communities and specialist services. This is particularly important from a DFSV perspective, as victim-survivors may seek help through religious networks before approaching formal support services, making faith leaders a critical point of identification, referral and early intervention. When appropriately informed and connected to specialist services, faith leaders can help reduce barriers to help-seeking, strengthen protective factors such as social connectedness and belonging, and support safer outcomes for women and children experiencing violence.

The victim-offender binary has been increasingly challenged within both domestic violence and criminological literature²⁴. Women who have used force or engaged in offending behaviour often do so within a context of long-term victimisation, coercive control, trauma and survival. Research suggests that framing women as either victims or offenders' fails to capture this complexity and can result in ineffective or retraumatising responses²⁵. Greater recognition of the victim-offender overlap is therefore critical to ensuring that justice involvement does not become a barrier to accessing domestic and family violence supports and other therapeutic services.²⁶

Improving access alone is insufficient if services remain fragmented. Effective responses depend on systems that are coordinated, integrated and capable of responding holistically to complex needs.

3. Improving services and support

How can services and supports work better for people who have experienced, or are at risk of experiencing, family, domestic or sexual violence?

As noted earlier, greater integration of services for DFSV victim-survivors and perpetrators will better support specialist agencies in holistically assessing and addressing clients' needs. System integration of DFSV services must also work to strengthen information sharing between stakeholders, since this is also required to improve service delivery and risk management.

²³ Wendt, S., Clarke, J., Mayer, W., & Blackburn, D. (2023). *Understanding domestic violence and religion: Exploring how faith-based organisations can be part of the solution*. Flinders University.

²⁴ Larance, L. Y., Kertesz, M., Humphreys, C., Goodmark, L., & Douglas, H. (2022). Beyond the victim-offender binary: Legal and anti-violence intervention considerations with women who have used force in the U.S. and Australia. *Affilia: Feminist Inquiry in Social Work*, 37(3), 466-486

²⁵ Australia's National Research Organisation for Women's Safety (ANROWS). (2020). *Women's imprisonment and domestic, family and sexual violence: Research synthesis (ANROWS Insights, Issue 03/2020)*. ANROWS.

²⁶ Safe and Equal. (n.d.). *Supporting criminalised women*.

At OARS CT, a consistent challenge is the ability to accurately assess and manage risk when critical information about an individual's offending history, current risk factors, patterns of behaviour, and family context is not available at the point of service delivery. Effective risk assessment relies on a comprehensive understanding of the individual's circumstances; however, relevant information is often fragmented across agencies, with police, courts, corrections, victim-survivor services and child protection each holding different components of the overall risk picture. In the absence of timely and effective information-sharing, there is an increased risk that significant indicators of harm may be overlooked, leading to decisions that do not adequately reflect the level of risk to victim-survivors and children. This is particularly concerning where individuals return to the family home while risk remains elevated, including situations where charges have been withdrawn or there is pressure for reunification. Integrated responses are therefore essential to developing a shared understanding of risk, supporting informed decision-making, and enhancing the safety of victim-survivors and children.

OARS CT supports recommendations from the SA Royal Commission into DFSV, which respond to sector-wide acknowledgment that information is often not shared effectively between agencies²⁷. These recommendations aim at strengthening cross-agency information sharing to support risk assessment, case coordination, service referrals and system planning, whilst also maintaining privacy safeguards through use of de-identified data. Yet we would also emphasise any systems upgrades should support information sharing 'in real time' to facilitate responsive risk management for individuals and family groups.

To strengthen responses to domestic and family violence, the Action Plan should support interventions that promote sustained behaviour change and desistance from violent and controlling behaviours. Evidence suggests that effective interventions extend beyond addressing offending behaviour alone and should foster the development and maintenance of hope, recognise that desistance is an individual process shaped by personal identity and motivation, and support the development of positive relationships and social capital.²⁸

The Action Plan should also recognise referrals from police following domestic and family violence incidents, including those where no offence has been recorded, as a critical early intervention opportunity. Establishing clear pathways for referral and engagement at this point may enable earlier access to support for individuals who are using, or are concerned about using, abusive, violent or controlling behaviours.

Consideration should be given to ensuring that timely information, counselling, intervention programs and other intervention services are available following police contact. For many individuals, this may represent their first formal engagement with service systems, despite harmful behaviours potentially being longstanding. Early intervention has the potential to act as a circuit-breaker by encouraging self-reflection, accountability and engagement in the process of behavioural change.

The Action Plan should prioritise mechanisms that support identification, referral and engagement of perpetrators at the earliest possible stage, recognising that early intervention is a key strategy for

²⁷Government of South Australia. (2025).

²⁸ McNeill, F., Farrall, S., Lightowler, C., & Maruna, S. (2012). *Reexamining evidence-based practice in community corrections: Beyond a confined view of what works*. *Justice Research and Policy*, 14(1), 35-60.

reducing the escalation of violence, preventing further harm, and promoting long-term accountability, safety and positive behavioural change outcomes for individuals, families and communities.

While South Australia's Information Sharing Guidelines (ISG)²⁹ support the exchange of information to enhance the safety of individuals, families and communities, the absence of equivalent cross-jurisdictional mechanisms creates significant barriers when individuals and families move between states or when services need to respond to risks that extend beyond South Australian borders.

4. Children and young people

How can communities and services best support children and young people to stay safe from violence?

OARS Community Transitions (OARS CT) recognises that children and young people are not merely witnesses to domestic and family violence (DFV), but victim-survivors in their own right³⁰. Exposure to DFV can have significant and enduring impacts on a child's emotional, psychological, social and developmental wellbeing. Research demonstrates that children exposed to violence are more likely to experience difficulties with attachment, emotional regulation, peer relationships, school engagement and behavioural functioning, with these impacts often extending well into adulthood³¹.

Through our work with men engaged in perpetrator intervention and counselling services, OARS CT frequently hears accounts of childhood exposure to DFV, family conflict, trauma and abuse. Many participants identify these experiences as having shaped their understanding of relationships, parenting, emotional wellbeing and conflict resolution. While exposure to violence does not excuse the use of violence, these experiences illustrate the intergenerational nature of DFV and reinforce the importance of early intervention, therapeutic support and prevention efforts that begin in childhood.

Despite growing recognition of children's experiences, their needs are often overlooked within DFV responses, with support services primarily focused on adult victim-survivors³². Children and young people require dedicated, age-appropriate and trauma-informed supports that recognise their individual experiences and recovery needs. OARS CT welcomes the South Australian Royal Commission into Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence's decision to centre children's voices through

²⁹ Department of Treasury and Finance. (2024). *Information Sharing Guidelines for Promoting Safety and Wellbeing*. Government of South Australia. <https://treasury.sa.gov.au/our-services/data-sharing/information-sharing-in-south-australia/information-sharing-guidelines>

³⁰ McMahon, M & McGorrrery, P (2020) 'Criminalising Coercive Control: An Introduction' (Chapter 1) In *Criminalising Coercive Control: Family Violence and the Criminal Law*. Springer Nature; Singapore. Page 13

³¹ Evans, S. E., Davies, C., & DiLillo, D. (2008). 'Exposure to domestic violence: a meta-analysis of child and adolescent outcomes'. *Aggression and Violent Behaviour*, 13, 131-140; and

Kitzmann, K. M., Gaylord, N. K., Holt, A. R., & Kenny, E. D. (2003). 'Child witnesses to domestic violence: a meta-analytic review'. *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology*, 71, 339-352.

³² Gillfeather-Spetere, S., & Watson, A. (2024). In their own right: Actions to improve children and young people's safety from domestic, family and sexual violence. *ANROWS Insights*, 01/2024. <https://anrows-2019.s3.ap-southeast-2.amazonaws.com/wp-content/uploads/2024/11/25125930/CYP-ANROWS-In-their-own-right-Children-and-young-people-Gillfeather-Spetere-Watson-ANROWS.pdf>

research examining the experiences of young people who have lived with violence and navigated support systems. Embedding the perspectives of children and young people in policy, service design and reform is essential to building responses that genuinely meet their needs.

Communities and services must also respond to the increasing role of technology in facilitating harm. The Royal Commission highlighted concerns regarding exposure to harmful online content, including material that promotes misogyny, sexual coercion, gender stereotypes and violence-supportive attitudes³³. As digital environments continue to influence the attitudes and behaviours of young people, coordinated action is required to strengthen online safety, improve digital literacy, and increase accountability for platforms that facilitate harmful content. OARS CT supports the Royal Commission's recommendations aimed at improving regulation, monitoring and evaluation of online environments to reduce technology-facilitated harm³⁴.

Schools play a critical role in both prevention and early intervention. Children and young people spend a significant proportion of their lives within education settings, making schools well placed to identify concerns, respond to disclosures and connect students with appropriate support³⁵. Comprehensive, evidence-informed relationships and sexuality education should be delivered across all year levels and complemented by ongoing professional development for educators. Teachers and school staff must be equipped to recognise indicators of DFV, respond safely and appropriately to disclosures, and participate in coordinated responses that prioritise child safety and wellbeing.

OARS CT also recognises the value of accessible consultation and referral pathways for education professionals. Specialist helplines and secondary consultation services can provide practical guidance to educators who are concerned about a child's safety, unsure how to respond to a disclosure, or seeking information regarding referral options. Strengthening these supports can help ensure that concerns are identified early and that children, young people and families receive timely assistance.

Ultimately, improving outcomes for children and young people requires more than responding after harm has occurred. Effective responses must combine therapeutic supports for children, prevention initiatives in schools and communities, stronger online safety measures, and interventions that address the behaviour of those who use violence. Reducing children's exposure to violence is critical to improving immediate safety, supporting recovery, and disrupting intergenerational cycles of abuse.

Men as Fathers: Recognising Children as Victims

"The kids didn't see or hear anything."

Preventing the intergenerational impacts of domestic and family violence requires greater recognition of the role fathers who use violence play in shaping children's experiences and wellbeing. Too often, responsibility for protecting children is placed primarily on mothers, while the actions and choices of

³³Government of South Australia. (2025).

³⁴Government of South Australia. (2025).

³⁵Government of South Australia. (2025).

fathers who use violence receive insufficient attention³⁶. This can result in incomplete assessments of risk, accountability and family functioning.

Children exposed to DFV are not passive observers. They experience the fear, uncertainty and instability created by violence in the home. Even where children do not directly witness incidents, they are often acutely aware of tension, intimidation, conflict and the emotional impact of violence on other family members. The effects can be profound and long-lasting.

Perpetrators must therefore be held accountable not only for the harm caused to partners and former partners, but also for the impact of their behaviour on their children. Meaningful accountability requires recognising children as victims in their own right³⁷ and supporting fathers to understand the consequences of their actions on their children's development, wellbeing and future relationships.

Within OARS CT's intervention programs, many men reflect on their own childhood experiences of violence, recalling what they saw, heard and felt³⁸. These insights often become powerful moments of reflection, helping participants recognise the similarities between the environments in which they were raised and those they may be creating for their own children. Such opportunities demonstrate the importance of interventions that combine accountability with trauma-informed practice and a clear focus on child safety.

Protecting children requires services and communities to recognise that violence between adults is also violence against children. By supporting children directly, strengthening parenting accountability, and intervening early with those who use violence, Australia can reduce the long-term impacts of DFV and create safer futures for children and young people.

5. People who use violence

What more can be done across the community to promote healthy, safe relationships and strengthen accountability for people who use violence?

Through our work with DFSV perpetrators, OARS CT has observed limited referral pathways from key points of engagement between clients and the criminal legal system, including police contact, court appearances and release from custody. This limits opportunities for early intervention and support, which is critical where victim-survivors express a desire to maintain relationships and/or cohabitation arrangements with perpetrators. Accordingly, any future systems reform aimed at improving coordination and referrals across the DFSV sector should incorporate referral pathways for perpetrator-focused interventions at these contact points, also ensuring programs are adequately

³⁶ Mandel, David (2024) *Stop Blaming Mothers and Ignoring Fathers: How to transform the way we keep children safe from domestic violence* Legitimus Media; Canton CT

³⁷ McMahon, M & McGorrery, P (2020) 'Criminalising Coercive Control: An Introduction' (Chapter 1) In *Criminalising Coercive Control: Family Violence and the Criminal Law*. Springer Nature; Singapore. Page 13

³⁸ Boxall, H (2023) *Reimagining Desistance from Male-Perpetrated Intimate Partner Violence: The Role and Experiences of Female Victim-Survivors* Springer; ACT

promoted to support greater uptake. This observation echoes one of the key themes that emerged from the SA Royal Commission into DFSV, namely the need to establish ‘a cohesive approach to, and investment in, intervention programs’ aimed at perpetrators³⁹.

Against this background, OARS CT supports Recommendations 73 to 78 of the SA Royal Commission into DFSV, which seeks to establish minimum standards for government-funded perpetrator interventions, scale up behaviour change programs, expand programs for people on remand and improve rehabilitation pathways. Supporting accommodation for people using violence is also addressed in Recommendations 79 to 82, working to hold perpetrators of violence accountable by putting the onus on them to leave the home, as opposed to staying and causing further disruption to family groups.

OARS CT currently delivers the ‘Perpetrator Response Pilot program, where male perpetrators of domestic and family violence are accommodated in crisis housing managed by OARS CT, whilst also receiving counselling and case management support that addresses risk factors related their unsafe behaviours. We welcome further expansion of the important work occurring in this space, which aims to increase both perpetrator accountability and community safety through holistic rehabilitative intervention.

Strengthening the evidence base for interventions aimed at people who use violence is critical to improving responses to domestic and family violence (DFV). Significant gaps remain in the evidence relating to perpetrator interventions, and the quality of available research is often limited, highlighting the need for further investment in evaluation and longitudinal research⁴⁰. OARS CT welcomes opportunities to contribute to and learn from evaluation studies that assess the effectiveness of perpetrator-focused interventions. We also agree with Bell and Coates that research should draw on multiple data sources over extended periods to develop "a more comprehensive understanding of behaviour change".⁴¹

Outcome monitoring should extend beyond program completion rates. Meaningful measures of effectiveness include breaches of intervention orders, repeat offending, engagement with and uptake of referrals, validated assessments of behavioural change undertaken pre- and post-intervention, and, most importantly, victim-survivor safety outcomes.

In addition to strengthening program evidence, ongoing investment in workforce capability is essential. Professional development should extend beyond curriculum delivery and include reflective practice, supervision, risk assessment and management, cultural responsiveness, trauma-informed practice, emerging evidence on the use of violence, and opportunities for practitioners to integrate research findings into service delivery. A skilled and well-supported workforce is critical to ensuring interventions remain responsive, evidence-informed, and effective in promoting sustainable behaviour change and improving safety outcomes for victim-survivors and children.

³⁹Government of South Australia. (2025).

⁴⁰Bell, C., & Coates, D. (2022). *The effectiveness of interventions for perpetrators of domestic and family violence: An overview of findings from reviews*. ANROWS What Works, 22.02/1. <https://anrows-2019.s3.ap-southeast-2.amazonaws.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/08091000/ANROWS-OofR-Perpetrator-Interventions.pdf>

⁴¹Page 3, Bell, C., & Coates, D. (2022).

While legislative and policy reforms are often introduced to improve accountability, information sharing and victim-survivor safety, it is important to recognise and monitor any unintended consequences these measures may have on service delivery and system effectiveness. For example, mandatory child abuse notification requirements can, in some circumstances, create barriers to engagement where individuals are reluctant to disclose family circumstances due to concerns about statutory intervention. Similarly, changes to offence definitions, recording practices and data collection requirements can influence how incidents are categorised and reported, potentially affecting the interpretation of prevalence data, service demand and system performance measures. Legislative changes can also have downstream impacts on intervention pathways for people who use violence. For example, bail and remand settings may alter referral patterns into behaviour change programs, reducing opportunities for early intervention, disrupting continuity of engagement, or limiting access to services that have traditionally operated as part of pre-sentence or community-based responses. Ongoing consultation with service providers and regular evaluation of legislative reforms are therefore essential to ensure that policy objectives are achieved without inadvertently creating barriers to service access, engagement, or the delivery of effective interventions.

6. Recovery and Healing

What would make the biggest difference in helping people and families to recover and heal after being affected by family, domestic and sexual violence?

Recovery and healing are long-term processes that extend beyond immediate crisis responses. For individuals and families affected by domestic, family and sexual violence (DFS), meaningful recovery requires safety, stability, connection, and access to services that support healing over time. Alongside investments in prevention, early intervention, service integration, information sharing and evidence-informed responses to people who use violence, recovery initiatives must be centred on the diverse experiences and needs of those affected by violence.

Lived experience plays a critical role in shaping effective systems, policies and services. The voices of victim-survivors, children and young people must remain central to service design, evaluation and reform. Their insights provide an essential understanding of the barriers, needs and service responses that contribute to safety and recovery. At the same time, there is value in understanding the experiences of individuals who have successfully engaged in behaviour change. Their perspectives can help inform approaches to prevention, accountability, help-seeking and intervention, contributing to a more responsive and effective system.

OARS CT recognises that the inclusion of lived experience from people who have used violence requires careful consideration. Any participation must be supported by robust governance arrangements, clear accountability frameworks and an unwavering commitment to victim-survivor safety. Opportunities to contribute should be carefully assessed, professionally supported and

designed to ensure they strengthen, rather than compromise, violence prevention and system improvement efforts.

The South Australian Royal Commission into Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence highlighted the importance of embedding lived experience into strategy development, service design and service delivery, including peer-support approaches for victim-survivors⁴². Peer support can reduce isolation, increase validation and foster hope by connecting individuals with others who have experienced similar challenges. OARS CT has observed the value of peer-led approaches through its family support work in the alcohol and other drug sector, where lived experience contributes to increased confidence, resilience, safety planning and wellbeing⁴³. Similar approaches have significant potential to support recovery and healing for individuals and families affected by DFSV.

Sustainable recovery is also closely linked to economic security. Access to safe and affordable housing, employment, education, financial assistance and community connection are critical protective factors that support both healing and long-term safety. For many victim-survivors, recovery cannot occur while basic needs remain unmet. Addressing the structural impacts of violence, including housing instability, financial hardship and social exclusion, is therefore an essential component of recovery-oriented responses.

OARS CT's Women's Hive demonstrates the importance of gender-responsive, trauma-informed spaces that support women to rebuild their lives following experiences of trauma, violence and justice system involvement. Through practical assistance, therapeutic support, peer connection and pathways to specialist services, the Women's Hive assists women to strengthen wellbeing, rebuild self-agency, reduce social isolation and establish foundations for long-term recovery and positive change. This work is particularly important for women whose experiences do not fit neatly within traditional victim-offender categories and whose pathways to healing require integrated and holistic support.

Recovery and healing must also include pathways for people who use violence to engage in genuine accountability and sustained behaviour change. From this perspective, recovery is not centred on absolution or forgiveness, but on recognising harm, accepting responsibility and actively working to prevent further violence. Effective interventions support individuals to understand the impacts of their behaviour on partners, children, families and communities; challenge attitudes relating to power, control and entitlement; and develop respectful, non-violent ways of relating to others. Where appropriate and safe, victim-led restorative processes may also provide opportunities for accountability and reparation.

Ultimately, recovery and healing require a coordinated approach that combines victim-survivor safety, therapeutic support, peer connection, economic security, community participation and accountability for those who use violence. Investment across these areas will strengthen individual and family wellbeing, reduce the risk of future harm, and support safer communities for future generations.

⁴²Government of South Australia. (2025).

⁴³Page 560, Government of South Australia. (2025).

Conclusion

OARS Community Transitions welcomes the development of the Second Action Plan as an important opportunity to strengthen Australia's collective response to domestic, family and sexual violence. While significant progress has been made under the National Plan, enduring change will require sustained investment across the continuum of prevention, early intervention, response, recovery and healing.

The safety and wellbeing of women, children and all victim-survivors must remain central to system design and service delivery. At the same time, meaningful reductions in violence will only be achieved through coordinated efforts to address the attitudes, behaviours and circumstances that contribute to people using violence. This requires evidence-informed perpetrator interventions, accessible support services, integrated systems, effective information sharing and pathways that promote accountability and behaviour change.

OARS Community Transitions supports a whole-of-community approach that recognises the interconnected roles of governments, services, communities, families and individuals in preventing violence and responding to its impacts. We encourage the Australian Government to continue investing in approaches that are trauma-informed, culturally responsive, victim-survivor centred and grounded in evidence, while ensuring that services are adequately resourced to meet increasing demand.

OARS Community Transitions appreciates the opportunity to contribute to the development of the Second Action Plan and remains committed to working alongside governments, community organisations, victim-survivors and people who use violence to promote safety, accountability, recovery and lasting social change