



Submission

National Plan to End Violence against Women and Children: Second Action Plan Submission *July 2026*

Introduction

YACSA is an independent, member-based peak body representing the interests of young people aged 12–25 years and the youth sector that supports them. At the core of our systemic advocacy is social justice and upholding young people's human rights. YACSA aims to achieve meaningful improvements in the quality of young people's lives and advocates for the fundamental right of young people to contribute to all aspects of community life, particularly decision-making processes that impact them. We also recognise the distinct challenges young people face when engaging in these processes.

YACSA welcomes the opportunity to participate in consultation on the Second Action Plan for the National Plan to End Violence against Women and Children 2022–2032 and believe our response can assist to ensure action needed to end violence against women and children (VAWC) and gender-based violence (GBV) continues to progress.

Young people in context

It is vital to recognise and acknowledge the distinct experiences of young people today who, while undergoing significant developmental changes, are also facing vastly different economic, social, environmental and civil circumstances to previous generations. It is within this context that young people are not only at greater risk of experiencing violence but also perpetrating violence. Evidence shows that an assumption that young people would develop better understandings of and attitudes towards gender inequality and VAWC/GBV have not been directly realised in some key areas and so young people continue to hold misinformed beliefs and attitudes that are drivers of this violence.

In South Australia the importance of this context is supported by findings from recent analysis that found a greater proportion of children and young people who experienced VAWC/GBV lived in Playford, Salisbury, Eyre Peninsula and South West as well as Outback North and Eastⁱ with each area ranking as a disadvantaged area on the Index of Relative Socio-Economic Disadvantageⁱⁱ. The need to focus on young people is also supported by this analysis which found those most likely to experience VAWC/GBV were young people aged 13–15 yearsⁱⁱⁱ. Through the recent South Australian Royal Commission into Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence young people clearly communicated their desire to feel safe, be believed and have access to age-appropriate services and supports^{iv}.

Overall existing efforts to prevent, intervene in and respond to VAWC/GBV as well as targeted support for young people impacted remain significantly limited across South Australia with young people in South Australia struggling to engage with a system designed by and for adults^v.

Priority 1: Victim-survivors

The need to improve system responses to young people who have experienced VAWC/GBV along with the need to better understand and improve age-appropriate approaches were acknowledged in the National Plan to End Violence against Women and Children 2022-2032. Current responses do not adequately support young people and opportunities for improvement in practices have been highlighted in previous consultations^{vi}.

School environments

While school environments represent an opportunity to support young people who are victim-survivors, evidence indicates these young people avoid school^{vii}. This is largely due to difficulties attending and engaging in schooling, distrust of adults transferring from the home to school environment, concern for isolation, disconnection and significant life changes as well as impacts on young people's physical and mental health^{viii}. Young people who are victim-survivors can also struggle to engage with education within an unsafe home environment including due to risks to their physical and mental safety and other disruption following violent incidents. Additionally, they can struggle to gain healthy peer relationships and experience a lack of trust, low self-esteem and anxiety over failing^{ix}. Nevertheless, young people do disclose their experiences of VAWC/GBV and they do seek support in school environments. It is vital that disclosures from young people receive an adequate and age-appropriate trauma-informed response^x. Further evidence and co-designed development on achieving an embedded multi-tiered trauma-informed response within the school environment is needed^{xi}.

As part of the South Australian Royal Commission into Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence's consultation with children and young people school-based, trauma-informed counselling and peer support (like youth workers) who are embedded in the school environment was included as an important aspect of system reform^{xii}.

Priority 2: Prevention and early intervention

Evidence shows us that a key driver of VAWC/GBV is attitudes, beliefs and understandings that dismiss, endorse or support gender inequality and this violence. Attitudes and understandings held by young people have improved but there are exceptions with young people falling behind in understanding the gendered nature of violence, the responsibility of perpetrating violence and the acceptability of violence as a response to day-to-day stress^{xiii}.

Effective prevention and early intervention would see young people at risk of or using violence identified early and able to access intervention that includes holistic supports for a young person and their family or support network. There is currently a lack of youth-specific services available for young people at risk of or using violence that provides adequate holistic, culturally safe, trauma-informed, inclusive and accessible intervention that would reduce further harm. Effective prevention and early intervention require a whole-of-government commitment to collaboration and accountability across key areas including child protection, youth justice, health services and education^P.

Media literacy

Increased misogynistic rhetoric, particularly online, continues to impact young people. This rhetoric seeks to further the view that men are victims of gender equality and to improve general life satisfaction society needs to strengthen patriarchy and rigid gender roles^{xiv}. Engaging with these harmful online communities and their content, like 'the manosphere', sees young people be more likely to hold beliefs and attitudes that undermine gender equality, reinforce gender stereotypes and therefore VAWC/GBV^{xv}. Building an understanding of these online communities and their content,

how they increasingly use algorithms to their advantage and critical digital media literacy skills are essential to protect young people and reduce risk of radicalisation and violence^{xvi}. This is especially relevant in the context of the social media ban that acts as a barrier for young people seeking support for harmful content they may see.

Improving prevention and early intervention

Prevention and early intervention efforts targeting young people can be strengthened by ensuring they take a relationship-centred approach that recognises the importance of trust, meaningful and ongoing engagement and support^{xvii}.

Effective prevention efforts that consist of educational initiatives should be co-designed with young people to provide inclusive, intersectional and continuous age-appropriate learning opportunities^{xviii}. Prevention education should also aim to incorporate psychosocial education, accessible and appropriate language, and a non-judgemental approach^{xix}. At the same time, prevention education needs to be current and incorporate emerging trends especially including changes in digital and online spaces to ensure young people understand and are supported to safely navigate these spaces^{xx}. Evidence suggests that young people need to develop understandings of what constitutes violence especially regarding non-physical forms of violence like technology-facilitated monitoring and stalking behaviours which is especially important as developing evidence shows non-physical forms of violence facilitate physical and sexual violence^{xxi}. Additionally, young people need greater support to understand consent, the impacts of harmful gender norms and power dynamics as well as sexual violence that does not focus on legality but frames consent as ongoing communication^{xxii}. Lastly, it is essential to recognise the value of relational and holistic contributions of youth workers and peers in promoting positive outcomes in prevention.

For early intervention to be effective efforts must include addressing underlying risk factors experienced by young people at risk of or using VAWC/GBV including housing insecurity and homelessness, mental health and wellbeing challenges, disengagement from education, and social isolation^{xxiii}. Much like with victim-survivors, young people who disclose use of VAWC/GBV to trusted adults require an adequate and age-appropriate trauma-informed response that supports their recovery^{xxiv}. Early intervention should incorporate youth-specific service settings to ensure support is accessible, culturally safe, intersectional, holistic and able to provide a supported pathway towards age-appropriate behaviour change programs when needed^{xxv}. By utilising a holistic approach to young people at risk or using violence services can address underlying needs that risk use of violence and therefore interrupt intergenerational impacts of VAWC/GBV^{xxvi}.

A profound lack of youth-specific VAWC/GBV services in South Australia was highlighted in recent work for the state Royal Commission on Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence with young people reporting they continue to be treated as extensions of caregivers rather than autonomous individuals. This issue is currently impacting many aspects of services including intake processes being adult-focused, services excluding based on age (particular for young people under 16 years) and the impact of lacking youth-specific mental health and housing support^{xxvii}. This work called for a whole-of-system reform in South Australia including to embed trauma-informed age-appropriate responses across all services, ensure youth-specific and culturally safe pathways to safety, recovery and healing exist and build proactive early intervention systems to identify and respond to violence before crisis.

Priority 3: Children and young people in their own right

Gaps in evidence

There is an existing gap in evidence focused on young people's use and experience of VAWC/GBV. There is a comparative lack of research on young women's experiences of VAWC/GBV leading to their experiences being included with child or adult experiences despite the unique developmental stage they are experiencing^{xxviii}. Additionally, research to understand young men as perpetrators and therefore effective interventions to address harmful attitudes and behaviours is also lacking^{xxix}.

Young men who use violence have distinct risk factors and therefore require distinct intervention to address their behaviour alongside their individual needs including mental health or substance use support, homelessness supports and support for those disengaged from education^{xxx}. Recent evidence highlights the need for young people to be engaged by youth-specific services they have an existing relationship with to sustain engagement and work towards accountability while reducing harm and risk of violence^{xxxi}. To adequately respond to young men's use of violence age-appropriate intervention that is individualised and trauma-informed needs to be explored and developed. Preferably such a response would be developed to be embedded within existing youth-specific services that are able to provide multidisciplinary intervention that meet the holistic needs of a young person and provide support to develop healthy communication, conflict navigation and emotional regulation skills. Importantly, shame and guilt about using VAWC/GBV is also a barrier to young men accessing intervention that could lead to engagement behaviour change learning. This highlights the need for youth-specific responses to be non-judgemental and trauma-informed to effectively engage these young people sustainably.

South Australian context

Consultation undertaken with children and young people as part of the South Australian Royal Commission into Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence identified the need for whole-of-system reform co-designed with young people that includes youth-specific domestic and sexual violence services, mandatory trauma-informed training for educators, child protection and response service providers, confidential youth-specific help-seeking options, emergency housing and financial independence pathways, school-based trauma-informed counselling and peer support and age-appropriate prevention education^{xxxii}.

Using lived experience

Part of genuinely recognising young people as victim-survivors, witnesses and perpetrators in their own right is providing services developed by and for them specifically. This is best achieved by ensuring those with lived experience are involved in the development of approaches, responses and services. However, it is important that young people have existing support and are further adequately supported to engage in these processes.

Current approaches to involving young people with lived experience in these processes remain inconsistent^{xxxiii}. There is a present lack of consideration for the distinction between 'lived experience' meaning past experience of VAWC/GBV as a young person and 'living experience' meaning current ongoing experience of VAWC/GBV as a young person. There are also risks to involving young people with lived or especially living experience of VAWC/GBV that must be considered in the design of research and decision-making processes^{xxxiv}.

To allow safe and genuine youth participation efforts must include informed consent, confidentiality and work to identify and mitigate risks of psychological distress or harm by providing structured support for young people^{xxxv}.

Emerging issues

As mentioned in consultation papers prevalence of sexual violence has increased. Recent data on youth offenders (under 18 years) proceeded against (including formal caution, conference or penalty notice) for sexual offences indicates most young people (42 per cent) were proceeded against for child sexual abuse material (CSAM) offences. Of young women proceeded against, over 70 per cent were for CSAM offences^{xxxvi}. This could be due to the electronic sharing of self-produced images and video content with peers^{xxxvii}.

Due to the emerging issue of technology-facilitated abuse, the current social media ban, and evidence that young people do not find existing education on sharing intimate images and videos to be fit for purpose, there is an urgent need to strengthen the evidence base on young people's experiences in this context.

This evidence and the further involvement of young people should inform the development of effective prevention, early intervention, and responses. These approaches must recognise the complex legality present while focusing on developing young people's understanding of respect, safety, and consent^{xxxviii}.

Recommendations

1. **Commission dedicated research** to build the evidence base on the distinct experiences of young people violence against women and children and gender-based violence (GBV), ensuring research informs age-appropriate prevention, early intervention and response strategies.
2. **Fund the increase and evaluation of evidence-based prevention programs** for young people including respectful relationships education and proven community-based models, like those delivered by Power Community Limited, to reduce the drivers of gender-based violence before harmful behaviours emerge.
3. **Invest in youth-specific early intervention services** for young people at risk of using, or who are using, violence, delivering holistic, culturally safe and trauma-informed support that addresses the underlying risk factors.
4. **Fund the development and implementation of individualised, trauma-informed behaviour change programs** that are designed specifically for young people, embedded within youth-specific services, and not directly adapted from adult behaviour change models.
5. **Establish minimum standards for lived experience engagement** across policy, research and service design, including requirements for informed consent, confidentiality, clear distinction between lived and living experience, and access to structured psychological support before, during and after participation.
6. **Invest in further research on technology-facilitated abuse** specific to young people experience to strengthen evidence and inform the development of contemporary, evidence-based education on image-based abuse, sexting, consent and digital safety.
7. **Fund evidence-based digital media literacy initiatives** that are co-designed with young people and equip them to critically engage with online content, address the influence of manosphere-style narratives and algorithm-driven radicalisation, and are co-designed with young people to ensure relevance and effectiveness.



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