



Submission by Warringah MP Zali Steggall on the Second Action Plan under the National Plan to End Violence against Women and Children 2022–2032

10 August 2026

Executive summary

I welcome the Australian Government's [consultation on the Second Action Plan](#) under the National Plan to End Violence against Women and Children 2022–2032, and provide this submission for consideration as the Plan is finalised.

Violence against women and children remains a national emergency. Australia does not lack evidence about what needs to change. We have national plans, inquiries, reviews and hundreds of initiatives. The challenge is turning that evidence into a connected system that prevents violence, intervenes earlier, supports victim-survivors to be safe and recover, and holds people who use violence accountable.

The scale of the problem remains unacceptable. The [ABS Personal Safety Survey 2021–22](#) estimated that 23 per cent of women had experienced violence by an intimate partner since age 15, 22 per cent had experienced sexual violence and 16 per cent had experienced economic abuse by a cohabiting partner. In 2024–25, [AIHW reported](#) that around 117,000 specialist homelessness services clients had experienced family and domestic violence.

These national figures are reflected locally. At a [Warringah domestic and family violence roundtable](#) I convened with frontline providers, services described rising demand, limited crisis and transitional housing, complex legal needs and women being turned away because services had reached capacity. Safety cannot depend on a postcode, a spare bed or a short-term grant round.

The Second Action Plan should therefore be tighter and more accountable than the first. It should identify a smaller number of nationally significant actions, name who is responsible for each action, fund them properly, set deadlines and report publicly on whether women and children are actually becoming safer. Government expenditure and activity should not be confused with effectiveness.

Recommendations

I recommend that the Australian Government, working with states and territories, prioritise the following actions:

1. Make implementation accountable. Give every Second Action Plan action a named lead minister and agency, deadline, funding pathway and public measure of success, supported by a statutory Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence Commission with stronger monitoring and information-gathering powers.
2. Fund safety and recovery according to need. Complete a national unmet-demand analysis and move essential frontline, legal, housing, sexual violence, culturally specific and recovery services to indexed, multi-year funding.
3. Treat economic safety as part of physical safety. Reform child support, Family Tax Benefit, taxation, social security and financial systems so they cannot be easily weaponised after separation, and implement the parliamentary financial abuse reform agenda.
4. Give children and young people their own strategy, services and outcomes. Provide age-appropriate therapeutic support, protect education continuity, strengthen respectful relationships and online safety, and establish meaningful youth participation in implementation.
5. Make safety accessible to multicultural communities and women on temporary visas. Fund culturally safe specialist services, qualified interpreters and translated information, and ensure visa settings and migration processes cannot be used to threaten, control or trap victim-survivors.
6. Shift responsibility for managing risk onto people who use violence and the systems with power to intervene. Set nationally consistent perpetrator-intervention standards, improve domestic violence order and breach information, strengthen firearm safeguards and expand partner-safety and perpetrator-accommodation pathways.
7. Scale prevention and use regulation as well as education. Sustain respectful relationships education, work with men and boys, and address online misogyny, technology-facilitated abuse, gambling advertising, alcohol-related harms and prevention duties in workplaces, universities, sport and other institutions.
8. Make dating and digital platforms responsible for safety. Establish a statutory duty of care, stronger identity verification, stronger perpetrator detection and removal and effective information sharing, and safeguards against romance scams.
9. Create a distinct sexual violence implementation stream. Establish a transparent Commonwealth-state pathway for the Australian Law Reform Commission's sexual violence recommendations, backed by specialist services, justice reform, prevention and public reporting.

10. Establish a time-limited national royal commission without delaying urgent reform. Use its compulsory powers to examine cross-jurisdiction and cross-portfolio failures, hear from victim-survivors and frontline services, and turn repeated recommendations into clear responsibilities, deadlines and public accountability.
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Victim-survivors

1. What should the Second Action Plan prioritise to improve safety, wellbeing, healing and recovery?

The starting point must be timely access to practical help. Victim-survivors need safe housing, legal assistance, health care, specialist sexual violence services, financial support and recovery services without having to repeatedly prove their need or retell traumatic experiences across multiple systems.

The [Rapid Review of Prevention Approaches](#) identified unmet demand in crisis response, recovery and healing as a major gap and called for a national needs analysis. The Second Action Plan should complete that work within its first year and use it to establish a transparent funding pathway. Essential services should not depend on short funding cycles that make it difficult to retain skilled staff or plan for demand.

Housing must be treated as safety infrastructure. A Leaving Violence payment can help with the immediate costs of separation, but it cannot solve a lack of safe and affordable housing. The Action Plan should link crisis accommodation, transitional housing, social and affordable housing and longer-term recovery support so victim-survivors are not forced to choose between violence and homelessness.

Recovery also needs greater weight. Safety does not end when a woman leaves a refuge or obtains an order. Stable housing, trauma recovery, parenting support, employment, financial independence and social connection all affect whether safety can be sustained. The Plan should fund recovery as a core domain, with outcomes measured at six, 12 and 24 months rather than by service contacts alone.

Technology-facilitated abuse must be addressed across the response system. Stalking, surveillance, image-based abuse, deepfakes and other AI-enabled harms can extend coercive control well beyond physical separation. Services, police, courts and platforms need the capability to respond quickly, while privacy and digital-safety safeguards must be built into service delivery.

Prevention and early intervention

2. What prevention and early intervention measures should be expanded?

Prevention must be more than awareness campaigns. It requires sustained work across schools, workplaces, sporting organisations, universities, online platforms and communities to change the attitudes, behaviours and institutional settings that enable violence.

Respectful relationships and consent education should be consistent, age-appropriate, evidence-based and delivered across school years. It should be evaluated for quality and impact, not simply by counting the number of schools that have received materials.

Work with men and boys is also essential. The [Rapid Review](#) called for a nationally coordinated approach to healthy masculinities and earlier engagement at key life transitions. Services should provide pathways for men seeking help before violence escalates, while remaining clear that mental ill-health, trauma, alcohol or other pressures do not excuse violence.

Government also needs to use regulatory levers. Prevention cannot rest on individuals while harmful products and content are aggressively promoted. The Second Action Plan should support stronger action on gambling advertising, alcohol availability and delivery, technology-facilitated abuse and platform responsibility for harmful and misogynistic content.

Digital safety must extend beyond social media. Dating apps can give perpetrators repeated access to potential victims and can be used for stalking, coercive control, sexual violence, image-based abuse, impersonation and fraud. Safety cannot depend only on users identifying danger after harm has occurred.

Dating apps should also be required to use robust identity and age assurance so banned users cannot simply create new profiles. Government should establish minimum safety standards rather than leaving verification and enforcement to inconsistent voluntary policies.

Romance scams must be treated as a safety and economic-abuse issue as well as consumer fraud. Platforms, banks, telecommunications providers and law enforcement should share risk intelligence, detect synthetic identities, provide rapid reporting and account-intervention pathways, preserve evidence and connect victims with financial, legal and trauma support. Prevention must not shame victims or discourage reporting.

The Second Action Plan should assign clear responsibility for these reforms across communications, online safety, consumer protection, financial regulation and law enforcement, with enforceable standards and public reporting on whether platforms are reducing harm.

Australia should examine a nationally consistent domestic violence judgments register, drawing on [Ireland's Domestic Violence Judgments Register Act 2026](#), which provides for the publication of court judgments concerning certain serious domestic violence convictions. Any Australian model must be carefully designed with victim-survivors, legal experts and specialist services, and include court oversight, procedural fairness, privacy protections, victim consent and safeguards against misuse. It should complement, not replace, police risk assessment and a properly designed disclosure scheme for people concerned about a current or prospective partner.

Children and young people in their own right

3. How should the Second Action Plan better respond to children and young people?

Children who experience domestic, family or sexual violence are victim-survivors in their own right. They should not be counted only as dependants accompanying an adult. Every child should have

access to developmentally appropriate risk assessment, therapeutic support and recovery services, with attention to housing stability and continuity at school.

The Plan should establish a dedicated children and young people implementation strategy that connects with, but does not duplicate, existing child safety frameworks. Services should record whether a child received direct support and measure safety, wellbeing and education outcomes.

Young people also need specific responses to dating violence, sexual violence, technology-facilitated abuse, sexual extortion, image-based abuse and misogynistic online content. Prevention and online safety must be designed with young people, not simply delivered to them.

Young people who use violence or harmful sexual behaviours require age-appropriate, developmentally informed interventions that protect victim safety while addressing trauma, disability, family violence exposure and other relevant needs. Early intervention is critical to preventing escalation and repeated harm.

International child return proceedings must also account properly for family and domestic violence. [QUT research](#) shows that the Hague Convention on the Civil Aspects of International Child Abduction can be weaponised by an abusive former partner to force continued contact and the return of women and children who have fled violence, exposing them to further abuse, adverse custody consequences and financial hardship; Australia should support reforms and consistent domestic practice that place evidence of family violence and the safety of women and children at the centre of return decisions.

Multicultural communities and women on temporary visas

4. How should the Second Action Plan improve safety for multicultural communities and women whose visa status increases their vulnerability?

Women from culturally and linguistically diverse communities can face additional barriers to safety, including language barriers, social isolation, financial dependence, limited knowledge of Australian laws and services, fear of authorities, community pressure and concern about the consequences of seeking help for themselves or their children. These barriers can be compounded in smaller or close-knit communities where confidentiality is difficult to maintain.

Specialist and mainstream services must be equipped to respond safely. This requires reliable access to qualified, independent and trauma-informed interpreters, translated and accessible information, culturally competent staff and properly funded multicultural and ethno-specific services. Victim-survivors should not have to rely on a partner, relative, friend or child to interpret disclosures of violence or explain legal, health, housing or migration options.

Visa status must never become a tool of coercive control. Women on temporary or partner visas may be threatened with visa cancellation, deportation, loss of child custody or withdrawal of sponsorship, or may be prevented from accessing money, documents and migration advice. The Action Plan should require migration, family violence and legal systems to work together so victim-survivors can obtain confidential advice, access essential services and pursue an independent and secure visa pathway without remaining dependent on the person using violence. Family violence protections

should be clear, timely and available across relevant visa categories, with decision-makers trained to recognise migration-related abuse and avoid requiring evidence that is unsafe or unrealistic to obtain.

The effectiveness of these measures should be monitored with disaggregated data, developed with multicultural organisations and handled with strong privacy protections. Consultation must include migrant and refugee women, temporary visa holders and culturally specific services so that policy reflects the barriers they encounter in practice.

People who use violence

5. How can the system identify and respond to people who use violence earlier and more effectively?

The system must stop placing the burden of risk management on victim-survivors. Police, courts, corrections, health services and specialist services should have nationally consistent pathways to identify high risk, intervene early and hold people who use violence accountable.

Perpetrator programs should operate to national quality and safety standards. Program completion alone is not an adequate measure of success. Outcomes should include breaches, reoffending, behavioural change and, where it can be measured safely, the safety of current and former partners. Partner-safety contact should be a core requirement.

Information sharing also needs to improve. The [House inquiry into family violence orders](#) reinforced the need for more consistent laws, risk practices and information sharing across jurisdictions. Authorised police, courts and designated risk-management bodies should have timely access to verified order, breach and relevant high-risk information, with strict privacy controls, audit trails, correction rights and safeguards against victim-survivor misidentification.

Firearm access must reflect domestic violence risk. I have [previously moved amendments](#) to strengthen firearms background checks where apprehended violence orders or domestic-violence-related events are present. The Second Action Plan should support nationally consistent safeguards in this area.

Perpetrator accommodation should also be expanded so that, where it is safe and lawful to do so, the person using violence is removed rather than the victim-survivor and children being routinely displaced from their home and community.

System integration and workforce

6. What needs to change to make the national system more connected and accountable?

This is the area where the Second Action Plan can make the greatest difference. Australia has extensive evidence and significant activity, but responsibilities remain spread across social services, housing, health, justice, education, communications, taxation and financial systems. Without clear ownership, gaps between portfolios become gaps in safety.

The [Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence Commission's 2025 Yearly Report](#) rightly emphasised implementation, workforce capability, economic and systems abuse, children and young people, men

and boys, First Nations leadership and sexual violence. The Commission should be established as an independent statutory authority with appropriate powers to obtain information, monitor implementation and report publicly to Parliament.

Every Second Action Plan commitment should identify a lead minister, accountable agency, funding source, milestone and measure. Progress should be reported annually, with overdue actions clearly identified. Reporting must distinguish outputs, such as funding announced or programs commenced, from outcomes, such as reduced repeat violence, improved housing stability or shorter waits for legal and therapeutic support.

A national workforce strategy is equally important. Specialist domestic, family and sexual violence services need sustainable employment conditions, training and career pathways. Mainstream services, particularly health, legal, housing, education and Centrelink, also need the capability to identify violence, avoid systems abuse and make safe referrals.

Implementation must also respect First Nations leadership. [Our Ways – Strong Ways – Our Voices](#) should be supported as a distinct First Nations-led framework, with community-controlled services, cultural authority and Indigenous data sovereignty. The Second Action Plan should complement that work, not absorb or override it.

Additional priority actions

7. What additional actions should be included?

Two issues require clearer visibility across the whole Action Plan: sexual violence and economic and systems abuse.

Sexual violence. Family and domestic violence and sexual violence overlap, but they are not interchangeable policy problems. The [Australian Law Reform Commission's Safe, Informed, Supported report](#) made 64 recommendations to reform justice responses to sexual violence. The Second Action Plan should establish a public Commonwealth-state implementation pathway, with responsibilities, timeframes and progress reporting, alongside specialist sexual violence services, forensic access, prevention and institutional accountability.

Economic and systems abuse. Economic abuse can prevent a victim-survivor from leaving, force continued contact after separation and undermine housing and recovery. The Parliamentary Joint Committee report on financial abuse made 61 recommendations across financial services and government systems. The Action Plan should drive implementation of that reform agenda and require an audit of how child support, Family Tax Benefit, taxation, social security, immigration and other government systems can be weaponised, including through threats linked to sponsorship, visa status or deportation.

Child support should be an early priority. The [2026 Survey of Separated Parents](#) confirms the importance of safety, payment reliability, power dynamics and understanding of the child support and Family Tax Benefit systems. Reform should make it easier to move safely from Private Collect to Agency Collect, improve enforcement, and avoid treating assessed child support as received where it has not actually been paid.

Royal commission. I have called for a national royal commission into domestic, family and sexual violence because the continuing scale of deaths, injuries, homelessness and economic harm shows that existing plans and inquiries have not produced sufficiently coordinated or accountable implementation. Responsibility and action is fragmented across governments and across policing, courts, child protection, housing, health, social security, migration, education and technology regulation. This fragmentation makes it difficult to identify systemic failures, compare outcomes or determine who is responsible when known risks are not acted on.

A time-limited royal commission could compel evidence and data that ordinary reviews cannot, examine how systems interact across jurisdictions, hear directly from victim-survivors and frontline services, and establish a public record of implementation failures. It should scrutinise risk assessment and information sharing, housing and service capacity, systems abuse, responses to children, migrant women and First Nations communities, and accountability for people who use violence. Its terms of reference should be developed with victim-survivors and specialist services, provide trauma-informed and culturally safe participation, and produce clear responsibilities and deadlines.

A royal commission must not become a reason to pause reforms for which the evidence is already clear. Governments should fund urgent safety, housing, legal and recovery measures now, while using the commission to resolve systemic questions, expose gaps in implementation and create enforceable national accountability.

Conclusion

The Second Action Plan is an opportunity to move from a collection of initiatives to a functioning national safety system. It should be shorter on aspiration and stronger on delivery: clear responsibilities, secure funding, consistent standards, deadlines and public measures of whether women and children are safer.

Immediate reforms should not wait for another inquiry. A time-limited national royal commission could complement, not delay, action by compelling evidence across jurisdictions, examining why repeated recommendations have not been implemented and assigning clear responsibility for reform. It should deliver an authoritative national evidence base, public accountability and a practical implementation pathway.

Violence against women and children is preventable, but only if implementation matches the scale and urgency of the problem. The measure of this Action Plan should be simple: fewer women and children killed, injured, made homeless, impoverished or forced to navigate unsafe systems year on year.



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