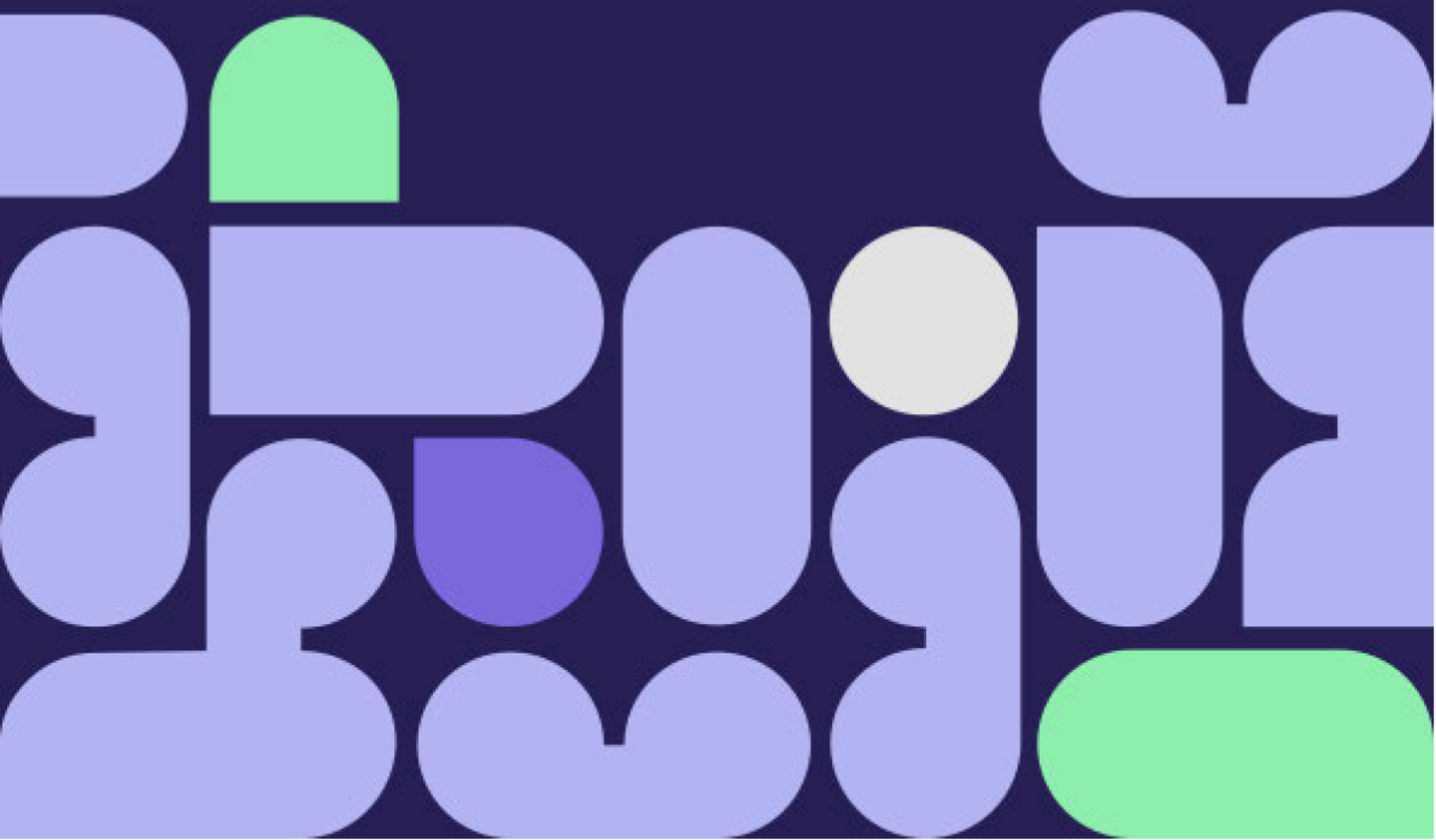


Submission on the Second Action Plan

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

Queensland Domestic and Family Violence Alliance | July 2026



About QDFVA

Queensland Domestic and Family Violence Alliance – QDFVA – is the peak body for specialist domestic and family violence services across Queensland. Established in June 2026 and building on the work of a number of informal networks across the sector, QDFVA aims to deliver a unified voice for the sector to government and the community on how we can tackle the growing challenges of domestic and family violence.

Our role is to support the sector and guide governments to reforms that will make a difference for victim-survivors while amplifying the exceptional work done by frontline domestic and family violence workers everyday under increasingly challenging circumstances.

Our frontline workforce knows what's needed and what works – our job is to make people listen.

Our Governing Members

- ❖ Centre Against Domestic Abuse
- ❖ Centre for Women & Co
- ❖ Cairns Regional Domestic Violence Service
- ❖ Domestic Violence Prevention Centre
- ❖ Domestic Violence Action Centre
- ❖ DV Connect
- ❖ Immigrant Women's Support Service
- ❖ Edon Place Women's Domestic Violence Service
- ❖ Gladstone Women's Health
- ❖ DVNQ
- ❖ Mackay Women's Service

Our Response

We recognise the strides made by the First Action Plan and the commitment to building on this foundation with the Second Action Plan. There is more to do.

Every day, we hear from frontline services who are stretched beyond capacity, managing increasingly complex and challenging cases, with limited support options for people post-crisis, in an environment where the costs of keeping their doors open are rising. Yet policy across the country continues to focus largely on crisis support and policing rather than prevention, early intervention and healing and recovery.

The single most impactful action government can take is prioritising domestic and family violence as a national crisis. Similar to the 'Coward Punch' style campaign delivered after the high-profile violent deaths of young men in 2012, a national media campaign to educate and empower the community on recognising, preventing and responding to domestic violence is essential.

We believe the Australian community needs to hear this message now, before more women and children are harmed.

This campaign also needs to be supported by a long-term, well-funded, preventative and coordinated approach that addresses the causes of violence and the needs of those affected.

- ❖ By long-term, we mean locking in funding for specialist services so they and their staff can have certainty and put proper plans in place for growth, sustainability and worker wellbeing.
- ❖ By well-funded, we mean ensuring that funding keeps up with the real costs of running frontline services. This includes accounting for Fair Work wage and CPI increases, increased operating costs from inflation and cost of living pressures, and support to recruit, train and retain our workforce. This also means ongoing funding for pilot projects and prevention and early intervention initiatives that work – not just a sudden funding cut when governments or budget cycles change.
- ❖ By preventative, we mean focusing on stopping harm before it begins for all parties to domestic and family violence. Addressing gender inequality, countering harmful narratives around women and violence, increasing access to behaviour change options for people using violence and increasing awareness of how domestic and family violence starts is critical.
- ❖ By coordinated, we mean supporting services and sectors to work together and reducing bureaucracy and red tape for victim-survivors to access records and fundings to support a fresh start for themselves and their families.

Our recommendations below outline where – with the right support – we can make practical and meaningful change within the next 5 years.

Priority Area 1: Victim Survivors

Queensland's frontline services are experiencing record demand for services with an increase in case complexity and the scale of harm. In particular, young women are being seen earlier and for higher levels of harm, pointing to a growing male violence problem starting younger. But this is only part of the picture.

While we recognise the increase in investment into the sector in the last decade, this has largely been to crisis response services and policing, with little to no real funding delivered for prevention and early intervention or post-crisis support.

Post-crisis support is fraught with challenges for women and their children, and the services that desperately try to help them. These challenges largely centre around:

- ❖ Access to post-crisis support and funding restricted by bureaucracy, red tape and complementary support agencies being spread out across regions. This is especially challenging for women leaving dangerous situations without access to money, personal records or transport.
- ❖ Eligibility requirements for health and wellbeing services that do not reflect the current wait times for those services. This is particularly evident in dental support where the wait list for treatment is so long that clients are no longer engaged with crisis services, a key eligibility requirement of the scheme.
- ❖ A lack of safe and affordable housing for women and their children leaving dangerous situations. A key part of healing and recovery is establishing a new life and returning to a normal routine including school, work and recreation. This is not possible in temporary accommodation or refuges.
- ❖ A lack of specialised treatment services for children and young people who are victim-survivors of domestic and family violence
- ❖ The complex needs of women and children on temporary visas and lack of access to immediate financial assistance
- ❖ Navigation of the housing landscape for victims-survivors with assets in their names and lack of access to legal aid.

A major challenge we have become aware of is the increasing use of statutory and judicial systems by people using violence to further harm victim-survivors including through the Family Court (custody arrangements), Child Support Agency (income assessments), and Child Safety (harm and neglect investigations). Repeated, vexatious reports and perpetrators refusing to comply with court orders becomes costly to defend and emotionally taxing on victim-survivors.

Recommendations

- ❖ Reduce bureaucracy and red tape that prevents or delays women from accessing essential post-crisis funding and support to enable them to start over. This could include co-locating services and agencies, embedding DV workers in key government service offices and streamlining application and identity verification processes, recognising that finding personal records is not often a top priority of someone fleeing domestic violence. These records are costly and often time-consuming to reorder.
- ❖ Ensure eligibility requirements for government-subsidised or funded programs reflect and are considerate of the reality of long wait lists and health resourcing challenges.
- ❖ Approach housing as prevention infrastructure, providing safe housing options both pre and post crisis to ensure victim-survivors can leave situations safely earlier and begin their recovery faster.
- ❖ Increase funding for programs that keep women and their children safe in their homes, particularly as technology facilitated abuse becomes more widespread. The Keeping Women Safe in Their Home

program is an effective way to support victim-survivors to ensure tracking applications, devices, spyware and software are not impacting their safety.

- ❖ Review how statutory and judicial systems are being abused by people using violence to further harm victim-survivors. As part of this, consider removing mutual disclosure requirements from DFV-related child support assessments to improve safety for women and limit the ability for people using violence to make continual unfounded and vexatious applications.
- ❖ Fund specialist child and youth counselling and support services for those experiencing domestic and family violence and who are at risk of becoming stuck in the cycle of violence.

Priority Area 2: Prevention and early intervention

Prevention and early intervention are key to addressing the gender inequality, harmful norms and the normalisation of disrespect that leads to domestic and family violence. Our whole approach needs to shift to prevention and early intervention to materially reduce harm.

Currently, the priority appears to be crisis response and policing. These responses, while incredibly important, help after harm has occurred – often multiple instances of harm. We need to get ahead of this offending.

To do that, we need to properly engage with the community. Current domestic and family violence campaigns do not match the scale of harm we are seeing in our community and have not properly explained less obvious domestic and family violence offending including coercive control, technology-facilitated abuse and financial abuse. As a priority, a national awareness campaign – similar to the ‘Coward Punch’ campaign and other past public health initiatives – needs to be deployed. Key to this is the engagement and leadership of adult men.

For too long, public campaigns around domestic and family violence have focused on women being responsible for their own safety. The responsibility needs to shift to adult men – especially those with influence – to take leadership in prevention and cultural change.

The focus of this national campaign needs to be progressive and engage men effectively on how they can prevent violence and where to seek help and support if they are likely to or have previously used violence. This campaign needs to consider all ages, cultures, sexualities and gender identities, abilities and socioeconomic statuses, recognising that domestic and family violence is not experienced by just one group in our community.

In support of a national campaign driving awareness and real discussion in the community, is the need to embed high-quality, culturally appropriate, respectful relationship education in early school years. This needs to be properly resourced and consistently delivered, with support for teachers and schools to implement it well. Early, age-appropriate education about respect, equality, and consent is critical to preventing the development of harmful attitudes and behaviours. Evidence-based whole-of-school programs – that include educating parents and carers – and are aligned with the curriculum and best practice (including the UNESCO International Technical Guidance for Sexuality Education) – are readily available across Australia but lack of funding often limits access.

Additionally, support needs to be offered to the whole community in not only recognising all aspects of domestic and family violence but what steps to take when a discovery or disclosure is made. Funding for community education across genders, cultures and abilities should be embedded across communities.

Any prevention or early intervention strategy must acknowledge the intersectionality of many people's experiences. Harm is compounded by engagement with systems, services and therapies that are not culturally appropriate, trauma informed or context responsive. This lack significantly shapes risk, access and outcomes for all victim-survivors and must be addressed.

Recommendations

- ❖ Lead a national campaign about domestic and family violence that is long-term, progressive and engaging with a primary focus on adult men.
- ❖ Embed respectful relationships education across all school years, starting in early primary school, with proper resourcing and teacher support.
- ❖ Fund specialist long-term counselling for children who are victims of DFV to help them recover from abuse and support them breaking the cycle as they get older.

- ❖ Fund community education supporting members of the public, family and friends to take action when a disclosure or discovery of domestic and family violence is made.

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

Often children and young people are forgotten when we talk about the victim-survivors of domestic and family violence, but they are frequently exposed to both violence and its impacts making them victim-survivors in their own right. Supporting only a parent or carer without providing adequate long-term therapeutic support for children and young people, leaves them managing trauma on their own and at risk of becoming part of intergenerational cycles of violence.

Children and young people, whether exposed to domestic and family violence or not, are also potential users of violence. Frontline services are seeing an increasing frequency in young people experiencing intimate partner violence and adolescents using violence against parents and siblings. Their support – particularly at the early intervention stage - needs to be prioritised. Waiting for them to reach adulthood is leaving intervention too late, potentially exposing more people to harm.

Private psychologists and counsellors come with long wait lists and appointment costs out of reach of most victim-survivors. Even with bulk-billed services, wait lists are months long, meaning children and young people miss valuable opportunities to deal with trauma early and start the healing process.

Children with a disability who are exposed to family violence are a growing group of victim-survivors. Some are completely reliant on parents, siblings and other family for their care needs making it impossible for them to seek support independently or communicate with relevant services or supportive adults. These children and young people suffer in silence, often experiencing physical and emotional abuse as well as financial abuse and restricted access to paid supports that improve their quality of life.

QDFVA has become aware of cases where young people with significant mobility challenges have managed to seek support in family violence situations, only for Child Safety to become involved, inform the family of the report and return the child to that family. With limited emergency care options for children with a disability, young people are placed back into dangerous situations.

Children being part of Family Court processes is also a significant area that needs to be looked at. As understanding of violence-related trauma grows, it is essential that courts provide children with support as matters progress. This should include multi-disciplinary wellbeing assessments that are non-admissible but with referral powers for investigation, recognising that the social and emotional wellbeing of the child should be a priority in all family matters.

Recommendations

- ❖ Provide funding for long-term, therapeutic support for children and young people exposed to domestic and family violence. This must include therapeutic options for children and young people at risk of using violence against intimate partners and their families.
- ❖ Invest in research and evaluation of child-specific prevention and early intervention programs to determine their effectiveness in risk reduction, needs assessment and response.
- ❖ Support information sharing between Child Safety agencies and the NDIS, ensuring that young people who have interactions with the Child Safety system are flagged for follow up by the NDIS to ensure supports are being delivered as intended.
- ❖ Fund specialist, supported emergency housing for young people with a disability who are experiencing domestic and family violence, so they are not returned to unsafe homes due to a lack of appropriate foster placement options.

- ❖ Fund a children's wellbeing assessment function within the Family Court, ensuring that the social and emotional wellbeing of children involved in matters is paramount. Anything obtained during this assessment would be inadmissible but subject to referral to investigative agencies as required by law.

Priority Area 4: People who use violence

While support for victim-survivors is essential, equally important is the need to fund the engagement and support of persons using violence. For decades, the community's focus has been on women's safety planning – acknowledging that domestic violence happens and that women are responsible for making themselves safe.

A national shift is needed to put the onus back onto persons using violence.

Domestic and family violence does not just need to be a fact of life that women try and protect themselves from. Men need to be held accountable for making the choice to use violence and be supported to recognise their triggers and make better choices. That includes undertaking compulsory treatment not just for the use of violence itself but for the underlying issues that have created this problem, including addiction (drugs, alcohol, gambling, sex/pornography) and mental health.

Behaviour change programs need to be genuinely therapeutic and delivered by trained professionals. The pillars of these programs need to be understanding the impact of their behaviour, accountability for harm, and fostering respectful relationships. These programs need to be accessible and tailored to people of all genders and cultural backgrounds who identify as potential users of violence through to those who are court-ordered to complete them. It is essential that people using violence participate in these programs straight away to make the most of their impact. Delays due to wait times otherwise reduce the effectiveness of these programs. These programs also need to last as long as needed so they can build trust and make a genuine impact. A one-size-fits-all approach to therapeutic support does not work.

These therapeutic treatment options should be supported by community-based options that are easily accessible through existing service delivery. Hundreds of community organisations deliver services to key cohorts every day across youth programs, parenting programs, sport and recreation, and cultural groups. Men accessing these community spaces may be more open to considering support for their use of violence or any other underlying issues.

Men need to become aware of the underlying sexist attitudes and stereotypes about women that are pervasive across the community that can lead to domestic and family violence. While often seen as 'unimportant', these dangerous norms and disrespect remaining socially acceptable provide fertile ground for misogyny and hate.

Housing is also a critical need across the whole domestic and family violence space, with housing solutions for persons using violence or who are at risk of using violence critical for improving the safety of women and children and getting access to prevention and early intervention therapeutic supports earlier.

Recommendations

- ❖ Change the national approach to simultaneously support victim-survivors and treat persons using violence to reduce future harm.
- ❖ Fund compulsory treatment for persons using violence, ensuring these programs are therapeutic, identify contributing co-morbidities (eg addiction, mental health) and refer participants to appropriate services. These services need to be customisable to adequately support people across age, gender, culture and ability spectrums.
- ❖ Fund the compulsory participation of persons using violence in behaviour change programs immediately after offending – any delay to this reduces the impact of the program
- ❖ Support compulsory treatment by funding community-based options which persons using violence can access through other services delivered in the community eg parenting programs, youth programs, sport and recreation.

- ❖ Fund supporting services for addiction and mental health that treat the underlying causes and potential triggers for persons using violence.
- ❖ Invest in housing options for people at risk of using violence or who use violence to support early intervention in the cycle of violence and ensure the safety of their families.

Priority Area 5: System integration and workforce

Resourcing remains a challenge for frontline DFV services with rising costs, workforce challenges and increased demand for support with an increased complexity of cases. Services are expected to do more with less.

The magnitude of unmet need is not even truly known.

We are concerned by what appears to be a preference for funding general support services over specialist domestic and family violence services. While getting support into communities is of utmost importance – particularly outside of urban areas – access to specialist services is essential to victim-survivors receiving high quality, end-to-end care and support from qualified workers. This quality gap is not anecdotal; specialist services deliver evidence-based care and organisational accountability that complies with the established standards of Queensland's Human Services Quality Framework (HSQF).

The DFV workforce is highly skilled but under pressure facing burnout driven by high demand, administrative burden, and low pay. Much of this could be addressed through adequate, long-term funding that considers the real cost of delivering services. This includes recognising that case complexity is increasing meaning more time and resources are needed to support the same number of women and their children while demand grows.

Most notably, services represented by QDFVA have seen a significant increase in First Nations women and women with a disability seeking support. Unfortunately, for many of our services, they simply don't have the funding to employ specialist First Nations or disability workers. Ideally, women seeking support could be seen by someone who understands their unique challenges and the systems, networks and services that could support them post-crisis.

System coordination and integration is another key challenge faced by the sector. Navigating a disparate system is challenging for both specialist services and the women and children who seek support.

The Queensland Government is committed to a “no wrong door” approach with its services. The Australian Government should commit to the same. We have heard numerous stories of victim-survivors going to significant effort to reach services, obtain new copies of personal records and make applications, only to be told they are in the wrong place, have not filled in the correct form, do not have the right identity document, or worse still, an application must be made in person.

Banks, insurance companies, superannuation funds and other private service providers further compound these challenges – often unintentionally – simply because they are not adequately equipped to respond to domestic and family violence. Simplifying and streamlining processes – including coordination with external service providers – is essential to truly supporting victim-survivors in getting help when it's needed.

The court system – particularly the Family Court – is a key space where harm is unintentionally compounded. With 90% of Family Court matters and 80% of property matters involving some form of family violence, this needs to be addressed urgently. We recognise the work being undertaken in the Family Court, particularly with the employment of Indigenous Liaison Officers, the Lighthouse Program (triage and risk) and court officer education but we believe there is more to do in supporting women to navigate a complex system in challenging circumstances.

Just like our frontline services are seeing more diverse and complex cases, the Family Court is too. These systems are challenging enough to navigate without the added complexities of disability and impairment, culture and language. In addition, women can become fearful if they have existing or potential interactions with immigration or child protection as a result of disclosing domestic and family violence or seeking relief through the courts. Well-

trained liaison officers, particularly for disability and women from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, would be a positive first step to supporting their successful navigation of the system.

This increased diversity of people appearing before the Family Court also highlights the need for more diverse judicial officers and better education on domestic and family violence – in all its forms. This is particularly urgent in regional areas and for judicial officers who have served for long periods, where the accepted definition of domestic and family violence has changed significantly over the past two decades.

Recommendations

- ❖ Fund the real cost of specialist domestic and family violence services, considering rising costs, inflation, increased complexity and significant demand.
- ❖ Ensure the focus of funding for domestic violence remains on specialist services rather than more general services to ensure high-quality service provision for victim-survivors.
- ❖ Fund specialist workers within services to provide culturally appropriate support to First Nations women who experience domestic and family violence at disproportionately high rates, reflecting the ongoing impacts of colonisation, intergenerational trauma, and systemic inequality.
- ❖ Fund specialist workers within services to support women with a disability, many of whom deal with accessibility, mobility and communication challenges and are navigating disability-specific systems.
- ❖ When establishing government services, consider co-location and/or embedding domestic and family violence workers within services to facilitate victim-survivors accessing support and complementary services.
- ❖ Review all domestic and family violence-related Australian Government processes to ensure that accessing supports and services are more streamlined and timelier for those in crisis. This should include reviewing how government systems interact with private service providers (eg banks).
- ❖ Expand the Lighthouse Program of the Family Court into regional areas, recognising the success this program has had in assessing and addressing risk to parties of domestic and family violence, acknowledging that risk profiles can change as matters progress.
- ❖ Expand the Indigenous Liaison Officer program within the Family Court, particularly in regional areas where support is frequently unavailable.
- ❖ Create a Disability Liaison Officer program and a CALD program within the Family Court to support women with a disability – including those injured as a result of domestic and family violence – and women from diverse backgrounds to navigate the court system.
- ❖ Increase the diversity of judicial officers to better reflect the changing face of Australia's population and those appearing before the Family Court.
- ❖ End Australia's participation in the Hague Convention, given its operation can have unintended consequences for domestic violence victim-survivors such as forcing the removal of their children from their care or forcing victim-survivors to remain with an abusive partner.
- ❖ Improve and increase judicial officer education, ensuring both presiding officers and support staff understand domestic and family violence in all its forms, including coercive control and trauma responses.
- ❖ Increase Australian Institute of Family Studies funding to deliver court outcomes data and family separation data that will inform practice and support for women and their children accessing the Family Court.

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