



Working with
Women Alliance

POLICY BRIEFING:
DEVELOPING A NATIONAL
YOUTH-BASED TEXT
SERVICE FOR INTIMATE
PARTNER VIOLENCE IN
AUSTRALIA

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PURPOSE

This policy briefing outlines the rationale for implementing a youth-based digital support service to address intimate partner violence (IPV) among young people in Australia. Drawing on Australia's National Community Attitudes Survey: Findings for young Australians (NCAS) 2023 (ANROWS, 2023) findings and the success of Sweden's ungarelationer.se platform (Stiftelsen 1000 Möjligheter & Stenbecks Stiftelse, 2020), this briefing highlights the urgent need and strategic opportunity to develop a national text/chat support service tailored for young Australians who are experiencing intimate partner violence.

THE PROBLEM IN AUSTRALIA

- Young Australians (16–24) experience high rates of IPV, particularly young women (ANROWS, 2023).
- One in three (34%) youth don't know where to seek support for IPV (p. 22).
- Youth understanding of IPV, especially non-physical and gendered violence, remains limited (pp. 22–24).
- Technology-facilitated abuse is common, yet often unrecognised as violence (p. 23).
- Problematic attitudes persist: 26% believe women who stay with abusive partners are partly responsible; 30% think women exaggerate claims in custody cases (p. 22).
- Young men demonstrate significantly lower understanding and rejection of IPV than young women (p. 24).

AUSTRALIA'S CURRENT TEXT CRISIS SERVICES

Text-based services are not a new concept for help seeking in Australia. Lifeline Australia Crisis Text line has received rigorous evaluation of the efficacy of the service for help seekers in crisis. (Williams, 2021) The success of Lifeline Australia's SMS-based crisis intervention pilot provides strong domestic evidence that text services are not only effective, but essential in reaching under-served groups. The evaluation showed that help seekers experienced significant reductions in psychological distress, improved coping, and enhanced social connectedness following the intervention (Williams, 2021). Notably, over 50% of users were under 25, with many stating they would not have sought help via phone or chat, highlighting the unique accessibility of text communication (Williams, 2021). The service also reached groups with lower help-seeking rates—young men, LGBTIQ+ youth, and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities (Williams, 2021).

Given the government's recent investment of over \$450 million in digital mental health reform, a youth-specific text platform—co-designed and targeted at intimate partner violence—represents a cost-effective and scalable next step. Leveraging existing infrastructure and learnings from Lifeline, a national service can rapidly extend reach to young people at risk, particularly those unlikely to access traditional supports (Williams, 2021).

SWEDEN'S RESPONSE: THE SUCCESS OF UNGARELATIONER.SE

Sweden's national youth service, ungarelationer.se, offers confidential chat support, relationship education, and a quiz to help youth identify abusive dynamics. In one year, it recorded 216,000+ visits, 5,400+ chat contacts, and 28,000+ quiz completions (Stiftelsen 1000 Möjligheter & Stenbecks Stiftelse, 2020). 78% of users were victims with help-seeking behaviours being recognised in youth who may be using violence. Girls more likely to suffer emotional and sexual violence in higher incidents and severity; highlighting consistent gendered patterns seen in both countries (Stiftelsen 1000 Möjligheter & Stenbecks Stiftelse, 2020). This program offers continuity of care by connecting users to the same support volunteer for up to 10 weeks. [Ungarelationer.se](https://ungarelationer.se) reaches not just victims but also friends and young people using violence, encouraging early help-seeking and offering interventions for the behaviours.

Sweden's experience illustrates a dramatic shift in how youth IPV is addressed. What began as a pilot project has now become an essential national service. The evaluation of ungarelationer.se reveals that most young victims had never told anyone before reaching out via chat, and many young perpetrators took their first step toward change through anonymous digital contact (Stiftelsen 1000 Möjligheter & Stenbecks Stiftelse, 2020). The Swedish model has exposed how systemic gaps without appropriate and relevant pathways for help have failed young people, particularly girls (Stiftelsen 1000 Möjligheter & Stenbecks Stiftelse, 2020).

WHY AUSTRALIA NEEDS THIS NOW

Australian youth face similar dynamics of digital coercion and IPV as Swedish youth. (ANROWS, 2023) highlights a clear service gap: no national youth-specific, digital IPV support currently exists. Many young people are deterred from traditional helplines by fear, shame, or lack of privacy and it not being how they engage in specific (ANROWS, 2023). A discreet text-based platform matches youth communication preferences and addresses their expressed needs. Australia currently lacks any comparable national service. Investing in a youth-led digital platform would not only reflect global best practice but meet an urgent, unfilled need across urban, regional, and remote communities.

The 2023 ANROWS NCAS report makes it clear that many young Australians lack the knowledge, language, and safe channels to seek help for intimate partner violence (ANROWS, 2023). Sweden's ungarelationer.se shows how a national, youth-oriented, digital support platform can reach victims, educate peers, and change trajectories from both victim- survivors and perpetrators of violence. Australia has the opportunity to adopt and tailor this proven model to meet urgent, unmet needs.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Commission a National Scoping Study and Service Design Process

- Conduct an environmental scan of existing youth digital support platforms, both domestically and internationally.
- Map current IPV service gaps for young people across urban, regional, and remote communities.
- Co-design the service model with young people, including survivors, LGBTIQA+ youth, and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, ensuring it is trauma-informed, gender-responsive, culturally safe, and digitally accessible.
- Identify appropriate technology infrastructure, staffing models, and referral pathways for safety, legal, and mental health supports.
- Estimate service costs, staffing requirements, and scalability pathways for national rollout.

2. Fund a Geo-Targeted Pilot of the Digital IPV Text/Chat Service

- Deliver a 12-month pilot in a high-need geographic area (e.g. a mix of metro and regional settings) identified during the scoping phase.
- Test the digital platform, including live chat functionality, relationship education tools, and youth-targeted content.
- Evaluate uptake, safety, accessibility, and outcomes, particularly for under-reached populations such as young men, LGBTIQA+ youth, and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people.
- Use pilot data to refine the model, inform costings, and support future national expansion.

BUDGET ESTIMATE

National Youth IPV Digital Service (Scoping + Pilot)

This proposed budget represents a two-phase approach to develop and test a fit-for-purpose, youth-specific digital service to address intimate partner violence (IPV) in Australia. Costs are based on learnings from Sweden's national youth service (ungarelationer.se, \$1.4M AUD annually) and scaled to the Australian context with a focus on early-stage exploration and targeted delivery.

Phase 1: Scoping Study & Service Co-Design	Estimated Cost (AUD)
Research & environmental scan	\$150,000
Youth co-design workshops & engagement	\$200,000
Expert consultation (IPV, tech, cultural, LGBTIQA+)	\$100,000- \$200,000
Service model design (platform, staffing, referrals)	\$150,000
Cost modelling & evaluation framework	\$100,000
Project management & admin	\$100,000
Subtotal – Scoping Phase	\$800,000 – \$900,000
Phase 2: Geo-Targeted 12-Month Pilot	Estimated Cost (AUD)
Platform build & secure hosting	\$250,000
Staffing (chat responders, supervisors)	\$400,000
Staff training (trauma-informed, youth-centred)	\$100,000
Promotion & outreach (digital + schools)	\$150,000
Monitoring & evaluation	\$100,000- \$200,000
Integration with referral systems (tech/safety support)	\$100,000
Subtotal – Pilot Phase	\$1.1M – \$1.2M
Total Estimated Investment	\$1.8M – \$2.1M AUD

This budget supports a strategic, evidence-based approach to filling a clear national service gap, while minimising risk through phased implementation. It enables rapid learning, co-design with those most affected, and targeted service delivery—positioning Australia to lead in digital, youth-focused IPV prevention and response.

REFERENCES

ANROWS. (2023). Attitudes Matter: The 2021 National Community Attitudes towards Violence Against Women Findings for young Australians. Australia National Research Organisation for Women's Safety (ANROWS).

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