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FINAL REPORT

Department of Social Services

Roundtables to inform the Third Action Plan of the National Plan to Reduce Violence
against Women and their Children – Summary Report

18 July 2016

ISBN: 978-1-925318-48-7

Acknowledgement of Country

Westwood Spice acknowledges the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Traditional Owners and Custodians of Country throughout Australia and recognises their continuing connection to land, water and community.

Alison Plant/Margaret Scott

WestWood Spice

Level 2, 10 Mallett Street
Camperdown NSW 2050

Ph: 02 8594 0594

Fax: 02 8594 0595

Website: www.westwoodspice.com.au

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The consultation noted there are regional variations in the language used to describe the issue of violence against women and their children. “Family violence” is preferred to “domestic violence” in some settings as it recognises the abuse happening within family and kinship groups. For the purpose of this summary report we will use “violence” to encompass both.

Abbreviations and Acronyms

ABS	Australian Bureau of Statistics
ALRC	Australian Law Reform Commission
ANROWS	Australian National Research Organisation for Women’s Safety
AVO	Apprehended Violence Order
CALD	Culturally and linguistically diverse
COAG	Council of Australian Governments
DSS	Department of Social Services
DV	Domestic violence
DVO	Domestic Violence Order
FGM	Female genital mutilation
FSF	Family Safety Framework
FV	Family violence
LGBTIQ	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Intersex and Queer
NDIS	National Disability Insurance Scheme
NT	Northern Territory
OOHC	Out of home care

1. Roundtables in summary

The *National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children 2010-2022* (the National Plan) is a long term plan developed by the Commonwealth, state and territory governments with the community. Its vision is that *Australian women and their children live free from violence in safe communities*. The National Plan includes four three-year action plans. The First Action Plan and Second Action Plan ran from 2010 to 2013 and 2013 to 2016 respectively. The Third Action Plan will run from 2016 to 2019.

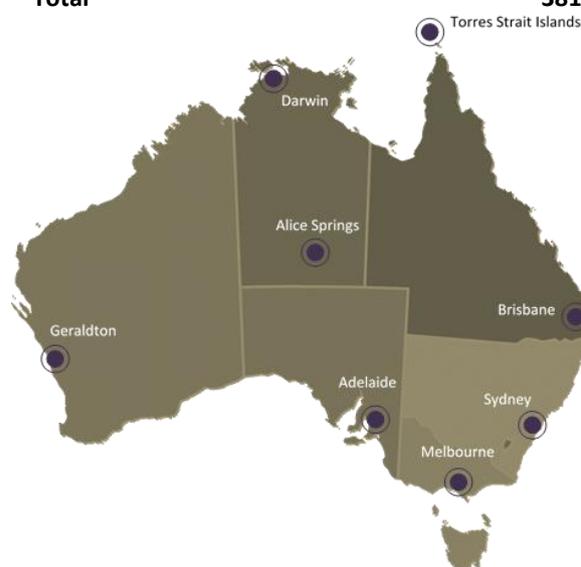
This report provides a summary of the sixteen Third Action Plan roundtable discussions that were held in April and May 2016 in locations as diverse as central Sydney and Thursday Island. The aim of the roundtables was to obtain input from a wide range of stakeholders, and to test and refine draft Third Action Plan priorities and actions informed by research and recommendations from a range of sources including the Council of Australian Governments' (COAG) Advisory Panel on Reducing Violence against Women and their Children Final Report. Each roundtable brought together diverse organisations including women's services; peak bodies; advocacy organisations; local, state and federal government; and research organisations. Most sessions focused on violence against women from an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspective (11 roundtables). One focused on the experiences of culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) women, one on disability, one on issues in regional, rural and remote areas, and two focussed on representatives from the violence against women sector. There were approximately three hundred and eighty roundtable participants. Sixty per cent of participants attended an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander roundtable. In the Aboriginal

and Torres Strait Islander roundtable locations, the roundtable format was such that there were three separate roundtables: one for men, one for women and one for service providers.

The agendas and formats of the roundtables varied. Some roundtables addressed the experience of women and children broadly, whilst others focused on testing specific draft Third Action Plan priorities and actions.

Table 1: Number of participants by session and geographical distribution of roundtables

Disability (Melbourne)	12
Rural, remote and regional (Geraldton)	21
Broader sector (Melbourne)	22
Indigenous men's only (Alice Springs)	9
Indigenous women's only (Alice Springs)	21
Indigenous service providers (Alice Springs)	41
Indigenous men's only (Darwin)	10
Indigenous women's only (Darwin)	15
Indigenous service providers (Darwin)	27
Indigenous urban (Sydney)	23
Indigenous urban (North Adelaide)	18
Broader sector (Brisbane)	25
Torres Strait women	26
Torres Strait men	14
Torres Strait service	30
CALD (Adelaide)	67
Total	381



2. Roundtables feedback - areas underpinning action

This section summarises common themes discussed across the roundtables. It identifies six areas that provide a foundation for other actions and directions: understanding the nature of violence, integrated planning at all levels, funding resourcing, strengthening legislation, capacity building and research.

2.1. *Understanding the nature of violence*

The roundtables raised the importance of continuing work to address the fundamental causes of violence such as gender inequity, and other factors relating to inequality and disadvantage.

It was also highlighted that there is a need to increase the understanding of what violence is and how it manifests, and to address the view that all violence is physical. The roundtable discussions also indicated that there is a need for the Third Action Plan to articulate a clear definition of its scope, include different types of violence and impacts through the life continuum, and focus on different relationship types and settings. For example, women can experience violence in institutional and carer relationships. Research is needed to develop a better understanding of, and skills to address, violence occurring outside of intimate partner relationships. It is also important to include definitions of complex violence.

Roundtable participants were keen to see the Third Action Plan provide clarity on actions that prevent violence. There is still work to be done for the community and the various sectors to understand the difference between primary prevention and early intervention.

Language is needed to combat the euphemisms masking serious abuse. For

example, in disability services violence against women may be described as an “incident” for “investigation”.

2.2. *National framework and planning*

Roundtable participants advocated for a systems approach to facilitate greater integration and collaboration across governments, service providers and agencies including justice, education, health, and housing. This could be embedded into a national framework, and incentives to work closely together at regional and local levels could be built into funding arrangements supported by consistent monitoring and evaluation. Such an approach would improve the effectiveness of cross-sector responses to violence. It could also address the problem of silos, competitive funding and different work contexts.

Roundtable participants noted that such a national framework would promote a whole of system response, from prevention through to crisis, and support after crisis. Such an approach could address key life transitions and the differing needs of children, young people, older women and other vulnerable groups.

The Third Action Plan is an opportunity to communicate how the planned actions integrate with related policy frameworks (spanning disability, child protection, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander for example), and how that drives improved outcomes.

Feedback from the roundtables indicated that the Third Action Plan needs to demonstrate how it links to and builds on other key work including the COAG Advisory Panel and Victorian Royal Commission.

There was also a suggestion that there should be a planning framework, in which state and territory plans sit, and violence prevention plans for all cities and regional areas should sit within the state or territory plan. It was noted that this approach has been effective in the Kimberley region.

It was suggested that it might also be useful to consider developing a policy stream to guide working with men as both perpetrators and change agents to prevent violence.

Linked to the proposed national framework, it was suggested monitoring and reporting could be enhanced by the input from key advisory groups (Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander, CALD, women with disability) in a governance role.

2.3. Funding and resourcing

Funding security was raised as a significant issue in roundtables by many stakeholders, including service providers, community legal centres and advocacy groups. The negative impacts of short term funding included inability for longer term planning, service closures and high turnover of workforce with the associated problems of loss of community confidence and knowledge. This is a particular problem for rural and remote communities where it can be very difficult to attract staff, and new workers may not be culturally competent.

Solutions advocated include longer term contracts for effective local projects and service models where there are incentives for demonstrating enhanced outcomes through increasing collaboration and decreasing competition. Hub based and collaborative models where “no door is the wrong door” optimise existing resources and expertise so that it is not about “more resources for my service”.

Funding for grassroots community organisations to innovate was also considered to be vital.

2.4. Underpinning legislation and the justice system

Developing consistent legislation in the areas of family and domestic violence in all states and territories was considered to be an essential next step for the Third Action Plan. Whilst extensive work has been done by the Australian Law Reform Commission (ALRC)¹ and NSW Law Reform Commission (2010), there is more to be done. Legislative anomalies such as frequent recourse to civil rather than criminal legal actions in order to achieve a faster decision, masks the severity of the issues being addressed.

In the context of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander populations there are ongoing discussions about the role of traditional and customary lore in the justice system. This included early intervention and education to prevent instances of domestic violence as well as when engaging with the legal system.

The national expansion of specialised courts and magistrates for domestic violence cases was supported by the roundtables. In addition, the potential to optimise the use of technology, for instance use of video and mobile phone evidence and other processes to support the safe participation of women and children, was considered important.

Increasing the information shared across jurisdictions and across services and sectors would be beneficial, for example between children’s services and justice systems. Problems with current arrangements were highlighted in relation to serial offenders travelling between different jurisdictions. The

¹ See ALRC report 114 “Family Violence a National Legal Response” 11 November 2010

need to improve information sharing is currently being considered by the Family Law Council.

Navigating the legal and other support processes is challenging and was described as “disempowering”. It was suggested this can exacerbate mental health and other issues. The role of enhanced community legal services to help women navigate the system and take action was seen as very important. The roundtables highlighted the need for plain and easy English versions of documents as well as translations and audio versions. This is particularly important for legal documents but also relevant for educational and prevention work.

2.5. Capacity building and skills development

Work to build capacity in the workforce generally and with specific groups (including police and other first responders, and court personnel) was highlighted as a priority. Fostering a trauma informed approach in service delivery models is essential. The Third Action Plan could drive the development of national standards and thereby work towards consistency in services and workforce capacity (similar to some homeless services models).

Recognition of vicarious trauma impacts of working with (and within) communities impacted by violence was also raised as an area where the workforce needed systematic support and training.

DV-alert training and other similar training was viewed as important for many roles particularly in the context of growing community awareness of the issue. Some roundtables reported increased disclosures of violence to non-specialist agencies (for example Child Care, Education and Housing) and amongst corporates and employers, and

emphasised that training in responding and referring is necessary.

2.6. Research, evaluation, monitoring and information dissemination

In the Third Action Plan, roundtable participants would like to see a framework for whole system monitoring, however services would need to be resourced to report in an efficient, consistent and meaningful way. In addition, the creation of a national knowledge bank and clearing house of effective strategies and research would be valuable to disseminate and apply learning. It is important to note that the Commonwealth and states and territories are funding ANROWS for this purpose.

It was suggested that the framework might prioritise work to calculate the long term social return of investing in prevention. One participant noted: “*We have to understand the long term costs of not acting*”.

Domestic and family violence can be experienced by anyone, however the roundtables emphasised that we already know prevalence is disproportionately higher and more complex in certain groups. Urgent action is needed, informed by significantly more research. These groups include Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women, some CALD groups, sex workers, LGBTIQ and women with disability. It was highlighted that research, evaluation and action plans should be developed collaboratively and disseminated to communities.

Many areas were identified where more research is needed:

- structural issues that increase vulnerability and risk
 - poverty
 - low educational attainment
 - lack of access to transport

- workforce status
 - housing (overcrowding and institutional settings in particular)
- effectiveness of perpetrator work
- experience and prevention of violence against women with disability
- mental health
- experience of children.

It was also suggested that further work should be undertaken with the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) to include data from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities in the Personal Safety Survey.

3. Roundtables feedback – priority areas

In this section, ideas from the roundtables are summarised in five priority areas. The Third Action Plan also recognises the work to prevent violence against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and their children as a priority. Their comments and issues are included in all of the five sections reflecting a leadership role and participation in the majority of consultation meetings. A separate section (4.1) highlights issues raised specifically in relation to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people not covered elsewhere in the report.

3.1. Prevention

Strategies to prevent violence were agreed to be important, with greater clarity required in relation to primary prevention initiatives, as opposed to early intervention. Work such as the recent Our Watch advertising campaign and initiatives with sports organisations were seen as positive, but more needs to be done to achieve widespread culture change across the community. Areas for action are listed below.

- Education of children and young people around respectful relationships. For Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, this needs to draw on local community cultural protocols for respectful communication and behaviour and facilitated in local community settings with community members participating.
- Parenting skills and family conflict management education can be very valuable but there is limited availability currently.
- Education at key life transitions (e.g. first pregnancy, young parents who want the best for a child, family breakup and separation, ageing and loss of

independence) can be important in better preparing for significant changes.

- Education on gender equity, rights and social mores at early stages of transition to life in Australia is important for new migrants.
- Prevention strategies re-emphasising consent to empower women and reducing the risk of violence.
- Research on how to address impacts of pornography and social media.
- Literacy and financial inclusion for women and families to prevent and reduce poverty and enhance options for women.
- Healing programs are a high priority for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities to address intergenerational trauma for men and women.
- Addressing underlying issues, such as poverty and lack of youth services, particularly in remote communities, should be included within the Third Action Plan as prevention strategies.

As noted earlier, it is important to continue to develop an understanding of prevention as distinct from early intervention work. One strategy is to highlight the costs of inaction, and the social return from investment in prevention activities. Roundtables sought clarity on where responsibility for prevention investment sits within current governments' frameworks.

Roundtable discussions raised the important role of mainstream media in changing culture but also flagged that it can undermine preventative work when it blames victims and minimises perpetrator actions. For young people in particular there needs to be recognition of multiple channels of influence and this requires research, social marketing

and targeted programs – and identifying synergies between channels.

Some of the key areas identified by roundtable participants where the media can have a positive impact include:

- changing attitudes - ensure the community understands what domestic and family violence are, and their impacts, and condemns it
- challenging assumptions about perpetrators – who they are and how they behave
- addressing male power assumptions, cultural normalisation of violence.

The current National Campaign was widely supported by roundtable participants and they were keen to see other versions including in different languages. The current [National Campaign resources](#) are available in 19 languages.

Gender equity and cultural frameworks were identified as important, and it was advised that Our Watch should deepen the involvement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and CALD communities in the design and evaluation of preventative work.

Other prevention strategies raised at the roundtables included:

- encouraging more men to work in the sector (social work, health, counselling)
- supporting key male role models – not just sports identities. Be careful how role models are selected. The CALD roundtable highlighted the experience of the same people nominating and being appointed as leaders or role models although they were not necessarily advocates of gender equality
- focusing on vulnerable young parents with multi agency programs. Parenting is a critical transition point and there are known risk factors (lowering of income,

additional stress on the other parent and sleep deprivation)

- providing financial literacy education for women
- expanding respectful relationships education programs across the lifespan including for younger children and children who drop out of school
- encouraging whole of school approaches to violence prevention (current good examples in Victoria)
- using technology – social media in particular - to provide strong consistent messages against violence and supporting the value of respectful relationships.

3.1.1. Leadership

Initiatives to train and develop leaders, both men and women, were considered to be a priority. This requires careful selection and recruitment. Many groups discussed the significance of identifying the right leadership for prevention work. In some communities there are gatekeepers such as faith leaders or Elders who reinforce views at odds with gender equality and respectful relationships.

Support for leaders is also important. In some communities, women who speak out or who provide refuge for women experience retaliation, physical threats and abuse from other community members. Recognising and addressing the impacts of vicarious trauma and the courage and resilience required in this context is vital.

3.2. Support and choices for women affected by violence

3.2.1. Better support and more choices for women

Educating women and communities to understand the different manifestations and impacts of violence and to combat an

acceptance of violence was identified as a fundamental precursor to achieving change. Recognition that many women are reluctant to report violence because of stigma, shame and fear of children being removed is vital.

A wraparound, confidential, trauma informed approach to women who experience violence was strongly advocated. A woman may have a range of needs (e.g. health, mental health, literacy needs) as well as practical requirements of shelter and food. Support may also include the need to work with the whole family. Agencies need to be able to collaborate on the ground and be supported to do that through systemic factors including funding arrangements, service agreements, acquittals and performance indicators.

The view from the roundtables was that women affected by violence should be able to access services early so that interventions are not delayed until a crisis stage. It was highlighted that, ideally, a range of service options should be available, so that women can choose (for example Indigenous and CALD specific or mainstream advice service). In some situations a community's mainstream service may offer greater privacy than a specific community controlled service.

At a grassroots level, women are creating local plans that pre-empt violence. Some examples from the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander roundtables include women and children intentionally being away at high risk times in the community such as when welfare payments arrive, the end of the football season, Christmas and the arrival of the boat. In these situations a whole of family/community response is needed so that violence is prevented and people do not need to hide.

“What to do” (bystander/call to action) information and awareness campaigns were

seen as important, so that communities, employers, teachers, know what action to take if they suspect family or domestic violence. Making [DV-alert](#) or other similar training widely available so that women could be appropriately supported as early as possible was encouraged.

In one state, a Suspect Target Management Plan program is in place. This means that the perpetrator is aware that their behaviour is closely monitored across a range of potential areas.

Other initiatives being trialled rely on technology such as perpetrator tracking apps and personal alarms.

The Family Safety Framework (FSF) in the Northern Territory was identified as one example of success. It is an action based, integrated service response to individuals and families experiencing domestic violence who are at high risk of serious harm or death. This process is based on a crisis management model, rather than a case management model, and based on multi-agency meetings convened by the police. Actions of participating agencies (Government and non-government) must be prompt. Each meeting reports on action items. A key indicator of success has been the very low level of victims that are being re-referred back into the FSF. There are six sites where FSF is operating (Darwin, Katherine, Tennant Creek, Alice Springs, Yuendumu and Nhulunbuy). Across these sites, 10 per cent of victims have been re-referred back into the FSF. This equates to 9 out of 10 victims that have not re-presented as being at high risk of serious harm or death. The FSF and actions taken by participating agencies has resulted in a significant decrease in domestic and family violence risk for these vulnerable families. The figures for Darwin are better than the average, with 3.4 per cent of high risk victims being re-referred after their

risk has been moderated down by the FSF process.

In other areas, co-location of services in “hubs” to facilitate communication and referral was highlighted. Measures to streamline processes so that there is a consistent contact point and women don’t have to repeat information to different providers is important.

In some consultations, specific groups of women were highlighted as requiring attention within the Third Action Plan. These include LGBTIQ women, women in the sex industry and older women. An example of a challenge raised is the denial of access to appropriate housing for transgender people.

3.2.2. Housing

Safe and affordable housing is key to women’s safety, as emphasised at every roundtable. Women and children generally remain in violent homes because they have no alternative place to go. Initiatives to assist women and children to remain at home, removing the perpetrator but providing support with the aim of keeping the family together (when that is what the woman wants) was considered a gap. Ouster orders were cited as being of value in the settings where they are being used.

Within refuge and shelter options, family appropriate accommodation is rare and feedback suggested accommodating teenage sons with their mothers and siblings is particularly difficult. Temporary accommodation in motels over extended periods was identified as being particularly inappropriate for families and added further to distress.

Flexible brokerage is one solution highlighted to better enable access to more accommodation options. For example, in

Whittlesea a program has been trialled to make brokerage no interest loans and case management support available to assist people to secure rental properties in the private sector.

Overcrowding is a known contributing factor to violence. In some communities overcrowding can be predicted (such as during flooding or sorry business) and planned access to temporary housing and ablution blocks would be a good local prevention strategy.

3.3. Sexual violence

Participants stressed the importance of ensuring that the issue of sexual violence is not hidden or diminished within the broader framework of domestic violence. Understanding the prevalence and impact of the full spectrum of types of sexual assault, relationships and contexts was emphasised. This included rape, assault, non-consensual sex, sexual violence within the sex industry, forced marriage and using intimate images without consent. In many communities sexual violence is still not discussed due to very strong cultural taboos.

The limited access to sexual violence services in many contexts was raised by roundtables.

Suggestions to respond to sexual violence focussed on the challenges of responding quickly and minimising the traumatic nature of processes of investigation and evidence. Evacuation to specialist units can re-traumatise women and children in remote areas.

Key actions raised at the roundtables included:

- investing in quick response specialist units – aiming for them to be first point of contact rather than police

- enhancing access to sexual violence services and support.

3.3.1. Forensic evidence

Evidence collection can take too long. Options trialled in Australia and/or internationally in the interest of supporting the victim and the legal process which could be evaluated and introduced nationally included:

- self-collection kits (especially for rural, regional and remote areas)
- accreditation of nurses and other health professionals to provide evidence
- investment in mobile models of collection.

3.3.2. Legislation

It was agreed that the legislation relating to sexual violence should be consistent in all States and Territories. Some of the areas to update include:

- mandatory reporting
- consistent sentencing
- online “revenge porn” (sharing intimate images without permission)
- regulating and removing online pop up pornography
- acceptability of video/mobile phone evidence.

3.4. Responding to children living with violence

The roundtables discussed issues relating to children from a number of perspectives. It was agreed there is an urgent need to pay far greater attention to the impacts of violence on children and there are important dimensions that need to be reflected in the Third Action Plan:

- The distinction between children and young people/youth. The roundtables emphasised that different responses are needed at different life-stages and

suggested the Third Action Plan separates actions for the two groups.

- Fear of child removal in situations of violence may mean the mother delays action until violence is extreme/family is in crisis. It was also noted that children are used by perpetrators to control victims. The protection of children was also raised – in some jurisdictions they are not automatically covered by a parent’s AVO/DVO.
- Children who are living in unsafe and dangerous circumstances in their communities.
- Children and young people who are perpetrators.

Normalisation of violence and inter-generational trauma at home needs to be challenged through education and community programs; teachers and youth workers need training and support to do this.

Information is needed for children in a variety of formats/platforms, supported by programs such as “Love bites” and Respectful Relationships education that is delivered in schools in many states.

3.4.1. Service implications

It was agreed that a focus on child centred services and specific expertise in working with children is essential. It should not just be added to the service provided to the mother.

Both urban and regional centres reported inadequate accommodation for families escaping violence. They are unable to meet current demand, particularly where the family included teenage boys.

Immediate solutions when children are not safe at home are required in many communities. For example, it was reported that children are outside late at night and at risk because they have nowhere safe to go.

Specialised skills/trauma services for children and children with sexually transmitted infections are a gap in many communities. Evacuation for treatment may add trauma.

Policy and specialised services are also needed for children/young people who are perpetrators.

3.4.2. Intersection with out of home care (OOHC)/child protection

The roundtable discussions highlighted the importance of close consideration of the overlapping issues of child protection and violence and the vulnerability of children in OOHC.

The Senate Inquiry into out of home care (2015) recognised that children with disability are over represented in removals.

The very high and increasing rates of removal of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children was highlighted in the Inquiry and considered a matter of urgency.

There is a need for continuity of records and information sharing – with medical specialists and other service providers.

3.4.3. Workforce capacity building

A pressing need and priority was identified for training in domestic and family violence and support for teachers and youth workers to enable them to better identify, support and refer at risk children and youth.

3.5. Perpetrators

Discussion on perpetrators highlighted the need for a continuum of responses, starting with prevention work through to community led early intervention through to crisis response and behaviour change work within the justice system. Integrated responses are important. For example, Corrective Services in

the NT and NSW are testing programs combining behaviour change, employment and education.

There was strong support for holding men to account, whilst recognising the impacts in many communities of intergenerational trauma that contributes to abusive behaviours and related alcohol and drug issues.

There were a number of men's programs that are reporting successes (mostly anecdotally), however all programs working with men need standards and accreditation to ensure quality. There are currently limited programs and workers with skills and experience to work with perpetrators. Roundtables emphasised the need to evaluate behaviour change initiatives and expand these to reach diverse groups of men.

It was agreed that it is important to make perpetrator programs available as early intervention voluntary programs as well as being mandated by courts.

It was also identified that programs are provided to offenders during incarceration. However, on leaving prison, perpetrators felt that they were not supported with services and lost the benefit of the programs.

In Indigenous communities, there was often the additional issue of men having nowhere to go after leaving imprisonment, and in many cases it was expected that they would return home to families (and were invited to do so) despite orders to the contrary. The need for some form of transitional accommodation until respectful relationships could be established was considered important.

Better ways of linking information are needed so that identified perpetrators can be monitored across regions and jurisdictions.

3.5.1. Early intervention

The importance of early intervention and a whole of family approach was emphasised at all the roundtables. Removal of the perpetrator is not always the solution that the woman wants. Key early intervention strategies identified include follow up within 24 hours of an incident by the police and/or referral to counselling services. Rapid action and follow up underscores the seriousness of the incident. In Queensland, there is counselling in the watch house following a domestic violence matter.

Increased use of Ouster orders, providing accommodation to house men, and enabling the women and children to remain safely at home were identified as priorities and precursors to other interventions.

Access to men's spaces where issues of grief, trauma and identity can be explored; and voluntary participation in male counselling (for example, anger management workshops) were felt to be important. New parenthood can be a key transition and opportunity for change.

Workplace policies are needed. Perpetrators need to be able to take leave to engage in behaviour change programs; otherwise they may lose work, which can exacerbate family stress.

Some roundtables also highlighted the problem of child and adolescent offenders, and also perpetrators with disability. Agencies need specialist skills to design and implement programs to work with these distinct groups.

3.5.2. Corrective services and behaviour change

The roundtables highlighted that more emphasis is required on completing in-prison

behaviour change programs and the need for these to include follow up on release to be effective.

Restorative justice should be trialled so that perpetrators can come to understand the impact of their actions.

There is an urgent need for men's accommodation and support when released from prison with conditions.

There is also a need to support women in prison and on remand.

3.5.3. Contributory factors

Interagency work to address contributory factors to domestic and family violence such as trauma, poverty, unemployment, mental health issues, alcohol and drug use, and brain injury is required. Ice was identified as a growing problem in some communities.

4. Roundtables feedback - perspectives of specific communities

Key themes and issues raised at different roundtables have already been drawn together in section three of this report. Section four highlights distinctive perspectives or particular issues emphasised by different cohorts of participants.

4.1. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples

4.1.1. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and their children

The roundtables emphasised the importance of understanding the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander ecological view and lived experience. This needs to be the foundation used to inform how work is done. Participants articulated a success indicator for the Third Action Plan as *“Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives and experience inform how domestic and family violence is defined, responded to, measured and evaluated”*. Consultations with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people emphasised the importance of community leadership, participation of Elders, place-based solutions and longer term resourcing.

It is critical to recognise that communities are different. Place-based, collaborative work was highlighted as the most effective approach. One participant noted: *“Desert, freshwater, saltwater mobs, all different”*.

Rather than seeking to develop new solutions, roundtables advocated identifying and building on what is working. Reliance on short-term, project-based work was considered to be a poor investment, as cultural competence could be haphazard.

Implementing the recommendations of key reports (including *Black Deaths in Custody, Little Children are Sacred, Growing them Strong Together, Bringing them Home Report*)

and building key performance indicators into service agreements based on those recommendations was considered important.

There was an explicit call by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander participants to challenge offenders in their own communities and to take local leadership and responsibility for addressing their own issues. Survivor stories and positive role models can be powerful and supportive.

Specific challenges for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women highlighted by the roundtables included:

- overcrowding in houses – solutions such as tents/ablution blocks for big events or floods, trespass and return to country processes were suggested
- shame of victims and reluctance to admit and report violence
- fear that children will be removed if violence is reported or disclosed is a significant barrier to action
- language – the need for appropriate formats of court documents, education materials and advertising including audio
- escalation of violence whereby multiple family members become involved after incidents. This can intimidate people who report and animosities can be perpetuated over many years
- violence is exacerbated by alcohol and drugs. In some communities meth-amphetamines are a significant problem
- lack of awareness of the nature of violence and thresholds that should not be tolerated
- lack of access to safe houses and shelters prevents some women from leaving violent situations
- fear of deaths in custody.

Principal barriers to Aboriginal women disclosing violence

The roundtables raised principle barriers to Aboriginal women disclosing violence or taking action. These include attitudinal, systemic and resourcing factors. Experience varies from community to community. More research is needed into urban Aboriginal experiences.

Attitudinal and psychological barriers

- shame in victims
- women can feel isolated and/or blamed
- fear of consequences, including removal of children and deaths in custody. Women feel responsible if this happens and wait until violence is extreme
- women may want to maintain the family but want the violence to stop
- women feel responsible about “fixing” things
- sometimes the perpetrator has strong support from his “mob” and women fear payback and retribution
- violence is normalised. This is itself a “*spiritual violence*” that decreases self-worth.

Systemic barriers

- lack of access to culturally appropriate services and support
- difficulty navigating the system if victims do act
- lack of confidentiality in small communities
- experience that there is a lack of police action – relationships may be tense. One participant observed: “*They can't be bothered with the paperwork for domestic violence – she will just take him back tomorrow*”.

Resources/operational barriers

- lack of places to go and safe houses, especially places that will have room for older children

- lack of service, resource and facility access (this could be as basic as a telephone or transport)
- a small number of centres (Wilcannia and Katherine for example) have multiple agencies present, however it is difficult for clients to navigate the different parts of the system.

Funding

Long-term funding and support is very important (recurrent or minimum three year funding) and long-term relationships need to be built. Cultural competence of non-Indigenous workers is vital and only achieved over time. The benefits of systemic incentives to collaborate and innovate were viewed as significant. In some cases, specialist referrals are not made because agencies need to maintain a client base to retain funding.

The cost of travel is a significant impost in regional, rural and remote communities and is inhibiting access to services and timely deployment of services in response to crises.

Leadership

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leadership was repeatedly highlighted as very important.

Roundtables recognised that people may be traumatised and exhausted. There is an urgent need for support for existing leaders as well as the encouragement of new and emerging leaders.

People need to be supported, trained and resourced, to take leadership roles in community to be empowered to speak out. The role may sometimes involve challenging Elders who are perpetrators. This can be difficult culturally and can lead to severe ostracism and retribution.

The roundtables noted that it is vital to change the acceptance of violence in many

communities, in families or between partners. One participant stated: *“Girls need to understand that jealousy isn’t love.”*

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander workforce

Developing an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander workforce to work within communities in services and alongside other professional roles was viewed as an effective strategy.

4.1.2. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Men’s groups

Three roundtables brought men together to discuss the prevention of violence against women and their children. All of the groups emphasised the importance of forums where men could talk openly and lead behaviour change. It was commented that men are “just starting to find their voice” on these issues, and that previously they had only been a part of the conversation when they were incarcerated. Men expressed a desire to be a part of the conversation with women, but noted the importance to them of having their own conversations.

A “National Men’s Policy” was suggested by two groups in Alice Springs and Darwin to inform a consistent approach and direction. The Northern Territory has recently set up an Office of Men’s Policy. This policy framework, launched in June 2016, covers community safety, health and wellbeing, partnership and engagement, and supporting young Northern Territory males into adulthood. It coordinates initiatives such as No More, White Ribbon and Beyond Blue as well as Indigenous Males Advisory Council.²

It was noted that one of the successful programs – Uncle Albert’s Men’s Group – relied on making connections for men

between the legal system and traditional lore, and men’s roles within it to be a “strong father” or a “strong husband”.

The most often suggested ways in which the system could be improved for men were having men’s spaces, and ongoing support rather than one off interventions, often in prison.

Understanding the causes and contributory factors

Multiple factors were identified as underlying violent and abusive behaviours that need to be recognised and addressed. These include:

- loss of role and dignity for men
- trauma – usually inter-generational trauma
- loss of connection to culture and country
- unemployment and overcrowding – lack of general infrastructure in many communities
- alcohol and drug use – need to recognise the link between grog and violence. This education is important for both men and women
- lack of places for men to go, particularly after incarceration, and when they are invited by the family and/or wife to go back home
- in particular, a lack of infrastructure for youth impedes early intervention. There are limited workers outside of schools who can support transition to adulthood.

Lack of understanding of the issue and implications is a problem. For example, men may have little understanding of what a restraining order means. It is hard for police to implement orders in small communities and islands.

² <https://dlgcs.nt.gov.au/office-of-mens-policy>

Service responses

Service responses were agreed to be limited. Roundtable participants commented on the need for:

- more services for men especially those focused on preventing violence rather than addressing violence afterwards
- more support services after leaving incarceration
- State and Federal governments to support the long term funding of programs that work with the perpetrator, the partner, the family and the community
- community action plans to be developed locally to ensure relevance and implementation
- post-incarceration programs with joined up approaches to alcohol and other drugs and domestic violence
- nationally consistent programs so people who move are not affected by service availability
- young people, services/infrastructure, possibly boys' and men's centres with extended programs
- more male workers, for example, male domestic violence counsellors
- more support and training for male leaders who can guide youth (in addition to Elders) and who are recognised by Elders
- male spaces to start conversations. Men need to be comfortable talking about the issue of violence. Some participants were concerned that men's behaviour programs with mandatory co-facilitation by male and female workers were not effective
- "New Dads" programs.

4.2. Culturally and Linguistically Diverse women and their children

There was a strong view from the roundtable that there should be a specific focus on CALD women and children, as there is for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and children.

Participants were keen to see CALD advice and monitoring of the Third Action Plan at National, COAG and State/Territory levels. Re-activation of the National CALD Alliance was suggested as a mechanism.

To address the challenges experienced by some CALD women, the CALD roundtable considered legal strategies were needed, for example, changes in spousal visas to avoid the dependency of women on an abusive partner.

Diversity of experiences

The roundtable discussions emphasised the importance of recognising "*diversity within diversity*", for example, there are multiple ethnic, cultural and language groups within nationalities, and this needs to be understood in planning, communication and education.

The intersection of some key issues needs to be recognised in the plan, for example, the experience of CALD women with disability.

Related issues, including human trafficking, forced marriage, female genital mutilation (FGM), dowries and restriction of girls' education, need multi-agency planning.

Prevention

There is a need for an approach based on the continuum of experience, with planned interventions and responses at relevant points from pre-entry through to longer term settlement (multi-generational). It is critical that clear information is provided at pre-entry and entry points for all visa channels (including migrant, asylum, refugee, 457 and

student visas) on Australian laws, rights, respectful relationships, and cultural mores.

A coordinated grass roots campaign to change attitudes was suggested, targeting groups within the most-at-risk communities. In doing this, it is important to challenge stereotypes and avoid reinforcing prejudices.

Education was also highlighted as a significant prevention strategy. For CALD communities, face-to-face interaction and audio materials were recommended as printed materials are considered less effective. Social media and other strategies/avenues outside of school forums are also needed to communicate with youth.

Leadership

The roundtable underlined the key role of community and faith leaders. However it is important to identify the right people and avoid relying on those individuals who may have a high profile and serve on multiple panels but who may not be appropriate in terms of their views and behaviour towards women or lack of connection with the sector.

Suggestions included:

- community-led education
- resourcing women leaders to work with Our Watch and ANROWS and create better CALD interventions
- developing and working with youth leaders (both male and female)
- peer education and role models were viewed as effective.

Research and knowledge dissemination

Research was identified as a priority. Better data on prevalence is needed as there is a known and significant issue of under-reporting. A specific action proposed is to work with the ABS to identify how to collect CALD data.

In particular, the CALD roundtable highlighted research needs around:

- the experience of children
- the impact of states' reforms on migrant women.

It was suggested that a key requirement is to create a clearing house for sharing research, knowledge and expertise.

Services

The roundtable emphasised the importance of a holistic and integrated approach - especially on entry to Australia. There is an opportunity to leverage community expertise and social capital – community-led initiatives can be effective but need resources and quality assurance.

Both specialist agencies and mainstream services need to have access to expertise for working with CALD women and children. The profile of the issue is increasing, as is awareness and demand.

Up-skilling frontline workers was seen as important. This included providing training to frontline workers to ensure they are delivering consistent messaging and advice. Also, new and emerging communities were seen as a priority target group for frontline workers particularly with prevention strategies.

The availability of housing and safe at home programs are key for women escaping violence.

Mental health services and programs for older women in CALD communities are considered to be major gaps within the service system.

Policy, research and programs are needed for youth including:

- services for children who witness violence
- child protection system – understanding of cultural contexts
- working with young parents.

The isolation of CALD women in some communities can be a barrier and community radio and helplines are important resources.

Perpetrators

The need for CALD-specific perpetrator programs and evaluation of their effectiveness was highlighted.

Justice system

Consistency between jurisdictions was considered by the roundtable to be important going forward. Access to justice requires:

- interpreters – standards and accreditation are needed
- training for police, courts to address the assumptions and stereotypes that may impact on women.

4.3. Women living with disability

Three fundamental issues were highlighted by the roundtable.

1. The Third Action Plan needs to reflect the range of violence experienced by women with disability. Institutional and group home settings, for example, do not appear to be considered in the National Plan.
2. The Third Action Plan needs to coordinate with other policy frameworks such as the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) and understand the intersection of issues. For example, accessible crisis housing is needed. The disability roundtable suggested the Third Action Plan draw on principles from the UN Convention on Rights of Persons with Disabilities and Disability Discrimination Act.
3. More research is needed to understand and address the issues. Euphemistic language in the service system where violence or abuse is described as an 'incident' or where a focus is on 'safeguarding' illustrates the need for change.

Definitions

The National Plan appears to be limited in scope to intimate partner and family violence. The disability roundtable emphasised the importance of recognising that women with disability may experience multiple forms of violence in a range of locations and types of relationships. They may be targeted because of their disability as well as their gender. In addition they may not recognise acts as violence. The Third Action Plan should address practices such as forced sterilisation, restraint and care workers withholding aids and equipment.

More research is needed. It was suggested that the ABS needs to include women with disability within the Personal Safety Survey. It was also suggested a meta-analysis be undertaken to synthesise existing findings and plans across policy areas and disciplines.

Four main strategies were highlighted:

- facilitate relevant cross-policy connections with the NDIS, for example (Senate Inquiry, Victorian Royal Commission). Draw on the Istanbul Convention and build on existing research recommendations
- ensure that women with disability are specifically referenced in any state or territory, and in national risk assessment frameworks being developed
- involve women with disability and advocates at all levels of planning, evaluation and monitoring
- recognise intersectionality – plan across portfolios and sectors.

Services needed

It was emphasised that mainstream services need to be open to women with disability, for example, sexual assault and counselling. Other activities such as Respectful Relationships programs need to be inclusive of young people with disability.

Perpetrator programs are needed, with an emphasis on providing early intervention if the behaviour of a person with disability is inappropriate to prevent escalation and diverting them from the justice system.

Housing responses are critical, for example, when victim and perpetrator share the same/group home.

Training for disability workers is necessary to understand violence and appropriate actions (for example, referral to crisis services).

Safe at Home strategies, including personal alarms, may be important.

4.4. Rural, regional and remote areas

Service integration and collaboration was highlighted as vital in the context of rural remote and regional work to share limited resources. Key issues raised at the rural, regional and remote roundtable included:

- availability of adequate safe housing
- lack of funds for services to travel to remote areas (for example, men in one program in the Torres Strait can be visited only once a month)
- delays in getting services to address incidents in remote areas, resulting in escalation of issues into crises and preventing opportunities for early intervention
- the lack of follow-up services including health care and mental health supports is also a gap
- when or if the family reunites, typically services stop. This can lead to a “revolving door” problem of reoffending

- women in rural communities may have limited financial independence, with family income linked to spasmodic rural cash flows and with assets tied up in property or equipment
- minimising the need to evacuate people for forensic examination and treatment by considering other ways to get the necessary evidence.

Solutions identified included:

- streamlining support and ensuring privacy (even in small communities). One solution uses a hub where multiple agencies are co-located (general practitioners, Community Legal Centre, Women’s Service etc.) so that the nature of a visit is more discrete
- resourcing multi-agency programs, not just services and enabling tailoring of these to community differences rather than taking a ‘one size fits all’ approach
- use of technology for communication, combating isolation of both domestic violence workers and women. Helplines including legal advice for women are helpful, (local firms in rural areas may have conflict of interest)
- identifying and supporting leaders.

The comment was made that *“Rural focus is on crisis, less on prevention or recovery”*. Minimal services are available and they focus on the immediate issues of evacuating people to safety, providing shelter and legal support. Additional resources are needed to prevent violence happening and respond to vicarious and historic trauma.

5. Conclusion

In summary, the most significant overarching messages from the Third Action Plan roundtables and national research agenda relate to the ten following areas. Each of these needs to be considered in relation to identified vulnerable groups such as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, CALD, LGBTIQ, and women with disability. A challenge for the Third Action Plan is the increase in demand for services brought on by the raised profile of the issue. At the same time work to prevent violence needs to be expanded.

The significance of contributory factors such as poverty, unemployment, intergenerational trauma, alcohol and other drugs needs to be explored through research, and addressed through integrated planning.

The ten overarching messages include:

1. Facilitate planning to address and prevent violence against women at local, regional, state/territory and national levels including addressing gender inequity. This includes:
 - a. having national campaigns to change attitudes within which local or culturally specific initiatives can be developed
 - b. raising awareness and recognition of the full range of types, settings and relationships where violence occurs.
2. Enable strong cross sector collaboration at the strategic policy level and through interagency frameworks. The 'one stop shop' integrated service delivery model was particularly highlighted as valuable.
3. Strengthen infrastructure to support integration across services and across jurisdictions including recognition of the key role played by community legal centres and other services that support women navigating the system.
4. Develop consistent measures across jurisdictions and consider developing national principles to underpin standards for service delivery and responses to violence against women and their children.
5. Support place based, community designed and implemented, multi-stakeholder initiatives and innovation. Encourage local solutions to achieve the outcomes of the National Plan and support appropriate leadership, recognising the need for funding security.
6. Increase access to appropriate emergency accommodation and transitional housing. The provision of men's accommodation would allow the removal of perpetrators so that women and children stay at home.
7. Develop more services for perpetrators to support behaviour change and increase early intervention programs to assist the family to stay together and to stop the violence.
8. Test initiatives using technology to address challenges in remote areas with limited services and barriers to transport access.
9. Increase the focus on the impacts on children of domestic and family violence and ensure more specialised services are available.
10. Building on previous work, explore the benefits and risks of aligning relevant pieces of legislation within and across jurisdictions (i.e. tenancy laws).