



## Reducing and eliminating family, domestic and sexual violence against women

### PRIORITIES

1. The Federal Government should commit substantially increased funding for the implementation of the next National Plan for the Reduction and Elimination of Family, Domestic and Sexual Violence (FDSV) from 2022.
2. A framework for the implementation of the Plan also needs to be developed which incorporates coordination across jurisdictions, clear and realistic performance outcomes and measures and annual reporting to the Federal Parliament to ensure public accountability for progress. The National Data Collection and Reporting Framework needs to be finalised and functional by its target date of 2022.
3. In the context of the next National Plan being inclusive of the diversity of victims/survivors, the funds allocated for its implementation need to have targeted components for specialist domestic and family violence (DFV) services and primary prevention and intervention programs which work with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women, women living with disabilities, culturally and linguistically diverse women, LGBTQI women and all children impacted by violence.
4. The Federal Government (with state and territory governments) should provide forward financial commitments under the National Housing and Homelessness Agreement (NHHA) for funding certainty and so that the DFV component of the funding under the bilateral agreement can be increased and allocated to women's refuges or shelters and accompanying emergency, temporary and transitional accommodation. No woman or her children fleeing violence should be turned away from these services anywhere in Australia.

### RATIONALE

The *Report of the Inquiry into Family, Domestic and Sexual Violence* by the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Social Policy and Legal Affairs was released in March 2021. This Parliamentary Report of 471 pages with 88 recommendations provides a comprehensive overview of the issues and legislative and program responses required from governments at all levels to address this scourge. WEL believes it provides a firm foundation for future policy and programs.

The most recent Personal Safety Survey (PSS) results available are for 2016 and these are testimony to the spread and impact of violence on mainly women. The Report of the Inquiry into

Family, Domestic and Sexual Violence recognises that most of the violence is “perpetrated by men against women”. The impact of this violence and accompanying abuse is profound and enduring on victim/survivors, on their families and friends and “the very fabric of our society”.

The economic cost of this violence was estimated in a KPMG report prepared for the Department of Social Services in May 2016 to be \$22 billion a year and if certain under-represented groups of women in the PSS are accounted for, then a further \$4 billion could be added.

A national planned approach is needed, led and coordinated by the Federal Government, with programs funded by all jurisdictions at their level of responsibility. This cannot be just tokenistic or window-dressing. The gravity and seriousness of this violence and its damage to individuals and communities must be reflected in the level of financial investment.

The level of funding, though increasing in recent months, has not been commensurate with the ambition of successive National Plans. WEL considers that measurement of performance and outcomes has been inadequate for proper accountability. Funding top-ups during a crisis like COVID 19 pandemic, while welcome, do not enable services and programs to be expanded in short time frames and delivered with the requisite quality if experienced staff cannot be recruited or emergency accommodation is not suitable or available.

Family, domestic and sexual violence affects different groups in different ways. There are cultural barriers and pressures on women to prevent their reporting violence and accessing services. Responses to violence in diverse communities need to be nuanced and programs and services to be co-designed rather than extrapolated from more general models. The Parliamentary Report acknowledges there needs to be “a greater focus on groups with particular vulnerability” (p.44).

Responses to violence should take into account the frameworks and measures of success adopted by other peak sector organisations such as the Australian Women’s Health Network and Women with Disabilities, Australia among others. Services, including wrap-around services such as counselling need to be culturally appropriate. Online and telephone services need to have interpreters available. Police, legal and support organisations need to be trained to provide culturally appropriate services. Services funded to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and CALD communities need to be specialised in providing culturally appropriate support and guidance, not just providing a repetition of online triage services. Cultural safety and cultural competence need to be at the heart of service delivery and staff appropriately trained.

WEL has for some years advocated for a separate program under the National Housing and Homelessness Agreement (NHHA) to fund specialist domestic and family violence services. WEL recognises that this is unlikely to occur and acknowledges that in each of the state and territory bilateral agreements under NHHA, the cohort—women and children affected by family and domestic violence—is reported on separately with the proportion of funds allocated. In this vital area of frontline crisis services essential to saving lives, however, there has been no increase in funding since the NHHA came into force in July 2018.



In 2020, 54,000 women and girls experiencing family and domestic violence came to homelessness services needing accommodation, but one-third or 18,000 were unable to be housed. A funding increase is overdue, and the Federal Government must take the lead so that 24 hour accessible women's refuges, frontline outreach services and emergency, temporary and transitional accommodation is adequate to meet the needs experienced by these crisis services.