Factsheet: Fourth Action Plan of the *National Plan to Reduce Violence Against Women and Their Children 2010-2022* (the National Plan)

The information in this factsheet is designed to be easy to read.

Introduction

All forms of violence against women and their children are unacceptable, in any community and in any culture. All levels of government, plus business, service providers and the community must commit to continuous action and investment to stop violence before it starts, and support women and children where and when they need it.

Ending violence against women and their children starts with promoting equality between men and women, and respect for all. There is no single cause of violence against women and their children; however, gender inequality sets the stage for such violence to occur. The Fourth Action Plan will continue to address this issue through prevention, early intervention and response, including working with those who use violence, to stop.

The rates of violence against women are highly concerning. One woman is killed every nine days by a current or former partner[[1]](#footnote-1). Rates of sexual violence have increased by eight per cent across Australia between 2016 and 2017[[2]](#footnote-2). Complex violence, such as forced marriage and dowry abuse continue to emerge. Such experiences can be influenced by cultural beliefs and traditions, immigration and settlement in a new country and, in some contexts, religious and/or cultural values, among other factors. These crimes need to be addressed and tackled head on.

The National Plan and development of the Fourth Action Plan

The National Plan was released in 2011. It aims to ensure that each year, fewer women experience violence and more women and their children live safely. The National Plan connects the important work being done by all Australian and state and territory governments, community organisations and individuals. It recognises that violence against women and their children is a complex problem that needs a long-term plan of action. For this reason, the National Plan is being delivered through four action plans that build on each other, with one released every three years. This document outlines key aspects of the Fourth Action Plan, the final action plan in this series.

To develop the Fourth Action Plan, the Australian Government consulted widely with hundreds of people affected by violence, and also with the people working to stop it. In 2018, 30 consultations were held with more than 600 individuals and 400 organisations. These included people working with women who have experienced family, domestic and sexual violence; the general community; researchers; and people working in health, justice and business organisations. The results of these consultations informed the Fourth Action Plan.

The Fourth Action Plan

The Fourth Action Plan has eight key principles. These principles apply to all Fourth Action Plan activities and underpin and inform the five national priorities. The five national priorities highlight the focus areas for government. The priorities reflect what we heard in the consultations and what the evidence tells us works.

National Priority One: Primary Prevention is key

Prevention is the most effective way to eliminate violence against women and their children and is at the core of the Fourth Action Plan. Primary prevention means stopping violence before it occurs. It means changing attitudes, behaviours and accepted standards that excuse, justify or even encourage violence against women and their children. Primary prevention activities are for the whole community, not just for those who have been impacted by violence.

National Priority Two: Support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and their children

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women, children and communities continue to experience disproportionally high rates of violence[[3]](#footnote-3).

We must be clear that family violence is not part of Australian culture, or Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture. Culture and family are central key protective factors that support Indigenous families to be free of violence. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women must be supported to make choices that will protect and promote their own and their families’ long-term safety if they are to break the cycle of trauma and violence. The Fourth Action Plan recognises that preventing and responding to family violence starts by recognising individual, family and community strengths.

Solutions to address violence must effectively engage and equip Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women in decision-making processes. Service providers and governments must work with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and with community-controlled organisations to develop solutions that are culturally appropriate, trauma-informed and holistic and can lead to healing for families and communities.

National Priority Three: Respect, listen and respond to the diverse lived experience and knowledge of women and their children affected by violence

Women of all backgrounds can experience domestic, family and sexual violence. No two women’s experiences of violence are the same. The experiences of victims and survivors can help us understand what works for them. Support services should:

* prioritise the needs and voices of victims and survivors
* avoid discriminating against any victims or survivors
* show an understanding of different experiences of trauma
* take into account the needs and experiences of different cultures
* take into account race, sexuality, gender and disability
* consider inequality between women and men together with other forms of social discrimination and disadvantage.

It is important to consider gender inequality together with other forms of social discrimination and disadvantage. Race, sexuality, gender, and disability, among other forms of identity, can impact the way a woman experiences violence.

National Priority Four: Respond to sexual violence and sexual harassment

Sexual violence can be a form of domestic and family violence and a standalone crime. Like domestic and family violence, more women experience sexual assault and sexual harassment than men[[4]](#footnote-4).

Despite recent changes to legislation there are still many barriers that make it difficult for women to report and access services. This includes women not being believed and as a result not trusting the criminal justice system.

The Fourth Action Plan specifically addresses sexual violence through primary prevention. This includes raising awareness and understanding of issues such as gender equality, consent and healthy sexual relationships, particularly for young people. It also aims to stop people blaming victims. This focus will also contribute to reducing sexual harassment, in the home, workplace, public spaces and online.

National Priority Five: Improve support and service system responses

All governments continue to work hard to improve service responses to ensure women and their children have access to help when they need it. This includes improving how violence is identified and reported, and reducing the stigma associated with seeking support.

**Service systems must work together to:**

* reduce the impact of violence on women and their children
* prioritise their safety
* prevent perpetrators from using violence.

**Recognising and responding to early warning signs is key. Early intervention can:**

* stop the escalation of violence against women and children
* protect victims from immediate harm
* prevent violence from escalating.

Implementing the Fourth Action Plan

Over the coming months the Australian and state and territory governments will develop a national implementation plan. The plan will outline the policies and programs all governments will implement to address the Fourth Action Plan priorities to reduce violence against women and their children. The implementation plan will also outline how performance will be monitored and measured over the life of the Fourth Action Plan.

For more information about the National Plan:

* Go to [www.plan4womenssafety.dss.gov.au](http://www.plan4womenssafety.dss.gov.au)
* Read the full plan National Plan at [www.dss.gov.au](http://www.dss.gov.au)

For support:

Help is available if you, or someone you know is experiencing violence. In the case of an emergency call 000.

For information, support and counselling contact 1800RESPECT on 1800 737 732 or visit www.1800respect.org.au. This service is free, confidential and open 24 hours a day.

1. Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW), *Family, domestic and sexual violence in Australia: continuing the national story* 2019 (Canberra, ACT: AIHW, 2019), https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/domestic-violence/family-domestic-sexual-violence-australia-2019/report-editions. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS), *Recorded Crime – Victims, Australia, 2017* (Canberra, ACT: ABS, 2018), <https://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/Lookup/by%20Subject/4510.0~2017~Media%20Release~Recording%20of%20sexual%20assaults%20reaches%20eight-year%20high%20(Media%20Release)~16>. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Our Watch, *Changing the Picture: A National Resource to Support the Prevention of Violence against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Women and their Children* (Melbourne, VIC: Our Watch, 2018), <https://www.ourwatch.org.au/getmedia/ab55d7a6-8c07-45ac-a80f-dbb9e593cbf6/Changing-the-picture-AA-3.pdf.aspx>. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. ABS, 2016 *Personal Safety Survey.* [↑](#footnote-ref-4)