

REPORT TO GOVERNMENT

# A National Domestic Violence Disclosure Scheme for Australia

*Evidence, Rationale and Recommendations for a Nationally  
Consistent Scheme*

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July 2026

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# 1. Executive Summary

*Australia invests heavily in responding to domestic and family violence after it happens, and far less in the tools that could help people recognise danger before it escalates. A national Domestic Violence Disclosure Scheme (DVDS) is one such tool.*

This report sets out the case for a nationally consistent Australian DVDS, modelled on international best practice and, in particular, on the South Australian DVDS, the only disclosure scheme in the world to have been the subject of a full independent academic review. That review, published in December 2024 by Dr Katerina Hadjimatheou (University of Essex) and Dr Kate Seymour (Flinders University), examined six years of operation, more than 2,500 applications and 1,064 disclosure meetings. Its findings are the strongest evidence base available anywhere for the design of a disclosure scheme, and they are used throughout this report to ground every recommendation in demonstrated outcomes rather than assumption.

|                                                                                                          |                                                                                                        |                                                                           |                                                                                                                  |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <div>99%</div> <div>of South Australian DVDS clients were satisfied with the service they received</div> | <div>98%</div> <div>found the disclosure helpful in making decisions about their personal safety</div> | <div>2.6×</div> <div>Applications more than doubled over six years.</div> | <div>0</div> <div>legal challenges brought against police in relation to a disclosure, in any jurisdiction</div> |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|

The evidence shows a disclosure scheme, properly designed, does not carry the legal or privacy risk that is often assumed, is overwhelmingly valued by the people who use it, and reaches victim-survivors who have never engaged with a domestic violence service before, 86% of South Australian applicants were not receiving support from any service at the point they applied. It also shows that getting the model right matters: the schemes that work best are those built in genuine partnership between police and specialist domestic and family violence services, with trauma-informed support offered to every applicant regardless of outcome.

This report recommends that Australia adopt a nationally consistent scheme built on these principles, developed through the Women and Women's Safety Ministerial Council, with police, specialist services, victim-survivors and researchers at the design table from the outset.

# 2. Why This Proposal Exists

For more than twenty years I have worked to prevent domestic violence, since surviving a violent relationship that left me in hospital in a way I would not wish on anyone. For the past 19 months I have led one of Australia's largest grassroots campaigns calling for a national domestic violence disclosure scheme, self-funded, and built through hundreds of conversations with ministers, victim-survivors, researchers, legal experts, police and community organisations. The Good Warrior community, made up of victim-survivors and supporters from across Australia, has played a significant role in bringing this campaign to life. Many who never had the confidence to participate in anything public recorded themselves in video campaigns, believing their voices mattered and that their lived experience could contribute to meaningful reform. My responsibility is to them, and to all victim-survivors who continue to walk this path. What began as a grassroots campaign has evolved into one of Australia's largest community-led conversations on domestic violence disclosure, supported by more than 133,000 Australians calling for earlier intervention.

The scale of public support reflects this. Over 133,000 Australians have signed the campaign's national petition calling for a disclosure scheme, currently before the Attorney-General's office. One theme has consistently emerged in my conversations with victim-survivors, their first instinct is rarely about their own experience, it is about stopping the next person going through what they went through.

### **A track record of delivering law reform**

This is not my first experience taking a reform through to legislative change. I was the lead applicant in *Cooper v The Owners – Strata Plan No 58068* [2020] NSWCA 250, a five-and-a-half-year case that went to the NSW Court of Appeal and established that a strata scheme cannot impose a blanket by-law banning pets. The Court found such by-laws oppressive and invalid, restoring a fundamental property right to strata owners and placing a clear legal constraint on the scope of owners corporations' by-law-making power. The judgment led directly to the NSW Parliament passing the Strata Schemes Management Amendment (Sustainability Infrastructure) Act 2021, which prevents owners corporations from unreasonably refusing a resident's request to keep a pet.

That reform has a direct bearing on this proposal. Fear of losing a pet, or having nowhere pet-friendly to go, is a well-documented and often underestimated barrier that keeps people in unsafe homes, reflected in this report's own evidence, where pets' safety was a significant factor in 92.5% of South Australian disclosure clients' decision-making (Section 5.4). By opening up significantly more pet-friendly housing across Australia, my case has made it more possible for people fleeing violence with a pet to stay with friends or family, or secure a rental, without being forced to choose between their safety and their pet's welfare. I include this because it demonstrates a consistent approach to reform, identifying practical barriers that place people at greater risk and pursuing evidence-based legal and policy change to remove them.

The case's significance has since been recognised in *The Australian Law Journal*, described as arguably the most significant decision to date for the millions of Australians who live in strata schemes, examining it in the context of property and governance debates in Australia and other jurisdictions. The College of Law separately included it among its Top 10 Most Influential Court Cases of the 21st Century. I raise that recognition to make one point: sustained, evidence-led advocacy can and does change the law at the highest levels, and I bring that same determination to this proposal.

## **3. The Current Problem**

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One message has come through consistently in these conversations, Australia responds extensively after violence has occurred, investing heavily in crisis accommodation, policing, courts, counselling and recovery, while far less attention is given to equipping people to recognise risk before it escalates. Every opportunity for earlier intervention matters. This report is a request for government to take that opportunity seriously, and it is built on the best evidence in the world for how to do it well.

Many victim-survivors describe a similar experience, they sensed something was wrong but were made to feel that their concern was the problem, that their own judgement could not be trusted. Friends and family sometimes shared those concerns. Police may already have held relevant information about a pattern of prior behaviour. Yet the person entering or remaining in the relationship had no clear, structured process through which that information could be considered for disclosure when it may have influenced decisions about their safety.

Domestic homicide and domestic violence death reviews frequently identify fragmented information, missed opportunities for intervention and failures in information sharing between agencies. Each agency knew a fragment of the risk; none shared the full picture with the person facing it. A disclosure scheme addresses this gap directly by extending the principle of lawful information sharing to the person whose safety decisions may depend on it.

## 4. What Is a Domestic Violence Disclosure Scheme?

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A disclosure scheme provides a structured, lawful process through which police may share relevant information about a person's history of domestic and family violence with someone who may be at risk from them, where there is an identifiable risk and a proper legal basis. Disclosure schemes are not designed to punish perpetrators; they are designed to support informed decision-making and improve public safety.

## 5. The Evidence Base: The South Australian Model

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*South Australia's DVDS is the most rigorously evaluated disclosure scheme in the world, and the evidence it has produced should anchor the design of any Australian national scheme.*

The South Australian DVDS was introduced in September 2018 under the previous Liberal government and is delivered through a coordinated partnership between South Australia Police (SAPOL) and Women's Safety Services South Australia (WSSSA), the lead Domestic and Family Violence Service (DFVS), together with regional and specialist partner agencies. In December 2024, Dr Katerina Hadjimatheou and Dr Kate Seymour published the first independent review of the scheme, funded by the British Academy. The review drew on six years of monitoring data covering every application, two rounds of anonymous client surveys, 43 in-depth case studies and interviews with practitioners across police and specialist services.

### 5.1 How the scheme works

A person at risk (PAR) can apply for police to assess whether relevant information held on police systems should be disclosed, where the legal criteria for disclosure are met. A third party, a friend, family member or professional, can also apply on the person's behalf, though the resulting information is only ever shared with the person at risk themselves.

The two agencies divide responsibility according to their expertise and legal powers. SAPOL manages the application, assesses eligibility and compiles the disclosure. WSSSA and its regional partners make contact with the applicant, provide risk assessment, safety planning, trauma-informed support and onward referral, regardless of whether the applicant is ultimately found eligible for a disclosure, and regardless of whether one is made. A police officer attends the disclosure meeting only to confirm identity, deliver the disclosure and administer a confidentiality agreement, then leaves so the specialist worker can debrief and support the client.

| SAPOL (police)                                                                  | Domestic and Family Violence Specialist                                             |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Assesses eligibility and compiles the disclosure from police records            | Makes safe contact with the applicant and assesses their circumstances and risk     |
| Shares the disclosure content with the DFV specialist in advance                | Provides safety planning, DV education, counselling and referral, before and after  |
| Attends the meeting to confirm identity and deliver the disclosure, then leaves | Coordinates the meeting location, leads the debrief, and provides follow-up support |

Source: Hadjimatheou & Seymour, *The South Australian Domestic Violence Disclosure Scheme 2018–2024: An Independent Review*, University of Essex, 2024.

5.2 Rising, unprompted demand

Applications increased from 256 in the scheme's first year to 662 in 2023–24, more than two and a half times the first year's total, despite only modest promotion through service networks, community awareness activities and limited paid social media promotion. Of the 2,581 applications received over six years, 1,828 were found eligible and 1,064 proceeded to a disclosure meeting. That growth, achieved without a sustained public awareness campaign, is itself evidence of latent, unmet demand for this kind of information.

5.3 Who uses the scheme, and why it matters

The review's demographic data has direct implications for how any Australian scheme should be designed and promoted. Ninety-six per cent of applicants are female and the median age matches the South Australian population average of around 40. Sixty-seven per cent of applicants have children and six per cent are pregnant at the time of applying. First Nations people and those who met their partner through a dating app are over-represented among applicants relative to the general population, consistent with known vulnerability factors. By contrast, people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, LGBTIQ+ people and people with disability are under-represented, a gap the review recommends targeted outreach address, since these groups may be reluctant to approach police through other channels.

Most significant for the case for early intervention, 86% of applicants were not receiving support from any domestic and family violence service at the point they applied, and 67% had never received such support at all. For most clients, the disclosure scheme was their very first contact with a specialist service, reaching people the sector had not otherwise been able to find.

|                                                                                          |                                                                                   |                                                                                       |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>86%</b><br>of applicants had no current connection to a DFV service when they applied | <b>67%</b><br>had never previously received support from a specialist DFV service | <b>33%</b><br>of applications were made by a third party on behalf of someone at risk |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|

5.4 Impact on safety decision-making

The review's clearest finding is the overwhelming positive impact clients report on their own decision-making. Ninety-eight per cent of clients found the disclosure meeting extremely or very helpful in making decisions about their personal safety; over 95% found it similarly helpful for decisions about the safety of their children, their former partner and their current partner, and 92.5% found it helpful in making decisions relating to the

safety of pets, a consideration that is often overlooked despite the well-documented role pets can play in decisions about leaving an abusive relationship.

| Area of safety decision-making | Found meeting extremely / very / helpful |
|--------------------------------|------------------------------------------|
| Personal safety                | 98%                                      |
| Children's safety              | 96%                                      |
| Safety from a former partner   | 95.5%                                    |
| Safety from a current partner  | 94%                                      |
| Pets' safety                   | 92.5%                                    |

Source: Hadjimatheou & Seymour (2024), Table 4.

Clients also described the emotional impact of receiving accurate information, relief at learning a pattern of behaviour predated them and was not their fault; validation of instincts they had been made to doubt; and for some, the belief that the disclosure may have prevented further harm by revealing a documented pattern of behaviour across previous relationships. These accounts are consistent with the independent research literature on disclosure schemes, which finds that accurate information about a partner's history helps correct victim-blaming narratives and supports victim-survivors to trust their own judgement.

See Hadjimatheou, K. (2023), 'Using criminal histories to empower victim-survivors of domestic abuse', *European Journal of Criminology*, 20(3), 1106–1122.

5.5 Client satisfaction

Satisfaction with the South Australian scheme is exceptionally high across every stage of the process, the online application, the disclosure meeting itself, and the support provided by both police and the specialist service, with dissatisfaction in the low single digits or lower on every measure surveyed. Notably, 71% of clients who responded to a question about possible improvements said none were needed, and many used the opportunity to praise the staff who supported them.

|                                                     |                                                  |                                                               |
|-----------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------|
| 99%<br>satisfied with the disclosure meeting itself | 99%<br>satisfied with support provided by police | 99%<br>satisfied with support provided by the women's service |
|-----------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------|

5.6 Addressing the legal and privacy concerns

A recurring objection to disclosure schemes is the risk of legal challenge over privacy or the accuracy of disclosed information. The South Australian evidence directly answers this concern, in six years of operation and over a thousand disclosures, no legal challenge has been brought against SAPOL in relation to a disclosure. The review notes that no other jurisdiction operating a disclosure scheme has reported a legal challenge either. This is strong evidence that a well-designed scheme, built on clear information-sharing guidelines and proportionate eligibility criteria, can operate lawfully and sustainably at scale.

5.7 Why Police Buy-In from the Start Matters

Dr Hadjimatheou's wider international research, spanning every jurisdiction currently operating a disclosure scheme, points to one factor that predicts success more reliably than any other, whether police helped design the scheme, rather than having it imposed on them after the fact. England and Wales' scheme was proposed by police themselves, working with the domestic violence sector and academics, before the murder of Clare Wood, the case with which the scheme is popularly, though not formally, associated. That professional ownership, not the tragedy the scheme is often assumed to have originated from, is what allowed police to work through early anxiety about privacy law and litigation risk. South Australia's experience mirrors this, SAPOL and Women's Safety Services South Australia designed the scheme together, with the Minister for Women involved from the outset. Where a scheme has instead been introduced quickly by government without that professional buy-in, the evidence, set out in Section 7, shows it has consistently struggled.

This has direct relevance to Australian implementation. Frontline police often already recognise the gap a disclosure scheme would close, officers attending a household for a sixth time, aware of a partner's extensive and escalating history, are frequently unable to share any of that information with the person in front of them, even where they may want to. A national scheme designed in genuine partnership with policing, not delivered to police as a fait accompli, is more likely to secure the professional confidence that has made both the UK and South Australian schemes work.

This evidence suggests that Australia's first step should not be to ask whether a disclosure scheme is possible, but how to design one that reflects the strongest available international evidence and secures the confidence of police, specialist services and the communities it is intended to protect.

*The first proposal had actually been developed by police in close collaboration with academics and the domestic violence sector here in England and Wales. There was already a strong desire to do something like this from the police themselves.*

- Dr Katerina Hadjimatheou, in conversation with Jo Cooper, 2026 – The Voice Of Warriors Podcast

## 6. What Makes the South Australian DVDS Unique

The independent review identifies four features that distinguish the South Australian model from every other disclosure scheme in the world, and that this report recommends Australia adopt nationally.

### A victim-centred, trauma-informed approach

- Coordinated by a specialist domestic and family violence service in partnership with police, rather than being police-led.
- Applicants need no personal contact with police beyond an online form, until the disclosure meeting itself.
- Officers delivering disclosures are typically not in uniform, reducing the risk the encounter feels intimidating.
- Disclosures take place in a safe location agreed with the specialist service, not a police station.
- Applicants may bring a support person to the meeting; a provision no other scheme offers.

Specialist support for every applicant

- Every applicant receives contact from a DFV specialist and is offered trauma-informed support, risk assessment, safety planning and referral, regardless of eligibility and regardless of whether a disclosure is ultimately made.

A coordinated partnership grounded in law

- Roles are divided by expertise and legal power, underpinned by South Australia's Information Sharing Guidelines for Promoting Safety and Wellbeing, which give agencies a clear and tested legal basis to share information to prevent harm.

Systematic monitoring for continuous improvement

- Detailed data on applicant demographics, timeliness, decision-making impact and support provided is collected and analysed on an ongoing basis, alongside case studies and independent client feedback, enabling the kind of evidence-based review that produced this very report.

7. International Comparison

At the time of the independent review, disclosure schemes had been introduced across ten jurisdictions worldwide, including England and Wales, Scotland, Northern Ireland, four Canadian provinces, New Zealand and Malta. The independent review compared South Australia's performance against these schemes on uptake, disclosure rates and client satisfaction, and found South Australia performs as well as, or better than, every comparator for which data exists.

| Measure                                                   | South Australia                                                | England & Wales                         |
|-----------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------|
| Uptake relative to population (highest-uptake comparator) | Equal highest globally, achieved in 4 fewer years of operation | Equal highest globally                  |
| Client satisfaction with police service received          | 99%                                                            | 64% (32% satisfied, 32% very satisfied) |
| Clients reporting being 'very unsatisfied' with police    | 0%                                                             | 20%                                     |
| Legal challenges brought against police over a disclosure | 0                                                              | 0                                       |

Source: Hadjimatheou & Seymour (2024), drawing on a 2024 anonymous survey of 345 England and Wales DVDS applicants and recipients.

The review attributes South Australia's comparatively higher satisfaction to precisely the design features set out in Section 6, applicants are not required to have direct contact with police outside the disclosure meeting itself, and every applicant, eligible or not, receives specialist trauma-informed support. It is not explained by more extensive public promotion; England and Wales' scheme receives considerably more media and social media coverage yet achieves lower satisfaction and a lower proportion of eligible applications resulting in a disclosure.

Practitioners internationally are consistently positive about disclosure schemes in general, but jurisdictions that lack South Australia's coordinated support model report more serious concerns, in England and Wales, practitioners have raised concerns about recipients being left without adequate support after receiving

distressing information; in New Zealand, excessive risk-aversion among police legal teams and low awareness of the scheme have limited its reach. These findings should directly inform the design choices Australia makes, the evidence points clearly toward a specialist-support model, not a police-only one.

On scale: Dr Hadjimatheou reports that England and Wales received approximately 90,000 disclosure applications in the most recent year, up from 58,612 the year before, demonstrating that a national scheme of this kind can operate at population scale without becoming unmanageable, provided it is resourced to match demand, the point underlying Recommendation 6.

## 7.1 New Zealand: A Cautionary Case Study

Not every disclosure scheme succeeds, and Australia should learn deliberately from the schemes that have not worked as well as from the one that has. New Zealand's scheme illustrates almost every design choice this report recommends against.

- The New Zealand model has been criticised for relying on a comparatively narrow disclosure framework focused primarily on conviction information, limiting the amount of relevant risk information available to applicants.
- It is housed within privacy and official-information legislation rather than domestic violence legislation, meaning the applicant must justify their need for the information, similar to a freedom-of-information request, rather than the scheme being oriented around their safety.
- Authorisation is given by police lawyers focused on litigation risk, most of whom have no domestic violence expertise, rather than by DFV specialists.
- It was introduced quickly by government without the sustained buy-in of police or genuine partnership with the domestic violence sector, leaving police officers themselves nervous about sharing information.
- There has been no meaningful involvement of victim-survivors or lived experience in its design.

The result is low uptake, frequent refusals, including, in some cases, refusing applicants who are already experiencing abuse on the reasoning that they "already know" their partner is violent, and a scheme that has, in practice, fallen into disuse. Every one of these design flaws is the direct inverse of a feature this report recommends Australia adopt from South Australia, broad non-conviction disclosure, housing in domestic violence rather than privacy legislation, DFV-specialist rather than legal-risk-driven decision-making, genuine police and sector partnership, and lived-experience input from the start.

## 8. Answering the Objections

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This campaign has not been without resistance, some of it principled disagreement about how a scheme should work, and some of it from within the sector itself. None of it has changed the underlying evidence, and none of it changes the fact that people are currently making decisions about their safety with less information than a properly designed scheme could give them. The independent evidence set out in this report answers the most common and most serious of these objections directly.

## What this proposal is not

This proposal does not suggest that disclosure schemes prevent every act of violence, replace policing or criminal justice responses, replace behaviour-change programs or crisis services, or eliminate coercive control. They provide one further opportunity for prevention through informed decision-making. Just as seatbelts are not judged by whether they prevent every road fatality, a disclosure scheme should not be judged against an impossible standard, its value lies in reducing risk, not eliminating it.

### **"Disclosure schemes expose police and government to legal risk."**

Not borne out by the evidence. No legal challenge has been brought against police in South Australia, or in any jurisdiction operating a disclosure scheme, in relation to a disclosure. A scheme built on clear information-sharing guidelines and defined eligibility criteria carries manageable legal risk.

### **"A scheme like this will discourage people from reporting to police or push them toward vigilante information-seeking."**

The South Australian evidence points the other way. By offering a route to information that does not require direct police contact until a supported disclosure meeting, the scheme reaches people who might otherwise never approach a service, 86% of applicants had no existing DFV service connection. Practitioners report the process builds, rather than damages, trust in police, including among applicants who began with significant reluctance to engage with them.

### **"This duplicates or undermines the work of existing services."**

The evidence shows the opposite, two-thirds of applicants had never previously engaged with a specialist DFV service. A disclosure scheme is a front door into the sector for people the sector has not otherwise reached, not a substitute for the services that follow.

### **"We can't know if this actually helps people."**

This is precisely the question the independent review set out to answer, with six years of monitoring data and anonymous client feedback rather than anecdote. Ninety-eight per cent of clients found the disclosure helpful for their personal safety decision-making, and 99% were satisfied with the service overall, among the strongest client-outcome evidence available for any early-intervention DFV measure.

### **"She's already experiencing abuse, she already knows her partner is violent, so a disclosure won't tell her anything new."**

This reasoning has been used to refuse disclosures in some jurisdictions, and the evidence directly contradicts it. If simply having a sense that a partner is capable of violence were enough, no one would remain in a violent relationship, yet shame, self-blame and a perpetrator's own narrative about the relationship are well documented reasons people stay regardless of what they already suspect. Independent, corroborating information from a source outside the relationship functions differently to a private suspicion, it counters the self-doubt the relationship itself has created. Across more than 600 people surveyed in South Australia and England and Wales, among the top three outcomes reported after a disclosure was that the person left the relationship or stayed away from a former partner, evidence that a disclosure is often most valuable to someone already in the relationship, not only to someone approaching it for the first time.

*If that was all somebody needed to know, then nobody would be staying in a violent relationship. We really have to move beyond that.*

- Dr Katerina Hadjimatheou, in conversation with Jo Cooper, 2026 – The Voice Of Warriors Podcast

### **"The research behind this is too limited or outdated to justify a national scheme."**

The imbalance runs the other way. Australia already holds one of the most robust disclosure-scheme evidence bases in the world, in the South Australian independent review, drawing on detailed survey responses from hundreds of victim-survivors, 43 case studies and six years of monitoring data across every application received. By contrast, the small pilot evaluations sometimes cited in state-level policy debate, including a New South Wales pilot survey of around a dozen participants, and a similarly small independent academic study, are a fraction of that size, though their findings were also positive. Where Australian evidence has driven policy conversations, it has too often been the smallest and least representative studies, rather than the most comprehensive independent evaluation currently available from South Australia.

*As an academic, that kind of evidence is gold dust. Any domestic violence sector organisation would want that kind of evidence behind what they're doing. And yet it doesn't seem to have had any impact. I don't know why.*

- Dr Katerina Hadjimatheou, in conversation with Jo Cooper, 2026 – The Voice Of Warriors Podcast

## **9. Principles for an Australian Model**

Drawing on this evidence, any Australian disclosure scheme should be guided by the following principles.

### **Prevention**

The scheme should prioritise preventing harm before violence escalates, while recognising, as the South Australian evidence shows, that it is equally valuable to people at the point of leaving a relationship.

### **Public safety**

Protecting life and reducing serious harm should remain the primary objective.

### **Evidence-informed practice**

Policy should be informed by international research, operational policing, specialist domestic and family violence expertise, and lived experience, supported by continuous independent evaluation following South Australia's example.

### **Procedural fairness**

Disclosures must be lawful, proportionate and based on established, transparent criteria.

### **Privacy**

Privacy protections should remain central, while recognising that carefully managed disclosure can be justified by public safety, a balance the South Australian model has struck without a single legal challenge in six years.

## Victim-survivor participation

People with lived experience should be genuine partners in policy design, implementation and evaluation, rather than consulted only after key decisions have been made.

## National Information Sharing Capability

Relevant domestic and family violence information is currently recorded across multiple police, court and government systems operating under different legislation, recording practices and information-sharing arrangements. While national policing systems already exist, differences in jurisdictional processes, legal frameworks and data consistency can make information sharing more complex than it should be. This creates the risk that relevant information is not consistently identified or considered when assessing risk across jurisdictions.

This is something I have advocated for alongside a national disclosure scheme for many years. A national disclosure scheme cannot reach its full potential if it operates against a fragmented information-sharing environment while perpetrators and victim-survivors move freely across state and territory borders.

Whether achieved through enhanced interoperability of existing systems or the development of a nationally accessible information-sharing platform, Australia should ensure that relevant domestic and family violence information can be lawfully and consistently considered when disclosure decisions are made. Whatever model is adopted, it must be supported by robust privacy protections, clear governance arrangements and nationally consistent information-sharing protocols.

Together, these recommendations translate the strongest available evidence into a practical Australian implementation framework.

# 10. Recommendations

## Recommendation 1 — Ministerial agenda

Place the development of a National Domestic Violence Disclosure Scheme on the agenda of the Women and Women's Safety Ministerial Council.

## Recommendation 2 — National working group

Establish a national multidisciplinary working group comprising police representatives, victim-survivors, researchers including those with expertise in disclosure schemes, legal and privacy specialists, frontline domestic and family violence services, state and territory governments, and experienced victim-survivor advocates who have demonstrated sustained leadership in disclosure scheme reform.

## Recommendation 3 — Legislative review

Undertake a national review of existing information-sharing legislation, operational policies and technological capability to identify barriers to nationally consistent disclosure decision-making, informed by the operation of South Australia's Information Sharing Guidelines for Promoting Safety and Wellbeing.

## Recommendation 4 — A coordinated partnership model, not a police-only model

Adopt the coordinated partnership approach demonstrated in South Australia as the national template, with police responsible for eligibility assessment and disclosure content, and specialist domestic and family violence

services responsible for applicant contact, support, safety planning and the disclosure meeting environment. Comparative evidence strongly associates this model with high levels of client satisfaction and support for safety-related decision-making. National operational guidelines should include consistent risk-assessment criteria, disclosure thresholds and post-disclosure support pathways.

### **Recommendation 5 — Universal support, not eligibility-contingent support**

Guarantee that every applicant, whether or not they are found eligible for a disclosure, receives contact from a domestic and family violence specialist and is offered trauma-informed support, risk assessment, safety planning and referral. South Australian data shows most applicants have no prior connection to a service, this may be their only point of contact.

### **Recommendation 6 — Sustainable, dedicated funding**

Fund dedicated specialist domestic and family violence positions to deliver the scheme and ensure that funding scales with demand. South Australia currently allocates approximately 3.2 full-time-equivalent positions to scheme delivery. Applications increased from 256 in the first year to 662 in 2023–24—more than two and a half times the first-year total—without a corresponding increase in resourcing. The independent review identifies this as a live risk to service quality and the sustainability of in-person delivery.

### **Recommendation 7 — Targeted outreach to under-represented groups**

Develop targeted promotion and outreach for culturally and linguistically diverse communities, LGBTIQ+ people and people with disability, who were under-represented among South Australian applicants relative to the general population. Public information should make clear that applying for a disclosure does not require attendance at a police station.

### **Recommendation 8 — National information sharing**

Audit existing national policing and domestic and family violence information systems and establish nationally consistent, lawful protocols that enable relevant interstate information to be identified and considered in disclosure assessments. This should include improving the interoperability of existing systems and addressing any remaining gaps created by jurisdictional borders.

Interstate information sharing was the most frequently requested improvement identified by South Australian clients.

### **Recommendation 9 — Independent evaluation framework**

Implement an ongoing, independent evaluation framework from the outset, covering applicant demographics, timeliness, uptake, client experience, safety-related decision-making, support outcomes and client feedback. Findings should be publicly reported at regular intervals to support transparency, accountability and continuous improvement, following the South Australian approach that made the current evidence base possible.

## **11. Implementation: Risks and Lessons Learned**

The independent review is candid about the challenges South Australia has faced in delivering its scheme, and these lessons should shape national implementation rather than be treated as reasons for delay.

**Building trust where it is currently low**

Some applicants have been reluctant to engage with police, citing past negative experiences. South Australian practitioners have overcome this through close partnership working, a specialist worker briefing the attending officer in advance, and a trauma-informed approach at the meeting itself, turning a difficult first contact into a point of restored trust.

**Safe contact with applicants under surveillance**

Coercive control and partner surveillance can make it difficult to safely contact an applicant. South Australian services have addressed this through third-party go-betweens and by arranging contact in safe locations such as a person's workplace.

**Regional and remote delivery**

Regional areas face a shortage of experienced specialists, linked to historic underfunding of regional DFV services, and no dedicated travel budget for in-person disclosures. Practitioners consistently report that in-person meetings are more effective than telephone delivery, 64.5% of South Australian disclosures are delivered in person, because they allow specialists to read distress and respond to it in the moment. A national model should budget explicitly for regional and in-person delivery rather than defaulting to phone contact as a cost-saving measure.

**Resourcing has not kept pace with demand**

This is the most significant risk identified in the review. Six years of increasing demand is placing pressure on processing times and on specialists' capacity to maintain service quality. Left unaddressed, this risk could erode the very outcomes that make the scheme worth replicating nationally, which is why Recommendation 6 treats scalable funding as a first-order design requirement, not an afterthought.

## **12. A National Opportunity**

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Why police must be central, international experience shows disclosure schemes exist to support policing, not to bypass it. Police are often the first to recognise a pattern of escalating risk, and a structured framework gives them greater consistency, accountability and confidence in sharing information intended to prevent foreseeable harm. This report recommends Australian police play a central role in designing any future scheme, in genuine partnership with specialist services, on the South Australian model.

Why lived experience must be equally central, research and operational expertise are essential, but policies designed without meaningful participation from people who have experienced domestic violence risk overlooking practical realities that only lived experience reveals. Effective policy is strongest where evidence, professional expertise and lived experience work together, and the South Australian evidence exists precisely because that scheme was built to listen to its clients on an ongoing basis.

Australia now has an opportunity to move beyond debating whether a domestic violence disclosure scheme should exist and begin considering how to implement one using the strongest available evidence.

## 13. Call to Action

I respectfully request that governments work collaboratively through the Women and Women's Safety Ministerial Council to progress the development of a nationally consistent domestic violence disclosure scheme, built on the evidence set out in this report.

I welcome the opportunity to provide further evidence, participate in consultation, and contribute, alongside Dr Hadjimatheou's ongoing research, to the design of an Australian model informed by evidence, operational practice and lived experience.

*It can be life changing. It can save lives. It can be empowering. It can make people safer. This is now for me no longer a question to be asked, because the evidence is there.*

- Dr Katerina Hadjimatheou, in conversation with Jo Cooper, 2026 – The Voice Of Warriors Podcast

*I have spent over twenty years turning what happened to me into something that protects other people. Nothing I have found is more powerful than this. Every day it sits on a shelf is a day someone doesn't get the warning I never had.*

- Jo Cooper, Founder, The Good Warrior

## 14. References

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