



Australian Services Union

SA + NT Branch

Written submission to the South Australian Royal Commission
into Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence

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Acknowledgement of Country

The South Australian + Northern Territory Branch of the Australian Services Union acknowledges that our offices are on the traditional lands of the Kurna people and the Larrakia people, and we pay our respects to Elders past and present.

We recognise that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander sovereignty was never ceded. We acknowledge that 'Australia' was built on the dispossession and colonisation of First Nations people, and that colonial structures and policies continue to result in systemic injustices for First Nations people.

This is Aboriginal land – always was, always will be. The ASU unwaveringly stands in solidarity with First Nations people, and we extend our solidarity to all colonised people in the continued struggle for self-determination, recognition, and justice.

The Australian Services Union SA + NT Branch

The Australian Services Union ('ASU') is one of Australia's largest unions, representing over 135,000 members nationally. The ASU was created in 1993. It brought together three large unions – the Federated Clerks Union, the Municipal Officers Association, and the Municipal Employees Union, as well as smaller organisations representing social welfare workers, information technology workers and transport employees. The ASU has members in every state and territory of Australia and in almost every regional area, working in a wide variety of industries and occupations, including:

- Social, community and disability services
- Advocacy, not-for-profit and non-government organisations
- Private law firms and community legal centres
- Local Government
- Call centres
- Professional administration
- Credit unions, superannuation and finance
- Transport, including passenger air and rail transport, road, rail, and air freight transport
- Electricity generation, transmission, and distribution
- Assistants to Members of Parliament (State and Federal)

The ASU serves as the dedicated union for workers in the domestic, family and sexual violence ('DFS') sector, along with workers in the homelessness, social and community, and legal sectors. Many of the people who our members work alongside are experiencing, or at the risk of experiencing crisis, disadvantage, social dislocation or marginalisation, including but not limited to domestic, family, and sexual violence.

ASU members are highly skilled practitioners. They hold qualifications in law, psychology, management, social sciences, welfare work, disability work, social work, youth work, child protection, aged care and community work, mental health, drugs and alcohol counselling, financial counselling, and a long list of specialist qualifications.

ASU members are experienced advocates for working women and vulnerable people. ASU members have achieved progressive reform through their skilled and sustained advocacy for justice, safety, and equality – in and outside of workplaces. For example, in 2010 the ASU was the first union in the world to successfully negotiate paid family violence leave in a workplace enterprise agreement. In 2023 we successfully lobbied the South Australian Government to legislate 15 days paid family violence leave for all workers in the State Industrial system, and again in 2023 we led a national campaign that saw the Federal Government embed 10 days paid family violence leave into the National Employment Standards. In late 2023, following the devastating murder of four South Australian women in just one week (including one personally known to an ASU Branch Councillor) the ASU Secretary - alongside peak family violence group Embolden, SACOSS and other DFSV service providers - successfully lobbied the South Australian Government to establish this Royal Commission into Family, Domestic and Sexual Violence.

We believe that ASU members are uniquely placed to contribute to the work of the Royal Commission and welcome the opportunity to make this submission.

Inquiries & Contact

Any inquiries about the ASU's submission should be directed to [REDACTED]

Executive Summary

The ASU recognises that a holistic and intersectional approach is required to effectively address the catastrophic impact of DFSV in South Australia and across the country. We acknowledge that all individuals, tiers of government, and sectors have a role to play in responding to the current and continuing DFSV crisis, however the scope of this submission largely draws upon the expertise and experience of ASU members working in, or closely aligned to, the DFSV sector.

ASU members provided input into this submission through an extensive online survey (*Appendix A – Summary of Survey Responses*), with an advisory group established to provide ultimate oversight and guidance. Members of the advisory group work in the following services:

- Women’s led services
- Regional Family Violence services
- Aboriginal Family support services
- Aboriginal Legal Aid
- Child Protection
- Youth Justice
- Men’s offender rehabilitation services
- Family counselling
- Primary prevention, advocacy and education
- Community Legal sector
- Homelessness
- Community mental health services
- LGBTIQ+ services
- Disability services
- Aged Care
- Employment Services
- Social Work
- Migrant support
- Sexual Assault and trauma support services
- Financial counselling
- Local Government

The recommendations contained in this submission primarily focus on improving responses to DFSV within the scope of industries and services that our members work in.

We emphasise the impact of intersectionality in considering drivers of violence and the risk of experiencing violence, as well as the extent to which this impacts the ability to access services, and the effectiveness of services available.

Introduction

Aligned with the five areas of the *National Plan to end Violence against women and children 2022-2023* (prevention, early intervention, response, recovery and healing, and coordination), our submission addresses items within the Terms of Reference, with particular regard to:

- Developing the DFSV workforce¹, building workforce capacity, and workforce sustainability;
- The views and experiences of workers who provided services related to family, domestic and sexual violence; and
- The extensive work undertaken in other jurisdictions in relation to optimal system design to support family, domestic and sexual violence

Our submission largely draws upon responses received to our branch's survey which actively sought the input of ASU members who work directly or indirectly² in dealing with the impact of domestic, family and sexual violence. This submission has been informed by an advisory group of members and calls for improved Government responses to DSFV, with our recommendations focusing on:

1. Primary Prevention
2. Early Intervention
3. Workforce Capacity
4. Barriers to Justice
5. Services Coordination
6. Implementation & Monitoring of Programs

1. PRIMARY PREVENTION

Affecting Social Drivers of Change & Intersectional Approaches to Primary Prevention

Through the fostering of long-term cultural and behavioural change, primary preventions strategies seek to reduce the incidence of violence before it occurs.

'Primary prevention' broadly refers to the identification of high-level risk factors in relation to domestic, sexual, and family violence incidents, and how these risk factors may be reduced over time through strategic changes to social attitudes, public policy, institutions, systems and practices that elevate gender equality and women's intersectional security.³ Such strategies are broadly recognised as being critical to addressing the root causes and mitigating drivers of DFSV and creating safer communities.

The ASU's recommendations under this section focus on expanding community-driven services, including outreach and education primary prevention programs, to address the unique needs of diverse communities in alignment with the social drivers of change (as outlined by Our Watch's

¹ For the purpose of this submission, 'frontline', 'primary', or 'specialist' DFSV workforce broadly refers to specialist services wherein a workers' substantive role may be primary prevention, early intervention, response, recovery and healing, and advocacy

² 'Indirectly' broadly refers to industry sectors that intersect in providing support or services to victim / survivors and perpetrators of DFSV (such local government, finance, legal services).

³ Salter, M., & Gore, A., 2020, 'The tree of prevention: understanding the relationship between the primary, secondary, and tertiary prevention of violence against women', *Improved Accountability: The Role of Perpetrator Intervention Systems*, p. 70. p. 73.

national 'Change the Story' framework)⁴. It is particularly important to recognise that prevention efforts must be led and co-designed with relevant communities to ensure relevance and effectiveness. This not only empowers those communities, but ensures that programs are culturally informed and meet the specific needs of participants.

Effective primary prevention is comprehensive and inclusive. Communities who experience intersectional barriers to justice are statistically over-represented in incidents of DFSV - including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, people with disabilities, migrants, CALD communities, and LGBTIQ+ individuals. These communities must be provided with culturally safe, accessible, sustainably funded programs and support services that focus on primary prevention initiatives.

We acknowledge Our Watch's national 'Change the Story'⁵ as the leading national policy framework for primary prevention strategy in addressing these social drivers, and further recognise this framework as the most comprehensive framework to address the essential primary prevention actions required to address the occurrence of DFSV.

The ASU urges the South Australian Government to demonstrate its genuine commitment to address DFSV through the development of a targeted primary prevention strategy. For this strategy to be successful, the South Australian Government must commit to providing sustainable, indexed funding for primary prevention services.

Recommendation 1: Develop a South Australian Primary Prevention Strategy, with an emphasis on workforce development and sustainability, as outlined in the Australian Government's Report of the *Rapid Review of Prevention Approaches*⁶. The development of this strategy must be facilitated in consultation with sector specialists and stakeholders including but not limited to FDSV Services peak Embolden, Our Watch and relevant unions⁷.

Recommendation 2: Provide targeted funding for community co-designed outreach and education programs, with specified allocation to Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations.

Recommendation 3: Increase funding to:

- (a) Engage men and boys in comprehensive gender equality and violence prevention efforts. These efforts should include education programs, public awareness campaigns, fatherhood engagement, community mobilisation, and the promotion of alternative, positive models of masculinity.
- (b) Establish primary prevention services in regional and rural areas.
- (c) Provide outreach and education programs that focus on the needs of disabled people, migrants, CALD and LGBTIQ+ communities.
- (d) Enhance the accessibility of outreach and education programs (i.e. translation of written or audio material, content for hard of hearing/sight, deaf or blind people, easy read resources, content culturally informed).
- (e) Financial education and economic empowerment for victim / survivors.

⁴ Our Watch, 2021, 'Change the story: A shared framework for the primary prevention of violence against women in Australia', 2nd ed, Melbourne, Australia.

⁵Our Watch, 2021, 'Change the story: A shared framework for the primary prevention of violence against women in Australia', 2nd ed, Melbourne, Australia.

⁶Campbell et. al., 2024, 'Unlocking the Prevention Potential: Accelerating action to end domestic, family and sexual violence', *Report of the Rapid Review of Prevention Approaches*, Canberra, Australia.

⁷These frameworks are 'Change the Story', 'Changing the Picture', and 'Changing the Landscape'.

Building Institutional Capacity

While calling for a significant investment into the internal primary prevention capabilities within all government agencies, the ASU has prioritised the institutional capacity of early education environments, due to their notable sphere of influence to affect social drivers of change. Notwithstanding this focus - highlighted in our recommendation below - we recognise that all government and non-government institutions, agencies, organisations and people play a role in influencing and embedding the behaviours that drive DFSV. The ASU unequivocally supports a holistic and consistent approach to building internal capabilities of institutions across South Australia.

Recommendation 4: Build internal capabilities within the Department of Education to develop and deliver primary prevention learning and education strategies, including evidence-based Respectful Relationship Education ('RRE'), across all primary and secondary schools in South Australia. Recognising the expertise of ASU members who provide frontline support and advocacy to DFSV victim / survivors – especially those who work in child protection and youth justice – the ASU recommends frontline workers be consulted when developing such a strategy.

2. EARLY INTERVENTION

Effective early intervention in DFSV focuses on identifying risk factors and intervening before harmful behaviours escalate into entrenched patterns of abuse. By addressing the underlying drivers of violence early on, we create opportunities to disrupt cycles of abuse and provide support that can significantly reduce harm for individuals and communities⁸. This approach requires targeted programs that not only support victim / survivors but also address the behaviours of those at risk of offending, fostering healthier relationships and community dynamics.

In high-risk environments - including male-dominated industries, educational institutions, and First Nations communities - early intervention efforts must be responsive to specific cultural and social contexts. This requires comprehensive, culturally informed research and tailored programs that promote positive relationships and address harmful behaviours at their source. Early intervention efforts can be particularly effective when they are community-driven, culturally grounded, and focused on both supporting victim / survivors and reshaping behaviours among those at risk of perpetrating violence.

The following recommendations aim to support early intervention through dedicated research into culturally significant support spaces, targeted programs for men and boys to foster positive masculinity, and the expansion of proven offender intervention programs. These initiatives are key to reducing long-term harm, promoting healthy relationships, and building safer communities across South Australia.

⁸Centre for Innovative Justice, 2015., *'Opportunities for Early Intervention: Bringing perpetrators of family violence into view'*, RMIT University, Melbourne, Australia.

DFSV Early Intervention in First Nations Communities

Evidence-based practice recognises that incidences of violence and consideration of early intervention approaches within Aboriginal communities must be considered in the context of ongoing colonisation and intergenerational trauma⁹. At present, there is insufficient literature regarding the nature and efficacy of First Nations early intervention programs that address men's violence against women.

The current gaps in early intervention service response systems and programs are matched by the over-representation of Aboriginal men in the criminal justice system. The poor efficacy of existing mainstream programs in addressing DFSV within Aboriginal communities is well documented. The ASU acknowledges the extensive work already undertaken in reviewing early intervention approaches within Aboriginal communities, and makes particular note of the recommendations contained within the Wangkiny Yirra 'Speaking Up' report¹⁰.

Drawing upon qualitative research conducted with the Alice Springs Women's Shelter (ASWS), the Domestic Violence Crisis Service (DVCS), and the Ngaanyatjarra Pitjantatjara Yankunytjajara Women's Council (NPYC), research collaborations are demonstrated to yield significant benefits in service design and delivery models for early intervention programs focussed on addressing DFSV within First Nations communities. However, it is essential that any research partnerships are appropriately funded to facilitate time spent in conceptualisation, priority setting, definition, and establishing shared understanding of meaning before specific research commences.

Informed by our consultation with ASU First Nations members who have worked in DFSV programs, the ASU calls on the South Australian Government to invest adequate funding into research design and reporting on the function and importance of gendered spaces within First Nations communities. This will address the current gap in available literature, and will ensure early intervention programs and services for Aboriginal victim/survivors and perpetrators of DFSV are culturally appropriate and therefore, ultimately, more successful.

We would like to acknowledge the extremely generous input of ASU First Nations members who informed this submission, and we further acknowledge that the framework that academic research occurs typically places a heavy cultural burden on First Nations participants involved in program design. We also acknowledge academic institutions as extensions of colonial structures through which Aboriginal men and women, and other culturally and linguistically diverse communities, are often required to participate in order to demonstrate a standard of legitimacy that is fundamentally rooted in Western conceptualisations of 'evidence' and 'fact'.

Recommendation 5: Commission a report into the function and importance of gendered spaces in First Nations communities in delivering services for Aboriginal victim / survivors, as well as perpetrators, of DFSV. This report should then inform the development of future DFSV services for First Nations communities.

⁹Andrews, S. et. al., 2018, 'Holistic programme developments and responses to Aboriginal men who use violence against women' *International Social Work*, vol. 64 no. 1., pp. 59 - 73

¹⁰Jones, J. et. al., 2023, Research Report: *Wangkiny Yirra "Speaking Up" - First Nations women and children with disability and their experiences of family and domestic violence*, Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of People with Disability, Canberra, Australia.

Specialist Early Intervention Programs

Early intervention targeting men and boys at risk of, or already demonstrating, harmful behaviours against women is a crucial component of breaking the cycle of domestic, family, and sexual violence (DFSV). These behaviours often stem from ingrained gender norms and peer dynamics that perpetuate harmful attitudes and conduct, which, if left unchecked, can escalate into more serious forms of abuse. To address this, early intervention programs need to promote positive masculinities and respectful peer relationships by challenging traditional gender stereotypes and providing healthier alternatives.

Programs targeting men and boys should be implemented across high-risk environments where harmful gender norms often take root, including male-dominated industries, workplaces, schools, sports clubs, and online spaces. By focusing on these settings, where peer influence is strong and expectations around masculinity are deeply embedded, these initiatives can have a transformative impact, promoting behaviours that align with respect, equity, and non-violence. These programs should engage participants in active discussions and experiences that deconstruct toxic masculinity and encourage empathy, accountability, and healthy relationship skills.

Recommendation 6: Fund and develop targeted programs for men and boys at risk of and/or demonstrating harmful behaviours against women. Such programs should seek to foster positive masculinities and healthy peer relationships, and should be implemented across key settings such as male-dominated industries, workplaces, educational institutions, sports environments, and online platforms, where harmful gender norms often prevail.

Expanding specialised offender intervention programs is essential to prevent repeat offending and protect communities from further harm. Intensive programs that target individuals who have already demonstrated abusive behaviours, or are at high risk of offending, have proven effective in reshaping attitudes and reducing recidivism. Programs such as the successful model trialled by OARS SA and SAPOL in the Barossa/Light region offer structured, evidence-based interventions designed to challenge abusive behaviours, build accountability, and provide participants with tools to change harmful patterns.

Expanding these specialised intervention programs across South Australia would allow for a broader reach, providing high-quality, effective support to more individuals at risk of offending. These programs should be trauma-informed and tailored to address the unique backgrounds and needs of participants, recognising that intervention must be individualised in order to be effective. By scaling up these programs, South Australia can make significant strides in its early intervention efforts, reducing the likelihood of future abuse, supporting safer communities, and aligning with best practices in offender rehabilitation and accountability.

Recommendation 7: Expand specialised intensive offender intervention programs that have demonstrated success, such as the model trialled by OARS SA and SAPOL in the Barossa / Light region.

3. WORKFORCE CAPACITY

Mechanisms for workforce and sector development are recognised as one of the key elements required to establish a foundation through which coordinated primary prevention can be achieved¹¹.

The sustainability of our community services sector is at urgent cross-roads. Australia's largest research report into the characterisation, classification and value of social and community services workers was released this year, confirming systemic underpayment of workers through undervaluation and misclassification.¹² For many years, social and community service work was viewed as an extension of women's unpaid domestic and volunteer labour. It wasn't until the 1990s that the sector gained coverage under an Industrial Award, restricting the ability of organisations to advocate for fair wages from the government for their contracted services before that time.¹³

The role & responsibility of Government as the funder of services

Today, the overwhelming majority of workers who work within domestic and family violence services are remunerated under the Social, Community, Home Care and Disability Services Award¹⁴ ('SCHCDS'), which contains the same classification structure from 1990s when it was first introduced.

The outdated classification structure of the Award, which underpins most Enterprise Agreements in the community services sector, is no longer fit for purpose and is having a detrimental effect on the sustainability developing the DFSV workforce. With half of the workers within the community services sector being paid below their qualifications, skills, and levels of experience¹⁵, the capacity of the workforce relied upon to facilitate DFSV prevention, intervention, support and recovery services is in crisis.

A strong and skilled workforce is the foundation of delivering effective, high-quality DFSV services.¹⁶ To meet the complex and increasing demands of victim / survivors, we need sustainable, long-term funding that prioritises the security, retention, and development of skilled workers in the sector. Secure employment and stable funding cycles not only allow service providers to focus on client outcomes, but they also improve the overall quality and consistency of support, reduce staff burnout, and foster better relationships between staff and clients.

Recommendation 8: Strengthen workforce capacity by supporting the ASU's claim in the Fair Work Commission to update the classification structure of the SCHCDS Award, to ensure workers receive fair remuneration that reflects the value and technical skill of the work they do.

Recommendation 9: Ensure all future government tenders for social and community services funding guarantee staff are paid at the correct Award levels (benchmarked and agreed to by the ASU and Procurement SA's Non-profit sector advisory group)

¹¹Our Watch 2021, pp. 25-26.

¹²Blaxland, M & Cortis, N., 2024, 'Australia's Social and Community Services Workforce: Characterisation, Classification and Value', University of New South Wales, Social Policy Research Centre, Sydney.

¹³Briggs, C. Meagher, G., Healy, K., 2007, 'Becoming an Industry: The Struggle of Social and Community Workers for Award Coverage, 1976—2001', *Journal of Industrial Relations*, vol. 49, no. 3, pp. 497-521.

¹⁴Blaxard & Cortis 2024, p. 28.

¹⁵Blaxard & Cortis 2024, p. 37.

¹⁶Macdonald, F., & Charlesworth, S., 2011, 'Regulating for gender-equitable decent work in social and community services: Bringing the state back in', *Journal of Industrial Relations*, vol. 63, no. 4, pp. 477-500.

Recommendation 10: Ensure government funding of DFSV is automatically indexed to allow for future wage increases. Indexation should be consistent across all Government agencies.

Recommendation 11: Introduce 6 year funding cycles for frontline FDSV services to provide more certainty for service providers, staff and clients. More stable funding allows services to focus on delivering outcomes, rather than expending time and resources on rolling tenders.

Recommendation 12: Ensure government funding for FDSV services delivers job security for frontline workers. Service providers in receipt of government funding should be obligated to provide workers with permanent jobs (with limited exceptions for long-term leave coverage and genuine short-term projects). This can be achieved by introducing a Community Services Jobs Code, embedded in all community service funding agreements, as has been introduced by both the Victorian and NSW Governments.

Recommendation 13: Ensure funding reflects the true nature of operating and delivering services. Current funding does not meet the rising pressures felt across the sector (cyber-security insurance, compliance costs, infrastructure maintenance / improvements etc).

Recommendation 14: Allocate additional funding for service providers in regional, rural, and/or remote areas to better reflect the true costs of delivery services in these areas (for example, the cost to recruit and relocate new staff, to cost of travel and accommodation when servicing clients).

Training & employment pathways

Creating stronger employment pathways and developing workforce capabilities is needed to ensure underrepresented communities, and those with lived experience of violence, can obtain meaningful, supported, well-structured employment in the sector if they wish to do so. These recommendations focus on the importance of diversity and cultural competency in delivering trauma-informed, culturally response and high-quality DFSV services:

Recommendation 15: Develop a state-wide, high quality and evidence-based training and professional development framework for all agencies that intersect with the State Government's primary prevention, early intervention and response to family, domestic and sexual violence. This framework must be formulated and led by frontline specialist workers and representatives from diverse communities and stakeholders.

Recommendation 16: Improve employment pathways to enter the workforce for diverse and marginalised communities, and people with lived experience who want to gain employment in the sector.

Safely supporting children & teenagers in Government care

The ASU also notes the Royal Commission's focus on children as victims of family and sexual violence. ASU members work in youth justice and child protection, supporting children under the guardianship of the Minister for Child Protection. It is widely acknowledged that children and teenagers in government care have typically experienced family or sexual violence. These traumatised children and teenagers have unique and complex needs, and are at high risk of experiencing further violence and/or perpetrating violence against others.

When considering how we support children who are victims of DFSV it is critical that the unique and complex needs of this cohort of young people aren't overlooked. Key to this is making sure the staff who are caring for these children and teenagers are adequately trained and supported by their employers. ASU members have provided feedback to the recent *Child Protection and Family Support Sector Workforce Strategy* review that they do not feel adequately trained or supported when dealing with dangerous behaviour in these facilities. They feel unsafe working overnight shifts on their own, and are calling for a minimum of two workers on shift at all time. This would assist staff to more easily deescalate potentially dangerous behaviours before having to contact SAPOL or other external supports for example.

Recommendation 17: Recognise the unique vulnerabilities of children living in government funded residential homes and ensure minimum staffing ratios reflect best practice for preventing all kinds of on-going violence in these facilities.

4. STABLE & SECURE WORKPLACES

See recommendations 8 – 16 for ASU's proposals on how the South Australian Government can provide more stable and secure workplaces in the DFSV sector specifically.

More broadly, employers, especially those in receipt of government contracts, have a duty to ensure their workforce is equipped with the knowledge and tools necessary to identify and respond to DFSV effectively. This not only protects employees and clients, but also helps create a broader culture of awareness and support within the workplace.

Recommendation 18: Procurement SA should be used by government as a powerful lever of social change. To be eligible to apply for South Australian Government procurement contracts, Australian businesses and/or not-for-profit organisations should be required to demonstrate that they are playing their role as corporate citizens in addressing DFSV. This could be done through making contracts subject to a minimum target for Board members, Executive and employees to have undertaken *Respond and Refer to Domestic and Family Violence training* for example.

Recommendation 19: Introduce a Family Violence accreditation system for Employee Assistance Programs and general counselling services. The DFSV sector should be involved in the development of this standard, and the development of any prescribed training.

5. ADDRESSING BARRIERS TO JUSTICE

Access to justice remains a significant challenge for victim / survivors of domestic, family, and sexual violence, particularly for those from marginalised or vulnerable communities. Systemic barriers, including restrictive legal frameworks, inadequate interpretation services, and insufficient support for migrants and Aboriginal communities, can compound the difficulties faced by those seeking justice and support. Overcoming these barriers is critical to ensuring that all victim / survivors, regardless of their background or circumstances, can access the support and legal recourse they need.

Services Accessibility

Ensuring that all victim / survivors and perpetrators of domestic, family, and sexual violence can access holistic services is a critical step toward equitable justice. Many individuals, particularly those from marginalised background - including migrants, people with disabilities, and those with language barriers - face heightened obstacles when seeking legal and support services. These accessibility barriers often prevent victim / survivors from effectively participating in legal processes, understanding their rights, or accessing critical support systems, leaving them vulnerable and underserved.

The following recommendations focus on improving the accessibility of DFSV support and legal services by expanding interpretation capabilities and widening service eligibility criteria. By strengthening interpretation services to cover all aspects of the legal process, not just for defendants but also for applicants and witnesses, South Australia can better support individuals with language needs or disabilities. Additionally, broadening eligibility for DFSV support services to include migrants on working visas and other non-partner visas ensures that residency or citizenship status does not hinder access to safety and support. By prioritising accessibility, South Australia can create a more inclusive, responsive justice system that truly meets the needs of all victim / survivors.

Recommendation 20: Improve capability and capacity of available interpretation services for victim / survivors of DFSV (not only for people who don't speak English, but also for people with speaking, visual or hearing impairment, those with low literacy skills, and/or intellectually, physically and psychiatrically disabled people). Currently, the right for an interpreter is restricted to the defendant, and the same interpreter is often used for witnesses and/or the applicant when matters proceed to Court. The same right extended to the defendant with regards to interpretation services should be afforded to applicants and/or witnesses.

Recommendation 21: Broaden the eligibility for DFSV support services to include migrants on working visas and other non-partner visas to ensure access to support services isn't hindered by lack of residency or citizenship status.

Specialised FDSV training for workers regularly exposed to FDSV victims / survivors and perpetrators

Police officers, members of the judiciary, teachers, first responders, emergency department staff, and general practitioners are just some of the professions regularly exposed to people experiencing, fleeing and/or perpetrating FDSV. Their behaviour can have a significant impact, especially for victim / survivors seeking justice. ASU members working in FDSV tell us it is still far too common for people in these roles to display a complete lack of understanding and sensitivity towards victims / survivors. Rather than assist someone to escape violence, there are many reports of people in these positions demonstrating attitudes that actively discourage or block victims / survivors from accessing justice.

It is critical that people in these key professions who are frequently exposed to FDSV victims / survivors to undertake compulsory training in how best to respond to FDSV. This training should be face to face, best practice and trauma-informed - akin to the training currently offered by the Working Women's Centre SA and WSSSA. Training should be on-going so that people working in these critical positions keep up to date with new research and best practice.

Specialised training is required for members of SAPOL and the judiciary in who to identify and respond appropriately to coercive control, and trained to identify key signposts for escalating behaviours such as the use of strangulation. (For example, the ASU is aware of one South Australian case from 2023 where the perpetrator was released from home detention and had his charges dropped because the Judge became frustrated with the public prosecutor's mix up of case files. The perpetrator walked free - dispute a lengthy history of violent offenses well known to SAPOL and a witness who testified that he saw the perpetrator drag his partner by the hair down the road and attempt to strangle her. Shockingly the victim / survivor was not officially notified of the court date, nor of the charges being dropped, instead she was first made aware of her former partner's release via the witness.)

Recommendation 22: Ensure professionals who have cause to frequently interact with people experiencing or perpetrating FDSV through their daily work environment - for example, members of the judiciary, SAPOL members, first responders, frontline SA Health staff, emergency department staff, general practitioners, and teachers - undertake best practice, trauma informed, tailored training on identifying and responding to FDSV. This training should be akin to the training currently offered by Women's Safety Services of SA and the Working Women's Centre SA. Training should be face to face and on-going.

Adequate funding for crisis response services

In November 2023 - when ASU joined the calls for this Royal Commission into family, domestic and sexual violence to be established – the Secretary wrote to the South Australian Government with concerns about the inadequate level of funding for family and domestic violence services compared to other jurisdictions in the country. The ASU was provided these funding figures from impeccable sources on a confidential basis, and while the Government has since responded to the ASU and contested the funding figures, our sources stand by them as an accurate representation and comparison of funding levels across Australia as they stood in November 2023. See Appendix B for a copy of this letter (please note this letter is confidential, and not for publication).

In November 2023, at the time when this Royal Commission was announced, the FDSV sector in South Australia was only funded to provide support to women and children in extreme crisis, experiencing homelessness. The South Australian government was not provided any funding for preventative or early intervention services – meaning we weren't providing services that support victims / survivors to stay safely in their own homes. The choice was homelessness or violence.

At that time, these crisis response services were already overwhelmed by the amount of unmet need and were experiencing the compounding impacts of under-funding over many years. This was something that ASU members working in the sector had raised repeatedly with the South Australian Government. In late 2023, one in five calls to the statewide Domestic Violence Crisis Line went unanswered.

The ASU notes that FDSV peak group Embolden has reported a significant increase in unmet demand for services following the announcement of this Royal Commission and the national focus on this issue. This is echoed by ASU members working in Women's Safety Services SA, the Zahra Foundation and Yarrow Place.

The ASU also notes that the most recent South Australian and Federal Budgets provided no additional funding for frontline support services (recognising the Federal Government has since announced the *National Plan to End Violence against Women and Children 2022–2032*).

The South Australian Government's reluctance to invest additional funding into new services before this Royal Commission's recommendations can be considered is understandable, however existing frontline services, with a demonstrated track record of delivering quality, effective supports for victim / survivors are crying out for more funding. We also note Victoria's experience during, and immediately after, their Royal Commission when media coverage significantly increased the number of victim / survivors seeking help, with the assumption that services are already in place to support them.

Recommendation 22: Increase funding for frontline FDSV services to adequately meet the reported levels of unmet demand. This must be done without delay. We must bring South Australia in line with other jurisdictions in the country such as Victoria, New South Wales and Queensland on spending per head of population. This funding needs to be in addition to the funding required for primary prevention, offender intervention programs, and housing etc.

Adequate funding for CLCs, ACCOs and court translator programs

The following recommendations seek to address barriers to justice by increasing funding for Community Legal Centres ('CLCs'), Aboriginal Controlled Community Organisations ('ACCOS'), and court translator programs. Long-term, sustainable funding is essential to ensuring these organisations can continue their critical work, providing direct legal support, advocating for systemic change, and developing policies that advance justice for victim / survivors.

Additionally, establishing an independent Aboriginal Children's Legal Service is crucial to addressing the unique needs of Aboriginal children impacted by violence and ensuring that they have access to culturally appropriate legal representation and support.

Increased funding and a commitment to secure funding cycles will enable these services to invest in necessary infrastructure, expand their reach, and incorporate essential functions such as advocacy, policy development, and law reform. This approach will ensure that frontline services and legal supports are equipped to address intersectional risks and respond to the complex needs of victim / survivors across South Australia.

Recommendation 24: Increase funding for specific programs or services that address intersectional risks of DFSV. Funding should prioritise women, First Nations, LGBTIQ+ and migrant led services.

Recommendation 25: Increase funding and introduce 6 year funding cycles for Community Legal Centres and Aboriginal Controlled Community Organisations, and ensure funding recognises the cost of capital infrastructure improvements necessary for centre sustainability.

Recommendation 26: Recognise Community Legal Centres and Aboriginal Controlled Community Organisations functions of service include advocacy, policy development and law reform work, and provide adequate funding for this critical work.

Recommendation 27: Establish an independent Aboriginal Children's Legal Service to provide culturally appropriate legal representation and support to Aboriginal children impact by violence.

Recommendation 28: Increase funding to expand court translator programs.

Utilise Local Libraries as alternate avenue to seek assistance

In the past few years, ASU members working in Local Government have reported an increase in victim / survivors seeking shelter in libraries. Libraries are now legitimate third places - this term refers to space that is separate from home and work where people seek conversation, neutral ground, and comfort in feeling connected. Libraries are the ideal place for people wanting to avoid a violent home – they are free, air conditioned, opened extended hours and offer discreet environments where you can stay for hours at a time. Importantly, Libraries also provide access to computers and the internet should victim / survivors be too fearful to search for support services or conduct personal administration at home.

The ASU notes FDSV peak group Embolden’s previous suggestion to the South Australian Government that they provide a grants program to better enable community centres to support connection and wellbeing for women in their local community. The ASU recommends taking this a step further. The South Australian Government should fund social workers to be embedded in local libraries. Some interstate councils and two Metro councils here in South Australia have been trialling the use of social workers in libraries to better support vulnerable residents, including women and children seeking respite from violence at home. These qualified social workers can assist victims / survivors with practical supports, and can refer onto specialist services in the local area. This model would be particularly helpful in regional communities, where there are less avenues to seek assistance, and less services, than in the metro areas.

Recommendation 29: Fund and embed social workers in local libraries, with a particular focus on regional and rural libraries. Social Workers should provide practical support and connection to victim / survivors in a discreet environment, and be able to refer on to specialist services where required.

Banning the Misuse of Non-Disclosure Agreements

Non-disclosure agreements (**‘NDAs’**), limited access to interpreters, and immigration status-related restrictions further hinder victim / survivors' ability to speak out and access justice. These issues disproportionately affect marginalised groups. Addressing these barriers requires targeted reforms, increased funding for services, and a commitment to ensuring culturally appropriate and accessible legal and support frameworks.

By removing these obstacles and increasing the capacity of legal and frontline services through the implementation of these recommendations, the South Australian Government can create a more responsive justice system that meets the diverse needs of all victim / survivors, particularly those facing intersecting forms of disadvantage.

Recommendation 30: Introduce legislation that bans the use of non-disclosure agreements (except where the victim / survivor requires it) in sexual harassment and discrimination cases, to ensure victim / survivors are empowered to speak out. The Victorian Government has already taken steps to ban the use of NDAs.

6. SERVICES COORDINATION

ASU Members highlighted significant barriers for women and children experiencing DFSV who seek safe housing through SA Housing Trust. In homelessness services, organisations have been unable to meet growing levels of demand in the context of Australia's housing affordability crisis, and growing inequality.¹⁷ Of all SA Housing Trust tenants, 35% have experienced, or are at risk of experiencing, family and domestic violence.¹⁸ Feedback from DFSV workers emphasised a lack of coordination between housing and frontline DFV services, creating additional burdens on both victim / survivors and DFSV workers, and ultimately compromising the effectiveness of support.

Key areas of concern identified were:

- *Lack of collaboration with DFSV services:* Housing Trust does not have a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with key services like Women's Safety Services SA (WSSSA) and conducts its own domestic violence risk assessments. When making assessments about transfers for women and children, or making assessments about the need to access motel accommodation for safety, Housing Trust ultimately makes independent decisions and can disregard the expertise of DFSV specialists.
- *Intervention order requirements:* SA Housing Trust requires verification of domestic abuse when providing assistance¹⁹, which frequently includes requirement to obtain intervention orders to secure a transfer or extend motel accommodation.²⁰ Intervention orders are not always safe or feasible for victim / survivors to access, especially for First Nations women and LGBTIQ+ individuals, who may face further harm from interactions with the police (SAPOL).
- *Strain on DFSV workers:* SA Housing Trust imposes mutual obligations on women in emergency accommodation, which are difficult to meet. As a result, DFSV workers spend a disproportionate amount of time fulfilling housing-related tasks rather than engaging in trauma-informed intervention, which is the best practice for supporting victim / survivors.

The South Australian Government should ensure there is coordination between SA Housing Trust and DFSV services to provide appropriate and trauma-informed housing support for women and children experiencing family, domestic and sexual violence. By implementing the below recommendations, the South Australian Government can reduce unnecessary burdens on women and on workers, and foster a more effective and trauma-informed response to family violence.

Recommendation 31: Establish a Memoranda of Understanding (MOUs) between SA Housing Trust and frontline DFSV services such as Women's Safety Services SA (WSSSA) to ensure housing decisions are informed by experts who understand the complexities of family violence and can advocate for the safety of victim / survivors.

¹⁷ Cortis, N. and Blaxland, M., 2023, 'At the precipice: Australia's community sector through the cost-of-living crisis, findings from the Australian Community Sector Survey', ACOSS, Sydney, accessed 02 August 2024, <https://www.acoss.org.au/wpcontent/uploads/2023/04/At-the-Precipice_ACSS-2023.pdf>

¹⁸ SA Housing Trust, accessed 27 August 2024 <<https://www.housing.sa.gov.au/social-housing/tenant-statistics>>

¹⁹ SA Housing Trust, accessed 22 August 202 <<https://www.housing.sa.gov.au/about-us/policies/domestic-abuse-policy>>.

²⁰ We note SA Housing Trust may accept verification after providing assistance in urgent situations, however acknowledge this is a discretionary application and no guidelines or definition on what criteria constitutes an urgent situation is contained in the Domestic Abuse Policy.

Recommendation 32: Conduct a collaborative review of SA Housing Trust risk assessment frameworks, policies, and verification requirements prioritise the safety and wellbeing of victim-survivors.

Recommendation 33: Reduce the burden of mutual obligations imposed on women in emergency accommodation. These requirements often force DFSV workers to focus on housing-related tasks rather than providing essential trauma-informed interventions. Streamlining these obligations and ensuring that DFSV workers can focus on supporting victim / survivors should be a priority.

7. IMPLEMENTATION & MONITORING OF PROGRAMS

The ASU would like to ensure that the current and future governments are held to account and genuinely act on the Royal Commission's final recommendations in a timely manner. We recognise that there is the potential of recommendations that will take years to implement, and we need to ensure there is an appropriate, independent reporting and monitoring mechanism in place.

Recommendation 34: Establish a taskforce, comprised of government, non-government, employer, and worker representatives with expertise and experience in the DFSV sector, to monitor and report on progress made on the recommendations made by this Royal Commission.

Concluding Remarks

ASU members who have formed a FDSV advisory group for this inquiry look forward to having an opportunity to expand on these recommendations when they meet with the Royal Commissioner face to face in November 2024.

Summary of Recommendations

PRIMARY PREVENTION

Recommendation 1:

Develop a South Australian Primary Prevention Strategy, with an emphasis on workforce development and sustainability, as outlined in the Australian Government's Report of the *Rapid Review of Prevention Approaches*. The development of this strategy must be facilitated in consultation with sector specialists and stakeholders including but not limited to FDSV Services peak Embolden, Our Watch and relevant unions

Recommendation 2:

Provide targeted funding for community co-designed outreach and education programs, with specified allocation to Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations.

Recommendation 3:

Increase funding to:

- a) Engage men and boys in comprehensive gender equality and violence prevention efforts. These efforts should include education programs, public awareness campaigns, fatherhood engagement, community mobilisation, and the promotion of alternative, positive models of masculinity.
- b) Establish primary prevention services in regional and rural areas.
- c) Provide outreach and education programs that focus on the needs of disabled people, migrants, CALD and LGBTIQ+ communities.
- d) Enhance the accessibility of outreach and education programs (i.e. translation of written or audio material, content for hard of hearing/sight, deaf or blind people, easy read resources, content culturally informed).
- e) Financial education and economic empowerment for victim / survivors.

Recommendation 4:

Build internal capabilities within the Department of Education to develop and deliver primary prevention learning and education strategies, including evidence-based Respectful Relationship Education ('RRE'), across all primary and secondary schools in South Australia. Recognising the expertise of ASU members who provide frontline support and advocacy to DFSV victim / survivors – especially those who work in child protection and youth justice – the ASU recommends frontline workers be consulted when developing such a strategy.

Recommendation 5:

Commission a report into the function and importance of gendered spaces in First Nations communities in delivering services for Aboriginal victim / survivors, as well as perpetrators, of DFSV. This report should then inform the development of future DFSV services for First Nations communities.

Recommendation 6:

Fund and develop targeted programs for men and boys at risk of and/or demonstrating harmful behaviours against women. Such programs should seek to foster positive masculinities and healthy peer relationships, and should be implemented across key settings such as male-dominated industries, workplaces, educational institutions, sports environments, and online platforms, where harmful gender norms often prevail.

Recommendation 7:

Expand specialised intensive offender intervention programs that have demonstrated success, such as the model trialled by OARS SA and SAPOL in the Barossa / Light region.

WORKFORCE CAPACITY

Recommendation 8:

Strengthen workforce capacity by supporting the ASU's claim in the Fair Work Commission to update the classification structure of the SCHCDS Award, to ensure workers receive fair remuneration that reflects the value and technical skill of the work they do.

Recommendation 9:

Ensure all future government tenders for social and community services funding guarantee staff are paid at the correct Award levels (as agreed to by the ASU and Procurement SA's Not-for-profit Advisory Group).

Recommendation 10:

Ensure government funding of DFSV is automatically indexed to allow for future wage increases. Indexation should be consistent across all Government agencies.

Recommendation 11:

Introduce 6 year funding cycles for frontline FDSV services to provide more certainty for service providers, staff and clients. More stable funding allows services to focus on delivering outcomes, rather than expending time and resources on rolling tenders.

Recommendation 12:

Ensure government funding for FDSV services delivers job security for frontline workers. Service providers in receipt of government funding should be obligated to provide workers with permanent jobs (with limited exceptions for long-term leave coverage and genuine short-term projects). This can be achieved by introducing a Community Services Jobs Code, embedded in all community service funding agreements, as has been introduced by both the Victorian and NSW Governments.

Recommendation 13:

Ensure funding reflects the true nature of operating and delivering services. Current funding does not meet the rising pressures felt across the sector (cyber-security insurance, compliance costs, infrastructure maintenance / improvements etc).

Recommendation 14:

Allocate additional funding for service providers in regional, rural, and/or remote areas to better reflect the true costs of delivery services in these areas (for example, the cost to recruit and relocate new staff, to cost of travel and accommodation when servicing clients).

Recommendation 15:

Develop a state-wide, high quality and evidence-based training and professional development framework for all agencies that intersect with the State Government's primary prevention, early intervention and response to family, domestic and sexual violence. This framework must be formulated and led by frontline specialist workers and representatives from diverse communities and stakeholders.

Recommendation 16:

Improve employment pathways to enter the workforce for diverse and marginalised communities, and people with lived experience who want to gain employment in the sector.

Recommendation 17:

Recognise the unique vulnerabilities of children living in government funded residential homes and ensure minimum staffing ratios reflect best practice for preventing all kinds of on-going violence in these facilities.

Recommendation 18:

Procurement SA should be used by government as a powerful lever of social change. To be eligible to apply for South Australian Government procurement contracts, Australian businesses and/or not-for-profit organisations should be required to demonstrate that they are playing their role as corporate citizens in addressing DFSV. This could be done through making contracts subject to a minimum target for Board members, Executive and employees to have undertaken Respond and Refer to Domestic and Family Violence training for example.

Recommendation 19:

Introduce a Family Violence accreditation system for Employee Assistance Programs and general counselling services. The DFSV sector should be involved in the development of this standard, and the development of any prescribed training.

ADDRESSING BARRIERS TO JUSTICE

Recommendation 20:

Improve capability and capacity of available interpretation services for victim / survivors of DFSV (not only for people who don't speak English, but also for people with speaking, visual or hearing impairment, those with low literacy skills, and/or intellectually, physically and psychiatrically disabled people). Currently, the right for an interpreter is restricted to the defendant, and the same interpreter is often used for witnesses and/or the applicant when matters proceed to Court. The same right extended to the defendant with regards to interpretation services should be afforded to applicants and/or witnesses.

Recommendation 21:

Broaden the eligibility for DFSV support services to include migrants on working visas and other non-partner visas to ensure access to support services isn't hindered by lack of residency or citizenship status.

Recommendation 22:

Ensure professionals who have cause to frequently interact with people experiencing or perpetrating FDSV through their daily work environment - for example, members of the judiciary, SAPOL members, first responders, frontline SA Health staff, emergency department staff, general practitioners, and teachers - undertake best practice, trauma informed, tailored training on identifying and responding to FDSV. This training should be akin to the training currently offered by Women's Safety Services of SA and the Working Women's Centre SA. Training should be face to face and on-going.

Recommendation 23:

Increase funding for frontline FDSV services to adequately meet the reported levels of unmet demand. This must be done without delay. We must bring South Australia in line with other

jurisdictions in the country such as Victoria, New South Wales and Queensland on spending per head of population. This funding needs to be in addition to the funding required for primary prevention, offender intervention programs, and housing etc.

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Introduce legislation that bans the use of non-disclosure agreements (except where the victim / survivor requires it) in sexual harassment and discrimination cases, to ensure victim / survivors are empowered to speak out. The Victorian Government has already taken steps to ban the use of NDAs.

SERVICES COORDINATION

Recommendation 31:

Establish a Memoranda of Understanding (MOUs) between SA Housing Trust and frontline DFSV services such as Women's Safety Services SA (WSSSA) to ensure housing decisions are informed by experts who understand the complexities of family violence and can advocate for the safety of victim / survivors.

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IMPLEMENTATION & MONITORING OF PROGRAMS

Recommendation 34:

Establish a taskforce, comprised of government, non-government, employer, and worker representatives with expertise and experience in the DFSV sector, to monitor and report on progress made on the recommendations made by this Royal Commission.

Appendix A - ASU SA + NT Branch Survey Summary

The majority of responses received were from workers in the disability support sector, followed by domestic violence services and youth work.

Other responses received from specific sectors were:

- Aboriginal family support services
- Advocacy
- Alcohol and other drug services
- Community centres
- Community legal
- Financial Counselling
- Homelessness & Housing services
- LGBTIQ+ Health
- Libraries
- Local Government
- Mental Health Services
- Migrant Resources & Support
- Not-For-Profit

The majority of survey respondents had worked in the sector for greater than 10 years.

Most respondents worked primarily in metropolitan areas (86%) with the remainder working in regional, rural or remote areas.

Almost all respondents have experience working with specific communities, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander, migrant and refugees, LBGTIQ+, disability, youth, elderly, and remote communities.

Respondents also have experience working directly with victim / survivors of family sexual and domestic violence, including children, as well as perpetrators of family, domestic and sexual violence.

Core Issues and Key Themes Identified:

- Inadequate funding for existing services, restricted access to existing services based on capacity and geography
- Lack of appropriate classification and support for workers dealing with DFSV cases
- Insufficient investment in workforce development and training
- Workplace safety & support: highlighted the need for safer workplaces and stronger support systems, particularly for those directly dealing with DFSV cases.
- Inadequate integration and coordination between various support services, leading to gaps in victim/survivor care
- The provision of housing / adequate access to safe, reliable and affordable housing options

- The ways in which technologies can promote violent or misogynistic attitudes towards women (such as targeted algorithmic content on social media applications), and the lack of regulation to address, monitor, mitigate or prevent this

Victim / Survivor Perspectives:

Our survey invited victim / survivors to anonymously share their perspectives and experiences in accessing support services to deal with the impact of DFSV. Key and recurring issues identified were:

Access to Services: Victims / survivors noted the frequency and variability of barriers in accessing essential services due to bureaucratic hurdles, or lack of awareness about service availability.

Consistency in Support: Many emphasised the need for more consistent and reliable support services, highlighting the disparities in service delivery across regions.

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Yours sincerely

[Redacted]

Abbie Spencer
SECRETARY
Australian Services Union – SA + NT Branch

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