

Jesuit Social Services' input to the *Draft National Plan to End Violence against Women and Children 2022-2032* Survey

About Jesuit Social Services – who we are and what we do

Jesuit Social Services is a social change organisation that delivers practical support and advocates for policies to achieve strong, cohesive and vibrant communities where every individual can play their role and flourish. As a social change organisation, we seek to *do* and to *influence* by working alongside people experiencing disadvantage and advocating for systemic change. Our service delivery and advocacy focus on the areas of justice and crime prevention; mental health and wellbeing; settlement and community building; education, training and employment; gender justice; and ecological justice.

Whilst we do not deliver specific family violence services, Jesuit Social Services provides support to women who are victim-survivors of family violence through our programs *Next Steps*, *Connexions* and our justice and crime prevention programs.¹

Our work on gender justice

Jesuit Social Services has been working with boys and men for 45 years. This work has included engaging with boys and men involved in the criminal justice system; establishing Victoria's first dedicated counselling service working with young people struggling with concurrent mental health and substance abuse problems; and the Support After Suicide program which provides free individual and family counselling to people bereaved by suicide and runs a specialist men's group.

Many of the boys and men we work with use violence and hold harmful attitudes towards girls, women and gender diverse people. Jesuit Social Services works with men who have committed violent or sexual offences and seeks to ensure they can successfully transition into community once released from prison to lower the risk of recidivism and improve community safety.

Our key priorities, within our gender justice focus area, are to promote positive social change surrounding masculinities, as well as develop programs that intervene earlier to reduce male violence and harmful behaviours, keep families and communities safe and improve men's wellbeing and relationships.

[The Men's Project](#) has been established to lead this agenda and is informed by a number of key principles which underpin our work, including taking an intersectional and gender transformative approach which is accountable to women and adopts a strengths-based mindset to engage men.

The Men's Project incorporates a range of initiatives across three areas of work, namely to:

1. Promote cultural and attitudinal change around issues of masculinity and gender to support primary prevention of violence efforts including building workforce capacity.
2. Design, pilot and evaluate targeted early interventions to address violence and other harmful behaviours that address significant gaps in the service system.

¹ For details of Jesuit Social Services' justice and crime prevention programs, please see [here](#).

3. Produce and share knowledge about the attitudes of men and boys including how these attitudes impact behaviours.

Additional comments for questions

9. The draft National Plan includes a clear explanation of the prevalence, drivers, and different forms of gender-based violence in Australia.

On page 11, the section discussing the prevalence and patterns of violence against women and children would benefit from including specific data about rates of family violence amongst Aboriginal and Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) communities. We know that the conditions that allow family violence to occur are different depending on culture, religion, language, citizenship status and refugee experience.

In particular, the National Plan must acknowledge the dual discrimination faced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women in relation to their culture and gender. This manifests in a number of ways, primarily as cultural barriers to discussing and reporting experiences of family violence as well as difficulties with accessing legal supports and navigating the criminal justice system. This is compounded by the impact of colonialism and racism. The mainstream system is not equipped to deal with this. Services need to be culturally appropriate to meet the needs of people from different cultures and with different understandings of gender-based violence. Jesuit Social Services advocates for Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations to be adequately resourced to work with Aboriginal communities in line with self-determination.

On page 12, we recommend that Driver 3 'Rigid gender stereotyping and dominant forms of masculinity' should be amended to read as '**Rigid gender stereotyping and attachment to dominant forms of masculinity**'. This aims to address the issue of men and boys strongly identifying with and endorsing dominant forms of masculinity, which is a key driver of gender-based violence and other harmful behaviours. Research, including our [Man Box reports](#) outlined below, has shown that men who rigidly conform to dominant masculine norms (that men should be tough, stoic, dominant and in control) are more likely to self-report the use of violence, engage in risky behaviours and less likely to engage in health promotion behaviours².

10. The draft National Plan meaningfully reflects issues highlighted through stakeholder consultations and the National Summit on Women's Safety, including the experiences of victim-survivors.

Jesuit Social Services commends the Department of Social Services on its continued engagement with the sector on this important piece of work. We believe the National Plan would be strengthened by further reflecting the issues raised in stakeholder submissions and consultations, for example by specifically quoting submissions.

² Our Watch., (2019). Men in focus: unpacking masculinities and engaging men in the prevention of violence against women, Our Watch: Melbourne, Australia.; The Men's Project & Flood, M., (2018). The Man Box: A Study on Being a Young Man in Australia. Jesuit Social Services: Melbourne.

11. The four Foundation Principles (gender equality, the diverse lived-experiences of victim-survivors are informing policies and solutions, Closing the Gap, and intersectionality) appropriately underpin the National Pillars and actions within the National Plan.

Feedback on Foundation Principles

Jesuit Social Services would like to see the third principle about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities (page 7) amended to include boys and men, rather than just girls and women. We know that harms experienced as a child – whether by boys or girls – can result in trauma that poses significant risks later in life. Although by no means deterministic, many of the people we work with who have spent time in prison were once victims of violence.

We also recommend that the fourth principle about intersectionality (page 7) should include an expansion on the term intersectionality, including its framework within the plan. It is important to specify what ‘intersectionality’ means – especially in relation to diverse groups of people. There may also be merit in providing examples of intersectional approaches. For instance, our Adolescent Man Box Survey explores differences in attitudes and behaviours among men and boys. We use this data to inform and tailor our primary prevention work based on a nuanced understanding of the groups we’re working with.

Additional principles needed

On page 7, we recommend the inclusion of an additional principle to acknowledge that achieving cultural change and ending family violence cannot be achieved without **engaging men and boys on issues of masculinities**.

The impact of family violence on women, children, families, communities and society as a whole is profound. There is a compelling need to address its causes by supporting boys and men to live respectful, accountable and fulfilling lives. Progressing towards cultural change requires boys and men to be supported to take responsibility for challenging attitudes and changing behaviours. Cultural and attitudinal change around issues of masculinity and gender is essential in the pursuit of ending violence.

Jesuit Social Services commends the National Plan on highlighting the importance of engaging men and boys to challenge views that condone gender inequality (page 13). However, we advocate that the Plan should address the root causes of harmful masculine norms and promote healthier masculinities.

It is important to have national consistency around how organisations promote healthier masculinities. We therefore recommend that the Plan include an action to develop a set of guiding principles or best practice principles that underpin healthy masculinities practice. Work has commenced on this, see for example Wells, Flood and Boutilier et al. (2020)³.

³ Wells, L., Flood, M., Boutilier, S., Goulet, S., & Dozois, E. (2020). Supporting best practices: Guidelines for funding programs that engage and mobilize men and boys in violence prevention.

12. The four National Pillars in the draft National Plan provide a holistic approach to identifying and responding to gender-based violence.

Jesuit Social Services emphasises the need for the Plan to drill down to the key commitments under each pillar and ensure they are clearly measurable. Further to this, the Plan would benefit from having a clearer direction in terms of where funding will be invested in relation to each pillar to achieve its vision. We provide some specific feedback on each of the pillars below to ensure a holistic approach to ending gender-based violence.

Pillar 1: Prevention

We commend the Government on including ‘Focus area 4: Work with men and boys’ (page 31) as a key aspect of prevention. As previously highlighted, it is critical to engage men and boys in order to prevent gender-based violence. Consistent with Our Watch’s framework for the primary prevention of violence and in line with our work at The Men’s Project, we recommend that the draft Plan focus specifically on building awareness of the harms of rigid gender stereotypes and promoting the development of identities that support boys and men to live respectful, accountable and fulfilling lives free from violence. We highlight that the focus must go beyond awareness raising and towards developing the skills needed to challenge ideas of what it means to be a man as well as the skills needed to form healthier masculine identities. This should include workforce capacity building efforts among professionals and volunteers who engage with men and boys.

We recommend the inclusion of **‘Workforce capacity building’** as a key focus area under the Prevention pillar (page 31). Jesuit Social Services has developed workforce capacity-building projects for people working with men and boys to engage them on issues related to stereotypical constructions of masculinity (a key driver of violence) including:

- *Modelling Respect and Equality* - supports participants to develop greater self-awareness, learn how to model and promote positive change, and recognise and challenge problematic attitudes and behaviours.
- *Unpacking the Man Box workshops* - provides a range of participants (social workers, well-being staff, teachers, students, faith leaders and parents) with awareness of the negative consequences associated with outdated forms of masculinity and tools/resources to foster healthier forms of masculinity.

In internal evaluations of both programs, participants reported significant improvements in their knowledge and understanding of stereotypical constructions of masculinity, and in their confidence and motivation to affect change.

Under **‘Focus area 2: Strengthen positive, equal and respectful relationships between and among women and men, girls and boys, in public and private spheres’** (page 30), we also recommend the inclusion of a strong focus on education and awareness raising around rigid adherence to gender norms in school settings. The period of primary and early secondary schooling is a crucial time to work with students to support them to develop into the best person they can be. In line with this, alongside our work, we have observed the effectiveness of the Rights Resilience and Respectful Relationships Curriculum in Victorian schools in challenging rigid adherence to gender norms – a key driver of the use of violence against women. We advocate

for this to be expanded nationally with the federal government playing a role sharing best practice, including related to effective implementation, across states.

Pillar 2: Early intervention

We commend the Government on including **'Focus area 1: Break the cycle of intergenerational violence through early intervention'** (page 33). Jesuit Social Services has seen the adverse impacts of family violence on children and adolescents. We recommend that the National Plan include adolescents who use violence in the home as a priority cohort.

The Victorian *Royal Commission into Family Violence* found that children and adolescents who use violence in the home often have complex needs, including mental illness, acquired brain injuries, alcohol and other drug use, and past exposure to family violence⁴. Recent research from the Australian Institute of Criminology has highlighted the significant links between juvenile and adult domestic and family violence. The study found that 58 per cent of adolescents in the domestic family violence (DFV) group were also violent towards family members and/or partners during adulthood⁵. In comparison, 18 per cent of adolescents in the non-DFV violence group and eight percent in the non-violent group were proceeded against for DFV-related offences during adulthood⁶. In other words, adolescents charged for a family violence related offence seem to be much more likely to be violent towards family members in adulthood (even relative to adolescents who had committed non-DFV violence offences). As the study notes "identifying the minority of adolescents who engage in DFV behaviours is a worthwhile intervention target, potentially preventing a substantial proportion of adult DFV offending."⁷

Existing legislation and response systems in Australia are geared towards adults and do not meet the complex needs of adolescents using violence who may have also experienced violence. Responses to police call-outs also, at times, result in adolescent involvement with the criminal justice, out of home care and homelessness systems. In response to this, Jesuit Social Services commenced the pilot of our program RESTORE in 2018 aiming to address adolescent violence in the home. The program is guided by restorative practice principles, providing a restorative process, and applies a family systems, strengths-based, culturally sensitive and trauma-informed approach to working with all family members.

RESTORE operates in the Family Division of the Melbourne Children's Court. It offers a Family Group Conference process for young people using violence in the home to assist them and their affected family members to address and prevent the violence. The program seeks to address the ensuing harm caused by the violence and prevent future harm from occurring. Importantly, the process of preparing for a Conference seeks to build trust and empathy and identify supports that the family may benefit from. As most of the adolescents we support through RESTORE have themselves experienced violence in the home, we focus on taking a holistic approach by also working with their immediate family. We advocate for investment in adolescent family

⁴ State of Victoria (2014–2016): *Royal Commission into Family Violence: Report and Recommendations*, Parl Paper No 132, Vol 4, Chapter 34.

⁵ Boxall H., Pooley K. & Lawler S. (2021). Do violent teens become violent adults? Links between juvenile and adult domestic and family violence. *Trends & issues in crime and criminal justice* no. 641. Canberra: Australian Institute of Criminology.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Boxall H., Pooley K. & Lawler S. (2021), pg. 12

violence programs such as RESTORE as well as support and resourcing for Police and Courts to respond to the needs of adolescents who use violence in the home.

Under **'Focus area 2: Support pathways for boys and men who identify as having attitudes and behaviours that may lead to violence to seek help'** (page 33), Jesuit Social Services notes the importance of ensuring that behaviour change program models are age appropriate and tailored to specific cohorts. For example, boys who use violence have complex needs and require specialist behaviour change programs and supports.

Under **'Focus area 3: Embed perpetrator programs into community and justice settings to reduce recidivism rates'**, regarding the action to 'develop programs that focus on deterrence that ensure perpetrators understand the costs of committing a crime' (page 33), Jesuit Social Services believes that people must be held to account for their actions and this can be done through a strength-based, person-centric, restorative approach. We note that many of the perpetrators we work with are also victims and have complex needs, and by working restoratively, we can allow them the opportunity for rehabilitation and to aim for communities that are free from family violence.

Under **'Focus area 5: Build sectoral and community capacity to identify family, domestic and sexual violence and to intervene early to prevent the escalation of violence and, over time, reduce instances of violence'** (page 34), we advocate for a broader definition of risk that allows for earlier intervention. Often in the family violence service system, risk is narrowly defined as an imminent threat of safety to a person and this limits the ability of services to intervene early to meet people's needs.

Pillar 3: Response

We welcome the commitment of a **resourced service system** under **Focus area 1** (page 36) and call for further resourcing in brokerage for programs working from an evidence base. This must be made available in a timely manner so that frontline workers are able to meet the immediate needs of people impacted by family violence, with specific supports for children who witness violence. We also suggest the inclusion of 'women who are planning to leave violent situations' as a priority cohort as they are particularly vulnerable.

In relation to **'address perpetrator behaviour'**, Jesuit Social Services highlights that the majority of programs aimed to do this are currently delivered to people in custodial settings. We note that these programs are only provided to a proportion of people in custody who are deemed suitable for receiving support. We are therefore concerned that some of the people who use violence are missing out on these programs and are re-entering society with the same violent behaviours.

There is a need for investment in specialised, therapeutic programs that can engage more broadly with perpetrators who have additional and complex needs and more difficult behaviours. We further advocate for such programs to be holistic and address a person's myriad of needs, such as housing and financial security, while supporting them to repair any affected relationships in their lives.

We welcome **'Focus area 3: Ensure women and children escaping violence have safe and secure housing, across the spectrum from crisis to longer term, sustainable social housing'** (page 36). However, we note that while the physical provision of emergency and longer-term housing is crucial, additional supports are needed to assist people to maintain their housing as well as to meet additional needs. At Jesuit Social Services, we work with people who have complex and multiple needs. We have observed that group refuges may not be appropriate housing for women who have experienced, or are at risk of experiencing, family violence, who

also present with other needs including physical disabilities, cognitive disabilities or mental health concerns. We also highlight the need for the provision of housing for perpetrators so that the onus isn't solely on women and children to escape violent situations and be displaced from their home.

Under the '**Response**' pillar (page 36), we would like to see actions in response to the issue of data and information sharing across the service system. Through our experience, we have observed that databases across systems, services and organisations are siloed (i.e. Victoria Police, the courts, youth justice services and adult justice and correctional facilities all have different systems). This means there are limited ways to understand patterns of gender-based violence or what works in preventing and addressing it. We therefore call for the Plan to outline a national, coordinated approach to data and information sharing which could consist of a purpose-built database.

14. The draft National Plan reflects the needs and experiences of women and children.

On page 14, 'The impacts of violence against women and children – Australia' section of the draft Plan would be strengthened by including issue of chronic disengagement from services for some women and children. In our experience, there is a high correlation between family violence trauma and chronic disengagement from services. This is especially pronounced when women move interstate and have a limited support network and understanding of the new state system. In our experience, limited engagement with support services for the family can also result in disengagement with schooling for children who have experienced or are experiencing family violence.

Disengagement from education is a risk factor for justice involvement. This is reflected in data from the 2019 Victorian Youth Parole Board Annual Report where 68 per cent of detainees at the Parkville and Malmsbury Youth Justice precincts had previously been suspended or expelled from school⁸. Jesuit Social Services delivers the program *Navigator*, which provides case management and intensive outreach for young people to create their own education re-engagement plan. We strongly believe that a targeted approach to keeping children engaged or supporting them to reengage with education is a key preventative measure against justice system involvement. We call for specific evidence-based interventions for children that ensure that protective factors such as schooling are maintained.

15. The draft National Plan reflects the needs and experiences of diverse communities and individuals.

On page 27, under '**Intersectionality**' the draft Plan provides a broad outline of the needs and experiences of diverse communities and individuals but requires further detail to inform direct action, accountability and reform.

In particular, there needs to be further discussion of the needs of families from a CALD background. The *Inquiry into family, domestic and sexual violence* found that CALD women who experience family violence and

⁸ State of Victoria (2020). Youth Parole Board Annual Report 2019–20. Department of Justice and Community Safety, September 2020. ([Weblink](#))

coercive control are often faced with a number of additional challenges such as temporary visa status, lack of community support, financial dependence on perpetrator or entrenched patriarchal structures or attitudes⁹. As a provider of settlement support for newly arrived families, Jesuit Social Services has also observed that the very use of the phrase ‘family violence’ may be stigmatised in CALD communities due to cultural factors. This can make women from CALD communities reluctant to seek support. We must ensure that the family violence response system is culturally safe and sensitive to the needs of diverse communities. This means providing greater support for CALD women experiencing violence and help them to navigate the support system as well as ensuring the support offered is culturally safe.

Further to this, we highlight the need for the Plan to account for the diverse needs of women with disabilities. While existing data is useful, there are substantial knowledge gaps regarding the prevalence and nature of violence experienced by women with disabilities in Australia.¹⁰ The ABS personal safety survey only includes people who live in private dwellings. As a result, people with a disability who live in institutional settings are not included. Further, for safety reasons, the personal safety survey doesn’t include people who need support communicating. We highlight that this is a nuanced and complex issue and requires a clear plan of action.

17. The draft indicators and outcome measures provide a strong framework for measuring progress towards the next National Plan goals.

Jesuit Social Services would like to see the **indicators** (pages 50-52) align with the actions in relation to the four key pillars. For example, if a key action under ‘Response’ is to increase access to safe and secure housing for families working through violent situations, we need indicators that represent this.

The **indicators** must also include a greater focus on the processes needed to achieve change. Key to the effective implementation of policy reform are process indicators that contribute to the achievement of the desired outcomes.

Further, we would like to see the **indicators** measure the reduction of perpetration as well as measuring the rate at which victim-survivors seek help, advice and report violence, thereby shifting the onus from victim-survivors. Relatedly, given the importance of **engaging men and boys** to prevent and address harmful behaviours, the Plan needs to include measures that track this progress. We recommend the inclusion of the following indicators (page 51):

- Men who sought help, advice or support about partner or sexual violence
- Level of attachment to dominant masculine norms (e.g. data collection could be done through our Man Box Research)
- Workforce capacity building to engage with men and boys to prevent violence.

Lastly, careful consideration must be given in terms of how the indicators measure success. For example, the indicator ‘People are intolerant of violence against women’ (page 50) will be challenging to measure given the

⁹ Commonwealth of Australia. (2021). Inquiry into family, domestic and sexual violence. House of Representatives Standing Committee on Social Policy and Legal Affairs. Canberra.

¹⁰ Mitra-Kahn, T., Newbiggin, C., & Hardefeldt, S. (2016). Invisible women, invisible violence: Understanding and improving data on the experiences of domestic and family violence and sexual assault for diverse groups of women: State of knowledge paper. Sydney: ANROWS.



difficulties in capturing the attitudes and views of the whole community. It is also critical to ensure that the figures drawn on to inform the indicators take account of the significant issue of under-reporting.

We appreciate the Department of Social Services receiving our recommendations for Australia's next *National Plan to End Violence against Women and Children 2022-2032*. We would welcome an opportunity to discuss the points raised with you further.

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