



National Women's
Safety Alliance



In One Generation

The National Women's Safety Alliance Federal Election Policy Statement

May 2022



About the National Women's Safety Alliance

The NWSA brings together a diversity of voices, expertise and experience to advise government on national policy to end gender-based violence.

Established in August 2021, we have a growing membership of over 120 organisations, subject matter experts and individuals, all with a shared commitment to ending gender-based violence.

The NWSA is one of six National Women's Alliances supported by the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet's Office for Women.

Find out more at nwsa.org.au.



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FOREWORD

Maybe for the first time in Australia's history, gender-based violence and women's safety are key issues in a federal election.

It comes following decades of dedicated work by experts, victim-survivors and advocates to highlight the issue, dispel myths and promote understanding across the Australian community.

Even a few short years ago, many people thought domestic, family and sexual violence could only be physical. Words like trauma, financial abuse and coercive control were not part of our vocabulary. Myths about who uses violence were widespread and the stories of victims and survivors were far less visible or indeed, believed.

There has been progress, but we still have far to go to address the underlying drivers of gender-based violence, better protect and support those most at risk and hold those who use violence to account.

The COVID-19 pandemic has made violence against women worse, with many women experiencing violence for the first time during the 2020 lockdown. The frequency and severity of violence also increased.¹

At the same time, women shouldered three out of five job losses – increasing the likelihood of violence from a partner.²

Natural disasters also make violence against women worse. As floods and fires spread across the country, higher rates of domestic and family violence are bound to follow.³

That is why we must hit the reset button now and drive action towards a new goal: to end gender-based violence in one generation.

Getting to this goal is not out of reach. Gender-based violence is preventable. We know what drives it. Gender inequality is the heart of the problem, so gender equality must be the heart of the solution.

Collective action and investment are needed now from all levels of government, the corporate sector and the broader Australian community to drive real change over the next 30 years.

The next Australian Parliament can play a pivotal role in bringing forward laws and policies that could help end gender-based violence.

In One Generation outlines the first actions that must be taken during the next parliament to end gender-based violence. It is based on consultation with the National Women's Safety Alliance's membership – which includes the domestic, family and sexual violence sector, people with lived experience, experts, community leaders and employers.

These tangible, measurable actions – taken together – will bring us closer to preventing gender-based violence, intervening early before violence escalates and providing better support for those affected from crisis to recovery.

No one should be unsafe just because of who they are. That is why we must end gender-based violence in one generation.



Renee Hamilton
CEO, National Women's Safety
Alliance



The problem

We are experiencing a national domestic, family and sexual violence crisis in Australia. Every nine days, a woman is murdered by her current or ex-partner.⁴ Since the beginning of this year alone, 17 women have been killed this way.

What we know about domestic, family and sexual violence

- One in three women has experienced physical violence in their lifetime.⁵
- One in five has experienced sexual violence.⁶
- Two in five LGBTIQ+ people surveyed have experienced violence from an intimate partner.⁷
- For women aged 18 to 44, violent relationships are the single biggest risk factor to their health – bigger than smoking or alcohol use.⁸
- For every non-Indigenous woman hospitalised for family violence-related assault, 34 indigenous women are hospitalised for the same reason.⁹

This violence is gendered: most perpetrators are men, and most victim-survivors are women.¹⁰ More than nine in ten people who have experienced physical or sexual abuse identify a man as the perpetrator.¹¹

The reason for action

Every person deserves to live a life free from violence.

When someone is not safe, it affects every part of their lives. Domestic, family and sexual violence damages their education, income, mental and physical health and wellbeing, relationships and housing – in both the short and long term.

Children exposed to domestic and family violence can develop anxiety and depression, have problems with eating and sleeping, struggle with schoolwork, abuse drugs and alcohol, and become homeless.

Technology – like smartphones, social media and GPS trackers – now enable perpetrators to inflict old harms in new ways, making abuse even harder to escape.

If no woman experienced violence from a partner, we would have 41% less homicide and violence, 18% less early pregnancy loss, 19% less suicide and self-harm, 19% less depression and 12% fewer anxiety disorders.¹²

The drivers

The evidence is clear – gender inequality is at the core of violence against women.¹³

Gender inequality is in every layer of Australian life. Women earn less than men in every industry, retire with just over half the savings of men, and continue to carry the unpaid caring burden.¹⁴ From parliaments to the top 200 company boards, the number of women and men remains unequal.

Despite this evidence, many Australians do not recognise gender inequality as a problem or understand its link to violence. One in three men in Australia does not think gender inequality really exists.¹⁵ Gender inequality also plays a role in violence against LGBTIQ+ people. Rigid views on gender, sexuality and what it means to be a 'man' or a 'woman' contribute to violence against LGBTIQ+ people.

The solutions

Advancing gender equality is the solution to ending gender-based violence.

Too many women and members of the LGBTIQ+ community are not in the driving seat when it comes to their own lives – and the policies and laws that affect them.

To address the underlying driver of gender-based violence – gender inequality – it will take all areas of society, from decision-makers to employers, to play their part.

Governments need to:

- look at every policy and funding decision to see if it will advance gender equality – or send it backwards.

Businesses need to:

- examine their policies and practices to identify and address bias and improve support for employees and customers dealing with violence.

The community needs to:

- question and challenge attitudes that condone or normalise violence and be able to identify the early signs of violence.

Solutions must also address how other forms of inequality and discrimination intersect with gender inequality, leading to higher rates of violence for some groups of people. This includes women with disability, First Nations women, migrant and refugee women, and LGBTIQ+ people.

To put women and LGBTIQ+ people in the driver's seat, their voices and experiences must be at the centre of how all of us respond. Without their contributions, well-intentioned actions risk leading to the wrong outcomes.

The following priorities and actions are for an incoming federal government and the next Australian Parliament. If we are to end gender-based violence in one generation, their roles will be vital – but reaching this goal will take all parts of our community working together.

PRIORITIES

The following are priorities for an incoming federal government and the next Australian Parliament.

By the end of the first year

Include meaningful and measurable targets in the *National Plan to End Violence Against Women and Children 2022–2032* and its Action Plans

- To end gender based violence we must have **clear, definite and measurable goals.**
 - The *National Plan to End Violence Against Women and Children 2022–2032* is the government's key strategy to end gender-based violence. The plan must be inclusive and represent all victim-survivors of gender-based violence more fully.
 - It must also include effective targets. To get a complete picture of progress, we need **indicators and new data that measure shifts in the community's understanding of and attitudes towards violence against women, unmet demand for services, victim-survivor interaction with services, predictors of violence, and perpetrator characteristics.**
- » nine out of 10 Australians disagree with attitudes that excuse, minimise or mistrust women's reports of violence, or disregard sexual consent
 - » all perpetrators can access and engage in accredited, evidence-based and culturally appropriate perpetrator programs
 - » all victim-survivors know where and how to access expert support
 - » all victim-survivors report positive health, economic, housing outcomes and positive experiences accessing services.
- Measures and indicators to track change against the drivers of violence against women should be drawn from Our Watch's *Tracking Progress in Prevention* framework.¹⁶

Over the life of the plan, the targets should include:

- » a significant decrease in the number of women who experience domestic, sexual or family violence
- » four out of five Australians can identify early signs of violence
- » nine out of 10 Australians understand what constitutes violence against women

- The **National Plan Advisory Group and the domestic, family and sexual violence sector should also be consulted** on successive Action Plans under the National Plan.



Impose a new legal obligation on employers to prevent sexual harassment

- One in three women has experienced sexual harassment in the workplace.¹⁷
- As it stands the burden of dealing with sexual harassment in the workplace is put on those who have experienced it – not on employers to stop it from happening.
- Rather than simply mopping up the damage, a **new enforceable ‘positive duty’ for employers to prevent sexual harassment should be created** under the *Sex Discrimination Act 1984*. A positive duty imposes a new legal obligation on employers to prevent sexual harassment and promote gender equality.
- Along with this reform, **all recommendations of the Respect@Work report should be adopted** by an incoming government and supported by the next federal parliament.

Double the Escaping Violence Payment and remove the ‘cash equivalent’

- People who are getting ready to leave a violent relationship, or have recently left, need substantial resources to establish a new life safely.
- The average cost of leaving an abusive relationship is \$18,000.¹⁸
- The Escaping Violence Payment (EVP) – which aims to support victims and survivors of domestic and family violence to leave an abusive relationship or recover from leaving – **should be doubled from \$5,000 to at least \$10,000**.
- The upfront cash payment included in the EVP should also be increased from \$1,500 to \$3,000 and should be delivered within two business days to enable victim-survivors to achieve safety as quickly as possible.
- **There should be no ‘cash equivalent’ or vouchers** as this limits the options of victim-survivors and locks them into particular forms of spending.

Increase domestic and family violence leave to ten paid days and extend it to sexual violence in the National Employment Standards

- On average, it takes 141 hours to flee a violent relationship – almost all during business hours.¹⁹
- It takes significant time to find alternative housing, go to medical and counselling appointments, arrange childcare, and attend court appearances.
- Without paid leave, a victim cannot leave.
- The **minimum national standard should be raised** from five days of unpaid domestic and family violence leave **to at least ten days of paid domestic, family and sexual violence leave.**
- The current leave entitlement should **also extend to those who have experienced sexual violence and sexual harassment**, including outside domestic and family settings, and to those experiencing abuse in family-like or other caring settings.

Develop a national program of Respect and Consent Educators to teach consistent, best practice respectful relationships education in schools

- In February 2022, all Education Ministers agreed to include consent and respectful relationships education in the national curriculum from foundation to year 10.
- While this is positive, far more is needed to deliver a best practice approach.
- Teachers are under-resourced to deliver evidence-based, consistent and appropriate respectful relationships education. **A national program of trained Respect and Consent Educators for every school would ensure people with the right expertise teach students about consent and gender equality.**

- This national program should be co-designed with experts in violence prevention.
- In addition, **current teaching resources covering consent and respectful relationships need to be audited and approved by experts** in violence prevention. And where gaps exist, **new resources** should be developed in partnership with the sexual violence prevention and response sector.
- Approaches to respectful relationships and consent education should be based on [Our Watch's evidence-based resources](#) and must also provide support for teachers and students.

Establish a cross-jurisdictional taskforce to support consistent legal definitions of domestic, family and sexual violence and affirmative consent

- Different legal definitions of domestic, family and sexual violence across states and territories mean victim-survivors receive a different justice response based on where they live.
- Currently, legal definitions of consent tend to focus on the actions of the victim-survivor – rather than the actions of the perpetrator – and are based on the idea that the absence of a ‘no’ means consent has been given.
- Affirmative consent laws shift the focus to getting an ‘enthusiastic yes’ and are already a reality in Tasmania and New South Wales.
- A cross-jurisdictional taskforce that includes **governments, representatives from the domestic, family and sexual violence sector, legal experts and people with lived experience** should be established.
- This taskforce should create a new set of **national principles to promote consistent definitions of domestic, family and sexual violence and affirmative consent across jurisdictions.**



Commit to continue the National Plan Advisory Group and the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Advisory Council until 2032

- The National Plan Advisory Group and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Advisory Council were established in 2021 to provide advice on the National Plan and shape its development.
- The National Plan Advisory Council will be dissolved on 30 June 2022. The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Advisory Council – which is leading work on the dedicated Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Action Plan – will be disbanded on 30 June 2024.
- The **National Plan needs to be a living, responsive and iterative document informed and shaped by expertise and evidence over the next decade.**
- The National Plan Advisory Group and the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Advisory Council **should be in place for the life of the National Plan and involved in reviewing the National Plan and its Action Plans every three years.**
- These groups should also play an ongoing role in providing advice to the new Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence Commissioner.

Mandate all national data collections – current and future – to align with the ABS *2020 Standard on Sex, Gender, Variations in Sex Characteristics, and Sexual Orientation Variables*

- How violence affects LGBTIQ+ people is not visible in current government data collections. This leads to significant gaps in our understanding of how violence affects them and hinders government responses.
- Any group that experiences gender-based violence should not be left behind.
- A consistent recognition of gender, sex and sexuality data is critical **to ensure services are adequately resourced, public policy is better informed and everyone affected by gender-based violence is counted.**

By the end of the second year

Provide at least 17,000 social housing units for women escaping domestic and family violence

- Domestic and family violence is a leading cause of homelessness for women and children.²⁰ Over 7,000 women a year are returning to violent homes because they have nowhere affordable to live.²¹
- To ensure that women and children escaping domestic and family violence have somewhere to go and are not forced to return to a violent partner or become homeless, **there is an urgent need for at least 17,000 more social housing units.**²² These units should be spread proportionately across Australian state and territories according to need.
- While this would deal with the immediate crisis, **additional housing will be needed to meet projected demand.**
- Programs that help women stay in their own homes and shift the burden to perpetrators to find alternative accommodation should also be prioritised.

Release the first annual report card to monitor the performance of the *National Plan to End Violence Against Women and Children 2022–2032*

- The *National Plan to End Violence Against Women and Children 2022–2032* is the government's key strategy to end gender-based violence.
- The new Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence Commission should publish an **annual report card in a timely manner** to measure the progress of the National Plan and its Action Plans.

Renew the National Partnership on Family, Domestic and Sexual Violence Responses

- The current National Partnership – which is intended to provide federal funding to states and territories for frontline domestic, family and sexual violence services – expires in June 2023.
- Given demand for these services is likely to increase because of work under the next National Plan, the **domestic, family and sexual violence sector needs to be resourced to meet this demand past 2023 with longer-term funding options in place.**
- There should also be **complete transparency on how National Partnership funding is distributed by state and territory governments** and the criteria by which funding decisions are made.
- **Funding should be distributed on a five-year cycle** – rather than on a short term 12-month basis. This would align with the National Plan's five-year Action Plans and allow frontline services to plan ahead and recruit and maintain qualified, expert staff.



Develop a national workforce recruitment and retention strategy for the domestic, family and sexual violence sector

- Two out of three managers surveyed in frontline services say they are experiencing some level of funding shortfall to recruit staff.²³
- While states and territories have outlined their plans to strengthen their frontline workforces, there is no overarching national strategy.
- As the Commonwealth Government continues to dedicate resources to address domestic, family and sexual violence, **it must ensure the workforce is there in every state and territory to prevent violence and meet the needs of victim-survivors.**
- A national workforce strategy should include an analysis of **workforce needs – such as education, training and professional development – across prevention, early intervention, response and recovery.** It should also consider how to prevent vicarious trauma and worker burnout.

Develop a new tool to understand what stops men from using violence

- Men's behaviour change programs and other interventions aim to stop men from using violence – but our evidence base for what works is limited.
- Establishing **a new national evaluation framework to assess perpetrator programs** would help us understand what works and what does not – to better target services and scale up effective interventions.

By the end of the third year

Train 50,000 people a year to identify domestic, family and sexual violence and respond compassionately

- Identifying early signs of violence can help the community stop perpetrators from escalating violence and help victim-survivors get the expert support they need.
- Two in five Australians do not know where to go for domestic violence advice and support.²⁴
- In 2021, DV-alert trained 7,000 people to recognise, respond and refer people experiencing, or at risk of, domestic and family violence.
- Accredited and expert training needs to happen at a much larger scale to improve community understanding, help people recognise the early signs of domestic, family and sexual violence, and help them to respond with compassion.
- This training needs to be developed in partnership with experts in the domestic, family and sexual violence sector.
- **A national training target should be at least 50,000 people per year.** This should include those working with victim-survivors in **family law, police, health, mental health and social services.**

Create a program of independent domestic, family and sexual violence advisers to guide victim-survivors through the legal system

- Navigating the criminal justice and family law systems as a victim-survivor can be complex and re-traumatising.
- **A program of independent advisers would improve victim-survivors' experience of the criminal justice system** and enable counsellors and frontline workers to focus on their main roles.

- These advisers would:
 - » provide information about justice options and general information about legal processes
 - » support victim-survivors to understand and exercise their rights, including their rights to information, and information about the progress of their cases
 - » liaise with and advocate for them with different parts of the legal system and its multiple processes
 - » support their individual needs and refer them to other services if required.
- This program should be linked with the service delivery model pilot – announced in this year's Federal Budget – that is set to provide survivors of sexual assault with greater access to legal services.

Amend the *Workplace Gender Equality Act 2012* to include a specific indicator on gender-based violence and discrimination

- Sexual harassment may be the most visible form of gender-based violence to some employers, but domestic, family and sexual violence takes many forms and affects many people in Australia's workforce.
- **A specific indicator on gender-based violence and discrimination** would enable employers to increase their understanding of gender-based violence, better support victim-survivors and target prevention programs.
- This indicator should be developed in **partnership between the Workplace Gender Equality Agency, the Respect@Work Council and the domestic, family and sexual violence sector.**

Expand the definition of 'relevant employer' in the *Workplace Gender Equality Act 2012* to include all Commonwealth, State and local government agencies and publicly funded institutions

- Currently, 40 per cent of the nation's employers are required to report against gender equality indicators. While this is a considerable proportion of employers, promoting gender equality and preventing gender-based violence requires all employers to play their part.
- In accepting Recommendation 43 of the Respect@Work report, the Commonwealth Government agreed to expand the definition of 'relevant employer' to include Commonwealth agencies.
- This should be **extended to include all levels of government and publicly funded institutions.**

Increase Paid Parental Leave to 26 weeks and promote equal uptake between parents

- Challenging stereotypes about men's and women's roles is critical to ending gender-based violence.²⁵ This includes child-caring roles.
- Currently, only half of fathers eligible for Paid Parental Leave are taking it.
- While recent proposed changes to Paid Parental Leave take away barriers for both parents to share leave equally, the scheme should be more generous and **include a 'use it or lose it' mechanism to encourage equal uptake.**
- **Increasing Paid Parental Leave to 26 weeks** to be shared by both parents would ensure caregiving parents are not disadvantaged in the workplace. It would also send a clear signal to the community that raising children is a shared responsibility between parents.
- **Superannuation should also be included on Paid Parental Leave.**



Increase transparency on the gender pay gap

- The gender pay gap is currently 13.8 per cent – a difference on average of \$255.30 per week between women and men.²⁶
- When women earn less than men, it signals to the community that women and men are not equal. And we know gender inequality is the key driver of gender-based violence.
- Women with less economic security and financial independence are more vulnerable to abuse, and less able to escape unsafe relationships.²⁷
- Through the Workplace Gender Equality Agency, the government should **publicly release the gender pay gap of organisations with more than 200 employees** to encourage a race to the top to close the pay gap.

Expand affordable access to early learning education and care

- Greater workforce participation leads to greater economic equality between genders. It also **challenges gender stereotypes around working and parenthood**.
- The government should consider ways to make early learning education and care **more affordable and more accessible** to increase women's workforce participation.

Notes

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