National Women’s Safety Alliance Policy & Advocacy Priorities

To end gender-based violence, there must be a commitment across Australian   
society – from governments, institutions, organisations and individuals – to advance gender equality. We must address the structures, norms and practices that entrench gender inequality where people work, live, play and socialise. This means eradicating differences in outcomes in employment, health, education, income, housing, and caring responsibilities that are driven by gender inequality.

All approaches to ending gender-based violence must also consider how other forms of inequality and discrimination intersect with gender inequality, resulting in some groups of people experiencing higher rates of violence than others including lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans/transgender, intersex, queer and other sexuality, gender, and bodily diverse (LGBTIQ+) people. Taking an intersectional approach means not only ensuring prevention initiatives recognise people’s diversity but also addressing the differences in privilege and access to power and resources across the community.

The following priorities are underpinned by these two principles.

## Priority

**The *National Plan to End Violence Against Women and Children 2022–2032* and its two Action Plans must be evidence-based, have meaningful targets and a robust governance framework, with clear roles and accountabilities assigned to the Commonwealth and state and territory governments.**

Targets must be underpinned by annual population-level data collected at the national and state and territory levels. Data must include people’s awareness and attitudes towards gender-based violence as well as all people’s lived experience of sexual, domestic and family violence and their interactions with services.

Progress against the National Plan and each of the Action Plans should be monitored by a well-resourced, independent Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence Commission that works in consultation with key stakeholder groups. These stakeholders need to include the domestic, family and sexual violence sector and a diverse range of people with lived experience.

## Priority

**All governments must work together to develop consistent definitions of family, domestic and sexual violence across legal, policy, and service systems, as well as practice standards for culturally safe, trauma specialist, and violence-informed service responses.**

Definitions of violence must be evidence-based and recognise the gendered drivers of this violence. They must also reflect the dynamics and patterns of gender-based violence, incorporate an understanding of grooming and coercive control, and acknowledge various expressions of violence in diverse cultural contexts including LGBTIQ+ contexts.

Definitions need to be developed in conjunction with key stakeholders, including the domestic, family and sexual violence sector and people with lived experience.

Training on these definitions must be provided to every person and service that supports or comes into contact with people affected by domestic, family and sexual violence.

## Priority

**Every person affected by family, domestic and sexual violence must have access to trauma-informed and culturally safe support. This support needs to be tailored to that person’s age, gender, cultural background, language, ability, health status, sexual orientation, intersex status, economic status, and geographical location.**

Specialist family, domestic and sexual violence services need to be universally available at every stage of someone’s experience of violence and abuse, including early intervention, crisis response, and trauma recovery. Mainstream services must be trauma-informed, culturally safe, and integrated with specialist family, domestic and sexual violence services in accordance with a no-wrong door service model.

## Priority

**National policy must prioritise the primary prevention of family, domestic and sexual violence and local communities must be resourced by every level of government to address the underlying social context, gendered drivers and reinforcing factors that influence the prevalence and dynamics of violence.**

Australia’s approach to primary prevention must include actions at the national, state/ territory and local community levels. Workplaces, educational institutions, the media, sporting bodies, the arts, faith-based organisations, and service institutions must all be supported by governments to take an active and meaningful role in challenging violence‑supportive social norms and expectations and promoting understanding of consent and respectful relationships.

## Priority

**Governments, workplaces, institutions and the community must recognise – and respond to – sexual harassment as a form of gender-based violence and discrimination as well as a work health and safety issue.**

Sexual harassment is a form of gender-based violence that is perpetrated mostly by men against women and girls and also occurs in LGBTIQ+ communities. Policies and programs addressing sexual harassment should be underpinned by the objectives of ending gender-based violence, advancing gender equality and fulfilling work health and safety obligations. These approaches to addressing sexual harassment are complementary and one should not substitute another.

## Priority

**A positive duty for employers to prevent sexual harassment and promote gender equality under the *Sex Discrimination Act (1984) Cth* must be enacted.**

This is an urgent priority to eliminate workplace sexual harassment. A key outstanding recommendation from the *Respect@Work* report is to impose a positive duty on employers to prevent sexual harassment (Recommendations 17 and 18). Rather than relying on individuals to make complaints to assess whether an employer has taken reasonable steps to prevent sexual harassment, a positive duty would require employers to actively promote gender equality and take proactive action to prevent sexual harassment. Relying on current work health and safety obligations is not sufficient as these obligations do not recognise gender inequality as the systemic driver of sexual harassment.

## Priority

**Laws, policies and programs to prevent and respond to sexual harassment should take an intersectional approach given sexual harassment is experienced differently depending on gender, age cultural background, ability, sexual orientation and gender identity, geographical location and socio-economic status.**

Governments, organisations and the community need to work in partnership with diverse groups to design, implement and evaluate sexual harassment legislation, policies and programs to ensure their specific needs and experiences are reflected. This is the only way to recognise that gender inequality interacts with other forms of inequality (e.g., racism, colonialism, ableism, homophobia and transphobia among others) to result in specific forms of sexual harassment and create additional barriers to seeking support and remedies.