



Response to the Draft Second National Action Plan

February 2022

About inTouch

inTouch Multicultural Centre Against Family Violence (inTouch) provides person-centred, integrated and culturally responsive family violence services to people from migrant and refugee communities across Victoria. We have assisted over 20,000 women and children experiencing family violence throughout our 37 years of operation, providing a holistic service that centres the experiences of victim-survivors in everything we do.

inTouch works across the family violence continuum, providing culturally-informed early intervention, case management, perpetrator programs, legal advice, crisis recovery and enhanced capacity-building across the sector and community. We are proud to provide high-level leadership and guidance to all levels of government with our evidence-based, victim-survivor informed advocacy and policy work.

Our services include:

- An accredited community legal centre working at the intersection of Family Law and Migration Law
- Learning and development programs for family violence providers and multicultural organisations to build their knowledge and skills when supporting women from refugee and migrant communities
- Case management that encompasses a first-hand understanding of the migration journey and unique cultural barriers women may face when seeking assistance
- Post-recovery initiatives for victim-survivors, focusing on economic independence, social and family connection and emotional wellbeing
- Prevention projects and resource development for migrant and refugee communities
- Programs focusing on trauma and culturally-informed perpetrator intervention.

inTouch is a critical piece in Victoria's family violence response system and an organisation that is growing in size, scope and capacity. We are a unique and vital service, with specialist expertise working with people of migrant and refugee backgrounds. This is reflected in our workforce, which is comprised primarily of people who are migrants and refugees themselves – the inTouch team is from over 20 different countries and communities globally.

General remarks

Migrant and refugee communities must have greater focus in the Second National Plan

According to ABS statistics, just under 30 percent of Australia's population in 2019-2020 was born overseas. In April 2021, there were 1.7 million people in Australia on temporary visas.¹ This diversity, of country of birth, preferred language and cultural identity must be recognised and planned for within the

¹ Scanlon Foundation Research Institute, Australian Migration and Population Dashboard (<https://scanloninstitute.org.au/migrationdashboard>)

Second National Plan. This Plan must be better tailored to the needs of migrant and refugee communities, as well as those on temporary visas.

The best way to accomplish this is to design prevention, early intervention, response and recovery activities in collaboration with the specific communities that they are intended for. Culturally safe and responsive initiatives, for victim-survivors and perpetrators of family violence will ensure that policies implemented by the National Plan are effective achieve their objectives.

The Second National Plan must develop a vision of where this country needs to be in 10 years. Within the Plan, it should recognise that although experiences of family violence in communities can manifest in different ways, the structural and systemic barriers that communities face when seeking assistance for family violence must be addressed and removed.

An effective way to ensure migrant and refugee communities have a stronger focus in the National Plan is through the elevation of those with lived experience. The lived experience and views of victim-survivors from migrant and refugee backgrounds should be embedded through the action plans, the funded services and policy responses.

The voices and opinions of migrant and refugee women in Australia must be included in the consultative process to ensure that their unique experiences, structural barriers and how they navigate the system are included within policy and program design. While family violence affects one in five women in Australia, the way that it can manifest when the layers of culture, language and settlement are taken into account can be different. Being a migrant, refugee or temporary visa holder will impact the way in which they experience family violence, how they receive support, and how they move on from that experience.

It is crucial that the vision, policy and programmatic responses to family violence are led and guided by a diverse, broad range of those with lived experience.

Working with men and boys must be nuanced and tailored to the needs of the community

We welcome the recognition and focus the government has placed on working with men and boys. Men and boys are critical players in the prevention and response to family violence and must be included in future plans and policies.

It is crucial however that all activities designed for men and boys are tailored to the specific needs of the community that they are from. Ensuring cultural safety and responsiveness will also ensure that programs are effective and successful.

We must also consider and include family violence outside the gender binary

Family violence must be viewed and responded to through a gendered lens. As research indicates and as is widely accepted, the root causes of family violence and violence against women are entrenched in gender inequality.

Despite this however, the Second National Plan must also better acknowledge the nuances of family violence outside the gender binary and amongst LGBTIQ+ communities. Through the plan, the government should commit to research, community-led initiatives, and the implementation of programs to better protect people experiencing family violence in LGBTIQ+ communities. These activities must be community-led.

Family violence outside intimate partner violence

The immense focus on family violence perpetrated through the lens of the gender binary undermines the response need for family violence that is perpetrated in situations that are outside intimate partner violence. Family violence occurs in a range of settings including by carers, children or extended family members. Whilst it is important for the gendered nature of family violence to continue to be centred in the Plan, the Government must also strongly commit to policies and activities that are aimed at preventing and responding to family violence in a variety of settings.

A clearer articulation of the roles of states/territories and the federal government

The Plan does not articulate the distinct roles of states/territories and the federal government, nor does it discuss the partnership needed between jurisdictions. It is crucial that the final version of the National Plan clearly articulate the roles and responsibilities of federal government agencies and those of the states/territories. This is particularly important to ensure transparency of policies, programs, and funding streams, but also because there is no consistent way in which family violence is dealt with across the various jurisdictions in Australia.

Intersectionality

We welcome the government's focus on intersectionality and the recognition that there are people in our community who experience multiple oppressions simultaneously which impacts their ability to access support services. To understand intersectionality and to provide equity within this framework, we ask that policies are designed to address the structural and systemic barriers and not merely equate intersectionality with diversity. Rather, the Second National Plan must articulate the policies it will implement to overcome structural barriers that impact victim-survivors of family violence. For example, a well-known barrier to accessing safety for safety and support for victim-survivors from migrant and refugee backgrounds is visa status. Visa status determines eligibility to social security and therefore housing, public health, and schooling.

The National Pillars

Prevention

We welcome the focus on prevention. Prevention is crucial to change behaviour and culture on a societal level. Prevention activities must be tailored to the needs of the population. Prevention activities for migrant and refugee communities must be bespoke and designed and implemented by the communities that they are created for.

Prevention activities for men and boys in migrant and refugee communities must be designed and implemented with ongoing collaboration and leadership from community members who understand cultural attitudes, nuances, and expectations.

Prevention also needs to address systemic drivers of family violence – including gender and economic inequality. The Plan needs to specifically discuss ways in which the Federal Government will support activities to respond to these systemic drivers.

Early intervention

Early intervention activities must also be culturally aware and safe. There is a significant role that community and faith groups can play in the design and implementation of early intervention activities that can suit communities.

Furthermore, strengthening and formalising referral pathways between settlement services, ethno-specific groups and specialist family violence services will ensure timely support for migrant and refugee communities. Settlement services and ethno-specific organisations play critical roles in how migrants and refugees experience and settle into Australia and navigate services. They are a critical part of the service system and can support women learn what family violence is and how to seek help.

Response

Funding specialist family violence services

The Second National Plan must show a strong commitment to increasing funding of specialist family violence services. A consistent and effective national strategy requires collaboration between existing specialist services, as well as increased resources to ensure that specialist services continue to provide critical services to both victim-survivors and perpetrators of family violence.

A new visa stream for those who are on a temporary visa, are in a legitimate relationship and have experienced family violence in Australia.

Women on temporary visas who experience family violence in Australia have limited access to support services and therefore safety.

inTouch believes that the establishment of a three-year visa that includes working rights, access to Medicare, social services, a permanent visa pathway and school education for children would enable women to receive the support they need to make safe and secure long-term arrangements for themselves and their children

Culturally responsive service delivery

The Second National Plan must show a commitment to culturally responsive service delivery. Effectively responding to family violence requires an understanding of nuance and the specific needs of the person, their family and their community. Workers that can understand the impacts of migration and nuances of culture, gender norms, dowry, or the relationships between extended family members, can empower clients to be better understood and supported.

Culturally responsive practice is also incredibly effective when working with perpetrators and/or offenders.

Embedding culturally responsive practice into the specialist family violence sector, and resourcing and expanding existing culturally responsive services such as inTouch, will undoubtedly help to support more victim-survivors of family violence and engage more men who use violence from migrant and refugee communities.

Increased resources for interpreters

Alongside the expansion and resourcing of culturally responsive services, the government must fund and expand resourcing for interpreters. It is crucial that the family violence and justice systems are demystified for migrant and refugee communities by ensuring that accurate and effective information is available in

their language, and that there are trained, skilled and appropriate interpreters available for them at every point in which they engage with the system.

Ineffective, unskilled, and inappropriate interpreters can cause significant harm to victim-survivors. The client may be reluctant to discuss aspects of the violence or their situation with an interpreter due to privacy concerns, particularly if she has been allocated a male interpreter. For newer and emerging communities, the pool of interpreters can be very small and confidentiality issues can arise.

More legal support for victim-survivors from migrant and refugee backgrounds

The justice system can be incredibly daunting for victim-survivors of family violence, particularly those who have only recently arrived in Australia, who may not have social networks and supports, and who may be unsure of the systems and laws in Australia.

More resourcing and funding should be allocated to Legal Aid and community legal centres, to build the expertise around family law and migration law. The intersection of these legal issues can be extremely complicated to navigate for many victim-survivors of family violence. It can also be difficult to obtain free legal assistance from the community legal and Legal Aid sectors due to inadequate resourcing, resulting in an inability to provide holistic assistance on multiple complex legal issues for a client.

Recovery

We welcome the Draft National Plan's commitment to prioritising activities that will support the recovery and economic independence of victim-survivors. For many migrant and refugee women who are trying to move on from their experiences of family violence, the post-crisis period is becoming one of the most difficult to navigate. They are no longer engaged with services and have no support to navigate employment, social connection, and parenting. This is a significant gap in the services sector.

inTouch's inSpire program seeks to fill this gap. The aim of inSpire is to support ex-clients of inTouch to rebuild their lives by connecting with others and establishing social and economic independence. The inSpire program links participants with employment agencies to increase their skills and job-readiness, provides opportunities for training and professional development, as well as opportunities to connect with other women who have been through a similar experience.

inTouch sees profound potential in the expansion of such recovery programs, to help women to rebuild connections with community as well as social and professional networks- boosting confidence, resilience and independence.

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inTouch also endorses the submission made by the Harmony Alliance.