



Wellsprings
for women



Response to the Second Action Plan of the National Plan to End Violence against Women and Children 2022–2032

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About Wellsprings for Women

Wellsprings for Women is a specialist women's organisation based in Melbourne's southeast, working predominantly with migrant, refugee and asylum seeking women, including women on temporary visas, women with limited English, and women experiencing multiple forms of disadvantage. Our programs include family violence prevention and early intervention, casework, settlement support, financial capability, digital literacy, community education, and leadership development.

Each week Wellsprings staff engage with over 1000 women and children across our programs. We are a hybrid of neighbourhood house, Learn Local, Women-only agency offering services that meet the needs of migrant and refugee women and their children. We offer child minding while mothers are accessing our education classes. We have also built solid partnerships across a number of primary and secondary schools in Dandenong and Casey. Our approach is place-based, intersectional and trauma informed.

Our specialist family violence service assists over 200 women each year while we engage over 2000 women in prevention. Wellsprings has developed a range of resources we use in our education workshops on gender equality and prevention of violence against women. The resources are published and available on our website: <https://www.wellspringsforwomen.com/about-us/gender-equality-resources/>

Our work on prevention has won several awards over the years and we continue to develop and co-create resources that women with low or no English literacy can access and learn from.

OBJECTIVE

Our submission draws on decades of frontline experience, extensive engagement with culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) communities, and our ongoing advocacy for equitable, culturally safe, trauma informed responses to family violence.

We make this submission to share our learning, observations and analysis as well as to ensure the voices, needs and aspirations of women from migrant and refugee backgrounds are considered and included in the commitments and funding allocations of the second national plan to end violence against women.

PRIORITY AREA 1: Victim Survivors

1. Service and system responses that would make the biggest difference

Wellsprings' experience shows that migrant and refugee women face unique, compounding barriers to safety. The most impactful improvements include:

- Integrated, trauma informed service pathways that reduce the burden on women to navigate complex systems.
- Guaranteed access to safe, long term housing, including crisis accommodation that is culturally safe and accessible to women with children.
- Specialist, culturally responsive family violence services delivered by organisations with deep community trust.
- Visa safe pathways to support, ensuring women on temporary visas can access income support, housing, legal assistance and safety planning without fear of deportation.
- Improved justice responses, including consistent risk assessment, interpreter access, and better coordination between police, courts and child protection.

2. What helps or hinders early access to support

Enablers:

- Community based education delivered in women's first languages.
- Bicultural workers who bridge trust and cultural understanding.
- Confidential digital and phone support for women monitored by perpetrators.
- Partnerships with faith leaders and community elders who influence help seeking.

Barriers:

- Fear of immigration consequences.
- Lack of culturally safe services and trained interpreters.
- Economic dependence, financial abuse and lack of income support.
- Perpetrator surveillance, coercive control and technology facilitated abuse.
- Distrust of police and government systems due to past trauma or discrimination.

PRIORITY AREA 1: Victim Survivors (continued)

3. Emerging issues

- Rapid escalation of technology facilitated abuse, including spyware, online harassment and digital monitoring.
- Increasing complexity of coercive control, especially in extended family or community based contexts.
- Growing financial stress and housing insecurity, which heighten risk.
- Children experiencing trauma as victim survivors in their own right.

4. Gaps for diverse communities

- Insufficient investment in CALD specific family violence services.
- Lack of interpreters trained in family violence dynamics.
- Limited support for women with disability, older women, and women on temporary visas.
- Inadequate services in regional and outer suburban growth corridors.



PRIORITY AREA 2: Prevention and Early Intervention

1. What would make the biggest difference in preventing violence

- Long term, community led primary prevention that addresses gender inequality, harmful norms and power imbalances.
- Culturally tailored prevention programs co designed with migrant and refugee communities.
- Respectful relationships education that delivered consistently across early childhood, schools and adult learning settings. But also that engages parents from migrant and refugee backgrounds the majority of whom feel totally alienated from this curriculum and perceive it as undermining their cultural values and practices.
- Workplace based prevention, especially in industries with high CALD workforces.

2. Strengthening existing efforts

- Scaling up evidence based programs delivered by trusted community organisations.
- Embedding prevention across health, education, settlement, employment and multicultural services.
- Ensuring prevention messaging is linguistically accessible and culturally relevant.
- Sustained funding rather than short term pilots.

3. Supporting people to recognise and respond to harmful attitudes

- National campaigns that challenge gender stereotypes and normalise consent.
- Training for teachers, youth workers, community leaders and bicultural workers.
- Stronger regulation of online platforms to reduce misogynistic content.
- Community led bystander programs.

PRIORITY AREA 2: Prevention and Early Intervention (continued)

4. Promising approaches

- Place based, community led initiatives.
- Early intervention programs for young men and boys.
- Digital tools offering anonymous early support.
- Perpetrator early response programs linked to risk assessment.

5. Emerging issues

- Online misogyny and extremist content targeting young men.
- AI generated deepfakes used for coercion.
- Adolescent family violence.
- Prevention tailored to newly arrived communities.



PRIORITY AREA 3: Children and Young People

1. What would improve safety and recovery

- Recognising children as victim survivors in their own right.
- Guaranteed access to therapeutic supports, including play therapy and trauma informed counselling.
- Stable housing to prevent school disruption.
- Specialist support for children with disability and those from CALD backgrounds.

2. Better recognition and response

- Universal screening in schools, early childhood, paediatrics and youth services.
- Mandatory training for educators and frontline workers.
- Culturally safe, community led responses for CALD and Aboriginal children.
- Clear referral pathways and coordinated case management.
- Dedicated funding to family violence services to provide case work support for children and young people impacted by family violence.

3. Supporting young people who use violence

- Developmentally appropriate therapeutic programs.
- Family based interventions.
- Culturally informed healing programs.
- Diversion pathways that emphasise accountability and behaviour change.

4. Responding to emerging harms

- Technology facilitated abuse, online grooming and harmful content.
- Violence in peer and dating relationships.
- Social media driven misogyny and harmful gender norms.

5. Meaningful involvement of children and young people

- Youth advisory groups.
- Co design of programs and policies.
- Safe, supported opportunities for young people to share lived experience.

PRIORITY AREA 4: People Who Use Violence

1. Preventing and responding earlier

- Universal screening for early signs of coercive control.
- Clear referral pathways into early intervention programs.
- Integrated responses linking perpetrator interventions with victim survivor safety planning.
- Housing and financial supports that allow perpetrators to leave the home.

2. Better recognition and safe response

- Training for frontline workers to identify patterns of harm.
- Workplace policies for early identification and referral.
- Community education to help families recognise warning signs.
- Improved information sharing across systems.

3. Effective behaviour change approaches

- Men's behaviour change programs with strong risk management frameworks.
- Culturally informed healing programs for CALD and Aboriginal men.
- Therapeutic interventions addressing trauma, substance use and mental health.
- Specialist programs for young people using violence.

4. Strengthening culturally safe responses

- Investment in CALD specific perpetrator programs.
- Bicultural facilitators and interpreters trained in family violence.
- Tailored approaches for men on temporary visas, newly arrived migrants and faith based communities.

PRIORITY AREA 5: System Integration and Workforce

1. Creating a coordinated, connected system

- Nationally consistent risk assessment and management frameworks.
- Integrated service hubs combining legal, health, housing and family violence supports.
- Real time information sharing.
- Sustained funding for coordination roles.

2. Workforce capabilities and supports

- Mandatory family violence training across universal services.
- Expansion of the specialist workforce, especially bicultural workers.
- Cultural safety training co designed with CALD communities.
- Workforce wellbeing supports and manageable caseloads.
- Clear career pathways.

3. Effective collaboration and information sharing

- Multi agency risk assessment panels.
- Co located multidisciplinary teams.
- Shared digital platforms for secure information sharing.
- Formal partnership agreements.

4. Supports needed for inclusive, accessible services

- Culturally safe practice frameworks.
- Interpreters trained in family violence.
- Flexible service delivery (outreach, telehealth, after hours).
- Specialist expertise for diverse cohorts.
- Long term funding stability.

5. Priority gaps

- National data on coercive control and tech facilitated abuse.
- Evaluation of perpetrator interventions.
- Workforce shortages in regional and outer suburban areas.
- Limited CALD specific services.
- Gaps in child focused recovery supports.
- Fragmented information systems.

Conclusion

Wellsprings for Women strongly supports the development of a Second Action Plan that is intersectional, culturally responsive, trauma informed and grounded in lived experience. Our frontline work demonstrates that migrant and refugee women face unique risks and barriers that require targeted, sustained investment and community led solutions.

We welcome continued collaboration with government to ensure that all women and children — regardless of visa status, language, culture or background — can live free from violence.

We stress the importance of supporting place-based, community-led, tailored and co-designed approaches to prevention, and early intervention programs targeting communities from migrant and refugee backgrounds, to ensure the outcomes hoped for occur at a pace that communities feel comfortable with and in control of, rather than coerced into.

In Victoria, the Coercive Control legislation is due to be passed by the Victorian parliament. Its introduction and application will bring new challenges to Prevention and Response as services and communities grapple with the impact.

Wellsprings for Women has faced rising costs challenges especially with increased wages whereby such increases are not covered through the stagnant levels of funding.

Funding continues to be short term, and well below the levels needed to eliminate violence against women. The impact of inadequate funding leads to increased vicarious trauma, and loss of experienced staff. While our sector is resilient and scaffolded by dedicated staff, nevertheless, it is critical that Governments urgently address the reforms to the service system to alleviate the pressure points that are hindering progress and better outcomes.