



**National Women's
Safety Alliance**

**The National
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Alliance**

**2024-2025
Pre-Budget
Submission**

National Women's Safety Alliance
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Acknowledgment of Country

The National Women's Safety Alliance acknowledges the Traditional Owners of the land on which we work and live. We pay our respects to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elders past, present and future, and we value Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elders past, present and emerging. We value Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories, cultures, and knowledge.

About National Women's Safety Alliance

The NWSA brings together over 400 individual and organisational members, including front-line services, research, and legal expertise, as well as survivors of domestic, family, and sexual violence.

We work with members and stakeholders, including Government to provide advice on a range of policy measures that directly affect women living with violence and the staff who work tirelessly to provide advice and support to them.

Contact for this Submission

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Executive Summary

National Women's Safety Alliance (NWSA) welcomes the opportunity to provide guidance to the Australian Government on the forthcoming Australian Budget, 2024-2025.

We are a National Alliance whose combined voices, expertise and experiences aim to inform policy to prevent and reduce violence against women. To prepare for this submission, NWSA surveyed members of the Alliance in developing this submission and met with our expert advisory groups to identify priorities for the year ahead.

Our pre-Budget 2024-2025 recommendations are:

1. A stronger focus on innovative and targeted primary prevention strategies that are informed by the growing body of research into perpetrator behaviours is needed.
2. A national inquiry into frontline and system responses to high-risk perpetrators
3. A workforce sustainability plan to align with higher education reforms that improve affordability and availability of community service degrees.
4. An end to unpaid work placements for students undertaking mandatory on-site placements as part of their degree qualification.
5. Funding support for ongoing professional development and training, particularly in sensitive case management roles such as therapeutic counselling, culturally sensitivity, bias recognition, and crisis responses.
6. We support calls for a standalone alliance, funded under the Alliance model to represent the unique needs to LGBTQIA+ people in Australia.
7. A national inquiry into frontline and system responses to reports of domestic, family, and sexual violence to understand the extent of institutional biases and other challenges when reporting.
8. Initiate research into health conditions that are related to exposures to violence including traumatic brain injuries, to better understand service gaps, underdiagnoses, and the unique needs and challenges of survivors with brain injuries as a result of violence.

Primary prevention

We understand that Australia's primary prevention strategy is delivered largely through the remit of Our Watch, the national violence prevention body. In policy terms, this primary prevention work has a strong focus on programs and awareness raising campaigns including respectful relationships, and targeted training delivered through education and workplace settings through the lens of gender inequality as the major driver of violence against women. We welcome efforts to increase awareness among the broader community and note that improving community attitudes towards gender-based violence through innovative measures is outlined in Action 1 of the First Action Plan 2023-2027.¹

There remain concerning attitudinal pockets however, where progress on rejecting disinformation and the minimising of gender-based violence have stalled.²

We draw attention to the 2021 National Community Attitudes Survey (NCAS) findings for young people, arguably the focus of many efforts in awareness raising and education campaigns. The NCAS report demonstrates a concerning plateau in attitudes towards violence among young people. Further, the attitudes of young men also continue to lag their female peers when it comes to myths around sexual violence and gender equality. In particular, the NCAS found that a sizable minority of young respondents supported problematic attitudes towards domestic violence, including that women are prone to exaggeration and that those who stay with their abusive partners are partially to blame for continuing violence.³

Our concerns on progress in this regard, go beyond the NCAS findings and we also wish to note the following:

¹ https://www.dss.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/12_2023/d23-1021308-first-action-plan-accessible-pdf.pdf pp 22-24.

² ANROWS, Media Release, 13, December 2023 <https://anrowsdev.wpenginepowered.com/wp-content/uploads/2023/12/NCAS-Media-Release-NCAS-Young-Australians-Final-1.pdf>

³ [https://irp.cdn-website.com/f0688f0c/files/uploaded/ANROWS%20-%20NCAS%20Young%20People%20Sub-Report%202023%20\(DIGITAL\)%20-%20FINAL.pdf](https://irp.cdn-website.com/f0688f0c/files/uploaded/ANROWS%20-%20NCAS%20Young%20People%20Sub-Report%202023%20(DIGITAL)%20-%20FINAL.pdf), pp. 22-23

- The recent findings of the Child Maltreatment Study, that sexual offending against young people, *by young people* has outstripped offending by adults.⁴
- The findings of UNSW research exploring the prevalence of sexual feelings or offending, towards children, by men in Australia.⁵ This research found that of the surveyed men who had sexual feelings towards children, the greatest proportion were aged 18-34.⁶
- Lastly, young men were over-represented in a sample of 13,300 Australian adults regarding their exposure to child sexual material. The survey found that the *deliberate* viewing of child sex abuse material was higher among respondents aged 18-34 than among those aged 35 and over.⁷

As the majority of child sexual abuse is perpetrated by men, these findings which indicate a growing prevalence of sexual offending in young adult males is deeply concerning.

For young men in particular, conceivably a cohort which would have come of age in a social climate that has progressively been exposed to a greater understanding of gender inequality, respectful behaviours, the longstanding [Stop it at the start](#) campaign and online forms of violence, the above findings call for pivoting of Australia's primary prevention strategy.

To begin to address this we call for:

- A stronger focus on innovative and targeted primary prevention strategies that are informed by the growing body of research into perpetrator behaviours is needed.
- A national inquiry into frontline and system responses to high-risk perpetrators.

⁴ The prevalence and impact of child maltreatment in Australia: Findings from the Australian Child Maltreatment Study (2023) https://www.acms.au/wp-content/uploads/2023/04/3846.1_ACMS_A4Report_C1_Digital-Near-final.pdf

⁵ UNSW (2013) Identifying and understanding child sexual offending behaviours and attitudes among Australian men [Identifying and understanding child sexual offending behaviour and attitudes among Australian men.pdf \(unsw.edu.au\)](#)

⁶ Ibid, p 12.

⁷ AIC, Trends and issues in crime and criminal justice (2023) [Prevalence of viewing online child sexual abuse material among Australian adults \(aic.gov.au\)](#)

Early intervention

Early intervention facilitates advice and support before the point of crisis. These services are crucial in skilling-up clients in identifying escalating behaviours and managing their or their children's trauma responses, often while navigating a labyrinth of life-changing decisions.

Achieving the targets of both the early intervention and response pillar requires a sustainable and professional workforce, which has a sufficient entry pipeline and workforce retention to continue meeting demand into the future.

We note an outcome of Action 3 in Action Plan, that services and prevention programs are *effective, culturally responsive, intersectional, and accessible*. Achieving this requires the development of a national workforce and pipeline strategy for community sector workers and other professionals who operate in violence prevention and response.

We drew attention to workforce deficits in our 2023-2024 Budget Submission when we noted; *without subsequent investment in services and ancillary support, we are creating a false level of security among women who approach women's services at the early stages of intervention. Feedback from Alliance members indicates that non-crisis level intervention services are already at breaking point and are now unable to meet new client demand*". This situation is unlikely to have improved in the preceding year for our members and it, arguably, has deteriorated as cost-of-living concerns among the workforce and students on unpaid placements as well as the significant impact of natural disasters flows through to workers and their workplaces.

We support Action 3 in the First Action Plan that calls for "*developing and sustaining a strong national workforce by addressing workforce planning, workforce preparation and pathways, sector governance and coordination, working conditions and professional development*".⁸ To achieve this, we urge the Australian Government undertake consultation with the National Women's Safety Alliance and our members and consider investing in the following:

⁸ https://www.dss.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/12_2023/d23-1021308-first-action-plan-accessible-pdf.pdf, 31.

- A workforce sustainability plan to align with higher education reforms that improve affordability and availability of community service degrees.
- An end to unpaid work placements for students undertaking mandatory on-site placements as part of their degree qualification.
- Funding support for ongoing professional development and training, particularly in sensitive case management roles such as therapeutic counselling, cultural sensitivity, bias recognition, and crisis responses.

Response

We draw attention to the Actions outlined in the First Action Plan relating to evidence collection and front-line services responses.

Action 2 calls for the national evidence base to be improved, both in consistency and availability. In this regard, it is noted that the Personal Safety Survey plays a strong role in the knowledge base regarding the extent of violence in Australia and while its reach is significant, the survey's methodology continues to limit or exclude intersectional experiences of violence. Of particular concern is the absence of data related to persons with a disability, persons in institutional group housing or rehabilitation facilities, and gender diverse persons. These cohorts are uniquely and disproportionately targeted by violence both in the home, the workplace and in public settings.

Further, while the Survey collects content related to sexual orientation and country of birth,⁹ findings against these demographic markers are not released as part of the public data package. This oversight restricts the public's understanding of violence against marginalised groups and presents a barrier for advocacy organisations in representing their community.

Measured progress against Action 2 of the First Action Plan, must include delivery of the following:

- Future iterations of the Survey include gender identity and disability in the methodology and that publicly released data packages include intersectional responses.

⁹ <https://www.abs.gov.au/methodologies/personal-safety-australia-methodology/2021-22>

Our members have also raised concerns with the absence of meaningful outcomes or actions in the First Action Plan that relate to the lived experiences of the LGBTQIA+ community. Dedicated resourcing towards the LGBTQIA+ service and advocacy sector and improved data collection of this cohort are needed at the national level.

- We support calls for a standalone alliance, funded under the Alliance model to represent the unique needs to LGBTQIA+ people in Australia.

Further to this, improving front-line responses for gender diverse persons, who report sexual assault or violence is a desired outcome of Action 9 of the First Action Plan; *Improve police responses (...) to better support victim-survivors through the provision of trauma-informed, culturally safe supports that promote safety and wellbeing.* Some victim-survivors, however, experience unique barriers when reporting sexual assault, including women with disability, older women, women with limited English proficiency, women with uncertain visa status and sex workers. In many instances, women may need support to identify their experiences as worthy of reporting and to engage in reporting processes. Further, LGBTQIA+ people also face their own unique challenges and prejudices when reporting crimes against them.

We have noted how police biases feature in system responses to violence against women in children in our earlier policy work.¹⁰ Likewise, there is an urgent need to understand the extent of and address biases and prejudice in service responses, particularly when marginalised groups seek assistance. We note the findings of the Special Commission of Inquiry into LGBTQIA+ hate crimes (NSW 2023)¹¹ gives numerous historical examples of prejudice interfering with objective policing and failing to deliver justice for victims and their families.

While the Special Commission was focused on historical LGBTQIA+ hate crimes in NSW, similar independent inquiries held in Queensland, looking at police

¹⁰ <https://nwsa.org.au/wp-content/uploads/NWSA-Teach-us-Consent-Submission-to-the-Inquiry-into-current-and-proposed-sexual-consent-laws-in-Australia-Final.pdf>

¹¹ [SCOI-LGBTIQ-Hate-Crimes-Volume-2-191223.pdf \(nsw.gov.au\)](https://www.scoi.nsw.gov.au/SCOI-LGBTIQ-Hate-Crimes-Volume-2-191223.pdf)

responses to domestic violence, demonstrate these biases are common and routinely interfere in police objectivity.

- A national inquiry into frontline and system responses to reports of domestic and family and sexual violence to understand the extent of institutional biases and other challenges when reporting.

Recovery and healing

To a significant extent, the success of the recovery and healing pillar is reliant on the sustainability of the sector and accessibility of recovery services, covered earlier in this submission. However, ancillary government policies relating to housing affordability and supply, family poverty and income support also have strong relevance to recovery. We support recent housing measures including the Social Housing Accelerator to assist those on low incomes find safe homes. Likewise, we supported and welcomed the cessation of the Parents Next mutual support welfare model, that disproportionately penalised single mothers. We will continue to use our platform to draw attention to peripheral policies that impact on women living with or leaving violence.

The health and wellbeing impacts for survivors of violence can be lifelong. Our members work with survivors who have significant health issues emerging from violence including traumatic brain injuries and stress disorders. These conditions can have profound impacts on a survivor's rehabilitation and social and economic wellbeing. For some survivors however, these conditions can go undiagnosed and therefore untreated, prolonging trauma and ill health. The National Plan noted that there was a need for further research to be conducted into conditions like traumatic brain injuries in order to identify appropriate response and recovery efforts.¹² In this regard, we call on the Australian Government to

- Initiate research into survivors' health conditions that are related to exposures to violence including traumatic brain injuries, to better

¹² National Plan to End Violence Against Women and Children 2022-2032, https://www.dss.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/10_2023/national-plan-end-violence-against-women-and-children-2022-2032.pdf, p. 87.



understand service gaps, underdiagnoses, and
unique needs of survivors with brain injuries as a result of violence.