

SAFE + EQUAL

Standing strong
against family
violence

Safe and Equal Response to the Federal Budget

4 April 2022

Earlier this year, the Commonwealth Government released a draft of the next *National Plan to End Violence Against Women and Children*. Just like the draft National Plan, this budget funds a handful of initiatives but lacks any clear strategy or detail for how these will be coordinated to achieve meaningful or lasting change for victim-survivors of family violence and ultimately end violence against women and children.

While the Morrison Government has made some commitments towards women's safety, this budget fails to address structural barriers affecting women and children experiencing or at risk of family violence, and signals that this government is not prepared to act to make meaningful change. We welcome the Commonwealth Government's recent funding for primary prevention - it is critical to focus on changing the underlying social conditions that produce and drive gendered violence, and that excuse, justify or even promote this violence, to prevent it from occurring in the first place. The government must also invest at the federal level in a sustainable support system for victim survivors in crisis and throughout their recovery.

In the 2022-23 Budget, the Federal Government has committed \$1.3 billion to fund the next National Plan, including:

- \$104M to address technology facilitated abuse,
- \$100M over five years to continue the Safe Places Emergency Accommodation program, which will fund around 720 new safe places for women and children,
- \$54.6M over five years for the Keeping Women Safe in their Homes Program,
- \$19M over five years for ANROWS to support data collection to better target services and policies to meet the needs of victim-survivors,
- \$100M over five years for trauma-informed counselling services to support victim-survivors and their families, and
- \$104M over five years for Our Watch.

While this investment is important, the reality is that \$1.3 billion in this budget is a small amount compared to the estimated \$21.7 billion that violence against women costs the Australian community every year.¹

To achieve maximum impact, this funding must be embedded in the specialist domestic, family and sexual violence sectors where expertise and skills are uniquely focused on keeping women and all victim survivors safe. This can only be achieved through shared responsibility by the federal government and states and territories working together. Siloed interventions without a cohesive and sustainably funded strategy are simply band aid solutions and will not end the family violence crisis in Australia. We know that while technology facilitated abuse is on the rise, technology-based responses to addressing family violence are not enough on their own. We need a whole-of-systems approach that pulls together housing, health and justice responses and is led by specialist family violence expertise to keep perpetrators accountable. It is also essential that the plan to achieve this is clear and sustainably funded.

¹ PCW (2015) A high price to pay: The Economic case for preventing violence against women. <https://www.pwc.com.au/publications/economic-case-preventing-violence-against-women.html#:~:text=We%20estimate%20that%20violence%20against,administration%20and%20social%20welfare%20costs.>

To this end, Safe and Equal is disappointed that the Commonwealth Government has again failed to address the drivers of family and gender-based violence, as well as the systemic barriers that prevent victim-survivors from accessing support and recovery options. In particular, we point to the following gaps in this budget:

- Funding for specialist family violence services directly at a level that meets true demand,
- Funding for community legal services and specialist family violence financial counsellors to make sure victim-survivors have access to legal and financial advice,
- Increasing social housing to prevent homelessness among those escaping family violence,
- Lifting income support payments to ensure those escaping family violence are not forced into poverty, and
- Reforming the immigration system to grant victim survivors of family violence on temporary visas access to income support and Medicare so they can leave a violent relationship,
- No allocated additional funding towards mandating and embedding whole school respectful relationships education across all government schools nationwide

In our response to the draft National Plan we called for:

- A National Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence Workforce and Recruitment and Retention Strategy to address the workforce shortage in the sector
- A separate National Plan to End Violence Against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Women and Children to give power back to Aboriginal communities to make sure the needs of their women and children are met
- An increase in income support payments to improve women's economic security and ability to leave relationships without being at risk of poverty
- Implementation of the recommendations set out in the *Blueprint for Reform: Removing Barriers to Safety for Victims/Survivors of Domestic and Family Violence who are on Temporary Visas*, including creating a new visa that gives women on temporary visas experiencing family violence and their children access to Medicare and income support
- Holistic reform of the family law system to ensure safety of victim-survivors is prioritised and to reduce opportunities for systems abuse,
- A National Housing and Homelessness Strategy to increase social housing stock to a level that meets demand to make it possible for more victim-survivors to access affordable, long-term housing and not be forced into homelessness if they leave a violent relationship.
- Standardised legislative definitions of family violence, so victim-survivors receive equitable legal responses across jurisdictions and perpetrators are consistently held to account,
- A national, flexible and accessible financial support package program – administered via \$54.6 million over five years for the Keeping Women Safe in their Homes Program specialist domestic, family and sexual violence services – to provide all victim-survivors with up to \$10,000 to establish long-term safety and independence,
- A common, evidence-based family violence risk assessment framework across jurisdictions that embeds a common understanding of family violence risk and how to respond across all sectors of the human services system,

- A plan to address the ‘crisis response gap’ at the interface of NDIS and specialist family violence services in close consultation with both sectors and victim-survivors with disabilities,
- A new Medicare item number for family violence counselling and therapeutic services, distinct from a general practitioner mental health treatment plan, and
- A workforce development strategy that includes long-term funding to help increase the size of the prevention workforce.

This budget could have been an opportunity to make a meaningful commitment to ending family violence in Australia. Unfortunately, it has not funded any of these crucial reforms, and the impact of family violence will continue to be felt by victim-survivors and the whole community. Until we see the development of a sustainably funded National Plan that identifies concrete actions and targets for addressing the drivers of violence and the systemic and structural barriers to accessing support and safety, at all levels of government and society, nothing will change.

We urge the Commonwealth Government to release a National Plan that commits to addressing family and gender-based violence in a systemic way, along with the funding necessary to achieve this.