

Women's Safety Summit and the National Plan to Reduce Violence Against Women and their Children

ACHIEVING GENDER EQUALITY AND FREEDOM FROM VIOLENCE

Opportunity for transformative change

The *National Plan to Reduce Violence Against Women* is an historic opportunity for the Australian Government to commit to transformative change to substantially reduce gender-based violence.

What women expect

We are in a period of widespread community mobilisation across Australia demanding justice for women. The Australian Government must honour the expectations of women across the nation and commit to eliminating violence against women in all its forms, and deliver a robust, evidence-based plan to achieve it.

Policy action on systems and structures that drive violence against women and children

The Australian Government has paid inadequate attention to legislative and policy measures to address structural gender inequality and the material barriers to women and children's safety. We need more than awareness raising. Without action to rectify barriers to safety and equality, women will continue to be trapped in violent relationships and we are unlikely to see a reduction in gender-based violence.

PRIORITY POLICY ACTIONS

Eliminate barriers to women's safety & financial security

1. Meet the needs of financially disadvantaged women

- An **income support system** that values unpaid caring and enables women and children to escape and recover from violence
- **Safe and secure housing** to enable women and children to escape and recover from violence
- Enable **women on Temporary Visas** to escape and recover from violence by providing access to income support

2. Equitable and safe workforce participation

- **Paid parental leave** that is accessible to both parents based on a shareable amount
- Implement all recommendations of the Australian Human Rights Commission's *Respect@Work* report and **eradicate workplace sexual harassment**

3. Remedy the lived impact of women's disproportionate share of unpaid work

- High-quality, affordable **early childhood education** and care
- Reform the **superannuation system** to better reflect women's full contributions (both paid and unpaid) and repair the significant gender gap in retirement incomes

Integrated best-practice family violence response nationally

4. Consistency across family violence response

- National **definition of family violence** that reflects its nature and dynamics – including recognising coercive control as a defining feature of most family violence
- National **best practice system framework** to ensure consistency across all parts of family violence response

5. Family law system that supports safety and financial security

- Put the **safety of family violence victim-survivors first** in the family law system:
 - Prioritise children's safety by removing the presumption of equal shared parental responsibility
 - The impact of family violence is addressed directly and at the earliest opportunity
 - Better integrate the family law, child protection and family violence jurisdictions
 - Establish mandatory family violence training and competency standards for all practitioners
- **Prioritise the future needs** of women and children by:
 - Addressing the economic and structural barriers that women face in achieving financial parity
 - Recognising that the financial outcomes the family law system can provide is central to safety and recovery
- **Increase** access to **specialist legal assistance** for victim-survivors, including in Family Dispute Resolution

6. Specialist women's services embed best practice across family violence response

- Recognise and resource the **crucial role of specialist women's services** – including women's legal services – in achieving best practice across the family violence system

About Women's Legal Service Victoria

Women's Legal Service Victoria is a not for profit specialist organisation which has been providing free specialist legal services to women since 1982. We work with and for women to address legal issues arising from family violence and relationship breakdown.

We exist to help build a gender equitable country. Our unique contribution to this vision – as lawyers, advocates and educators – is to work alongside women experiencing disadvantage to promote their rights to live free from violence and make informed choices about their relationships.

Women's Legal specialises in family violence, family law and child protection law – recognising the intersection between the jurisdictions. We do this by:

- Providing legal advice and representation to women
- Advocating for law and policy that respects and promotes the rights of women
- Building the capacity of other professionals and communities to identify and respond appropriately to legal need