

Department of Social Services
National Plan Delivery
Women's Safety Policy Branch
Canberra, ACT, 2600

31 July 2026

Re: Second Action Plan to End Violence Against Women and Children 2022–2032

Thank you for the opportunity to provide feedback on the Second Action Plan for the National Plan to End Violence Against Women and Children 2022–2032 (The National Plan).

We commend the Australian Government's commitment to addressing violence and abuse in our communities, and to recognising children and young people as victim-survivors, who require tailored responses and support.

As South Australia's Commissioner for Children and Young People, my priorities are to ensure children's voices are heard, their rights are protected, and their experiences help shape better decisions, stronger systems and lasting change.

My mandate under the Children and Young People (Oversight and Advocacy Bodies) Act 2016 is to advocate for the rights, interests and wellbeing of all children and young people in South Australia. It is also my role to ensure that the State, at all levels of government, satisfies its international obligations under the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Under the UNCRC children and young people have a right to:

- develop healthily and live a full life (Article 6)
- be heard and considered in matters that affect them (Article 12), and
- be properly cared for and protected from physical or mental violence, abuse, exploitation or neglect (Article 19).

The Convention also recognises that parents/carers should be the main people who are responsible for the child (Article 18) and that they should not be taken from them unless they are not being 'properly looked after' (Article 9). Governments also have a responsibility to support families facing financial disadvantage through monetary support (Article 26) and with providing food, clothing and a safe place to live (Article 27). For children and young people to thrive it is imperative that services complement and enhance Australia's legal and policy protections ensuring children and their families are given the right support at the right time.

These principles are reflected in the Office of the Commissioner for Children and Young People's (CCYP's) vision for South Australia. We believe that the wellbeing of children and young people is both an important indicator of the health of our society and a shared responsibility across governments, communities and families.

Our work is guided by three interconnected priorities:

- **Access** – when children and young people have their essential needs and rights met, they can grow, learn, participate and thrive.
- **Belonging** – when children and young people are connected to family, culture, trusted people and communities, they feel valued, develop strong identities and experience lifelong wellbeing.
- **Contribution** – when children and young people are genuinely heard and trusted to influence decisions and shape the world around them, they feel more optimistic about the future.

These priorities align strongly with the intent of the National Plan and provide a useful lens through which to consider children's and young people's experiences of domestic, family and sexual violence. The reflections and recommendations that follow are therefore structured around access, belonging and contribution, recognising that improving outcomes for children and young people requires action across all three.

This submission draws upon the perspectives of children and young people who have been consulted directly by the CCYP and the voices and experiences of children, young people, victim-survivors and supporters who participated in South Australia's Royal Commission into Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence¹. Throughout this submission, quotes from the Royal Commission's *Voices Report*² have been included to amplify the perspectives of those with lived and living experience of violence and abuse. Their contributions reflect an important body of evidence about what children, young people and families need to feel safe, supported and heard. Consistent with the themes outlined in this submission, these voices remind us that meaningful reform requires not only listening to people's experiences but acting on what they have told us and what we already know.

The following provides key reflections in response to both the *Rapid Review of Prevention³ Approaches* and the *Evidence to Action⁴* paper (referred to as the “consultation paper”) released as supporting documentation for this consultation.

Yours sincerely,



Dr Kylie Heneker
Commissioner for Children and Young People, South Australia

¹ Royal Commission into Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence. (2025). *With courage: South Australia's vision beyond violence*. Government of South Australia

² Royal Commission into Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence. (2025). *Voices*. Government of South Australia.

³ Australian Government. Department of Social Services. (2026). *Rapid review of prevention approaches: Update report* (20 February 2026). Commonwealth of Australia.

⁴ Australian Government. Department of Social Services. (2026). *Evidence to action: Consultation paper for the Second Action Plan under the National Plan to End Violence Against Women and Children 2022–2032*. Commonwealth of Australia.

Overview of Recommendations

Recommendation 1: Consider national consistency in how children and young people's capacity to independently access DFSV-related supports is defined and applied across jurisdictions and sectors. Particular attention should be given to mature minor principles, consent requirements and service eligibility criteria to reduce barriers and ensure equitable access to support regardless of where a young person lives or seeks assistance.

Recommendation 2: Strengthen recognition of children and young people as victim-survivors in their own right, including through access to developmentally appropriate, trauma-informed supports that are not solely contingent on the engagement of a protective parent, while recognising family as the foundation of safety, healing and prevention.

Recommendation 3: Expand data collection and evidence development to better understand unmet need, informal help-seeking and missed opportunities for prevention and early intervention for children and young people across the service system and organisations.

Recommendation 4: Ensure communications, support pathways and service responses are accessible and inclusive, enabling children and young people to recognise their experiences and seek help early.

Recommendation 5: Strengthen youth-centred responses to coercive control and technology-facilitated abuse, including the design of reporting, information and support mechanisms.

Recommendation 6: Strengthen prevention efforts to address the full continuum of respectful relationships, including building healthy relationship behaviours, recognising early warning signs of harm, and supporting children and young people to seek help before harm escalates.

Recommendation 7: Embed prevention efforts within families and communities, including supporting parents and caregivers to model, reinforce and sustain safe, respectful relationships alongside prevention initiatives delivered to children and young people.

Recommendation 8: Ensure Respectful Relationships Education (RRE) is adequately resourced and supported for long-term implementation as a whole-of-school approach, with sufficient time to embed across school culture, policies, practices and partnerships.

Recommendation 9: Strengthen whole-of-government accountability for improving outcomes for children and young people affected by DFSV, including clear responsibility for translating evidence, consultation and co-design into measurable action and outcomes.

Recommendation 10: Put children at the forefront of decision making and reform processes. Ensure co-design processes explicitly include children and young people who face the greatest institutional and systemic barriers, including children and young people in care, care leavers, and



Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people, and that their experiences inform the design, implementation and evaluation of reforms.

Key Reflections and Considerations

Access

When children and young people have their essential needs and rights met, they can grow, learn, participate and thrive.

Children and young people in their own right

The Evidence to Action consultation paper⁵ rightly recognises that children and young people should be treated as victim-survivors in their own right, including having access to tailored, evidence-based and trauma-informed supports.

The paper states that in supporting children and young people in their own right, we must also consider support that is not contingent on the engagement of a protective parent. This is paramount, and whilst some service systems have made progress in actioning this, the age at which young people can independently access services varies significantly across systems. For example, South Australia does not have a single statutory age of independent service access for young people. Instead, access is determined through a combination of legislative capacity thresholds (particularly the right of 16–17 year olds to consent to health care), mature-minor principles for younger adolescents, child protection requirements, and service-specific eligibility criteria.

In South Australia the Consent to Medical Treatment and Palliative Care Act 1995 (SA) (Consent Act) does state that a child over the age of 16 can consent to their medical treatment, and a child under 15 can consent when additional conditions are met. However, the South Australian DFSV Royal Commission Report addresses the limitation of the Consent Act, stating, *“while many recovery and healing services may fall within the definition of ‘medical treatment’, many will not... There is a need to ensure that children and young people can access recovery and healing services when they need them, and, when appropriate, in the absence of parental consent”*.

These inconsistencies exist not only across systems and individual services within a single state, but also across states and jurisdictions, which can create confusion and barriers to young people accessing timely support. Having consistency in how we support young people to access help that is not contingent on a protective parent is especially important in the context of domestic, family and sexual violence (DFSV) when we consider that victim-survivors may flee to other jurisdictions to escape abuse. The South Australian DFSV Royal Commission Report further states that for *“children and young people who are unsafe in their own homes – the laws relating to parental consent should not be the barrier preventing these children and young people from accessing help, and from receiving the supports they need to become safe”*.

⁵ Australian Government. Department of Social Services. (2026). *Evidence to action: Consultation paper for the Second Action Plan under the National Plan to End Violence Against Women and Children 2022–2032*. Commonwealth of Australia.

Additionally, when conceptualising how young people might access services, with or without the support of a protective parent, consideration must be given to how children and young people in the care of the State would be afforded the same right as those within family and kinship structures. We must ensure equitable access to services so that children and young people's rights are not compromised due to their experience in care.

Consideration should also be given to the availability of DFSV responses within youth-serving systems, recognising that adolescents do not only experience family violence, but may also experience intimate partner abuse, and therefore, fall between existing child protection and adult service responses.

*“I would advocate for DFSV services to be available in the youth sector - there are often young people under the age of 18 in DFSV relationships with partners (often young themselves) and there are minimal SAPOL responses to these concerns, rarely a child protection response and young people are experiencing significant injuries and coercion. I also view supporting young people in DFSV relationships (both survivors and perpetrators) as a key opportunity for early intervention and to change trajectories”. **Supporter of a Victim-Survivor, DFSV Royal Commission Voices Report***

While the consultation paper identifies sexual violence, harmful sexual behaviours and emerging forms of technology-facilitated abuse as important priorities for children and young people, significant gaps remain in access to developmentally appropriate supports for children and adolescents who experience sexual violence. Children and young people frequently fall between child and adult service systems, resulting in inconsistent access to counselling, advocacy and trauma-informed recovery supports at a time when early intervention is critical. Particular attention should be given to ensuring that children and young people who experience sexual violence can access timely, age-appropriate therapeutic supports regardless of where they live, which service system they encounter, or whether they fall between child and adult service eligibility criteria.

*“There is a massive gap in services for girls aged 14-16 as [service name] only manages 16+ & [Child protective services] are disinterested after about 13 unless it is familial rape & sexual assault. There is no counselling or services for young women who are raped or sexually assaulted under 16”. **Supporter of a Victim-Survivor, DFSV Royal Commission Voices Report***

Seeing yourself in the solution

The consultation paper appropriately highlights coercive control and technology-facilitated abuse as emerging priorities and identifies the need for improved responses across systems, including policing, justice and online environments. However, equal consideration should be given to how children and young people access, understand and engage with support systems, particularly as the nature of harm continues to evolve.

While a gendered analysis remains essential to understanding the drivers, patterns and impacts of DFSV, consideration should also be given to how policy framing influences service design, eligibility

and pathways to support. The lens through which a problem is defined shapes the solutions developed in response and can influence who is recognised within service systems, how support is delivered, and who may be unintentionally excluded. A gendered analysis and an inclusive service response are not mutually exclusive. Effective systems should retain a strong understanding of gendered patterns of violence while ensuring all children and young people experiencing harm can recognise themselves within support pathways and access appropriate support.

Experience in South Australia through the recent Royal Commission into Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence demonstrates that narrowly defined service models can create barriers for people whose experiences do not align with dominant assumptions about victim-survivors⁶. This may include adolescent boys accompanying a parent escaping violence, young people in same-sex or gender-diverse relationships, and others whose experiences of harm may not be readily reflected in service design despite experiencing many of the same safety concerns and support needs.

“I picked up my sons, put them in the car, rang a crisis centre (shelter) and was advised that I could go there immediately with 2 of my sons but my eldest was 14 and he could not go there. This was horrific, no way would I let any of my sons out of my sight. We... slept in the car.” Victim-Survivor, DFSV Royal Commission Voices Report (pg.24)

The consultation paper also acknowledges that existing terminology can exclude some experiences of violence and that young people do not always identify with the language commonly used in policy and service systems. However, less attention is given to how the language, assumptions and design of services, reporting mechanisms and support pathways influence whether children and young people recognise their experiences, seek help, and see themselves reflected in available responses.

Children and young people do not always describe their experiences using the same language as policy and service systems. Experiences of coercion, manipulation, control, neglect, bullying and technology-facilitated harm may not be recognised by children and young people as “violence”, despite having significant impacts on their safety and wellbeing. This is particularly important for children and young people whose experiences may be further obscured by dominant assumptions about gender, sexuality, disability or family structure. Ensuring that children and young people can recognise themselves and their experiences within communications, education and support pathways is therefore an important component of early intervention and help-seeking.

“I was in a coercive relationship with a transgender woman several years my senior. I found it very hard to articulate my experiences and only realised what I was experiencing was Intimate Partner Violence after the relationship ended. More support for young people navigating adult relationships from the ages of 14-18 are definitely needed, especially spaces for young women navigating the online world. You feel like you're invincible when you're young and then come to realise you're not, and there aren't many places to go when your

⁶ Royal Commission into Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence. (2025). *With courage: South Australia's vision beyond violence*. Government of South Australia

relationship doesn't fit into the usual male/female narrative.” Victim-Survivor, DFSV Royal Commission Voices Report (pg.14)

The importance of language alignment and shared understanding also extends to prevention initiatives, including Respectful Relationships Education (RRE). The consultation paper could more strongly acknowledge the role of Respectful Relationships Education (RRE) and broader primary prevention efforts in supporting children and young people to recognise and respond to harmful behaviours. Effective prevention requires sufficient time, resourcing and support to embed RRE within whole-of-school approaches and across the broader community. Alongside this, greater alignment and clarity of language across policy, education and service systems can help build a shared understanding of violence and harm, reduce barriers to help-seeking, and ensure children and young people can more readily identify available supports and see their experiences reflected within them.

Understanding unmet need and missed opportunities

Both the Evidence to Action consultation paper and the Rapid Review of Prevention Approaches recognise the importance of improving evidence, data collection and system responses for children and young people affected by DFSV. While these efforts are important, current approaches to understanding demand and service utilisation remain largely focused on the crisis and response end of the system.

There is an opportunity to strengthen the evidence base beyond crisis response. Current efforts to understand demand and service utilisation are heavily concentrated at the crisis end of the system. While important, this provides only a partial picture of children's and young people's experiences or where they might try to access support. Greater attention should be given to understanding unmet need, informal help-seeking and missed opportunities for intervention across prevention and early intervention settings.

Many children and young people who eventually present to specialist services will have previously engaged with schools, health services, community organisations, digital platforms, family members, peers or other trusted adults. Understanding where these opportunities for earlier support and intervention are being missed is critical to building a more preventative and responsive system; a system that genuinely shares responsibility to respond and act.

Youth-designed pathways in a digital world

The consultation paper highlights the need to strengthen responses to coercive control and technology-facilitated abuse, while the Rapid Review and subsequent actions recognise the increasing role of online environments in both harm and help-seeking. As these responses continue to develop, consideration should also be given to whether reporting, information and support pathways are genuinely designed with children and young people in mind.

Children and young people may experience challenges navigating pathways designed around adult assumptions, language and help-seeking behaviours. Information about rights, reporting options

and support services is often dispersed across agencies, websites and service systems, requiring children and young people to understand complex systems before they can access support.

“A 'one stop' website should be provided to be able to deal with the Government red tape that comes with DFV. I.e. via one central application to advise ATO, child support, Centrelink, fines enforcement, immigration etc of DFV, and be able to access hardship services.” ***Victim-Survivor, DFSV Royal Commission Voices Report (pg.53)***

While this feedback above relates to adults, the challenge is likely to be amplified for children and young people navigating systems independently. Ensuring that reporting, information and support pathways are developmentally appropriate, accessible and responsive to the ways children and young people seek information and assistance should be considered an important component of strengthening responses to technology-facilitated abuse and coercive control.

Recommendations

Recommendation 1: Consider national consistency in how children and young people's capacity to independently access DFSV-related supports is defined and applied across jurisdictions and sectors. Particular attention should be given to mature minor principles, consent requirements and service eligibility criteria to reduce barriers and ensure equitable access to support regardless of where a young person lives or seeks assistance.

Recommendation 2: Strengthen recognition of children and young people as victim-survivors in their own right, including through access to developmentally appropriate, trauma-informed supports that are not solely contingent on the engagement of a protective parent, while recognising family as the foundation of safety, healing and prevention.

Recommendation 3: Expand data collection and evidence development to better understand unmet need, informal help-seeking and missed opportunities for prevention and early intervention for children and young people across the service system and organisations.

Recommendation 4: Ensure communications, support pathways and service responses are accessible and inclusive, enabling children and young people to recognise their experiences and seek help early.

Recommendation 5: Strengthen youth-centred responses to coercive control and technology-facilitated abuse, including the design of reporting, information and support mechanisms.

Belonging

When children and young people are connected to family, culture, trusted people and communities, they feel valued, develop strong identities and experience lifelong wellbeing.

Complex relationships, healing and recovery

Children and young people also experience relationships affected by violence and other forms of abuse, in complex and non-binary ways. They may simultaneously be harmed by a parent's behaviour, care deeply about that parent, and want violence to stop without wanting relationships or families to be irreparably fractured. Similarly, children and young people may move between experiences of victimisation, resistance, retaliation and harm in ways that do not fit neatly within rigid victim-perpetrator frameworks. Policy and service responses should recognise these realities and avoid assumptions that children's experiences can be understood through mutually exclusive categories.

*“Young people struggle to speak up because they want to protect those involved.” **Young Person, DFSV Royal Commission Voices Report***

Children and young people who use violence should also be understood within the context of their developmental stage, relationships and experiences. For some children and young people, experiences of violence, coercion, trauma and disrupted attachment are important parts of understanding behaviours that emerge later. This does not remove accountability for harm caused, but highlights the need for developmentally appropriate responses that prioritise safety, behaviour change and healing. Responses that rely solely on punitive, disciplinary or justice-based approaches risk criminalising children and young people without addressing the underlying drivers of harm.

*“[There is] not enough help for children raised in domestic violence homes. They get given into the care of violent parents as if those abusive partners are going to become model parents...the children grow and start showing signs of being manipulative and abusive towards the main care giving parent. That parent seeks counselling help. That parent is now being abused by the child and there is no help for the parent or the child... So my child is going to grow into an abuser like their father (because) no one will help me while they're still young... That's not going to be on me”. **Victim-Survivor, DFSV Royal Commission Voices Response***

The long-term impacts of violence on children and young people can also emerge well beyond the immediate period of crisis and should not be viewed solely through the lens of safety and immediate recovery.

*“I think children who have witnessed ongoing violence should have counselling and training where they are taught the difference between kind and peaceful parenting and violent aggressive parenting to help prevent history being repeated. Without spelling out what is wrong, many children will grow up doing what they witnessed”. **Victim-Survivor, DFSV Royal Commission Voices Report***

Family as a foundation and acting earlier

While children and young people require tailored responses in their own right, support must also recognise the central role of family and community in their safety, healing and long-term wellbeing. As reflected by victim-survivor Florence in the consultation paper, children and young people should not be expected to carry responsibility for responding to their experiences of violence. Reducing children's contact with systems requires greater investment in families and the communities that support them. For First Nations children and young people in particular, strong connections to culture, Country and community are well-established protective factors and forms of prevention.

Current service responses often remain contingent on a family reaching crisis or leaving a violent situation. Children and young people living in homes where violence remains present may have limited access to therapeutic and trauma-informed support despite experiencing significant impacts. Earlier engagement with whole-of-family supports is needed, particularly for families who are unable to safely leave due to financial abuse, fear, coercive control or limited support networks. Supporting children in their own right and strengthening families are complementary rather than competing objectives.

"Please consider carefully responses for children, particularly where supports are working with their parents and DFSV is active in the home. Most therapeutic/trauma services will only engage children once survivors have left the relationship and child survivors are deemed 'safe'. This limited service model offers nothing to support children in homes where they reside and violence continues." **Victim-Survivor, DFSV Royal Commission Voices Report**

"Ensuring safety is so crucial to people who cannot leave without their kids and do not have the finance or support network to care for them. Knowledge of other people's experiences and knowing they are strong." **Young Person, DFSV Royal Commission Voices Report**

Young people consistently recognised the importance of understanding their rights, identifying harmful behaviours and seeking help. However, they also highlighted the importance of addressing the drivers of violence and supporting behaviour change among those causing harm. As one young person reflected:

"To prevent family and domestic violence SA should educate the children that they have the right to speak up for themselves ... But we also need to get the people who are being violent to change their behaviour." **Young Person, DFSV Royal Commission Voices Report**

Prevention for Children, Young People and Families

The consultation paper also highlights the risks of engaging young people in prevention efforts when their lived experience contradicts what they are being taught, particularly when they are exposed to violence or abuse within their own homes or communities.

Strengthening families to model and sustain respectful relationships is critical to ensuring that prevention messages are not experienced as abstract or contradictory, but as relevant, consistent and reinforced across the systems and environments that shape children and young people's lives.

*“To prevent family and domestic violence SA should educate the children that they have the right to speak up for [themselves]. And no one has [the] right to hurt them or bullying them or touch them inappropriately. But we also need to get the people who are being violent to change their behaviour.” **Young Person, DFSV Royal Commission Voices Report***

This underscores the importance of locating prevention efforts within the broader context of family and community. If families are the foundation of children and young people’s development, then prevention initiatives must extend beyond the individual child to support safe, respectful relationships within their homes and broader environments.

The South Australian Government’s recent student consultation on Respectful Relationships Education (RRE)⁷ demonstrates that young people perceive current approaches as overly focused on crisis points, with a strong emphasis on responding to “extreme” situations rather than addressing everyday conflict or the subtle, emerging forms of disrespect that often precede harm. Young people also expressed a desire for greater support to recognise their own behaviours, including understanding “*how to know if you’re doing something wrong in a relationship*” and having the tools to be able to challenge coercive behaviours or problematic language used by others.

Young people's feedback also highlights the importance of ensuring RRE is sufficiently resourced and embedded through whole-of-school approaches rather than delivered as a standalone or time-limited intervention. Effective implementation requires consistent reinforcement across school culture, policies, staff practice and engagement with families and communities. It also requires clear and consistent language relating to respect, coercion, control and abuse across education, prevention and service systems, helping to build a shared understanding of harmful behaviours and available pathways to support.

With RRE being a key prevention activity with children and young people, listening to their needs, and affecting change is paramount. This includes strengthening RRE’s focus on early identification, building young people’s capacity to recognise red flags, and supporting the development of safe, respectful behaviours, i.e. not only responding when harm has already escalated. This is imperative so that children and young people can spot the early warning signs in relationships and seek help before issues escalate.

Digital spaces, connection and belonging

As governments seek to reduce online harms, equal attention should be given to understanding the role digital spaces play in connection, identity formation, belonging and help-seeking. For many children and young people, online environments are not only sites of risk but also places where they access information, build social connections, engage with communities and seek support.

⁷ Department for Education. (2026). *Respectful relationships education: Student consultation report*. Government of South Australia.

Efforts to address technology-facilitated abuse should therefore be accompanied by consideration of how children and young people can safely access the benefits of digital participation and how support systems can engage with them in the places and spaces that matter to them.

Children and young people consistently recognise both the opportunities and risks associated with digital participation. Efforts to reduce harm should be developed with children and young people, ensuring responses strengthen safety without inadvertently undermining connection, belonging and access to support.

Recommendations

Recommendation 6: Strengthen prevention efforts to address the full continuum of respectful relationships, including building healthy relationship behaviours, recognising early warning signs of harm, and supporting children and young people to seek help before harm escalates.

Recommendation 7: Embed prevention efforts within families and communities, including supporting parents and caregivers to model, reinforce and sustain safe, respectful relationships alongside prevention initiatives delivered to children and young people.

Recommendation 8: Ensure Respectful Relationships Education (RRE) is adequately resourced and supported for long-term implementation as a whole-of-school approach, with sufficient time to embed across school culture, policies, practices and partnerships.

Contribution

When children and young people are genuinely heard and trusted to shape the world around them, they feel more optimistic about the future and can influence decisions that affect their lives.

Children and young people at the forefront of decision-making

Children and young people consistently tell us that being heard means not just being consulted on their concerns- they want to see tangible outcomes from their participation and be a part of forming solutions. The Action plan echoes these sentiments with the intent that children and young people's involvement in redesigning the system should move beyond consultation and into co-design.

*“We feel heard when action is taken or something changes.” – Year 10 Student
Woodville High*

Meaningful participation requires organisations to be clear about the purpose of engagement, the questions being asked, and the areas in which children and young people can genuinely influence decisions. Engagement should be purposeful rather than extractive, with transparency about the opportunities and constraints shaping reform. This includes challenging assumptions that children and young people are unable to understand the complexities of policy, service design or resource limitations. When invited to help identify solutions, children and young people should be provided with honest and accessible information about the context, trade-offs and constraints involved, enabling them to participate as informed partners in decision-making.

An important consideration in both consultation and co-design is not only what is being asked, but who is asking. Children and young people are more likely to participate meaningfully when engagement occurs through trusted relationships and environments where they feel safe, respected and understood.

Governments should prioritise working through existing trusted organisations and engagement mechanisms that already have established relationships with children and young people, including those with lived experience of care. Building on these established networks can reduce consultation fatigue, support ongoing participation, and strengthen pathways for children and young people's views to influence decision-making. This approach also helps ensure that children and young people are connected to existing support networks throughout the engagement process, with trauma-informed support available proactively rather than only being offered once distress or disclosure has occurred.

While co-design processes often emphasise the importance of diverse representation, there must also be a deliberate focus on ensuring that policy and service reforms work for children and young people who experience the highest levels of institutional and systemic disadvantage. This includes, but is not limited to, children and young people in care, care leavers, and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people, who are overrepresented across multiple service systems and are more likely to encounter barriers to accessing support.

This is particularly important where proposed reforms affect children and young people whose interactions with government systems are most frequent and complex, as they are often best placed to identify practical barriers that may otherwise go unnoticed. Effective co-design should therefore move beyond representation alone and deliberately centre the experiences of children and young people who are most likely to encounter barriers to safety, support and participation. Doing so helps ensure that reforms are equitable, accessible and responsive to those most impacted by system failures.

“Big ideas come from people who are made to feel small in the system.” – SA SRC Participant

Acting on what we already know

Effective co-design and system reform should draw on a range of evidence, including the lived and living experiences of children and young people, practitioner expertise, research, and the insights generated through previous consultations, inquiries and engagement activities. While it is important to continue creating opportunities for children and young people to influence change, meaningful participation should build upon, rather than replace, the substantial body of evidence that already exists.

Both the *Evidence to Action* consultation paper and the *Rapid Review of Prevention Approaches* acknowledge that improving outcomes for children and young people affected by DFSV requires coordinated action across governments, systems and sectors. There is already considerable evidence from research, service systems, non-government organisations and direct engagement

with children and young people that clearly articulates what children need to feel safe, heard and supported, inclusive of their experiences of DFSV. The challenge is not a lack of evidence, but ensuring accountability for translating this evidence into action.

Achieving this requires a coordinated whole-of-government approach, recognising that experiences of violence rarely occur in isolation and are often intertwined with other social, economic and systemic challenges affecting children, young people and their families. While responsibility for children and young people is distributed across multiple departments and sectors, accountability for outcomes can become fragmented. Strengthening shared accountability across governments and service systems is critical to ensuring that children and young people's needs remain a priority and that commitments made through consultation, co-design and existing evidence result in meaningful change.

Recommendations

Recommendation 9: Strengthen whole-of-government accountability for improving outcomes for children and young people affected by DFSV, including clear responsibility for translating evidence, consultation and co-design into measurable action and outcomes.

Recommendation 10: Put children at the forefront of decision making and reform processes. Ensure co-design processes explicitly include children and young people who face the greatest institutional and systemic barriers, including children and young people in care, care leavers, and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people, and that their experiences inform the design, implementation and evaluation of reforms.