

DSS Engage – National Summit on Women's Safety

27 August – 17 September 2021

Purpose and background

The National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children 2010-2022 (National Plan) is Australia's overarching strategy to address domestic, family and sexual violence.

The next National Plan is being developed by the Australian Government (led by the Department of Social Services in partnership with the Office for Women, Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet) in consultation with state and territory governments.

The next National Plan will provide a national blueprint for action and promote commitment from all levels of government, community partners, civil society and the private sector to end all forms of violence against women and children.

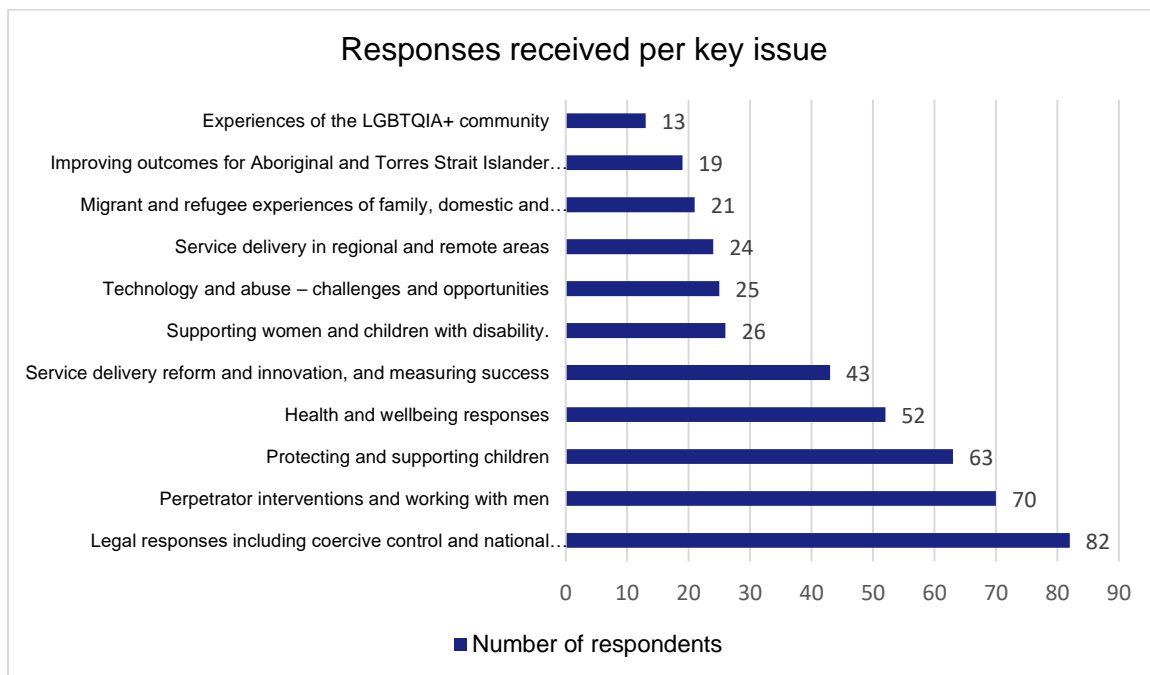
At the Council of Australian Governments meeting on 13 March 2020, leaders agreed that the Women's Safety Ministers would start work on the development of the next National Plan. The next National Plan will be informed by an extensive consultation process, including the National Summit on Women's Safety (Summit) held virtually 6 - 7 September 2021, with closed roundtable sessions held the week prior on 2 – 3 September 2021. The Summit brought together the insights of advocates, service providers and other stakeholders and experts, including the voices of women with lived experience of violence.

Open for public submission from 27 August to 17 September 2021, the DSS Engage Survey, National Summit on Women's Safety, was an opportunity for all Australians to contribute to the key issues discussed at the National Summit. These key issues were:

- experiences of the LGBTQIA+ community
- improving outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples
- migrant and refugee women's experiences of family, domestic and sexual violence
- service delivery in regional and remote areas
- technology and abuse – challenges and opportunities
- supporting women and children with disability
- service delivery reform and innovation, and measuring success
- health and wellbeing responses
- protecting and supporting children
- perpetrator interventions and working with men

- legal responses including coercive control and national consistency.

Contributors had the option to respond to one issue, multiple issues or all of them.



Key findings and recommendations

A total of 207 submissions were received and these have been reviewed and analysed by DSS. Of the 207 submissions, 158 submissions were received from individuals and the remaining 49 received from organisations.

From the analysis, seven key issues have been identified. These are listed below in no specific order:

1. **Children** being treated as victim-survivors in their own right and being provided with appropriate supports. Many respondents were concerned about children's welfare in the context of the family court – particularly in relation to the presumption of 50/50 shared custody even in cases where family violence is documented and in relation to children's preferences being appropriately gathered and respected.
2. **Legal responses** - Respondents suggested legal pathways were too expensive, too traumatic, took too long and did not taking children's perspectives into account. Respondents felt that police, lawyers and judges lack knowledge, understanding and compassion, and that victim-survivors do not feel outcomes are just and appropriate as a result. There was broad support for criminalising coercive control among individual respondents.

3. **Health and wellbeing** – particularly the life-long mental health impacts of lived experience of violence, with many individual respondents speaking about struggling with post-traumatic stress syndrome, depression and anxiety and struggling to cope with life.
4. **Perpetrator interventions** were generally seen to be ineffective. Concerns included lack of involvement with victim-survivors and other family members during and after programs, courses and other interventions being too short, interventions being ineffective and based on faulty premises and penalties not being tough enough.
5. **Housing** – a lack of safe, affordable, appropriate accommodation was frequently raised as an issue and a barrier to victim-survivors being able to safely escape violence.
6. **Workplaces** are seen as generally not responding effectively to issues such as sexual harassment and not effectively supporting victim-survivors to remain in the workplace while experiencing or recovering from family and/or sexual violence.
7. **Privacy** concerns were raised by a number of respondents who want offline options for engaging with government and business to safeguard their privacy and avoid online forms of engagement which may be hacked by perpetrators.

These seven key issues are reflective of the priorities for the next National Plan, as stated in the Delegates' Statement¹ - specifically those noted below:

- Continue to build on our strong base in **primary prevention** to stop violence before it starts and achieve long-term attitudinal, cultural, systemic and behavioural change
- Be backed by **long-term bipartisan investment by all governments across prevention, intervention, response and recovery.**
- Prioritise **working with men and boys** to disrupt and prevent the attitudes and behaviours that can lead to violence, and seek to engage men in leadership positions across the community to articulate the need for change in their context
- Recognise the importance of **justice and healing from trauma** and the need for government support to allow healing from undisclosed and unresolved trauma caused by violence against women and children
- **Continuously improve the justice system** to ensure people impacted by sexual, domestic and family violence are able to achieve justice and people using violence and abuse are held to account, and explore alternative transformative strategies to prevent and address violence
- Ensure **children and young people are acknowledged as victims and survivors** of violence in their own right, with serious life-long negative consequences and economic costs

¹ [Statement from Delegates' – 2021 National Summit on Women's Safety](#)

- **Affordable, accessible long-term housing** and inclusive, culturally-appropriate crisis accommodation is fundamental to the safety and recovery of victim-survivors and must be a priority.

In addition to the seven key issues raised, a number of submissions also supported:

- a national strategic approach be developed, with a focus on prevention and early intervention
- clear and measurable targets and deliverables in the next National Plan
- dedicated family and domestic violence training for all social support services, frontline workers, and those in the education system - to build capability within those services to identify and respond appropriately to instances of family and domestic violence.

DSS sincerely thanks all contributors who provided a submission for inclusion in this important discussion.

The department acknowledges that this information may be triggering for some, and strongly encourage individuals effected by the content in this report to contact one of the services listed below for support:

- In an emergency call Triple Zero (000)
- 1800RESPECT (1800 737 732) for family, domestic and sexual violence matters
- Lifeline 13 11 14 for crisis support and suicide prevention
- Beyond Blue 1300 224 636 for support with anxiety, depression and suicide prevention
- MensLine 1300 78 99 78 for support for men with family and relationship concerns
- Suicide Call Back Service 1300 659 467.