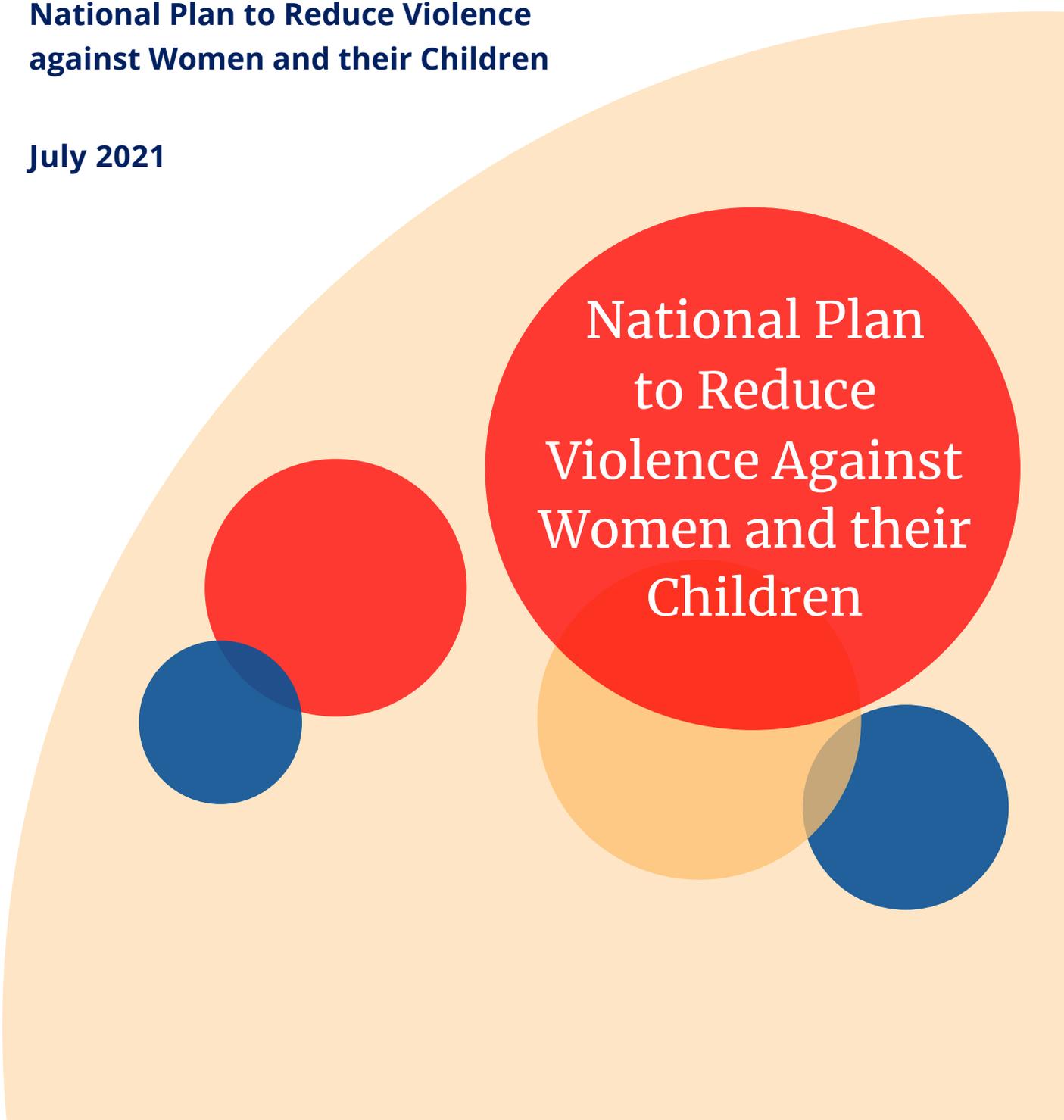


**A Call to Collaboration and Partnership:  
A contribution to developing the next  
National Plan to Reduce Violence  
against Women and their Children**

**July 2021**

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**National Plan  
to Reduce  
Violence Against  
Women and their  
Children**

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## CATHOLIC SOCIAL SERVICES VICTORIA SUBMISSION

### National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children

*"If violence has its source in the human heart, then it is fundamental that nonviolence be practised before all else within families... From within families, the joy of love spills out into the world and radiates to the whole of society. [17] An ethics of fraternity and peaceful coexistence between individuals and among peoples cannot be based on the logic of fear, violence and closed-mindedness, but on responsibility, respect and sincere dialogue. ...I plead with equal urgency for an end to domestic violence and to the abuse of women and children."*

— Pope Francis, Message for World Day of Peace 2017, #5

#### Introduction:

Catholic Social Services Victoria (CSSV) is the peak body for 43 member agencies delivering a wide range of community and social services to over 200,000 people each year across Victoria (a list of our member agencies is at Appendix 1 to this submission). We are a collaboration between the Bishops of Victoria and our member organisations. Our shared Christian mission is to love and serve our disadvantaged neighbours in the light of the human dignity they bear as persons made in God's image, no matter how difficult, or violent the circumstances they may face. Inspired by Jesus Christ's life, death, healing and teaching ministry, we and our member agencies seek to hear and stand with the poor and marginalised, and to work for a just, equitable, peaceful and compassionate society. Further information about CSSV is available on our [website](#).

Several of our member agencies are engaged in focused care, support, provision of specialist services and accommodation and advocacy for people suffering from domestic violence, including those experiencing mental illness. A number are also active in working in the prevention of violence, with various communities and cohorts.

Since the Royal Commission into Domestic Violence in Victoria in 2016, Catholic Social Services Victoria has been actively working to build capacity within the Catholic community to respond and prevent domestic violence. We work collaboratively with the Bishops of Victoria, members of the Clergy and Religious, parishes and alongside our member organisations to broaden knowledge and awareness, recognising that the issue of domestic violence is complex, and that broad ranging societal structural and cultural change is required urgently if we are to live in a society where women are respected and not subjected to domestic violence and other abuse.

We are particularly grateful to the tireless work of our member organisations and the CSSV Domestic Violence Working Committee (see Appendix 2), and others, including the alliance behind the Everybody's Home Campaign, for their work in this demanding field and for generously assisting us with particular expertise and data to inform this submission.

Disturbingly, Equity Economics estimates that the lack of long-term social housing is leading to 7,690 women a year returning to violent partners.<sup>1</sup> If we are to work effectively to prevent and reduce violence against women, we need to address the gendered drivers of violence, as well as providing, as a society, an adequate response to instances of violence: to prevent it happening to the same person again, as well as preventing violence from being experienced in the first place.

We recognise the importance of national leadership on this issue, and appreciate the opportunity to bring perspectives and some examples of good work done in Victoria by our members and others and hope that these will be properly considered in the formulation of the next National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children.

## Catholic Social Services Victoria's Approach to Domestic Violence

The liberating principles of Christ and Catholic Social Teaching promote the common good — that no part of society can flourish if other parts miss achieving their God-given potential. CSSV strongly affirms all efforts to improve both quality and quantity of personal, familial and systemic supports so that those who are victims/survivors of domestic violence can express their God-given dignity and rights and 'be helped to participate in every dimension of family and social life at every level accessible to them and according to their possibilities.'<sup>2</sup> This is broader than just providing charity and services. It requires society to ensure equity, and this includes access to safe housing, protection, and support as a platform for participation in a full community life.

In 2016 the Catholic Bishops of Victoria released a pastoral statement<sup>3</sup> condemning domestic violence and urging action:

- Our goal must be a society where all people are safe in their home, families and close relationships; where violence and abuse are not acceptable; and where all relationships respect the equality and dignity of each person. This is part of the Gospel vision of love and respect... Jesus challenges us to act in favour of the victims and work against anything that would prevent individuals from 'living life to the full'.
- We need to confront the causes of this violence, including the unequal position of women and men in our community.
- We also need to foster in our families and communities alternatives to violence. We particularly need to lead boys and young men to treat girls and women with respect and teach them how to develop positive and violence-free relationships.

CSSV seeks, along with many other Christian churches and world religions, to honestly address the side of religious groups, including ours, which can lead to distorted readings of our scriptures, used as justifications for patriarchal power, coercion and violence. CSSV recognises that 'Religion can sometimes be used by perpetrators to justify the harm they cause another person. Meanwhile victims can also feel they should endure abuse because of religious convictions'.<sup>4</sup> These distortions are not in keeping with the images of God in Christ used to name some of our member organisations most actively responding to and preventing domestic

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<sup>1</sup> <https://everybodyshome.com.au/report-social-housing-keeps-women-safe-from-family-violence-expands-economy/>

<sup>2</sup> Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church, 2004, para 148, at [http://www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/pontifical\\_councils/justpeace/documents/rc\\_pc\\_justpeace\\_doc\\_20060526\\_compendio-dott-soc\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/justpeace/documents/rc_pc_justpeace_doc_20060526_compendio-dott-soc_en.html)

<sup>3</sup> See <https://css.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/Statement-by-Bishops-of-Victoria.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> A Catholic Response to Domestic Violence Booklet, p.7, <https://www.bbcatholic.org.au/parish-community/parish-renewal-discipleship/social-justice/domestic-violence/domestic-violence-response>

violence – the ‘Good Shepherd’ and ‘Good Samaritan’ being the best known. In knowing our own propensities and context, it is these images that encourage our members to work in transformative, restorative justice and healing ways with those captured or boxed in by unhelpful and harmful images of manhood and humanity, as research by Jesuit Social Services’ describes.<sup>5</sup> Further, our stress on prevention and transforming structures is validated by Rev Martin Luther King’s stress:

*On the one hand we are called to play the good Samaritan on life's roadside; but that will be only an initial act. One day we must come to see that the whole Jericho road must be transformed so that men and women will not be constantly beaten and robbed as they make their journey on life's highway. True compassion is more than flinging a coin to a beggar; it is not haphazard and superficial. It comes to see that an edifice which produces beggars needs restructuring.*

— Rev'd Martin Luther King Jr., *A Time to Break Silence*, - Riverside Church, New York

### Prevention in Faith Community Contexts

Violence against women and children occurs in all communities and settings, including faith communities. Faith Communities, in partnership with experts and services, should be supported and resourced to prevent and respond to domestic violence. Secular strategies and policies which seek to address violence against women and domestic violence have often framed the faith sector as a cause of violence, rather than acknowledging the role faith leaders and settings can and do play in responding to and preventing violence (le Roux, 2015; Nason-Clark, 2009).<sup>6</sup>

The Victorian Royal Commission into Family Violence acknowledged that faith communities represented an important setting through which to reach and engage people with education about family violence and prevention messages, and to connect women experiencing violence with appropriate supports. It also noted that faith leaders are highly influential and authoritative figures, who could potentially make a major positive contribution to the prevention of violence against women, but that the ‘training for faith leaders in recognising and responding to family violence is inadequate’ (State of Victoria, 2016, p. 137).

A collaborative approach by Government, working alongside faith communities and faith leaders, assisting them to be resourced by experts and with assistance in evaluation of their efforts, are an effective way of reducing reduce and preventing violence used against women. The 2020 ‘Evidence Guide’ produced by the University of Melbourne states that ‘all evidence from evaluated initiatives to address violence against women and family violence in faith settings suggests that interventions and programs should be jointly designed by faith leaders, communities, and sectoral experts’.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> See <https://jss.org.au/what-we-do/the-mens-project/the-man-box/>

<sup>6</sup> <https://minerva-access.unimelb.edu.au/bitstream/handle/11343/239130/Final%20technical%20paper%20copy.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y> p12

<sup>7</sup> <https://minerva-access.unimelb.edu.au/bitstream/handle/11343/239131/Faith%20Leaders%20evidence%20guide.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y> p18

While the July 2019 Technical Paper submitted to the Victorian Department of Premier and Cabinet as part of the 'Faith communities supporting healthy family relationships: a Participatory Action Research project with the Multifaith Advisory Group', states that there is currently not broad ranging data enabling an accurate assessment whether the prevalence of violence against women is different in faith communities than in the general population (Popescu et al. 2009),<sup>8</sup> a couple of reports have begun to explore this. Aune and Barnes (2018) found in their work with Christian churches in Cumbria, UK, that 57% of women and 17% of men who responded to their survey had experienced domestic abuse at some point in their lives. A recently released April 2021 report, commissioned by the Anglican Church of Australia states that within the general Australian population, the prevalence of Intimate Partner Violence overall across an adult's lifetime was 38% of those who had ever been in an adult intimate relationship. Among those who identified as Anglican it was 44%.<sup>9</sup>

Work that is collaborative in approach and resourced by partnership with Government has already started in faith communities in Victoria, and the National Strategy could assist in ensuring that these efforts are learned from and rolled out across Australia. The following are just three of a number of examples of collaborative work in action:

1. The Victorian Sikh Gurduaras Council (VSGC) received financial support from the Victorian government for a family violence prevention project in November 2019. 'The purpose of the focus group programme is to start a conversation with youth, men and women on the issue of domestic and family violence, and to get their feedback on how to share information about the preventive measure within in the Sikh community'<sup>10</sup> with the project's main aim being to ensure that the community feels safe in their home and neighbourhood, and that they can rely on fellow members for guidance and assistance to prevent family violence whenever required. This work includes professional capacity building for religious leaders, priests, committee members and future leaders, with the aim being that "if someone reports family violence to any religious worker or committee member at a Gurduara, they will have the requisite training to respond to the situation according to Australian laws and regulations".<sup>11</sup> This project will work towards the goal that every Sikh household will have information about Australian laws pertaining to family violence and modes of prevention.
2. The Islamic Council of Victoria (ICV) has "recognised the high incidence of family violence as a leading cause of preventable deaths amongst women in Australia"<sup>12</sup> and is actively developing a program of meaningful responses to the intersecting issues to address attitudinal change. They are working with Jesuit Social Services in a partner project to implement a range of objectives, with key aims including:
  - Better community understanding and openness regarding FV issues; Helping youth break the silence.

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<sup>8</sup> <https://minerva-access.unimelb.edu.au/bitstream/handle/11343/239130/Final%20technical%20paper%20copy.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y> p6.

<sup>9</sup> <https://anglican.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/NAFVP-Top-Line-Results-Report-NCLS-Research.pdf> p11.

<sup>10</sup> <https://religionsforpeaceaustralia.org.au/?p=12285>

<sup>11</sup> <https://www.sbs.com.au/language/english/audio/sikh-temples-in-victoria-to-roll-out-family-violence-prevention-project>

<sup>12</sup> <https://www.icv.org.au/new/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/ICV-Annual-Report-2019-20-Digital-01.pdf> , p31.

- Developing and strengthening family relationships.
  - Leadership in developing a community 'conscience' that FV is unacceptable and detrimental to the health of women, children and families.
  - Strengthen the capacity of Muslim families and the ICV to sustain a dialogue that brings about a cultural shift in attitudes and responses to family violence within the Islamic faith-based communities.
  - Develop a model program for service providers and government agencies working with Muslim women and men in any field or sector.
3. The Anglican Diocese of Melbourne has run (in partnership with Anglicare Victoria, the Brotherhood of St Laurence, and Lifeworks) their Prevention of Violence against Women program, to develop a whole-of-Church approach to preventing family violence. The program includes:
- Providing training and mentoring for church leaders,
  - Developing resources and tools for church communities,
  - Developing best practice policy and governance procedures, and
  - Connecting churches with specialist and local service providers.<sup>13</sup>

The Evaluation of this program by the University of Melbourne<sup>14</sup> found a range of promising outcomes that contributed to shifts in culture, attitudes, and practices within the Diocese by supporting faith leaders to understand, prevent and respond to violence against women and family violence. Indeed, the program made progress to address the gendered drivers of violence against women and put the best practice actions described in prevention research to good use (Our Watch et al., 2015). The program also demonstrated strengths with respect to emerging evidence-based principles for preventing violence against women in faith communities (Vaughan et al., 2020).<sup>15</sup>

Bringing faith leaders and communities to the table alongside experts and social services in a national dialogue and plan has great potential to reduce and prevent violence against women.

#### **Recommendation 1.**

*The National Plan should establish mechanisms that allow for resourcing and collaboration with faith leaders and faith communities, alongside experts and services, to prevent and respond to violence against women.*

#### **Recommendation 2.**

*The National Plan should prioritise engagement with relevant national and state peak bodies which represent both faith communities and/or social services, to collaborate and coordinate resourcing and action on addressing violence against women and children.*

## Housing as Key to Preventing Violence

Domestic violence is the key cause of women and children seeking specialised homelessness services, but only 3.2% are receiving much needed long-term housing.

<sup>13</sup> <https://www.melbourneanglican.org.au/pvaw/>

<sup>14</sup> <https://www.melbourneanglican.org.au/pvaw/evaluation/>

<sup>15</sup> For more information see: <https://www.melbourneanglican.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/PVAW-Program-Evaluation-Exec-Sum-digital-1.pdf>

Based on pre-pandemic incidence of domestic and family violence annually, Equity Economics<sup>16</sup> modelling shows that approximately:

- 7,690 women p.a. are returning to perpetrators due to unaffordable housing;
- 9,120 women are becoming homeless after leaving their homes due to domestic and family violence and inability to secure long-term housing.

There is an immediate need for an extra 16,810 social housing units to provide women a place to go when their only option is to leave homes due to family violence. To get a sense of scale of the challenge but the enormous economic benefits of social housing, Equity Economics analysis<sup>17</sup> shows how provision of 16,810 social housing units would:

- 'Cost up to \$7.6 billion, with costs to government potentially lower through use of community housing providers and other innovative financing models;
- Deliver immediate economic benefits of \$15.3 billion and create 47,000 jobs;
- Avoid \$122.5 million costs yearly due to women returning to a violent partner;
- Avoid \$257 million a year in costs due to women experiencing homelessness after leaving their homes due to family and domestic violence.

Good Shepherd Australia and New Zealand's Submission to the Committee on Social Policy & Legal Affairs Inquiry into Family, Domestic and Sexual Violence (FDSV)<sup>18</sup> stresses the increasingly recognised link between inadequate and inaccessible social housing and domestic violence. In summary form they state that FDSV is the prevailing face of homelessness in Australia.

Further, as McAuley Community Services for Women states, in the last decade a typical homeless person's profile has changed. It is now a woman who has suffered family violence, and is sole parent of one child or more. Availability of housing options is key to delivering real choice for families experiencing violence to stay in their home or to leave and not become homeless.

There is a critical shortage of safe, affordable and ongoing tenancy options for women affected by FDSV. They are often caught in the Catch-22 between staying in an unsafe relationship or fleeing to unsafe and costly motel crisis accommodation and becoming homeless. Despite commitment to make perpetrators accountable for their violence, victim survivors are still overwhelmingly the ones that have to leave their homes, jobs, schools and communities to achieve safety and likely be precariously housed or at risk of homelessness.

Housing shortages that see perpetrators of violence bailed and returning to victims' homes is a system failure which continues to endanger women and children.

Temporary and crisis accommodation is vitally important; it must remain for people in crisis, and so needs complementing by temporary and permanent social housing choices to allow flow-on.

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<sup>16</sup> <http://www.equityeconomics.com.au/#/nowhere-to-go>

<sup>17</sup> <http://www.equityeconomics.com.au/#/nowhere-to-go/>

<sup>17</sup> <https://goodshep.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/snapshot-fdsv-inquiry-final-20200921.pdf>

Whilst the 2016 Victorian Royals Commission found that women's preference for accommodation was self-contained properties where they can have safety and privacy and be able to cook for themselves and their families without having to share facilities, there remains a place in the service system where supported accommodation in a communal setting can have beneficial impacts on victim survivors. A communal setting with 24/7 onsite support can provide positive outcomes for certain cohorts of women such as increasing opportunities for social connections and reduced isolation for women who have been deliberately socially isolated by the perpetrator of violence. Women from CALD backgrounds will often seek out and flourish in an environment with other women and families. An emerging cohort that work well for short term communal refuges are young 16-18 year old women who have been subjected to violence from their families of origin. Too young to live independently and not appropriate for a mixed gender adolescent residential setting, these young women have been increasingly referred to or have contacted safe steps the 24/7 crisis telephone service. Young first time mothers who have experienced domestic and family violence and have Child Protection involvement are also a cohort who benefit from spending at least the early stages post birth, in an environment with 24/7 support and parenting assistance.

As such, further investment in core and cluster models of supported accommodation should be promoted, but there remains a place for communal refuges within the service system, if the strengths of this approach is understood and used with particular cohorts. The Good Samaritan Inn is one example of a service which uses and provides a variety of accommodation options and supports, with the aim to best meet the needs of women and children, within the limits of existing infrastructure and service context.

Several vulnerable groups become more vulnerable by a general lack of safe and suitable social housing. For children and youth especially, FDV is the cause of homelessness in almost all cases.

Culturally safe, community owned and controlled housing for First Nations women and children.

Despite announced plans in some states, particularly Victoria, to increase accommodation and support across the spectrum, including crisis, refuge, public and community housing, the scale and numbers remain concerning. There is a lack of current affordable national housing availability and of a future federal roadmap for enough safe, secure, affordable housing options is important for the prevention and reduction of violence against women.

### **Recommendation 3.**

*The National Plan should include a focus on addressing the crisis of housing in Australia, to prevent homelessness and increase options available to victim/survivors of domestic violence.*

### **Primary Prevention**

Services need to go beyond usual service delivery modes and contexts to really impact primary prevention spaces. They should be resourced to increase the broader community's awareness of and capacity to respond to violence, but also to confront attitudes and behaviours perpetuating violence. This requires cross-sector partnerships, community engagement and development through cooperation between Government, services and community groups. Resourcing for organisations enabling this nexus and catalysing a whole-of-community response is required.

Embedded approaches to prevention where other programs already exist could be a powerful way forward to increase efficacy in reducing violence. Place based approaches which look to the

strengths and existing knowledge and connections within a community is important to consider, such as Wellsprings for Women's work with their recent 'Women's Health and Safety Project'. Wellsprings for Women adopt a placed-based approach, engaging community in a range of programs. Through these existing trusted relationships and connections they integrate a program for preventing violence against women. Further resourcing and support would enable such smaller organisations intimately connected to their stressed communities to have great potential for significant impact on prevention of violence. There are also learnings and principles from the approaches of locally grounded organisations that can be promoted nationally<sup>19</sup>.

#### **Recommendation 4.**

*The National Plan should appreciate the particular expertise and unique role of organisations embedded in communities, and resource place-based approaches to prevent violence.*

Primary prevention begins with the primary perpetrators of family violence – men. Research done by Jesuit Social Services<sup>20</sup> demonstrates that particular understandings of masculinity can impact on behaviours and attitudes correlated to increase acts and use of violence, as well as being correlated with other negative impacts on men's health and wellbeing. This work should inform primary prevention approaches in community settings. The research has resulted in development of particular programs like their Modelling Respect and Equality (MoRE) program. This supports participants, who are role models and people working with men and boys, 'to build deeper understanding of key issues, develop greater self-awareness, learn how to model and promote positive change, recognise and challenge problematic attitudes and behaviours, and actively influence and make an impact in their community'.<sup>21</sup>

#### **Recommendation 5.**

*The National Plan should resource active engagement with men and boys in constructive community and program settings to create lasting cultural change.*

### **Perpetrators and People Using Violence**

The National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children (2010-2022) emphasises the need to hold perpetrators accountable through laws and policing, as well as interventions aimed at confronting their use of violence in intimate partner relationships. During Victoria's COVID response some programs were resourced that see perpetrators removed and housed away from their homes so they can be kept safe for victim/survivors. This welcome service also supports men with an Exclusion Order with a fortnight's accommodation — but only if they engage with particular services (such as the St Kilda Crisis Service and No to Violence (NTV). NTV provides effective evidence-informed engagement for men while primarily concerned for safety

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<sup>19</sup> See <https://www.anrows.org.au/research-program/culturally-and-linguistically-diverse-projects-with-action-research/wellsprings-for-women/> for further information on specific work done by Wellsprings for Women.

<sup>20</sup> [The Men's Project - Jesuit Social Services](https://www.jss.org.au/what-we-do/the-mens-project/the-man-box/). The Men's Project aims to support boys and men to live respectful, accountable and fulfilling lives free from violence and other harmful behaviour. It is linked to the global Men Engage Alliance. Jesuit Social Services uses 'The Man Box ([jss.org.au/what-we-do/the-mens-project/the-man-box](https://www.jss.org.au/what-we-do/the-mens-project/the-man-box/)); tackling a set of beliefs within and across society that pressures men to be to be tough, unemotional etc. It is based on 2018 research with c. 1000 young Australian men.

<sup>21</sup> <https://jss.org.au/what-we-do/the-mens-project/modelling-respect-and-equality-more/>

and wellbeing of women and children. Once male perpetrators experience this process, they can then be referred to a Men's Behaviour Change Program, case management and supports.

These programs are meant to allow women and children to remain at home, but there are concerns regarding what happens after two weeks, and how female partners are simultaneously supported to ensure ongoing safety. This program is another example of the crucial role availability of housing plays in allowing victim/survivors to stay safe at home.

There is a need to provide alternative accommodation to perpetrators of violence, accompanied by a community education/awareness program, so that there is better understanding and appreciation of the rights of victim/survivors to stay in their home. This contributes to a culture which affirms the unacceptability of violence at home, and where the perpetrator takes responsibility for violent actions, instead of victims having to leave to be safe.

Prevention and response work needs to include a stronger sense of awareness of 'safe at home options' – putting the onus on the perpetrator to remove themselves or modify their behaviour, rather than victims having to remove themselves from the situation to be safe.

#### **Recommendation 6.**

*The National Plan should affirm perpetrator accountability and ensure that there is resourcing to properly allow victim/survivors to live safely at home, and perpetrators to find other housing options and access to effective therapeutic and program supports.*

#### **Services to Women without Australian Permanent Residency**

Family Safety Victoria<sup>22</sup> in its 2017 briefing paper 'Women in refuge with no income due to temporary visa status' states that "One of the groups of victim-survivors which experience the most significant barriers to accessing family violence refuge and crisis accommodation is women on "no income"; most often due to living on a temporary bridging, spousal, student or tourist visa."

This correlates with the current experience of our member organisations who work with women who are on such visas. They report that even though women can apply for protection through the service system, there is further complexity, and women often must go through a traumatic experience in having to provide evidence of the marriage/relationship having been a genuine one, etc. to the Department of Home Affairs during the course of accessing assistance.

Migrant and refugee women's experiences are complex: they can experience domestic violence from multiple perpetrators and our members have experiences of supporting women who have been misidentified as perpetrators due to fabricated accounts by their partners, and sometimes they have been separated from their children by a system they don't know how to engage with. Supporting women as they sort through these complexities takes time and considerable resources. Timely access to legal services is crucial, and member organisations report that they struggle to get women the legal services they need to address their situation in all its complexity.

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<sup>22</sup> <https://www.vic.gov.au/family-safety-victoria>

Research literature, as referenced by Family Safety Victoria<sup>23</sup> in its 2017 briefing paper, shows that critical challenges for this client cohort also include:

- temporary migration status providing greater opportunity for coercion and control by perpetrators
- multiple barriers to navigating the Australian system and accessing family violence services
- ineligibility for most government funded income benefits and services
- complexity of need, intensive support and high costs associated with providing assistance for “complex legal, immigration and protection matters
- intersections between family violence committed against non-residents of Australia and potential trafficking and slavery circumstances, including forced marriage, domestic servitude, forced labour, human and sexual trafficking and “other slavery- like situations”
- most refuge providers currently limit the number of places or exclude women altogether who receive no income
- an increasing proportion of requests for refuge/crisis accommodation responses for these women and children, with longer stays leading to fewer vacancies for new referrals
- extremely limited exit pathways to medium and longer term housing unless/until permanent residency has been granted

As the situation of many of this group are complex, and many challenges associated with this cohort fit within the remit of a Federal Government legislative and policy context, it is of great importance that the National Plan addresses the vulnerability of this group of women and provides leadership to State Governments and the sector. Providing avenues for eligibility for Centrelink welfare benefits including crisis payments and Medicare are of great importance for the safety of this cohort, and access to other service-based funding. Prevention could include a widespread federal campaign to raise awareness of DFV laws and support available for victim-survivors.

**Recommendation 7.**

*The National Plan includes provisions that would address the real needs of women and children who, due to their visa status, are currently excluded from eligibility to a safety net and other services that would enable them to navigate crisis due to an experience of violence.*

**Recommendation 8.**

*The National Plan should consider coordinated processes by which women who arrive to Australia with a spouses' visa can understand their rights on arrival, ensuring they know who to call and what services to approach in case of Domestic Violence.*

**Recommendation 9.**

*The National Plan should address the process by which women without permanent residency can access services, and how interactions with the Department of Home Affairs could be made to be less cumbersome and more person-centric to avoid further traumatisation.*

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<sup>23</sup> <https://www.vic.gov.au/family-safety-victoria>

## **Recommendation 10.**

*The National Plan should consider the coordination of access to and funding of legal services for women who are not permanent residents and are victim survivors of domestic violence.*

### **COVID-19 and 'COVID Normal' Effects**

During the past year, our member organisations have reported an overall increase in demand for family and domestic violence related services – this correlates with numbers reported in the 2021/22 Victorian Budget papers. In the previous (2020/21) year: There was an expectation that 6,000 men would call for help who were concerned about their own behavior, but there were 8,800 calls by services received. There was an expectation that the 'Orange Doors' across the state would deliver 22,536 DFV related assessments, in reality there were 25,406 assessments delivered. 62,134 calls were responded to on the Victorian statewide crisis service relating to DVF over the 2020/21 year. Concerningly 'Child first' assessments and interventions (except 'orange door' responses) were expected to be 8,064 — but the number for 2020/21 was 17,443.

Given the complexity of the past year, and the increase in calls/seeking assistance, there is a demonstrated and ongoing need for planning, support and funding. Effective prevention – both via community development and programming needs to be an ongoing dialogue with education, community and social services, and an ongoing funding priority.

In addition, impacts of COVID-19 and now 'COVID Normal' are likely to make housing accessibility more essential than ever. The general populations' housing stresses and lack of timely access to affordable housing impacts specifically on the situation of domestic violence victims in many ways – leaving victim survivors vulnerable to homelessness due to blocked movement from crisis accommodation to transitional or permanent housing.

Publicised initiatives responding to COVID-19 supporting entry to the private rental market will not assist a significant number of victim/survivors who are in an even worse position to pay market rent given the cessation of Job Keeper and the COVID supplement, and the unexpected record rise in rental costs.<sup>24</sup> Safe, stable and affordable housing for victim/survivors who have additional complexities such as mental health issues, substance abuse or addiction, or physical conditions need prioritising, as these people are often excluded from services when challenging behaviours are mis-understood.

Never have the intersecting fissures of the social determinants been so profoundly exposed and expanded than during the COVID-19 pandemic. The United Nations recently described family violence as the shadow pandemic to COVID-19; such a description signals the scale of the problem, but also to the opportunity to not return to business as usual.

There is a need to evaluate the outcomes of the many state-based COVID initiatives, particularly the above provision of accommodation for perpetrators of violence and its impacts. It would be useful to understand the attitudes and situation of victims able to stay at home because of this

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<sup>24</sup> Everywhere in Australia currently has record rental rates (and static wage rates), except inner-city Melbourne, and to a lesser extent Sydney, due to the massive drop in international student renters. <https://www.realestate.com.au/news/australia-records-biggest-rise-in-housing-rents-in-more-than-22-years-as-wages-barely-budge/>

provision, as well as understanding broader community responses to this approach to determine potential attitude/behaviour changes.

The added effects of Covid-19 and lockdowns need careful examination. For instance, in the lockdown in Victoria in 2020, the sector reported in consultation that calls from victim/survivors seemed to decrease, but calls from concerned family, friends, and others increased — increased surveillance and lack of opportunities to be alone are obviously increased during lockdowns.

### **Recommendation 11.**

*A collation and evaluation of the many individual state responses to COVID 19 in the areas of domestic violence should be coordinated at a national level so that learnings can be shared effectively. Resourcing directed to better understanding the ongoing impact of the pandemic responses on instances of domestic violence is important to prepare for the future.*

### **Additional Risk Factors - Especially Financial & Technological**

Good Shepherd are leaders in work on various aspects of violence used against women, including interrogation of economic abuse.<sup>25</sup> They further extend ‘expanded understanding of economic abuse’ to highlight how ‘financial abuse is enabled by the rise in Artificial Intelligence’:

- Rising use of digital platforms, and the associated significant increase in consumer access to unregulated ... payday lenders and ‘buy now pay later’ schemes ... creates a further site for economic abuse’.
- Coerced debt is a key aspect of economic abuse, with strong evidence suggesting that it is surprisingly easy for perpetrators to manufacture a situation of long-term intractable indebtedness and associated hardship in this form;
- Migrant women face heightened risk of economic abuse in the context of fringe lending;
- Artificial technology in design and delivery of financial products has no lens or scope for assessing vulnerability and risk. It lacks sophistication and nuance to recognise FDSV.

The National Plan to reduce violence against women and children should consider the ever-evolving scapes and sites for abuse, and the many and varied ways violence manifests.

### **A Systemic Approach to Reform**

Domestic violence services like Good Shepherd and others report insufficient collaboration between various community and government sector stakeholders—particularly child protection, family violence and family services providers. Structures of coordination and integration must be underpinned by guiding principles of women’s and children’s safety; perpetrators accountability; and the agency of women. The complexity of FDSV, demands long-term investment in integration and coordination — calling the whole community together. ‘Improving collaboration among existing service providers and frameworks is a priority—equal to the realisation that together government, community and private/corporate sector[s] all have a role to play.’

We would add faith communities to this – being a key enabler of both detrimental and positive approaches to the problem in multicultural communities – deep multiculturalism being fundamentally religious, given the global growth in religions, many of whom migrate to Australia.

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<sup>25</sup> See [https://goodshep.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/economic-abuse\\_final-report.pdf](https://goodshep.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/economic-abuse_final-report.pdf)

## Conclusion and Recommendations

Formulation of a new National Plan is a vital step in addressing ongoing challenges of violence in Australian society, and in the work to reduce and prevent violence against women and children. In spite of the sobering reality of the current use of violence in Australia, with National attention and leadership, adequate resourcing, and working in a spirit of collaboration and partnership across communities and organisations, Australia can confront the gendered drivers of violence and actively work towards being a nation and society where the use of violence is unacceptable, and where people who experience violence are supported, and perpetrators held to account.

### **Recommendation 1.**

*The National Plan should establish mechanisms that allow for resourcing and collaboration with faith leaders and faith communities, alongside experts and services, to prevent and respond to violence against women.*

### **Recommendation 2.**

*The National Plan should include active engagement with relevant national and state peak bodies, to collaborate and coordinate resourcing and action on addressing violence against women and children.*

### **Recommendation 3.**

*The National Plan should include a focus on addressing the crisis of housing in Australia, to prevent homelessness and increase options available to victim/survivors of domestic violence.*

### **Recommendation 4.**

*The National Plan should appreciate the particular expertise and unique position of organisations embedded in communities, and resource place-based approaches to preventing violence.*

### **Recommendation 5.**

*The National Plan should resource active engagement with men and boys in constructive community and program settings to create lasting cultural change.*

### **Recommendation 6.**

*The National Plan should affirm perpetrator accountability and ensure that there is resourcing to properly allow victim/survivors to live safely at home, and perpetrators to find other housing options and access to effective therapeutic and program supports.*

### **Recommendation 7.**

*The National Plan includes provisions that would address the real needs of women and children who, due to their visa status, are currently excluded from eligibility to a safety net and other services that would enable them to navigate crisis due to an experience of violence.*

**Recommendation 8.**

*The National Plan should consider coordinated processes by which women who arrive to Australia with a spouses' visa can understand their rights on arrival, ensuring they know who to call and what services to approach in case of Domestic Violence.*

**Recommendation 9.**

*The National Plan should address the process by which women without permanent residency can access services, and how interactions with the Department of Home Affairs could be made to be less cumbersome and more person-centric to avoid further traumatisation.*

**Recommendation 10.**

*The National Plan should consider the coordination of access to and funding of legal services for women who are not permanent residents and are victim survivors of domestic violence.*

**Recommendation 11.**

*A collation and evaluation of the many individual state responses to COVID 19 in the areas of domestic violence should be coordinated at a national level so that learnings can be shared effectively. Resourcing directed to better understanding the ongoing impact of the pandemic responses on instances of domestic violence is important to prepare for the future.*

## Appendix 1: Catholic Social Services Victoria Member Organisations



Aboriginal Catholic Ministry Victoria	John Pierce Centre for Deaf Ministry
Assisi Centre	Kewn Kreestha (Family Care Sisters)
Australian Catholic Religious Against Trafficking in Humans (ACRATH)	Keysborough Learning Centre
Brigidine Asylum Seeker Project	LinCoN
Cabrini Outreach	MacKillop Family Services
CatholicCare Victoria	Mary Aikenhead Ministries
Catholic Women's League Victoria and Wagga Wagga	Nazareth House – Sisters of Nazareth
Corazon	Order of Malta Hospice Home Care (Vic)
Corpus Christi Community	Pregnancy Assistance Frankston
Don Bosco Youth Centre & Hostel Inc.	Rosie's Oblate Youth Ministry
Edmund Rice Camps (Amberley)	Sacred Heart Mission
Edmund Rice Refugee and Community Services	St Vincent de Paul Society Victoria
Edmund Rice Services – Mt Atkinson	St John of God ACCORD
Good Samaritan Inn	St Joseph's Flexible Learning Centre
Good Shepherd Australia New Zealand	St Joseph's Home for the Aged - Little Sisters of the Poor
Griefline	St Joseph's Corner
House of Welcome Ballarat	St Mary's House of Welcome
Highways & Byways: A Community of Service (Missionary Sisters of Service)	The Way Community
Jesuit Social Services	Vietnamese Catholic Family Mutual Assistance Network
JoCare	VMCH
	VincentCare Victoria
	Wellsprings for Women

## Appendix 2: 2021 CSSV Domestic Violence Working Group Members

Felicity Rorke – Chair (Good Samaritan Inn)

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Janene Evans (Good Shepherd ANZ)

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Sue Dornom (St Vincent de Paul Society)

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Sherry Balcombe (Aboriginal Catholic  
Ministry Victoria)

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Joshua Lourensz (CSSV)

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Deacon Mark Kelly (Diocese of Sale)

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Fr Peter Matheson (Catholic Archdiocese of  
Melbourne)

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Nick Collins (CatholicCare Victoria)

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Deanna Davis (CatholicCare Victoria)

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Narelle Struth (Melbourne Archdiocese  
Catholic Schools)

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Matt Tyler (Jesuit Social Services)

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Cindy Bowan (ACRATH)

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Sandra Maudier (Wellsprings for Women)

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Sr Nicole Rotaru rsm (McAuley Ministries)

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