



31 July 2026

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

Women's Health and Equality Queensland (WHEQ) are leaders in advancing women's health, gender equality and the primary prevention of violence in Queensland. Founded over 40 years ago, we are a not-for-profit organisation dedicated to supporting women, improving their health and wellbeing, and advocating for gender equality. Our vision is for all women to be equitably resourced, healthy, safe and thriving.

WHEQ has a long history as Queensland's statewide women's health organisation with our current work currently including:

- Leading primary prevention of gender-based violence policy initiatives and programs including community capacity building programs and respectful relationship education
- Health literacy and health promotion programs providing gender transformative prevention and early intervention support.
- Coordination and leadership of Queensland Health and DFSV networks and alliances.
- Policy development and advice to State and Federal Government on women's health, gender equality and DFSV.
- 1800 4 Women Counselling service – providing mental health counselling to help women in Queensland access the health and wellbeing support.
- Healing and Recovery therapeutic counselling and group services to support victim-survivors of domestic, family & sexual violence.

WHEQ believes that gender equality, women's health, and the elimination of violence against women and girls are fundamentally interconnected and mutually reinforcing. Fundamental to this position is the extensive evidence-base that demonstrates gender inequality limits women's access to healthcare, education, economic opportunity, and decision-making, while exposure to violence can have profound and enduring impacts on physical, mental, sexual, and reproductive health. Efforts therefore to improve women's health outcomes, cannot be separated from efforts to address the social and structural inequalities that place women at greater risk of violence and discrimination.

WHEQ is grateful for the opportunity to contribute to the shaping of the Second Action Plan and to speak with a Queensland lens to the gaps, challenges and emerging challenges and opportunities to eliminate violence against women and children.

Priority Area 1: Victim-Survivors

An integrated, appropriately funded, and coordinated approach across government and community service providers would make the greatest difference to victim-survivors' safety, wellbeing, healing and

recovery. This should include strong collaboration between domestic and family violence services, child safety, police, corrections, housing and health services, so that victim-survivors receive timely, connected and consistent support.

A cross-agency information-sharing system would also improve responses by ensuring key agencies have access to relevant information about both victim-survivors and people using violence. This would support more effective management of family violence risk, reduce duplication, and enable agencies to respond earlier and more safely. Without addressing the existing system fragmentation, the burden on victim-survivors to repeatedly tell their story, complete multiple assessments and manage referrals between services can be distressing, re-traumatising and overwhelming – particularly so during crisis situations.

Early Access Supports

Victim-survivors are more likely to access support early when they have trusted community touchpoints around them. This includes family members, friends, neighbours or other community members who can listen without judgement and provide practical help and initial referral to support services. To this end WHEQ recommends greater, inclusive access to trauma-informed training and information that support these trusted touchpoints to ask non-judgemental questions, respond safely to disclosures and provide appropriate referral options to better support victim-survivors during early help-seeking.

Low-barrier, accessible and discreet contact options are also critical. This includes 24/7 services that are easy to access, safe to use and able to provide risk assessment, safety planning and connection to ongoing support.

Barriers

From WHEQ's position, as a provider of DFSV Healing and Recovery services, we view the key barriers to service access for victim-survivors being often practical and systemic rather than a fundamental lack of willingness or readiness to seek help. We know that victim-survivors routinely face long wait times, rigid eligibility thresholds and limited availability of specialist supports. Especially so in relation to housing, legal support and recovery services. These factors invariably lead to victim-survivors experiencing multiple rejections, delayed support, increased risks to safety, and heighten the danger that victim-survivors abandon support seeking altogether.

Services are also often only able to offer time limited or session limited support. This means victim-survivors routinely need to access multiple services to meet their needs which translates to multiple intake processes requiring the re-telling of their story and the heightened risk of re-traumatisation.

Geographical access is also a barrier, particularly across regional, rural and remote Queensland. Victim-survivors are often required to travel significant distances to access specialist DFSV services, courts, legal assistance and/or crisis accommodation. Cost and concerns about anonymity in small communities can exacerbate these barriers and make engagement with services incredibly difficult or impossible.

Finally, while centring victim-survivors throughout the plan, it is important that it attributes sufficient weight to addressing the gendered dimensions of violence. Surmounting these drivers through primary prevention strategies should actively promote opportunity for victim-survivors to shape these efforts. This includes engaging women and communities with diverse experiences of violence, recognising that insights from victim-survivors across all forms of violence can strengthen prevention initiatives and improve system responses.

Priority Area 2 : Prevention and Early Intervention

WHEQ considers that prevention is most effective when linked to broader service systems, including health, education, community and specialist family violence sectors. It further considers that maintaining clarity about the unique purpose of primary prevention is critical to ensure efforts to address drivers of violence are not diluted.

Long-term investment is also essential to ensuring that violence prevention initiatives with demonstrable impact can continue to deliver meaningful outcomes and build safer, more equitable communities across the lifespan of the plan. Impactful and effective programs require stable and sustained funding to maintain skilled workforces, strengthen partnerships, scale and deepen community reach and embed sustainability to end gender-based violence.

At the same time, chronic underfunding of the prevention sector has limited opportunities for innovation and the development of new approaches and evidence development. A comprehensive investment plan must balance ongoing support for proven programs with a clear commitment to testing, evaluating, and scaling innovative and emerging initiatives that address the gendered drivers of violence. Especially so those that support diverse communities. To this end, WHEQ recommends that investment should be guided by an intersectional lens and include dedicated support for programs designed with, by and for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, LGBTIQ+ people (for example, the implementation of the Our Watch and Rainbow Health Australia Framework to prevent violence against LGBTIQ+ people and communities), people from refugee and migrant backgrounds, people living with disabilities, and children and young people to recognise that experiences of violence and access to prevention initiatives are not uniform. By investing in both established and emerging approaches, governments can strengthen the overall prevention ecosystem and ensure that responses remain relevant, inclusive, and responsive to changing community needs.

How can governments, communities, schools, workplaces, online platforms and others better support people to recognise and respond to harmful attitudes and behaviours?

Government, communities, schools, workplaces, online platforms, and other institutions all play important, reinforcing roles in creating environments where harmful attitudes and behaviours are recognised early and addressed effectively. To do this well and comprehensively, WHEQ believes a coordinated approach should be outlined that combines education, clear standards of behaviour, and practical opportunities to build skills and confidence to intervene safely. Specifically:

- Governments can support this through investment in evidence-based primary prevention initiatives, public awareness campaigns, and workforce capability development.
- Schools and workplaces can embed respectful relationships, gender equality, and inclusion into policies, practices, and everyday culture, while online platforms can strengthen measures to prevent, identify, and respond to harmful content and abuse.

Of equal importance is empowering individuals and communities with the knowledge, language, and bystander skills needed to challenge harmful attitudes, support those affected, and promote positive social norms. Tailoring these strategies and supports to diverse communities and informed by those with lived experience will support responses that are culturally safe, accessible, and relevant.

By fostering collective responsibility and consistent messaging across all of these settings, it is WHEQ's view that whole-of-community capacity to prevent violence will be greatly strengthened across the lifespan of the National Plan.

What prevention and early intervention approaches appear most promising or effective, and what is needed to strengthen or expand them?

Evidence based, comprehensive consent and respectful relationships education is a clear approach that offers opportunity for expansion and what WHEQ would contest should be universally accessed by young people. The evidence for respectful relationship education is clear. Building on the Australian Government's investment in Consent and Respectful Relationships Education (CRRE), the priority now is sustained national leadership, investment, and system-wide coordination to support consistent implementation of primary prevention across Australian schools. This investment should include resourcing for the curriculum to be updated and regularly reviewed, program evaluation and standardisation and for teaching qualifications to include appropriate professional training. In review of programs there should be scope to allow for young people and community to drive or adapt programs for their community needs.

What emerging issues should the Second Action Plan address in relation to primary prevention and early intervention?

WHEQ is increasingly concerned by the ways digital platforms are being used to normalise harmful gender attitudes, amplify anti-women narratives, radicalise boys and young men, and enable new forms of coercion, harassment, surveillance and abuse. WHEQ facilitators of consent and respectful relationship education within secondary school settings are increasingly engaging with young people who have experienced online forms of abuse, with experiences of surveillance and harassment particularly common. These online environments can also reinforce rigid gender norms, legitimise violence-supportive beliefs, and undermine decades of investment in gender equality and violence prevention.

The Second Action Plan provides opportunity to address these emerging issues through appropriate regulation of digital platforms, improved accountability for harmful content and algorithms, investment in digital literacy and early prevention initiatives, and enhanced research and monitoring of online trends.

A comprehensive and coordinated response is essential to ensure that technological innovation does not outpace our capacity to protect communities from harm and to prevent the escalation of gender-based violence in both online and offline settings.

WHEQ also supports the criticality of programs that support behaviour change in people using violence and prevention programs that support men and boys. It does though consider that there must be a clear set of minimum standards that are grounded in evidence, accountability and best practice. These standards are essential to ensure programs are informed by a robust understanding of the gendered drivers of violence, prioritise victim-survivor safety, and are delivered by appropriately trained and supervised practitioners. Without consistent quality requirements, there is a risk that programs may inadvertently reinforce harmful gender stereotypes, excuse abusive behaviour, minimise responsibility for violence, or promote attitudes that undermine gender equality. Establishing minimum standards would support program integrity, strengthen outcomes, enable consistent evaluation, and ensure investment is directed towards interventions that contribute to meaningful and lasting behaviour change while advancing the broader goal of preventing violence against women and girls.

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

While WHEQ does not currently provide direct DVFS healing and recovery services to children, it recognises the significant opportunity to strengthen both the sector's and government's recognition of children and young people as victim-survivors of domestic and family violence in their own right, rather

than solely as witnesses to violence experienced by a parent. While considerable progress has been made in acknowledging the impacts of DFV on children - policy, funding and service responses continue to be largely centred on adult victim-survivors. Strengthening the system and sectors response would broadly require:

- dedicated investment in children and youth-focused specialist DFSV services
- greater integration between the violence, child protection, education, health and mental health systems
- the routine inclusion of children's voices in service design, policy development and safety planning
- workforce capability uplift to recognise the unique ways children and young people experience coercive control, trauma and technology-facilitated abuse
- recovery responses extend beyond crisis intervention to support long-term healing, wellbeing and resilience from childhood through adolescence and into adulthood

By embedding a child-centred and trauma-informed approach across the service system, governments, services, education settings, families and communities are better placed to recognise children and young people as victim-survivors whose experiences, safety and recovery needs warrant dedicated consideration and investment.

Priority Area 4: People who use violence

As earlier offered, it is WHEQ's view that the single greatest enabler of preventing violence before it occurs is through sustained, long-term investment in primary prevention that shifts the gendered drivers of violence across schools, workplaces, sporting clubs and communities. It is the deliberate embedding of:

- comprehensive consent and respectful relationships education throughout childhood and adolescence
- strengthening both policy and practice for workplace action on gender equality and sexual harassment
- supporting the scale and continuation of sport and community-led initiatives that challenge harmful gender stereotypes and rigid norms

The culmination of these strategies being the curation of environments where equality, respect and shared power are reinforced through institutions, policies and everyday social norms. Where respectful, equitable relationships are the norm rather than the exception.

While recognising that WHEQ does not hold specific expertise in responding to the use of violence, broadly we support the strengthening of integrated systems that identify, intervene and ensure early accountability and behaviour change before behaviours escalate. This could include the extension of perpetrator early intervention programs, increasing workforce capability across health, education and community services to recognise and respond to signs of coercive control and abusive behaviour, and creating greater pathways for men to seek support to change their behaviour before violence occurs and becomes entrenched.

Priority Area 5: System integration and workforce

It is WHEQ's belief that an effective, well-coordinated and trauma-informed system response is one that delivers an integrated, whole-of-system approach that center's victim-survivor safety while

holding people who use violence accountable. It is also one necessarily predicated by ongoing, sustained and precise investment.

There is opportunity to strengthen the architecture that provides for streamlined information sharing, risk assessment and cross-sector collaboration between family violence services, health, mental health, alcohol and other drugs, housing, child and family services, education, justice, and police services. In our experience, too often women who are affected by violence and who our services support, are required to navigate multiple systems, repeat their story, and manage complex, dislocated service responses. This is neither safe nor supportive and carries the high risk of extending or causing further harm while stifling healing and recovery from violence.

Establishing consistent risk assessment frameworks, shared referral pathways, and place-based, integrated multi-agency responses would enable earlier identification of risk, reduce service gaps, and ensure people access timely and synchronised support regardless of where they first seek help.

A stronger system response must also recognise that addressing violence against women and children requires a dual focus on supporting victim-survivors and intervening effectively with people who use violence. Greater alignment between specialist family violence services, men's behaviour change programs, corrections, courts and community services would support more consistent responses and reduce opportunities for perpetrators to disengage from support or avoid accountability.

A stronger system response must also include further investment into Aboriginal community-controlled organisations, diverse communities who experience additional barriers to support, and embedding survivor voice and lived experience expertise in service design and system reform. A coordinated response is not simply about improving service integration; it is about creating a system where prevention, early intervention, crisis response and recovery are connected, culturally safe, trauma-informed and centred on the needs of those affected by violence.

Concluding comments

WHEQ welcomes the continued Government commitment to ending gender-based violence and appreciates the opportunity to provide input on these important issues. Meaningful and sustainable progress will require sustained investment, cross-sector collaboration, and a continued focus on the experiences of those most impacted by violence, including women, children and young people.

We look forward to seeing ongoing efforts to strengthen prevention, early intervention and recovery responses, and to working collectively towards a system that is accessible, evidence-informed and responsive to the diverse needs of victim-survivors across Queensland. Thank you for the opportunity to contribute to this consultation.