

National Plan to Reduce Violence Against Women and their Children **Noor Family Violence Survivor-Advocates Group Submission**

What do you think are the major issues for people experiencing family, domestic, and sexual violence when they try to find support?

- Many victim-survivors, particularly from migrant/refugee backgrounds, don't recognise their experience as family violence - there must be clearer understanding of all types of violence, including more nuanced portrayals in the media and awareness-raising campaigns.
- Cultural barriers, including stigma/shame, worry about what community will think or say, or being perceived as a failure in your marriage can inhibit disclosure.
- Weaponisation of migration and visa rights, with many victim-survivors unaware of their rights or support available, which can be compounded by ineligibility for government support for those on specific visas, leaving them with no means of financial support if they leave.
- Lack of understanding of, or perceived safe access to, services/support, e.g. what/where services exist, feeling welcome as a migrant/refugee, fear of identification within community and lack of understanding of how the system works. This can be exacerbated by:
 - Fear of persecution in the system (sometimes used as a control by perpetrators);
 - Fear of collusion/misidentification due to perpetrators' ability to manipulate the system and situations;
 - Lack of trust in courts/police;
 - Having to self-advocate in an unfamiliar system.
- Many are isolated, so even when they get support, it may not be practical – may not have a 'safe place', a neighbour or friend/family, or access to their documents.
- Mental health issues can make it difficult for victim-survivors to seek help, to self-advocate and the impacts of the violence can severely impact their self-esteem and confidence, which can make engaging with the support or broader community very difficult.

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What do you think are the major issues regarding services for people experiencing family, domestic, and sexual violence?

- Not always culturally safe, sometimes correlating culture with abuse or making assumptions based on victim-survivors' background. Some services do not have the skills/training to support victim-survivors from migrant/refugee backgrounds, and need additional training to address unconscious bias, how to support those who may not have permanent residency/citizenship, and to avoid using migration status to victim-blame or assume victim-survivor should be grateful for opportunities in Australia.
- Specialist FV organisations are not always the first point of contact – first disclosure is often doctor, faith-based supports etc, who may not know what to do, leaving the victim-survivor with the burden of accessing support. Need increased support for non-specialist 'gateway' supports, with improved system coordination to manage the interface between specialist and general services.
- Not always person-centred or trauma-informed, which means women disengage or not engage in the first place. Should respect victim-survivor's trust, their privacy and their individual situation and avoid treating them like a 'case', but with respect and as a human.
- Support is too often short-term. Victim-survivors need support beyond and into recovery/post-recovery, especially for migrant and refugee communities – to survive is a continuous process. Provide holistic support such as practical information on how to find work, understand Australian culture and systems and understand the journey that victim-survivors have to take. Recognise the need for mental health, spiritual, legal, physical, psychological and economic support, and provide warm referrals that don't require significant self-advocacy on the part of traumatised victim-survivors.
- Services should take non-physical violence as seriously as physical violence, and provide appropriate, immediate support.

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Are there any other priorities that would make a big difference to preventing family, domestic and sexual violence beyond those listed in the question above?

Education and awareness-raising is vital, and must be tailored and targeted to specific communities. Key communities include new parents, migrant/refugee communities, prospective/new migrants, children and men.

Education and awareness-raising should focus on understanding family, domestic and sexual violence, as well as addressing key drivers such as gender inequality and norms. It should also ensure that information is provided on the many different types of violence, what to do and where to seek support. It should be provided in places where people gather, including community centres, schools, workplaces, pre-natal classes, as part of pre-marital counselling and at men's sheds, sporting events and even in bathrooms.

All education activities must be evidence-based and linked directly to action using social behaviour change or other models. Where evidence and evaluation show impact, programs should be extended and embedded in the prevention space, with adequate funding available to ensure meaningful outcomes.

Ensuring that those in positions where disclosures may take place are well-trained in how to react in a person-centred, trauma-informed and culturally sensitive manner will ensure improved early intervention and support. This includes training for frontline services, universal systems, addressing bias and assumptions. Information on family, domestic and sexual violence should be provided to new or prospective migrants, particularly those on partner/family visas, and should include information on support available, rights and accountability. This should be provided in a safe and meaningful way as part of the visa application and approval process.

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What improvements or useful responses have you seen in the prevention of family, domestic and sexual violence?

Ensuring that organisations provide culturally appropriate support – interpreters, translations, information in a way that is understood by victim-survivors. This is improving, but must be funded and provided as standard. This should be offered to victim-survivors without making assumptions (e.g. ‘assuming’ that their English is strong enough), and staff should be trained in how to use such tools effectively. Trauma-informed practice – victim-survivors can find it difficult to take in lots of information when they are trying to survive and manage their situation, so ensuring that staff follow up and support referrals.

Are there other things we can do to support people who are experiencing family, sexual and domestic violence?

Support a meaningfully integrated system, which limits the requirements on victim-survivors to navigate or self-advocate and provides holistic, person-centred support. This could include an integrated database of a victim-survivor's journey to avoid retraumatisation due to retelling experiences, and to collate the information and supports they have received and are eligible for (for example, similar to a health record).

Ensure police and other responses take all forms of family violence seriously, including breaches of IVOs, and don't minimise victim-survivor's experiences of issues such as coercive control, but respond to all forms of violence as serious breaches of victim-survivor's rights and act accordingly to ensure perpetrators are held accountable.

Fund long-term, recovery-focused, strength-based support so that victim-survivors can safely move on with their lives. While crisis support is vital, long-term recovery takes time and investment. This includes access to mental health support, employment and skills building, housing, child support and legal support.

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If you could recommend up to three things for a national strategy on preventing family, domestic and sexual violence, what would they be?

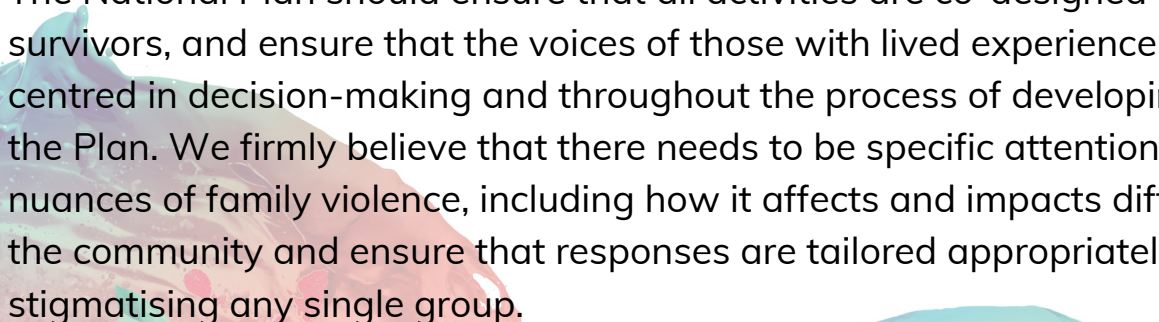
1. *Accountability and information:* Perpetrators must be held accountable for their actions, with meaningful repercussions for perpetrators to prevent future instances of violence (e.g. IVO breaches on police records) and ensure victim-survivors feel safe and seen. This could include ensuring that information is provided to new/prospective migrants about family violence, legal rights and supports, as well as penalties.

2. *Systematic approach:* An integrated and person-centred system that you can access early, providing clear messaging and representing all types of violence. Consider a way of information sharing so that point-in-time support can be provided, and victim-survivors and those at risk can access support (something like sharing health record system)

3. *Addressing the shame and fear associated with speaking out:* Improved understanding and awareness of the many types of family violence, and directly addressing the shame and stigma that victim-survivors have. Ensuring that it is safe to speak out, that victim-blaming is avoided and that those with lived experience have a voice and platform to speak out

Is there anything else you would like the next National Plan to include or address?

The National Plan should ensure that all activities are co-designed with victim-survivors, and ensure that the voices of those with lived experience are clearly centred in decision-making and throughout the process of developing and delivering the Plan. We firmly believe that there needs to be specific attention paid to the nuances of family violence, including how it affects and impacts different parts of the community and ensure that responses are tailored appropriately without stigmatising any single group.



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This includes a strong intersectional lens and understanding of the many ways in which family, domestic and sexual violence can be perpetrated, and address the systems and structures that make it difficult for some communities to access meaningful, long-term and genuine support. We strongly advocate for the removal of barriers to support for those from migrant and refugee backgrounds, including limitations on support based on visa status, and improving awareness and education on all types of family violence, including emerging areas such as modern slavery (forced marriage, domestic servitude etc).

We especially encourage evidence-based and measurable impacts on both rates and incidence of family, domestic and sexual violence, including information on recidivism by perpetrators with clear structures for ensuring accountability.

**For more about Noor Family Violence Survivor-Advocates visit
www.intouch.org.au, or email admin@intouch.org.au**

