

Consultation on the Second Action Plan (National Plan to End Violence against Women and Children 2022–2032)

Submission to Department of Social Services by the Seymour Family Violence
Working Group

July 2026

Summary

The Seymour Family Violence Working Group welcomes the opportunity to contribute to consultation on the Second Action Plan. This is a joint submission prepared by members of the working group, an initiative of the [Seymour Community Investment Committee](#). The Committee brings together local stakeholders to collectively meet the needs of the community and has several working groups focused on key local issues.

Our submission is informed by ongoing cross-sector collaboration involving family violence services, community legal services, Victoria Police, housing providers, education, community organisations, financial capability services, child and family services, and broader community stakeholders operating across Seymour and surrounding communities. It highlights what works and the key challenges, based on local experience.

The strongest message emerging from our work is that victim-survivors are already engaging with multiple systems before they reach specialist family violence services. Community programs, schools, housing services, child and family services, financial counselling services and legal services are frequently the first point of disclosure. However, these adjacent systems are not consistently equipped, connected, recognised or funded to play this role.

We believe the Second Action Plan should prioritise:

- Recognition and investment in adjacent systems.
- Place-based coordination and local partnership models.
- Simplification of service navigation and funding pathways.
- Improved access to justice and legal supports.
- Workforce capability and retention.
- Youth-focused prevention and early intervention.
- Integrated responses that support victim-survivors to remain safely in their homes and communities.

What is working well

Local cross-sector collaboration

The Seymour Family Violence Working Group demonstrates the value of place-based collaboration by successfully bringing together:

- Family violence services
- Community legal services
- Victoria Police
- Housing providers
- Education providers
- Community organisations
- Financial capability programs
- Child and family services.

As a result, the group has been able to identify service gaps, strengthen referral pathways and build a more coordinated local response. Working group members consistently report that relationship-building across sectors has improved informal referral pathways, strengthened professional networks and increased understanding of each service's role.

Workforce capability building

Local training initiatives have demonstrated strong demand for cross-sector learning.

Examples include:

- Intervention Order education sessions
- Family violence professional information sessions
- Legal literacy training
- Planned legislative update sessions
- Financial capability training through MoneyMinded
- Service familiarisation visits and court engagement initiatives.

These activities strengthen the confidence of workers operating outside specialist family violence services and improve the quality of support available to victim-survivors.

Warm referrals

Strong evidence from local services suggests warm referrals significantly improve engagement and outcomes.

Victim-survivors are more likely to engage when workers actively connect them to services rather than simply providing contact information. Community hubs and trusted local relationships are critical enablers of these connections.

From a legal service perspective, warm referrals between legal assistance, specialist family violence services and adjacent systems frequently improve client engagement and reduce barriers to accessing support. They also provide opportunities for earlier legal intervention, coordinated risk management and more holistic responses to intersecting legal and non-legal needs.

Key challenges

Fragmented systems

The most significant challenge identified across our work is fragmentation.

Victim-survivors routinely experience:

- Multiple referrals
- Repeated retelling of traumatic experiences
- Inconsistent information
- Complex eligibility requirements
- Conflicting advice
- Difficulty understanding service pathways.

These challenges are particularly evident when navigating legal services, The Orange Door, Flexible Support Packages (FSP), Personal Safety Initiatives (PSI), housing supports and brokerage systems.

Many experienced practitioners report difficulty navigating these systems themselves, indicating that complexity is affecting both service providers and victim-survivors. Fragmentation is particularly evident where victim-survivors are navigating multiple legal systems simultaneously. Many individuals are involved in family violence intervention order proceedings, parenting matters in the federal family law jurisdiction, child protection involvement and related civil legal issues at the same time. Greater coordination across these systems would reduce complexity, improve consistency and enhance victim-survivor safety.

Regional boundary issues

Seymour sits across multiple service catchments and referral systems.

This creates additional complexity where responsibility may be divided between regions, resulting in confusion, delays and gaps in service delivery. Place-based disadvantage is amplified by administrative boundaries that do not reflect how communities actually access support.

Workforce pressures

Family violence and adjacent-system workforces are operating under significant pressure.

Challenges include:

- Recruitment and retention difficulties
- High staff turnover
- Vacancy rates in specialist roles
- Increased service demand
- Workforce fatigue
- Reduced capacity for prevention and partnership work.

These pressures are particularly acute in regional communities and directly impact service continuity and client outcomes.

Access to justice

The justice system continues to act as a major entry point into the family violence response system. However, working group members identified a number of barriers, including:

- Complexity of intervention order processes
- Delays in service and enforcement of orders
- Difficulties understanding legal processes
- Limited legal support availability
- High numbers of self-represented parties
- Poor integration between court and support systems
- Multiple and intersecting legal proceedings requiring navigation across different jurisdictions.

Practitioners also highlighted concerns regarding inconsistent approaches to intervention order withdrawals and differing interpretations of ongoing risk. Working group members emphasised that the absence of recent incidents does not necessarily mean the absence of family violence risk, particularly where there is a history of coercive control, prolonged abuse or ongoing family law proceedings.

Continued collaboration between police, legal services and community organisations has been valuable in identifying opportunities for improvement and developing clearer escalation pathways. Working group members also identified community legal services as an important point of early intervention rather than solely providers of court representation. Early legal advice assists victim-survivors to understand their rights, navigate complex legal processes, address related issues such as housing, tenancy and debt, and make informed decisions that support longer-term safety and recovery.

The Working Group also noted the importance of improved coordination between state and federal legal systems. Greater consistency between intervention order proceedings and family law processes would assist victim-survivors experiencing ongoing post-separation abuse and reduce the burden of navigating multiple disconnected legal systems.

Youth and early intervention

A recurring theme throughout our discussions has been the importance of engaging children and young people earlier. Working group members identified:

- Increasing family violence impacts on young people
- Growing concerns regarding coercive control and technology-facilitated abuse
- The importance of schools as safe disclosure environments
- The need for youth-friendly support pathways
- The need for accessible information young people can act on independently.

There is strong support for interventions that strengthen healthy relationships education, early help-seeking and youth-specific responses. Schools, youth services and community organisations are critical partners in prevention and early intervention efforts. Working group members also highlighted the importance of ensuring young people can access clear, youth-friendly legal information where appropriate, including information about family violence, intervention orders, online safety, consent and available support services.

Children must also be recognised as victim-survivors in their own right, with access to age-appropriate therapeutic and recovery supports.

Supporting victim-survivors to remain safely at home

Working group members strongly supported investment in practical safety responses that allow victim-survivors to remain safely connected to their homes, communities, schools and support networks.

Discussion regarding PSI and related supports highlighted the value of:

- Personal safety devices
- Safety planning
- Security upgrades
- Technology safety responses
- Crisis brokerage
- Integrated case management.

Working group members consistently observed that practical safety measures are most effective when delivered as part of an integrated response involving legal assistance, specialist family violence services, housing providers, financial supports and coordinated safety planning. Legal protections

alone are often insufficient unless accompanied by practical supports that enable victim-survivors to remain safely connected to their homes, communities and support networks. These supports can reduce the need for victim-survivors to leave their communities while reinforcing perpetrator accountability. Effective safety planning remains critical and should be prioritised alongside technological responses.

Recommendations

Recommendation 1

Recognise adjacent systems as core components of the family violence response system. This includes:

- Schools
- Child and family services
- Community organisations
- Housing services
- Financial capability services
- Community development programs.

These systems already act as trusted entry points and should be funded and equipped accordingly.

Recommendation 2

Invest in place-based coordination and local partnership infrastructure.

Support local cross-sector working groups and collaborative forums as a core part of the national response to family violence.

Recommendation 3

Simplify service navigation for both practitioners and victim-survivors. This should include improved coordination between legal, community and government services so that victim-survivors are not required to repeatedly explain their circumstances or independently navigate complex service systems during periods of crisis.

To reduce confusion and fragmentation, develop:

- Shared resources
- Consistent information
- Clear referral pathways
- Integrated service navigation tools.

Recommendation 4

Strengthen access to justice by creating safer and more accessible legal responses, through:

- Intervention order pathways
- Court preparedness supports
- Communication with victim-survivors
- Integration between legal and support systems
- Local justice capability.

Community legal services should be recognised as core partners within integrated family violence responses. Timely legal assistance supports earlier intervention, assists victim-survivors to understand and exercise their legal rights, and contributes to safer, more coordinated outcomes across the broader service system.

Recommendation 5

Invest in workforce capacity and capability by prioritising:

- Recruitment and retention
- Regional workforce development
- Cross-sector training
- Legal literacy
- Family violence capability
- Ongoing professional development
- Dedicated capacity to participate in cross-sector collaboration and partnership activities.

This needs to take place across specialist and adjacent systems. Working group members noted that collaboration, secondary consultation, joint training and local partnership work require dedicated time and resources. These activities strengthen system integration but are often undertaken alongside frontline service delivery without specific funding.

Recommendation 6

To reduce future family violence and improve help-seeking, strengthen prevention and early intervention responses for children and young people by expanding:

- School-based initiatives
- Youth-friendly access pathways
- Early identification mechanisms
- Community education
- Healthy relationship programs.

Recommendation 7

Invest in integrated safety, housing and economic security responses.

Support victim-survivors to remain safely connected to their homes and communities through coordinated safety planning, housing responses, financial supports, legal assistance and practical security measures.

Effective integrated responses recognise that access to justice is itself a protective factor. Early legal advice and representation assist victim-survivors to secure legal protections, resolve intersecting legal issues and make informed decisions that support longer-term safety and recovery.

Conclusion

The Seymour Family Violence Working Group has demonstrated that meaningful change occurs when services are connected, practitioners are supported, and communities are empowered to respond collectively.

The Second Action Plan presents an opportunity to move beyond siloed service models and invest in a coordinated, place-based approach that recognises the crucial role of adjacent systems, strengthens local capability and enables earlier, safer and more effective responses for victim-survivors and their children.

As a regional cross-sector partnership, the Working Group has observed that sustainable improvements are achieved when legal, community, housing, education, policing and family violence services work collaboratively around the needs of victim-survivors rather than within organisational or funding boundaries. Continued investment in integrated, place-based approaches will strengthen local capacity while improving safety, access to justice and long-term outcomes for victim-survivors and their children.