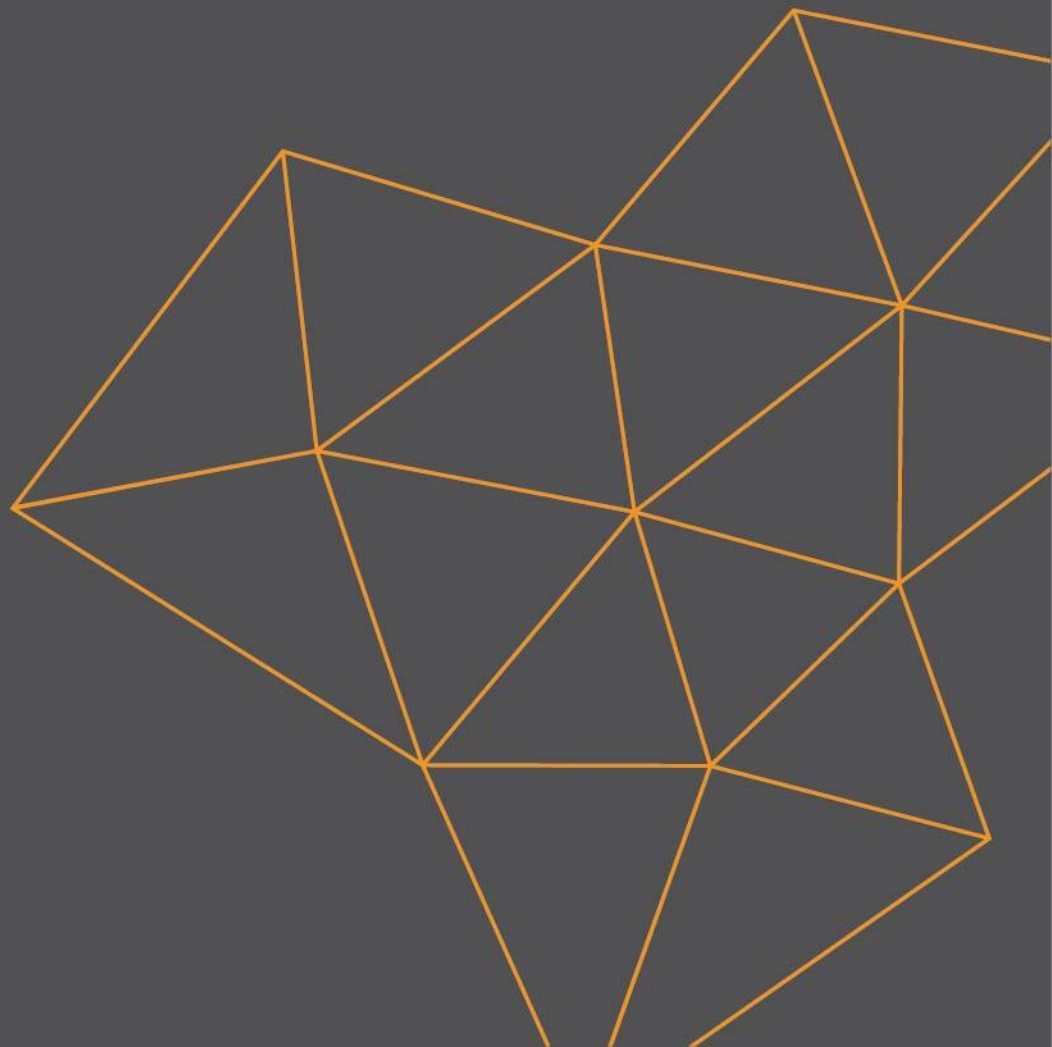


Response to Consultation on the National Plan to End Violence Against Women and Children

31 July 2026



The Behaviour Change Collaborative acknowledges the First Peoples – the traditional custodians of the lands, waters and sky. We honour and recognise their unbroken connection to Country, culture and community and pay respect to Elders past and present.

Executive Summary

The Behaviour Change Collaborative (The BCC) welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the development of the Second Action Plan to End Violence Against Women and Children.

Since 2012 we have applied behaviourally anchored and lived experience informed approaches to numerous research and place-based projects on family and domestic violence (including coercive control), gender equity, violence against women and elder abuse. We have conducted work to increase help seeking behaviours, explore attitudes toward gender equality, encourage bystander action, and to stop various expressions of violence against women and children including verbal, physical, emotional, and financial abuse.

Our submission reflects findings from own work. This includes exploratory and behavioural research, formative research, place-based initiatives and the co-design of services for women and children. It is a submission that honestly and openly reflects what we've heard from people experiencing family and domestic violence, those perpetrating (or at risk of conducting) violence, and the views of countless partners and stakeholders with whom we have engaged to prevent violence against women and children.

A consistent finding across all our work is that violence (of which there are numerous behavioural expressions) is not simply the result of individual attitudes or choices. Rather, it can be shaped by a variety of influences including:

- Social norms
- Gender inequality
- Community expectations
- Cultural context
- Life experiences
- Environmental conditions
- Institutional responses

Preventing violence requires sustained efforts to reshape the conditions that make it possible while strengthening the conditions that support respectful, equitable and healthy relationships.

It is widely understood that violence is harmful, yet controlling behaviours, coercive control, unhealthy relationship dynamics and gendered power imbalances remain normalised. This suggests that prevention efforts must move beyond telling people what not to do and instead focus on supporting and reinforcing the behaviours, relationships and social norms that reduce the likelihood of violence occurring.



Our evidence points to the need for greater investment in primary prevention across childhood, adolescence and adulthood. Respectful relationship education, positive fatherhood programs, healthy masculinity initiatives, parenting support, community-led prevention programs and Aboriginal-led healing initiatives all demonstrate significant promise. Importantly, these approaches are most effective when delivered over time, reinforced across multiple settings and supported by broader system change. Prevention should be viewed as a long-term investment rather than a series of short-term projects.

Our work also highlights the importance of addressing the environments in which violence develops and is reinforced. Schools, workplaces, sporting clubs, online platforms, community organisations and families all play a powerful role in shaping attitudes and behaviours.

The Second Action Plan should:

- Prioritise strategies that strengthen protective social norms
- Support active bystander behaviours
- Increase community accountability
- Create environments where respectful and equitable behaviours are expected, visible and rewarded

A recurring theme across all projects was the importance of trust, connection and belonging. Social isolation emerged as both a risk factor for violence and a barrier to help-seeking. Prevention efforts should therefore recognise community participation, cultural connection, volunteering, social inclusion and community development as important protective factors. For Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities in particular, self-determination, cultural strengthening, connection to Country, community leadership and Aboriginal-led solutions are central to prevention and healing.

The Second Action Plan should also respond to emerging challenges. Technology-facilitated abuse, coercive control, online misogyny and harmful digital content are increasingly shaping experiences of violence and influencing attitudes among young people. Prevention efforts must evolve to address these new environments, recognising that digital platforms are now significant settings in which social norms are formed, reinforced and challenged.

Alongside prevention, there remains a critical need to strengthen the integration of primary and secondary prevention, early intervention, response and recovery systems. People with experience of violence frequently described fragmented service systems that required them to navigate multiple agencies while managing trauma, safety concerns and practical challenges. Integrated, trauma-informed and culturally safe service models can reduce barriers to engagement, improve continuity of care and create better outcomes for victim-survivors, children and families.

Ultimately, the insights generated through our work suggest that lasting reductions in violence will not be achieved through isolated programs or awareness campaigns alone. The greatest gains will come from a coordinated national effort to change behaviours, social norms, systems and environments simultaneously. The Second Action Plan presents an opportunity to move beyond responding to violence after it occurs and invest more deeply in the conditions that prevent violence from occurring in the first place. By embedding behavioural science, community leadership, cultural safety, gender equality and systems thinking throughout the Action Plan, governments can create stronger foundations for safety, wellbeing and healthy relationships for future generations.



Priority Area 1: Victim-survivors

Across our research and community engagement projects, we have found that victim-survivors are most likely to experience safety and recovery when services reduce the burden of navigating complex systems. Participants frequently described the challenge of having to retell their story multiple times across different agencies, while simultaneously managing housing, financial insecurity, parenting responsibilities, legal processes and ongoing safety concerns. Service fragmentation is not simply an administrative problem; it creates additional cognitive and emotional demands at a time when people are already experiencing trauma and crisis. From a behavioural perspective, systems that are difficult to navigate reduce people's capability and opportunity to engage with support.

The greatest gains are therefore likely to come from integrated, trauma-informed and culturally safe models that provide coordinated support. This can be fostered through a range of services including housing, mental health, health care, financial wellbeing, legal assistance and family violence services. Victim survivors have been particularly supportive of co-located and coordinated service models that allow people to access multiple services through a single trusted entry point.

Our work has also highlighted the importance of moving beyond crisis intervention towards long-term recovery and healing. People with lived experience consistently described housing security, financial stability, social connection, cultural connection and trauma recovery as fundamental to safety. Recovery was not viewed as something that occurs once the violence ends. Rather, healing was described as a longer-term process requiring sustained support, stability and empowerment.

For Aboriginal people, cultural safety emerged as a critical determinant of engagement and recovery. Many emphasised that healing is strengthened when services are Aboriginal led, when Aboriginal staff are visible within organisations, and when responses acknowledge the impacts of colonisation, intergenerational trauma and ongoing experiences of racism.

Help-seeking should be understood as a behaviour rather than an automatic response to experiencing violence. Many participants were aware that support services existed but remained reluctant to seek assistance because of concerns about what might happen if they did.

Another key finding across our research and community-based engagements is the importance of trust. People are more likely to seek support when they encountered welcoming, respectful and non-judgemental services, when referrals came from trusted individuals, and when they believed they would retain some control over decisions affecting their lives. Participants frequently described the importance of workers who listened, validated their experiences and focused on strengths rather than deficits.

Early access to support was also strengthened when services were visible within communities, culturally relevant and easy to access. Our research has found that the physical environment, organisational branding, staff diversity and communication materials all influence whether people perceive a service as being "for people like me". This is particularly important for Aboriginal people, people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, people with disability and LGBTQIA+ communities.

The strongest barriers identified across the research were fear, shame and mistrust. Aboriginal people frequently speak to concerns about child removal, previous negative experiences with government



systems and fears of being judged or misunderstood. We also regularly hear violence described as a source of shame and reported worrying about community reactions, family repercussions or social stigma.

Structural and practical barriers are also significant. Housing insecurity, financial stress, transportation difficulties, childcare responsibilities and lack of access to technology all limit people's ability to engage with services. Our work suggests that most victim-survivors are not failing to seek help because they lack awareness. Rather, they are making rational decisions within circumstances where engaging with services may feel risky, difficult or unlikely to produce positive outcomes.

A major finding across much of our research is that the public's understanding of violence is evolving. While awareness of physical violence is relatively strong, understanding of coercive control remains less developed. Many community members only recognised behaviours such as monitoring, emotional manipulation, financial control and social isolation when they were presented with specific examples, suggesting that these forms of abuse remain partially normalised.

The Second Action Plan should continue to strengthen community understanding of coercive control as a pattern of behaviour rather than a series of isolated incidents. A behavioural science perspective highlights that coercive control often operates through repeated actions that gradually shift what is perceived as normal within a relationship. Because these behaviours may not leave visible evidence, victim-survivors can struggle to identify their experiences as abuse and may be less likely to seek support early.

Technology-facilitated abuse represents an increasingly important extension of coercive control. While much of our work has been conducted during a period of rapid technological change, participants in our research and service providers highlighted growing concerns around surveillance, monitoring, harassment, location tracking and online intimidation. Digital technologies now create new opportunities for perpetrators to maintain control before, during and after separation.

Another emerging issue relates to the role of online environments in shaping attitudes towards women, gender equality and relationships. Behavioural science tells us that social norms are heavily influenced by what individuals repeatedly observe in their social environment. Increasing exposure to misogynistic content, harmful gender stereotypes and normalised controlling behaviours online may undermine prevention efforts, particularly among younger audiences.

Our work has also pointed to the ongoing importance of addressing the intergenerational transmission of violence, recognising the links between childhood exposure to violence, trauma, disadvantage and future harmful behaviours. Prevention efforts will have greater impact when they address these broader developmental and social influences rather than focusing solely on individual incidents of violence.

A consistent finding across our research is that many systems continue to be designed around mainstream assumptions that do not adequately reflect the realities of diverse communities. For Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, the evidence points to an ongoing gap between service availability and cultural safety. The importance of Aboriginal leadership, Aboriginal staff, community-controlled approaches and culturally grounded healing cannot be overstated. Many people reported experiences of racism, distrust of institutions and concerns about child protection involvement. These factors significantly influence willingness to engage with services and cannot be addressed through generic service models.

Prevention and response efforts are more likely to succeed when they build on existing community strengths, cultural knowledge and community leadership rather than relying solely on externally designed



interventions. Culturally safe services are not simply more inclusive; they are more effective because they align with the realities of people's lives and increase trust in support systems.

There are ongoing gaps for women with disability, who face higher risks of violence while simultaneously experiencing additional barriers to reporting, disclosure and support. Accessibility, workforce capability and service coordination remain significant challenges.

Similarly, participants from CaLD backgrounds described barriers associated with language, stigma, confidentiality concerns and limited availability of culturally responsive support. Many of our research projects have found that visible inclusion, multilingual communication and workforce diversity can significantly influence whether people perceive services as safe and accessible.

Across all communities, a common theme emerges; effective prevention and response require more than equal access to services. They require systems that recognise how behaviour is shaped by culture, identity, lived experience and structural disadvantage. The most effective responses will therefore be those that combine trauma-informed practice, cultural safety, community leadership and behavioural science to create environments where seeking support feels possible, safe and worthwhile.



Priority Area 2: Prevention and early intervention

A consistent theme across our work is that the drivers of violence are becoming more complex, more interconnected, and in some cases less visible. While significant progress has been made in building awareness of family, domestic and sexual violence, emerging challenges require prevention efforts that move beyond traditional awareness-raising and focus more deliberately on behaviour and systems change.

One emerging issue is the increasing role of online environments in shaping attitudes, beliefs and behaviours relating to gender, relationships and violence. People make sense of violence through broader social narratives, observations and lived experiences. Today, many of these influences are occurring online. Young people are increasingly exposed to content that normalises rigid gender roles, hostility towards women, controlling behaviours and unequal power dynamics. Repeated exposure to such content can shape social norms by influencing perceptions of what behaviours are acceptable, expected or rewarded. Prevention efforts therefore need to extend beyond traditional education settings and engage directly with the digital environments where attitudes are being shaped and formed.

Related to this is the growing prevalence of technology-facilitated abuse. While often discussed as a response issue, technology-facilitated abuse should also be viewed as a prevention issue because it reflects evolving patterns of coercive control. Participants across several projects have highlighted concerns regarding surveillance, monitoring, online harassment and digital intimidation. As technology becomes further embedded in daily life, prevention initiatives must strengthen digital literacy, healthy relationship education, awareness of coercive behaviours and understanding of how technology can be used to exercise power and control. Workforce capability will also need to evolve so that professionals can recognise and respond to these emerging forms of abuse.

While public understanding of violence has improved considerably over recent decades, many people still struggle to identify emotional and financial abuse, isolation, manipulation and monitoring as forms of violence. We have found that recognition of controlling behaviours often increased when people were presented with concrete examples rather than abstract definitions. This suggests that future prevention efforts should move beyond communicating that violence is wrong and invest more heavily in helping people recognise the early warning signs of unhealthy, controlling and disrespectful relationships before violence escalates.

Another emerging issue concerns the relationship between social and economic conditions and violence prevention. Those with lived experience of violence have frequently described housing insecurity, financial stress, unemployment, overcrowding and social exclusion as factors that increase vulnerability and reduce people's ability to leave or avoid harmful relationships. While these issues are not direct causes of violence, they are drivers that shape the environments in which behaviours occur. People experiencing scarcity often have fewer resources, options and opportunities available to them. Prevention frameworks should therefore place greater emphasis on the social determinants that influence safety, wellbeing and relationship dynamics.

There is a growing need to better understand the interaction between trauma, mental health, community disconnection and violence prevention. Many participants described how unresolved trauma, intergenerational disadvantage and experiences of violence can shape future behaviours and relationship



expectations. This was particularly evident in our work with Aboriginal people, where violence was frequently linked to the ongoing impacts of colonisation, dispossession and intergenerational trauma. Strengthening community connection, cultural identity and healing should therefore be viewed not only as recovery strategies but also as important prevention strategies.

There is also a need to strengthen prevention responses that engage men and boys earlier and more effectively. Violence prevention efforts often focus on supporting victim-survivors after harm has occurred, while comparatively less attention is paid to addressing the beliefs, social norms and behaviours that contribute to violence perpetration. Behaviourally informed programs promoting healthy masculinities, positive fatherhood, emotional literacy, respectful relationships and accountability may offer significant long-term prevention benefits. Importantly, these initiatives are most likely to succeed when they focus on building skills and positive alternatives, rather than relying solely on messages about what people should not do.

A further emerging issue is the growing recognition that violence is shaped by intersecting forms of inequality and exclusion. The experiences of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, women with disability, culturally and CaLD and LGBTQIA+ communities demonstrate that violence cannot be understood solely through a gender lens. We have heard repeatedly the ways in which racism, ableism, discrimination, poverty and social isolation interact with gender inequality to create additional risks and barriers. Prevention approaches that address these intersections are likely to be more effective than approaches that treat them as separate issues.

One of the strongest messages emerging from our work is that ending violence requires a long-term commitment to changing the conditions that enable violence, not simply responding after violence occurs. Our work suggests the greatest impact would come from sustained investment in social norm change, gender equality, healthy relationship development and community-level prevention. Violence is learned and reinforced through families, peer groups, institutions, workplaces, communities and media environments. It follows that prevention efforts must influence these same environments.

Preventing violence therefore requires more than awareness-raising. It requires creating environments where respectful, equitable and non-violent behaviours are easier, more rewarding and more socially supported than harmful alternatives.

Our work also points to the importance of addressing intergenerational cycles of violence through early childhood interventions, parenting support, trauma-informed programs and initiatives that strengthen social connection and belonging.

A consistent finding across our work is that prevention is most effective when multiple levels of influence are addressed simultaneously.

- At the individual level, programs should focus on building concrete skills, including emotional regulation, communication, conflict resolution, healthy relationship skills and bystander action.
- At the community level, prevention efforts need to be community-led and culturally responsive. Participants frequently highlight the value of trusted local leaders, Elders, peer networks, sporting organisations and community groups in shaping social norms.
- At the organisational level, workplaces, schools and service providers should be supported to embed gender equality, inclusion and cultural safety into everyday practice. Organisational culture shapes what behaviours are tolerated, rewarded or challenged.



- At the institutional and societal levels, governments have an important role in creating policy settings that support prevention, strengthening cross-sector collaboration and ensuring long-term investment in prevention infrastructure rather than relying on short-term initiatives.

People are more likely to recognise and challenge harmful behaviours when they receive clear behavioural examples, observe positive role modelling and feel supported to act. Governments can strengthen prevention by investing in behavioural and social marketing approaches that move beyond awareness and provide practical, insight informed actions people can take. Additionally, schools can also help by embedding respectful relationships, gender equality and emotional literacy throughout the educational journey rather than treating them as standalone topics. Workplaces can play an important role in modelling respectful cultures and providing support pathways. Communities can support prevention by creating opportunities for dialogue and reinforcing positive social norms.

Online platforms are also increasingly important because they act as powerful social environments. Prevention efforts will need to address algorithmically amplified misogyny, online harassment and digital communities that reinforce harmful attitudes while promoting healthy, respectful alternative narratives.

The most promising approaches identified across The BCC's work combine behavioural science, community engagement and systems change. These include:

- Respectful relationship education and capacity building
- Aboriginal-led prevention and healing initiatives
- Community-based social marketing approaches
- Place-based prevention programs
- Positive fatherhood initiatives
- Programs that engage men and boys before violence occurs

A common lesson across all projects is that short-term interventions rarely produce lasting change. People with lived experience and stakeholders repeatedly express frustration with pilot programs that disappear before relationships, trust and community capacity can be established. To strengthen and expand promising approaches, governments should prioritise sustained investment, workforce development, rigorous evaluation, community-led design and long-term scaling of successful models. Lasting prevention necessitates reshaping the social, cultural and institutional environments that influence behaviours over time.



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

Children and young people should not be treated solely as the future beneficiaries of violence prevention efforts. They are current experts in their own experiences and are often the first to identify emerging forms of harm, shifts in social norms and gaps in existing responses.

Meaningful involvement requires moving beyond consultation exercises that seek feedback on pre-determined solutions. Children and young people should be involved throughout the design, implementation and evaluation of policies and services. This includes youth advisory groups with genuine decision-making influence, ideation and co-design processes, participatory research approaches, peer-led initiatives and ongoing mechanisms through which young people can shape priorities and provide feedback.

Our work also suggests that involvement must be developmentally appropriate, culturally safe and trauma informed. Aboriginal young people, young people with disability, LGBTQIA+ young people and those with lived experience of violence often have unique insights into barriers that are overlooked by adult-centred systems. Their participation should be supported through accessible processes, appropriate remuneration and safe environments where they can contribute without experiencing further harm.

Participation has value beyond improving policy design. Involving young people in decision-making can increase agency, strengthen protective factors such as belonging and self-efficacy, and foster social norms that support respect, inclusion and shared responsibility.

One of the strongest themes across the evidence is the need to recognise children and young people as victim-survivors, rather than viewing them only through the experiences of their parents or caregivers. Research participants and community members frequently described the long-term impacts of exposure to violence on emotional wellbeing, relationships, education, sense of safety and future expectations of relationships. It is suggested that children often carry the consequences of violence long after immediate safety concerns have been addressed.

The greatest improvements are likely to come from earlier identification and support combined with long-term recovery responses. While crisis intervention remains important, many children need ongoing support to process trauma, rebuild trust and develop healthy relationship skills. Schools, youth services, health services, sporting clubs and community organisations all represent important opportunities for early support. Children and young people are often more likely to disclose concerns to trusted adults in familiar settings than through specialist violence services.

Our work also highlights the importance of strengthening protective factors. Positive relationships with family members, teachers, peers, Elders, mentors and community leaders can play an important role in buffering the impacts of violence. For Aboriginal children and young people, strong cultural identity, connection to Country, community participation and culturally grounded healing approaches emerged as important contributors to resilience and wellbeing.

Harmful behaviours often become normalised before they are recognised. Many young people grow up in environments where disrespect, coercion, emotional abuse or violence are common, making it more difficult



to identify these behaviours as problematic. Improving recognition therefore requires building the capability of the adults and systems around young people.

Governments should invest in workforce development that helps professionals recognise behavioural indicators of trauma, coercive control, family violence exposure and emerging harmful behaviours. Teachers, youth workers, health professionals and community leaders are often well positioned to identify concerns before they escalate, but many report uncertainty about how to respond appropriately. Schools have a particularly important role because they are one of the few universal settings that engage young people over an extended period. The evidence supports whole-school approaches that integrate respectful relationships education, emotional literacy, help-seeking skills and clear support pathways.

Responses should focus not only on disclosure but on creating environments where disclosure feels safe and worthwhile. Children and young people are more likely to seek help when they trust the adults around them, believe their concerns will be taken seriously and have confidence that support will improve rather than worsen their situation. Families and communities also play a critical role. Prevention efforts that strengthen communication, connection and positive role modelling within families can help create environments where young people feel safe discussing concerns before harms become entrenched.

Evidence reviewed by The BCC suggests that punitive approaches alone are unlikely to produce sustained behaviour change. Harmful behaviours often arise from a combination of learned norms, trauma, peer influences, skill deficits, emotional regulation challenges and environmental factors. Effective responses therefore need to balance accountability with understanding of the factors contributing to behaviour.

Programs appear most effective when they focus on helping young people understand the impacts of their behaviour, develop empathy, build healthy relationship skills and learn practical alternatives to violence or coercion. It is important to intervene early, before patterns of behaviour become entrenched. This may require movement away from a binary distinction between "perpetrators" and "victims" when working with young people and recognising that many young people who engage in harmful behaviours have themselves experienced violence, trauma or adverse childhood experiences.

Family-based approaches, mentoring, restorative practices, therapeutic interventions and culturally grounded programs were all identified as promising strategies. For Aboriginal young people, approaches that strengthen cultural identity, community connection and positive role models may be particularly effective.

Our work points to the importance of engaging boys and young men before harmful attitudes become established. Programs that promote respectful relationships, positive masculinity, emotional literacy and healthy help-seeking behaviours have significant potential to contribute to long-term violence prevention.

The most significant emerging challenge identified across our research is the increasing influence of digital environments on attitudes, relationships and behaviours. Young people are now forming relationships, consuming information and developing social norms in environments that did not exist when many current prevention frameworks were designed. As a result, online and offline harms are becoming increasingly interconnected. Technology-facilitated abuse should be recognised as a core prevention issue rather than solely a response issue. Young people need support to understand how coercive control, surveillance, image-based abuse, online harassment and digital monitoring can manifest within peer and dating relationships.



Community members are concerned about exposure to harmful online content that reinforces misogyny, rigid gender stereotypes and unhealthy relationship expectations. Repeated exposure to such content can shape perceptions of what behaviours are normal, acceptable or rewarded. The Second Action Plan should therefore invest in digital citizenship, online relationship education and critical media literacy. Young people need practical skills to recognise manipulation, challenge harmful content and navigate online relationships safely.

Violence within peer and dating relationships also warrants greater attention. Evidence suggests that many controlling or abusive behaviours first emerge during adolescence, yet young people often do not recognise these behaviours as harmful. Prevention efforts should therefore focus on building understanding of consent, respect, boundaries, healthy communication and coercive control before patterns become established.

Prevention efforts need to keep pace with the environments in which young people live. This requires ongoing partnership with young people themselves, who are often best positioned to identify emerging risks, changing social norms and opportunities for effective prevention. By involving children and young people as partners in policy and program design, governments will not only improve the relevance of prevention initiatives but also strengthen the conditions that support safety, wellbeing and healthy relationships across the life course.



Priority Area 4: People who use violence

People's use of violence is shaped by the interaction of attitudes, beliefs, social norms, lived experiences, trauma, relationships, environmental conditions and broader structural factors. Effective responses therefore need to move beyond a narrow focus on individual incidents and instead address the behavioural, social and systemic conditions that allow violence to occur, escalate and persist.

Responses to people using violence must always be grounded in victim-survivor safety. Behaviour change for people using violence is not an end in itself. Its purpose is to reduce harm, increase accountability and improve safety for victim-survivors, children and communities.

There is a need to identify and respond to violence much earlier, before behaviours become entrenched and before serious harm occurs. We consistently hear violence described as something that often develops over time through patterns of control, disrespect, entitlement and unhealthy relationship dynamics. By the time physical violence occurs there have frequently been numerous earlier opportunities for intervention. These opportunities are often missed because communities, institutions and services tend to focus on crisis points rather than recognising earlier warning signs.

From a behavioural science perspective, preventing violence requires addressing the drivers of behaviour before violence occurs, or becomes normalised. This includes building emotional regulation skills, healthy relationship skills, conflict resolution capabilities and positive models of masculinity throughout childhood and adolescence. It also means challenging social norms that reinforce entitlement, rigid gender roles, control and the use of aggression to manage conflict.

Our work suggests that earlier intervention should not be confined to specialist violence services. Health services, schools, sporting organisations, workplaces, community organisations and family support services are often the settings where concerns first emerge. Strengthening the capability of these settings to recognise harmful behaviours and respond appropriately could significantly reduce escalation.

We also consistently hear about the links between trauma, social disadvantage, family violence exposure and later use of violence. While these experiences do not excuse violence, they do point to the importance of early childhood supports, family strengthening initiatives and interventions that address trauma before harmful behaviour patterns become established.

Notably, people often recognise violence only when it becomes severe or visible. However, many of the behaviours that precede violence are more subtle and are frequently minimised, excused or normalised. While public understanding of violence has expanded, many people still struggle to identify coercive control, emotional abuse, financial abuse, intimidation and controlling behaviours as serious warning signs. This suggests a need for greater literacy around patterns of behaviour rather than isolated incidents.

Services and institutions need stronger capability to identify indicators such as possessiveness, controlling behaviour, social isolation, emotional manipulation, threats, monitoring and escalating anger. These behaviours often emerge before physical violence and can indicate increasing risk.

Families and communities also have an important role. There have been numerous discussions around the influence of social norms and peer expectations. Behaviour is shaped not only by formal interventions but also by what family members, friends, colleagues and community members tolerate, challenge or



reinforce. Communities are therefore better positioned to respond when they understand that violence is not a private matter, but a collective responsibility.

Workplaces represent an important but often underutilised setting for early intervention. Managers and colleagues may observe behavioural changes, disclosures, controlling behaviours or concerning interactions. In many cases, workplaces may be one of the few institutions that maintain regular contact with individuals who are using or at risk of using violence. Providing clear pathways for referral, support and accountability could strengthen early intervention efforts.

Evidence suggests that successful behaviour change requires more than asking people to stop using violence or deploying values-based messages that don't resonate with those whose behaviours need to change. Rather, effective interventions help people understand the impacts of their behaviour, challenge underlying beliefs and develop practical alternatives.

Participants in our research and engagement projects consistently emphasised the importance of accountability. Behaviour change programs are most effective when they explicitly address responsibility for violence and avoid frameworks that excuse or minimise harmful behaviour. Victim-survivor safety must remain the central measure of success. However, accountability alone is rarely sufficient to produce lasting change. From a behavioural perspective, people need opportunities to develop the capability, opportunity and motivation to behave differently. This includes building emotional regulation skills, communication skills, relationship skills and non-violent strategies for managing stress, conflict and disagreement.

Our work highlights that many people using violence have experienced trauma, violence or adversity themselves. While this should never be used to justify harmful behaviour, trauma-informed approaches can help services better understand the pathways that contribute to violence and support more effective intervention. Programs for men and boys were repeatedly identified as a priority. Prevention programs should occur earlier, ideally before patterns of violence become established. Initiatives that promote healthy masculinity, positive fatherhood, emotional literacy and respectful relationships appear particularly promising because they focus on building protective behaviours rather than responding only after violence has occurred.

Long-term engagement is another important theme. There is widespread frustration with programs that end before meaningful change can occur. Sustained investment, ongoing support and continued accountability are required to support lasting outcomes.

Some of the strongest findings across our work is that responses are more effective when they are designed with communities rather than for communities. For Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, participants consistently highlighted the importance of Aboriginal leadership, community control and cultural safety. Many described how historical trauma, racism, experiences of child removal and distrust of government systems continue to influence engagement with services. As a result, culturally safe responses are not simply a matter of inclusion. Rather, they are fundamental to effectiveness. Strengthening Aboriginal-led services, increasing Aboriginal workforce participation and investing in culturally grounded healing approaches were repeatedly identified as priorities. Participants also emphasised the importance of recognising strengths within communities, including cultural identity, kinship systems, community leadership and connection to Country. There is also a need for tailored responses for women with disability, culturally and linguistically diverse communities, LGBTQIA+



communities, and people living in regional and remote areas. Generic interventions often fail to address the specific barriers these groups experience.

An evidence-informed response requires recognising that violence is shaped by different combinations of social, cultural and structural factors across different communities. Effective programs therefore need to balance fidelity to evidence-based principles with flexibility to respond to local contexts. Culturally safe and accessible services increase the likelihood that people will engage with support because they improve capability, opportunity and motivation for change. People are more likely to participate in programs when services feel relevant, trustworthy and responsive to their lived experience.

Ultimately, our research suggests that the most effective responses to people using violence combine early intervention, accountability, behaviour change, cultural safety and systems coordination. Preventing violence is not simply about changing individuals. It requires changing the social, organisational and community environments that shape behaviour while ensuring that victim-survivor safety remains the primary objective of all intervention efforts.



Priority Area 5: System integration and workforce

People experiencing violence, and those using violence, encounter systems that are often fragmented, difficult to navigate and inconsistent in their responses. People describe a system comprised of many well-intentioned services that do not always operate as a coherent system. The result is that individuals and families are often required to coordinate services themselves at precisely the time when they have the least capacity to do so.

Fragmented systems create additional barriers to help-seeking, service engagement and behaviour change. When pathways are unclear, referrals are inconsistent or support is poorly coordinated, people experience greater uncertainty, greater cognitive burden and reduced likelihood of remaining engaged with services. Creating a more integrated system is therefore a critical mechanism through which safety, recovery and prevention outcomes can be improved.

A significant improvement would be a shift from service-centred responses toward genuinely person-centred and family-centred systems. Across our work, those with lived experience frequently describe moving between multiple services that each addressed a single aspect of their circumstances while rarely addressing the broader context of their lives. Victim-survivors often required support with safety planning, housing, financial wellbeing, mental health, legal matters, parenting, children's wellbeing and recovery. Similarly, people using violence often interacted with multiple systems, including health, justice, family support, child protection, education and community services. Yet these interactions were frequently disconnected.

Integrated "no wrong door" approaches offer significant promise because they reduce the burden of system navigation. Individuals have been seen to be particularly supportive of coordinated and co-located models that allow individuals to access multiple forms of assistance through trusted entry points. These models are effective because they increase opportunities for early intervention, reduce service drop-off, improve continuity of care and strengthen trust.

Our work also points to the importance of shared responsibility across systems. Violence prevention and response cannot sit solely within specialist family violence services. Education, health, housing, community services, justice, child protection, disability and local government sectors all have a role to play in recognising risk, supporting safety and facilitating referrals. A more connected system requires shared goals, common language, aligned risk assessment approaches and mechanisms that support collaboration rather than siloed service delivery.

The quality of relationships and interactions plays a major role on whether people engage with services, disclose concerns or remain involved in support programs. As a result, workforce capability extends well beyond technical knowledge. Staff require strong skills in trauma-informed practice, cultural safety, relationship building, communication, risk assessment and behaviour change. Workers who listened, showed empathy, respected people's autonomy and understood the complexity of their circumstances are highly regarded and contribute to a more positive service experience.

Aboriginal people we have engaged with repeatedly identified the need for increased Aboriginal leadership and workforce representation across prevention, early intervention and response systems. Many



participants explained that trust is strengthened when people can engage with staff who understand their cultural context and lived experience.

Additionally, workforces need stronger capability in recognising and responding to coercive control, technology-facilitated abuse, adolescent family violence, harmful sexual behaviours and the intersections between violence, disability, mental health and substance use. However, capability alone is insufficient. People with lived experience and service providers frequently point to workforce pressures including high caseloads, workforce turnover, short-term funding and practitioner burnout. Building a sustainable workforce requires investment in supervision, reflective practice, wellbeing supports, professional development and long-term funding arrangements that promote workforce stability. Many of the outcomes sought through the Second Action Plan depend upon trust and relationships, both of which are undermined when workforce instability is high.

The most effective models identified through our work were those that created structured opportunities for collaboration while maintaining a focus on client safety, consent and cultural safety. People with lived experience consistently identify the value of integrated service hubs, multidisciplinary teams and place-based initiatives that bring organisations together around shared goals. These approaches appear particularly effective because they reduce duplication, strengthen referral pathways and increase understanding of the roles played by different services.

There is considerable potential value in co-location and collaborative service design. When services work together physically and relationally, information sharing becomes easier and clients experience a more seamless journey through the system.

At a systems level, there is a need for greater consistency in risk assessment, referral pathways and outcome measurement. Shared frameworks and common approaches can help ensure that victim-survivors and people using violence receive more consistent responses regardless of where they enter the system.

We consistently hear that accessibility is not simply about physical access. It is about whether people feel safe, welcome, understood and supported. Participants from Aboriginal communities, culturally and linguistically diverse communities, disability communities and LGBTQIA+ communities frequently described experiences where services existed but did not feel relevant or accessible to them. This highlights the importance of inclusive service design, cultural safety and community involvement in service planning.

Universal services such as schools, health services, child and family services, workplaces and community organisations need greater capability to identify and respond to violence. Because these settings are often the first point of contact, they play a critical role in prevention and early intervention. They require clear referral pathways, specialist support, workforce training and access to consultation from violence specialists.

Specialist services, meanwhile, need greater capacity to respond to the complexity and diversity of community needs. This includes stronger disability inclusion, culturally responsive approaches, multilingual communication, Aboriginal-led service models and services designed for children and young people as well as adults.



Other areas of action

There remains a significant evidence gap regarding what works for diverse communities, particularly Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, women with disability, culturally and linguistically diverse communities, LGBTIQ+ communities and people living in regional and remote areas. While there is strong demand for culturally responsive practice, the evidence base for scaled, long-term models remain underdeveloped.

There is a need for stronger evidence regarding behaviour change among people using violence. This is particularly evident for adolescents using violence in the home, men at risk of using violence and perpetrators engaging in technology-facilitated abuse. While accountability remains essential, there is a continuing need to better understand which interventions produce sustained behavioural change while improving victim-survivor safety.

Multiple projects carried out by The BCC identify community frustration with pilot programs that show promise but are not sustained long enough to build trust, demonstrate impact or achieve systems change. The Second Action Plan should prioritise long-term investment in prevention infrastructure, workforce capability and evaluation, recognising that changes in norms, behaviours and systems occur over years rather than funding cycles.

One of the clearest lessons from behavioural science is that awareness does not automatically translate into behaviour change. Many of our research respondents are often able to identify violence as unacceptable while simultaneously normalising controlling behaviours, unequal gender relations, emotional abuse or harmful relationship dynamics.

Governments should place greater emphasis on unpacking the behavioural mechanisms that drive violence prevention. This means investing in approaches that identify specific behaviours to change, understand barriers and motivators, redesign environments that reinforce harmful behaviours, and establish new social norms over time. The implication is that prevention should be treated more like tobacco control, road safety or public health reform. Change occurs when policy, community expectations, institutions, education systems and communications all work together to make healthy behaviours easier and harmful behaviours harder.

It is also evident through our work that the role of belonging, participation and social connection is extremely significant. People who are socially connected are more likely to:

- Seek help earlier
- Intervene when they witness problematic behaviour
- Access support during periods of crisis
- Develop positive identities and relationships
- Maintain connections to community norms that discourage violence

By contrast, isolation frequently appears as both a contributor to violence and a consequence of violence. Government should recognise community participation, volunteering, youth engagement, cultural connection and social prescribing initiatives as part of the prevention system, not simply as wellbeing initiatives.



Prevention efforts often engage men only after problematic attitudes or behaviours have become established. Greater investment is needed in childhood and adolescence, particularly through schools, sporting clubs, youth services, community organisations, fatherhood programs and mentoring initiatives. The focus should not simply be on preventing harmful behaviour but on actively building healthy identities, emotional literacy, relationship skills, empathy and positive models of masculinity. Additionally, many participants also argued that boys need more opportunities to learn what respectful, equitable and emotionally healthy masculinity looks like in practice.

Prevention systems are often designed around risk reduction. However, the strongest community prevention programs identified through our work also build protective factors. These include:

- Strong cultural identity
- Positive parenting relationships
- Connection to community
- School engagement
- Peer support
- Employment and economic participation
- Trust in institutions
- Confidence in help-seeking

Government should invest not only in reducing violence but also in strengthening the conditions that make violence less likely to emerge, that is, primary prevention.

Aboriginal communities frequently describe cultural connection, identity, healing and self-determination as central to violence prevention. We have heard from Aboriginal community members that investment should be made towards areas including Aboriginal-led community development, connection to Country, Elders' leadership, cultural mentoring, language revitalisation and cultural healing initiatives.

Government should consider building behaviour change capability across those departments and agencies responsible for prevention. This could significantly improve how initiatives are designed, implemented and evaluated.

Notably, the system often treats primary prevention, early intervention, response and recovery as separate domains. However, participants rarely experience them that way. Children exposed to violence today become the young people targeted by prevention programs tomorrow. Housing insecurity affects both recovery and prevention. Community trust influences both help-seeking and social norm change. The most effective future action plan is likely to be one that views violence through a systems lens and seeks to strengthen the entire continuum rather than treating prevention and response as separate policy agendas.

Consideration should be given to viewing violence as a problem of individual perpetrators and victims alone. Findings from our work suggest that violence is produced and sustained by systems, environments, social norms and behavioural patterns. The greatest long-term gains will come from investing in the conditions that make respectful, equitable and non-violent behaviours easier, more visible, more rewarding and more socially expected across homes, schools, workplaces, communities and online environments.

