



## Preventing and responding to violence against women and girls: From legislation to effective law enforcement

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### **New directions in Australia – building on the evidence base A National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children**

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#### **Background**

Following the 2007 Australian elections the Rudd Labor Government came into power carrying a commitment to appoint a National Council to advise it on developing a National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children. This 10 member Council, each member selected for their extensive and relevant expertise, was appointed in May 2008. After an intense work program the Council presented its report, *Time for Action: the National Council's Plan for Australia to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children (Time for Action)*, to Prime Minister Rudd in April 2009.

On receipt of this advice the Prime Minister immediately committed to spending on a number of programs totalling \$A42m and to develop a Plan of Action based on the advice in *Time for Action*. He committed to take the Plan to the Council of Australian Governments (COAG), the organisation consisting of the federal government, the governments of the six states and two mainland territories and the Australian Local Government Association.

The Prime Minister then appointed a Ministerial Council, comprising Ministers for the Status of Women and Attorneys-General from all States and Territories, to develop the *National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children: 2010-2022*, including the first three-year Action Plan. This was ratified by the Prime Minister and all State and Territory First Ministers in February 2011.

Over many years there have been several attempts to address this troubling issue at the state, territory and national levels. Most of these attempts struggled with the complexity and embedded nature of the problem. This National Plan emphasises that there is no 'one-size fits all' approach. It acknowledges the rights and the diverse experiences of women and their children, and the need to tailor responses to meet varied and specific circumstances. For example, different responses are needed for: rural, urban and remote areas, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders, women with disabilities, same-sex couples, and immigrant and refugee families.

The new National Plan of Action also supports contemporary learning that action on multiple levels – individual, relationship, community, and societal – is more likely to be successful in tackling the issue of violence against women and their children than ad-hoc generalised solutions.

This Plan creates a shared understanding, a common purpose, and the foundation for a collaborative approach between different levels of government and the wider community. It encourages cross-sectoral collaboration and forms a basis for dialogue between governments and communities which will encourage consistent and effective justice responses to violence.

#### **Personal Safety Survey 2005 - Australian statistics**

The most recent information on violence in Australia comes from the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) Personal Safety Survey 2005. This built on a 1996 Women's Safety Survey. In the 2005 Personal Safety Survey, it was reported that:

- an estimated 443,800 Australian women (5.8 per cent of the population) had experienced physical or sexual violence in the past 12 months.
- more than a million women had experienced physical or sexual assault by their male current or ex-partner since the age of 15 (some women may be counted twice if they experienced both physical and sexual assault).

- 37.8 per cent of women who experienced physical assault by a male in the 12 months before the survey said the perpetrator was a current or previous partner, and 34.4 per cent said the perpetrator was a family member or friend.
- most incidences of physical assault against women by a male perpetrator in the 12 months prior to the 2005 survey were committed in a home (64.1 per cent).
- 33.3 per cent of women had experienced physical violence since the age of 15.
- 19.1 per cent of women had experienced sexual violence since the age of 15.
- 12 per cent of women had been sexually abused before the age of 15, compared with 4.5 per cent of men.
- Between 1996 and 2005 there was an increase in the reporting of physical assault to police from 18.5 per cent to 36 per cent.
- 64 per cent of women who experienced physical assault by a male perpetrator; and 81.1 per cent of women who experienced sexual assault by a male perpetrator; did not report this assault to the police.
- the percentage of women who reported that their children had witnessed partner related violence either from a current or ex-partner was lower in 2005 than in 1996.
- Women are much more likely to be victims of sexual violence with an estimated 126,100 women (1.6 per cent) in the 12 months prior to the survey compared with 46,700 (0.6 per cent) of men.

The ABS Personal Safety Survey is to be repeated in 2012 and data available in 2013. It is currently being designed to ensure data relevant to measuring the success of the new National Plan will be available.

### **The National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children 2010 – 2022 (the National Plan)**

The National Plan builds on an extensive history of government initiatives in this area and is reinforced by other reforms being progressed by Australian Governments including the National Framework to Protect Australia's Children and the National Affordable Housing Agreement.

It is also directly in support of other Australian human rights obligations under international laws and universal human rights instruments, including: the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*; the *Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women*; the *Convention on the Rights of the Child*; the *Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women*; the *Vienna Declaration and Program of Action of the World Conference on Human Rights*; the *Millennium Development Goals*; the *UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities*, the *Beijing Platform for Action*; and the *Campaign UNITE to End Violence Against Women, 2008 – 2015*.

The National Plan is built on a number of key principles

- safety;
- community responsibility;
- equality and diversity;
- responsiveness;
- justice;
- durability;
- knowledge and accountability.

Key features of the National Plan include:

- the combination of both sexual assault and domestic and family violence;
- the recognition that everyone in the community is responsible for reducing these forms of violence;
- a commitment to supporting women and children affected by violence;
- a focus on the perpetrators of violence, and ways in which they can be part of a solution;
- addressing prevention in a way that goes beyond the message of "stop violence", to teaching children how to develop respectful relationships throughout their lifetime;
- ensuring that responses to violence are just;
- using a strong evidence-base;
- setting a long-term vision and direction for responding to this complex social issue, and seeking bi-partisan support for reducing violence which ensures women, children and our communities are safe;
- recognition of the need for long-term commitment and sustained investment from all levels of government.

### **Safe and Free from Violence**

While living [safe and free from violence](#) is everyone's right, reducing violence is everyone's responsibility.

Around one-in-three Australian women have experienced physical violence and almost one-in-five have experienced sexual violence since the age of 15. For certain groups, this statistic may be much higher.

The [National Plan](#) brings together the efforts of governments across the nation to make a real and sustained reduction in the levels of violence against women. This plan shows Australia's commitment to upholding the human rights of Australian women and it is the first plan to coordinate action across jurisdictions.

The [National Plan](#) is unprecedented in the way it focuses on preventing violence by raising awareness and building respectful relationships in the next generation. The aim is to bring attitudinal and behavioural change at the cultural, institutional and individual levels, with a particular focus on young people. The *National Plan* has been built from an evidence base of new research and extensive consultation with experts and the community. Those compiling it have thus used the best knowledge and expertise currently available to them.

The [National Plan](#) sets out a framework for action over the next 12 years. By working together and challenging the attitudes and behaviours that allow violence to occur, all Australian governments are saying a very loud 'no' to violence.

### **How are the governments of Australia going to do this?**

The [National Plan](#) will be driven by a series of four three-year action plans. They will support Australian governments to work together to develop, implement and report progress within a coordinated national framework.

Each Action Plan will address agreed national outcomes, while allowing states and territories to act in locally relevant and responsive ways. In addition, the Action Plans will draw on existing evidence and will aid national consistency, through the development of national benchmarks.

Importantly, each Action Plan will also help to build the skills, systems and data for governments to improve policy making and service delivery. This is essential to creating the new capacity for governments to work together and to support lasting change.

The *First Action Plan (2010-2013) – Building a Strong Foundation* establishes the groundwork for the [National Plan](#) through putting into place the strategic projects and actions that will drive results over the longer term while also implementing high-priority actions in the short term.

Details of the specific actions to be undertaken by each jurisdiction against the strategies and actions outlined in the [National Plan](#) will be provided in each jurisdiction's implementation plan. This will include details of what actions each jurisdiction will undertake, along with when they will do it and who has responsibility for its success.

There are a range of primary prevention initiatives under the *National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children*, which aim to promote the development of healthy and respectful relationships through attitudinal and behavioural change at the cultural, institutional and individual levels. These initiatives include:

#### **Respectful Relationships Projects**

The Government is investing over \$9 million across five years to 2012-13 in implementing Respectful Relationships education projects nationally. Respectful Relationships is a primary prevention strategy that seeks to reduce sexual assault and domestic and family violence through education. The Government is also working through the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA) to support the inclusion of respectful relationships education in Phase Three of the Australian Curriculum. 'The Line' Social Marketing Campaign 'The Line' a \$17 million social marketing campaign, was launched in June 2010 to encourage young people to develop healthy, respectful relationships. The campaign provides a [website](#) and [Facebook](#) page for young people to have dialogue about healthy and unhealthy relationship behaviour and how to have and maintain a respectful relationship. [Qualitative research](#) and [quantitative research](#) commissioned by the Department have informed the development of the campaign and specific campaigns for Indigenous youth and youth from culturally and linguistically diverse communities.

#### **Community Action Grants**

\$3.75 million over three years is being provided for Community Action Grants. The grants aim to support community-level action to reduce violence against women through innovative primary prevention projects which reduce domestic violence and encourage respectful relationships. Projects may include activities which strengthen the community, increase awareness in the community and encourage community responsibility in reducing violence against women.

## The cost of Violence against Women

### The cost of inaction

Violence against women and their children is estimated to have cost the Australian economy an estimated \$13.6 billion in the financial year 2009-10.

Without appropriate action to address violence against women and their children, it is estimated that three-quarters of a million Australian women will experience and report violence in the period of 2021-22, costing the Australian economy an estimated \$15.6 billion. This is more than the cost of the recent \$10.4 billion plan by the Australian Government to stimulate the economy in the face of the global financial crisis.

Implementation of the National Plan aims to reduce the levels of violence against women and their children by 2021. For every woman whose experience of violence can be prevented, \$20,766 in costs across all affected groups in society is believed to be avoided.

To place this in perspective, if the National Plan resulted in an average reduction in violence against women and their children of just 10 per cent by 2021-22, some \$1.6 billion in costs to victims/survivors, their friends and families, perpetrators, children, employers, governments and the community could be saved.

Domestic interpersonal violence (as opposed to violence perpetrated by a stranger) has been the focus of most Australian studies. Australia was one of the first countries to attempt to calculate the economic costs of domestic violence. Despite the inadequacy of much of the necessary data, the Australian studies were traditionally more successful in calculating the *direct* costs of domestic violence (examples of direct consequences include the cost of crisis accommodation, legal services, income support, and health and medical services) than in calculating the *indirect* costs of domestic violence (examples of indirect consequences include the replacement of lost or damaged household items, and costs associated with changing houses or schools).

### Prevalence of reported violence

The cost estimates in the report have been calculated using a “reported prevalence approach” based on Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) Personal Safety Survey (PSS) data<sup>7</sup>. A prevalence approach measures the costs associated with domestic violence in a specific year, based on the number of women experiencing violence in that year – that is, it includes the costs of all domestic violence occurring in that year. The approach captures reported violence only – in other words, unreported violence is not included.

Implementation of the Plan of Action would likely result in increased awareness of domestic violence against women and their children, leading to an initial increase in the number of cases of reported violence (and an associated increase in costs). A reduction in the levels of violence to 2021 is expected however as the initiatives gain traction. Without appropriate action, the prevalence of reported violence is assumed to increase on average at a rate consistent with forecast population growth to 2021-22.

### Cost categories

Key features of this methodology included:

- a focus on economic costs, and a clear distinction between economic costs and transfer payments
- use of a prevalence approach that conceptually captures all annual costs of domestic violence and its consequences

There are seven cost categories that comprise the headline cost estimate. These are:

1. pain, suffering and premature mortality costs associated with the victims/survivors experience of violence
2. health costs include public and private health system costs associated with treating the effects of violence against women production-related costs, including the cost of being absent from work, and employer administrative costs (for example, employee replacement)
3. production-related costs, including the cost of being absent from work, and employer administrative costs (for example, employee replacement)
4. consumption-related costs, including replacing damaged property, defaulting on bad debts, and the costs of moving

5. second generation costs are the costs of children witnessing and living with violence, including child protection services and increased juvenile and adult crime
6. administrative and other costs, including police, incarceration, court system costs, counselling, and violence prevention programs
7. transfer costs, which are the inefficiencies associated with the payment of government benefits.

The costs are allocated across eight groups within society which bear the costs of violence. These are:

1. victims/survivors;
2. perpetrators;
3. children;
4. friends and family;
5. employers;
6. federal government;
7. state/territory and local government;
8. rest of the community/society (non-government).

Further details, including cost category descriptions and details on the approach taken to update and forecasts these costs, are in the Appendix to the Report '*The Cost of Violence against Women and their Children*'.

### Summary

Australia seems to be in a promising moment to take serious action on reducing violence against women and their children.

- Australia has committed to a National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and their children: 2010-2011 (February 2011)
- The research and evidence base has been accepted to inform the governments' policy development and their consequent action. There now seems to be a political will expressed by all Australian governments
- The Federal and all State and Territory Governments have committed to take action.
- It is agreed there must be a long-term commitment – over 12 years
- There will be 4 consecutive 3-year Plans, each building on the one before
- There is an agreed focus on prevention
- Better integrated support is underway in services e.g. more housing, better integration of services
- Research will be undertaken on perpetrators and what will change their behaviour
- There is a commitment to align and ensure data assists to measure the progress
- A Centre of Excellence will be established to coordinate research.

### References

*Time for Action: The National Council's Plan for Australia to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children, 2009-2021* (March 2009)

*The Cost of Violence against Women and their Children*, National Council to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children (March 2009)

*National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children*, including the first three-year Action Plan (2010)