

To Whom It May Concern,

Although I have missed the official deadline for submissions, I hope that my input will still be considered. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]. I also questioned whether my submission would be read or do anything – or simply archived because of my honesty. However, I am determined to contribute, hoping that my submission will support survivors and victims of harm.

[REDACTED]

My experience as both a victim and a professional that bears knowledge in this field, reveals significant shortcomings in how the system addresses these issues. It feels as though the efforts made are merely symbolic rather than genuinely addressing the needs of survivors. The outreach seems focused on those already engaged in government or related sectors, rather than the survivors who have the most relevant lived experience.

Given my background, I hope that my submission will contribute to meaningful change in this flawed system. I consider myself fortunate to be in a relatively stable situation despite my past trauma. Many others continue to struggle, and when they seek help, they often encounter systemic issues that exacerbate their difficulties. It is deeply disappointing to see that those meant to support survivors sometimes contribute to the very problems they are supposed to address.

In my submission, I have answered the questions posed and drawn from my personal experiences to highlight critical issues. I also intend to include a complaint about the conduct of a South Australian Police Officer. I am open to having my submission published and shared with the Office for Public Integrity, and I welcome any follow-up contact.

Thank you for considering my perspective.

Kind Regards,

[REDACTED]

1. What causes domestic, family, and sexual violence?

There is no right answer to this one. It's a combination and complex issue surrounded by a numerous range of factors. Personally, I find it all mainly stems from generational or learnt behaviour.

Other factors (but not limited to include):

- Substance abuse
- Economic stress
- Societal, cultural norms
- Pre-existing trauma (that the perpetrator has adopted from youth) and unaware that it is stemming into their adulthood. This can then spill into:
- Power and control – the need to control or dominate their partner (coercive control).
- Exposure to violence exacerbating into mental health issues (being born into a violent household/environment growing up and having inadvertently adopted this behaviour)
- Other mental health issues that can be associated with violent behaviour.
- Lack of support systems – access to resources, services, counselling, legal assistance... this all makes it difficult and compounds on the difficulty for victims to leave violent situations and seek help or refuge.
- Legal and institutional failures – Addressing these issues require a multi-faceted approach, and a lot of the time it requires in long wait times, inefficient enforcement of laws, and failures within the institutional responses which allow violence to persist and discourages victims from seeking help.

2. What works, or will work, to prevent domestic, family and sexual violence?

From my experience, I can tell you what didn't work as a victim of all the above.

Take my current situation: I chose to move out of my home because, despite knowing that my brother has stolen from them and sexually abused me as a child, my parents continue to let him live there. He has labelled himself as their main carer, but he doesn't care for them at all. He can't drive, and despite both my parents having experienced strokes, they don't attend the appointments they need. He doesn't cook or clean; instead, he expects them to do all the cooking, cleaning, shopping, and driving, even though they're legally not supposed to.

I found the courage within myself to call 131 444 on [REDACTED] and was advised by the operator and a [REDACTED] station) had followed up with me multiple times, listened to my situation and highly encouraged me to come in and make a statement and the steps involved if I were to take my brother to court. She was highly encouraging considering what I had experienced and believed that despite being historical, it mattered.

I made reports to ARAS – Aged Rights Advocacy Service – on 23/05/2024 and followed up with the Adult Safeguarding Unit [REDACTED] as I had previously contacted them in January 2024. I then called SAPOL on 23/05/2024 to make a report, and was [REDACTED] [REDACTED] I have received no follow up from any of these organisations to this date. I was encouraged to come into a station to make a full report and statement. I finally made it to [REDACTED] where a very kind police officer took my full report and statement on 04/07/2024, and he sent a welfare check on my parents

[REDACTED]). Despite the officer being fully supportive and hopeful, I received a follow-up call the next morning regarding the welfare check, informing me that the level of 'squalor' was not 'that' bad. Then, on 05/07/2024, a detective followed up in a manner that was extremely dismissive and unprofessional.

These were his exact words to me: "Realistically, if you wanted to progress it to court, I don't see a likely chance of it progressing, and given your hopes that you've expressed, it really would be a waste of time to get you to come in and do the video questioning."

When he asked why I made multiple reports in one night, I explained the timeline of my extremely convoluted situation up to that point. He laughed, scoffed, and said, "Well, that's not very good advice." He then continued, "It doesn't look good for you to have come in and made several reports all in one night. You're grasping at straws here."

My main questions are: Where are the failures here? If multiple officers are handling current cases like this, how can the system, which is supposed to support victims, provide any real solutions? Is this the proper way to speak to victims? Should someone trained to support victims really address and diminish their experiences like this? And then we wonder why people hesitate to come forward when this is the treatment they receive!

In a separate instance, even looking at the way I was treated when I tried to report a previous employer for sexual harassment. All these perpetrators out there are protected by all these systems that just allow them to walk away scot-free and make the victims out there feel minimised or forced to relive trauma just to get a mere 'sorry'.

In my attempts to make complaints to the Office for Public Integrity South Australia, there was no ability to complete an online form for months and an inability to call anyone – the phone number was always unavailable or would ring out.

3. What existing initiatives are directed at addressing the attitudes and systems that drive domestic, family and sexual violence? Are they effective?

- The National Plan to End Violence against Women and Children
- White Ribbon Australia
- ZAHRA Foundation
- Our Watch
- 1800 RESPECT
- Office for DFSV.

I believe these initiatives are essential in addressing domestic, family, and sexual violence, though their effectiveness varies. Success hinges on consistent implementation, adequate funding, community engagement, and the commitment of everyone involved. Education plays a crucial role, yet I feel schools did not sufficiently address these issues. My time in school left me largely unaware of the very challenges I was facing at home. I grew up seeing my dad hit my mum on a few occasions, my dad beating me as form of punishment as a child, my brother sexually abusing me – Yet, when I choose to voice my concerns now, I encounter roadblocks at every turn—whether related to time, the system, or the lack of support. If I hadn't been mentally resilient or fortunate enough to have a

partner who has been incredibly patient and supportive, I genuinely believe I would be homeless or worse.

4. What systems, including systems outside of government, receive information which may allow for the identification of individuals who are at high risk of experiencing or perpetrating domestic, family and sexual violence?

- Healthcare
- Education – Schools, Universities, Childcare
- SA Police
- Courts and Legal services
- Social services
- Community and NGOs
- Workplaces
- Financial institutions
- Telecommunications and technology providers

These systems all play a vital role in identifying individuals at high risk of experiencing or perpetrating domestic, family, and sexual violence. Effective coordination and information sharing between these systems are crucial to providing timely intervention and support.

5. What is needed to allow for this information to be used by government and specialist domestic, family and sexual violence services?

- Funding and resources
- Feedback mechanisms
- Training
- Hiring individuals who are genuinely committed and passionate about their work
- Continuous monitoring and evaluation

6. What interventions should be considered to manage the risk of a person who is identified as being at high risk of experiencing or perpetrating domestic, family and sexual violence?

Effective management of individuals at high risk of experiencing or perpetrating domestic, family, and sexual violence requires a multifaceted approach. By combining safety planning, legal measures, counselling, risk assessment, and community support, a comprehensive strategy can be developed to address the immediate and long-term needs of those at risk.

I think all professionals including healthcare providers, law enforcement, and social workers, to recognise signs of domestic violence, respond appropriately, and coordinate with other services.

Hosting panel discussions and internal government events alone will not resolve the issue. Allocating funds to these events may merely perpetuate discussions about the same challenges on designated days of significance. Awareness is great, but it's not tangible actions. Instead, these resources should be directed towards upskilling and providing genuine support to those who are in need.... VICTIMS.

7. What are the barriers to reporting domestic, family and sexual violence to police or seeking support from domestic, family and sexual violence services?

- Fear of retaliation, threats or action from perpetrator
- Cultural issues, stigma and shame generated from family and history. Victims always experience shame or embarrassment about the abuse, and blame themselves.
- Previous negative experiences from authorities
- Lack of specialised support
- Lack of trust in authorities, fear of disbelief or dismissal
- Financial and economic barriers such as victims depending on their perpetrator and feel trapped in being unable to seek help or fear the costs associated with legal services.
- Language barriers
- Concerns about custody if there are children involved
- Scenarios where victims are isolated, controlled or manipulated into situations where they are unable to seek help
- Privacy and confidentiality concerns – victims may be concerned about their personal information being exposed or mishandled by authorities or service providers and their perpetrator finding out
- Psychological and emotional barriers such as trauma, fear, uncertainty and ambivalence.

8. What are the elements of a best practice crisis response which will meet the needs of: a. a victim-survivor? b. a victim-survivor who is a child? c. a perpetrator (acknowledging that one need is to hold a perpetrator to account for their use of violence)?

9. What are the elements of a best practice health response?

10. What are the elements of a best practice police response?

Aside from the personal experience I previously described, I encountered another situation that highlighted an inadequate police response.

One night, I was out in the city with my best friend, who was in a relationship, experiencing coercive control. While we were at a club, an argument erupted because her boyfriend refused to return her bag, which contained her phone, keys, and money. I explained the situation to the security guard, who responded by taking her belongings, dragging my friend out of the club, violently too, because they smashed her shins on the stairs. Despite my explanation, the security guard allowed her boyfriend to leave and even handed her belongings back to him instead of me – then asked me if I wanted to stay or follow ‘these idiots’. I followed my friend outside, where the argument continued. Her boyfriend then threw her bag at her head when she started walking away with such force that she fell face-first onto the ground.

I immediately tried to call the police, but they refused to dispatch any assistance until I completed a report over the phone, which included providing my name, number, and home address—despite my urgent pleas for help. As I was trying to convey the severity of the situation, her boyfriend began

threatening me when I mentioned that I was calling my boyfriend to pick us up (when, in reality, I was calling the police). The officer on the line would have heard these threats in the background, yet insisted on gathering my personal information before taking any action. My friend, who was intoxicated, refused to leave, and continued to argue with him.

Fortunately, my partner arrived in time to intervene and take us to safety. But my question remains: What if her boyfriend had become violent with either of us? Knowing his history—slicing her heel with broken glass, punching holes in her walls, threatening to kill her dogs, stalking her at work, the list goes on—if he had escalated to physical violence, the outcome could have been devastating. This experience reinforces my belief that our system is failing those it's meant to protect.

11. What are the elements of a best practice justice system response?

12. Taking into account your response(s) to questions 8 to 11, which elements are already in place in the domestic, family and sexual violence systems in South Australia?

I will leave the unanswered above questions 8 - 12 to field experts to advise on, as there is no linear solution. There are many steps and areas of the system that present as barriers which conflict with each other, making it challenging to develop a one-size-fits-all approach. Therefore, it is crucial for experts to provide insights that consider the complexities and nuances involved in addressing these issues.

13. Acknowledging that every victim-survivor will have different needs depending on their personal circumstances, are there universal needs that will arise for all victim-survivors?

- Safety and protection – Immediate and ongoing safety from a victim's perpetrator is paramount. This includes safe housing, restraining orders and access to emergency services.
- Timely access to legal support and assistance and reporting mechanisms
- Counselling and mental health services to begin healing – Reflecting on the financial and emotional investment required for my own healing journey, it's appalling to recall the invasive questions I've faced at certain GP visits just to obtain a mental health care plan, because my regular GP was unavailable. Moreover, the costs associated with seeing a psychologist or psychiatrist are exorbitant, making it seem as though mental health services are only accessible to the wealthy, even with the Medicare rebate. While I acknowledge that we're better off than many other countries, such as the U.S., the focus here is on Australia. It's deeply concerning that those who need mental health support the most—often individuals from low socio-economic backgrounds—are the ones who face the greatest barriers to access.

14. What are the best practice approaches to supporting a victim-survivor to recover from trauma and the mental, physical, emotional and economic impacts of violence?

15. Taking into account your response to question 14, what best practice approaches are already in place in the domestic, family and sexual violence systems in South Australia?

I will defer questions 14 and 15 to the field experts, as I believe I have already addressed most of the key aspects in my previous responses. Their specialised insights will further enrich the discussion on these complex topics.