

National Plan to End Violence Against Women and Children - Consultation Report

Yfoundations' summary of stakeholder feedback relating to children and young people

Background

On 14 July 2022, a consultation report on the National Plan to End Violence Against Women and Children was released. The Report, delivered by Monash University's Gender and Family Violence Prevention Centre at the request of the Australian Government, presented the findings of workshops and interviews with almost 500 stakeholders conducted from July to September 2021, as well as the roundtable discussions at the National Summit on Women's Safety in September 2021.

Key recommendations

- Next National Plan must acknowledge children and young people as victim-survivors of family, domestic and sexual violence (FDSV) in their own right.
- Stakeholders support a larger investment in therapeutic and trauma-informed services for children and young people who are experiencing or impacted by FDSV. These services include embedding peer support workers into services, as well as capacity building for the specialist workforce, ensuring safe and trauma-informed engagement with children and young people.
- It was emphasised that the next National Plan must address the lack of safe housing for children and young people experiencing or impacted by DFSV, with the goal of increasing availability and access to respite services and safe housing.
- Throughout the consultations, stakeholders repeatedly called for children and young people to be clearly established as a priority in the next National Plan. This involves the wellbeing, recovery and safety needs of children and young people to be a central focus of the plan. Stakeholders also called for the voices of children and young people to be made visible within the implementation and activities that stem from the next Plan's operation.
- The importance of addressing recovery for children and young people experiencing or impacted by FDSV, as well as the need to increase investment and resources into this cohort was also emphasised.

Detailed insights

An acknowledgement of children in their own right

- The consultation workshops and interviews revealed stakeholders consistently emphasised the importance of the next National Plan to recognise children as victim-survivors of FDSV in their own right, ensuring that their perspectives, experiences and expertise are implemented into policy design and service system reform.
- In acknowledging victim-survivor children in their own right, stakeholders emphasised the importance of not viewing children as an appendage of their mothers, female carers or women experiencing FDSV. Children and young people need to be considered separately from the primary victim parent.

- The previous plan was titled 'National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children.' The removal of 'their' was essential, acknowledging that children and young people can be primary victims, for example- teenagers in abusive relationships or children who are the target of parental or sibling abuse.
- One stakeholder expressed this concern through a human rights lens, pointing to the UN Convention on the right of the child, which addresses the right for children to participate in issues that affect them. This highlights this isn't just an issue that they need to exercise, but rather a human right that children and young people are entitled to.
- Stakeholders addressed the need to explore the ways in which children and young people's voices can be centred and better used to inform policy and practice reform, the next National Plan was viewed by stakeholders as a critical opportunity to commit to providing a platform to listen to young people impacted by FDSV.
- The competing discussion to this point was made, with some stakeholders outlining that targeting children and young people specifically for prevention can be problematic, placing the weight of prevention responsibility onto them, rather than adults.
- Stakeholders also recommend the development and implementation of peer support workforce, with examples of peer support workers embedded into organisations in Victoria, exemplifying how this approach enhances the design and delivery of support mechanisms to children and young people.

Specialist domestic and family violence services for children

- Stakeholders outlined the need to ensure service accessibility and availability for children and young people outside of punitive systems (e.g child protection and youth justice), many acknowledging that access to therapeutic and trauma-informed support for children and young people are lacking in the current system.
- There was a clear recognition by stakeholders that there is a dire lack of specialised children services nationally, identifying gaps in available and appropriate options when they sought to make referrals for children and young people in their own practices. This highlights the need for these services to be child-centric, designed for and with children in focus.
- The introduction of stand-alone services for children and young people in the DFSV sector will require an investment in increasing workforce capacity, to engage children safely and with a trauma-informed lens.
- Some stakeholders urged caution in siloing out services from children from services for women, noting that children are often with those they are cared by, or caring for. These stakeholders noted that any services focusing on adults should additionally be required to have any child of that adult in focus as well.
- Stakeholders emphasised the diversity of Australian children, noting that experiences of FDSV will be different across children and young people, meaning the support they require will also vary significantly. Emphasis was placed on children living with disability and children from low socioeconomic backgrounds. Culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds also require specific needs that must be addressed by service providers.
- For First Nation communities, stakeholders reiterated the need for specialist services for children and young people to be community led and community controlled. Stakeholders called to reduce the disproportionate overrepresentation of Indigenous children and young people in the child protection system, through trauma informed, culturally safe, community led intervention and support strategies that are centre on the child.
- It was additionally acknowledged that the needs of Indigenous youth cannot be addressed via a one-size-fits-all child-centred policy, but rather requires a focus on intergenerational healing of trauma and a commitment to meeting targets outlined under the National Agreement on Closing the Gap.
- Access to safe housing was identified as a key area of concern. It was noted that children and young people experience homelessness because of FDSV. Stakeholders noted the dire need for stable and safe housing options for children and young people, with some stakeholders acknowledging Out of Home Care (OOHC) to often be a site of re-traumatisation.

Intergenerational Trauma

- It was acknowledged that intergenerational trauma of children and young people are largely unaddressed in the current systems responses to FDSV. There was an acknowledgement among stakeholders that when children or young people who are victims of FDSV become parents themselves, the onus is placed on them to break the cycle of violence.
- When intergenerational trauma is unaddressed, stakeholders noted the impacts this has on the trajectory of children and young people, including the tendencies for young people to 'step up' in the family and act as a circuit breaker, this can result in, for example, a young person dropping out of school to care for family members.
- Trauma-informed support services for parents and children whose attachment is disrupted by FDSV are crucial in preventing the intergenerational transmission of trauma.

Children and young people who use violence in the home

- Acknowledgment that children who use violence in the home do not fit the perpetrator model, and that to respond to children and young people as perpetrators is inappropriate.
- Stakeholders highlighted that young people who use violence within the home are at a higher risk of homelessness. There is a need to ensure the accessibility and availability of respite services and safe housing options.
- Some stakeholders call for the next National Plan to include an objective to not criminalise children and young people.

Data gaps

- To date, FDSV data sets have often not captured child-focused data. Greater data collection on children and young people is required to ensure they do not continue to be invisible in policy and practice.

You can view the report in full [here](#).