

31 July 2026

Addressed to: The Australian Government Department of Social Services

**Submission regarding: Consultation with respect to the Commonwealth Government's
National Plan to End Violence against Women and Children 2022–2032**

Thank you for the opportunity to provide PeakCare's submission on the Second Action Plan under *Australia's National Plan to End Violence against Women and Children 2022–2032* (the National Plan).

PeakCare is the peak body representing organisations that work to improve the safety, wellbeing and life outcomes of Queensland's children, young people and families. Our members deliver prevention and early intervention, family support, out-of-home care, residential care and child protection services across Queensland.

PeakCare supports the recommendations made by Families Australia in their submission to this consultation process and seeks to complement those recommendations. Our submission focuses on the opportunity for the Second Action Plan to:

- Recognise and respond to the needs of children and young people in their own right.
- Strengthen prevention and early intervention through universal child and family services.
- Improve service delivery integration across domestic and family violence, child protection, education, health and other linked service systems.
- Address the social and environment conditions that increase vulnerability and reinforce gender-based violence.

The Australian Childhood Maltreatment Study (ACMS) found that 39.6 per cent of Australians aged over 16 years old experienced exposure to domestic violence during childhood.¹ In comparison, Queensland's 2024 Children in Care Census found that 68 per cent of children in care had been exposed to domestic violence prior to entering care,² demonstrating that domestic and family violence is a significant driver of child protection involvement.

These figures emphasise why the National Plan and *Safe and Supported: The National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children 2021–2031* (Safe and Supported) must operate as connected, national reform agendas. Safe and Supported recognises that child protection outcomes depend on coordinated action across domestic and family violence, mental health, alcohol and other drug services, disability, education, justice, housing and employment.³ Many families who come into contact with child protection services are experiencing several interconnected challenges.⁴ So, responses that address only one issue, or require families to navigate multiple disconnected systems, are unlikely to provide the sustained support needed to achieve safety and stability.

¹ Australian Child Maltreatment Study. (2023). [Australian Child Maltreatment Study](#).

² Queensland Department of Families, Seniors, Disability Services and Child Safety. (2024). [Children in care census 2024](#).

³ Australian Government Department of Social Services. (2021). [Safe and supported: The national framework for protecting Australia's children 2021–2031](#).

⁴ Bromfield, L., Sutherland, K., & Parker, R. (2012). *Families with multiple and complex needs: Best interests case practice model*. Victorian Government Department of Human Services.

Recognising children and young people in their own right

PeakCare strongly supports the proposed focus area to recognise children and young people in their own right – as victims, survivors and as people in need of support.

Children are not simply witnesses to violence. They have their own experiences, rights, safety needs and recovery needs. The Second Action Plan consultation paper acknowledges this distinction and calls for tailored, age-appropriate and developmentally appropriate support across prevention, early intervention, response, recovery and healing.

This distinction is particularly important for children in statutory care. Domestic and family violence service responses can sometimes assume that support provided to a child's primary caregiver (usually their mother) will automatically meet the child's needs and support their healing. While supporting the non-offending parent is essential, it does not replace the need for direct assessment and support for the child.

Recommendation 1: Children entering care or support services as a result of domestic and family violence need their own tailored supports, not just services accessed through or by a parent.

The Second Action Plan must also respond to the changing ways in which children and young people experience violence. The ACMS found that, when compared to previous generations, it is now more common for child sexual abuse to be inflicted by an adolescent than an adult.⁵ The increasing prevalence of peer-on-peer violence, technology facilitated abuse and violent pornography content consumed at young ages, are all concerning trends which warrant nationally aligned attention and action. Action on these issues should be aligned nationally, with clear responsibilities for state and territory governments in delivery.

Recommendation 2: Prevention and early intervention investment must provide clear, funded services pathways to support children and young people experiencing or using gender-based violence, with measurable outcomes driven by improved data collection.

Strengthening prevention and early intervention

PeakCare strongly supports the proposed focus on prevention and early intervention.

Ending violence requires action before harm occurs or escalates. This includes challenging the gendered drivers of violence, strengthening respectful relationships and consent education, addressing the impacts of childhood exposure to violence and building capability of services to recognise and respond to risk earlier.

While ending violence requires a whole-of-society response, one of our greatest opportunities for lasting prevention is through work with children, young people and their families.

Recommendation 3: Invest in the capability and capacity of universal services including schools, early childhood, health services, as well as child and family support services to combat attitudes and beliefs that underpin gender-based violence and address the factors that reinforce gender-based violence.

⁵ Australian Child Maltreatment Study. (2023). [Australian Child Maltreatment Study](#).

Universal services are often among the earliest and most consistent points of contact for children and families. They are uniquely positioned to identify concerns, strengthen protective factors and connect families with support before violence escalates. Consistency, accountability and capacity of organisations delivering universal services must continue to be improved. For example, the delivery of respectful relationships education remains inconsistent across the sector, including expectations for early engagement in respectful relationship education and the quality of the program delivered. There are also significant gaps in delivering respectful relationships education to young people disengaged from traditional education, whether that be because of mental health challenges, disability, developmental delays, youth justice or child safety involvement.

Recommendation 4: Fund the delivery of respectful relationships education – or equivalent programs – to children who are disengaged from traditional or mainstream education, including for children in out-of-home care or youth detention.

Addressing social and environmental conditions

Prevention must also address the social and environmental factors that reinforce gender-based violence. The Second Action Plan should retain a clear focus on the gendered drivers of violence, while addressing the conditions that can reinforce violence or make prevention and early intervention work more difficult.

Childhood exposure to violence or maltreatment, unmanaged financial or employment stress, exposure to violent pornography, harmful alcohol use and gambling as some of the factors that can influence the prevalence, frequency and severity of violence against women.⁶ These factors reinforce gender inequalities and interact with the gendered drivers of violence to intensify prevalence and severity of violence in certain circumstances.

An integrated service system must address the broader conditions that contribute to vulnerability, in particular, the reinforcing factors for gender-based violence that impact the prevalence and patterns of violence against women.⁷ An effective prevention strategy must therefore address both attitudes and behaviours and the wider conditions in which families live. This includes:

- Poverty and economic insecurity
- Housing stress and homelessness
- Harmful alcohol use and gambling
- Social isolation
- Limited access to early family support
- Exposure to violent and degrading online material
- Barriers to education, health, disability and mental health supports

Investment in early family support, early intervention and community-based services will strengthen protective factors, reduce the escalation of violence and contribute to the National Plan's vision of ending

⁶ Queensland Government. (2024). [Queensland's plan for the primary prevention of violence against women 2024–2028](#). Department of Families, Seniors, Disability Services and Child Safety.

⁷ Our Watch. (2024). *Reinforcing factors for gender-based violence: Evidence brief*.

violence within a generation. Investment needs to be intensive and sustained; short-term or fragmented programs are unlikely to provide the consistency and reliability needed to achieve lasting outcomes.

Recommendation 5: Long-term, sustained investment must address broader social and environmental conditions that contribute to vulnerability and disadvantage with funding coherence and continuity over short-term, fragmented programs.

Thank you for considering this submission. Please do not hesitate to contact us for any additional information via email at office@peakcare.org.au.

