



National Plan to End Violence against Women and Children 2022-2032

YACSA is the peak body in South Australia representing the interests of young people, youth workers, organisations, and networks throughout the non-government youth sector. Policy positions are independent and not aligned with any political party or movement. YACSA supports the fundamental right of all young people to participate in and contribute to all aspects of community life, particularly the decision-making processes that impact them.

YACSA welcomes the opportunity to provide a perspective focused on young people in relation to ending the epidemic levels of violence against women and children that persist in Australia, and we welcome the release of the Draft National Plan to End Violence Against Women and Children 2022-2032.

YACSA maintains that government, institutions, workplaces, and the community play a vital role in instigating social and cultural change to prevent violence against women and children before it starts and that, as identified by Australia's National Research Organisation for Women's Safety, we note that young people are agents of change in ending violence against women and children and should be prioritised as such¹.

Since the first National Plan to Reduce Violence Against Women and their Children released in 2010, rates of family and intimate partner violence have scarcely improved, and sexual violence rates have increased². It is evident the plan's target of significantly and sustainably reducing violence against women and children has not been met³. There remains an urgent need for change, and for change to transpire we need an overarching strategy containing specific steps to reach specific targets. While the draft of the National Plan indicates that it is a "blueprint for change", much like the original national plan, it lacks detail on planning, implementation and does not include detailed steps to meet measurable performance targets⁴. Having access to the consultation reports completed for the draft National Plan to End Violence Against Women and Children would significantly assist in providing adequate feedback on the draft.

Key points

- Young people are impacted by domestic, family, and sexual violence by witnessing, intervening, perpetrating, and experiencing violence themselves.
- Prevention education should be co-designed with young people, based on long-term peer-to-peer education, and aim to shift attitudes that are supportive of violence against women and gender inequality.

¹ Struthers, K., Parmenter, N., & Tilbury, C. (2019). Young people as agents of change in preventing violence against women: Research report, 02/2019. ANROWS. <https://www.anrows.org.au/publication/young-people-as-agents-of-change-in-preventing-violence-against-women/>

² Australian Bureau of Statistics. (2021). Sexual Violence – Victimization (August 2021). ABS.

³ The Council of Australian Governments. (2011). The National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children: Including the first three-year Action Plan. Department of Social Services. <https://www.dss.gov.au/women/programs-services/reducing-violence/the-national-plan-to-reduce-violence-against-women-and-their-children-2010-2022>

⁴ The Auditor-General. (2019). Auditor-General Report no. 45 2018-19 Performance Audit – Coordination and Targeting of Domestic Violence Funding and Actions. Australian National Audit Office. <https://www.anao.gov.au/work/performance-audit/coordination-and-targeting-domestic-violence-funding-and-actions>

- Mental health and wellbeing support systems must be adequate to provide trauma-informed early intervention for young people who experience or perpetrate violence.
- Young people should be supported to access targeted responses when they experience violence and to respond themselves when witnessing disrespect or violence towards women.
- The non-government youth sector remains in a unique position to provide targeted long-term recovery support for young people but requires adequate investment to deliver and evaluate services.

Pillar one - Prevention

YACSA welcomes the recognition of young people as victim-survivors and perpetrators of violence against women and children and the increased risks for young Australians. The importance of family relationships for young people's emotional and psychosocial development and wellbeing is paramount, as is acknowledging that young peoples' family relationships commonly comprise of structures outside of the traditional nuclear family unit including foster carers, extended family, same-sex parents, and created families. Young peoples' intimate relationships are also an integral aspect of their social and emotional development. YACSA acknowledges the importance of supportive and respectful relationships for young people as well as the importance of respectful relationships education to prevent violence against women and children.

Young people, especially young women, are at greater risk of experiencing violence and thus are rightfully identified as a focus in previous National Plans and Change the Story framework⁵. Prevention, as a pillar of the draft National Plan, aims to stop violence against women and children before it starts⁶. Prevention education that addresses underlying drivers of violence against women and children must be prioritised for young people as current prevention education programs fall short⁷. Prevention through respectful relationships education, for students who can access it, is often short-term and framed from a risks perspective, especially concerning consent. This approach can reinforce stigma as well as be a barrier to full engagement and honest discussion⁸. For prevention education to be effective it must meet young people where they are, and consult with them on design, implementation, and delivery. It is also beneficial for effectiveness to design long-term education that seeks to build trusting relationships between educators and young people⁹.

Attitudes towards gender equality and violence against women are strong indicators for acceptance and perpetration of violence against women¹⁰. These attitudes have far-reaching consequences from influencing responses, to impacting family and friend support, and can impact perpetrators of violence as much as victim-survivors. Challenging violence-supporting attitudes at an individual and community level is a prevention priority identified internationally¹¹. Therefore, the key to prevention education for young people is shifting attitudes that support violence against women and gender inequality through programs designed and delivered with young people.

⁵ Council of Australian Governments, *National Plan*, p. 11

⁶ Our Watch (2021). *Respectful relationships education to prevent gender-based violence: Lessons from a multi-year pilot in primary schools*. Our Watch. <https://www.ourwatch.org.au/resource/respectful-relationships-education-to-prevent-gender-based-violence-final-evaluation-report/>

⁷ McCarry, M., and Lombard, N. (2016). Same old story? Children and young people's continued normalisation of men's violence against women. *Feminist Review*, 112 (1), 128–43. <https://doi.org/10.1057/fr.2015.50>

⁸ Struthers, *Young People as Agents of Change*, p. 50

⁹ Quadara, A., O'Brien, W., Ball, O., Douglas, W., & Vu, L. (2020). *Good Practice in Delivering and Evaluating Interventions for Young People with Harmful Sexual Behaviours*. ANROWS. <https://www.anrows.org.au/publication/good-practice-in-responding-to-young-people-with-harmful-sexual-behaviours-key-findings-and-future-directions>

¹⁰ Webster, K., Diemer, K., Honey, N., Mannix, S., Mickle, J., Morgan, J., Parkes, A., Politoff, V., Powell, A., Stubbs, A., & Ward, A. (2018). *Australian's Attitudes Towards Violence Against Women and Gender Equality: Findings of the 2017 National Community Attitudes towards Violence Against Women Survey*. ANROWS. <https://www.anrows.org.au/publication/australians-attitudes-to-violence-against-women-and-gender-equality-findings-from-the-2017-national-community-attitudes-towards-violence-against-women-survey/>

¹¹ McCarry, *Same Old Story?*, p. 128

Understandably, as attitudes are influenced by day-to-day environments, it has been demonstrated young people do not inherently hold more positive attitudes towards violence against women and gender inequality than older cohorts as some have theorised, and therefore prevention education to support and educate young people is needed¹². The National Community Attitudes towards Violence against Women Survey (NCAS) demonstrates that while most young people in Australia hold attitudes and beliefs that recognise gender inequality and violence against women, there remains areas of concern. Most notably, there is a concerning decline in the proportion of young people that understand intimate partner violence is most likely to be perpetrated by men, and nearly a quarter of young people do not agree that violence against women is common¹³. This is concerning as not only do these attitudes undermine the evidence base for prevention programs, but because holding beliefs that support gender inequality are predictors of accepting or perpetrating violence against women¹⁴.

Young people are agents for generational change and should be the primary focus of prevention. Prevention education that focusses on demonstrating acceptable and harmful relational behaviour and education about affirmative and informed consent have been shown to positively influence attitudes and beliefs held by young people¹⁵. Respectful relationships education is grounded in a gender-based framework, based on evidence that demonstrates gender inequality as a primary driver of violence against women and children. Entrenched gender inequality promotes disrespect of women, reinforces attitudes supportive of violence, and limits women's capacity to recognise and leave harmful relationships¹⁶. Research demonstrates interactive, action-based peer-to-peer learning within a school, sport or recreational club, youth-based organisation and on social media to be most successful in shifting young people's attitudes¹⁷. ANROWS has demonstrated young people highly value peer-to-peer education on respectful relationships and the positive impacts of this delivery method¹⁸. From this work by ANROWS, evaluation has identified the need to fully fund and embed prevention approaches within an educational setting that utilises long-term peer-to-peer learning. YACSA welcomes the inclusion of efforts to ensure programs on respectful relationships, consent education and emotional literacy are available to all ages and reinforces the importance of young people's participation in developing and implementing targeted primary prevention activities.

Pillar two: Early Intervention

Breaking the cycle of intergenerational violence through early intervention and providing young people who experience or perpetrate violence with support, programs and resources is a vital aspect of ending violence against women and children. As stated in the draft National Plan's focus areas for early intervention, there is a need to ensure trauma from experiences of violence, which increase the risk of revictimisation and perpetration, can be addressed¹⁹. Currently, the systems in place to support young people's mental health and wellbeing are struggling to meet demand, resulting in young people in need of support either facing lengthy delays or missing out completely. Regardless of whether young people are victim-survivors or perpetrators of violence, mental health and wellbeing support is a crucial service in early intervention especially as young people who experience or

¹² Politoff, V., Crabbe, M., Honey, N., Mannix, S., Mickle, J., Morgan, J., Parkes, A., Powell, A., Stubbs, J., Ward, A., & Webster, K. (2019). Young Australians' attitudes to violence against women and gender equality: Findings from the 2017 National Community Attitudes towards Violence against Women Survey (NCAS). ANROWS. <https://www.anrows.org.au/NCAS/2017/youth-report-findings/>

¹³ Ibid, p. 6

¹⁴ Ibid

¹⁵ Kearney, S., Gleeson, C., Leung, L., Ollis, D., and Joyce, A. (2019). *Respectful Relationships Education in Schools: The Beginning of Change: Final Evaluation Report*. Our Watch. <https://www.ourwatch.org.au/resource/final-evaluation-report-respectful-relationships-education-in-schools-the-beginnings-of-change>

¹⁶ Council of Australian Governments, *National Plan*, p. 14

¹⁷ Struthers, *Young People as Agents of Change*, p. 9

¹⁸ Ibid

¹⁹ Boxall, H., Morgan, A., and Brown, R. (2020). *The Prevalence of Domestic Violence Among Women During the COVID-19 Pandemic: Statistical Bulletin no. 28*. Australian Institute of Criminology. <https://doi.org/10.52922/sb04718>

perpetrate family, intimate partner, or sexual violence are at greater risk of perpetrating or experiencing violence later in life²⁰.

The draft National Plan recognises that further research is needed for effective intervention strategies targeted to young people who use violence. This research must support systems to move away from incident focused intervention, and instead prioritise long-term holistic support including therapeutic, educational, financial, and social support. Current research notes a need to develop police responses and child protection frameworks to incorporate outreach based on whole family support that focuses on improving perpetrator accountability and restorative justice²¹. Perpetrator behaviour change programs (PBCPs) are used in Australia, much like the federally funded programs that concluded in 2019 and are currently awaiting evaluation. For these programs to be effective, they must include support to shift attitudes and change behaviour while also providing psychosocial support like accommodation. We must also ensure there is a widespread understanding of the aims of PBCPs which are more appropriately based on a variety of indicators and not simply a reduction in reports of violence. This is important as we know people, including young people, who use violence in the home likely exhibit non-physical forms of violence²². Further expansion of support services like legal assistance specifically targeted to young people who use violence and are subject to intervention orders, as well as investment in both crisis and long-term accommodation options linked closely to therapeutic support, are also necessary to divert young people from the justice system as a means of early intervention²³.

Pillar three: Response

Young people, especially young women, are at greater risk of experiencing violence, particularly sexual violence, and experiences of violence have significant long-term impacts on wellbeing and health. So too does witnessing family, intimate partner, and sexual violence²⁴. Impacts from experiences of or witnessing violence are far-reaching including affecting young peoples' physical, neurological, and emotional development, sense of security, mental health and cognitive function, and so responses must be targeted specifically to young people and provide holistic support. Part of genuinely recognising young people as victim-survivors or perpetrators in their own right is providing services specifically targeted to them, and adequately resourcing those services to provide system-wide support. Adequate investment supports recognition for how young peoples' needs are distinct from other groups and helps to extend suitable and sustainable support services inclusive of safe accommodation, access to adequate income support, and trauma-informed wellbeing support²⁵.

Given a significant portion of people who experience violence seek informal support from friends or family, it is crucial young people receive adequate education concerning respectful relationships, affirmative and informed consent, as well as gender equality²⁶. Generally, attitudes supportive of violence against women are improving and most young Australians reject problematic attitudes that contribute to violence, however, there remain areas of concern that can impact responses. Young

²⁰ Australian Institute of Health and Welfare. (2021). *Family, domestic and sexual violence*. Retrieved from <https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/australias-welfare/family-domestic-and-sexual-violence>

²¹ Quadara, *Good Practice in Delivering*, p. 115

²² Chung, D., Upton-Davis, K., Cordier, R., Campbell, E., Wong, T., Salter, M., Austen, S., O'Leary, P., Breckenridge, J., Vlasis, R., Green, D., Pracilio, A., Young, A., Gore, A., Watts, L., Wilkes-Gillan, S., Speyer, R., Mahoney, N., Anderson, S., and Bissett, T. (2020). *Improved accountability: The role of perpetrator intervention systems: Research report, 20/2020*. ANROWS. <https://www.anrows.org.au/publication/improved-accountability-the-role-of-perpetrator-intervention-systems/>

²³ Campbell, E., Ritcher, J., Howard, J., & Cockburn, H. (2020). The PIPA Project: Positive Interventions for Perpetrators of Adolescent Violence in the Home (AVITH): Research Report 04/2020. ANROWS. <https://www.anrows.org.au/project/the-pipa-project-positive-interventions-for-perpetrators-of-adolescent-violence-in-the-home-avith/>

²⁴ AIHW, *Family, Domestic and Sexual Violence*

²⁵ Campbell, E., Ritcher, J., Howard, J., & Cockburn, H. (2020). The PIPA Project: Positive Interventions for Perpetrators of Adolescent Violence in the Home (AVITH): Research Report 04/2020. ANROWS. <https://www.anrows.org.au/project/the-pipa-project-positive-interventions-for-perpetrators-of-adolescent-violence-in-the-home-avith/>

²⁶ AIHW, *Family, Domestic and Sexual Violence*

women are particularly vulnerable to sexual violence, especially sexual assault, with the highest rate of sexual assault victimisation being women aged 15-19 years of age²⁷.

Additionally, nearly one in four young men show attitudes suggesting disregard for consent²⁸. Therefore, it is concerning that 45 per cent of young men and almost half of Australians overall (42 per cent) believe sexual assault allegations are commonly used by women to “get back at men”²⁹. Primarily and urgently, more needs to be done to ensure young people, especially young men, and the community understand false accusations are evidenced to be extremely rare. This false belief maintains an almost insurmountable barrier for victim-survivors seeking support or reporting sexual violence which means a formal response, no matter how well developed and implemented, will be inaccessible to many victim-survivors³⁰.

At least four in ten young people stated in the 2017 ANROW’s Young Australian’s Attitudes Towards Violence Against Women survey that they do not know where to seek outside support for violence related issues, and while most young people would act or would like to act if witnessing disrespect or violence towards women, they do not feel supported to do so³¹.

Pillar four – Recovery

Recovery support is fundamental for regaining safety, health, and security. Providing adequate support to young people includes long-term financial, social, and psychological support to assist them to reconnect with family, community, and their own independence. As noted in the draft National Plan to End Violence Against Women and Children, services specifically for recovering young people need to be holistic, accessible, targeted, and trauma-informed while working to reduce the potential for future victimisation and perpetration. This makes the recovery support needs of young people unique to other groups especially as Australia is yet to develop substantive youth-specific integrated services³².

The youth sector workforce has long reported that, due to delays in accessing services and the relational nature of youth work, they are de facto mental health support workers for young people³³. The relational nature of youth work performed within non-government youth organisations places the sector in prime position to be able to provide the holistic and targeted recovery support needed, but only if the sector is provided with adequate resources, recognition, and provisions to effectively support young people’s increasingly complex needs³⁴. As holistic support in response and recovery is most effective for young people, adequate funding must be provided to youth sector organisations to facilitate the sector in co-designing targeted recovery support services with young people³⁵.

²⁷ ABS, *Sexual Violence – Victimisation*

²⁸ Politoff, *Young Australian’s Attitudes towards Violence*, p. 27

²⁹ Webster, *Australian’s Attitudes towards Violence*, p. 86

³⁰ Minter, K., Carlisle, E., and Coumarelos, C. (2021). Chuck Her on a Lie Detector - Investigating Australian’s Mistrust in Women’s Reports of Sexual Assault: Research Report 04/2021 . ANROWS. <https://www.anrows.org.au/publication/chuck-her-on-a-lie-detector-investigating-australians-mistrust-in-womens-reports-of-sexual-assault/>

³¹ Politoff, *Young Australian’s Attitudes towards Violence*, p. 19

³² Bond, S. (2010) *Integrated Service Delivery for Young People – A Literature Review*. Brotherhood of St Laurence.

[https://www.google.com/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=&ved=2ahUKewjqk8aZ2IX2AhV8SGwGHcbBD6QQFnoECAIQAQ&url=https%3A%2F%2Flibrary.bsl.org.au%2Fjspui%2Fbitstream%2F1%2F6156%2F1%2FBond Integrated service delivery for young people lit review 2010.pdf&usq=AOvVaw2a4nSyH3do3WdmWDowZuzo](https://www.google.com/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=&ved=2ahUKewjqk8aZ2IX2AhV8SGwGHcbBD6QQFnoECAIQAQ&url=https%3A%2F%2Flibrary.bsl.org.au%2Fjspui%2Fbitstream%2F1%2F6156%2F1%2FBond%20Integrated%20service%20delivery%20for%20young%20people%20lit%20review%202010.pdf&usq=AOvVaw2a4nSyH3do3WdmWDowZuzo)

³³ Bartlett, J., and Stratford, B. (2021). A National Agenda for Children’s Mental Health. Child Trend.

<https://www.childtrends.org/publications/a-national-agenda-for-childrens-mental-health>

³⁴ Collin, P., Palombo, L., Marrades, R., Lala, G., Vromen, A., and Maci, G. (2016). *Creating Benefit for All – Young People, Engagement and Public Policy*. Young and Well Cooperative Research Centre. www.youngandwellcrc.org.au

³⁵ Mental Health Coordinating Council. (2014). *Recovery for Young People: Recovery Orientation in Youth Mental Health and Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) – Discussion Paper*. Mental Health Coordinating Council.

GPO Box 2117
Adelaide SA 5001

Level 4, 182 Victoria Square, Tarntanyangga
Adelaide SA 5000

08 8211 7546
yacsa@yacsa.com.au
www.yacsa.com.au



youth affairs council
OF SOUTH AUSTRALIA