

COMMONWEALTH GOVERNMENT SUBMISSION TO THE SECOND ACTION PLAN (NATIONAL PLAN TO END
VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN AND CHILDREN 2022-2032)

DV-Watch

*A national domestic violence monitoring system based on text mining police
domestic violence reports*

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Executive summary

Domestic and family violence (DFV) is a major societal problem with profound individual health consequences and significant economic burden to the community. Despite current DFV surveillance efforts, significant information gaps remain. Existing DFV reporting is based on hospital presentations, court outcomes, one-off surveys, and in-depth qualitative interviews which fail to capture the scope and nuance of DFV necessary for effectively targeted prevention efforts. The National Plan to End Violence against Women and Children 2022-2032 recognises that *“a key focus of the National Plan is to improve data collection, coordination and consistency”*, and makes good on Action 2 from the 2023-2027 strategy *“...strengthening collection and sharing of data and evidence”*.

Police are almost always the first responders to attend DFV events, recording their observations and accounts from victims and perpetrators in detailed reports. These reports are written with a view to matters progressing before the courts and so contain rich information, yet they are never used for statistical purposes. However, innovative approaches such as text mining enable the extraction of textual information which can fill key knowledge gaps and guide effective DFV intervention protocols and feed into policy.

Working in collaboration with the NSW Police Force, we developed a system, referred to as DV-Watch, to automatically extract information from approximately 500,000 DFV police reports proving feasibility of the approach to deliver population-based insights on mental illness in DFV, abuse types, victim injuries, DFV in key population groups, across different settings, coercive control, threats of future violence, and DFV risk prediction.

We propose an extension of this work by including 4 other jurisdictions (Queensland, Western Australia, South Australia, Tasmania) retaining all the relevant evaluation, governance and risk management protocols previously established. This proposal is supported by the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, the National Women’s Safety Alliance (ANROWS), and the NSW Women’s Community Shelters.

The proposed approach is proven, efficient and cost-effective and utilises an existing data source. Preliminary discussions have been held with the four additional jurisdictions. This proposal requests \$5.4 million over five years to establish DV-Watch across five jurisdictions covering 70% of the Australian population, with the option for national scale-up.

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1. DV-Watch summary

The police are almost always the first responders to attend DFV events, recording their observations and accounts from victims and perpetrators in detailed reports and in structured data called the fixed fields (e.g., demographic information on individuals involved). The reports are written with a view to matters progressing before the courts and so contain rich information. However, this information is not used for statistical purposes due to its being held in text format with restricted access and its voluminous nature making it impossible to be processed manually. In NSW, the police attend numerous DFV events per year (over 130,000 events in 2025 alone) resulting in a large but untapped data repository. To overcome this, in collaboration with the NSW Police Force we developed an AI-powered text mining approach to test whether it is possible to extract information from DFV police reports (DV-Watch). This work was initially funded by a small grant from the Australian Institute of Criminology and represents the first successful application of text mining globally to approximately 500,000 police reports. The text mining method used common lexical patterns observed in the police text to automatically extract mentions of mental illness, victim injuries, abuse types, drug use, and threats of future violence with 90% accuracy when compared to a human expert coder^{1,2}. The data extracted enabled the development of 20 publications and 4 government reports.

1.1 DV-Watch: main findings

The application of DV-Watch on over half a million NSW DFV police reports identified a range of previously unknown insights (see below) at population level for at-risk groups, specific settings, abuse types, and mental illness. This highlights the huge potential for this approach.

Theme	Findings
Mental illness	16% of DFV events had a mental illness - 77% associated with the perpetrator. Mood disorders were the most common condition in victims and perpetrators ¹ .
Victim injuries, abuse types	71% of events reported at least one abuse type with verbal abuse was the most common, followed by punching and property damage ² . More than one-third of events reported a victim injury with bruises and cuts being the most common ² .
Autism	DFV involving autism most commonly occurred in a caregiver context involving a spouse/partner. 1 in 4 cases with an autistic perpetrator had an associated mental health condition ³ .
Nursing home-based DFV	Victims were mostly women over 80 years, with perpetrators being men in their fifties. Dementia was the most common mental health condition in both perpetrators and victims of nursing home-based DFV, with 4 out of 5 events involving physical abuse ⁴ .
Non-fatal strangulation	Perpetrated predominantly by males towards female partners (92%). Physical assault, social abuse, and threats by the perpetrator to cause harm were associated with an increased chance of non-fatal strangulation ⁵ .

Theme	Findings
Linkage to external administrative health data collections	Only 1% of DFV events had a documented hospital record within 48 hours of the DFV event showing the reach of police data ⁶ .
DFV prediction	Data was used to develop a prototype AI-powered model to predict future DFV offences with 70% prediction accuracy ⁷ .
Coercive control	55% of DFV events had at least one coercive control behaviour with a total of 48 different behaviours being recorded. No major differences were found between male and female perpetrators/victims in terms of behaviour ^{8,9} .
Male victims	Female perpetrators used objects/weapons, employ verbal abuse, and performed minor acts of physical violence on male victims. Anxiety disorders and depression were the most prevalent conditions in male victims ¹⁰ .

1.2 Program insights and impact

DV-Watch findings relating to mental illness have been cited by the Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Psychiatrists, Australia's National Research Organisation for Women's Safety (ANROWS), 14 state reports in NSW, Queensland, and Victoria, 2 United States government reports, and the South Australia Royal Commission on DV. The Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) features DV-Watch's findings of mental illness as a DFV risk factor for both receiving and conducting DFV in its DFV webpage. Results from DV-Watch's application on additional sample of over 550,000 DFV police narratives involving stalking and harassment were presented as evidence in the 2021 NSW Parliamentary Inquiry into coercive control, contributing to its criminalisation and making NSW one of the few jurisdictions globally to do so.

2. DV-Watch: outcomes

DV-Watch will provide Australia with a world first DFV surveillance approach to complement and enhance current reporting. The proposed approach is not only cost-effective by utilising existing data but will also enhance the coverage and scope of Australia's existing surveillance mechanisms.

2.1 Enhanced and efficient DFV data collection

This newly formed data collection can potentially be made available for researchers, law enforcement agencies, DFV advocacy groups, and policy stakeholders in de-identified format to answer key questions that can feed into policy and program development both locally and nationally. It will also demonstrate the benefit of multi-jurisdictional information (NSW Police Force, Queensland Police Service, Western Australia Police Force, South Australia Police, Tasmania Police) covering 72% of the Australia population with a full national scale-up to follow. Without relying on large, expensive surveys, or small samples, for the first time, population level information for DFV will be available. Extracted, information on victims and perpetrators (e.g., mental health status, injuries, substance use, abuse types, threats, weapons used); the actual event itself (e.g., cause of the domestic dispute); and children exposed to DFV (e.g., age, sex) will be available. The following table shows the comprehensive

and complete nature of the available data that can be extracted from police reports as occurred in the NSW proof-of-concept study.

2.2 Development of comprehensive DFV reporting

Information scope	Emergency departments	ABS Australian Personal Safety Survey	Ambulance	Courts	DV-Watch
Licit/illicit drugs	✓	-	✓	-	✓**
Mental health status	-	-	✓	-	✓**
Event cause	-	-	-	-	✓
Disability type	✓	-	-	-	✓**
Injuries*	✓*	-	✓*	-	✓**
Coercive control	-	-	-	-	✓
Abuse types	-	✓	-	-	✓
Sexual assault	-	✓	-	✓	✓**
Threats	-	✓	-	-	✓
Weapons	✓	-	-	-	✓
Child present	-	-	-	-	✓
Justice outcome	-	-	-	✓	✓
Technology facilitated abuse	-	-	-	-	✓

*Available for victim only. ** Available for both victims and perpetrators.

A national annual report will be made available detailing information on DFV in groups such as Indigenous, people with disabilities, veterans, the elderly, culturally and linguistically diverse populations, and LGBTQ. Additionally, DFV will be reported across a variety of high-risk settings such as foster care, and nursing homes. Data will also be used to examine abusive behaviours such as non-fatal strangulation, coercive control, sexual assault, technology facilitated abuse, social isolation.

2.3 Utilising innovative technologies to process free-text data in DFV surveillance

Transitioning to a fully automated approach based on DV-Watch will enable researchers and law enforcement personnel to have access to near real-time data on DFV. Due to its generalisability and efficiency, DV-Watch can be rapidly customised to address specific local and national issues as they arise.

2.4 National DFV data collection network

A collateral benefit of this proposal will be the establishment of a national network of experts comprised of stakeholders across the police, public health, mental health, DFV, not-for-profit agencies, government departments, and indigenous organisations.

2.5 Alignment with Commonwealth and State Government priorities

1. **First Action Plan 2023–2027 (the current delivery mechanism under the National Plan):** Improve the national evidence base by working towards consistent terminology and monitoring and evaluation frameworks, and by strengthening collection and sharing of data and evidence¹¹
2. **Australian Institute of Health and Welfare:** Provide stronger evidence (data and information) for better decisions and improved health and welfare for all Australians¹²
3. **NSW government:** Develop a 10-year NSW cross-agency DFSV Data Strategy to guide data collection, performance monitoring and reporting; support service providers to improve databases, data collection and reporting to support monitoring and evaluation¹³
4. **The National Plan to End Violence against Women and Children 2022-2032:** Our ability to provide quality responses to victim-survivors, hold perpetrators accountable and keep women and children safe is predicated on addressing data gaps and building strong data-sharing mechanisms¹¹

3. Our approach

Text mining is an established field in computer science that deals with automatic information extraction from text. It has been used for more than thirty years in areas such as bioinformatics and medicine to harvest information by processing large-scale unstructured data. Depending on the task, a text mining application ranges from the recognition of single words and complex multi-word entities and their relationships to determining the context of a phrase. Its success depends on the syntax, grammar (e.g., understanding the use, role and place of prepositions, articles), and the frequency of words. Seeking to replicate the human annotation process fast and reliably, text mining can be implemented with transparent rules, dictionaries, machine learning, or a combination of all the above. Unlike high-tech '*black box*' approaches where error interpretability is not possible, its results are compared with the knowledge of human domain experts to ensure transparency. The proposed project will use our fully evaluated and tested text mining method which is ready for immediate deployment across the span of five years.

3.1 Phase 1: Governance, and data access protocols, Year 1

Conduct a national roundtable with team members and establish a steering group to agree on the protocol and data alignment with stakeholder needs. Two groups will be established: an Aboriginal one to ensure the work is conducted in a culturally appropriate manner and a victim-survivor group to ensure the inclusion of victim voices in this project. Required data will be specified (i.e., police narratives, fixed fields) and a data request and approval template will be developed for each of the participant jurisdictions (NSW, Queensland, Western Australia, Tasmania, South Australia).

3.2 Phase 2: Text mining, data curation and integration, Years 2-4

Once data sharing and confidentiality agreements are signed, text mining will be applied to the DFV narratives for the period 2000 to 2027 in the first instance to extract: abuse types, cause of dispute, severity and body part (based on injury type), mental illnesses, substance use, threats of future violence, and victim injuries. The project will use GATE, an established text mining platform for annotating and categorising text which was used in the proof-of-concept study in NSW. The approach is based on rules (i.e., common syntactical patterns indicating the presence of a characteristic in text) and manually crafted dictionaries that contain terms, synonyms and abbreviations of interest.

DFV and mental health experts will expand the dictionaries with additional forms of abuse and injuries and create new ones for DFV causes, disability types, and commonly used weapons. Despite having implemented this approach in NSW, additional calibration of the system may be required in each jurisdiction. To ensure reliability, a random sample of DFV narratives from each jurisdiction will be selected and annotated by DFV experts which will be used to subsequently train the system. Based on the NSW narratives, this approach returned a 90% robust performance, and we do not anticipate significant deviation from this in other jurisdictions. Four police data scientists from each jurisdiction will be trained to apply the method locally. The text mined results will not have any identifiers (e.g., postcode, names, address) maintaining the victims and perpetrators confidentiality.

A technical subgroup will record risks arising from this project documenting the feasibility of this infrastructure across all jurisdictions. The extracted information will be linked locally with each jurisdiction's fixed fields to create a jurisdictional dataset with no identifying information relating to individuals involved in DFV events. In partnership with the AIHW, each dataset will be aligned with current national standards to ensure reporting consistency. Data will be locally encrypted and transferred (via Secure File Transfer Protocol) to UNSW's ERICA platform, a secure cloud computing infrastructure. Combining the five jurisdictional data sets will create a composite data source.

Two groups, one Aboriginal focused will be chaired by Associate Professor [REDACTED] (Maladiny Research Centre, Edith Cowan University), and one representing victim survivors will be chaired by [REDACTED]. This will ensure the information presented is culturally safe and trauma informed. An additional group comprising experts in data management and information processing will oversee the statistical analysis by jurisdiction and will create a national report.

An interim independent evaluation of the proposed approach and the generated results will be conducted to examine whether the project is being delivered as planned - including whether the Aboriginal and Victim Survivor groups are functioning effectively and their input is being reflected, whether text mining is being successfully applied to the narratives in each jurisdiction, whether this is generating usable results, and whether jurisdictional datasets are being collated as intended - informing any refinements required before the national scale-up option in Year 5..

3.3 Phase 3: Outputs from data curation and integration, Year 5

A national report will be available using data for the period 2000-2030 (depending on individual jurisdictional availability) along with the methods, the new research data infrastructure. A final technical evaluation report on the implementation across the five jurisdictions will be produced

detailing specifications, challenges and risks. Part of the final evaluation will be a plan for national scale-up of DV-Watch. A national roundtable comprised by the team, project partners, Aboriginal and Victim Survivor groups and representatives of the identified DFV priority groups will discuss the translation of findings while reflecting the lived and cultural experiences of emergent populations.

4. DV-Watch Governance

Governance meetings will be held every three months. The content and the scope of the national data report will be co-designed in partnership with the Aboriginal and Victim Survivor groups. A smaller project management group of 4 members will make day to day decisions and discuss any risks that might be identified during the project. These will be addressed according to the risk mitigation plan, and the group will oversee the new data infrastructure providing guidelines for national scaling and scope expansion.

Multi-layered oversight will operate through three governance bodies:

1. **Stakeholder Group.** Will provide strategic direction across DFV, health, text mining, Aboriginal organisations, child protection, and victim-survivor advocacy, with representation from all five jurisdictions; will ensure the translation of findings according to national reporting standards.
2. **First Nations Advisory Group.** Chaired by Associate Professor [REDACTED]. Will provide cultural safety, equity threshold setting, and governance-mandated review authority for the text mined results, including Indigenous data sovereignty.
3. **Consumer Group.** Chaired by [REDACTED]. Will provide community input representing the voices and lived experience of victim-survivors co-designing the scope of DFV in the report and method.

5. Feasibility

The proposed project has previously been endorsed by five jurisdictional police agencies (NSW, Queensland, Western Australia, Tasmania, South Australia) who have given written support to access their data with ethics approval already obtained from UNSW. Progress though has been hampered by the lack of funding. Support has also been forthcoming from the AIHW who will assist in the data infrastructure development; and DFV advocates such as the [REDACTED] (NSW Women's Community Shelters) and [REDACTED] (Foundation for Alcohol Research and Education, FARE) who will lead discussions to inform the scope of DV-Watch and advise on the translation of findings towards policy. Endorsement from the national plan will also give the project greater authenticity.

DV-Watch has been evaluated initially on approximately one million DFV narratives in NSW, demonstrating how the rich extracted information can improve DFV surveillance and result in legislative change in NSW. Due to the use of similar (if not the same) narratives by other police jurisdictions, we are confident that the pipeline can be seamlessly applied to other jurisdictions' narratives within the grant period. To ensure its successful application in non-NSW narratives, we have in our project plan a training and evaluation period to calibrate its performance.

6. Our capability

6.1 The team

The project includes many world leading researchers in disciplines relevant to this proposal-public health, surveillance, text mining, informatics, public health informatics, DFV, mental health, biostatistics, police studies, Indigenous health. The team has outstanding experience in designing and applying innovative text mining methodologies in multiple areas (justice, health) including extensive clinical DFV insight. The team's extensive skillset and outstanding expertise, proven NSW work, clear goals, history of collaboration and publication between team members and partner support guarantee impactful outcomes for people experiencing DFV.

Team member	Institution	Role and expertise
[REDACTED]	UNSW Sydney	Lead. AI, text mining and DFV, designer and developer of DV-Watch
[REDACTED]	Foundation for Alcohol Research Education (FARE)	Former head of National Women's Safety Alliance. Responsible for coordinating community and lived experience input
[REDACTED]	UNSW Sydney	Justice and offender health data collection
[REDACTED]	NSW Women's Community Shelters	CEO. Responsible for coordinating community and lived experience input
[REDACTED]	Australian Institute of Health and Welfare	Head, Family, Domestic and Sexual Violence Unit. Data standardisation and DFV reporting
[REDACTED]	UNSW Sydney	Child maltreatment, findings translation
[REDACTED]	Justice Health NSW	Stalking expert, consultant
[REDACTED]	Maladiny Research Centre, Edith Cowan University	Indigenous health and governance. First Nations research and Indigenous data sovereignty
[REDACTED]	NSW Police Force	Chief Inspector, Strategic Intelligence and Command
[REDACTED]	University of Manchester	AI, text mining, consultant on national application of text mining
[REDACTED]	University of Liverpool	Civic data systems, public health informatics. Consultant on knowledge dissemination and policy development

6.2 Proven track record

The team has substantial experience in crafting and initiating new public health data infrastructures including the National Prisoner Health Data Collection ([REDACTED]), the National Prison Entrants Bloodborne Virus Survey ([REDACTED]), and the Collection Combined Intelligence for Population Health

Action (CIPHA), a National Grid of Civic Data Cooperatives (██████████). DV-Watch was also a global first approach to extract DFV insights from police narratives, linking them to health records (██████████). In addition, the team's research has been translated into policy: results from text mining informed a NSW Parliament inquiry on coercive control that resulted in legislative change (██████████), data linkage studies on severe mental illness influenced changes to the 2020 Mental Health Act (██████████); and practice: the NSW Police Force integrated DV-Watch into their existing data infrastructure for real-time extraction of mental health information to better support frontline police (██████████). Other members have directly contributed to DFV surveillance with government reports (██████████) and policy recommendation documents (██████████).

7. Risk management plan

Risk	Mitigation strategy
Data availability, confidentiality, integrity, loss	All jurisdictions agreed to provide access to their data (i.e., narratives, fixed fields) which are stored on secure servers of each agency. The extracted (and de-identified) outputs and the fixed fields will be encrypted, transferred via Secure Transfer File Protocol and stored on UNSW's ERICA, a secure cloud computing infrastructure for individuals working with sensitive, large-scale data.
Team experience	The team has significant experience in effectively delivering outcomes on large and complex NHMRC and ARC projects including government contracts in public health. The team has also world leading expertise in the use of text mining on large scale public health and police related data. Quarterly meetings between the team and project partners will ensure a reliable project governance.
Poor communication and oversight	Quarterly meetings between the team will discuss the on-going progress of the project regularly providing updates. A smaller group of four team members will be making day to day decisions and discuss any arising risks and address them accordingly.
Poor text mining performance in other jurisdictions	The proposed method has been successfully applied in DFV narratives of the NSW Police Force. After engaging into discussion with the participant jurisdictions, the structure of reporting for DFV events is the same with that one of the NSW Police Force: a free text narrative that describes in detail key information of the event and structured (i.e., fixed fields) data. Despite its generalisability, however, it has not been tested in other jurisdictions. Thus, as a part of our approach, we will train and evaluate the method on other jurisdictional data to limit any potential sources of errors and expand its scope.
Failure to convince other jurisdictions to join	Support from government and key bodies (e.g., AIHW, NSWPF, QLDPS, SAPOL, WAPF, TASPOL, FARE, NSW Women's Community Shelters) are likely to encourage other jurisdictions to lend their support for our approach.
Findings lead to increased stigmatisation of key groups	Whilst this is possible, in practice we found that the opposite was true. Mental health advocacy groups were pleased that attention was brought to the nexus of DFV and mental illness. Due to a diverse and experienced team, research findings will be presented accordingly to avoid stigmatisation in partnership with the Aboriginal reference (headed by Jones) and the Victim survivor Steering Committees and with consumer input guided by FARE and the NSW Women's Community Shelters.

Risk	Mitigation strategy
Poor uptake of findings	The project enjoys the support from Australia's peak health reporting DFV agencies (AIHW, FARE) who will provide input and direction to national and state policy formulation, thus it is reasonable to assume that the findings in this process will be translated accordingly. In addition, the involvement of the police ensures a further, more practical use of these data.

8. Budget

8.1 Investment summary

Phase	5-year total
Phase 1 (Year 1): Governance, memorandums of understanding between UNSW and individual police jurisdictions regarding data access, advisory group formation, text mining application	\$2.1M
Phase 2: (Years 2-4) Text mining, data curation and integration, independent evaluation	\$2.2M
Phase 3: (Year 5) Outputs from data curation and integration phase	\$1.1M
TOTAL INVESTMENT	\$5.4M over 5 years

Category	Item	Y1	Y2	Y3	Y4	Y5
Staffing	Project Director at 1.0FTE	\$161,619	\$161,619	\$161,619	\$161,619	\$161,619
	Research Officer at 1.0FTE	\$118,483	\$118,483	\$118,483	\$118,483	\$118,483
	State data scientists /jurisdictional liaison (x5) at 0.6FTE	\$388,390	\$388,390	\$388,390	\$388,390	\$388,390
	AIHW information officer at 0.5FTE	\$42,092	\$42,092	\$42,092	\$42,092	\$42,092
	Senior Data Scientist 1.0FTE	\$133,065	\$133,065	\$133,065	\$133,065	\$133,065
	DFV Community Liaison advisor (x2) at 0.5FTE	\$88,099	\$88,099	\$88,099	\$88,099	\$88,099
	Epidemiologist at 1.0FTE		\$110,525	\$110,525	\$110,525	\$110,525
Independent evaluation	Independent DV-Watch evaluation	-	-	\$30,000	-	-
Other expenditure	ERICA secure data storage platform	-	-	\$15,000	\$15,000	\$15,000
	Sitting fees (Lived experience & Aboriginal advisory groups)	\$15,000	\$15,000	\$15,000	\$15,000	\$15,000
Meeting costs	Annual meeting costs	\$30,000	\$30,000	\$30,000	\$30,000	\$30,000
Total		\$976,749	1,087,273	\$1,132,273	1,102,273	1,102,273

9. Conclusion

DV-Watch represents a proven, world-first approach to DFV surveillance that transforms an existing but untapped data source into population-level evidence that can be used to guide future prevention and intervention policies. Having successfully applied this approach to approximately 500,000 NSW police reports evidenced in 20 publications (see below) and four government reports, demonstrating policy impact, including its role in informing the 2021 NSW Parliamentary Inquiry into coercive control. This team's proven track record, combined with endorsements from the AIHW, and other peak national bodies, confirms both the technical feasibility of the approach and our capacity to deliver the project and fill critical DFV information gaps.

Expanding DV-Watch to Queensland, Western Australia, South Australia, and Tasmania to build an internationally unique national resource covering 72% of the Australian population, enabling consistent, near real-time reporting on DFV features such as mental illness, abuse types, injuries, coercive control, and on priority populations across jurisdictions. Because the proposal leverages an already-developed and validated system, and established governance and risk-management protocols - including dedicated Aboriginal and victim-survivor oversight groups - the \$5.4 million, five-year investment offers a low-risk, low-cost pathway to a robust and enduring national DFV data infrastructure, to directly inform frontline practice, policy formulation, and legislative reform across Australia.

Further information

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

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