

About Zonta House Refuge Association

Zonta House Refuge Association is a specialist family and domestic violence service supporting women, children and young people across Western Australia.

As a specialist and holistic provider of family and domestic violence services, Zonta House delivers 16 programs across four key service pillars: **Accommodation Services, Healing and Wellbeing, Safety and Support, and Prevention and Community Education.**

Services span the continuum of support from crisis response through to recovery and long-term wellbeing. This includes refuge accommodation, transitional housing, outreach support, counselling, recovery programs, housing assistance, justice system advocacy, financial support, technology safety responses, specialist support for children and young people, and initiatives supporting diverse communities. Zonta House services and programs provides support to victim/survivors across FDV with intersections in health, mental health and within prisons.

Zonta House currently operates:

- Koort Kulaark, providing refuge accommodation and independent living units for women and families experiencing family and domestic violence.
- Annear House, providing crisis accommodation and support.
- Transitional housing programs supporting women and families to establish safe and sustainable housing outcomes.

Across its service system, Zonta House supports victim-survivors to improve safety, access housing, engage with legal and justice processes, strengthen social and economic participation, support recovery from trauma, and build long-term stability and wellbeing.

This submission is informed by the experiences of victim-survivors accessing our services, the expertise of frontline practitioners, and the trends and challenges observed through direct service delivery across metropolitan, regional and remote communities.

As a Western Australian service provider, Zonta House recognises the unique challenges associated with delivering specialist family and domestic violence services across a geographically large jurisdiction. These factors influence service accessibility, workforce availability, housing pathways and coordinated responses and should be considered in the design and implementation of national initiatives.

Zonta House supports the vision of the National Plan to End Violence against Women and Children 2022-2032 and welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the development of the Second Action Plan.



Service Reach and Emerging Trends

The recommendations outlined in this submission are informed by direct service delivery across accommodation, outreach, recovery, justice, housing, prevention and community education programs.

During 2024-25, Zonta House supported 526 adults and 210 children affected by family and domestic violence and delivered 387 workshops reaching 2,130 participants

Demand for specialist support continues to exceed available capacity. During the reporting period, Zonta House provided 13,967 nights of safe accommodation; however, 640 requests for accommodation could not be met due to a lack of available capacity.

Service data highlights the severity and complexity of violence experienced by victim-survivors accessing specialist services. In 2024-25:

- 57% of clients were assessed as high risk.
- 83% reported violence that was escalating or becoming more frequent.
- 67% experienced threats to kill.
- 63% experienced stalking and 63% experienced strangulation or suffocation.
- 68% experienced financial control or restricted access to money.

The increasing complexity of client presentations reflects the interconnected nature of family and domestic violence, housing insecurity, financial hardship, mental health concerns, justice system involvement and social disadvantage. Victim-survivors are increasingly requiring coordinated responses across multiple service systems to achieve safety, recovery and long-term stability.

The experiences of victim-survivors accessing Zonta House services demonstrate the importance of sustained investment in specialist family and domestic violence services, integrated service responses, housing pathways, early intervention and perpetrator accountability. The recommendations contained within this submission are informed by these service trends and the ongoing challenges experienced by victim-survivors seeking safety and support.

Further, Zonta House's recommendations are informed not only by direct service delivery experience but also by independent evaluation. In 2022, a Social Return on Investment (SROI) analysis undertaken by Social Ventures Australia found that for every \$1 invested in Zonta House services, \$4.47 of social and economic value was generated. The evaluation recognised the value of holistic, person-centred responses that support victim-survivors across safety, recovery, housing, wellbeing and long-term independence.

Priority Area 1: Victim-Survivors

What service or system responses would make the biggest difference to victim-survivors' safety, wellbeing, healing and recovery?

Sustainable Funding for Specialist Services

Specialist family, domestic and sexual violence services are critical infrastructure within Australia's response system. Long-term, sustainable funding is required to maintain service continuity, workforce capability and access to specialist support for victim-survivors. Current funding undervalues the risk, complexity and organisational sophistication required to deliver safe, leading practice models of care and have strong governance and fiscal controls. Current funding arrangements often require services to supplement government investment through philanthropic contributions, fundraising and short-term funding opportunities, creating challenges for workforce stability, service planning and long-term sustainability.

There are many evidence-based and highly effective service models already operating across Australia; however, increasing demand and funding constraints mean many specialist services are focused on sustaining existing service delivery rather than expanding capacity, evaluating impact or developing innovative responses to emerging needs.

Future investment should support both service sustainability and innovation, enabling specialist services to expand reach, strengthen outcomes, respond to emerging trends and continuously improve service delivery. Funding outcomes should be measured by improvements in victim-survivor safety, recovery, healing, wellbeing and long-term stability. This should include investment into appropriate accreditation, which can include code of practice; mental health; community housing; child safety; carers; and reconciliation.

Further work should also be done with the ACNC, philanthropists and corporate giving to 'pay what it takes' to assist in the delivery of quality and safe services, pay equity for a women dominated industry, sustainable services and ongoing innovation.

Holistic and Wrap-Around Support

Victim-survivors often require support across multiple service systems simultaneously, including housing, health, mental health, justice, child protection and income support. Effective responses therefore require coordinated, integrated and trauma-informed service models.

Opportunities to support this:

- Healing and Recovery Centres that provide coordinated and multidisciplinary support.
- Specialist women's health and wellbeing services, including women's hospitals and integrated care models.
- Recovery-focused programs that address housing, health, mental health, financial wellbeing and social connection.
- Rapid rehousing and housing pathways programs.
- Integrated responses across disability, justice, health and community service systems, including NDIS, adult justice, transitional housing and family support services.

Victim-survivors should have choice in the services and supports they access.

Housing Security

Safe and stable housing is fundamental to recovery, long-term safety and independence for victim-survivors. Demand for refuge accommodation and housing assistance continues to exceed available capacity, limiting pathways to safety and increasing the risk of homelessness and ongoing housing insecurity.

During 2024-25, Zonta House was unable to meet 640 requests for accommodation, demonstrating the scale of unmet need and the continuing shortage of safe housing options for victim-survivors. This highlights the need for national infrastructure investment to increase the supply of specialist women's housing, including crisis accommodation, transitional housing, and long-term social and affordable housing.

Governments should strengthen collaboration with specialist FDSV services, frontline organisations and lived-experience advisory groups to ensure housing policy and investment decisions are informed by the realities experienced by victim-survivors. This should include a focus on housing availability, affordability, accessibility and long-term housing stability.

A recommendation is to release a new Housing Australia NHIF grant round with adapted eligibility focusing on specialised services for women and victim/survivors and in particular on long term accommodation. Previous and existing grant round eligibility and process have created challenges and barriers which have excluded specialist services from being able to provide purpose built and safe accommodation options. Any release of further grant funding needs prior consultation with services and state governments and territories reduce barriers and increase successful outcomes.

Access to Legal Support

Victim-survivors require timely, free and accessible legal assistance. Increased investment is needed to expand the capacity of community legal centres, Aboriginal legal services and women's legal services to be funded appropriately to meet growing demand.

Consideration should also be given to the provision of legal support and advocacy for victim-survivors appearing as witnesses in criminal proceedings to reduce re-traumatisation and improve justice outcomes.

Children and Young People

Children and young people who experience family and domestic violence require specialist responses in their own right.

Opportunities to support this:

- Increase dedicated funding for child and youth-focused support services.
- Fund specialist advocates, counsellors and family support workers within refuges and FDSV Outreach services.
- Expand access to trauma-informed mental health and recovery supports for children and young people.

Income Support

Financial insecurity remains a significant barrier to safety, recovery and long-term independence for victim-survivors. An increase in income support payments for victim-survivors and sole parents to reduce poverty and financial stress, enabling greater economic stability and access to safe, secure and sustainable housing. Adequate income support would also create more opportunities for education, medical and health support, safe transport, employment and community participation, supporting long-term recovery and reducing the risk of returning to unsafe or violent situations.

Representation and National Decision-Making

Frontline specialist services play a critical role in responding to victim-survivors and should have meaningful representation in national policy development, reform initiatives and decision-making processes.

National reform initiatives should incorporate structured engagement mechanisms for specialist services from all jurisdictions, including Western Australia, to ensure policy decisions reflect diverse service delivery environments and community contexts. This includes organisations delivering services across metropolitan, regional, remote and very remote communities, where victim-survivors often face additional barriers to accessing support, housing, legal assistance and health services.

Western Australia's geographic context also means that some specialist services operate across multiple jurisdictions, including cross-border regions spanning up to three jurisdictions. National policy and funding decisions must recognise these complexities and the unique challenges associated with delivering coordinated responses across different legislative, service and governance frameworks.

Lived-experience representatives and frontline service providers should be actively involved in shaping national strategies, reforms and investment priorities to ensure policies are informed by the realities of victim-survivors and the services that support them. Greater representation and engagement would strengthen the design, implementation and effectiveness of national responses to family, domestic and sexual violence.

Justice System Reform and Perpetrator Accountability

Current responses to perpetrators vary significantly across jurisdictions, resulting in inconsistent accountability measures and variable safety outcomes for victim-survivors. Greater national consistency is required to strengthen accountability, improve risk management and support coordinated responses across systems.

Priority reforms include:

- Development of a national framework for FDSV offending and perpetrator accountability.
- Expansion of specialist FDSV courts and FDSV-informed magistrates.
- More consistent and robust risk assessment processes when determining bail.
- Review of bail laws for FDSV offenders.
- Establishment of a national perpetrator register.
- Consistent national thresholds and responses for serial and high-risk offenders.
- Independent review or oversight mechanisms for judicial decision-making where serious safety concerns arise.

- Stronger accountability measures for perpetrators across health, mental health and child protection systems.

Current approaches often place a disproportionate burden on non-offending parents to demonstrate child safety, rather than holding perpetrators accountable for their use of violence. System Responses should be rebalanced to ensure responsibility remains with those causing harm.

Further reforms should include:

- Legislative protections preventing perpetrators from accessing sensitive counselling, psychological and specialist FDSV service records through court processes.
- Recognition of trauma and its long-term impacts when assessing criminal injuries compensation claims.
- Review electronic monitoring and exclusion zone arrangements to ensure victim-survivors retain their freedom of movement. Restrictions should be placed on perpetrators, not victim-survivors, so accountability remains with the person using violence and victim-survivors can live, work and travel without limitation.

In addition, the Second Action Plan should prioritise:

- National evaluation of Men's Behaviour Change Programs across all service systems.
- Increased investment in early intervention and youth perpetration programs.
- A national oversight body responsible for implementation, monitoring and reporting on perpetrator accountability frameworks.
- Stronger engagement with specialist victim-survivor services in policy design and system reform.

Additional investment is required for access to forensic examinations for FDV including sexual assault. There is a significant gap in equitable access to these services in regional and remote areas. Forensic services should be accompanied by access to non-forensic support. Our experience is that victim-survivors are at high risk of harm from perpetrators and have limited supports available throughout their experience including throughout a pathway to justice in the legal and court system.

Traumatic Brain Injury

Emerging evidence highlights the prevalence of traumatic brain injury (TBI) among victim-survivors of family and domestic violence. Government should invest in research, screening tools and specialist support pathways, and review how TBI is recognised and addressed within legal and service systems.

National Risk Assessment and Information Sharing

A nationally consistent risk assessment framework would improve service coordination, risk identification and perpetrator intervention across jurisdictions.

Opportunities to support this:

- Invest in research and analysis of risk assessment data to identify patterns, emerging risks and opportunities for early intervention, including the identification of perpetrators who may not yet have come to the attention of police, justice or other statutory systems.
- Improve information sharing between agencies and jurisdictions while maintaining victim-survivor safety and privacy.

- Strengthen interstate partnerships and relocation pathways for victim-survivors fleeing violence across state borders, ensuring they remain eligible for support regardless of where they seek safety.

Mental Health System Reform

Victim-survivors frequently encounter barriers when accessing mental health and alcohol and other drug (AOD) services. Current systems often operate under a medical model that does not adequately recognise the complex impacts of trauma, FDSV, homelessness and social disadvantage.

National investment should prioritise:

- Improved integration between mental health, AOD and specialist FDSV services.
- Increase access to FDSV-informed mental health services as an early intervention and prevention measure, ensuring victim-survivors receive timely, trauma-informed support before mental health issues escalate into crisis.
- Reduced waiting times and increased access to inpatient and community-based mental health care.
- Specialist FDSV support embedded within hospitals, emergency departments and urgent care settings.
- Increased mental health support for children and young people.

Particular attention is required for victim-survivors experiencing:

- Active substance use.
- Undiagnosed, misdiagnosed or untreated mental health conditions.
- Medication mis-use.
- Suicidal ideation.
- Acute mental health episodes.

These circumstances should not prevent access to support. Instead, service systems should provide coordinated, trauma-informed and flexible responses that address safety, recovery and wellbeing simultaneously.

What helps people access support earlier, and what barriers prevent people from seeking help or engaging with systems and services?

Education and Community Awareness

Our service supports a strong focus within the National Plan on education, community awareness and early intervention. Greater investment is needed in initiatives that improve understanding of family, domestic and sexual violence, challenge harmful attitudes, increase awareness of coercive control and encourage help-seeking. Community education should also promote positive social responses to disclosures, ensuring victim survivors are believed, validated and supported.

Low-Barrier Access to Support

Low-barrier entry points are critical to improving early engagement with support services. Victim-survivors often seek assistance at different stages of their experience and may require multiple attempts before engaging with support. Service systems should provide flexible access pathways, minimise eligibility barriers and reduce waiting times to ensure support is available when individuals are ready to seek help.

Timely access to counselling, therapeutic services and specialist family and domestic violence support should be recognised as both an early intervention and prevention strategy. Delays in accessing support can increase risk, exacerbate the impacts of trauma and reduce opportunities for earlier intervention.

Positive Social Responses to Disclosures

Poor social responses remain a significant barrier for victim survivors. Experiences of not being believed, having abuse minimised, being blamed, or feeling judged can discourage future help-seeking and contribute to ongoing isolation. The National Plan should strengthen community and workforce capability to respond in ways that are trauma-informed, supportive, and safety-focused.

Accessibility of Services in Regional and Remote Areas

Improved accessibility of services for people living in regional and remote communities is a key priority. Geographic isolation, limited specialist services, transport challenges and digital exclusion continue to affect access to support. Increased investment in outreach services, flexible service delivery models, technology-enabled supports and place-based responses is required to ensure equitable access regardless of location.

Cultural Leadership and Community Engagement

Greater engagement with cultural leaders and community leaders is essential to strengthen prevention and response efforts. Leaders across our communities can play an important role in reducing stigma, increasing awareness of available supports, encouraging help-seeking and promoting culturally safe responses within communities.

Safety and Fear of Escalation

Victim survivors may be reluctant to seek support where there are concerns that doing so could increase the risk of harm. Fear of perpetrator retaliation, escalation of violence, loss of children, or ongoing coercion are common barriers. Engagement with services must enhance both immediate and long-term safety and provide clear pathways for risk management and protection.

Stigma and Shame

Stigma and shame continue to prevent many victim survivors from seeking assistance, particularly within culturally and linguistically diverse communities. Fear of social exclusion, community backlash, family pressure, or damage to reputation can create significant barriers to disclosure and support-seeking. Responses must be culturally responsive and designed to reduce stigma while increasing safety and trust.

Financial Barriers

Financial barriers frequently prevent victim survivors from accessing support and safety. These include a lack of access to money, transport costs, limited access to phones and technology, and economic dependence resulting from financial abuse. Greater financial supports and practical assistance are required to reduce these barriers.

Responding to Intersectionality and Complex Needs

Victim survivors with intersecting experiences of disability, mental ill-health, homelessness, substance use, and LGBTQIA+ identities often face additional barriers when accessing support. The National Plan should support integrated and inclusive responses that recognise these intersecting vulnerabilities and improve accessibility across service systems.

Systemic Abuse and the Weaponisation of Systems

Perpetrators can misuse child protection, mental health, legal and other statutory systems to continue coercion and control. The National Plan should strengthen cross-system capability to identify and respond to the weaponisation of systems, ensuring that systems do not unintentionally reinforce abuse or place additional burdens on victim survivors.

Awareness of Available Supports

Many victim-survivors do not seek support because they are unaware of available services, uncertain about eligibility, or unsure how to navigate complex and fragmented service systems. Clearer referral pathways, improved service navigation supports and consistent information across government and community services would strengthen earlier engagement with support.

Opportunities to improve awareness should extend beyond specialist services and include health, education, housing, justice and community settings where victim-survivors may first disclose concerns or seek assistance.

Capacity of Specialist Services

The capacity of specialist family and domestic violence services remains a significant barrier to early intervention and support. Demand for refuges, crisis accommodation, housing support and specialist services continues to exceed available capacity, resulting in delays or missed opportunities for intervention.

When victim-survivors seek support, timely access is critical. Insufficient service capacity can increase risk, prolong exposure to violence and reduce opportunities to engage individuals before circumstances escalate. Sustainable investment in specialist services is essential to ensuring help is available when it is needed.

Housing Insecurity and Risk of Homelessness

Housing insecurity remains a significant barrier to safety. Concerns about homelessness, limited affordable housing options and shortages of crisis accommodation can prevent victim survivors from leaving violent situations. Access to safe, affordable and sustainable housing must remain a key priority within the National Plan.

Victim Survivor Responsibility and Feelings of Guilt

Many victim survivors carry a sense of responsibility for the potential consequences experienced by perpetrators. Concerns about incarceration, self-harm, suicide, reputational damage, family disruption or community backlash can create feelings of guilt and influence decisions about disclosure, reporting, and leaving a relationship. Responses should recognise these complex dynamics and provide appropriate support to victim survivors navigating these concerns.

What current or emerging issues should the Second Action Plan address, including in relation to coercive control and technology-facilitated abuse?

Coercive Control Legislation

Western Australia does not currently have coercive control legislation. Any future reform requires a comprehensive implementation strategy aligned with emerging national and international leading practice.

The introduction of coercive control legislation would require significant investment across both specialist FDV services and mainstream systems, including policing, courts, health and community services, to ensure workforce readiness and effective implementation.

Caution should also be exercised and learnings considered from low prosecution rates reported in Australian and international jurisdictions. Legislative reform alone is unlikely to improve outcomes without accompanying investment in training, community awareness and victim survivor supports.

Any reform must be developed in partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and refugee and migrant communities, to understand the unique drivers, barriers, and potential unintended impacts for these populations and ensure responses are culturally safe and equitable.

Increase in Separated Under One Roof Arrangements

A growing issue is the increase in families remaining separated under one roof, often due to housing shortages, cost-of-living pressures and a lack of suitable accommodation options. Victim survivors may remain living with the person using violence because there are no safe or affordable alternatives. Many parents also make decisions to stay in these arrangements to minimise disruption for children, despite ongoing safety concerns and exposure to coercive control. The Second Action Plan should recognise separated under one roof arrangements as an emerging risk area and strengthen responses that address both safety and housing access.

Technology-Facilitated Abuse and Mental Health

The increasing prevalence of technology-facilitated abuse highlights the need for stronger integration between FDV and mental health services. Victim survivors experiencing technology-facilitated abuse may present with symptoms that can be misunderstood or misinterpreted within mental health settings, particularly when concerns about surveillance, monitoring, tracking or device compromise are perceived as paranoia or symptoms of mental ill-health.

There is a need for greater awareness and understanding of the relationship between technology-facilitated abuse and mental health presentations to ensure victim survivors are appropriately assessed and supported.

Through facilitation of a small grant and due to end in August, Zonta House commenced a new Tech Safety program providing victim-survivors with access to brokerage to facilitate technology, home and vehicle sweeps for surveillance items, apps and software. From 33 devices swept, there has been 57% of devices compromised. Additional outcomes have included decrease in mental health distress and increase in device and technology safety.

The Second Action Plan should support the development of evidence-informed practice guidance that assists professionals to safely assess and respond to technology-facilitated abuse. This would promote more consistent, informed and victim-centred responses across both sectors.

As technology-facilitated abuse becomes increasingly sophisticated, investment is needed to strengthen technology safety capability across the FDV sector. This includes workforce training, access to specialist technology safety expertise, and clear referral pathways that enable victim survivors to receive timely support when concerns about digital surveillance, tracking, monitoring or online abuse arise. Technology safety should be recognised as a core component of contemporary FDV safety planning and integrated across prevention, early intervention, and crisis support services.

FDV-Informed Mental Health Partnerships

The Second Action Plan should strengthen partnerships between FDV and mental health services to ensure responses are informed by both specialist FDV practice and mental health expertise. Collaborative approaches are needed when responding to disclosures of technology-facilitated abuse, particularly where there is uncertainty about the nature of the risk being reported.

What gaps remain in addressing the needs of diverse communities, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people?

Access to Services in Regional and Remote Communities

Significant gaps remain in the availability and accessibility of specialist FDV services across regional, remote and very remote areas. Limited-service availability, workforce shortages, long travel distances and a lack of place-based support can leave victim-survivors with few options for assistance. Greater investment is needed to ensure equitable access to specialist responses, regardless of location. This includes adequate support for worker housing in regional and remotes areas.

Building Trust in Services and Systems

Trust remains a significant barrier for many diverse communities, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, culturally and linguistically diverse communities, and people with previous negative experiences of government systems. Building trust requires culturally safe, trauma-informed, and community-led approaches that recognise the impacts of historical and ongoing systemic racism and discrimination.

Immigration-Related Barriers

Victim survivors experiencing FDV while on temporary visas often face significant barriers to safety and independence. Immigration restrictions can leave people with limited options, including restrictions on work and income support that increase financial dependence and risk of poverty. Many are required to continue studying or meet visa obligations while experiencing crisis, and some are forced to consider protection visa pathways as a last resort, further increasing isolation and uncertainty. Greater accessibility, flexibility and support through the Department of Home Affairs is needed to ensure visa status does not prevent access to safety and recovery.

Access to Legal Advice and Advocacy

There is a significant gap in access to timely and affordable legal advice for victim survivors. Existing services are often operating at capacity and unable to meet demand, resulting in referrals being declined or delayed. Consideration should be given to expanding specialist legal supports and exploring innovative models that increase access to advice and advocacy.

Inclusion of Trans and Non-Binary People

There is a need for clearer guidance, support, and accountability regarding how FDV services respond to and accommodate trans and non-binary people. While many services are committed to inclusive practice, there remains inconsistency across the sector. Greater leadership from government and peak bodies is required to establish clear expectations, provide practical guidance, build workforce capability and ensure all victim survivors can access safe and inclusive support regardless of gender identity. There also needs to be specialist support and diversity of services for victim-survivors to choose.

Racism and System Responses

Experiences of racism continue to affect how diverse communities engage with services and systems. Real and perceived discrimination can discourage help-seeking, reduce trust, and create additional barriers to safety. The Second Action Plan should strengthen efforts to address systemic racism and ensure services are culturally responsive and accountable for equitable outcomes.

Misidentification of Victim Survivors

The misidentification of victim survivors as primary aggressors remains a significant concern, particularly for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women, culturally diverse women and individuals with complex circumstances. Misidentification can result in inappropriate system responses, reduced access to support and increased risk of ongoing harm. Improvements in workforce training, risk assessment and cross-sector understanding of coercive control are needed to reduce the likelihood of misidentification and ensure victim survivors receive appropriate protection and support.

Priority 2: Prevention and early intervention

What would make the biggest difference in preventing and ultimately ending violence?

Sustainable Investment in Prevention

Preventing and ending violence requires sustained investment across prevention, early intervention, response and recovery. While crisis responses remain essential, long-term reductions in family, domestic and sexual violence will not be achieved without continued investment in prevention initiatives that address the underlying drivers of violence.

Short-term funding limits the ability of organisations to build community trust, maintain workforce capability, evaluate outcomes and deliver lasting change. Long-term funding arrangements create greater certainty for services, strengthen partnerships and support the implementation of evidence-informed prevention initiatives.

Investment in prevention should be recognised as a critical component of achieving the National Plan's long-term outcomes and reducing future demand on crisis, health, housing and justice systems. Current funding is not conducive to delivering programs and campaigns to contribute to significant social change needed.

Frontline Services

Frontline specialist services should play an active role in the design, implementation and evaluation of prevention initiatives. These services provide valuable insights into emerging trends, community needs, service gaps and the practical challenges experienced by victim-survivors.

Prevention policy and program design should be informed by both frontline expertise and lived experience to ensure initiatives remain relevant, effective and responsive to changing community needs.

Ongoing Consultation with Diverse Communities

Prevention efforts must be informed by ongoing consultation with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, culturally and linguistically diverse communities, LGBTQIA+ communities, people living with disability and other priority populations.

Consultation should not be a one-off activity. Communities should receive feedback on how their input has informed programs and policies, and prevention initiatives should be evaluated to ensure messaging is accessible, culturally appropriate and meeting community needs.

Expand Education on the Drivers of Violence

Prevention efforts must continue to focus on addressing the underlying drivers of family and domestic violence, including gender inequality, rigid gender stereotypes, disrespect, and harmful attitudes that condone violence. Education campaigns should be sustained and expanded to ensure they reach people across metropolitan, regional and remote communities. Consistent and accessible messaging is critical to creating long-term social and cultural change.

Strengthen Prevention Education Across Community Settings

Education should continue to be embedded in settings where people live, work, learn, and connect. Sporting clubs, schools, workplaces and community organisations all play an important role in challenging harmful attitudes and promoting respectful relationships.

Education in schools should remain a key prevention strategy. Providing children and young people with opportunities to learn about consent, respect, communication, boundaries and healthy relationships can support the development of positive relationship expectations and behaviours from an early age.

Greater Focus on Boys and Young Men

A stronger focus is needed on engaging boys and young men in prevention initiatives. Programs that promote respectful relationships, emotional literacy, healthy help-seeking behaviours and positive expressions of masculinity can contribute to reducing the attitudes and behaviours associated with violence.

Early engagement provides an opportunity to challenge harmful gender norms, strengthen healthy relationship skills and support long-term cultural change.

Investment in Mentoring and Early Support for Young People

There is a need for greater investment in mentoring programs and specialist supports for young people impacted by FDV. Early intervention can help address trauma, strengthen protective factors and reduce the risk of future victimisation or use of violence.

Young people benefit from positive role models, safe relationships, and access to supports that build resilience, confidence and connection to their community.

Address Social and Economic Drivers

Violence prevention cannot occur in isolation from broader social and economic conditions. Housing insecurity, poverty, financial stress, social isolation, discrimination and barriers to support can increase vulnerability and reduce opportunities for safety and recovery.

Prevention efforts should be complemented by policies that strengthen housing security, economic participation, community connection and access to essential services. Addressing these broader conditions can enhance protective factors and support long-term wellbeing for individuals, families and communities.

Support Community-Led Prevention Initiatives

Community-led initiatives play an important role in preventing violence because they are often best placed to understand local needs, build trust and engage communities in meaningful ways. Zonta House's experience delivering community-based prevention initiatives, including Partnering in Prevention (PiP), Empowerment Through Education (ETE) and Diversity and Inclusion (D&I) programs, demonstrates the value of place-based approaches that engage communities in conversations about respectful relationships, inclusion, gender equality and early intervention.

The Second Action Plan should continue to support place-based and community-led prevention approaches that promote respectful relationships, inclusion, gender equality and community connection. These initiatives should be appropriately resourced and evaluated to strengthen the evidence base for prevention activities.

Recognise Early Intervention as Prevention

Timely access to counselling, therapeutic services, family support, mentoring and specialist FDSV services should be recognised as a core prevention strategy. Providing support early can reduce the long-term impacts of trauma, strengthen protective factors and help prevent the escalation or continuation of violence across generations.

How can existing efforts to prevent violence be strengthened or built upon at the individual, community, organisational, institutional and societal levels?

Maintain Access to Safety and Support

Prevention efforts are strengthened when victim-survivors can access timely safety and support. Specialist family and domestic violence services play a critical role not only in responding to violence but also in identifying emerging risks, supporting early intervention and preventing further harm.

Stable investment in refuges, accommodation services, counselling, advocacy and specialist support services is essential to ensuring victim-survivors can access help when it is needed and before risks escalate.

Strengthen Long-Term Funding and Sustainability

Prevention efforts are strengthened when services have certainty and stability. Short-term funding and pilot programs often end just as services have established community trust, developed referral pathways and built momentum. Long-term funding commitments allow organisations to retain and invest in skilled staff, strengthen partnerships, innovate and deliver sustainable prevention and early intervention programs that create lasting change.

Improve Funding and Evaluation Frameworks

Effective prevention requires clear outcomes frameworks and proportionate reporting requirements. Consistent guidance regarding outcomes, evaluation measures and evidence expectations would strengthen program delivery, support continuous improvement and enable more meaningful assessment of what is contributing to long-term violence prevention.

Evaluation approaches should balance accountability requirements with the capacity of organisations to deliver services and innovate in response to community needs. Recommendations could include exploring a grants program for research and/or evaluations in leading practice.

Increase Investment in People Using Violence Programs

Further investment is needed in evidence-informed interventions for people who use violence. Programs led by men, and where appropriate co-facilitated with gender diversity, can play an important role in challenging attitudes and behaviours that underpin violence.

These programs should focus on accountability, the use of violence as a means of power and control, respectful relationships, and healthy communication. Program design should be informed by the experiences victim/ survivors to ensure interventions remain focused on safety and reducing harm.

Strengthen Community and Organisational Responses

Violence prevention should continue to be embedded across schools, workplaces, sporting clubs, community organisations and government systems. Building capability across these settings helps create consistent messaging about respect, equality and healthy relationships while increasing opportunities to identify and respond to violence early.

Improve Collaboration Between Systems

Stronger collaboration between FDSV services, health, mental health, education, housing, justice, and child protection systems is needed to provide coordinated responses and reduce barriers for victim survivors. A shared understanding of family and domestic violence across service systems can improve safety, prevent re-traumatisation, and support earlier intervention.

Support Community-Led Solutions

Communities are best placed to identify local needs and effective prevention strategies. Continued investment in community-led initiatives, particularly those led by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and diverse population groups, will help ensure prevention efforts are culturally responsive, locally relevant and sustainable.

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

Strengthen Accountability Across Social and System Responses

Governments, communities, workplaces, schools and service systems all have a role in challenging harmful attitudes and behaviours that excuse, minimise or justify violence. Responses should actively challenge narratives that portray people who use violence as a “good guy” whose behaviour is out of character, as these narratives can detract from the harm caused and reduce accountability.

System responses should consistently reinforce that responsibility for violence lies with the person using violence and not the victim survivor.

Keep Justice and Accountability at the Centre of Court Responses

Court processes should remain focused on the offending behaviour, its impact and the harm caused to victim survivors. While character references may provide context, they should not overshadow the seriousness of FDSV or diminish accountability.

Across all systems, responses should be organised around justice, safety and accountability, ensuring that the actions and behaviours of perpetrators remain the focus rather than placing responsibility on victim survivors to manage risk or prevent future harm.

Support Early Intervention with Young People

Governments, schools and community organisations should strengthen early intervention responses when harmful behaviours emerge in young people's relationships. Early identification, education and age-appropriate support can help prevent patterns of coercion, control and violence from becoming entrenched.

Young people should have access to education and support that builds healthy relationship skills, emotional regulation, conflict resolution and respectful communication.

Continue Education on the Drivers of Violence

Ongoing education is critical to helping individuals and communities recognise harmful attitudes and behaviours before they escalate into violence. Prevention initiatives should continue to address the drivers of violence, including gender inequality, rigid gender stereotypes, entitlement and attitudes that condone disrespect and abuse.

Education should be delivered across schools, workplaces, sporting clubs, community organisations and online environments to create consistent messaging about respect, equality, and healthy relationships.

Build Community Capability to Recognise and Respond

Communities are often the first to observe signs of abuse, coercive control or unhealthy relationship behaviours. Increasing community awareness and confidence to safely respond to concerns can strengthen early intervention and help create environments where violence is less likely to be tolerated.

Programs that provide practical and accessible education, such as Zonta House's FDV First Aid Training can strengthen community understanding of family and domestic violence and build confidence to respond safely and appropriately. Increasing community capability to recognise coercive control, respond to disclosures and support victim survivors can contribute to stronger community accountability, earlier intervention and improved prevention outcomes.

Within the Zonta House Empowerment Through Education program across all workshops, we use pre- and post-workshop questionnaires to effectively assess our program's impact. In the past six months, on average, we saw a 24% increase (to 97%) in changes to participants' knowledge, attitudes, and behaviours.

Strengthen Online Platform Responsibility

Online platforms should play a greater role in identifying and addressing harmful attitudes, abuse and violence-facilitating behaviours. This includes improving responses to online harassment, technology-facilitated abuse, misogynistic content and harmful narratives that normalise violence or reinforce gender inequality.

Strengthening digital literacy and online safety education can also help individuals recognise harmful behaviours and seek support when needed.

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

Perpetrator accountability and therapeutic intervention

Approaches should hold people who use violence accountable while also providing psychological support to address underlying core beliefs, trauma and patterns of behaviour that contribute to violence.

Culturally informed, co-designed interventions

Interventions should be co-designed alongside communities and specifically address family and domestic violence within those communities. Prevention and early intervention programs delivered within communities should also recognise that the ongoing impacts of colonisation, generational trauma and poverty can contribute to the conditions that drive family and domestic violence.

Scaffolded family and domestic violence education

Programs should support communities to build FDV education progressively over time. This could begin in early primary school by helping children develop respectful interactions and supportive, non-coercive friendships. Similar education should also be provided for parents, caregivers and extended family members so the messages are reinforced across the broader community.

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

Non-Fatal Strangulation

Non-fatal strangulation should be recognised as a significant indicator of escalating risk and potential lethality in family and domestic violence. Increased workforce capability, community awareness and early identification are needed to ensure responses appropriately recognise the seriousness of these incidents and provide timely intervention and support.

Financial Abuse and Economic Control

Financial abuse should be recognised as both a form of violence and a significant barrier to safety, recovery and long-term independence. Responses should include prevention, early identification, financial recovery supports and stronger economic safeguards for victim-survivors.

Coercive Control

Coercive control remains a significant issue requiring greater awareness and understanding across communities and service systems. The Second Action Plan should support education, workforce development and system responses that improve identification of patterns of ongoing control, rather than focusing solely on individual incidents of violence.

Intimate Partner Violence Among Young People

There is increasing concern regarding intimate partner violence in adolescent and young adult relationships. Early intervention and prevention initiatives should focus on helping young people recognise unhealthy relationship behaviours, coercive control, digital abuse and sexual violence. Expanding education and age-appropriate specialist supports will be critical to addressing this emerging issue.

Young People Using Violence

There is a growing need for targeted responses to young people who are using violence in their relationships or within the family home. Early intervention programs that address harmful behaviours, promote accountability and provide therapeutic support can help reduce the risk of violence becoming entrenched into adulthood.

Elder Abuse

Elder abuse requires greater attention as an emerging issue within violence prevention frameworks. Older people may experience physical abuse, financial abuse, coercive control, psychological abuse, neglect and abuse by family members or carers. Increased awareness, targeted service responses and improved pathways for support are needed to identify and respond to elder abuse earlier.

Strengthening Early Intervention

Across all emerging issues, there is a need for earlier identification, low-barrier access to support and improved community awareness. Investment in prevention and early intervention initiatives that respond to emerging forms of violence can help reduce harm, improve safety and prevent violence from escalating over time.

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

What Would Make the Biggest Difference to Improving Safety, Recovery and Wellbeing Outcomes for Children and Young People Affected by Family and Domestic Violence?

Invest in a Specialist Children and Young People's Workforce

Children and young people affected by family and domestic violence require access to practitioners with specialist expertise in child development, trauma, attachment and recovery.

Investment in a specialist children and young people's workforce would strengthen early intervention, improve therapeutic outcomes and support long-term wellbeing for children experiencing family and domestic violence.

Improve Access to Specialist Child-Focused Supports

Children and young people need faster access to specialist counselling, therapeutic services, developmental supports and health services. Timely access to specialist supports is critical for children and young people affected by family and domestic violence. Delays in accessing support can increase the impacts of trauma and reduce opportunities for recovery and early intervention.

Strengthen Child-Focused Support Within Refuges

Many refuge services support children with complex emotional, developmental and safety needs. Increased investment in child-focused staffing within refuge settings would enable more individualised, trauma-informed support and improve therapeutic and developmental outcomes for children and young people.

Strengthen Therapeutic and Play-Based Interventions

Greater investment is needed in evidence-informed therapeutic approaches for children, including play therapy and other child-centred models. Innovative outreach approaches, such as mobile therapeutic services that can engage children in community settings, should also be explored to improve accessibility and early engagement.

Expand Responsibility for Child Safety Across Systems

Responsibility for identifying and responding to risk should not sit solely with the family and domestic violence sector. Schools, early learning services, childcare providers, health services and other child-focused systems all have a role to play in recognising concerns and contributing to coordinated safety planning and support for children and families. Improving outcomes for children requires a shared responsibility across systems.

Improve Responses to Children Living with Ongoing Violence

Housing pressures are contributing to an increase in families remaining separated under one roof, creating ongoing safety and wellbeing concerns for children. Responses should recognise the challenges associated with ongoing perpetrator access, maintaining children's safety, and supporting parents navigating complex living arrangements.

Greater collaboration between services, schools and behaviour change programs is needed to ensure children's needs remain central.

Recognise the Impact of Violence on Children in Perpetrator Interventions

Men's Behaviour Change Programs and other interventions for people who use violence should place a stronger focus on the impacts of violence on children. This includes supporting accountability for the harm caused to children and promoting safer parenting practices where appropriate.

Improve Identification of Family and Domestic Violence in Young People

There is a need to better identify and respond to family and domestic violence experienced by young people. Where young people are experiencing exploitation, abuse or violence within family relationships, they can be directed into separate service systems where the family violence context may be overlooked. Improved cross-sector responses are needed to ensure violence is recognised and addressed appropriately.

Sustainable Funding for Children's Services

Funding for refuges, specialist children's programs and family and domestic violence services should be stable, appropriate and sufficient to meet growing demand. Long-term funding allows services to build expertise, retain skilled staff and deliver consistent support to children and families.

Recognise Advocacy as Core Service Delivery

Advocacy is a critical component of effective responses for women and children affected by family and domestic violence. Securing access to housing, education, health care, child protection, disability supports and legal services often requires significant system navigation and coordination.

Funding models should recognise advocacy and system coordination activities as essential components of service delivery that contribute directly to safety, wellbeing and recovery outcomes.

Value Specialist Family and Domestic Violence Expertise

Specialist FDV services play a critical role in supporting children and young people affected by violence. Their expertise should be recognised and incorporated into decision-making processes, safety planning, case coordination and system responses to ensure children's needs remain central.

Develop a National Practice Framework for Children and Young People

Consideration should be given to developing a national practice framework for working with children and young people impacted by family and domestic violence. A consistent framework would support best practice, improve service quality, strengthen workforce capability and promote more coordinated responses across jurisdictions.

How can governments, services, education settings, families, communities and others better recognise and respond to children and young people experiencing violence or harm?

Invest Early to Improve Long-Term Outcomes

Children and young people who grow up experiencing FDV are more likely to require mental health, developmental, educational and therapeutic supports throughout their lives. Early identification and intervention can reduce the long-term impacts of trauma and improve wellbeing outcomes.

Investment in specialist supports, including mental health services, occupational therapy, speech therapy, developmental assessments and counselling, should be viewed not only as a response to harm but as a long-term investment that reduces future demand on health, education, justice and social service systems.

Strengthen Responses Across All Child-Focused Settings

Recognising and responding to violence should not be the responsibility of specialist family and domestic violence services alone. Schools, early learning centres, childcare providers, health services, sporting clubs and community organisations all play an important role in identifying signs of harm and providing coordinated support.

Strengthening workforce capability across these settings would support earlier identification, referral and intervention for children experiencing violence or trauma.

Improve Accountability for Children in Care

Greater accountability is needed for children and young people who are involved with the child protection system, particularly those living in out-of-home care. Attention should be given not only to immediate safety but also to long-term wellbeing, stability and developmental outcomes.

Children who have experienced FDV and entered care often require ongoing therapeutic support, consistent relationships and coordinated service responses throughout their childhood and adolescence.

Distinguish Between Prevention and Early Intervention

Prevention and early intervention are often grouped together despite serving different purposes and requiring different approaches, investment models and outcome measures.

Prevention focuses on stopping violence before it occurs, while early intervention seeks to respond to emerging risks and reduce the impacts of violence once identified. Recognising these distinctions would support more targeted policy development, funding decisions and evaluation frameworks.

Strengthen National Consistency and Child Protection Accountability

Consideration should be given to strengthening national consistency across child protection systems, including shared standards, accountability measures, and expectations regarding the safety and wellbeing of children affected by violence.

Greater consistency would support more equitable outcomes for children and young people regardless of where they live and may improve oversight of long-term outcomes for children involved with statutory systems.

Build Family and Community Understanding of Trauma

Families and communities need greater support to understand the impacts of family and domestic violence on children and young people. Increased education on trauma, child development, protective factors and recovery can strengthen community capacity to respond appropriately and support positive outcomes for children.

Strengthen Family and Domestic Violence Capability Within Legal Systems

Independent Children's Lawyers and other legal professionals working with children should receive specialist training in FDV, including coercive control, trauma, child development and the impacts of violence on children.

This would support more informed decision-making and ensure children's experiences, safety concerns and wellbeing are appropriately considered throughout legal proceedings.

Recognise Specialist Expertise

Specialist FDV services play a critical role in identifying and responding to children's experiences of violence. Their expertise should be sought and valued in child protection, education, health and legal decision-making processes to ensure responses are trauma-informed, child-centred and focused on long-term safety and wellbeing.

What approaches are most effective in supporting children and young people who are using violence or displaying harmful sexual behaviours to take accountability, change behaviours, and reduce harm?

Greater national consistency is needed in responses to children and young people who are using violence or displaying harmful sexual behaviours. There is currently no nationally consistent framework, model or practice standard to guide identification, assessment, intervention and evaluation across jurisdictions.

Early intervention approaches should balance accountability with developmentally appropriate therapeutic responses that recognise the influence of trauma, family violence, social environments and developmental factors. Responses should prioritise safety while supporting opportunities for behavioural change and positive development.

The Second Action Plan should support investment in evidence-informed interventions, workforce capability and national practice guidance to strengthen consistency and improve outcomes for children, young people and families.

How should the Second Action Plan respond to current or emerging forms of harm affecting children and young people, including technology-facilitated abuse, harmful online content, and violence within peer and dating relationships?

The role of online content, including pornography, in shaping attitudes towards relationships, consent, gender roles and sexuality should be considered within broader discussions about the drivers of FDV.

Understanding of online content, promotes healthy relationships, and helps young people distinguish between pornography and real-world expectations of safe, respectful and consensual relationships.

Prevention efforts should support critical digital literacy, healthy relationship education and age-appropriate discussions about consent, respect and online content to help young people distinguish between harmful representations and healthy, respectful relationships.

How can children and young people be meaningfully involved in shaping the policies, programs and services that affect them?

Children and young people lived experience consultations groups and feedback. Work with organisations such as peak bodies nationally and within State and Territories (ie YACWA).

Priority 4: People who use violence

What Would Make the Biggest Difference in Preventing and Responding Earlier to the Use of Violence?

Early Intervention and Healthy Relationships Education

Early intervention presents an important opportunity to prevent the development and escalation of violent behaviours. Children and young people exposed to violence benefit from supports that strengthen healthy relationship skills, emotional regulation, respect, consent and communication. This education must also occur with influential adults, caregivers and parents to support transfer of knowledge and societal/cultural change.

Continued investment in Healthy Relationships education can contribute to earlier identification of harmful behaviours and support long-term violence prevention outcomes.

Support for children and young people who have experienced FDV is vital in prevention.

Mandated Behaviour Change and Accountability

People who use violence should be held accountable for their behaviour while being supported to engage in evidence-informed interventions that reduce the likelihood of future harm.

Behaviour change programs should reinforce that violence, coercive control and abuse are choices, while supporting participants to understand the impacts of their actions on victim-survivors, children, families and communities.

How Can Services, Families, Communities, Workplaces, Institutions and Others Better Recognise and Respond Safely to People Using Violence or at Risk of Using Violence?

Strengthen Workplace Engagement in Prevention

Workplaces are an important but often underutilised setting for FDV prevention and early intervention. Workforce education can strengthen awareness of family and domestic violence, improve recognition of harmful behaviours and increase confidence in responding appropriately when concerns arise.

Training should be available across all levels of organisations, including leadership and management roles, to strengthen organisational capability and referral pathways.

Strengthen Workplace and Institutional Policies

Workplaces and institutions should implement clear and robust FDV policies that support victim survivors while also providing appropriate pathways for responding to employees or individuals who are using violence.

Invest in Workforce Capability

Effective responses to people who use violence require a skilled and supported workforce across specialist and mainstream systems.

This includes:

- Increased FDV-specific training for law enforcement personnel.
- Affordable and accessible training in recognised FDV practice frameworks and intervention models.
- Ongoing professional development to strengthen workforce capability and confidence.

Provide Clinical Supervision and Workforce Support

Accessible and regular clinical supervision should be available for all frontline FDV practitioners. Clinical supervision supports workforce wellbeing, reduces burnout, strengthens practice quality and assists staff to safely respond to complex and high-risk situations.

Improve Access to Specialist Support Services

Additional funding is needed for specialist FDV counselling and support services to reduce wait times and improve access for victim survivors. Early access to counselling and specialist support can improve safety, support recovery and reduce the long-term impacts of violence.

Strengthen Community Recognition and Response

Families, communities and institutions should be supported to recognise early warning signs of abuse, coercive control and harmful behaviours. Community education and practical training can increase confidence to safely respond to concerns, challenge harmful attitudes and encourage earlier help-seeking and intervention.

Strengthen Community Group and Children Young People Services Engagement in Prevention

Community groups and organisations including sporting, religious, cultural and activity should be supported to implement FDV policies and frameworks.

What Approaches Are Most Effective in Supporting People Who Use Violence to Take Accountability, Change Behaviours, and Reduce the Use of Violence, While Focusing on Victim-Survivor Safety?

Strengthen Information Sharing and Risk Assessment

Improved information sharing across services and systems is critical to increasing accountability and enhancing victim-survivor safety. Information sharing arrangements should support a clearer understanding of patterns of behaviour across current and previous relationships, including coercive control, physical violence, financial abuse, technology-facilitated abuse and escalating risk factors.

Information sharing arrangements should support a clearer understanding of patterns of behaviour across current and previous relationships, including coercive control, physical violence, financial abuse, technology-facilitated abuse and escalating risk factors.

A more comprehensive picture of a person's use of violence can support more informed legal and therapeutic interventions, strengthen risk assessment, and ensure victim-survivor safety remains central to all responses.

Combine Accountability with Therapeutic Intervention

Effective responses to people who use violence should combine accountability with opportunities for behaviour change. Behaviour change programs, counselling, psycho-social education and therapeutic interventions should reinforce that violence is a choice and challenge minimisation, denial and victim-blaming.

Access to relevant family violence information, including Family Violence Incident Reports (FVIRs), can strengthen interventions by helping practitioners:

- Identify patterns of abuse across incidents and relationships.
- Reduce opportunities for blame-shifting onto victim survivors.

- Better assess escalation and risk factors.
- Tailor interventions to address accountability and behaviour change.

Increase Community Safety Through Greater Transparency

Consideration should be given to exploring mechanisms that strengthen community safety and perpetrator accountability, including lessons from offender disclosure and information-sharing schemes used in other jurisdictions. Any future reform should be informed by evidence, victim-survivor safety considerations and appropriate privacy safeguards.

How Can Governments and Services Strengthen Culturally Safe, Accessible and Evidence-Informed Responses for a Range of Communities and Cohorts?

Continue Co-Designed and Community-Led Approaches

Responses should continue to be designed and delivered in partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. Programs should recognise the impacts of colonisation, intergenerational trauma, racism and socioeconomic disadvantage while maintaining a focus on safety, accountability and healing.

The same commitment to co-design and culturally safe service delivery should extend to culturally and linguistically diverse communities, refugee and migrant communities and LGBTQIA+ communities to ensure services are relevant, accessible and responsive.

Broaden Eligibility for Support Programs

Many support programs remain focused on intimate partner violence and do not adequately respond to violence occurring within broader family relationships. Eligibility criteria should be expanded to ensure victim survivors experiencing violence from parents, adult children, siblings, carers or extended family members can access support.

This is particularly important in the context of housing pressures and cost-of-living challenges, which are contributing to more intergenerational and extended family living arrangements.

Address Systems Abuse Through Legal Processes

The legal system can unintentionally provide opportunities for ongoing coercion and control through the misuse of court processes and legal proceedings. Family Violence Restraining Order processes can be used to prolong contact, create distress, exert ongoing control and place emotional and financial burdens on victim survivors.

A review of legal processes should consider safeguards that reduce opportunities for systems abuse while maintaining procedural fairness.

Improve Access to Legal Assistance

Access to legal representation remains a significant barrier for many victim survivors. Funded legal services play a critical role in supporting access to justice; however, current eligibility criteria can exclude people with limited financial resources who are retaining funds for essential future expenses such as migration or relocation costs.

Expanding access to legal assistance would improve safety, reduce financial hardship and strengthen access to justice.

Current free legal support whereby engagement is through pro-bono support can also create safety and justice risks through poor knowledge and understanding of FDV.

Strengthen Housing and Crisis Accommodation Responses

Housing remains one of the most significant barriers to safety. Increased investment is needed in both emergency accommodation and long-term housing options, particularly in regional and remote communities.

Victim survivors experiencing high levels of risk should have timely access to safe accommodation, and recommendations from specialist FDV services regarding housing transfers and priority housing allocations should be given greater weight in decision-making processes.

Improve Victim Information and Justice System Navigation

Victim survivors often experience uncertainty when navigating legal processes. Strengthening mechanisms for providing consistent updates throughout court proceedings, bail processes and corrections pathways would improve safety planning, reduce anxiety and increase confidence in the justice system.

Access to information is an important component of procedural fairness, safety planning and recovery.

Improve Coordination Across Justice Systems

Greater coordination is needed between justice agencies, including courts, WA Police, Community Corrections, Victim Support Services and other government departments. Improved communication and information sharing can support more coordinated risk management, strengthen accountability for people who use violence and improve safety outcomes for victim survivors.

Prioritise Family and Domestic Violence Across Government Systems

Family and domestic violence risk should be recognised as a cross-government issue requiring coordinated responses across housing, justice, health, child protection and community services.

Victim-survivor safety should remain a primary consideration in decision-making processes that affect housing, legal outcomes, service access and recovery.

Improve Evaluation of Perpetrator Interventions

Investment in perpetrator interventions should be accompanied by consistent evaluation frameworks to strengthen understanding of what contributes to sustained behaviour change, improved victim-survivor safety and reduced recidivism.

National evaluation would support continuous improvement and strengthen the evidence base for future investment decisions.

Priority 5: System Integration and Workforce

What would make the biggest difference in creating a more coordinated and connected system response for people affected by violence against women and children and other forms of gender based violence and people using violence?

Resource coordinated system improvement

Effective system integration requires dedicated and sustained investment. While significant effort is often directed towards individual service delivery, fewer resources are available to support the coordination, collaboration and system improvement activities required to deliver integrated responses.

The Second Action Plan should support sustained investment in system integration initiatives that reduce service fragmentation, strengthen cross-sector collaboration and improve pathways for victim-survivors. Investment should also support initiatives that strengthen perpetrator accountability and reduce barriers to accessing support.

Invest in economic abuse expertise

Economic abuse is a significant and often under-recognised form of family and domestic violence that can have long-term impacts on safety, recovery and financial independence.

The Second Action Plan should support specialist expertise, workforce capability and cross-sector responses to improve identification and responses to economic abuse. This includes strengthening partnerships with the financial sector and supporting initiatives that improve recognition of financial control, coercion and exploitation.

Strengthen cross-service collaboration

Victim-survivors frequently interact with multiple services simultaneously, including housing, health, mental health, child protection, justice and specialist family and domestic violence services.

Stronger collaboration between services can improve continuity of care, reduce service duplication, minimise re-traumatisation and support more coordinated responses. National reform efforts should continue to support mechanisms that strengthen collaboration, information sharing and joint responses across sectors.

Strengthen enforcement and monitoring of protection orders

Improve enforcement of FVROs and VROs, including clearer processes for monitoring people who have been served with these orders and responding promptly to breaches.

What workforce capabilities, supports, or conditions are most needed to strengthen prevention, early intervention, response and recovery?

Address system failures caused by short-term funding

Short-term funding arrangements can undermine workforce stability, service continuity and long-term planning. Effective programs may lose skilled staff, established partnerships and community trust when funding periods conclude without ongoing investment.

Greater funding certainty would strengthen workforce retention, support long-term service planning and improve the sustainability of effective initiatives.

What approaches or models appear most effective in improving collaboration, coordination and information sharing across services, systems and programs?

Improve early access to legal support

Access to timely legal advice can prevent issues from escalating across multiple systems and improve victim-survivors' ability to make informed decisions about safety, housing, parenting, immigration and justice matters.

Early legal assistance should be recognised as an important component of integrated responses and supported through increased accessibility and service capacity.

Prevent systems abuse through legal processes

Perpetrators may misuse legal and administrative systems to continue patterns of coercion and control, including creating barriers to legal representation, generating unnecessary legal proceedings or exploiting procedural processes.

System design should minimise opportunities for legal systems abuse while maintaining procedural fairness and access to justice.

What supports do specialist and universal services need to provide inclusive, accessible and response services?

Ensure adequate funding across specialist and universal services

Inclusive, accessible and responsive services require adequate and sustainable investment. Funding models should reflect increasing demand, workforce requirements and the complexity of victim-survivor experiences.

Investment should focus on improving accessibility, service quality and long-term outcomes, particularly for individuals experiencing multiple and intersecting forms of disadvantage.

Strengthen accountability in perpetrator interventions

Services working with people who use violence require sufficient resourcing to deliver evidence-informed interventions that maintain accountability and prioritise victim-survivor safety.

Investment should support quality assurance, workforce capability, evaluation and continuous improvement to strengthen the effectiveness of perpetrator interventions.

What evidence, workforce or system gaps should the Second Action Plan prioritise to strengthen implementation and improve outcomes over time?

Standardise system responses nationally

Variation in policy, legislation, information-sharing arrangements and service responses across jurisdictions can create inconsistency for victim-survivors and challenges for cross-border service delivery.

Greater national consistency would strengthen accountability, improve coordination and support more equitable outcomes regardless of location.

Support and train the specialist workforce

A skilled, supported and sustainable workforce is critical to achieving the objectives of the National Plan.

Workforce development should include access to specialist training, professional supervision, leadership development and wellbeing supports. These investments strengthen practice quality, support workforce retention and reduce the impacts of vicarious trauma and burnout.

Consideration should also be given to the development of a national family and domestic violence workforce strategy to address workforce shortages, capability requirements and future service demand.

Strengthen Outcomes Measurement and Evaluation

Effective implementation of the Second Action Plan will require robust outcomes measurement, evaluation and public reporting. National investment decisions should be informed by evidence about what improves safety, wellbeing, recovery and perpetrator accountability, while recognising the complexity of family, domestic and sexual violence and the long-term nature of social change.

Nationally consistent approaches to outcomes measurement would support continuous improvement, strengthen accountability and improve the evidence base for future investment decisions. Investment in evaluation should also recognise the value of lived experience, frontline service expertise and long-term outcome tracking.

CONCLUSION

Zonta House welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the development of the Second Action Plan under the National Plan to End Violence against Women and Children 2022-2032.

The experiences of victim-survivors accessing specialist family and domestic violence services demonstrate the importance of sustained investment across prevention, early intervention, housing, recovery, system integration and perpetrator accountability. While significant progress has been made nationally, demand for specialist services continues to exceed capacity and victim-survivors continue to face barriers to safety, housing, justice and recovery.

Achieving the vision of the National Plan will require long-term commitment, meaningful engagement with specialist services and lived-experience representatives, nationally coordinated reform and investment in evidence-informed responses that improve outcomes for victim-survivors, children and young people, and communities.

Zonta House remains committed to contributing to reform efforts and supporting a future where all women and children can live free from violence.