

TIME FOR ACTION:
THE NATIONAL COUNCIL'S PLAN
FOR AUSTRALIA TO
REDUCE VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN AND THEIR CHILDREN
2009–2021

A SNAPSHOT

March 2009

NOTE: For a full copy of *Time for Action*, the *Background Paper* and the *Cost of Violence* report:

Visit: http://www.ofw.fahcsia.gov.au/reducing_violence/national_plan/index.htm

Phone: 1300 764 656

“As a nation, the time has well and truly come to have a national conversation – a public national conversation, not a private one – about how it could still be the case that in 2008 so many Australian women could have experienced violence...

It is my gender – it is our gender – Australian men – that are responsible. And so the question is: what are we going to do about it?”

*The Hon. Kevin Rudd MP
Prime Minister of Australia, 2008*

Developing the plan

In May 2008, Prime Minister Kevin Rudd and the Minister for the Status of Women, Tanya Plibersek, set up the 11 member National Council to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children. Government asked the Council to lead a national conversation and analyse research to produce a plan to reduce the incidence and the impact of sexual assault and domestic and family violence perpetrated against women and their children.

In developing *Time for Action : The National Council’s Plan for Australia to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children, 2009-2021*, the Council consulted more than 2,000 Australians. This involved meetings in every State and Territory, six expert roundtable discussions, reviewing 370 formal written submissions and more than 350 interviews with both victims and with perpetrators of sexual assault and domestic and family violence. The Council drew from the available evidence, undertook research to identify current responses to violence against women across Australia, commissioned a comparison of State and Territory domestic violence and sexual assault laws, and was informed by an analysis of the costs to the economy of violence against women and their children. In writing the Plan, the Council invited people with a variety of expertise to act as ‘critical friends’ and provide feedback on its draft Plan.

The Council formally presented *Time for Action* to the Government in March 2009. *Time for Action* argues for a sustained new level of investment in primary prevention and the justice system to create respectful relationships, fair outcomes, and safe communities. This is to be complemented by more effectively planned, targeted and evaluated approaches to services that respond to victims and their families in all their diversity, holding perpetrators accountable for their violence, and working to stop men’s violence against women and their children.

Size of the problem

Violence against women is a fundamental breach of human rights, and sexual assault and domestic and family violence are the most pervasive forms of violence perpetrated against women in this country.

Sexual assault and domestic and family violence cannot be excused or justified under any circumstances. It is wrong and all victims need compassionate and highly responsive support and all perpetrators must be held accountable for their violence. While both men and women can be perpetrators and can be victims of sexual assault and domestic and family violence, research shows that the overwhelming majority of such violence in Australia is perpetrated by men against women.

- Any woman can become a victim of sexual assault and/or domestic violence – violence knows no geographical, socio-economic, age, ability, cultural or religious boundaries.
- Over their lifetimes, sexual violence affects almost one in five Australian women and physical violence affects at least one in three Australian women.
- Women usually experience violence at the hands of men they know, often in their own homes, often repeatedly.
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women report higher levels of physical violence and are more likely to sustain serious injuries.
- Women with disabilities are more vulnerable to violence and often have fewer pathways to appropriate support or options to escape violence particularly when perpetrated by partners and/or carers.
- Young women experience higher rates of sexual assault.
- Immigrant and refugee women are more likely to be murdered as a result of domestic violence.
- Almost one in four children in Australia has witnessed violence against their mother or stepmother.
- Women and their children who have experienced violence have poorer health and use health services, including mental health services, more often, even after they have escaped the violence.
- Without implementing a plan to reduce violence against women and their children, an estimated 750,000 Australian women will report being a victim of violence in 2021–22.

- The cost of violence against women and their children to the Australian economy is estimated to be \$13.6 billion in 2008-09 and, if there is no reduction in current rates, it will cost the economy an estimated \$15.6 billion by 2021-22.

Areas for improvement

Against a background of international developments, and as a signatory to the *United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women* (1979) and the *United Nations Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women* (1994), Australia has for decades acknowledged it has a responsibility to prevent sexual assault and domestic and family violence through policy, legislative and service reform. Despite significant efforts and investments, the horrific numbers of women and their children affected by violence has not shifted over the decades. The statistics about prevalence and the evidence about the impacts and economic costs of violence against women compel governments to reform for safety.

The *Background Paper to Time for Action* analyses the way the Australian Government and each State and Territory Government is currently dealing with violence against women and their children.

A fragmented system

All jurisdictions have implemented, or are in the process of implementing, cross-departmental and inter-agency approaches to sexual assault and domestic and family violence. However, significant barriers to effective collaboration and partnership impede genuine implementation of such approaches and no mechanisms to monitor and evaluate these whole-of-government approaches appear to be in place.

Gaps between policy intent and implementation

Nationally, there are gaps between policy and legislative intent and their implementation. Policies and laws interact in some cases to the detriment of women's and children's safety. Repeated stories about inadequate arrangements to support the portability of domestic violence orders across State and Territory borders; contradictory impacts experienced by victims as a result of their engagement with the Family Law and child protection and justice systems; and, the variance across jurisdictions in the way in which laws and procedures define consent and free agreement in sexual assault matters, signal the urgency for legal reform.

Failure to invest in primary prevention

Past investments in communication campaigns about violence against women have not been sustained or sufficiently aligned to ensure coherency in messages to the community. Public campaigns are a critical partner in any social change process and there is evidence that they work when they focus on positive messages promoting cultural and behavioural change, rather than focusing on victims as a means of encouraging them to access support.

Inadequate funding of services

Despite the wide ranging impacts of violence against women, funding commitments vary widely across jurisdictions with many initiatives operating as pilots. This severely impedes organisations' ability to attract and retain skilled staff in a sector where the work is complex, stressful and not well paid.

Responses are not tailored and accessible

A one-size response does not fit all victims and their children. Service systems are currently inadequate in supporting women in all their diversity. They are insufficiently integrated to provide a seamless and coherent service that addresses the multiple impacts violence has on a woman and her children's health, housing, financial, employment, schooling, family and social support needs.

Lack of evidence

In the small proportion of cases where the successful prosecution of perpetrators of violence occurs, the investment is primarily in sentencing rather than rehabilitation. This is partly because of a serious lack of knowledge about what interventions work in stopping men's violence. As a minimum, building the evidence about what works in primary prevention, what services for victims and their families promote safety and recovery, what law and procedure provides a just legal response for victims, what risk assessment and risk management tools effectively trigger early intervention, as well as what works in stopping men's violent behaviour, are critical to achieving the safety of all women and their children.

Inadequate monitoring and reporting

Adequate data and evaluation to inform understandings of what works, what works best and why, to ensure government and community investments are effective in reducing and ultimately preventing violence against women and their children, is consistently lacking. Setting the baseline for monitoring change over time, agreed by all governments, is essential.

Looking at the plan

“The Council’s vision for Australia is that women and their children live free from violence, within respectful relationships and in safe communities.”

*Libby Lloyd AM
Chair, National Council to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children
March 2009*

The experiences and needs of women and their children are positioned as central to the Plan through its vision, its values and its principles. The Plan recognises that:

- Women want their communities to be free from violence where they and their families live in safety and enjoy strong and respectful relationships.
- Women, in all their diversity, who are at risk of violence, are experiencing violence or are trying to recover from the trauma of violence, should have access to easily identified, appropriate and skilled services.
- If a woman needs help through the legal system, it must treat her with dignity and hold the perpetrator accountable for his behaviour.
- Perpetrators must accept responsibility for changing their behaviour and participate in accessible, effective, evidence-based programs to ensure their attitudes change and their violence is not repeated.
- Achieving these goals hinges on the entire system joining seamlessly, with all the parts working together, to assure women and their children that they will be safe and live free from violence.

Time for Action proposes sweeping changes between now and 2021. It sets a framework for social change through the achievement of six outcomes, delivered through 25 strategies and 117 actions. Of these 117 actions, Council identifies 20 actions for urgent implementation to quickly achieve real benefits for women and their children. The multiplicity of actions are borne from Council’s comprehensive consultation process, and whilst the actions themselves will significantly contribute to achieving Council’s vision, the reality is there will necessarily be variability of engagement with these actions across jurisdictions.

The key message therefore to governments is that it is time for action to:

- Bring forward the new era of federalism through governments uplifting their performance to break through entrenched patterns of violence against women and their children, repairing the fragmentation and inconsistency across the service system, and demonstrating leadership on the international stage in achieving the goals of the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Violence Against Women.
- Close the Gap for Indigenous women who are 35 times more likely to suffer family violence and sustain serious injury requiring hospitalisation, and 10 times more likely to die due to family violence, than non-Indigenous women.
- Enhance the role of the community sector in preventing violence against women and their children through realistic and sustained funding for services and an investment in skilling and supporting the workforce to achieve holistic responses to the complex of needs of women and their children who are victims of violence.
- Stop the intergenerational cycle of violence through a focus on children and young people that both protects their safety as well as skills them to build and sustain respectful, ethical, non-violent relationships for the future.
- Create a fair Australia by challenging the social mores of our communities and create a new ethos that ensures respect, safety and equality for all.
- Analyse the cost benefit of the current proportion of investment in crisis services and identify opportunities for reinvestment in prevention and early intervention.
- Collectively develop baseline data, evidence and clear targets to galvanise effort for reform and investment for effective action in building safe communities.

Communities are safe and free from violence

Everyone in Australia - individuals, families, communities, business and all levels of government - must take responsibility for preventing violence against women and their children. It is essential that we all recognise that this is not just a women's issue. Men also are required to play a key role in preventing violence

and ensuring that our society, particularly our women and children, are safe and free from violence. Men speaking out in opposition to violence against women are critical to achieving cultural change in attitudes and behaviour towards women.

The urgent actions recommended by Council for immediate implementation to support the achievement of this outcome are:

1.1.1 Develop a national primary prevention framework that draws on international and national evidence of the most effective strategies for preventing violence against women, and prioritises key settings and population groups in which to coordinate primary prevention initiatives and actions.

1.1.2 Establish a National Centre of Excellence for the Prevention of Violence against Women to lead thinking, broker knowledge, co-ordinate a national research agenda and data collection effort, provide a national and international primary point of contact, and monitor and report on the impact of the Plan of Action.

1.1.3 For Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, in particular in isolated and remote communities, increase access to appropriate housing to reduce overcrowding and the incidence of sexual assault and family violence that may arise from such situations.

1.3.1 Recognising that most men are not violent towards women, encourage them to take a role in countering such violence and promote understandings of, and support for, expressions of masculinities that are non-violent. For example:

- Increasingly target men and boys as agents promoting an end to men's violence against women (such as in the *White Ribbon Campaign* and programs in clubs and sporting and other organisations).
- Encourage men who play a leading role in the community, such as Members of Parliament, government officials, academics, business or community leaders, when making a public address, in addition to acknowledging the traditional owners of the land, to declare that they reject violence against women and their children in any form.

1.5.1 Include “Communities are safe and free from violence” as the fifth Priority Goal under the Promoting and Maintaining Good Health National Research Priority.

Relationships are respectful

Respectful interpersonal relationships form the basis of a safe community. It is never too early to learn the values and practice the skills that enable people to develop and sustain ethical, non-violent relationships. While these values and skills are assumed to be learned in the home, this is not always the case. Indeed, given the number of women and children who experience and/or witness violence in their home, respectful relationships education through school, recreational, faith-based, sporting, formal care and other environments influential on young people's development is critical. Supporting parents to be effective in raising respectful children, and skilling teachers, youth workers and community leaders to educate for respectful relationships is also critical to achieving the safety and wellbeing of all individuals, families and communities.

The urgent actions recommended by Council for immediate implementation to support the achievement of this outcome are:

2.1.1 As part of developing a National Primary Prevention Framework (preventing violence against women), build the capacity of the prevention education sector by researching and evaluating primary prevention outcomes, develop standards and indicators for best practice programs, and develop tools and information products to support programs in different settings.

2.2.1 Develop, trial, implement and evaluate educational programs, in a range of settings, based on best practice principles, for pre-schoolers, children, adolescents and adults that encourage respectful relationships and protective behaviours.

Services meet the needs of women and their children

The first door must be the right door for women and their children seeking support as a result of violence. The sector responsible for delivering services to women and their children shows great flexibility, adaptability and responsiveness. The sector's workforce, however, needs strengthening and strategic planning for the future so that services can attract and retain the right workers with the right skills. Services also need to be confident about sustained and adequate funding to support their delivery of high quality and tailored responses that meet the holistic, often complex and multi-dimensional physical, practical and emotional needs of victims and their families.

The urgent actions recommended by Council for immediate implementation to support the achievement of this outcome are:

3.2.1 Governments at all levels support the full implementation of strategies concerning domestic and family violence in *The Road Home: A National Approach to Reducing Homelessness* and in Outcome 4: 'Responses are just' of this Plan of Action.

3.2.2 Audit crisis accommodation services to determine their accessibility and safety for all women experiencing violence with a particular focus on rural women, girls and young women, older women, women with adolescent boys, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women, women with disabilities, women with no income, immigrant and refugee women and women with mental health, alcohol and/or drug dependence issues.

3.3.1 Following consultation with the sector, establish a professional national telephone and online crisis support service for anyone in Australia who has experienced, or is at risk of, sexual assault and/or domestic and family violence. The service should integrate and coordinate with existing services in all States and Territories, offer professional counselling, provide information and referrals, use best practice technology, link with other 1800 numbers, have direct links with relevant local and state services, and provide professional supervision and advice to staff in services in isolated and remote areas.

3.3.2 Provide funding to support a national network of locally developed healing centres and other emerging initiatives and support services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities in urban, regional, rural, remote and isolated areas, to address their experiences of trauma and violence.

3.3.4 Ensure children who are living with, or have lived with, sexual assault and/or domestic and family violence do not have their safety, wellbeing, support and counselling needs compromised, and that all interventions are in accord with the safety and wellbeing of their mothers.

Responses are just

As long as sexual assault and domestic and family violence persist, Australia is obligated under national and international conventions to legislate against it; to prosecute breaches of laws; and to provide appropriate civil law responses that protect against further violence, and promote recovery and wellbeing. While there have been strong improvements in these areas across governments, some laws remain inadequate, are not applied in the way they were intended, can re-victimise women within the justice process, or are not accessible and equitable. Additionally, the interaction of some laws that are particularly relevant to victims and their families - including family, child protection, and State and Territory domestic violence and sexual assault laws – may undermine the safety of women and their children.

The urgent actions recommended by Council for immediate implementation to support the achievement of this outcome are:

4.1.1 The Australian Government takes leadership to ensure the impending United Nations Convention on Victims Rights (expected in 2011) fully reflects the *United Nations Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women* and principles of other human rights conventions, such as the *United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities*, which Australia has ratified.

4.2.1 Establish a reference for the Australian Law Reform Commission to examine present State/Territory domestic and family violence, and child protection legislation, and federal family law, and propose solutions to ensure that the inter-relationship in the application of these laws works to protect women and children from violence.

4.3.1 Establish a mechanism that enables automatic national registration of domestic and family violence protection orders and subsequent variations, adaptations and modifications occurring anywhere in Australia or New Zealand; and consider the need to include police-issued domestic and family violence orders on the national register.

4.3.2 Establish or build on emerging homicide/fatality review processes in all States and Territories to review deaths that result from domestic and family violence so as to identify factors leading to these deaths, improve system responses and respond to service gaps. As part of this process ensure all information is, or recommendations are, centrally recorded and available for information exchange.

Perpetrators stop their violence

Perpetrators of violence must be held accountable for their behaviour and the consequences of their violence. The evidence about what works in stopping men's violence needs to be developed. A significant investment is required in designing, implementing and evaluating perpetrator treatment programs, delivered in custodial and community settings, that achieve sustained positive attitude and behaviour change. Comprehensive and skilfully managed processes to support the reintegration of perpetrators into their communities where appropriate, is also required to sustain long-term non-violent behaviour.

The urgent actions recommended by Council for immediate implementation to support the achievement of this outcome are:

5.1.1 Fund and develop a correctional facility-specific domestic violence behaviour change program to be tested in Australian prisons.

5.2.1 Support remote communities to agree to develop alternative places to which men are able to go, or be taken to, at the earliest point that violent behaviour or its precursors are exhibited.

5.4.1 Fund and deliver a perpetrator research agenda, including longitudinal research that has a particular focus on: what changes problem behaviour; what maintains behaviour change; the utility of risk assessment tools; the effectiveness of various recidivism reduction strategies; and takes account of different offender characteristics and cultures.

Systems work together effectively

A central objective of the Council's Plan is to establish and foster a coherent response to the problem of violence against women and their children. Currently, service planning, program design, funding, evaluation and reporting are chronically fragmented and lead to inefficient and ineffective outcomes for clients, for agencies and for governments. This seems to be the result of planning approaches and services having been designed for single problems and the establishment of organisations that are targeted to particular client groups. The result is gaps in service provision on the one hand, duplication of services on the other, and competition for scarce funding in the middle. Planning for partnership and collaboration at the whole-of-government level must be championed at the highest levels of government and within the community, and there needs to be designated resources that enable collaborative efforts and investments to work for the benefit of women and their families.

The urgent actions recommended by Council for immediate implementation to support the achievement of this outcome are:

6.1.1 Commonwealth, State, Territory and Local government agencies work collaboratively to develop policy, planning and service delivery responses for sexual assault, domestic and family violence; and establish performance reporting measures that recognise and encourage collaborative achievements and identify fragmented delivery of programs and/or services.

Implementing the plan

“Domestic and family violence and sexual assault are not merely personal or unseen problems, they should be regarded as public concerns that affect families, friends, communities, workplaces, and, ultimately, the nation. The accumulation of case upon case of violence against women and their children is a burden which our society must not sustain. Victims and their following generations must be helped to ensure safer futures not just for individuals but for the conscience of the nation.”

Time for Action: The National Council’s Plan for Australia to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children 2009–2021

Time for Action makes 11 recommendations to the Australian Government to achieve, in partnership with State, Territory and Local Governments, the delivery on its vision, six outcomes and 25 strategies. Consensus on 117 actions, borne from Council’s comprehensive dialogue with the community, should be delivered through four three-year implementation plans to 2021 to achieve all six interdependent outcomes

Council proposes that its Plan be taken to the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) for implementation, given violence against women is a national problem, a complex problem, and one that requires multiple portfolios to collaborate to achieve strategic outcomes in the pursuit of social change.

Monitoring the impact of the plan

“We need a clear road map that will set time lines, allocate responsibilities and use the best evidence available to us to build a future in which violence becomes unthinkable. I want a national plan that gives us clear guidance and concrete strategies to reduce violence, to support victims and survivors and to change the behaviour of perpetrators.”

*The Hon. Tanya Plibersek MP
Minister for the Status of Women, February 2009*

Given Council’s proposal that COAG implement and resource the Council’s Plan, it also proposes that COAG, in consultation with the Council, the sector and other experts, develop a Monitoring and Evaluation Strategy. The Strategy would include agreed indicators for measuring the outcomes of the Plan, set the baseline and targets for monitoring change over the life of the Plan, and establish

a methodology and timeframe for reporting on outcomes. The strategy would also provide for annual reporting to COAG on implementation progress, and, in the longer term, impacts and performance.

The Council recognises that some data and evidence will not be available initially and, through its proposed actions, has set a clear course for the development of data sets, information, standards, benchmarks and evidence as part of the cross-cutting strategy of *building the evidence base* within each of its six outcome areas.

Acknowledgement

The Council recognises and expresses its thanks to all those who contributed to the development of its Plan, *Time for Action*, through the extensive process of community consultation, access to expert research and advice, public submissions, one-on-one interviews and on-line surveys with victims, survivors and perpetrators, specialist roundtables, and 'critical friends' who reviewed the draft report. We have endeavoured to honour your voices for change and to honour the many who have been working tirelessly for many years to achieve safety and equality for women.

Libby Lloyd AM (Chair)

Heather Nancarrow (Deputy Chair)

Associate Professor Moira Carmody
Dr Melanie Heenan
Vanessa Swan

Dorinda Cox
Rachel Kayrooz
Lisa Wilkinson

Maria Dimopoulos
Andrew O'Keefe
Pauline Woodbridge

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