

OPEN DOORS YOUTH SERVICE INC.

SUBMISSION TO THE
SECOND ACTION PLAN



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ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY

Open Doors Youth Service acknowledges the traditional custodians of the land the Turrabal, Yugambeh and Yugarra people, we pay our respects to their Elder's and all Elder's past, present and emerging. We give thanks to them for their generosity in sharing their wisdom and culture and acknowledge the testament this engagement is to their integrity, strength, and perseverance.

At Open Doors Youth Service we take the time to learn and consider the history and significance of the country on which we work in a way that highlights the spiritual connection, strengths and shows respect to the Turrabal, Yugambeh and Yugarra people. Inspiring staff and young people to improve their knowledge and understanding. Most of the traditional cultural spaces in Meanjin have been destroyed over the past 250 years of colonisation, but by considering the space that these places were, the activity that was practiced, the culture that is lost and remains allows us to connect with the powerful energy that is past Elders and country.



open Doors
YOUTH SERVICE INC.

Every Young Person Deserves Safety

A Submission from Open Doors Youth Service (ODYS) to inform the Second Action Plan under the National Plan to End Violence against Women and Children 2022–2032

Executive Summary

Open Doors Youth Service (ODYS) welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the development of the Second Action Plan under the National Plan to End Violence against Women and Children 2022–2032.

Australia has made significant progress in strengthening its response to domestic, family and sexual violence (DFSV). As recognised throughout the ANROWS Consultation Paper, community understanding has improved, specialist responses have expanded, and there is increasing recognition that children and young people are victim-survivors in their own right. The Second Action Plan presents an important opportunity to build on these achievements and ensure that these advances are experienced equitably by all children and young people.

Open Doors Youth Service is Queensland's only dedicated LGBTQIASB+ youth service and delivers the state's only specialist LGBTQIASB+ youth domestic, family and sexual violence program. For more than twenty-five years, ODYS has provided trauma-informed, affirmative and person-centred support to LGBTQIASB+ young people aged 12–24 through counselling, youth work, family support, psychosocial peer programs, advocacy and community capacity building.

Since January 2025, ODYS' specialist DFSV program has supported 220 LGBTQIASB+ young people through 1,848 occasions of service. Eighty-four per cent of participants identified as transgender or gender diverse, 64% identified as living with disability, 19% were from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds and 15% identified as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander. These figures demonstrate the significant intersectionality experienced by young people accessing specialist LGBTQIASB+ DFSV services.

ODYS strongly supports the priorities identified within the Consultation Paper. However, our experience demonstrates that there remains a significant gap within Australia's current domestic, family and sexual violence system.

Australia does not currently have a domestic, family and sexual violence system intentionally designed to meet the needs of LGBTQIASB+ children and young people.

While many mainstream services provide excellent support, LGBTQIASB+ young people frequently experience violence that is intrinsically linked to their sexual orientation, gender identity or sex characteristics. Violence may include family rejection, coercive control relating to gender expression, forced outing, barriers to gender-affirming healthcare, identity-based emotional abuse and threats of homelessness. These experiences often require specialist knowledge, affirmative practice and integrated responses that are not consistently available within existing service systems.

At the same time, practical barriers continue to prevent young people from reaching safety.

Queensland currently has no specialist domestic and family violence refuge pathway for transgender young people. ODYS also receives no brokerage funding through its specialist DFSV program, limiting our ability to assist young people with the immediate practical costs associated with escaping violence, including emergency accommodation, transport, food, clothing and essential household items. As our service experiences every day, the barrier to safety is often not a young person's willingness to leave violence—it is the absence of practical resources that make leaving possible.

The Second Action Plan presents an opportunity to address these gaps by recognising that prevention, early intervention, response and recovery must reflect the diversity of children's experiences.

ODYS respectfully recommends that the Second Action Plan:

- recognise LGBTQIASB+ children and young people as a priority cohort throughout implementation;
- invest in specialist LGBTQIASB+ youth domestic, family and sexual violence services;
- strengthen integrated responses that combine counselling, youth work, family support, housing, healthcare and psychosocial peer support;
- establish dedicated brokerage funding within specialist youth DFSV services;
- improve access to safe crisis and transitional accommodation for transgender young people;
- invest in workforce capability across universal and specialist services; and
- recognise community connection and identity affirmation as protective factors that contribute to violence prevention and recovery.

Australia has committed to ending violence within a generation. Achieving this vision requires ensuring that every child and young person—regardless of their sexuality, gender identity or sex characteristics—can access a system that is designed to keep them safe.



About Open Doors Youth Service

Open Doors Youth Service (ODYS) is Queensland's only dedicated LGBTQIASB+ youth service, supporting LGBTQIA+ Sistergirl and Brotherboy young people aged 12 to 24 years. For twenty-five years, ODYS has worked alongside young people to improve mental health, strengthen identity, increase community connection and ensure access to safe, affirming and evidence-informed support. Our organisational framework is built upon three pillars: Safety, Connection and Pride.

ODYS provides an integrated service model that includes:

- specialist domestic, family and sexual violence support;
- counselling;
- youth work and case management;
- family support and mediation;
- psychosocial peer groups;
- advocacy;
- service navigation; and
- community education and capacity building.

Young people engage with ODYS for a broad range of intersecting experiences including domestic and family violence, housing insecurity, poor mental health, social isolation, discrimination, gender identity, sexuality and family relationships. Rather than responding to these issues in isolation, ODYS delivers a multidisciplinary, trauma-informed and LGBTQIASB+ affirmative model that recognises young people's strengths, autonomy and self-determined goals.

In January 2025, ODYS launched its dedicated Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence (DFSV) Counselling Program after being awarded 1FTE through the Federal Government's 500 Frontline Workers initiative. Since commencement, the program has supported 220 young people experiencing or at risk of domestic, family and sexual violence, delivering 1,848 occasions of service.

The young people accessing the program experience significant and often overlapping forms of disadvantage. Of participants supported, 84% identified as trans or gender diverse, 64% identified as having a disability, 19% were from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, and 15% identified as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander. These intersecting identities can compound vulnerability to violence, discrimination and social exclusion while simultaneously creating additional barriers to accessing mainstream domestic and family violence services. Many young people report previous experiences of discrimination, a lack of understanding of LGBTQIASB+ identities, or concerns about psychological safety within mainstream systems, resulting in delayed help-seeking and unmet support needs.

ODYS has demonstrated that a specialist, LGBTQIASB+ affirming approach delivers meaningful outcomes for this highly marginalised cohort. Internal evaluation consistently shows that young people feel safer, more understood and more willing to engage when services are delivered by practitioners with specialist knowledge of LGBTQIASB+ experiences. Notably, 100% of participants surveyed reported that it is important for them to be able to access a dedicated LGBTQIASB+ service, reinforcing the critical role that specialist organisations play in ensuring equitable access to domestic, family and sexual violence support.

Introduction

ODYS strongly welcomes the direction outlined within the ANROWS Consultation Paper. The paper appropriately recognises that violence continues to evolve, that children and young people are victim-survivors in their own right, that technology-facilitated abuse presents emerging challenges, and that stronger integration across systems is required to improve safety and recovery. Importantly, it also acknowledges that outcomes are not experienced equally across the community and that people facing intersecting forms of disadvantage continue to encounter greater barriers to support.

These findings reflect what ODYS experiences every day.

LGBTQIASB+ young people rarely present with a single issue. Domestic, family and sexual violence commonly intersects with poor mental health, housing insecurity, discrimination, disability, social isolation, disrupted education and barriers to healthcare. Young people often require support across multiple systems simultaneously, yet these systems frequently operate independently of one another.

The Consultation Paper identifies the importance of creating a "no wrong door" experience for victim-survivors. ODYS strongly supports this ambition. However, for many LGBTQIASB+ young people, there are still too many wrong doors. Young people frequently report needing to repeatedly explain their identity, educate services about their experiences, navigate discrimination or travel significant distances to access culturally safe support. While many mainstream services provide high-quality care, specialist LGBTQIASB+ services remain essential for young people whose experiences of violence are inseparable from their identity.

The Second Action Plan provides an opportunity not only to strengthen Australia's existing domestic, family and sexual violence system, but to ensure that it is genuinely inclusive of the diverse experiences of children and young people.

ODYS believes that this can be achieved by focusing on three overarching principles. First, responses must recognise that LGBTQIASB+ children and young people experience domestic, family and sexual violence in ways that are often shaped by identity-based abuse, family rejection and discrimination.

Second, safety requires more than counselling or crisis intervention. Young people require practical resources, integrated services and community connection to successfully recover from violence.

Finally, young people do not experience systems—they experience journeys. Effective responses require coordinated services that work together to meet young people's needs across prevention, early intervention, crisis response and long-term recovery.

The following sections outline ODYS' recommendations against each of the proposed priority areas identified within the Consultation Paper and provide practical examples of how the Second Action Plan can better support LGBTQIASB+ children and young people experiencing domestic, family and sexual violence.

Priority Area 1: Supporting Victim-Survivors

For LGBTQIASB+ children and young people, domestic and family violence is often inseparable from identity.

ODYS strongly supports the Consultation Paper's recognition that all victim-survivors should be able to access safety, support, justice, recovery and healing, regardless of where they live or the barriers they face in seeking support. We particularly welcome the proposed focus on strengthening "no wrong door" responses, recognising coercive control and improving system responses for communities experiencing unequal outcomes.

Our experience, however, demonstrates that achieving these ambitions requires greater recognition of the unique experiences of LGBTQIASB+ children and young people. For many young people accessing ODYS, domestic, family and sexual violence is not separate from their identity—it is experienced because of it.

While LGBTQIASB+ young people experience many of the same forms of domestic, family and sexual violence as other children and young people, these experiences are frequently compounded by identity-based abuse, family rejection, discrimination and barriers to accessing affirming support. Violence may include coercive control relating to gender expression, threats to withdraw access to gender-affirming healthcare, forced outing, emotional abuse centred on sexuality or gender identity, financial control, social isolation and threats of homelessness.

These experiences require responses that understand not only domestic and family violence, but also the unique social, cultural and developmental experiences of LGBTQIASB+ young people.

In October 2024 ODYS was awarded 1FTE as part of the Federal Government's 500 frontline workers. Since January 2025, ODYS' specialist domestic, family and sexual violence program has supported 220 young people through 1,848 occasions of service. Eighty-four per cent identified as transgender or gender diverse, 64% identified as living with disability, 19% identified as culturally and linguistically diverse and 15% identified as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander. These figures demonstrate that LGBTQIASB+ young people experiencing violence frequently navigate multiple, intersecting forms of disadvantage and require responses that are both trauma-informed and culturally responsive.

Importantly, these young people rarely require support from a single service. They commonly present with overlapping needs relating to housing, mental health, education, healthcare, legal issues, family relationships and community connection.

While mainstream services play an essential role within Australia's response to domestic, family and sexual violence, specialist LGBTQIASB+ services provide expertise that cannot easily be replicated within broader service systems.

Safety requires more than counselling

The Consultation Paper appropriately recognises that recovery and healing require coordinated responses across multiple systems. ODYS strongly supports this approach.

Our experience demonstrates that counselling alone cannot create safety.

Young people escaping violence often require immediate practical support, including emergency accommodation, transport, food, clothing, medication, replacement phones, identity documents and essential household items. Without these practical resources, even the most comprehensive safety planning can become difficult to implement.

Despite delivering Queensland's only dedicated LGBTQIASB+ youth domestic, family and sexual violence program, ODYS receives no brokerage funding.

This means that when a young person makes the incredibly difficult decision to leave violence, our practitioners often have no funded mechanism to assist with the immediate costs of reaching safety. Where practical support is provided, it is frequently subsidised through community donations rather than sustainable government investment. Establishing a dedicated brokerage fund would enable young people to access emergency accommodation, transport, food, clothing and other crisis supports that are often the difference between remaining in a violent environment and reaching safety.

Safety planning without practical resources risks placing responsibility back onto the young person rather than addressing the structural barriers preventing them from leaving violence.

Practice Insight

At ODYS, we regularly support young people who are ready to leave violence but cannot do so because they have nowhere safe to go and no financial means to access emergency accommodation or transport. These young people do not need greater motivation to leave—they need a system that makes leaving possible.

Safe services are as important as available services

The Second Action Plan rightly emphasises improving access to support for victim-survivors. However, access alone is not enough. Services must also be places where LGBTQIASB+ young people, particularly trans and gender diverse young people, feel safe, respected and affirmed.

While many mainstream domestic, family and sexual violence services are committed to inclusive practice, ODYS continues to hear from young people who are reluctant to engage with mainstream services due to previous experiences of discrimination, being misgendered, having to repeatedly explain their identity or concerns that their experiences will not be understood. These experiences can delay help-seeking, reduce trust in services and increase isolation during periods of significant risk.

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For transgender young people, these concerns are compounded by the absence of safe accommodation options. Queensland currently has no dedicated domestic and family violence refuge pathway that can safely accommodate transgender young people. This leaves practitioners attempting to identify alternative solutions within systems that were not designed to respond to their needs.

Improving outcomes for LGBTQIASB+ children and young people will require more than stronger referral pathways. It requires mainstream services across the domestic, family and sexual violence system to build the knowledge, confidence and capability to deliver consistently safe, affirming and culturally responsive care for LGBTQIASB+ communities, while recognising the ongoing role of specialist services in supporting young people with more complex or identity-specific experiences of violence.

What the Second Action Plan can do

ODYS recommends that the Second Action Plan:

- Invest in building LGBTQIASB+ affirmative capability across mainstream domestic, family and sexual violence services, ensuring practitioners have the knowledge and confidence to safely support LGBTQIASB+ victim-survivors.
- Develop national practice guidance to support inclusive responses to LGBTQIASB+ children and young people experiencing domestic, family and sexual violence.
- Recognise the complementary roles of specialist LGBTQIASB+ services and mainstream services, ensuring young people can access both specialist expertise and high-quality mainstream support throughout their recovery.
- Increase investment in crisis and transitional accommodation options that are safe, inclusive and accessible for transgender and gender-diverse young people.

Priority Area 2: Prevention and Early Intervention

Prevention begins long before violence occurs

ODYS strongly supports the Consultation Paper's focus on strengthening prevention and early intervention and its recognition that preventing violence requires sustained investment across families, communities, education, workplaces and systems. Preventing violence is not solely about responding earlier—it is about creating environments where violence is less likely to occur in the first place.

For LGBTQIASB+ children and young people, prevention must extend beyond universal messaging about respectful relationships. While these initiatives remain critical, our experience demonstrates that prevention also requires creating communities where young people are safe to be themselves, where diversity is affirmed, and where families, schools and services have the capability to respond positively to emerging concerns.

Many of the young people supported by ODYS have experienced prolonged periods of rejection, discrimination or isolation before violence escalates to the point of requiring specialist intervention. Early experiences of bullying, identity-based harassment, family conflict and social exclusion can increase vulnerability to poor mental health, housing instability and domestic and family violence later in adolescence and early adulthood.

Investing in prevention therefore means investing in environments where LGBTQIASB+ young people experience safety, belonging and connection from an early age.

Community connection is a protective factor

One of the strongest protective factors against violence is connection.

ODYS' psychosocial groups are often described as social programs. In practice, they are much more than opportunities for social connection.

They create spaces where young people experience affirmation, develop supportive peer relationships, build confidence in their identity and strengthen their connection to community. These outcomes reduce social isolation, increase help-seeking behaviour and create trusted networks that young people can draw upon during times of crisis.

For many LGBTQIASB+ young people, these groups provide the first opportunity to meet peers with shared lived experiences. They also provide consistent access to trusted adults who can recognise emerging concerns, provide early support and facilitate access to specialist services before issues escalate.

ODYS believes these forms of connection should be recognised as an important component of Australia's violence prevention framework.

Community connection is not simply a wellbeing initiative—it is a protective factor that strengthens resilience, reduces isolation and supports earlier intervention.

Practice Insight

Young people often tell us that attending an ODYS group was the first time they felt they could be themselves without fear of judgement. For some, this sense of belonging becomes the foundation from which they are able to disclose violence, seek support and begin their recovery.

Families need support too

Preventing domestic and family violence also requires supporting families to navigate conversations about sexuality, gender identity and affirmation.

ODYS recognises that many parents and carers are seeking to support their children but may feel uncertain, overwhelmed or lack access to accurate information and appropriate support. Early engagement with families can reduce conflict, strengthen relationships and improve outcomes for both young people and their caregivers.

The Second Action Plan presents an opportunity to increase investment in family-based early intervention programs that build understanding, reduce conflict and strengthen family relationships before concerns escalate into violence or family breakdown.

Importantly, these supports should complement—not replace—the autonomy of young people. Where family relationships remain unsafe, young people must continue to have access to confidential, specialist support that prioritises their safety and wellbeing.

Prevention requires inclusive communities

Violence does not occur in isolation from the broader social environment.

Schools, sporting clubs, community organisations, health services and other universal settings all play an important role in shaping whether LGBTQIASB+ young people experience inclusion or exclusion.

ODYS supports continued investment in initiatives that strengthen inclusion across these settings, recognising that affirming environments contribute to improved wellbeing, earlier help-seeking and reduced social isolation.

Creating communities where LGBTQIASB+ young people are respected and included is not separate from preventing violence—it is one of the conditions that makes violence less likely to occur and support more likely to be accessed when it does.

What the Second Action Plan can do

ODYS recommends that the Second Action Plan:

- Recognise community connection, identity affirmation and social inclusion as protective factors that contribute to the prevention of domestic, family and sexual violence for LGBTQIASB+ children and young people.
- Invest in specialist psychosocial peer support programs that reduce isolation, strengthen belonging and facilitate earlier access to support.
- Expand family support initiatives that build understanding, strengthen relationships and provide parents and carers with the skills and confidence to support LGBTQIASB+ children and young people.
- Continue to strengthen inclusion across schools, health services and community organisations through evidence-informed capability building and inclusive practice.
- Recognise specialist LGBTQIASB+ organisations as key partners in delivering prevention, early intervention and community education initiatives.

Priority Area 3: Children and Young People Must Be Recognised as Victim-Survivors in Their Own Right

ODYS strongly welcomes the Consultation Paper's recognition that children and young people are victim-survivors in their own right and that responses must move beyond viewing children solely through the experiences of adult victim-survivors. This represents an important shift within Australia's domestic, family and sexual violence system and reflects what specialist youth services have long understood—that children and young people experience violence directly, are impacted in unique ways and require responses designed specifically around their developmental needs.

The Second Action Plan presents an opportunity to build upon this progress by ensuring that policies, funding and service delivery consistently recognise children and young people as active participants in their own safety, recovery and healing.

Young people experience violence differently

While many aspects of domestic and family violence are shared across age groups, adolescence is a distinct stage of development characterised by increasing independence, identity formation and growing reliance on peer relationships and community connection.

For LGBTQIASB+ young people, these developmental experiences often intersect with the process of exploring and affirming their sexuality, gender identity or sex characteristics. Where families are supportive, this can be a period of growth and resilience. Where families are rejecting or controlling, these same developmental milestones can become the focus of conflict, coercive control and abuse.

ODYS frequently supports young people experiencing violence linked to disclosure of their identity, attempts to access gender-affirming healthcare, restrictions on gender expression, threats of homelessness, emotional abuse and family rejection.

These experiences demonstrate that responses for LGBTQIASB+ young people must recognise both the dynamics of domestic and family violence and the developmental realities of adolescence.

Young people need services they can access independently

One of the most significant barriers experienced by LGBTQIASB+ young people is access to timely and confidential support.

Many young people are reluctant to disclose violence if they believe doing so will automatically involve parents or caregivers, particularly where those relationships are the source of harm. The Second Action Plan should continue strengthening pathways that allow children and young people to safely access specialist support in ways that are appropriate to their age, capacity and circumstances.

Importantly, recognising young people as victim-survivors in their own right does not diminish the importance of families. Rather, it acknowledges that where family relationships are unsafe, young people require access to trusted professionals who can prioritise their immediate safety while working collaboratively with families wherever appropriate and safe to do so.



Young people experience one journey—not multiple systems

The Consultation Paper highlights the importance of integrated service responses. ODYS strongly supports this direction.

Young people do not experience violence through the lens of government portfolios. They do not distinguish between housing, health, education, mental health or domestic and family violence services.

They experience one life, one crisis and one journey.

For many young people, domestic and family violence is only one part of a much broader experience involving housing instability, disrupted education, declining mental health, financial hardship, barriers to healthcare and social isolation.

Effective responses therefore require services that work together rather than expecting young people to navigate fragmented systems independently.

ODYS' integrated model reflects this principle by combining counselling, youth work, family support, psychosocial peer programs, advocacy and service navigation within a single service. This allows practitioners to respond to the whole person rather than a single presenting issue and reduces the need for young people to repeatedly tell their story across multiple services.

Listening to young people strengthens systems

The Consultation Paper appropriately recognises the importance of embedding lived experience within policy and service design. ODYS strongly supports this approach and encourages continued investment in mechanisms that enable children and young people to meaningfully contribute to the design, delivery and evaluation of domestic, family and sexual violence initiatives.

Young people are experts in their own experiences.

Policies developed with young people are more likely to reflect the realities of navigating violence, help-seeking and recovery.

At ODYS, young people's voices shape everything from program design to service evaluation. Their insights consistently reinforce the importance of accessible services, affirming relationships, practical support and genuine opportunities to influence decisions that affect their lives.

Practice Insight

Young people consistently tell ODYS that the most important aspect of support is feeling believed, respected and involved in decisions about their own lives. Recovery is strengthened when young people are recognised not simply as recipients of services, but as active participants in shaping their own future.

What the Second Action Plan can do

ODYS recommends that the Second Action Plan:

- Continue embedding recognition of children and young people as victim-survivors in their own right across policy, funding and service delivery.
- Invest in specialist youth services that provide integrated responses to domestic, family and sexual violence alongside housing, mental health, healthcare and education support.
- Ensure children and young people can access confidential, age-appropriate specialist support where it is safe and appropriate to do so.
- Strengthen multidisciplinary service models that reduce fragmentation and improve continuity of care for young people experiencing violence.
- Embed meaningful participation of children and young people in the design, implementation and evaluation of domestic, family and sexual violence policy and services.

Priority Area 4: Responding to People Who Use Violence

ODYS supports the Consultation Paper's recognition that ending domestic, family and sexual violence requires greater investment in responses to people who use violence. Preventing future harm requires approaches that increase accountability, support behaviour change and address the drivers of violence before they become entrenched.

While specialist services such as ODYS primarily work alongside victim-survivors, our experience demonstrates that opportunities for early intervention often exist long before violence escalates.

Early intervention must include families

For many LGBTQIASB+ children and young people, the people using violence are parents, carers or other family members.

In many circumstances, these behaviours occur within a broader context of fear, misunderstanding, misinformation or a lack of confidence in supporting a young person's sexuality or gender identity. While this does not excuse violence or abuse, it highlights the importance of ensuring families have access to early support before relationships deteriorate and harmful behaviours become established.

ODYS has seen firsthand the positive impact that family support, education and therapeutic intervention can have in reducing conflict, rebuilding relationships and increasing safety for young people where this is appropriate and desired by the young person.

The Second Action Plan presents an opportunity to expand evidence-informed family interventions that support parents and carers to better understand LGBTQIASB+ identities, strengthen communication and respond to conflict in ways that promote safety and wellbeing. Importantly, these interventions must always prioritise the safety, wishes and rights of the young person. Family reconciliation is not appropriate in every circumstance, and responses must never place responsibility on young people to repair relationships where violence or abuse is ongoing.

Responding before violence becomes entrenched

The Consultation Paper highlights the importance of intervening earlier with people who use violence. ODYS strongly supports this direction.

For children and young people, early intervention should also include recognising and responding to harmful attitudes and behaviours before they escalate into patterns of coercive control or abuse.

Schools, sporting clubs, youth organisations and online environments all have an important role in promoting healthy relationships, challenging harmful gender stereotypes and fostering respectful, inclusive communities.

For LGBTQIASB+ young people, this also means addressing behaviours such as identity-based bullying, harassment, coercive control and discrimination. While these behaviours may not always meet the threshold of domestic and family violence, they can contribute to environments where violence is normalised, relationships are damaged and young people become increasingly isolated.

Building respectful, inclusive communities therefore benefits all young people and contributes to broader efforts to prevent violence across the lifespan.

Supporting practitioners to respond safely

Practitioners working with families affected by domestic and family violence require confidence and capability to navigate situations where harmful behaviours intersect with a young person's sexuality, gender identity or sex characteristics.

ODYS encourages continued investment in workforce development that equips practitioners to recognise identity-based forms of coercive control, engage safely with families and respond in ways that prioritise accountability while maintaining the safety of victim-survivors.

Strengthening workforce capability will enable earlier intervention, improve consistency across services and reduce the likelihood that LGBTQIASB+ young people disengage from support due to negative or uninformed experiences.

Practice Insight

ODYS has seen families move from conflict and rejection to understanding and support when provided with timely, evidence-informed intervention. While not every family relationship can or should be restored, early support can prevent conflict from escalating and improve outcomes for both young people and their families.

What the Second Action Plan can do

ODYS recommends that the Second Action Plan:

- Invest in evidence-informed family interventions that support parents and carers to safely respond to LGBTQIASB+ children and young people.
- Expand early intervention initiatives that address harmful attitudes and behaviours before they escalate into domestic and family violence.
- Build practitioner capability to recognise and respond to identity-based coercive control and family violence affecting LGBTQIASB+ children and young people.
- Ensure all interventions with people using violence prioritise the safety, rights and wishes of victim-survivors and are not pursued where they would increase risk.
- Recognise that strengthening families, where safe and appropriate, is an important component of preventing future violence and improving long-term outcomes for children and young people.

Priority Area 5: Building an Integrated, Inclusive and Capable System

ODYS strongly supports the Consultation Paper's recognition that achieving meaningful and lasting change requires a domestic, family and sexual violence system that is integrated, sustainable and capable of responding to the diverse experiences of victim-survivors. We particularly welcome the proposed focus on strengthening workforce capability, improving system coordination and reducing the fragmentation that continues to impact people's experiences of support.

For LGBTQIASB+ children and young people, the effectiveness of the domestic, family and sexual violence system is not determined solely by the availability of services. It is determined by whether those services work together, whether they understand the young person's experiences and whether they consistently provide safe, affirming and coordinated support.

Young people experience one journey, not multiple systems

Government systems are often organised around funding streams, portfolios and service types.

Young people do not experience life this way.

A young person experiencing domestic and family violence may simultaneously require support from housing services, schools, healthcare providers, mental health services, child protection, legal services and specialist domestic and family violence practitioners.

Too often, these systems operate independently, requiring young people to repeatedly tell their story, navigate multiple referral processes and coordinate their own care during periods of significant distress.

The Consultation Paper's commitment to strengthening integrated responses presents an important opportunity to redesign services around the experiences of victim-survivors rather than the structures of government.

ODYS' integrated service model demonstrates the value of this approach. By combining counselling, youth work, family support, psychosocial peer programs, advocacy and service navigation within one organisation, young people experience a coordinated response that reduces duplication, builds trust and enables practitioners to respond to the full range of their needs.

The Second Action Plan should continue encouraging integrated models that enable specialist services and mainstream systems to work collaboratively around the young person.

Capability matters as much as capacity

Expanding services is essential.

However, increasing capacity alone will not improve outcomes if services are not equipped to respond safely and effectively to LGBTQIASB+ children and young people.

ODYS continues to hear from young people who delay or avoid accessing support because they are concerned about discrimination, being misgendered, having to explain their identity repeatedly or not feeling understood within mainstream systems.

While many services are committed to providing inclusive care, confidence and capability across the broader workforce remain inconsistent.

Building workforce capability should therefore be recognised as a key strategy for improving safety, trust and accessibility.

This includes ensuring practitioners understand:

- the diverse experiences of LGBTQIASB+ children and young people;
- identity-based forms of domestic and family violence;
- the impacts of family rejection;
- trauma-informed and affirmative practice;
- culturally safe responses for young people with intersecting identities; and
- how to work collaboratively with specialist LGBTQIASB+ organisations.

Developing these capabilities across universal and specialist services will strengthen the overall system while reducing barriers to support for LGBTQIASB+ communities.

Specialist and mainstream services are complementary

ODYS believes Australia's response to domestic, family and sexual violence is strongest when specialist and mainstream services work together.

Mainstream services are, and will continue to be, the backbone of Australia's domestic, family and sexual violence response.

Specialist LGBTQIASB+ services provide complementary expertise in working with identity-based violence, family rejection, affirmative practice and the complex intersection of sexuality, gender identity, mental health, disability and homelessness experienced by many young people.

The Second Action Plan should recognise the value of both parts of the system.

Building capability within mainstream services should occur alongside continued investment in specialist organisations that provide direct support, secondary consultation, workforce development and sector leadership.

This is not about creating parallel systems.

It is about ensuring every young person can access the right support, at the right time, from services that are equipped to meet their needs.

Data drives better policy

ODYS welcomes the Consultation Paper's recognition of the importance of improving evidence and data collection. Better data enables governments, researchers and services to understand who is accessing support, where gaps exist and whether investments are improving outcomes. While significant progress has been made, important evidence gaps remain regarding the experiences of LGBTQIASB+ children and young people.

Improving the routine collection of data relating to sexuality, gender identity and sex characteristics, alongside other demographic information, will strengthen Australia's understanding of domestic, family and sexual violence and support more equitable policy development.

This data must be collected in ways that are safe, voluntary, respectful and informed by best practice to ensure young people's privacy and trust are maintained.

Practice Insight

Young people should not have to educate the systems designed to support them. A capable system is one in which practitioners have the knowledge, confidence and resources to respond safely, respectfully and effectively from the first point of contact.

What the Second Action Plan can do

ODYS recommends that the Second Action Plan:

- Continue investing in integrated service models that enable young people to access coordinated responses across domestic and family violence, housing, health, education and mental health.
- Strengthen workforce capability in LGBTQIASB+ affirmative practice across mainstream domestic and family violence, housing, health, education, child protection and justice systems.
- Recognise specialist LGBTQIASB+ organisations as key partners in direct service delivery, workforce development, secondary consultation and system improvement.
- Improve the collection and use of data relating to sexuality, gender identity and sex characteristics to strengthen evidence-informed policy and service planning.
- Support ongoing collaboration between governments, researchers, specialist organisations and mainstream services to ensure future reforms continue to reflect the experiences of diverse children and young people.

A Call to Action

The Second Action Plan presents an opportunity to build on the significant progress already achieved under the National Plan to End Violence against Women and Children. ODYS encourages the Australian Government to continue this momentum by ensuring the next phase of reform responds to the experiences of all children and young people, including LGBTQIASB+ communities.

Drawing on our experience delivering Queensland's only specialist LGBTQIASB+ youth domestic, family and sexual violence service, ODYS recommends the following priorities for implementation.

RECOGNISE

1. Recognise LGBTQIASB+ children and young people as a priority cohort throughout the Second Action Plan.

Children and young people experience domestic, family and sexual violence differently from adults, and LGBTQIASB+ young people often experience additional forms of identity-based abuse, family rejection and barriers to accessing safe support. Explicit recognition will help ensure policy, funding and implementation activities respond equitably to their needs.

2. Recognise community connection, identity affirmation and belonging as protective factors within Australia's violence prevention framework.

For LGBTQIASB+ young people, prevention extends beyond respectful relationships education. Safe communities, affirming relationships and opportunities for meaningful connection reduce isolation, strengthen resilience and encourage earlier help-seeking.

INVEST

3. Invest in specialist LGBTQIASB+ domestic, family and sexual violence services.

Specialist services provide expertise in responding to identity-based violence, family rejection and the intersecting needs of LGBTQIASB+ young people. Continued investment will strengthen Australia's specialist service system while complementing mainstream responses.

4. Establish dedicated brokerage funding within specialist youth domestic, family and sexual violence services.

Young people cannot leave violence without practical resources. Brokerage funding should support emergency accommodation, transport, food, clothing, medication, communication, identity documents and other essential items that enable young people to reach safety.

5. Increase investment in safe crisis and transitional accommodation for LGBTQIASB+ young people, including appropriate accommodation options for transgender young people escaping violence.

Every young person should be able to access emergency accommodation that is safe, inclusive and responsive to their identity.

6. Invest in workforce capability across mainstream services.

Support practitioners across the domestic and family violence, health, housing, education, child protection and justice sectors to develop confidence and capability in delivering LGBTQIASB+ affirmative, trauma-informed and culturally responsive care.

STRENGTHEN

7. Strengthen integrated, multidisciplinary responses for children and young people experiencing domestic, family and sexual violence.

Young people experience one journey, not multiple systems. Future investment should support models that integrate counselling, youth work, family support, healthcare, housing, education and psychosocial support to improve continuity of care and reduce fragmentation.

8. Strengthen early intervention and family support initiatives.

Provide families with access to evidence-informed education and therapeutic support that promotes understanding, strengthens relationships and reduces the likelihood of conflict escalating into violence, while always prioritising the safety and wishes of young people.

9. Strengthen national data collection relating to LGBTQIASB+ communities.

Improve the routine and voluntary collection of data relating to sexuality, gender identity and sex characteristics to strengthen evidence, inform policy and support equitable service planning.

PARTNER

10. Partner with specialist LGBTQIASB+ organisations in the implementation of the Second Action Plan.

Specialist organisations bring unique expertise, lived experience, community trust and practice-based evidence. They should be recognised as key partners in policy development, implementation, workforce capability, evaluation and continuous system improvement.

Conclusion

Open Doors Youth Service welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the development of the Second Action Plan under the National Plan to End Violence against Women and Children.

Australia has made significant progress in recognising domestic, family and sexual violence as a national priority and in strengthening responses for victim-survivors. The Second Action Plan provides an important opportunity to build on this foundation by ensuring that every child and young person can access support that is safe, inclusive and responsive to their unique experiences.

For LGBTQIASB+ children and young people, domestic, family and sexual violence is often experienced at the intersection of identity, family relationships, discrimination, housing insecurity and social isolation. While many mainstream services provide essential support, achieving equitable outcomes requires a system that combines specialist expertise with inclusive mainstream services, practical resources and coordinated responses centred on the needs of young people.

ODYS believes that ending domestic, family and sexual violence requires more than responding to crisis. It requires investing in prevention, strengthening families where it is safe to do so, building connected communities, improving workforce capability and ensuring that no young person is prevented from reaching safety because the system was not designed with them in mind.

Australia has committed to ending violence against women and children within a generation. Achieving this vision will require a domestic, family and sexual violence system that reflects the diversity of the communities it serves and responds to the unique experiences of all children and young people.

The Second Action Plan presents an opportunity to ensure that LGBTQIASB+ children and young people are not simply acknowledged within this vision, but meaningfully included in its implementation. By investing in specialist expertise, strengthening mainstream capability, improving access to practical supports and designing services around the experiences of young people, Australia can build a system where every child and young person has the opportunity to live free from violence, recover with dignity and thrive within safe, connected communities.

ODYS welcomes the opportunity to continue partnering with governments, researchers, specialist organisations and mainstream services to achieve this shared vision.



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