

Submission

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

July 2026



Contents

Executive summary.....	2
About Youth Off The Streets	3
Introduction	4
Responses to National Plan priority areas	4
Priority area: Prevention and early intervention.....	4
Priority area: Services and support	7
Priority area: Children and young people	9
Priority area: People who use violence	10
Priority area: Recovery and healing	11
Priority area: Access to support.....	12
Conclusion.....	13

Executive summary

Youth Off The Streets welcomes the opportunity to make a submission to the Second Action Plan consultation on the National Plan to End Violence against Women and Children 2022–2032.

As an organisation working alongside some of Australia's most vulnerable young people, Youth Off The Streets sees firsthand the devastating impact that domestic, family and sexual violence (DFSV) has on young people and families.

DFSV is a key driver of youth homelessness, disengagement from education, poor mental health, substance use, involvement with the justice system and long-term social disadvantage. Many of the young people we support have experienced violence directly, been exposed to violence within the home, or grown up believing that violence is a normal part of family and intimate relationships.

In 2025, 90% of young people accessing Youth Off The Streets' crisis accommodation service identified DFSV as a primary reason for seeking support. Across our six Special Assistance Schools, 64% of students received support from our specialist DFSV team, while an estimated 90% had experienced the impacts of DFSV.

While the National Plan has strengthened the national response to violence against women and children, young people continue to be under-recognised as victim-survivors in their own right. Too often they are viewed solely as dependants to victims or witnesses to DFSV, rather than individuals with their own experiences, risks and support needs beyond that of standard child protection processes. As a result, significant gaps persist in prevention, service delivery, early intervention, housing, recovery and behavioural intervention programs for young people.

Youth Off The Streets' central recommendation is that the Second Action Plan explicitly embed a dedicated youth focus across all actions, funding priorities, performance measures and reporting frameworks.

To achieve this, Youth Off The Streets recommends that the Australian Government:

1. Increase investment in youth-focused prevention and early intervention programs, including respectful relationships, consent and DFSV education across all schools.
2. Expand specialist DFSV capability across youth homelessness, education, health and youth justice services.
3. Improve integration between child protection, justice, education, housing and domestic and family violence systems.
4. Develop safe accommodation pathways and housing responses specifically for young people escaping from DFSV.

5. Fund specialist therapeutic and recovery supports for young people affected by violence, with improved access through streamlined referrals, digital services and simpler income support and housing pathways.
6. Establish youth-specific interventions for young people who use DFSV, recognising their distinct developmental and trauma-related needs.
7. Strengthen national data collection and reporting on children's and young people's experiences of violence to better inform policy and service responses.

The Second Action Plan presents an important opportunity to strengthen Australia's response to DFSV by recognising that prevention starts early, recovery takes time and young people require dedicated, age-appropriate responses. By investing in youth-focused prevention, intervention, housing and recovery initiatives, the Australian Government can help break intergenerational cycles of violence and build safer futures for young people, families and communities.

Youth Off The Streets urges the government to place young people aged 12–24 at the centre of the Second Action Plan alongside women and younger children, recognising that adolescence and early adulthood are critical periods for prevention, early intervention and breaking cycles of domestic, family and sexual violence. The government must ensure this cohort is visible, heard and supported across every aspect of the National Plan's implementation.

About Youth Off The Streets

Youth Off The Streets is a non-government organisation that has supported children and young people experiencing or at risk of homelessness, school disengagement, contact with the justice system, DFSV and other forms of complex disadvantage for over 30 years.

We provide homelessness and housing support, accredited alternative education pathways, First Nations services, youth justice programs, DFSV education programs and specialist support, casework, alcohol and other drug counselling and place-based outreach, among other services.

Introduction

In our submission to the First Action Plan consultation in 2022, Youth Off The Streets highlighted that children and young people are too often viewed as witnesses to DFSV, rather than victim-survivors in their own right. Young people's experiences of DFSV remain under-recognised, despite the significant impact violence has on their safety, development, mental health, housing stability, education and future relationships.

Through our Special Assistance Schools, youth homelessness and housing services, youth outreach and engagement programs, Youth Off The Streets works every day with young people who have experienced DFSV, many of whom have grown up in homes where abuse, coercive control and neglect have been normalised. Our experience demonstrates that prevention, early intervention and recovery must be tailored to the unique needs of young people aged 12–24 if Australia is to achieve the goals of the National Plan.

Responses to National Plan priority areas

Priority area: Prevention and early intervention

DFSV sits at the heart of the disadvantage experienced by many of the young people we support. Last year, 90% of young people accessing our crisis accommodation service identified DFSV as a major factor in their homelessness or housing instability, and almost two-thirds of students across our six special assistance high schools received support from our specialist DFSV team. These are not isolated cases. They reflect a systemic issue that is driving trauma, disengagement and vulnerability for some of the state's most at-risk young people.

In addition, without early prevention efforts, DFSV experiences become normalised and influence future relationships and behaviours. Youth Off The Streets' experience delivering our Power Within program demonstrates that young people often do not recognise abusive behaviours until they receive education and support to understand healthy relationships.

Power Within: DFSV youth education program

A central part of Youth Off The Streets' early intervention response is Power Within, a 10-week DFSV education program delivered through our seven Special Assistance Schools. The program helps young people recognise the cycle of violence, identify warning signs of abuse and coercive control, understand consent and healthy relationships, and develop practical safety and communication strategies.

Importantly, Power Within is continually updated to reflect the realities young people are navigating, including online abuse, social media influences, gender dynamics and the impact of pornography on relationships. By increasing young people's understanding of violence and its warning signs, the program helps challenge the normalisation of abusive behaviours and equips young people to seek help before situations reach crisis point.

What sets Power Within apart is the continuum of care that surrounds the program. Unlike one-off awareness sessions, Power Within is supported by specialist DFSV workers embedded within Youth Off The Streets schools, providing ongoing support when disclosures occur. Staff are trained to recognise changes in behaviour, respond safely to disclosures and connect young people with tailored support, including safety planning.

While delivering DFSV education in schools is important, awareness alone is not enough. Programs, guest speakers and curriculum content can encourage young people to recognise abuse and begin conversations about their experiences. However, without specialist DFSV practitioners embedded within schools, there is a risk that disclosures are not responded to safely or appropriately.

The success of Power Within demonstrates the value of having dedicated DFSV specialists on the ground. Embedded specialists build trusted relationships with young people over time, creating safe opportunities for disclosure and helping reduce the shame and stigma often associated with experiences of violence. They are skilled in recognising indicators of DFSV, responding in trauma-informed ways and supporting young people to develop safety plans before situations escalate.

In 2025, 177 Youth Off The Streets students received specialist support through the DFSV team, while practical safety plans were developed for 48 young people living with active violence at home. Power Within has also helped young people recognise abuse within their families, support non-offending parents to seek help and access interventions earlier, before violence escalates into homelessness, family breakdown or long-term disadvantage.

Power Within demonstrates the critical role that youth-specific education, prevention and early intervention programs play in reducing violence and improving safety outcomes for children and young people.

Prevention and early intervention recommendations

1. Establish a dedicated national funding stream for youth-focused prevention programs

The Australian Government should invest in the development and delivery through youth and community services organisations of evidence-based programs that support young people to recognise and respond to violence.

2. Mandate respectful relationships education in all schools

The Australian Government should work with states and territories to mandate age-appropriate education on respectful relationships, consent, coercive control, gender equality, online abuse and pornography literacy from primary through secondary school.

3. Dedicated DFSV specialists in schools

Teaching young people about DFSV is important, but awareness alone is not prevention. Without specialist support in schools, disclosures may be missed, mishandled or responded to in ways that increase risk or discourage future help-seeking.

Programs like Power Within (see above) demonstrate the value of having dedicated DFSV specialists embedded in schools. These practitioners build trusted relationships, recognise early signs of abuse, respond in trauma-informed ways and help young people develop safety plans before situations escalate. This enables earlier intervention and creates safer pathways to support for young people experiencing violence.

4. Fund peer-led prevention initiatives

Young people are more likely to engage with programs that are informed and delivered by their peers. Dedicated funding should support the growth of a youth peer workforce in DFSV prevention.

5. Require youth co-design of national prevention campaigns

National awareness campaigns should be co-designed with young people, victim–survivors, First Nations young people, LGBTQIA+ young people and young people with disability to ensure messaging is relevant and effective.

6. Develop a National Youth Domestic and Family Violence Strategy

A dedicated strategy would ensure young people's experiences remain visible and prioritised across future policy and funding decisions.

Priority area: Services and support

There remains a significant service gap for young people experiencing violence. Historically, DFSV responses have been designed for adult women and their children, leaving many young people without appropriate age-specific support.

Young people often seek help from homelessness services, schools and youth services long before they engage with specialist DFSV services. In 2025, nine in ten young people accessing Youth Off The Streets homelessness services identified DFSV as a major reason for needing assistance. These frontline settings are often the first point of disclosure and support and should be recognised as critical components of Australia's DFSV response system.

Taking Action Creating Change Together (TACCT): Sector training program

Young people impacted by DFSV often disclose their experiences to teachers, youth workers, caseworkers or other trusted adults before they engage with specialist services. However, many frontline professionals report feeling underprepared to recognise the signs of DFSV, respond appropriately to disclosures or connect young people with the supports they need. Inconsistent responses can leave young people unsupported, increase their risk of ongoing harm and reinforce distrust in adults and services.

To address this gap, Youth Off The Streets developed Taking Action Creating Change Together (TACCT), a two-day training program that builds the capability of youth sector professionals to recognise, respond, refer and empower children and young people impacted by DFSV. The program is delivered to youth workers, teachers, psychologists, homelessness practitioners, caseworkers and managers across the youth and community services sectors.

TACCT provides participants with practical knowledge and skills to identify the signs of DFSV, understand the impact of trauma, respond safely to disclosures and undertake appropriate safety planning and referral pathways. The program covers issues including grooming, intimate partner violence among young people, power and control, sexual violence, risk assessment, attachment theory, adverse childhood experiences and trauma-informed practice.

Importantly, TACCT was co-designed with young people with lived experience of violence, whose feedback highlighted that disclosures are too often dismissed or not acted upon. By strengthening the confidence and capability of frontline workers, TACCT helps ensure that young people's

disclosures are met with belief, empathy and action, creating earlier opportunities for intervention and reducing the likelihood of harm escalating into crisis.

A second sector training program, When Harm and Harm Exposure Intersect, has recently been developed by Youth Off The Streets. It builds on trauma-informed foundations to explore the complex reality that children and young people may be both victim–survivors of violence and use violence themselves as a learned response to trauma and exposure to harm (see **People who use violence** below).

Services and support recommendations

1. Fund DFSV capacity-building in youth and community services sectors

Expand investment in evidence-based training programs (see **TACCT** above) that equip sector workers with the knowledge and skills to provide appropriate responses to young people impacted by DFSV, recognising their distinct developmental and trauma-related needs.

2. Fund specialist DFSV workers within youth services nationally

All youth homelessness services, youth justice services and youth refuges should be funded to employ specialist DFSV workers.

3. Create integrated youth support hubs

Young people should be able to access housing, health, education, legal and DFSV services through coordinated, place-based service models such as Youth Hubs.

4. Increase investment in youth homelessness services

Given the strong relationship between DFSV and youth homelessness, specialist homelessness services require additional funding to respond to increasing demand and complexity.

5. Improve national data collection and information sharing

The Australian Government should establish nationally consistent DFSV data collection across youth, homelessness, child protection, health and justice systems.

6. Establish minimum national service standards

The Australian Government should develop national standards for youth DFSV responses covering risk assessment, trauma-informed practice, safety planning and service coordination.

Priority area: Children and young people

Children and young people must be recognised as DFSV victim–survivors in their own right rather than solely as dependants of adult victim–survivors. Exposure to violence significantly impacts their development, mental health, educational engagement and long-term wellbeing.

Children and young people recommendations

1. Explicitly recognise children and young people as victim–survivors throughout the National Plan

Future action plans should include dedicated outcomes, indicators and investment for older children and young people aged 12–24, recognising that adolescence and early adulthood are critical periods for prevention, early intervention and breaking cycles of DFSV.

2. Introduce universal early identification and screening

Schools, youth services, health services and justice agencies should be trained and supported to identify young people experiencing DFSV and connect them with specialist support.

3. Expand safe accommodation options for young people

Government should develop dedicated accommodation pathways for adolescents and young people, including young males who are frequently unable to access family violence accommodation.

4. Fund specialist therapeutic recovery programs

Children and young people require trauma-informed counselling and recovery services that recognise the developmental impacts of DFSV.

5. Establish a National Youth DFSV Advisory Group

Young people with lived experience should help guide implementation of the Second Action Plan and future reforms.

New Day Haymarket: Youth housing service

Youth Off The Streets has partnered with Habitat for Humanity Australia to deliver the first youth-specific housing service in NSW for unaccompanied young people escaping from DFSV.

Young people aged 16–25 who become homeless due to DFSV face a critical lack of safe, age-appropriate transitional housing in NSW. Existing services are often not tailored to their developmental needs or unique circumstances, leaving them vulnerable to long-term homelessness and disadvantage.

In addition to secure accommodation, young people require skilled, specialist support to address the causes of their homelessness, recover from their trauma and rebuild their lives.

The New Day youth housing project will be located in Haymarket in the heart of Sydney, using the vacant floor of a multi-use building. The design concept has been tailored to meet the needs of young people living with trauma experiences, providing the privacy to address their individual recovery goals in self-contained units, while also creating a sense of community and social cohesion through the inclusion of co-living spaces and onsite support.

The service is projected to provide housing and trauma-informed wraparound support to a minimum of 30 young people and any dependent children across years 1–4, with most tenants expected to stay for 12–18 months.

In addition, Youth Off The Streets will deliver an outreach service, expanding community impact to a further 200+ young people at risk of homelessness due to DFSV across years 1–4.

Supporting young people to develop their independent living skills and capabilities to maintain an independent tenancy is a core goal of the support delivered through New Day Haymarket. This will open exit pathways to long-term social or private market housing and empower young people to be active citizens in their community.

With the strength and expertise of Youth Off The Streets' youth support services behind it, New Day Haymarket will provide a safe place to heal – and a launchpad for driving meaningful change for unaccompanied young people whose lives have been impacted by DFSV.

Priority area: People who use violence

Youth Off The Streets supports strong accountability for people who use violence. At the same time, responses for adolescents and young people must recognise the role that trauma, exposure to violence and developmental factors often play in their behaviour.

Many young people who use violence have experienced violence themselves. Early intervention offers the best opportunity to prevent lifelong patterns of abusive behaviour.

People who use violence recommendations

1. Develop youth-specific behaviour change programs

Governments should fund specialist programs for adolescents using violence against family members, intimate partners or peers.

2. Ensure young people are not routinely placed in adult behaviour change programs

Young people require developmentally appropriate interventions tailored to their needs and circumstances.

3. Expand early intervention responses within schools and youth services

Schools and youth organisations should have pathways to identify and respond to harmful behaviours before violence escalates.

4. Commission national research on adolescent violence

Further evidence is required to strengthen policy and service responses for young people using violence.

Taking Action Creating Change Together (TACCT) – When Harm and Harm Exposure Intersect: Sector training program

This specialised youth sector workshop has been developed by Youth Off The Streets to build on the trauma-informed foundations of TACCT (see above) and explore the nuanced dual reality where children and young people may be both victim–survivors of violence and choosing to use violence themselves as learned behaviour.

This is not a behaviour change intervention program. Rather, it supports practitioners to navigate complex conversations, gently challenge problematic narratives in real time and respond safely while holding space for the young person’s lived experience and trauma history.

Priority area: Recovery and healing

Recovery from DFSV is not achieved once immediate safety has been established. Many young people require years of support to overcome the effects of trauma, homelessness, disrupted education and social isolation resulting from experiences of DFSV.

Recovery and healing recommendations

1. Guarantee access to long-term trauma-informed counselling for young people impacted by DFSV

Access to counselling should not depend on location, income or service availability.

2. Increase investment in transitional and long-term housing

Safe and affordable housing remains essential to lasting recovery and reducing the risk of returning to unsafe environments. (See **New Day Haymarket** above.)

4. Support education, employment and mentoring pathways

Education and employment are critical protective factors that improve long-term wellbeing and social participation.

5. Ensure culturally safe and inclusive recovery services

Services must appropriately support First Nations, LGBTQIA+, culturally diverse and disability communities.

Priority area: Access to support

Young people consistently describe shame, fear, stigma and lack of awareness as significant barriers to seeking help. Many do not identify their experiences as abuse and are uncertain where to turn for support.

Access to support recommendations

1. Develop a nationally consistent youth referral pathway

Schools, health services, police, homelessness services and community organisations should have clear referral pathways supported by warm referral processes.

2. Expand youth-specific digital and after-hours support

Many young people seek help online before approaching a formal service. Government should invest in accessible digital support pathways.

3. Reform income support pathways for young people escaping violence

Centrelink and housing support processes, including Unreasonable to Live at Home assessments, should be streamlined and fast-tracked for young people leaving DFSV situations.

Conclusion

Domestic, family and sexual violence against women and children cannot be ended without recognising and responding to the unique experiences of children and young people. Young people are not simply witnesses to DFSV or future adults at risk of harm – they are victim–survivors today.

The Second Action Plan presents an opportunity to strengthen prevention, improve early intervention, expand youth-specific service responses, invest in housing and recovery and ensure that young people remain visible across all aspects of Australia's response to DFSV.

Youth Off The Streets urges the Australian Government to adopt a dedicated youth focus within the Second Action Plan and invest in evidence-based, youth-specific approaches that support safety, recovery and long-term wellbeing for children and young people affected by DFSV.

For enquiries about this submission, please contact:

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]