



Catholic Social Services
Australia

Telephone 02 6285 1366
Facsimile 02 6285 2399

PO Box 326
Curtin ACT 2605
22 Theodore Street
Curtin ACT 2605
admin@cssa.org.au
www.cssa.org.au
ABN 18 810 059 716

To: National Plan to Reduce Violence Against Women and their Children
2010-22 Secretariat
Department of Social Services

Comments to inform the development of the Second Action Plan under the *National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children 2010-22*.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide input to the development of the *Second Action Plan under the National Plan to Reduce Violence Against Women and their Children 2010-22* (the Pla). I would like to apologise for the delay in submitting our submission.

Catholic Social Services Australia (CSSA) is the Catholic Church's peak national body for social services. For over 50 years, CSSA has assisted member agencies to promote a fairer, more inclusive society that reflects and supports the dignity, equality and participation of all people. Our 60 member agencies employ around 12,000 people, with 4,000 voluntary contributors to this work.

Many of CSSA's member organisations provide direct services to support women and children experiencing or fleeing from domestic violence, or violence in general. This includes specialised family support services, emergency accommodation, counselling and mediation and child contact services.

CSSA's belief is that violence against women and children has no place in our society whether it occurs in the family home, public institutions, the workplace or in the general community. Human dignity and respect for the individual and ultimately the family are important building blocks of the community. Social and economic isolation of individuals and even whole families can be a direct result of violence. This has broader ramifications for community wellbeing. CSSA recognises that the reasons for violence are complex and a multi-faceted response is required. CSSA also accepts that governments, business and community groups all have a part to play in reducing violence against women and children.

In general, CSSA would also like to see more attention given to evaluation of all existing and proposed action to reduce violence against women and their children. This should build on baseline data that existed at the start of the First Action Plan. Program evaluation would then feed into medium-longer term measurement of the impact of all National Plan activity.

Please find attached our input in the requested format. If you have any further queries please contact Liz de Chastel, Senior Policy Officer on (02) 6285 1366.

Yours sincerely

Jackie Brady
A/Executive Director
24th March 2014

CSSA response to key questions raised by Department of Social Services

What have been the achievements/gaps under the First Action Plan?

The integration of the *National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children 2010-2022* with other key national strategies such as *The National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children 2009–2020*, *The National Partnership Agreement on Homelessness*, *Stronger Futures* and *the National Disability Strategy* has been a positive feature of the First Action Plan. CSSA reiterates the important link between homelessness and domestic violence, as the Federal Government considers the future of *The National Partnership Agreement on Homelessness*.

The development of key primary prevention initiatives, including national websites such as '[The Line](#)' and the Western Australia Government's '[Youth Say No](#)', has been a great achievement and assisted in highlighting the need for greater awareness in the general community and especially among young people.

In addition, CSSA affirms ongoing support for the [White Ribbon Campaign](#) and the '[Safe at Home Safe at Work?](#)' project funded through the Australian Domestic Violence Clearing House. These have been positive accomplishments that should continue.

What are the opportunities for consolidating and building upon the actions undertaken under the National Priorities of the First Action Plan?

CSSA believes that increased engagement with the national police networks like the Standing Council on Police and Emergency Services would be warranted in the Second Action Plan.

CSSA has advice from our member agencies that in some jurisdictions there are a number of issues that could be resolved or at least minimised through better national co-ordination such as regular and adequate training and including but not limited to the following examples:

- failure to properly investigate;
- failure to charge where it is obvious an assault has occurred;
- failure to identify a single primary aggressor instead of minimising the unilateral violence that has occurred by including the victim as a primary aggressor;
- failure to record reports of violence and failure to understand how this evidence will assist in seeing the overall context and abuse patterns;
- failure to correctly read Family Domestic Violence (FDV) dynamics (for example, the person who has called for help may appear to be aggressive, while the alleged perpetrator may seem together, calm, collected and reasonable, so judgements are made based on how they present); and
- failure to understand why a victim may not want to make a statement and failure to collect other available evidence that will assist.

What types of other initiatives could benefit from a national focus?

Too often, children are *not* protected by the very Violence Restraining Orders (VRO) that are put in place to protect them. CSSA recommends that any ongoing law reform relating to families and children, especially concerning harm to children who are exposed to FDV, and any future actions under the National Plan of Action to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children, remain closely aligned.

Our agencies report that support for women and children experiencing domestic violence is more effective when provided within a multi-disciplinary context, for example, with specialised mental health, drug and alcohol or social work assistance.

We also support early intervention such as schools based and work place based responses that communicate with the whole community about appropriate behaviours and working and communicating with others to prevent violence.

In order to achieve greater efficiency and effectiveness in addressing violence against women, where is there scope to reduce duplication of programmes and services provided by the Commonwealth and the states and territories, as part of the Second Action Plan?

As with many issues that impact on a wide sector of the community a diverse response is required to enable flexibility in service delivery responses depending upon location, target group and programmes that can engage with difficult to reach communities.

While there may be some duplication, family and domestic violence programme services are rarely under-utilised and there appears an ever growing need to expand these programmes and their accessibility.

Which vulnerable groups and communities would benefit from an increased focus under the Second Action Plan?

Two groups that could benefit from an increased focus under the Second Action Plan include Indigenous and Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Groups, and families living in rural and remote regions. To do so the Plan would need to:

- recognise people from rural, remote and regional communities as a vulnerable group that face unique barriers to safety and justice, especially victims from such communities (for example, lack of access to support services and alternative accommodation and access to timely VRO applications);
- acknowledge that victims and their children should not be subjected to secondary victimisation arising as a result of inappropriate/ineffective responses to family violence and the children of victims should not be put at risk of further harm due to inappropriate/ineffective responses to FDV; and
- recognise that violence against women is a form of discrimination, a manifestation of historically unequal power relations between men and women, and a violation of women's human rights.

How can we better engage our leaders and broader civil society to address the attitudinal and cultural change required to reduce violence against women and their children?

Clients of the FDV system can be subjected to secondary victimisation due to inappropriate responses from officials within the legal system. We recommend that Federal, State and Territory Government police and directors of public prosecution undertake training on how the dynamics of family violence might affect the decisions of victims to negate the existence of family violence or to withdraw previous allegations of violence.

Any other comments you would like to make?

No.