

**EMBOLDEN SA INC:**  
**SUBMISSION TO DRAFT**  
**NATIONAL PLAN TO END**  
**VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN AND**  
**CHILDREN 2022-2032**

**FEBRUARY 2022**

## **About Embolden**

Embolden is the statewide peak body of organisations working to respond to and eliminate domestic, family and sexual violence in South Australia.

Our members provide services that promote women and their children's safety and wellbeing, and work to prevent and respond to violence against women.

We lobby and advocate for women's rights to respect, safety and self determination, and represent providers of specialist services in the domestic, family and sexual violence and related sectors, including services that work with men who use violence against women and Aboriginal specialist services.

## **Acknowledgement of Country**

We acknowledge and respect Aboriginal peoples as the state's first peoples and nations, and recognise Aboriginal peoples as traditional owners and occupants of land and waters in South Australia. Sovereignty has never been ceded. It always was and always will be, Aboriginal land.

We recognise that their spiritual, social, cultural and economic practices come from their traditional lands and waters, that they maintain their cultural and heritage beliefs, languages and laws which are of ongoing importance, and that they have made and continue to make a unique and irreplaceable contribution to the state. We acknowledge that Aboriginal peoples have endured, and continue to endure, injustices and dispossession of their traditional lands and waters.

We continue to pay respect to the resilience and strengths of Ancestors and Elders past, present and those emerging.

### About this Submission

This submission has been prepared by Embolden with consultation and input from its members and key stakeholders, including women with and without children who have lived experience of domestic, sexual and family violence.

The term 'sexual and gender-based violence', used throughout this paper, allows us to encompass not only intimate partner or domestic and family violence, but also sexual violence committed outside of intimate relationships as well as violence against women committed by and within institutions. This term encompasses violence committed against women (both cis-and-transgender) as well as non-binary people, serving as "an umbrella term for any harmful act that is perpetrated against a person's will and that is based on socially ascribed (i.e., gender) differences between males and females" (UNFPA 2019, pg. v). The term 'sexual and gender-based violence' draws attention to underlying drivers of violence that are rooted in rigid and binary gender norms, gender inequality, unequal power relationships, coercion and control, and reinforced by patriarchal social constructs (UNHCR 2021, DV Vic 2020). It includes sexual violence that can occur both within and outside the context of domestic and family violence.

The language 'violence against women' and 'violence against women and their children' is also used to acknowledge that most sexual and gender-based violence is perpetrated by men against women and their children, while recognising that children must be recognised as victim-survivors of SGBV in their own right. Additionally, it should be noted that other forms of violence against children (such as corporal punishment, institutional abuse and neglect) not adequately addressed under responses to SGBV must and should be addressed as intersecting, yet distinct, expressions of violence requiring targeted and specialist responses and prevention strategies.

### Acronyms used

<b>DFV</b>	Domestic and family violence
<b>DFSV</b>	Domestic, family and sexual violence
<b>LGBTIQ+</b>	People who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex or queer
<b>RRR</b>	Rural, regional and remote areas
<b>SGBV</b>	Sexual and gender-based violence
<b>SWDFVS</b>	Specialist women's domestic and family violence services
<b>TPV</b>	Temporary Protection Visa

This submission is provided on behalf of our member organisations, including:

Bramwell House  
Ceduna Regional Domestic Violence and Aboriginal Family Violence  
Services  
Coober Pedy Regional DV & Aboriginal Family Violence Service  
Cross Border/APY Lands Aboriginal Family Violence Service  
Fleurieu and KI DV Service  
Homelessness Gateway Service  
Kornar Winmil Yunti Aboriginal Cooperation  
Limestone Coast Domestic Violence Service  
Murray Mallee and Adelaide Hills DV Service  
Nunga Mi:Minar  
OARS Community Transitions  
Port Augusta Regional DV & Aboriginal Family Violence Service  
Relationships Australia (SA)  
Riverland Domestic Violence Service  
Victim Support Service  
Vinnie's Women's Crisis Centre  
Whyalla Regional Domestic Violence Service  
Women's Legal Service SA  
Women's Safety Services SA  
Yarredi Services  
Yarrow Place  
Yorke and Mid North Domestic Violence Service  
Zahra Foundation Australia

## INTRODUCTION

Embolden welcomes the opportunity to provide input into the draft *National Plan to End Violence against Women and Children 2022-2032* (the 'National Plan').

While there is much to be commended in the draft Plan, including the Foundation Principles upon which the Plan is based, there are significant opportunities to strengthen the Plan as Australia's blueprint for achieving significant reduction and ultimately elimination of men's violence against women and their children. In acknowledging the severity and prevalence of sexual and gender-based violence as a national emergency, the Second National Plan must prioritise timely action, proper implementation, and measurable targets, specifying how action will be resourced, monitored, and overseen, if it is to achieve its 'Towards Zero' objective. To build and strengthen the four National Pillars of the Plan will require significant and sustained investment across multiple sectors, including specialist women's, legal, health, and social services. This will ensure that long-term progress can be made while also meeting the immediate needs of women, gender-diverse people and children who are at risk of or experiencing sexual and gender-based violence.

## SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

- Ongoing consultation with, and sustainable funding and resourcing for, Aboriginal community controlled organisations and peak bodies including the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Women Alliance (NATSIWA) and Family Violence Prevention Legal Service (FVPLS)
- Incorporation of an Environmental Justice framework in consideration of the gendered impact of climate change and natural disasters
- A more inclusive approach and application of an intersectional lens
- Ensure that expressions of SGBV beyond intimate partner violence are adequately recognised and addressed, including targeted strategies for prevention, early intervention, response and recovery for affected individuals and communities
- Commit to significant investment in specialist SGBV services, including 50% increase to baseline funding, delivered through non-competitive tendering and funding cycles of at least three to five years
- Ongoing consultation with specialist SGBV services and peak bodies on the development of the Outcomes Framework, the Action Plan targets and the Evaluation Plan in future iterations of the Plan and Action Plans

## DISCUSSION

### Context for the Second National Plan

Overall, the draft Plan does an adequate job of explaining the prevalence, drivers and different forms of SGBV in Australia, including and particularly men's domestic, family and sexual violence against women and their children, although there are key areas which could be strengthened. Sustaining a focus on men as the predominant perpetrators of violence, and intersecting forms of privilege and oppression that co-exist alongside the gendered drivers of violence, would further ground the Principles and Pillars of the draft Plan, and strengthen response and prevention outcomes, for example addressing the need for adequately funded and accessible gender inclusive specialist sexual assault services. The ongoing effects of colonisation and intergenerational trauma inflicted upon Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, among other drivers of violence against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and their children, must be explicitly recognised and addressed (Our Watch 2018). Embolden supports the development of a dedicated Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Action Plan, codesigned and led by First Nations communities and the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Advisory Council. We recommend and note the necessity of consulting with, and providing sustainable funding and resourcing for, Aboriginal community controlled organisations and peak bodies including the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Women Alliance (NATSIWA) and Family Violence Prevention Legal Service (FVPLS).

The need for consistent, national definitions of key terminology relating to SGBV has long been recognised and is welcomed in the draft Plan. However, the need for ongoing, specialist and expert-by-experience led consultation is evident and noticeable throughout the draft Plan. In particular, in seeking to define coercive control, it is necessary to recognise that coercive control is not a 'type' of domestic, family and intimate partner violence, rather, it is a redefinition of the key ways in which we understand the nature and pattern of behavior present within violence relationships and the power relationships it creates. Physical violence, emotional, financial, and psychological and other forms of abuse cannot be seen as separate ways in which DFV is experienced. Coercive control describes the way in which these types of abuses are used and woven together in relationships that disempower and undermine victim-survivors' perception of the human rights abuse that is occurring.

It is necessary to ensure that sexual violence and assault is better understood and recognised in the draft National Plan, outside of a domestic and family violence context. To enable this, further and ongoing consultation with and leadership must be sought from communities and individuals with lived experience. Also needed in the Plan is recognition -- and mechanisms to address -- the retraumatisation that victim-survivors often experience as a result of interacting with systems while they are experiencing and/or in the process of recovering from SGBV, including and especially those that are intended to protect and support them, for example health, disability, legal and justice responses.

Missing from the discussion of impact of natural disasters on violence prevalence and severity is acknowledgement of the role of climate change in exacerbating and driving natural disaster occurrence and its effects, including economic impact, scarcity of resources, and increased prevalence and severity of SGBV. Embolden recommends that an Environmental Justice framework, as considered by Gender and Disaster Australia, is incorporated into the National Plan in consideration of the gendered impact of climate change and natural disasters (Weiss, 2015).

Finally, we note that the title of the National Plan has shifted, dropping the possessive pronoun *their* included in previous iterations of the Plan, to become the National Plan to End Violence against Women and Children. Embolden commends the approach to inclusivity that is signposted (if not thoroughly embedded) throughout the draft Plan, and recommends that the Plan title either be restored to reflect considered language around ‘ending violence against women and *their* children’ and more precisely indicate the intended scope of the Plan, or further revise the title to ‘end sexual and gender-based violence’ as an expression of intersectionality and inclusion, while recognising that men remain overwhelmingly the perpetrators of SGBV (ABS 2022, ABS 2016), which predominantly affects women and their children.

#### Reflection of lived experience and specialist knowledge

Throughout the draft Plan and consultation processes leading to its development, the vital importance of including a diversity of voices with lived experience, including First Nations women, culturally and linguistically diverse communities, women and girls with disabilities, and sexual assault survivors, is noted. However, the draft Plan does not sufficiently address how it is proposed to ensure these and other survivor voices are heard. The delay in making consultation outcomes accessible to stakeholders makes it difficult to respond as to whether the draft Plan has adequately represented and incorporated lived experience. Another key gap in the draft Plan is acknowledgement of the role of specialist women’s-led services, which provide expert, integrated and coordinated support for victim-survivors. Domestic and family violence services, sexual assault and rape crisis services, women’s legal services, and women’s health services must be recognised centrally and in their own right in the plan.

### Foundations and Pillars of the National Plan

The Foundation Principles provide a strong underpinning for actions under the Plan. However, they must be more explicitly linked to the National Pillars, with tangible actions attached to each. Additionally, we support the inclusion of a human rights lens and safety focus within the foundations of the National Plan. Such an approach would help to address some of the shortcomings of the draft Plan, including the lack of consideration of intersecting forms of oppression alongside gender inequality – in particular, the Plan needs to address the ongoing trauma impact of colonisation on First Nations communities.

### **Prevention**

Primary prevention is critical to the success of efforts to eradicate violence against women and their children. Targeted and cohesive strategies for primary prevention must go hand in hand with crisis response efforts, and everything that comes in between in consideration of a holistic framework to respond to SGBV. The draft National Plan could be greatly strengthened by drawing more from Our Watch's landmark primary prevention strategies, *Change the Story: A shared framework for the primary prevention of violence against women and their children in Australia* (Our Watch, 2015, updated 2021) and *Changing the Picture: A national resource to support the prevention of violence against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and their children* (Our Watch, 2018). Efforts under the National Plan towards attitudinal change must be matched with a focus on structural and systemic settings, and must be led by experts by experience and the specialist services that support them.

As noted elsewhere in this submission and by others, the focus throughout the draft Plan on intimate partner violence contributes to gaps in prevention strategies for other expressions of gender-based violence. We wish to highlight the importance of intersectional approaches and culturally safe and appropriate prevention strategies and initiatives (such as Our Watch's *Changing the Picture*) that are led by the experiences and voices of those who are all too often marginalised within a Western-centric, colonial, middle class sociopolitical context. These include Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and their children; CALD communities; LGBTIQ+ people, those living with disabilities, younger and older women. See *Changing the Picture* (Our Watch); *Pride in Prevention* (Rainbow Health), the *National Gender Equality Plan* (Equality Rights Alliance), *Intersectionality Matters* (Multicultural Centre for Women's Health) and *Preventing Violence against Women with Disabilities: Integrating a Human Rights Perspective* (Women with Disabilities Australia) for further discussion and recommendations.

### **Early Intervention**

Despite the strong international evidence supporting the benefits and efficacy of early interventions for children, families and individuals, there remains limited data on early interventions into family violence within an Australian context (Cameron, 2016). Embolden welcomes the focus in the draft Plan on research and development of early intervention strategies and modes of engagement that are evidence-based and community-led. We agree



that approaches to perpetrators must be consistent and constructive, and that behaviour change models should be supported whole-of-system – however the need for specialist perpetrator behaviour change programs to lead this work, including a strong focus on and adherence to the NOSPI needs to be explicitly and strongly embedded in the Plan. Specialist perpetrator behaviour change programs and services need to be better resourced to connect with relevant departments and agencies – this work cannot be outsourced or diluted.

Further, the language around, and inclusion of, ‘what drives men to perpetrate violence, including the role of their own lived experience of violence and trauma and the impact of use of alcohol and other drugs’ (pg. 33), as a focus area for early intervention of SGBV runs perilously close to minimising perpetrators’ accountability while at the same time demonising those with substance abuse issues and lived experience of trauma, potentially diverting much-needed research and response resources from other strategies as put forward by the draft Plan. Embolden reiterates the primacy of learned and lived expertise in driving research directions relating to perpetrator behaviour and intervention strategies.

### ***Response***

Over the past fifty years, the specialist women’s domestic and family violence service (SWDFVS) sector has developed and maintained and refined the knowledge, skill and competence required to tailor service responses that apply a safety first principle and provide immediate, medium and long-term support and solutions for individuals and communities experiencing gender-based violence. However, the vital role of this sector appears to be largely overlooked in the draft National Plan.

Specialist services, particularly those led by women and gender-diverse people, need to be adequately resourced and supported to deliver those services comprehensively and equally for women and children accessing assistance into the future. Embolden recommends commitments within the National Plan are included to increase funding to specialist women’s and culturally specific services that meet the standards the Australian Women Against Violence Alliance (AWAVA 2016) has set out:

- A rights-based approach
- Advancing gender equality and women’s empowerment
- A client-centred approach
- Women’s safety is central
- Perpetrator accountability
- Accessible culturally-appropriate and sensitive services

Specialist staff and services should not only receive but be funded and resourced to deliver specialist education, training and professional development, including in developing tech abuse resources, training and connections with industry.

In seeking to improve legal responses and outcomes for both victim-survivors and perpetrators of SGBV, the draft Plan would greatly benefit from applying the principles of

WLSA's 'Safety First in Family Law' framework (WLSA 2019) across the breadth of justice systems and responses available.

### ***Recovery***

All Pillars in the draft Plan, but particularly those of response and recovery, need to address the need for economic justice for women and governments' obligations to provide a social safety net, particularly in systems such as Services Australia and NDIS which can themselves further entrench inequality and systems abuse. Also needing to be embedded throughout the National Plan are strategies to address housing and homelessness, of which domestic and family violence is the leading cause for women in Australia (AIHW 2016). Measurable, timely targets must be included in the National Plan and further detailed in the Action Plans to address this gap, accompanied by funding commitments by the Commonwealth to deliver crisis, transitional and long-term housing solutions for people experiencing violence.

### **Intersectionality and diversity**

While the Plan purports to 'recognises the increased risk and unique forms of violence experienced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women, women with disability, migrant and refugee women, LGBTIQ+ communities, young women and women in rural and remote communities, while recognising the intersections with other...' (pg. 27), it does not in fact address unique forms of violence such as female genital mutilation (FGM), dowry abuse, carer abuse, forced sterilization, reproductive coercion and other specific forms of SGBV faced (for example) by migrant and refugee women, women with disabilities, and other vulnerable cohorts.

Through further consultation and focused efforts to address the unique experiences of marginalised communities and individuals, and systemic ways in which state violence is condoned and perpetrated against women and gender-diverse people, the draft Plan can improve its intersectional lens and capacity to more broadly address all expressions of SGBV, particularly beyond intimate-partner violence which is predominant throughout the draft Plan.

### **Evidence, indicators and outcomes**

The draft National Plan targets, indicators and outcomes framework provide a rough outline, however don't provide enough granular detail to serve as well as they could in setting direction and measuring success for the Plan. Intermediate targets and indicators must also be published annually, with stronger measures included in the outcomes framework.

The lack of accountability measures for perpetrators is evident throughout the draft Plan, and there is a need for data and strategies that demonstrate and provide evidence of changes in behaviour and success in reducing SGBV. Further evidence and target gaps are noted relating to prevalence of SGBV in health care settings, where SGBV is not adequately

screened for, and targets for criminal justice agencies regarding consistency of information about the reporting and prosecution processes for sexual assault in particular.

Embolden recommends and requests that specialist SGBV services and peak bodies are consulted on the development of the Outcomes Framework, the Action Plan targets and the Evaluation Plan in future iterations of the Plan and Action Plans.

## **CONCLUSION**

Strengths of the draft National Plan include the elevation of prevention and early intervention approaches contained within, and the overarching intention and comprehensive scene-setting is noted and commended. Areas for improvement include the need for a deeper understanding of inclusivity and applying more lenses to the work, including human rights, health promotion lens and intersectional lens. There is an opportunity to apply more learnings from the specialist women's-led service sector, which is broadly overlooked within the draft Plan, however remains central to the work of prevention, intervening, responding and supporting recovery for victim-survivors of sexual and gender-based violence. Finally, to ensure the utility and success of the National Plan to End Violence Against Women and Children, more specific, measurable targets and outcomes are required in the National Plan itself, in addition to the detail provided in the forthcoming Action Plans.

## REFERENCES

Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) 2016, *Personal Safety Survey*, ABS

Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) 2022, *Sexual Assault -- Perpetrators*, ABS

Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) 2016, Domestic & family violence & homelessness 2011–12 to 2013–14. Web Report (3 February 2016)

Australian Women Against Violence Alliance (AWAVA) 2016, 'The role of specialist women's services in Australia's response to violence against women and their children' *Policy Brief : 7 April 2016*, AWAVA

Domestic Violence Victoria (DV Vic) 2021, DV Vic Code of Practice, available at: <http://dvvic.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/DV-Vic-Code-of-Practice-v1.0-FINAL.pdf>.

Our Watch (2018) Changing the picture: A national resource to support the prevention of violence against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and their children, Our Watch, Melbourne.

Our Watch, Australia's National Research Organisation for Women's Safety (ANROWS) and VicHealth 2015, *Change the story: A shared framework for the primary prevention of violence against women and their children in Australia*, Our Watch

UNFPA 2019, The Inter-Agency Minimum Standards for Gender-Based Violence in Emergencies Programming, United Nations Population Fund, available at: [https://www.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/pub-pdf/19-200\\_Minimun\\_Standards\\_Report\\_ENGLISH-Nov.FINAL\\_.pdf](https://www.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/pub-pdf/19-200_Minimun_Standards_Report_ENGLISH-Nov.FINAL_.pdf).

UNHCR 2021, Gender-based Violence, United Nations Refugee Agency, available at: <https://www.unhcr.org/gender-based-violence.html>.

Weiss, C 2015, 'Women and Environmental Justice: a literature review', WHIN (Women's Health in the North)

Women's Legal Services Australia 2019, *Safety First in Family Law Plan*, WLSA