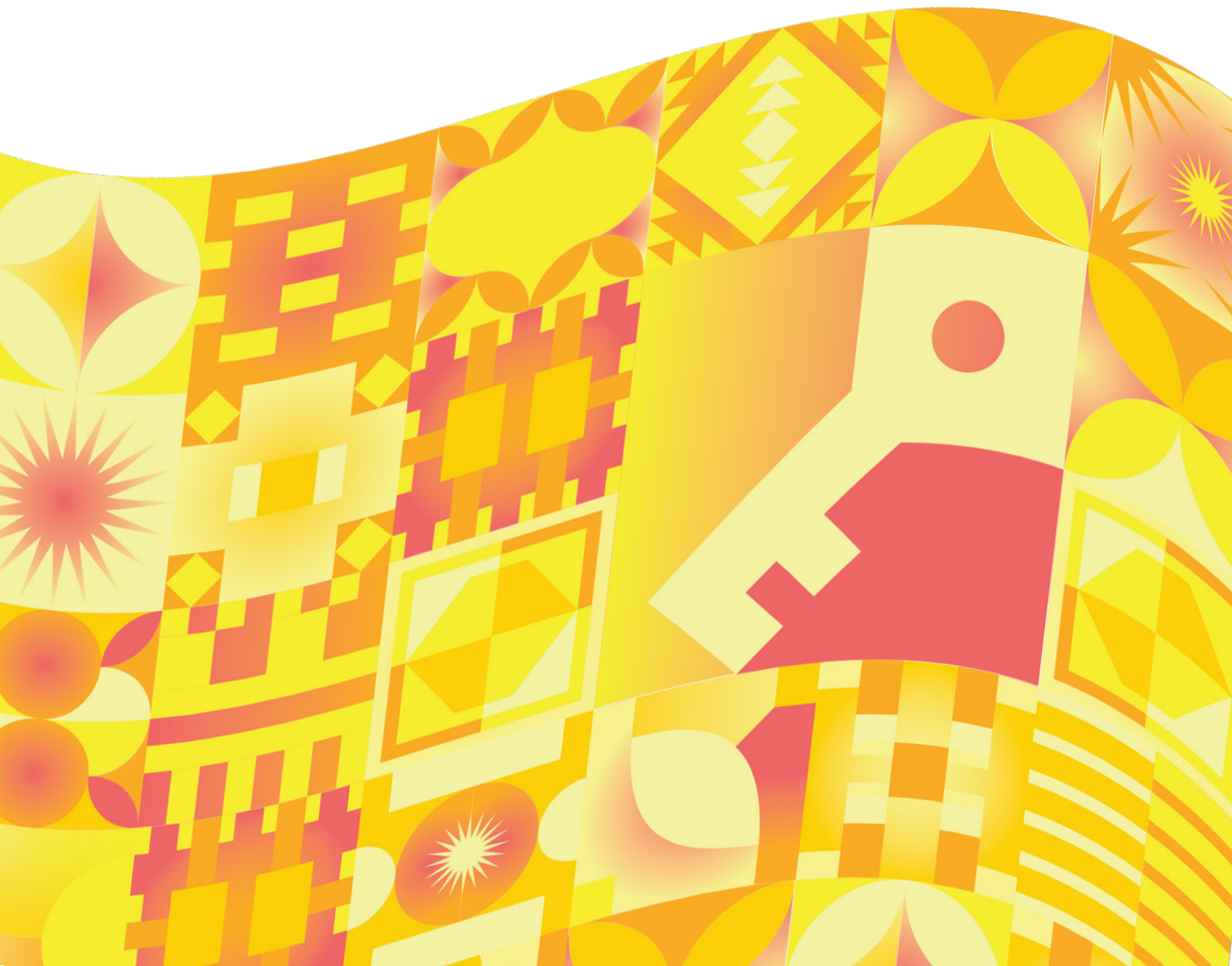


Unlocking the Prevention Potential

Accelerating action to end domestic,
family and sexual violence



Prepared by the Rapid Review Expert Panel:

Ms Elena Campbell, Dr Todd Fernando,
Dr Leigh Gassner APM, Ms Jess Hill,
Dr Zac Seidler & Dr Anne Summers AO

Acknowledgments

This report is dedicated to the survivors of domestic, sexual, and family violence. Your strength, resilience, and bravery stand as a constant reminder of why this work is necessary. You have shown us what it means to continue living in the face of unimaginable harm, and it is your courage that drives us forward – towards building a system that does more than respond. We are committed to creating a system that earns your trust; safeguards your dignity; and ensures your safety.

To those whose lives were tragically cut short by violence, we carry your memory as a call to action. You deserved more than what our systems offered. Your absence serves as a painful reminder that we must do better – our responsibility is to ensure that no more lives are lost to preventable violence.

This work is not just about addressing past failures, it's about creating something better. A system that communities can rely on, where prevention, protection and trust are paramount. This report imagines a future where safety is not a privilege, but a human right, and where justice is delivered with care, compassion and certainty.

In particular, this work acknowledges the strength of generations of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders – traditional owners of unceded country across this land and holders of knowledge and wisdom about the solutions that work for their own families and communities.

To the advocates, service providers, and Australians who stand beside survivors every day – your dedication, persistence, and belief in a better system continue to inspire this journey. Together, we strive for a world where violence is no longer tolerated and where communities can live in safety, trust, and peace.

Executive summary



Background and context

Work has been occurring for decades at the frontline, policy and decision-making levels to reduce and ultimately end domestic, family and sexual violence (DFSV). This includes through the current *National Plan to End Violence against Women and Children 2022-2032* ('National Plan'), as well as its predecessor and the recently released *Working for Women: A Strategy for Gender Equality*¹. This work is crucial to acknowledge and to honour – particularly for those on the frontline, who continue to respond to growing demand and increased risk and complexity.

The challenge that we have been tackling as a community, however, is a complex and perennial one – a fundamental human rights issue, driven by millennia of gendered and other forms of structural inequality, then compounded by an array of systems, industries and, recently, online forces that push back against our collective progress. In combination this means that, despite our gains, our shared task to prevent violence in all its forms has potentially become more difficult than ever before.

In April 2024, the Prime Minister labelled a rise in homicides of women and children a national crisis.² This rise follows a recent upward trend, despite the decline over the previous three decades.³ Yet even this categorisation as a 'crisis' belies the problem's true scale. In particular, the untold number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and children who are missing, presumed murdered, remains a source of grief, questions and national shame.

The extent of this challenge calls for us to assess our current approaches and ask what more can be done. This does not mean diverting from what we know must remain a priority. Rather, it means expanding our gaze and hearing what the frontline, lived experience advocates and communities across Australia tell us makes a difference. It means learning from the evidence and a broad range of sectors – and shedding light on areas which may not have been considered through a DFSV or prevention frame. Put simply, it means identifying every opportunity to unlock the 'prevention potential'.



Rapid Review of Prevention Approaches

The Rapid Review of Prevention Approaches (the Review) announced on 1 May 2024 was given the considerable job of bringing these opportunities into focus. As such, the six members of the multidisciplinary Review Panel – supported by three co-convenors and a Secretariat from the Commonwealth Office for Women – were tasked through broad Terms of Reference to provide independent advice on opportunities to expand and strengthen prevention efforts across all forms of violence against women and children, including a particular focus on preventing homicides.

The Review process was, as its name suggests, a particularly rapid one – in which the Panel and co-convenors met regularly over the course of 12 weeks to discuss and explore priority areas of focus.

As accelerated as this process was, the timeframe recognised the urgency of the challenge and the fact that the Australian community rightly expects governments to take swift, decisive action to end violence against women.

That said, the Review was commissioned to bring additional, short-term momentum to established long-term processes and was therefore guided by the advice of existing governance structures, including the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Advisory Council on family, domestic and sexual violence, the First Nations National Plan Steering Committee, the National Plan Advisory Group, the National Women's Alliances, as well as the Lived Experience Advisory Council supported by the National Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence Commission (DFSV Commission). These governance groups remain the authorities to which the Review referred, while bringing in additional areas of focus where opportunities arose.

The Review also received targeted briefings on a wide array of areas, ranging from primary prevention, cohort-specific and intersectional considerations, frontline responses, safety by design principles, sources of available data, and existing and emerging evidence regarding a range of systemic factors. In doing so, the Review noted the extent of information already being collected, as well as activity being conducted, at all government levels, while also identifying that considerable gaps and opportunities persist.

The Review was also supported by specifically commissioned work, with Australia's National Research Organisation for Women's Safety (ANROWS), the Australian Institute of Family Studies (AIFS), and the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) providing advice and a stocktake of evidence relevant to certain areas. Key emerging evidence and specific data was also sourced and made available to inform the Review.

The rapid timeline did not allow for the Review to call for submissions, however the Review did look to the extensive existing evidence collected through recent consultation processes. This included wide-ranging consultations conducted by the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Advisory Council. The Review also conducted a specific consultation concerning the needs of the Torres Strait region.

This remote area of Australia is too often excluded from consideration, with funding and data related to this region frequently subsumed within wider categorisations, despite it being a distinct region with its own strengths, experiences and barriers to women's safety.

Stakeholder groups consulted by the Rapid Review of Prevention Approaches

- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Advisory Council on family, domestic and sexual violence and First Nations National Plan Steering Committee
- Australia's National Research Organisation for Women's Safety
- Australian Criminal Intelligence Commission
- Commonwealth Government agencies including data agencies
- Communities and frontline services in the Torres Strait Islands
- Domestic, family and sexual violence peak bodies and frontline services
- Key academics with multidisciplinary expertise
- Lived Experience Advisory Council
- National Plan Advisory Group
- National Women's Alliances (Equality Rights Alliance, Harmony Alliance, National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Women's Alliance, National Rural Women's Coalition, National Women's Safety Alliance, Women with Disabilities Australia)
- Organisations that work on safety by design in the technology and financial sectors
- Organisations that work with children and young people
- Organisations that work with men and boys
- Organisations that work with migrant and refugee women
- Organisations that work with the LGBTIQ+ community
- OurWatch
- Senate Standing Committee on Legal and Constitutional Affairs
- Women and Women's Safety Senior Officials

Findings and Recommendations



Given its rapid nature, the Review could not draw conclusions across every area of policy or service delivery. While it was charged with identifying prevention opportunities across the full spectrum of Australia's DFSV response, the Review's scope needed to be sharp and inject momentum where obvious needs presented and where there were clear actions available to governments. It also needed to identify ways to leverage existing processes for future and more sustained reform.

A National Emergency – and an ongoing national priority

The significance of gender-based violence as a standalone issue for National Cabinet should not be underestimated. Since being established in 2020, National Cabinet has taken on an unprecedented level of authority and has encouraged swift, decisive action across areas of government policy and investment. This makes it an appropriate body to continue to monitor what the Review suggests is more than a national crisis, but a national emergency. The Review therefore recommends that gender-based violence becomes an ongoing priority for National Cabinet to ensure that government accountability, as well as sustained investment and attention, is maintained.

Crucially, the Review acknowledges with sorrow the missing, presumed murdered Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and children, as well as the courage of their families in their quest for accountability. For this reason and, more broadly, the Review recognises that the experience of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and children must be a national priority, urging the strengthening of culturally-informed and place-based DFSV responses for First Nations communities, noting the significant work under way to develop a First Nations National Plan. This should include urgent consideration of the evidence presented by families and communities to the *Senate Inquiry into Missing and Murdered First Nations women and children*, as well as the commitments under Target 13 of the *National Agreement on Closing the Gap*.⁴

To guide implementation of this report's recommendations, the Review also calls for communities that experience marginalisation to be prioritised. In addition to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, prioritised communities should include: refugee, as well as long term and recently arrived migrant communities, women and children with disabilities, people from LGBTIQ+ communities, older women and women in regional and remote communities. Addressing gender-based violence for communities that experience intersecting forms of marginalisation lays the foundation for population-wide success. Where applicable, implementation of these recommendations should involve a genuine and sustained co-design in partnership with affected communities to ensure that they can identify the priorities of greatest value and urgency to them.

The prevention potential

A focus on the challenge, however, is not enough when the task ahead of us as a nation is so immense – and when our efforts thus far have not yielded the results for which we had hoped. As a result, the Review also recommends that the Commonwealth, states and territories expand their approach to prevention and leverage all prevention touchpoints more effectively. This includes by commissioning an independent review of our current national prevention framework, *Change the story*, so that it continues to evolve and keep pace with global evidence; brings in valuable insights from a diversity of sectors; and considers the experiences of all communities.⁵

To supercharge Australia's prevention response, the Review also recommends the establishment of a five year Prevention Innovation Fund. This would resource and evaluate innovative prevention efforts to understand, assess and share what works in an Australian context and at a community-based level.

Prevention through people

The Review has chosen to place particular focus on supporting children and young people – and to do so by enabling young people's voices to drive change and hold government to account. By placing safety and recovery for children at the centre of our prevention efforts, we not only prevent further trauma in the present, but also stem future trajectories of harm. As a result, the Review recommends a strategic and coordinated approach to recognising children and young people as victim-survivors in their own right. As a starting point, a Youth Taskforce should be established under the National Plan, supported by the DFSV Commission, to ensure that a strong focus on action and implementation accelerates this priority.

In addition, the Review recommends that these strategic efforts be complemented by an immediate emphasis on support and recovery for young children, with a particular focus on supporting children's relationships with a protective parent. Further, the Review recommends development of youth-specific and informed responses for young people who have experienced harm and may also go on to use harm in different contexts, including by drawing on available practice frameworks published by ANROWS. The Review also recommends the development and delivery of a tailored response to assist young people escaping DFSV, in recognition that certain cohorts of young people will not be in the care of statutory child protection systems or a protective parent.

Separately, the Review highlights the potential that lies in working more effectively and meaningfully with men and boys on preventing DFSV. This includes the promotion of healthy masculinities to counter the growing influence of online misogyny. The Review notes that this requires a national and coordinated approach and should include intersectional, DFSV-informed mechanisms, including those which support engagement with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander men. It also involves adopting a national definition and measurement methodology for healthy masculinities, as well as the development or expansion of DFSV-informed responses focusing on men's life transitions, including leaving school, new fatherhood, relationship breakdown, recent migration and becoming unemployed.

In addition to unlocking the prevention potential through supporting children and young people and engaging more effectively with men and boys, the Review recognises that efforts to support women must remain central. In particular, the Review recognises the prevention potential that lies in structural levers – systemic and policy mechanisms which lay the social and economic conditions for support and improved safety. Improving women's economic security is recognised internationally as a best practice prevention strategy. As a result, the Review recommends priority actions in this area, including the implementation of particular Women's Economic Equality Taskforce (WEET) recommendations, as well as other structural reforms that will contribute to the financial freedom of women and their children and improve safety.

Further, the Review recognises the immense prevention potential embedded within the Australian community. Good practice exists in pockets around the country, including resources that help friends and family respond to disclosures and connect victim-survivors with support and people using violence with services that can address risk. Since friends and family are most often the first (and sometimes the only) support for people impacted by DFSV, the Review recognises that governments should prioritise investment in more targeted education and skills-building for this relational cohort. Embedding DFSV knowledge within the community will not only unlock a significant area of prevention, but also contribute to the improvement of community attitudes more generally.

Prevention through responses

Urgently, the Review recognises the prevention potential embedded in frontline crisis responses. The Review has aimed to highlight that – when appropriately resourced – DFSV crisis responses not only support immediate safety but lay the groundwork for safety to be sustained. For too long, however, investment in DFSV crisis response has perceived policing as the priority, with the Review hearing from specialist crisis services that they are unable to keep up with demand and escalating risk to such a point that their staff are overwhelmed and that some victim-survivors may not receive a response.

As such, the Review recommends a needs analysis to determine unmet demand in DFSV crisis response, recovery and healing (excluding police) with the view to develop a pathway to fund demand. This needs analysis should take diverse groups into consideration, as well as the demand for targeted and culturally safe responses, such as ethno-specific services and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-led organisations.

More immediately, the Review recommends that there should be a significant funding uplift in certain frontline areas. Here it is vital that the role of public legal assistance be acknowledged as a frontline response, noting the recent Independent Review of the National Legal Assistance Partnership finding about the ‘neglect’ of this sector. This is not only because legal assistance is an access to justice issue, but because legal assistance can improve safety for victim-survivors, particularly for women and children involved in protection order matters and family law proceedings. Importantly, it can also reduce risk and facilitate compliance with orders by engaging people using violence in a trauma and DFSV-informed way.

It is also vital to note the dire need for crisis accommodation for victim-survivors, particularly in remote and regional communities, such as the Torres Strait, where the Review heard that there was only one shelter to service the entire region. A crucial further step in unlocking the prevention potential therefore involves recognising the value of specialist crisis accommodation that provides a wraparound service, such as the Sanctuary model in Victoria. It also involves resourcing the DFSV sector for long-term case management, following the needs analysis identified above, as well as increasing linkage between the DFSV and homelessness sectors and aligning these sectors in national frameworks and plans.

In addition to pulling these prevention levers, significant potential lies in activating the health response, including by building capacity and capability to identify DFSV and intervene in appropriate ways. This involves equipping and resourcing practitioners across health settings to identify and support a diverse range of victim-survivors and people who use violence, as well as increasing capacity for doctors to spend appropriate time with people affected by DFSV. Further, the Review identified the potential in enabling an uplift in training of health professionals in primary and mental health settings and accelerating cross-sector collaboration between the alcohol and other drugs (AOD) and DFSV specialist sector. Just as significant is the value in recognising DFSV across relevant health, wellbeing and equity policies across government, so that DFSV and health do not sit in policy isolation.

Reducing risk in people who use violence and keeping them in view is clearly a priority objective. This has not been as well understood or actioned as other areas, however, with opportunities to reduce risk that lie at earlier points along the spectrum often overlooked. This means that efforts should be focused on interventions early in police and legal system interaction. In addition to the value of DFSV-informed legal assistance, particularly at the protection order stage, this includes facilitating men's access to information and assistance beyond legal needs, as this can help to reduce risk and improve compliance. Access to crisis accommodation, for example, can reduce escalation and prevent perpetrators from returning home when they have been excluded by police.

Along the spectrum, it is just as vital to improve the supply, quality and capability of men's behaviour change programs (MBCPs), which the Review recognises were always intended to function as a coordinated community response. The Review recommends that MBCPs be supported to enable increased engagement and retention, as well as continuous improvement – to ensure that their contribution to our collective efforts to hold men using violence to account can be maximised to the greatest possible extent.

Further, MBCPs should be resourced to facilitate access to service provision which addresses needs related to substance abuse, histories of trauma and mental ill-health, while recognising that this must occur through a DFSV-informed lens. These programs should be community and context specific, meeting cultural and other needs, while also prioritising support for victim-survivors through partner and family safety contact – a central, but often under-resourced, aspect of their work.

In keeping with this focus on a coordinated community response, it is vital to recognise the role of a shared understanding of risk and the capacity to access information which can support good decision-making. As such, the Review recommends that all governments develop a shared understanding and language about risk by developing nationally consistent risk assessment and management principles. These principles should be applied across the full range of roles identified as having decision-making and/or support functions in relation to DFSV, while taking a proactive approach to preventing misidentification, particularly in relation to members of diverse communities. The Review further recommends that this be accompanied by strengthened information sharing, including through the National Criminal Intelligence System (NCIS).

Additionally, the Review recommends the introduction and expansion of multi-agency responses. This includes highlighting the value of fit-for-purpose police co-responder models, as well as evidence-informed focused deterrence models. It also includes highlighting the urgent need for access to collaborative responses which increase access to forensic examination in sexual offence matters. This is a vital prevention measure, as many victim-survivors indicate that they report to police and undergo initial examination primarily in the hope that this may ultimately stop an offender from harming others. Accordingly, leveraging collaborations to increase access to forensic examination which may later support prosecution is important for victim-survivor choice. Access to examination in remote areas and in primary health settings, rather than through police, can expand this choice further, so that victim-survivors can disclose in a familiar or culturally safe environment and then later determine whether they wish to report.

Crucially, the Review recommends a national approach which can strengthen systems responses to high-risk perpetrators, including through trialling and evaluating DFSV threat assessment centres. Finally, the Review recognises that adequate, timely and DFSV-informed police response and investigation is a critical prevention measure. As such, the Review recommends transparency through public reporting of response and investigation data, as well as that all jurisdictions establish mechanisms for independent civilian oversight of police that are DFSV-informed and sit outside of policing authorities.

Associated with the need for more DFSV-informed decision-making, capacity and capability, the Review recognises the urgent need to build the specialist DFSV workforce, as well as to uplift and expand workforce capability of all services that frequently engage with victim-survivors and people who use violence. The Review recommends that this be achieved through analysis of current and future labour supply for the DFSV specialist services sector, which can then inform the embedding of a secure and appropriately resourced sector.

In addition to the above needs analysis, the Review also recommends the establishment of a DFSV National Workforce Development Strategy to expand capacity and capability in the related DFSV specialist sector including sexual violence and MBOP sectors. Further, the Review recommends a broader strategy to improve capability uplift across other frontline responses, such as health, police, courts and legal assistance, child protection, AOD and mental health.

Finally, the Review recognises the need for a specific focus on the prevention of, and service and justice responses to, sexual violence, as well as its co-occurrence with domestic and family violence. The Review therefore recommends that greater priority and focus be given to Action 6 of the First Action Plan of the National Plan – noting opportunities to consider the needs of particularly vulnerable cohorts.⁶ This includes women and children vulnerable to sexual exploitation, those working in the sex industry, as well as women and children from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities who are being murdered and disappeared. The Review further notes opportunities for prioritisation of responses to child sexual abuse, including incest and harmful sexual behaviours by children and young people, as well as the potential for expanded reporting options and alternative, community-based responses, such as restorative approaches – informed by the pending recommendations of the Australian Law Reform Commission's Inquiry into Sexual Offences.

Prevention through systems and industries

Beyond prevention through people and responses, the Review recognises the influential role of systems and industries in the prevention of DFSV, as well as in its perpetuation and escalation where these systems are abused. As such, the Review recommends immediate audits of the weaponisation of government systems by perpetrators of DFSV, including of systems where significant harm is occurring, such as family law, child support, taxation and immigration systems. The Review notes that the respective audits and responses should be informed by safety by design principles, given their effectiveness in other important areas of recent reform such as in the technology and finance sectors.

The Review also acknowledges that certain industries, such as alcohol, gambling, media and technology, are particularly well positioned to prevent and reduce DFSV. This is in part because these same industries too often function as the foundation for, or means of, the escalation of abuse. As such, the Review recommends that governments review and amend alcohol and gambling regulatory environments to prioritise the prevention of DFSV. This includes through restrictions on alcohol sale, advertising and delivery timeframes; restrictions leading to a total ban on advertising in gambling; and an examination of the density of electronic gaming machines and use of online gambling in relation to DFSV prevalence. Further, the Review recommends that the Commonwealth Government work with the Foundation for Alcohol Research and Education (FARE) and other bodies in an integrated and focused effort to reduce the role of alcohol in DFSV.

Beyond this, the Review recommends that governments establish and embed national standards for media reporting on gender-based violence to prevent the perpetuation of harmful narratives that can escalate risk. The Review also urges governments to ensure that the current age-verification pilot related to online pornography tests not only the relevant technology, but its implementation, including participation of major technology platforms. In addition, the Review recommends the provision of ongoing support to the eSafety Commission to protect victim-survivors from tech-based abuse and to work with the technology industry and government on improving policies, practice, transparency and accountability for an increasingly complex and hazardous online environment.

Prevention through learning and data

Efforts to unlock the potential of prevention also require accountability for, and monitoring of, these ongoing prevention efforts. The Review therefore recommends that the Commonwealth Government expand the functions and powers of the National DFSV Commission and establish it as a statutory authority. Expanded powers functions should include the DFSV Commission: performing a clearinghouse function; having stronger powers to gather information; and to continue monitoring the implementation and funding associated with the implementation of the National Plan.

Further, it is vital to acknowledge that improvements in our prevention efforts, wherever they fall along the spectrum, must be informed by accurate information. In particular, the Review found that Australia currently struggles with insufficient information and disaggregated data about particular communities, including those in remote areas such as the Torres Strait. Recognising the crucial role of data sovereignty, the Review recommends working in partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities to embark on a process to determine a community-led, self-determined approach to data collection that accounts for Indigenous data sovereignty principles, in line with the Close the Gap Priority Reforms.

Further, the Review recommends improved and disaggregated data collection around the intersection of gender-based violence with the experiences of older Australians, people with disability, long term and recently arrived migrant and refugee communities, LGBTIQ+ communities and communities in regional areas, as well as improved data collection about the impacts on children affected by family law processes.

The Review recommends improved data collection to understand the scale of the challenge that we face, as well as how we are tracking to address it. This includes the establishment of a centralised national data set on the extent and nature of perpetration; as well as enhancements to the measurements framework under the National Plan to include further quantitative targets.

In addition to these efforts, we must also continue to examine and learn from where our prevention efforts have failed and where DFSV-related deaths have tragically occurred. Death review panels provide salient lessons about those prevention points that did not work, or where victim-survivors fell through the gaps. As such, the Review recommends that state and territory governments work to establish and uplift death review panels across all jurisdictions, including with an emphasis on First Nations support units and protocols.

Highlighting the importance of recognising and accounting for suicides related to DFSV-victimisations – numbers not currently accounted for in conventional assessments of the ongoing national crisis – the Review also recommends an urgent inquiry into the relationship between suicide and experiences of DFSV victimisation. These numbers are not currently accounted for and therefore skew our understanding of the impact of DFSV. Capturing this data will enable the true scale of what the Review contends is actually a state of national emergency to finally be understood.



Conclusion

The Review recognises that opportunities for prevention of DFSV exist at an individual, community, systems and societal level. Prevention can happen through people, responses, and systems and industries. This builds on the approach of the *National Plan to End Violence against Women and Children 2022-2032* ('National Plan'), agreed by the Commonwealth and the states and territories, which acknowledges the need to be agile and responsive to the evolving evidence base. The Review's recommendations identify where violence and abuse can be prevented before it happens, when it occurs and before it becomes fatal.

Importantly, each of the above recommendations is designed to be as flexible and practical as possible and must be tested and co-designed with the communities that it is likely to impact. This is a task to which governments must commit if it is genuinely to unlock the prevention potential. **Implementation of these recommendations also requires dismantling siloed ways of working – overcoming the barriers of federation, where feasible, in the spirit adopted when facing other threats presenting on a national scale.** The Review's advice will be one stepping stone on a road which so many have been building for decades. Its purpose in many ways has been to add urgency to some obvious investment needs and to open doors to which multiple people or sectors have pointed for years. As such, many of the recommendations here have been made elsewhere or are ones for which individuals and sectors have been calling for some time.

That said, it was clear over just 12 weeks of review, consultation and consideration that the path ahead does not just involve tinkering at the edges but instead requires a surge of activity and investment around people, responses and systems. What's more, it demands examination of the mechanisms and levers that, thus far, have not created the momentum towards increased safety and accountability – and reduced homicides – that we would expect. As a result, many of this Review's recommendations are about identifying those mechanisms and levers which embed an effective and whole-of-community approach to prevention over the longer-term.

The scale of the challenge and the complex nature of DFSV may seem overwhelming. The fact that the Review could identify so many areas ripe for meaningful reform over such a short period of time, however, is also a sign of promise. Put simply, **there is a lot more that can be done if we draw on lessons available across multiple sectors and approach the task in an expansive and collaborative way.** That in itself should be a cause for energy and action.

By commissioning this Review and outlining broad Terms of Reference, the Commonwealth has recognised that prevention of violence can be seen as core business for every workforce, community and individual, regardless of whether they saw themselves situated in this task before. Similarly, by commissioning this Review, all governments will have a mandate for bold action – a prevention potential that the Review sincerely hopes they are ready and willing to seize.



Principles

The following principles underpin each recommendation and should be at the forefront in their implementation. In our efforts to prevent domestic, family and sexual violence (DFSV), Australia must:

1. Explicitly prioritise the experiences and needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and recognise that DFSV in Australia is rooted in our historical context and colonial legacy. To address this violence and prevent it, our efforts must be genuinely led by First Nations peoples in a way that embeds and promotes cultural safety, place-based approaches and self-determination.
2. Adopt an intersectional approach to preventing DFSV that understands this violence as being symptomatic of broader, systemic issues that intersect with race, class, disability, and sexuality and recognises the intersectional realities that exacerbate violence for certain groups.
3. Embed implementation science to bridge the gap between research and practice. To do this, build in the systematic uptake of research findings, including emerging evidence, across the implementation of policy, programs and practice in Australia. Where appropriate, implementation of recommendations needs to involve genuine engagement and testing with the people and communities they will impact, especially Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.
4. Collect more data to address gaps in our understanding. This should prioritise opportunities to collect both qualitative and quantitative data and building in activities that improve and expand data collection.
5. Continually inspect, understand and adapt to the emerging and changing role of technology. This should include understanding and responding to the opportunities that technology may present, as well as the unintended consequences technology may cause or exacerbate.

Recommendations



A national emergency – and an ongoing national priority

1. The Commonwealth and state and territory governments to agree that 'ending gender-based violence, including violence against children and young people' becomes an ongoing priority of National Cabinet.
2. The Commonwealth and state and territory governments to strongly embed and build on **culturally-informed and place-based** domestic, family and sexual violence responses for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women, families and communities, noting the significant work under way to develop a First Nations National Plan. This should include genuine and ongoing consideration of the evidence provided to the Senate Inquiry into Missing and Murdered First Nations women and children, and the commitments under Target 13 of the *National Agreement on Closing the Gap*.
3. The Commonwealth and state and territory governments to prioritise the experiences of communities that are marginalised especially Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, migrant and refugee communities, women and children with disabilities, LGBTIQ+ people, older women and regional and remote communities in implementing all of the recommendations in this report. Addressing gender-based violence for communities experiencing intersecting forms of marginalisation lays the foundation for population-wide success. Where applicable, implementation should involve a genuine and sustained **co-design approach** to ensure that affected communities are identifying priorities of greatest urgency and value to them.



The prevention potential

4. The Commonwealth and state and territory governments to expand their approach to prevention to acknowledge the global evidence base to leverage all prevention touchpoints more effectively. This should include:
 - a. an independent review and expansion of *Change the story* beyond primary prevention, with a focus on accommodating the evolving global evidence base around the prevention of violence across early intervention, response and recovery; and
 - b. **establishing a five-year co-funded Prevention Innovation Fund, understanding what works better in an Australian context and at a community level.**



Prevention through people

5. The Commonwealth and state and territory governments to adopt a strategic and coordinated approach to embedding the distinct experiences of children and young people in their own right. This includes through the establishment of a Youth Taskforce under the *National Plan to End Violence against Women and Children 2022-2032*, supported by the Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence Commission, to ensure implementation of the National Plan accelerates a focus on children and young people.

This strategic work should be complemented by more immediate efforts to support children and young people who have experienced violence, including:

- a. support and recovery for young children, with a focus on programmatic responses which maintain and repair a relationship with the protective parent, including in the context of the family law system, as well as upskilling Independent Children's Lawyers (Commonwealth and states and territories);
 - b. developing tailored and developmentally appropriate, as well as youth-specific and informed, service responses for child sexual abuse, children and young people who have experienced family violence, young people using violence at home, and young people using and/or experiencing violence in intimate relationships, drawing on available evidence and practice frameworks available through Australia's National Research Organisation for Women's Safety (ANROWS) (states and territories); and
 - c. in recognition that certain cohorts of young people will not be in the care of statutory child protection systems or a protective parent, develop and deliver an appropriate and tailored response to young people escaping violence and seeking financial support and safe housing (Commonwealth and states and territories).
6. **The Commonwealth Government, with states and territories, to develop a national, coordinated and co-designed approach to engaging with men and boys, and on healthy masculinities and violence prevention.** This should include:
 - a. establishing intersectional, DFSV-informed advisory mechanisms for engaging with men and boys with multi-disciplinary expertise (e.g., health, education, tech), including the establishment of an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Men's Advisory Body;
 - b. adopting a strengths-based national definition and measurement methodology for healthy masculinities to guide future campaigns and/or program implementation;
 - c. **developing or expanding DFSV-informed program responses across sectors, focusing on healthy relationships and masculinities throughout men's life transitions, including school leavers, new fathers, separation/relationship breakdown, recent migration and recent unemployment; and**
 - d. **developing a national response, attuned to the experiences of men and boys, responding to the rise of online misogyny and radicalisation through targeted investment in research to understand relevant risk factors and the extent of harm; collaboration with specialist frontline educators; and a focus on evidence-based tech-industry regulation.**

7. The Commonwealth to undertake further structural reforms to strengthen women's economic equality, in recognition of the interconnectedness between lack of economic security and vulnerability to DFSV. This should include:
 - a. consistent with the recommendations of the Women's Economic Equality Taskforce (WEET), abolishing the Child Care Subsidy Activity Test, as an immediate first step towards universal access to early education for Australian children, noting the current Activity Test limits flexibility in accessing child care for women in casual and insecure work;
 - b. adopting in full the WEET recommendation to remove a major and escalating form of financial abuse against women seeking child support (recommendation 6.5);
 - c. expanding eligibility for the Low Income Super Tax Offset (LISTO), in order to increase women's superannuation balances as they age;
 - d. developing a successor plan to the *National Plan to Respond to the Abuse of Older Australians (Elder Abuse) 2019-2023*;
 - e. undertaking further reforms including expanding eligibility to address the economic insecurity experienced by women on visas who are victim-survivors of DFSV; and
 - f. strengthening workplace health and safety laws to complement the positive duty on employers to prevent workplace sexual harassment, sex discrimination and harassment under the *Sex Discrimination Act 1984 (Cth)*.

8. The Commonwealth and state and territory governments to expand the evidence base on how to build capability of family and friends to identify and respond to DFSV as "natural responders" in their relational contexts with victim-survivors and perpetrators. In the immediate term, the Commonwealth should resource Lifeline's DV-alert to expand its current community-focussed program offering, prioritising increased reach and frequency of facilitator-led delivery to regional and remote areas, as well as delivery virtually.



Prevention through responses

9. The Commonwealth, through the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) and with state and territory governments, to expedite a needs analysis to determine unmet demand in DFSV crisis response, recovery and healing (excluding police), with the view to develop a pathway to fund demand. This should take into consideration the needs of different groups of women and children and the demand for targeted and culturally safe responses, such as ethno-specific services and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-controlled organisations, with a particular focus on remote communities.

More immediately, there should be a significant funding uplift for:

- a. legal services, noting the recommendations of the Independent Review of the National Legal Assistance Partnership and the expiry of the current partnership on 30 June 2025;
 - b. crisis accommodation, noting commitments to date and what is outlined in *Recommendation 10*; and
 - c. establishment of nationally consistent travel assistance for people escaping DFSV who live in remote areas (Commonwealth and states and territories).
10. The Commonwealth and state and territory governments to apply a prevention lens to the resourcing and delivery of crisis response and recovery services. This includes through:
 - a. replacing motels and other high-cost temporary crisis accommodation with specialist crisis accommodation that provide wraparound services (states and territories);
 - b. resourcing the DFSV sector for long-term case management, following the needs analysis identified in *Recommendation 9* (states and territories); and
 - c. increasing linkage between the DFSV and homelessness sectors, and align these sectors in national frameworks and plans (Commonwealth and states and territories).
 11. The Commonwealth and state and territory governments to activate the health system and workforce as a key prevention lever. This should include:
 - a. equipping and resourcing General Practitioners (GPs), perinatal, and mental health and alcohol and other drug (AOD) services to identify and support DFSV victim-survivors and people who use violence (Commonwealth and states and territories);
 - b. creating a specific Medicare item number for GPs that enables them to spend appropriate time with people affected by DFSV (Commonwealth);
 - c. mandating training of professionals in general primary and mental health settings in adult and child safeguarding, including DFSV, as a requirement for registration through the Australian Health Practitioner Regulation Agency (Commonwealth and states and territories); and
 - d. Increasing cross-sector collaboration between the AOD and DFSV sector and provide specialised services for women that are family friendly and support caring for children (states and territories).

12. The Commonwealth and state and territory governments to take targeted efforts to address the significant gaps in responses to people who use violence. This should include:
 - a. strengthening initial justice responses to facilitate advice and assistance beyond legal needs, which can help to reduce risk and improve compliance, including access to crisis accommodation (states and territories); and
 - b. improving the national evidence base, quality, capability and supply of men's behaviour change programs, including through a focus on continuous improvement. Behaviour change programs should:
 - i. be part of a community-coordinated response;
 - ii. be provided at appropriate intervention points;
 - iii. emphasise the value of associated support to victim-survivors through partner and family safety contact; and
 - iv. facilitate/co-locate access to support for needs related to harmful substance abuse, histories of trauma, cognitive impairment and mental ill-health through a DFSV-informed lens (states and territories, with Commonwealth supporting national consistency and best practice).

13. The Commonwealth and state and territory governments to work together to strengthen multi-agency approaches and better manage risk, with a lens on harm and safety, for victim-survivors of DFSV, including risk of homicide and suicide. This should include:
 - a. the development and implementation of nationally consistent risk assessment and management principles to be utilised across the full range of roles identified as having decision-making and/or support functions in relation to DFSV, with a proactive approach to preventing misidentification (Commonwealth and states and territories);
 - b. strengthening information sharing within and across jurisdictions – including through the National Criminal Intelligence System (NCIS) (Commonwealth and states and territories);
 - c. the introduction and expansion of multi-agency responses, including fit-for-purpose police co-responder models – with an immediate focus on collaborative responses that increase access to forensic examinations (states and territories);
 - d. a national approach to strengthen systems responses to high-risk perpetrators, including through trialling and evaluating DFSV threat assessment centres and evidence-based focussed deterrence models (states and territories, with Commonwealth support); and
 - e. all jurisdictions establishing mechanisms that are DFSV-informed for independent oversight and accountability of police response and management of DFSV (including members investigated for DFSV). These mechanisms should sit outside of police forces and be civilian-led (states and territories).

14. The Commonwealth and state and territory governments to work together to build the specialist DFSV workforce and expand workforce capability of all services that frequently engage with victim-survivors and people who use violence. This should be done through:
 - a. commissioning analysis into current and future labour supply for the DFSV specialist services sector and recommendations to build and support a secure and sustainably resourced sector; and
 - b. establishing a DFSV National Workforce Development Strategy that would expand the capacity and capability of sectors, such as the DFSV specialist sector, providing emergency services and accommodation, and including the men's behaviour change sector and the sexual violence sector; and
 - c. establishing a strategy for capability uplift across other intersecting workforces, and prioritising legal, justice, child protection and health (including AOD and mental health) sectors.
15. The Commonwealth and state and territory governments should further expand and prioritise work on Action 6 in the First Action Plan of the National Plan to recognise the full range of sexual violence including where it occurs apart from DFV particularly noting the recommendations from the forthcoming Australian Law Reform Commission inquiry into justice responses to sexual violence.



Prevention through systems and industries

16. The Commonwealth and state and territory governments to undertake an immediate audit of how DFSV perpetrators are weaponising government systems, and to respond to these findings. This audit and subsequent plans for reform should be informed by Safety by Design principles.
17. The Commonwealth Government should build on work that is already underway and prioritise systems where significant harm is occurring, such as: family law, child support, immigration, and taxation.
18. The Commonwealth and state and territory governments to work with industries that are well positioned to prevent and reduce DFSV, including homicide, with a focus on alcohol and gambling industries, in addition to media and pornography. This includes reviewing and strengthening alcohol and gambling regulatory environments to prioritise the prevention of gender-based violence. This should include:
 - a. adopting clear primary objectives in state and territory liquor regulatory regimes to prevent gender-based violence, alongside existing objectives around alcohol harm reduction (states and territories);
 - b. restrictions on alcohol sales, delivery timeframes (states and territories) and advertising (Commonwealth and states and territories);
 - c. stronger restrictions leading to a total ban on advertising of gambling (Commonwealth and states and territories);
 - d. examining the density of electronic gaming machines, and use of online gambling, in relation to the prevalence of DFSV across different populations and communities (Commonwealth and states and territories);
 - e. establishing and embedding national standards for media reporting on gender-based violence (Commonwealth); and
 - f. ensuring the age-verification pilot for online pornography tests both the technology, and how age verification assurance systems will be implemented, including the participation of the major technology platforms used by Australian children.

Further, the Review recommends that the Commonwealth Government work with the Foundation for Alcohol Research and Education (FARE) and other organisations on a framework to ensure the development of an integrated and focused effort to address the role of alcohol in DFSV.

18. The Commonwealth Government to continue to support the eSafety Commissioner to undertake increasingly complex work preventing gender-based violence, which includes working with the technology industry on the improvement of policies, practices and accountability.



Prevention through learning and data

19. The Commonwealth Government to expand the functions and powers of the National DFSV Commission and establish it as a statutory authority. Expanded powers should include performing a clearinghouse function, having stronger powers to gather information, and to continue monitoring the implementation and funding associated with the National Plan.
20. The Commonwealth and state and territory governments to further strengthen data collection, in relation to DFSV. This includes:
 - a. working in partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities to embark on a process to determine a community led approach to data collection that accounts for Indigenous data sovereignty principles;
 - b. increasing intersectional and disaggregated data, as well as a particular focus on improving data on regional, rural and remote communities such as the Torres Strait Islands, in addition to improving data on LGBTIQ+ experiences, experiences of people with a disability, and children and young people affected by family law processes;
 - c. establishing a national data set focusing on the extent and nature of perpetration to inform and improve response; and
 - d. prioritising enhancements to the measurements framework for the National Plan to include further quantitative targets
21. The Commonwealth and state and territory governments to develop a consistent approach to death review processes and improve knowledge on the relationship between DFSV and suicide. This should include:
 - a. establishing and uplifting death review panels across all jurisdictions, including with First Nations support units and protocols (state and territory governments);
 - b. strengthening national coordination and consistency of DFSV death review processes, and learning and sharing of findings (state and territory governments supported by Commonwealth); and
 - c. initiating an urgent inquiry into the relationship between DFSV victimisation and suicide, with a view to developing a methodology for accurate counting of the DFSV death toll (Commonwealth, state and territory governments).

Endnotes

- ¹ Department of Social Services (DSS), *National Plan to End Violence against Women and Children 2022-2032*, DSS, Australian Government, 2022; Department of Social Services (DSS), *National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children 2010-2022*, DSS, Australian Government, 2011; Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet (PM&C), *Working for Women: A Strategy for Gender Equality*, PM&C, Australian Government, 2024.
- ² A Albanese, *No more: National rally against gender based violence march* [speech], Canberra, 28 April 2024.
- ³ Australian Institute of Criminology (AIC), *Homicide in Australia* [data set], AIC website, 2024.
- ⁴ Australian Senate, Legal and Constitutional Affairs References Committee, *Missing and murdered First Nations women and children*, (Final report), Australian Senate Legal and Constitutional Affairs References Committee, Commonwealth of Australia, 2024.
- ⁵ Our Watch, *Change the story: A shared framework for the primary prevention of violence against women in Australia*, 2nd edn., Our Watch, 2021.
- ⁶ Department of Social Services (DSS), *First Action Plan 2023-2027*, DSS, Australian Government, 2023. Action 6: Improve action to prevent and address sexual violence and harassment in all settings, across the four domains of the National Plan.