



Response to the Fourth National Action Plan to Reduce Violence Against Women and their Children

About us

inTouch Multicultural Centre Against Family Violence (inTouch) is a not for profit organisation that provides integrated, culturally appropriate services to migrant and refugee communities experiencing family violence across Victoria. Over the past 35 years, we have addressed the specific needs of these communities and have helped over 18,000 women experiencing family violence. In the 2018-19 financial year, inTouch provided services to over 1400 women from 101 different countries, and their 1,300 children.

We have become a critical piece in Victoria's family violence response system. In 2016, the Royal Commission into Family Violence in Victoria recommended that the government fund inTouch to better support the needs of people from refugee and migrant backgrounds experiencing family violence. As a leading expert with these communities, the reach and impact of inTouch's work has significantly increased.

inTouch works across the family violence continuum, from prevention and early intervention, to crisis intervention, post crisis support and recovery. Our services and programs include:

- An integrated, culturally responsive model based on inLanguage, inCulture case management. Our 18 case managers are highly diverse, offering direct client services in over 20 languages. They have a unique understanding of a client's lived migration experience, cultural influences, and the barriers faced when trying to seek help.
- An in-house accredited community legal centre, the only one of its kind in a specialist family violence service, which provides legal advice, court advocacy and immigration support to inTouch clients.
- Capacity building of specialist and non-specialist family violence providers, and community organisations to better deliver support to refugee and migrant women experiencing family violence. This includes a public training calendar and providing secondary consultations.
- An early intervention program, Motivation for Change, working directly with men from culturally and linguistically diverse communities who use violence towards their families.

Introduction

inTouch welcomes the Commonwealth Government's Fourth National Action Plan to Reduce Violence Against Women and their Children (the 4NAP).

We commend their continued commitment to prevent violence against women and children and in particular, their acknowledgement of the additional barriers that certain groups in our community face, including women from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, women with disabilities, and women from migrant and refugee communities.



As a service that works specifically with women from migrant and refugee communities who have experienced family violence, we believe it is crucial that any implementation of the 4NAP takes steps to further identify the diverse and complex needs of migrant and refugee women. Whilst the 4NAP raises a number of important issues pertaining to this cohort of women, we would like to highlight additional issues for consideration, and make the following recommendations.

1. Intersectionality needs to be embedded in government policy to acknowledge and address the systemic barriers that migrant and refugee women and children face

The 4NAP identifies that changes need to be made to policies and practice to understand and accommodate the specific needs of migrant and refugee women and children who have experienced family violence.

The plan does not however, address the systemic barriers that many migrant and refugee women who are experiencing family violence face. This can be done by adopting an intersectional framework, which will assist legislators, policy makers and service providers understand the complex needs and intersecting barriers that women from migrant and refugee communities experience and how to overcome these. This is critical to ensuring services are equipped to identify and deal with varying client needs, and will help to address the systemic barriers that many women face.

For example, visa status determines eligibility and access to services including housing support, the public health system and welfare. Migration laws and systems can be difficult to navigate with even some of the eligibility requirements to access the family violence provisions, such as proof of a genuine relationship, being difficult to fulfil for women who have experienced family violence. Similarly, the family law and courts processes can be daunting and difficult to navigate for most community members, let alone individuals with less knowledge and exposure to Australia's legal systems.

Government policy needs to recognise and address these systemic barriers in order to better design and implement effective national strategies to prevent violence against women and children. The adoption of an intersectional framework would provide insight into such systemic and structural barriers and would assist with greater use of services among migrant and refugee women. Furthermore, the adoption of an intersectional lens across government family violence policy would be in line with new models of policy and human rights law internationally.

2. Better language services need to be offered for migrant and refugee women and children who are experiencing family violence

In order for government policies to be effective in addressing and preventing family violence in migrant and refugee communities, strategies are required to increase language services in the family violence sector. This is a fundamental barrier for migrant and refugee women and children who are experiencing family violence and are seeking assistance. It can cause women with lower English literacy to be isolated from the system and unable to access services that they need. This



can in turn exacerbate the tumultuous and traumatic nature of family violence and its wide reaching impacts.

Increasing access to interpreters, building the capacity of interpreters who work in family violence services, and building the resources and capacity of the services sector to become more culturally sensitive and responsive, are some strategies that would address the language barriers that migrant and refugee women face.

inTouch's inLanguage, inCulture case management model is effective in overcoming these barriers to identifying family violence and providing support services to women from migrant and refugee backgrounds, and their children. In 2018-19, we provided services to clients who spoke 93 different languages either directly through our case managers or the use of interpreters when required.

3. Victim-survivors from migrant and refugee communities need to be actively engaged by the Government to address the issues that are most pertinent to their communities

In order for the service system to be better equipped in addressing the complex cultural practices and specific needs of this cohort of women, it is recommended that women from migrant and refugee communities inform and lead strategies which are affecting their communities. Government policies and strategies should actively involve women from communities to help identify relevant issues and ways to deal with them.

Women and children from migrant and refugee backgrounds often experience multiple levels of disadvantage simultaneously. Along with expectations from within their own families, communities, and cultural groups, they may face racism and discrimination from the broader community. Understanding the issues many victim-survivors face must be led by victim-survivors themselves and women from the various communities.

4. Organisations that currently work with migrant and refugee women must play a central role in building the capacity of the service system

There are a number of organisations across Australia that provide family violence services to women from migrant and refugee communities. These organisations have existing models of care and service provision, from prevention through to post-crisis recovery, and work closely with women, children and their communities. Such services, along with national advocacy groups and networks, must play a central role in building the capacity of the service system.

Conclusion

inTouch welcomes the government's commitment to preventing violence against women and children. As an organisation that works specifically with migrant and refugee families who have experienced family violence, we believe it is crucial that intersectionality be embedded in government policy and practice, that language services are more highly resourced, and that victim-survivors from migrant and refugee communities, as well as specialist agencies and



organisations that work with this cohort of the community, are actively engaged in the design and implementation of policies and practices.

Contact us

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