

Submission: Inquiry into family, domestic and sexual violence

July 2020



YWCA

Australia

Women leading change

“In today’s world, women are not safe. Whether it be in their homes or out in the streets... As a woman, if I were homeless safety would be my number one priority, especially during the night... Some homeless women also have young children with them, this only increases the risk.”

YWCA Young Women’s Council Member

“As gender experts, we know that what we need is long-term investment into whole-of-setting primary prevention initiatives that are evidence-informed and developed with an analysis of gender and power”

YWCA Australia Regional Manager and Community Programs Manager

“What a minefield domestic violence can be for women to navigate alone. From a child protection perspective, they are often portrayed as ‘failing to protect’ their children, and from a Police and justice system perspective, there is often not enough ‘evidence’ of domestic violence for the necessary protections to be made. I see it as a privilege to help women navigate these waters; to be entrusted with their story, and to advocate for their rights and needs in what is often a very broken system. I am often astounded and humbled by the amazing resilience and strength that women demonstrate. For me as a domestic violence caseworker I strive to see the women as the experts in their own lives, and to follow their lead when safety planning and coordinating resources.”

YWCA Australia Domestic and Family Violence Caseworker

“The cognitive and behavioural change witnessed in young people who have been affected by Domestic and Family violence can often manifest as disengagement from education leading to things like self-medication. An increase in services supporting youth is required to prevent this cycle from continuing”

YWCA Australia Youth Coordinator

“We need a social contract that aligns to an intersectional feminist revolution, a world where women feel safe, supported and equal. This starts with a commitment to primary prevention, challenging the structures and norms that drive gender based violence”

YWCA Australia Regional Manager

‘Safe housing is a right of EVERY woman. If you look at Maslow's hierarchy of need you will see that psychological and safety needs are the foundations of what a human needs to progress through life. How can we expect women to have good physical and emotional health, function at work, study/go to school, create trusting relationships, build their self-esteem; if they don't have somewhere safe to sleep. Working in the DFV sector for around 5 years I have had to say to women many times, ‘I’m sorry we don’t have any accommodation’. As a worker this is hard, but as a woman this is harder, as they are just like me’

YWCA Australia Domestic and Family Violence Centre Acting Supervisor



YWCA Australia submission

Introduction to YWCA Australia

YWCA Australia (YWCA) is a proud evolving intersectional feminist, secular organisation committed to building a future, where all women and girls in all their diversity are equal, safe and respected. YWCA is a national organisation with over 350 staff across 11 locations throughout the country. YWCA delivers programs and services and undertakes advocacy that develop the leadership and collective power of women and girls; supports individuals, their families and communities at critical times; and promotes gender equality to strengthen our communities across Australia's diverse social and geographic landscape. YWCA has been providing invaluable community services since the 1880s.

YWCA is a women-led organisation that achieves positive change by providing programs, services and advocacy for women in all their diversity, families and communities. As an organisation, YWCA:

- Provides services for the safety and empowerment of women, young women and girls, including domestic and family violence programs
- Promotes and advocates for gender equality including promoting awareness of the causes and effects of sexual, domestic and family violence and amplifying young women's experiences and voices
- Works to advance the leadership of women, young women and girls
- Regularly collates and analyses quality improvement data, including demographics, outcomes and service capacity
- Provides community housing and support services for the relief of homelessness
- Operates for-purposes businesses such as hotels that generate funds for reinvestment into our core mission
- Assists communities to build resilience through local engagement, education and understanding local social constructs

YWCA's mission is for all women, young women and girls to be safe and respected, with equal access to power, opportunity and resources. The organisation's overall goal is to positively impact the lives of more than 2 million women, young women and girls throughout Australia by the end of 2023. Our values of feminism, inclusion, innovation, integrity and excellence are embedded in our operations to assist in achieving our objective and to fulfil our purpose to be a strong, unified, national feminist organisation of women, young women and girls, working to achieve gender equality.

YWCA has a wide reach in different geographic locations across the country including Darwin (NT), Toowoomba (QLD), Sydney Metro (NSW), Goonellabah (Northern NSW), Nowra (Southern NSW), Campbelltown (Western NSW), Adelaide (SA), Melbourne (VIC), Perth (WA), Broken Hill (NSW). YWCA have considerable experience in FDSV programming including; Keeping Women Safe in Their Homes, Rise Above The Pack Bystander Intervention, respectful relationships education, Healthy Relationships, Domestic Violence Intervention Service, Family Abuse Prevention Service, Safer Pathways, Safety for Housing, women's specialist housing and homelessness support and Women's Domestic Violence Court Advocacy Services.



Acknowledgement of Country

We wish to acknowledge the Traditional Owners of the lands on which we work, and pay our respects to Elders past, present and emerging. We recognise First Nations peoples as the custodians of the lands and waters of Australia, and the more than 60,000 years of knowledge, strengths and expertise they bring to caring for country. European settlers came to these lands and took them without authority, right or permission. We recognise that YWCA has benefited from colonisation and we have a responsibility to acknowledge the harm done and to work towards respect and recognition. This land is Aboriginal land – always was and always will be.

Executive Summary

YWCA welcomes the opportunity provided by the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Social and Policy and Legal Affairs to share our expertise and provide recommendations for the Inquiry into Family, Domestic and Sexual Violence (FDSV) and informing the next National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children. We commend the government on their commitment to driving positive change on a national epidemic of violence across all communities.

YWCA shares the following human rights based definition of violence against women from the United Nations Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women (1993), and also adopted by the National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children 2010–2022.

“any act of gender based violence that causes or could cause physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of harm or coercion, in public or in private life”.

This definition includes all forms of violence that women experience, comprising but not limited to physical, sexual, emotional, cultural/spiritual violence and financial abuse. These experiences are all gender-based and acknowledge that the violence is either directed towards women as a direct result of their gender, or that women are disproportionately affected by violence.

Violence can be described in many ways, and definitions vary according to the legislation in each Australian state and territory. ¹Australian statistics reveal that across the life course, one in three women will experience some form of family violence compared to one in 19 men². Stable rates of partner violence contrast with falling rates of overall violence. The number of people accessing services such as police, hospital, child protection and homelessness services due to FDSV continues to rise, ³ and one woman is killed every nine days.

Whilst the scope of the inquiry addresses all forms of FDSV, YWCA acknowledge they are part of a spectrum of gender-based violence. For the purposes of this submission, FSDV is considered as

¹ COAG 2011

² Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) (2016). Personal safety, Australia, 2016. ABS cat. no. 4906.0. Canberra: ABS. <https://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/mf/4906.0>.

³ Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2019. Family, domestic and sexual violence in Australia: continuing the national story 2019. Cat. no. FDV 3. Canberra: AIHW



gender-based violence and violence against women. Regardless of the type of violence, perpetrator/s are seeking power, dominance and control. YWCA believe everyone should be able to live free from violence and that anyone who experiences FDSV should be supported in their recovery journey.

We acknowledge the significant work and resources that have been coordinated across the previous National Plans. At the same time, across Australia we still see and support growing numbers of women and their children, young women and older women experiencing FDSV. There is a growing evidence base that women, young women and girls who face multiple forms of discrimination are also exposed to an increased risk of violence.

This submission is informed by YWCA's expertise in gender equality and FDSV, consultations with YWCA staff, and trauma informed practice that recognises that family and domestic violence is an ongoing pattern of coercive control maintained through physical, psychological, sexual and/or economic abuse.

Due to the wide-ranging reference areas for the inquiry, we have integrated the views and experiences of our frontline services with evidence-informed analysis supported by the membership of peak bodies like Australian Women Against Violence Alliance (AWAVA) and Domestic Violence NSW (DVNSW). YWCA endorse the AWAVA, DVNSW and Our Watch submissions in full.

In recent years, we have contributed to a range of initiatives in various states and territories aligning with the National Plan including

- New South Wales Domestic and Family Violence Blueprint for Reform 2016–2021
- Ending Family Violence: Victoria's Plan for Change
- South Australia's Women's Safety Strategy 2011–2022
- The Northern Territory's Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence Reduction Framework 2018–2028.

As an evolving intersectional feminist organisation working within communities as a women's specialist service, we seek intersectional and gender-responsive approaches to solutions that are framed within a model of gender equality. The social determinants that underpin FDSV require gender equality and intersectionality at the centre of our drive for change. This should also be considered as a mainstreamed context across Government, Non-Government and Community responses.

YWCA supports primary prevention as a whole-of-population approach aiming to stop violence against women, children and young people occurring in the first place. We endorse Our Watch's inquiry submission as industry experts focussed on prevention and as authors of *Change the story: a shared framework for the primary prevention of violence against women*.⁴ YWCA endorse the Fourth Action Plan of the National Plan statement, 'prevention is the most effective way to eliminate violence against women'.

Investment and focus on primary prevention approaches, however, should not be at the expense of comprehensive support for victim survivors nationally. The next National Plan needs to continue to address FDSV prevention, early intervention and specialist services and supports.

⁴ <https://www.ourwatch.org.au/change-the-story/>



We have no other option than to reflect upon the compounding factors facing communities across Australia including bushfires, drought, and the unprecedented response and recovery to a global health pandemic. FDSV services across Australia, including our own, have seen overwhelming demand pre-COVID-19. In the middle of COVID-19, we face a reality confirmed by recent research by the Australian Institute of Criminology published last week, which shows an "alarming" increase in family violence, including in homes where it had never occurred before, with almost one in 10 women in a relationship saying they experienced domestic violence during the coronavirus crisis.⁵ Recently released data shows Google searches related to family violence have increased by 75%⁶. This is some of the most detailed information available in the world currently. We have a responsibility to respond to this data and urgently address an escalating impact, faced overwhelmingly by women.

We believe ongoing and genuine reform is possible with long-term strategic approaches, increased secure funding, a commitment to research and continuous evaluation, and consistent, integrated FDSV responses.

Focus areas

- **Long term funding commitments for a holistic national approach to FDSV**
 - Federal and State Governments to provide adequate, long term funding for FDSV primary prevention, early intervention, responding to victim survivors and professionalisation, prioritising specialist women's services practitioners and organisations, First Nations specialist services, migrant and refugee specialist services, disability specialist services, children and youth services, LGBTIQ+ specialist services and men's behaviour change specialist services that are culturally appropriate and adaptable to all levels of education
- **National coordinated responses**
- **A National Gender Equality strategy and plan⁷**
- **Establishment of a National Plan on Violence against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Women**
- **Policy and law reform to end structural inequalities and address perpetrator accountability**
- **Social and affordable housing a priority for Federal, State and Local governments**
- **Investment in research and evaluation**
- **Expansion of professionals and services who support children and young people impacted by FDSV**

YWCA welcomes any further opportunity to provide input to the Committee regarding any issues detailed within our submission. All recommendations are for inclusion in the new National Plan and the consideration of all levels of Australian governments.

⁵ <https://www.smh.com.au/politics/federal/domestic-violence-on-the-rise-during-pandemic-20200712-p55b8q.html>

⁶ <https://7news.com.au/lifestyle/health-wellbeing/coronavirus-lockdown-results-in-75-per-cent-increase-in-domestic-violence-google-searches-c-901273>

⁷ Equality Rights Alliance, *National Gender Equality Plan*, <http://www.equalityrightsalliance.org.au/projects/ngep/>



Recommendations

Reference A

Immediate and long-term measures to prevent violence against women and their children, and improve gender equality

Recommendation A1: Federal and State Governments to provide adequate, long term funding for primary prevention work, prioritising specialist women’s services primary prevention practitioners and organisations and First Nations specialist services

Recommendation A2: Investment in whole of setting and whole of community primary prevention initiatives (for example, whole of school sport campaigns and training programs, whole of school respectful relationships, gender equality and well being initiatives or military and gender equality initiatives)

Recommendation A3: A National Gender Equality strategy and plan⁸

Recommendation A4: Government to encourage and enable workplaces to undertake gender audits that include analysis of workplace policies, practices and culture. This should be followed by concerted efforts to increase diversity and equity and to build women’s leadership and workplace responses to violence (e.g. through the Our Watch Workplace Equality Respect standards)

Recommendation A5: Increase support for community-based groups (for example local sporting clubs, RSL clubs, and faith-based community groups) to utilise best practice resources and collaborate with prevention practitioners to implement initiatives that mobilise their community to prevent violence

Recommendation A6: Increase public health messaging and promotion of comprehensive sexuality education including safer sex, contraceptive options and access to health care, and ensure that these are responsive to the context of the COVID-19 pandemic and evolving of contraception, other products and health services

Recommendation A7: Increase investment in collaboration on primary prevention between and within sectors, including business, not-for-profit, community, and government

Recommendation A8: Increase support for Our Watch and investment from government, business and community sectors into implementing their best practice frameworks and tools, including the new Primary Prevention Hub, *Change the Story, Changing the Picture* (for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and children), as well as the Workplace Equality Respect standards

⁸ Equality Rights Alliance, *National Gender Equality Plan*, <http://www.equalityrightsalliance.org.au/projects/ngpep/>

Recommendation A9: Reorganise social care and establish an Inter-Ministerial Taskforce to adequately value care

Recommendation A10: Implement measures to address women’s economic inequality, given growing evidence on the gendered drivers of violence including:

- **Gender Pay Gap**
- **Unpaid Care and women’s overrepresentation in underpaid roles**
- **Addressing gender inequity in superannuation**

Domestic, family and sexual violence is often referred to as gender-based violence. This acknowledges that men, with an unequal distribution and use of power, overwhelmingly perpetrate the violence affecting young women and girls, and that gender inequality underpins this violence. Gendered violence in Australia is preventable.

Primary prevention aims to change the structures, norms and practices that drive gender-based violence. Primary prevention more than any other level of intervention, has the potential to have the largest impact on reducing the prevalence of gender-based violence (Australian Government, 2019). Secondary (early intervention) and tertiary prevention — while essential — are unlikely to significantly reduce the rates of gender-based violence on their own.

YWCA supports the important work of Our Watch, the national foundation to prevent violence against women and their children. In particular, we value the Change the Story and Changing the Picture frameworks for understanding the ‘gendered drivers’ of violence against women, whilst addressing the legacies and ongoing impacts of colonisation for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, families and communities, and non-indigenous people.⁹ To end gender-based violence, these drivers must be addressed, including challenging the condoning of violence, redefining narrow gender roles and stereotypes, increasing women’s independence, and promoting respectful relationships.

Primary prevention is now a national priority and it must remain so until we change the trajectory of gender-based violence in Australia. In developing a new National Action Plan to Reduce Violence Against Women and their Children, the following elements to primary prevention work must be included as part of a best-practice, evidence based approach to preventing violence:

- All primary prevention work contains a gender analysis of power and gender inequality
- There is a strong intersectional lens, and initiatives must include principles of diversity, including consideration of sexual orientation, gender identity, migrant and refugee communities, people living with disabilities and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people
- Primary prevention initiatives align with Changing the Picture: A national resource to support the prevention of violence against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and their children by Our Watch:
 - o Self-determination: community ownership, control and leadership
 - o Cultural safety
 - o Trauma-informed practice and practitioner self-care
 - o Healing focused
 - o Holistic
 - o Prioritising and strengthening culture

⁹ Our Watch, Change The Story, 2015 – accessed July 2020 <https://www.ourwatch.org.au/getmedia/0aa0109b-6b03-43f2-85fe-a9f5ec92ae4e/Change-the-story-framework-prevent-violence-women-children-AA-new.pdf.aspx>



- Using strengths-based and community strengthening approaches
- Adapting to different community, demographic and geographic contexts
- Addressing intersectional discrimination
- Non-Indigenous organisations working as allies in culturally safe ways
- There is a strong focus on changing structures and norms, as well as shifting attitudes and behaviours¹⁰

In the era of the ‘MeToo’ and ‘Times Up’ movements, and with the national implementation of federally funded gender equality mechanisms such as the Workplace Gender Equality Agency (WGEA) and the next National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children, it is clear that the drive to address gender inequality is increasing, and that it is everybody’s business.

Overwhelmingly the evidence proves that gender inequality does not just negatively impact women, young women and girls, but also men, young men, boys and gender diverse people. It is impossible to achieve gender equality without ending homophobia, biphobia and transphobia. Challenging conventional gender binary and associated discrimination is an essential part of the movement towards gender equality.

Despite this, a concerning proportion of people in Australia believe that gender inequality is exaggerated or no longer a problem¹¹. Significant structural and cultural shifts, propelled by leaders within and outside of government, are required to see a measurable improvement in the impact of gender inequalities.

We refer to support for the ‘National Gender Equality Plan’¹² currently being developed by the Equality Rights Alliance (ERA) which outlines a universal and inclusive approach to consistent and sustainable policy development to promote gender equality. Australia needs a national gender equality strategy and plan to prevent gender-based violence.

YWCA’s Primary Prevention Expertise

“Respectful Relationships Education is important for young people because it fosters knowledge, skills and critical thinking capabilities which can become foundational guides for how they navigate their existing and future relationships.”

YWCA Respectful Relationships Program facilitator

YWCA delivers a suite of best practice, evidence based primary prevention initiatives across a number of settings, including respectful relationships education in schools like Everygirl, Links to Learning and Girl Almighty programs, bystander intervention workshops and campaigns. YWCA also delivers programs that develop the leadership of women, young women and girls, and advocates for gender equality more broadly. As a national organisation, YWCA has the capacity to scale up and deliver across a range of settings.

¹⁰ Our Watch, *Changing the picture: A national resource to support the prevention of violence against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and their children*, 2018, Our Watch, Melbourne

¹¹ 2017 National Community Attitudes towards Violence against Women Survey (NCAS)

¹² Equality Rights Alliance, *National Gender Equality Plan*, last viewed 27 July 2020 <http://www.equalityrightsalliance.org.au/projects/ngep/>



Primary prevention is particularly effective when aimed at children and young people, and when carried out at a whole of setting level.¹³ However, it is critical that responsibility for the prevention of gender-based violence must become a priority for all individuals, organisations and all levels of government. These prevention activities must occur in all settings and be carried out by individuals and communities.

In educational settings, respectful relationships education is critical for ensuring that young people experience healthy, safe, respectful and mutually positive relationships.¹⁴ In workplace settings, efforts must include embedding gender equitable policies and practices and culture, and building capacity to respond to and prevent violence and disrespect towards women. In community settings, awareness raising campaigns and community-led initiatives can drive cultural change and foster safe and respectful spaces for women, young women and girls, as well as other marginalised communities.

The new National Action Plan must include long term and sustainable funding for primary prevention practitioners and gender specialists to carry out whole-of-setting initiatives that includes long term evaluation.

Reference C

The level and impact of coordination, accountability for, and access to services and policy responses across the Commonwealth, state and territory governments, local governments, non-government and community organisations, and business

Recommendation C1: YWCA endorses, as a member, recommendations regarding coordinated responses made by AWAVA¹⁵:

- Commit to a national monitoring and evaluation framework aligned with the National Action Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children, including:
- Funding an independent body to monitor progress against this framework
- Support states and territories via the Women’s Safety Council to ensure ongoing and sustainable funding of specialist women’s services
- Support states and territories via the Women’s Safety Council to develop workforce capability across all sectors—public and private—who are likely to interface with FDSV.

Recommendation C2: Invest in the development of nationally consistent, intersectional and gender-responsive integrated FDSV support, based on a wrap-around model keeping victim survivors at the centre

Recommendation C3: National consistent approach to child protection and it’s intersections with FDSV

¹³ Our Watch, ANROWS & VicHealth 2015, *Change the story*

¹⁴ Our Watch 2015. *Respectful Relationships Education in Schools: Evidence Paper*, <https://www.ourwatch.org.au/getmedia/4a61e08b-c958-40bc-8e02-30fde5f66a25/Evidence-paper-respectful-relationships-education-AA-updated.pdf.aspx>

¹⁵ <https://awava.org.au/2018/11/09/submissions/submission-on-the-national-womens-health-strategy-2020-2030>



Recommendation C4: Involving women’s specialist service practitioners in the development of the coordination of FDSV responses and including First Nations women, migrant and refugee women, women with disabilities, older women, young women and gender diverse people in service and system design

Recommendation C5: YWCA also endorses the recommendations made by Women’s Legal Services Australia (WLSA)¹⁶ and DVNSW for the ALRC Inquiry¹⁷ and highlights the recommendation for modernisation of the family law system

- The family law system needs to be modernised and accessibility improved for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people; culturally and linguistically diverse communities; people with disability; lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex and queer LGBTIQ+ people; people living in regional, rural and remote areas. The people for whom accessibility needs to be improved should have the opportunity to participate in these discussions and in decisions that affect them.

Recommendation C6: YWCA also supports WLSA’s recommendation for 5 steps towards Safety First In Family Law:

- Strengthen family violence response in the family law system,
- Provide effective legal help for the most disadvantaged,
- Ensure family law professionals have real understanding of family violence,
- Increase access to safe dispute resolution models,
- Overcome the gaps between the family law, family violence and child protection systems.¹⁸

There are key information issues and gaps regarding particular aspects of family, domestic and sexual violence, including inconsistent identification and lack of comparability between data sets; limited information about vulnerable populations; and a lack of data about pathways, impacts and outcomes for victims, perpetrators and their children.¹⁹

Family Law

Due to the high levels of domestic and family violence (DFV) in Australia, it is unsurprising that we also see DFV is prevalent in family law cases. The ALRC review found that up to 70 per cent of parents in family law proceedings reported their children had been exposed to family violence, and almost one in five parents report that they have safety concerns for themselves and/or their children as a result of ongoing contact with the other parent.²⁰ YWCA endorses recommendations from the ALRC Inquiry regarding information sharing of family court orders on the grounds that these orders and proceedings are a recognised family violence risk factor; and, the establishment of an independent statutory authority with oversight responsibilities for the family law and broader FDSV system. In our extensive

¹⁶ <http://www.wlsnsw.org.au/wp-content/uploads/WLSA-submission-to-ALRC-Review-of-the-Family-Law-System-fa.pdf>

¹⁷ http://dvnsww.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/DVNSW-submission-to-ALRC_May-2018.pdf

¹⁸ .WLSA; Safety First in Family Law; 5 Steps to creating a family law system that keeps women and children safe

¹⁹ Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2019. Family, domestic and sexual violence in Australia: continuing the national story 2019. Cat. no. FDV 3. Canberra: AIHW

²⁰ Kaspiew et al, *Evaluation of the 2006 Family Law Reforms*, Australian Institute of Family Studies, 2009



history of providing FDSV court support, YWCA highlights the importance of training and professional development in building the capacity of legal professionals to understand risk and respond to family violence.

Reference D

The way that health, housing, access to services including legal services, and women's economic independence impact on the ability of women to escape domestic violence

Recommendation D1: Invest in women's specialist domestic and family violence services, including crisis and emergency accommodation, health and legal services, to respond to increased need as restrictions ease. In addition, increased measures for oversight of women living in closed residential settings, and training and advice to community service providers to recognise and respond to violence must be protected both in crisis and recovery.²¹

- Specific strategies and services to address gaps in housing services for young women
 - o Innovative programs that appropriately support young women experiencing domestic and family violence such as YWCA's newly established Young Women's Trauma Recovery Program
 - o Increase in medium-to-long-term supported accommodation services for young people, particularly those with complex needs
- Expand eligibility of crisis services to women on Temporary Visas
 - o Support recommendations from the Path to Nowhere²² and Blueprint for Reform²³ report

Recommendation D2: Critical and timely need for significant investment in social and affordable housing

- YWCA supports the Social Housing Acceleration and Renovation Program (SHARP) call for total government investment of \$7.7 billion; \$7.2 billion for new build/acquisition and \$500 million for renovation of existing homes. Commonwealth contributions should be complemented by state/territory governments in the form of land and/or capital and local governments may also make a valuable contribution.
- Ensure long term and sustainable funding for remote housing

²¹ Recommendation 11, Equality Rights Alliance, Submission of Equality Rights Alliance to the Select Committee on COVID-19 inquiry into the Australian Government's response to the COVID-19 pandemic 28 May 2020- <http://www.equalityrightsalliance.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/Final-ERA-Submission-Select-Committee-on-COVID19-.pdf>

²² National Advocacy Group on Women on Temporary Visas Experiencing Violence (2018) Path to Nowhere: Women on Temporary Visas Experiencing Violence and Their Children

²³ National Advocacy Group on Women on Temporary Visas Experiencing Violence (2019) Blueprint for Reform: Removing Barriers to Safety for Victims/Survivors of Domestic and Family Violence who are on Temporary Visas



- o Incorporate analysis and recommendations from YWCA's Regional Housing Report²⁴ including measures to address housing and homelessness for women in regional and remote areas
- Increase long term and sustainable capital funding allocated to National Housing and Homelessness Agreement (NHHA)
 - o Funding for social and affordable housing stock
 - o Invest in innovative housing projects in partnership with Community Housing Providers in all states/territories
 - o Respond to emergencies affecting regional Australia

Recommendation D3: Implement a Gender-responsive national Housing Strategy

- Implement a Gender-responsive national Housing Strategy
 - o A gender analysis of the impact of COVID-19 on housing and homelessness and
 - o A best-practice 'Housing First Approach' providing wrap-around services for tenants/clients

Women, children and young people recovering from FDSV may require various types of support and services dependent on their situation and circumstances. This can include, but is not limited to, counselling, housing, financial support and advice, parenting support and/or legal support.

Housing and Homelessness

YWCA is concerned that women face some of the most critical housing challenges in our community. A gender-responsive approach to housing and homelessness would effectively address the structural disadvantages experienced by women, as well as other marginalised groups of women and gender diverse populations facing housing insecurity and unaffordability.²⁵ A gender-responsive approach would also contribute to the prevention of homelessness due to domestic and family violence, by enabling specialist services to address and respond to the gendered drivers of violence and homelessness.

There is a chronic shortage of social and affordable housing which is forcing record levels of homelessness. More and more people are struggling to afford the private rental market and the demand for affordable or social rental properties is outstripping supply.²⁶

Women's economic disadvantage contributes to instability and unaffordability in housing, due to lower incomes, periods out of the workplace for caring, and longer lifespans.²⁷ Women are the primary beneficiaries of housing support systems, making up most of the public housing tenants and

²⁴ YWCA National Housing (2020) Women's Housing Needs in Regional Australia. Melbourne, Victoria: YWCA National Housing

²⁵ Our Watch, ANROWS & Vic Health 2015, Change the Story: A shared framework for the primary prevention of violence against women and their children in Australia, Our Watch, Melbourne

²⁶ Everybodys Home Campaign 2018 <https://everybodyshome.com.au/our-campaign/relief-for-chronic-rental-stress/>

²⁷ Tually, Dr Selina; Beer, Andrew & Faulkner Dr Debbie, Too Big To Ignore – A Report on Future Issues for Australian Women's Housing 2006-2025, Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute (AHURI) , 2007



Commonwealth Rent Assistance (CRA) recipients.²⁸ Women are also more likely to live in low-income or single-parent households and therefore are more likely to experience housing stress. Women disproportionately outnumber men in the receipt of Parenting Payments (93.8% women compared to 6.2% men), Aged Pension (55.9% compared to 44.1%) and Youth Allowance (54.1% compared to 45.9%). Studies show that single women who are recipients of these payments had access to 0% of the rental market based on affordability and appropriateness.

Domestic and family violence is the leading cause of homelessness in Australia, with women making up the majority of those accessing specialist homelessness services.²⁹ When women flee domestic and family violence situations the majority have children in their care. Almost 70% of the women housed by YWCA have experienced family violence.

For many women, children and young people, home can be a dangerous place. While COVID-19 quarantining helps to flatten the curve, it may be making instances of FDSV more frequent, severe and dangerous. With families in lockdown, and financial insecurity and mental health concerns on the rise, it is predicted that abusive relationships will continue to intensify, as they do during peak holiday times and natural disasters. We are dealing with a reality that women are trapped at home with nowhere to go. Our extensive experience in refuges and crisis accommodation is that this provides a critical element of the service system, supporting women and their children in their recovery after violence and abuse. As there are limited options for long term accommodation, our clients are reliant on crisis housing options for longer than necessary. In the case of women on temporary visas, support options are even further limited as they are often at the whim of the private rental market, a grossly unaffordable option for women already experiencing harrowing circumstances.

The ongoing shortage of transitional housing options for families escaping violence is also of profound concern. Lack of affordable accommodation is the leading reason women return to abusive relationships. Without a significant increase in the supply of transitional housing for women escaping family violence, many will leave abusive partners only to find they have nowhere to go.

Research also highlights Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women dependence on social housing with exclusion experiences from the private rental market such as racism and classism and the intersectionality experiences of Aboriginal women (i.e. poverty, gender, ethnicity).³⁰ Shortages of crisis accommodation and long-term housing options (particularly in regional areas) means that Aboriginal women often experience repeated abuse and further periods of homelessness.

There are a range of current housing pressures and needs identified across Australia, due to lack of affordable housing options, increased housing and land costs, stagnation in wages growth, the rising costs of living, and limited housing supply. The recent impact of natural disasters including drought, bushfires and flooding has added to housing challenges in regional areas of Australia. The economic

²⁸ Australian Women Against Violence Alliance (AWAVA) and Equality Rights Alliance (ERA) 2017, Submission to the Productivity Commission Introducing Competition and Informed User Choice into Human Services Draft Report, P.5

²⁹ <https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/homelessness-services/specialist-homelessness-services-2016-17/contents/client-groups-of-interest/clients-who-have-experienced-domestic-and-family-violence>

³⁰ Cripps, K. and Habibis, D. (2019) Improving housing and service responses to domestic and family violence for Indigenous individuals and families, AHURI Final Report 320, Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute Limited, Melbourne, <http://www.ahuri.edu.au/research/final-reports/320>, doi: 10.18408/ahuri-7116201.



and social impacts of the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic are also likely to increase pressures in regional communities.

Safe at home

YWCA supports initiatives that enable women experiencing domestic and family violence to remain safely in their homes if they choose. However, we do caution that comprehensive measures must be taken to ensure the safety and wellbeing of those women and children remaining in the home, for example providing safety planning, improving home security, support in managing finances, support for children, and help with legal processes.

Safe at home programs are not available to everyone that needs it and there are gaps in support, particularly for regional, rural and remote women. From our own experiences as a safe home support provider, we cannot meet increasing demand. Our Keeping Women Safe in their Homes program provides risk assessments, safety planning and security upgrades for women and their children to help them stay in their own homes, or a home of their choice, provided it is safe to do so. Without further significant investment women and their children will remain trapped in dangerous abusive situations.

Given the expected increase in violence against women during and immediately post the COVID-19 pandemic, we support the calls of AWAVA to expand and extend the Safe Places program to prevent risk of homelessness for women who experience violence during and immediately post the COVID-19 pandemic.

More Social and Affordable Housing for Women

In approaching economic recovery to COVID-19, the construction of social housing should be considered as economic stimulus. In line with recommendations from the Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute (AHURI), social housing must be seen as social infrastructure with a government subsidy to drive equity related asset class products.³¹

Effective social housing in Australia should target assistance to households with low incomes and complex support needs. Special attention should be given to ensuring accessibility of social housing for vulnerable groups including women and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander tenants. Research shows they experience increased barriers to obtaining and maintaining tenancy due to issues such as family violence and structural discrimination.³²

A commitment to adequate, long term funding is needed to address the critical shortage of accommodation and homelessness services, in particular for specialist support services for women and children facing violence.

³¹ AHURI 2018, Social Housing as Infrastructure, available from: https://www.ahuri.edu.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0025/29059/AHURI-Final-Report-306Social-housing-as-infrastructure-an-investment-pathway.pdf

³² <https://theconversation.com/australia-needs-to-triple-its-social-housing-by-2036-this-is-the-best-way-to-do-it-105960>



Reference E

All forms of violence against women, including, but not limited to, coercive control and technology-facilitated abuse

Recommendation E1: Exploration and support for an intersectional feminist approach to safety by design to work with and support technology companies to help prevent technology facilitated abuse directed at women’s organisations.

Technology-assisted domestic violence and abuse through the rapid rise and integration of technology in our lives is seemingly inevitable. Perpetrators can use the internet, social media, mobile devices, texting, email, and surveillance devices, as well as constantly evolving new methods and tools to stalk, harass, and abuse their victims. With tech being woven into our modern lives, we have to remain ahead in our approach to solutions.

Our experiences as an organisation trying to create safe spaces to mobilize on gender equality have shown women’s organisations and women’s human rights defenders are prime targets for men’s rights activists weaponising technology to disrupt and make an environment unsafe. In a recent panel held by World YWCA to discuss young women’s leadership in COVID and virtual safe spaces, trolls took over Zoom controls on screen and broadcasted hardcore pornography, nazi and terrorist imagery and overrode mute to shout and swear for several minutes. YWCA Canada have also experienced the same disruptions of “Zoombombing” when holding their virtual town hall.

It may be seemingly impossible to secure these types of communications by following all the safety and security recommendations. Security in these environments varies. However, it is hard to ignore that this is a highly gendered issue targeting women’s organisations, particularly during COVID-19 where we are trying to connect, amplify and learn together through lockdown.

The majority of technology-facilitated DFV is experienced misusing neutral, everyday technologies of convenience. Women who have experienced DFV are often expected to invest time and energy into becoming tech savvy to protect themselves from male violence (e.g. change your passwords, turn off location settings, block him, change your Facebook privacy settings, close accounts, don’t forget to collect electronic evidence, etc). With Zoombombing, there is a similar emphasis on women’s organisations doing the work through changing settings, monitoring and vetting participants to ensure that online spaces they have tried to carve out remain safe from male violence. Added complexity is involved given the law is a blunt instrument in these circumstances, partly from the anonymity technology brings in these virtual spaces, the prevalence of the issue, cross-jurisdictional complexities, costs and effort in investigating potential offences, and the need to prioritise these resources.

YWCA advocates for the exploration of intersectional and gender-responsive policy solutions in safety by design by technology companies and welcome engaging further on these experiences of gender-based “zoombombing”.



Reference H

The experiences of all women, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women, rural women, culturally and linguistically diverse women, LGBTIQI women, women with a disability, and women on temporary visas.

Recommendation H1: Establishment of a National Plan on Violence against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Women

Recommendation H2: Commission additional research on: young people's experiences of family, peer on peer, intimate partner and sexual violence women's economic security and its intersections with FDSV and women in the justice system who are survivors of DFV

Recommendation H3: Investment in innovative programs that appropriately support young women experiencing domestic and family violence such as YWCA's newly established Young Women's Trauma Recovery Program

Recommendation H4: Expansion of professionals who work with children and young people impacted by FDSV

Recommendation H5: Expansion of professionals who come into contact with perpetrators with the appropriate skills to work with them safely

Recommendation H6: Supporting increasing mainstream intersectional understandings of First Nations women, migrant and refugee women, women with disability, older women, LGBTIQIA+ people and children and young people's experiences of FDSV

Recommendation H7: Federal government provide the funding and frameworks for state governments to take a gendered approach to designing and implementing prison policies and programs

Recommendation H8: The Disability Royal Commission must address the systemic drivers of this violence and establish national mechanisms for redress, complaint and oversight³³

An intersectional approach provides a lens to assess how gender equality intersects with other forms of discrimination, disadvantage or experience. An intersectional approach not only considers experiences of gender inequality and Family, Domestic and Sexual Violence (FDSV violence), but also how additional experiences of race, ethnicity, faith, socio-economic status, ability, sexuality, gender identity, education level, age and migration status affect individual experience.

Our submission takes into consideration reference H throughout, where an intersectional lens considers the experiences of all women, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women, rural women, migrant and refugee women, LBTQIA+ women, women with disabilities, and women on temporary visas.

³³ AUSTRALIA'S 3RD UNIVERSAL PERIODIC REVIEW Joint NGO Submission on behalf of the Australian NGO Coalition, People with Disability, 7

'Intersectionality' refers to the ways in which different aspects of a person's identity can expose them to overlapping forms of discrimination and marginalisation. Aspects of identity can include but are not limited to social characteristics such as Aboriginality, sex, sexual orientation or preference, ethnicity, refugee or asylum status, age, socioeconomic status and ability.

Different aspects of identity can intersect to create additional risks, barriers or forms of isolation that influence the way people experience economic abuse, domestic violence and homelessness³⁴.

First Nations Peoples

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women are more likely to experience compounding risk factors of geographic isolation and some may experience family violence and intimate partner violence within a broader context of state, institutional and financial abuse. They are also more likely to encounter discrimination in the private rental and housing sector and are more likely to experience Intimate Partner Violence as a result of inadequate or cramped housing situations. First Nations women are approximately 34 times more likely to be hospitalised for injuries arising from FDSV than non-Indigenous women, and 11 times more likely to be killed³⁵. The disproportionately higher rates are related to intergenerational trauma associated with Australia's ongoing colonial heritage. Colonial violence includes 'the disadvantage, dispossession and attempted destruction of Aboriginal cultures'.³⁶

The Australian Burden of Disease Study found that intimate partner violence contributed 1.6% to the total burden of disease for Indigenous Australians. This was five times the disease burden rate for non-Indigenous Australians. Intimate partner violence was the leading contributor to the burden of disease for Indigenous females aged 25–34.³⁷

First Nations Peoples are best placed to lead change to end violence against women and children in their communities. We advocate for measures that enable this, reflected in Our Watch's Changing the Picture resource on preventing violence against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and their children.

Women from migrant and refugee backgrounds

Women from migrant and refugee backgrounds may experience specific forms of family violence or intimate-partner violence. For example, experiences of family violence may be more likely to involve non-partners, extended family members or family members overseas. People on temporary visas and their children experiencing violence often face specific and compounding barriers to accessing support. Family or intimate-partner violence may involve specific acts, such as threats of deportation. Experiences of intimate-partner violence may be more prolonged out of a lack of translated knowledge, or visa-related fears, that may inhibit accessing crisis or recovery services.

³⁴ DPC, 2019

³⁵ Braybrook, A (2015), 'Family violence in Aboriginal communities', DVRCV Advocate, No. 2, Spring/Summer 2015

³⁶ Braybrook, A (2015), 'Family violence in Aboriginal communities', DVRCV Advocate, No. 2, Spring/Summer 2015

³⁷ AIHW 2016a. Australian Burden of Disease Study: impact and causes of illness and death in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people 2011. Australian Burden of Disease Study series no. 6. Cat. no. BOD 7. Canberra: AIHW



Women with disabilities

People with disability, particularly women³⁸, experience significant violence and abuse. Women living with disabilities experience violence at much higher rates than the general population or compared to other cohorts of women. Over 1/3 of women with disabilities have experienced some form of violence. These experiences of violence are more likely to be prolonged and go on for longer. This can include abuse in institutional settings and from care-givers who may be family members, and isolation can be used more commonly as a threat or act of violence. It can also be a compounding factor that makes it more difficult to access help, this has been amplified during the pandemic.³⁹

LGBTIQ+ People

People of diverse sexual preferences or gender identities may also experience higher rates of violence⁴⁰. LGBTIQ+ people who experience rejection from their family of origin experience high rates of homelessness, verbal and physical abuse.⁴¹ Some population groups are more likely to experience general violence from strangers in public spaces who negatively perceive their sexual identity. Experiences of discrimination may also affect help seeking behaviours. YWCA endorse the ACON submission and the related recommendations endorsed by DVNSW

- Recommendation C1: Specialist LGBTQ services should be funded nationally to provide support to LGBTQ people who are experiencing SDFV recognising barriers to access and the specialist skills provided by peer community organisations.
- Recommendation C2: All funded mainstream SDFV service providers should be required to access LGBTQ inclusivity training, with a focus on LGBTQ SDFV, from LGBTQ community organisations and that funding contracts provide additional funds for this purpose. KPIs should reflect how contracted organisations are being responsive to the needs of LGBTQ people experiencing SDFV.
- Recommendation C3: Brokerage funds are available nationally for LGBTQ men and non-binary people experiencing violence to access safety and support options in the absence of crisis accommodation for men and non-binary people
- Recommendation C4: LGBTQ communities are acknowledged as priority populations in domestic violence strategies at all levels of government, and this acknowledgement is coupled with appropriate levels of funding and measurable targets.

Risk factors, expressions and experiences of violence are all shaped by different aspects of a person's identity. Taking an intersectional approach means understanding problems and developing program design to ensure that services are tailored to meet different needs, to have the most impact and to

³⁸ Disabled Peoples Organisations Australia and National Women's Alliances, The Status of Women and Girls with Disability in Australia (Position Paper, November 2019).

³⁹ <http://wwda.org.au/wwdas-submission-to-the-senate-select-committee-on-covid-19/>

⁴⁰ 74% of incidents reported to Australia's Disability Royal Commission have occurred since 2010: Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of People with Disability (First Progress Report, December 2019) 1

⁴¹ Rainbow Health Victoria, p. 6



avoid unintended negative impacts which may increase experiences of marginalization and discrimination.

Older women

Older, single women are increasingly vulnerable to housing stress, insecurity and homelessness largely due to experiences of FDSV⁴². In 2015-16 there was a 17% increase in the number of women over the age of 55 seeking assistance from homelessness services, which was twice the rate of growth for the general homelessness services population.⁴³

There are a range of factors contributing to this, including the financial disadvantage women face over their lifetime, as well as chronic and often prolonged experiences of DFV. Women retire with on average half the superannuation than men, a reality which many older women are now grappling with. Older women who experience domestic violence are often faced with no financial security and no safety nets, and so enter the homelessness sector for the first time. Sixty five per-cent of YWCA tenants are aged over 50, with many being first time users of the welfare system in Australia.

Research on housing futures, age and gender tell us that women who are older and living alone will be poorer than men their age, less able to maintain home ownership, and less able to compete in the private rental market for affordable accommodation, all compounding factors if also experiencing DFV.

YWCA endorses recommendations from the Retiring Into Poverty report⁴⁴ on increasing housing security for older women, including addressing financial insecurity for women and its underlying causes, as well as the establishment of a Seniors Housing Gateway program to better address the housing support needs of older women. YWCA also recommends government investment into innovative housing models such as co-housing or co-ownership models, and shared equity models. In building consistent best-practice initiatives to support older women's housing, we urge the federal government to work in collaboration with states and territories, and across other federal government departments such as ageing and aged care.

Young Women

Young women aged 16-24 are among the most vulnerable to varying forms of violence. For example, young women experience significantly higher rates of physical and sexual violence than women in older age groups.⁴⁵ Young women as young as 11 years old report street harassment of a sexual nature⁴⁶, and 1 in 4 young women in Australia have reported experiencing the non-consensual sharing of sexual

⁴² https://www.ywcahousing.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/2020_WomensHousingNeedsinRegionalAustralia_OlderWomen.pdf

⁴³ Equality Rights Alliance & Homelessness Australia 2017, Ending and Preventing Older Women's Experiences of Homelessness in Australia, https://www.homelessnessaustralia.org.au/sites/homelessnessaus/files/2017-07/Economic_Security_of_Older_Women_Inquiry.pdf

⁴⁴ <https://www.mercyfoundation.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2018/08/Retiring-into-Poverty-National-Plan-for-Change-Increasing-Housing-Security-for-Older-Women-23-August-2018.pdf>

⁴⁵ [ABS 2017](#). Personal Safety, Australia, 2016. ABS cat. no. 4906.0. Canberra: ABS.

⁴⁶ <https://www.plan.org.au/-/media/plan/documents/reports/sexism-in-the-city-plan-international-australia-embargoed-copy.pdf>



images.⁴⁷ The strongest predictors of attitudes supportive of violence against women are people having a low level of support for gender equality and a low level of understanding of the behaviours constituting violence against women (relative to other respondents)⁴⁸.

In Australia, 1 in 6 women (16% or 1.5 million) had experienced abuse before the age of 15. Of the women who experienced abuse before the age of 15, 94% (1.4 million) reported experiencing abuse by someone known to them. Women who experienced physical abuse before the age of 15 reported that the most common perpetrator type was a parent (including step-parents), with four in every five physically abused women (79% or 654,600) experiencing abuse by this perpetrator type⁴⁹ For young women who experienced sexual violence before the age of 15, a perpetrator was most likely to be someone known to their family.

Young women's experiences of intimate-partner violence (IPV) are likely to occur within a broader context of harmful dating cultures and experiences of sexual harassment and assault in public spaces. A 2001 survey of 5000 young people aged 12–20 years found that 26% of girls/young women who had been in a dating relationship had been pushed, grabbed or shoved by their boyfriend, 25% experienced an attempt to be physically controlled by their boyfriend, 19% had been physically threatened by their boyfriend, and 14% had had their boyfriend try to force them to have sex⁵⁰.

Experiences of family violence have been linked to increased chances of subsequently experiencing intimate-partner violence, as well as poorer mental and physical health outcomes. This cycle of violence, from early family experiences to later intimate-partner relationships is a growing evidence base.

There is also clear evidence showing a link between experiences of DFV in childhood and adolescence, and an increased risk of experiencing intimate-partner violence and/ or emotional abuse as an adult. The most recent version of the Personal Safety Survey (PSS), for the first time included a set of questions and analysis specifically on experiences and witnessing violence before the age of 15 and experiences of partner violence since the age of 15. The cycle from experiences of family violence into later experiences of harmful relationships and intimate-partner violence also occurs as a result of witnessing violence between parents, or intra-parental conflict (fighting and emotional abuse). One in eight women witnessed violence towards their mother by a partner before the age of 15 (13% or 1.2 million). These women were more than twice as likely to experience partner violence (after the age of 15) than women who had not witnessed violence towards their mother by a partner (34% compared to 15%)⁵¹. There is also evidence to show that people who had experienced or witnessed acts of family violence, either in childhood or early adolescence, also show poorer outcomes across, physical, mental health and wellbeing outcomes. An ANROWS study into the support needs of parents and children who

⁴⁷ <https://www.esafety.gov.au/image-based-abuse/about/research>

⁴⁸ 2017 National Community Attitudes towards Violence against Women Survey (NCAS)

⁴⁹ Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) (2016). Personal safety, Australia, 2016. ABS cat. no. 4906.0. Canberra: ABS. <https://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/mf/4906.0>

⁵⁰ NCP, 2001

⁵¹ Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) (2016). Personal safety, Australia, 2016. ABS cat. no. 4906.0. Canberra: ABS. <https://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/mf/4906.0>



had experienced family violence showed “an increased rate of poor physical health and health-related quality of life in children where families have persistent IPC, with the highest rates of poor health occurring in the pre-teens, compared to younger ages”⁵²

Young people who had experienced Intra-parental conflict and DFV also showed poorer outcomes in tangible areas related to seeking ongoing opportunities. “Young people who have experienced IPC and DFV show poorer outcomes across physical health, school-readiness, socio-emotional problems, have a poorer vocabulary, poorer approach to learning, poorer literacy and maths skills”.

Multi-component programming is particularly valuable for working with young people who have experienced violence. Therefore, it is important to build capacity across the following protective factors for young people:

- strong bonding to family, school, community and peers
- healthy beliefs (such as consideration for others and understanding the consequences of unacceptable behaviour and substance use)
- clear standards for behaviour (ie standards that are considered to be socially appropriate according to prevailing social norms). For bonding to be a protective influence, it must occur through involvement with peers and adults who communicate healthy values or beliefs and set clear standards for socially acceptable behaviour.

In Australia the majority of programs related to FDSV for young people focus on prevention. In particular, FDSV approaches are centred on very young children and healthy parenting techniques. IPV programming is largely focused on healthy relationships with primary and high school students. There is a significant gap in response approaches specifically designed for adolescents and young people, in spite of the fact that this is a peak period for experiencing all types of violence. In part this may be because young people are less likely to report or seek help. There are very few specialist services for young people experiencing FDSV. Our experiences within communities consistently show youth services lack FDSV support capacity and FDSV services struggle to engage and support young people. Across our practitioners we see young people’s experiences of sexual violence unreported, dismissed by police and hidden within families, and few specialist support services are available to refer young victim survivors to.

Healthy relationships and healthy dating programs are the most common type of program identified for young people and prevention in Australia. There are currently no curriculum and associated specific resources available for healthy relationship skills building for young people who had experienced FDSV. This is a key area to address. YWCA reiterates the need for primary prevention and early intervention programs and urges the federal government to resource comprehensive respectful relationships education in schools to build gender equitable attitudes and behaviours in young people.

Young Women and Sexual Violence

⁵² ANROWS. 2017. Inter-parental conflict, parenting and child development in Australian Families: Fact sheet

Sexual assault is the most common form of sexual violence in Australia, with 1 in 6 women (17%, or 1.6 million) and 1 in 25 men (4.3%, or 385,000) experiencing sexual assault since the age of 15.⁵³ Women aged 25–34 are also most likely to be hospitalised after assault by a partner. For girls aged 0–14 and women aged over 65 hospitalised for assault injuries, the perpetrator was most likely a family member other than spouse or domestic partner.⁵⁴

Women living in prison

There is growing evidence of the link between women’s imprisonment and domestic, family and sexual violence and imprisonment. ANROWS recent research report found that between 70—90% of women in custody have experienced violence.⁵⁵

YWCA recommends that the federal government provide the funding and frameworks for state governments to take a gendered approach to designing and implementing prison policies and programs. It is also critical that we address the cycles of violence and provide wrap around support services for women who have experienced both imprisonment and violence.

It also must be acknowledged that the over-policing and over-incarceration of First Nations peoples, and high rates of deaths in custody, constitute ongoing acts of colonial violence. This contributes to the prevalence of FDSV in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.⁵⁶ In line with ANROWS recommendations, we also recommend the funding of culturally relevant diversion and prison initiatives supported by groups such as Sisters Inside.

YWCA further recommends the funding of best practice initiatives such as the Women of Worth (WoW) program. YWCA’s WoW Program engages with women who have been involved in the justice system, providing support to integrate and re-engage within the community. In 2019, an evaluation of the WoW Program found that the program had a statistically significant impact on reducing the rates of re-offending among clients engaged with a case manager post-release, with 69% less likely to be apprehended for a new offence than women released from prison who were not participating in the program.⁵⁷ In 2019 the WoW Program won the Australian Crime and Violence Prevention Gold Community Award.

Sex Workers

YWCA supports the overwhelming evidence, as well as the many health and human rights experts, advocates, and those with lived experience, in support of the full decriminalisation of adult consensual

⁵³ ABS 2017

⁵⁴ AIHW National Hospital Morbidity Database

⁵⁵ Australia’s National Research Organisation for Women’s Safety (ANROWS) 2020. *Women’s imprisonment and domestic, family, and sexual violence: Research synthesis*. Sydney, NSW

⁵⁶ Braybrook, A (2015), ‘Family violence in Aboriginal communities’, DVRCV Advocate, No. 2, Spring/Summer 2015

⁵⁷ Dr Catherine Holmes (November 2019), A Report on the Evaluation of the YWCA Australia’s Women of Worth Program



sex work as the most effective way to safeguard the health, safety, human rights and workplace rights of sex workers, the majority of whom are women.

The criminalised nature of sex work in Australia (aside from NSW and NT where sex work is fully decriminalised) for example is a major barrier for sex workers (the majority of whom are women) in reporting abuse, discrimination and other forms of illegal activity. In fact, decriminalisation would encourage staff within the industry to cooperate with authorities and build positive working relationships with police. We note that in 2016 the NSW Government affirmed their continued support for full decriminalisation as the best way of protecting sex workers and maintaining a more transparent sex work industry.

Both the New Zealand and NSW experience demonstrates that rates of sex work have not increased, but that decriminalisation did improve sex workers' human rights; removed police corruption; resulted in savings in the criminal justice system; and enhanced the surveillance, health promotion, and safety of the sex industry.

We also express concern that amendments to criminalise certain aspects of sex work, such as street work, will only result in the most marginalised groups being forced into dangerous and isolated environments, unable to report abuse or exploitation. Furthermore, criminalising any aspects of sex work presents more barriers to women exiting the industry and gaining other employment, due to discrimination, stigma, and lack of workplace recognition and protections.

YWCA does not support the 'Nordic model' (criminalising the purchasing of sex but not the selling of sex). There is strong evidence suggesting that these laws discourage women to report violence and abuse; result in human rights violations for sex workers; and do little to address the stigma and risk associated with criminalised sex work.² It is imperative that sex work is fully decriminalised to ensure the safety of all sex workers, and to ensure the transparency of the industry.

Full decriminalisation across Australia would support:

- Safeguarding the human rights of sex workers
- Protecting sex workers from exploitation and abuse
- Promoting their health and safety
- Creating an environment conducive to public health and decent workplace rights

Reference I

The impact of natural disasters and other significant events such as COVID-19, including health requirements such as staying at home, on the prevalence of domestic violence and provision of support services



Recommendation I1: YWCA support AWAVA’s Submission⁵⁸ in response to the Select Committee inquiry into the Australian Government’s response to the COVID-19 pandemic. We highlight the following recommendations:

- Ensure access for women on temporary visas experiencing violence to Medicare, PBS, income support if jobs are lost due to COVID-19, and one-off economic support payment
- Increase disability support pension in line with Jobseeker payment increases
- Increase capital works (expand / extend Safe Places program) to increase refuge supply in light of potential surge in demand once immediate crisis is over

Recommendation I2: AWAVA Recommendation i-j11 the Australian Government considers how contraceptive and family planning resources including contraception, condoms, dental dams, emergency contraception, pregnancy tests and menstrual health products can be made freely available, while supporting privacy in their use

Economically FDSV has a devastating and costly impact on our society. It is estimated that violence against women costs the Australian economy \$21.7 billion per year, with victim/survivors bearing the major burden of this cost.

The recent impact of natural disasters including bushfires, drought and flooding, has amplified existing inequalities within our communities and added to challenges faced in Australia. There are now additional and unprecedented social and economic impacts due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Domestic and family violence is increasing, home and unemployment stress is rising, and family work-life balance is up-ended.

First Nations women, young women, women living with disability, older women, culturally and linguistically diverse women and people working in essential services such as health and social care (the majority of whom are women), are particularly vulnerable. The pre-COVID-19 scarcity of regional social and affordable housing for women, many of whom are escaping domestic and family violence, presents us with an increasingly alarming reality.

Women, and particularly young women, are one of the hardest hit demographics economically in COVID-19, due to their overrepresentation in casual work, and in the retail and hospitality sectors. Global disasters have shown that pandemics amplify and reinforce traditional gender roles, with negative effects for women, girls and gender diverse people. There is growing evidence that restriction measures and a variance of COVID response measures have compounded gender inequality. We are seeing unemployment and underemployment amongst women, particularly young women, and the reinforcement of unequal gender roles seen in unpaid care across communities in Australia. Gender-based violence has increased. There is a risk that women impacted by the economic downturn will become detached from the labour market either permanently or long-term. Gender equality and women’s economic participation is crucial to the GDP, economic recovery and Australia’s future resilience.

The COVID-19 (Coronavirus) pandemic is a public health emergency of a global scale. Millions of people have been infected, hundreds of thousands have died and many more are suffering

⁵⁸ https://awava.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/FINAL_-AWAVA-submission-COVID-Senate-inquiry.pdf

economically. Baseline forecasts envision a 5.2 percent contraction in global GDP in 2020—the deepest global recession in eight decades.

Increases in violence can be due to reduced access to necessities, financial stress, the potential breakdown of societal infrastructures, quarantines and social isolation, family separation in conflict or fragile contexts, or the inability to escape abusive partners. COVID-19 and its impacts, such as stress and/or loss of work, is not a direct cause of FDSV but can contribute to more severe episodes of violence.

COVID-19 has also impacted women’s health rights with access to menstrual health products, contraception, emergency contraception impacted by health service restrictions and shortages. Financial and physical access to sexual and reproductive health services has been reduced due to treatment of time critical services as non-essential procedures, unavailability of hardship support, restricted practitioner mobility and services’ access to personal protective equipment (PPE).

Women and pregnant people have also reported restrictions on their choice and rights in accessing perinatal care arising from risk management by and pressure on health services. The mental health impacts of COVID-19 appear to be having a more pronounced impact on women, with twice as many women reporting feelings of loneliness in comparison with men (28% to 16%), and having problems managing current health concerns, including mental health and chronic conditions (13% to 7%).

Summary

There are many challenges ahead, notwithstanding the global responses needed to navigate the current COVID-19 pandemic, but we cannot wait for incremental change.

YWCA acknowledges the complexity of FDSV violence and the opportunity this inquiry presents moving forward. We look forward to further consultations to address the needs in the communities we work in and for all Australians to live safe and free from family, domestic and sexual violence.

YWCA Acknowledges

Everyone preventing, responding, and recovering from family, domestic and sexual violence for their strength, leadership and commitment to a safer Australia

