



Reducing violence against women and their children

Statement from delegates at the Council of Australian Governments Summit on Reducing Violence Against Women and their Children

Purpose and background

On 2 and 3 October 2018, the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) Summit on Reducing Violence against Women and their Children was held in Adelaide. Over a hundred experts, Ministers and officials attended the Summit.

This statement from Summit delegates is presented to COAG to:

1. share outcomes from the Summit,
2. inform the Fourth Action Plan of the National Plan to Reduce Violence Against Women and their Children 2010-2022 (the National Plan), and
3. call for urgent action to end violence against women and their children.

Statement

Domestic, family and sexual violence against women is a national emergency. The estimated cost of violence to our economy is \$26 billion a year. Three million Australian women have experienced violence since the age of 15 by a person known to them. Every two minutes in Australia, police are called to a domestic violence incident. Every week, a woman is murdered by her current or former partner—in October 2018, the media reported that 11 women were killed in 22 days, with the majority reportedly killed by men they knew. Hundreds of thousands of women live in terror every day and are unable to reach their potential over a lifetime.

At the Summit, we discussed what immediate, medium and long-term action must be taken to end this crisis.

As First Ministers, Summit delegates ask that you:

1. Make violence against women and children the core political business of your governments. Violence against women impacts on every portfolio. This means violence against women is central to COAG's agenda. This national issue requires commitment from all—all Ministers, all governments, all sectors, all members of our community.
2. Have the long-term goal of eradicating violence against women front and centre of decision-making, and stay accountable to that goal. In policy making, constantly ask the question 'for a child born today, how will their relationships look in decades to come?'
3. Agree a Fourth Action Plan that sets an ambitious and evidence-based agenda for change—a Plan that builds on the prior three and creates consistency and accountability across the country, pushing each jurisdiction to do better and stop women and children from slipping through gaps in systems.
4. Adequately resource long-term efforts to address violence against women and children at a level that is meaningful and has most impact. Significant and sustained funding is needed to prevent more deaths and address the intergenerational impact of violence. Funding must value the important role of specialist services and responses.

5. Commit to a National Plan beyond 2022, and start working on it now. This commitment must be bipartisan and unequivocal.
6. Acknowledge that to stop violence, we must also address gender inequality—women will never be safe if they are not equal.
7. Acknowledge the complex intersections between gender inequality and other forms of inequality, discrimination and disadvantage, including colonisation, racism, ableism and homophobia that exist in our institutions and structures, and the role these play in driving violence against particular groups of women.
8. Support and respond to research that leads to evidence-based policy. Evaluation of programs and policies is essential to ensure accountability for outcomes and funding decisions.

Summit delegates call for specific action in the following areas:

We must invest in primary prevention and early intervention to stop violence at its source

We must commit to a long-term strategy with sustained funding in order to change attitudes and behaviour. We must understand what stages in people's lives provide the best opportunities to shape and change attitudes and behaviours. Education on respectful, appropriate relationships must cut across all settings – where people learn, work, live and play. We must listen to voices from diverse communities and tailor prevention and early intervention responses to their needs.

We must address the drivers of violence, such as gender inequality, end intergenerational trauma and stop the cycle of violence. In planning for the future, we must learn from successful national campaigns and strategies that have taken a multi-pronged approach to change community attitudes about issues such as smoking, seatbelts and AIDS. We must build on the momentum from campaigns like the COAG-funded Stop it at the Start campaign and do more to create lasting, generational change.

We must make reducing violence everyone's business

Addressing violence against women and children must move from the margins and become core business for all industries, sectors and areas of government. Change will not happen if violence does not go beyond women's portfolios and the specialist services that respond after the fact. We must drive change across systems, especially health, justice and policing, education, employment and migration. Workplaces must be supported to assist those who experience violence and equipped to respond to those who use it. We must listen to victim-survivors and empower the entire community to hold each other and governments to account.

Women's and community embedded services have been supporting and advocating for women and children affected by domestic, family and sexual violence for decades. We need to value, respect and develop the work and approaches of specialist practitioners and community controlled organisations. Without this, and ongoing resourcing, there is a danger that mainstreaming will erode specialist responses and more people will fall through the gaps. We must seek national consistency in quality and accessibility of services, and we must support services to respond to emerging challenges such as technology-facilitated abuse.

Business and the private sector, the broad community and families must be encouraged to take a role in addressing violence. We know that many in the community feel this issue needs urgent action but don't know what to do—we must engage with them to find solutions and assist them to act.

We must listen to lived experience and respect cultural knowledge

Delegates from a range of backgrounds emphasised “nothing about us without us”. Women from all communities must be listened to and involved in the development of policies and solutions. Lived experience and cultural knowledge must be valued and utilised.

All women must be able to access high quality, appropriate and non-discriminatory support wherever they live. Services and policies must respond to the unique and disproportionate violence experienced by particular women, such as women from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, migrant and refugee women (including women on temporary visas), women with disability, LGBTIQ+ people, older women, young women and women from regional and remote areas. We must acknowledge the complex and difficult relationships experienced by some women that make seeking help difficult, such as when a perpetrator is also a carer.

The needs of diverse groups must underpin all of the Fourth Action Plan and future approaches. Data and evaluations must be inclusive and representative of all women and their diverse and unique experiences.

We must acknowledge and better respond to the unique experiences of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and children

There has to be an understanding of trauma caused by colonisation and discrimination. This has been systemically perpetuated by ongoing policies that have an impact on family violence experienced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women, children and their communities.

“Nothing about our mob, without our mob” must be more than a slogan, and underpin all work with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. Responses to family violence go beyond gender—we must also engage men and boys. Policies must consider culture and country, at the heart of reform must be the involvement of the whole family and whole community.

We must work with local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Controlled Organisations and follow the lead of Indigenous women and men to use cultural knowledge to create change. We must support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Controlled Organisations to upskill, so they are empowered to further assist those in their communities impacted by violence. Communities must have ownership over data and how it's collected. Interventions with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who use violence must be culturally appropriate and trauma informed.

We must respond better to sexual violence, as a form of domestic and family violence and as a separate crime

We must go beyond raising awareness and drive behavioural change that promotes respectful and consensual sexual relationships. We must better educate young people on appropriate behaviour, and provide tailored education to meet the needs of all groups. Responses must be targeted to the experiences of all victim-survivors, including experiences that have happened in the past.

We need to empower more women to report and seek help after being sexually assaulted. This means giving women more choice in how they seek immediate and long term help, including from their community, police, lawyers and social workers. It means believing women and not re-traumatising them. Different options are needed for different women. Targeted responses must address the unacceptably high rate of sexual violence in some groups, such as women with intellectual disability.

We must improve systems so women and children are safe

We must reduce unnecessary system complexity, which stifles our progress and puts women and children at risk. Integration between services and government agencies in and across jurisdictions must improve. We must stop women and children falling through the cracks or being forced to tell their story repeatedly. Systems must empower women to report violence, not punish them.

Better collaboration between systems, such as policing and justice, child protection, family law, health, housing and specialist services, can help keep women safe and support them in the medium to long term. We must work to find the best ways to share lessons about what works across Australia, and solutions to build better and more integrated systems must be adequately resourced.

We must change the behaviour of people who choose to use violence

Violence must be stopped at its source. Legal systems and support services must make perpetrators accountable for their behaviour. Workforces, across all sectors, must be equipped to work with people who use violence. People who use violence must be supported to stop and to change their behaviours. Responses to perpetrators must be accountable to national standards.

We must respect the needs of children and young people as individuals

Responses to children and young people must be child/youth centred and their right to safety must be respected. Government and non-government service responses to the safety of women and children must be coordinated. They must meet the needs of each individual child or young person. Support workers must be resourced and equipped to understand and respond to the impacts of immediate and intergenerational trauma on children and young people. Refuges, crisis services, safe at home programs and other frontline supports should have staff and resources dedicated to working with children and young people as clients in their own right.

We must align and utilise other government policies that are addressing children and young people's safety and complement, not duplicate, their work. Children and young people who have experienced or witnessed violence need continuity of service and support staff. We must support children and young people who are impacted by violence to fulfil their potential and grow into adults that have respectful and safe relationships.

We must learn from what's working, be flexible and tailor our approaches

Across all these areas, we must increase the evidence base, be innovative and fund what works. We must use data effectively and evaluate our efforts. We must be committed to impactful change and continuous improvement. We must share good practice and build our collective knowledge, learn from each other and work together to end violence against women and their children.