

# The National Plan to Reduce Violence Against Women and their Children

By the FaHCSIA Safety Taskforce

## Background

On 15 February 2011, the Minister for the Status of Women, the Hon Kate Ellis MP and the Commonwealth Attorney-General, the Hon Robert McClelland MP officially launched the *National Plan to Reduce Violence Against Women and their Children 2010–2022* (the *National Plan*).

The *National Plan* is a 12-year initiative of the Council of Australian Governments and brings together the efforts of all Australian governments to ensure that women and their children are safe and free from violence now and in the future.

The *National Plan's* vision is that "Australian women and their children live free from violence in safe communities". To measure the success of this vision, all governments are working collaboratively to make "a significant and sustained reduction in violence against women and their children".

The *National Plan* sets out six national outcomes for all governments to work towards over the next 12 years:

- *Communities are safe and free from violence;*
- *Relationships are respectful;*
- *Indigenous communities are strengthened;*
- *Services meet the needs of women and their children experiencing violence;*
- *Justice responses are effective, and*
- *Perpetrators stop their violence and are held to account.*

The outcomes will be delivered through four rolling three-year Action Plans. The first Action Plan focuses on building a strong foundation for the *National Plan* in the longer term. It identifies key strategies and actions as well as immediate national initiatives. This will enable governments to work together to develop, implement and report progress within a coordinated national framework.

Since April 2009, the Commonwealth Government has committed over \$86 million to initiatives under the *National Plan*, to improve the lives of women who have experienced violence, and most importantly to stop violence from occurring. The following provides an update on progress of the national initiatives.

## Primary Prevention

### 'The Line'

*The Line* is an innovative social marketing campaign funded by the Commonwealth Government. It targets young people at an age when they are forming their ideas about relationships, and are more likely to be interested in the issues. It encourages respectful relationships and seeks to bring about change to the attitudes and behaviours which support violence. It encourages young people to discuss and debate relationship behaviours and issues. Based on extensive research, *The Line* uses media and language young people relate to.

*The Line's* key messages are:

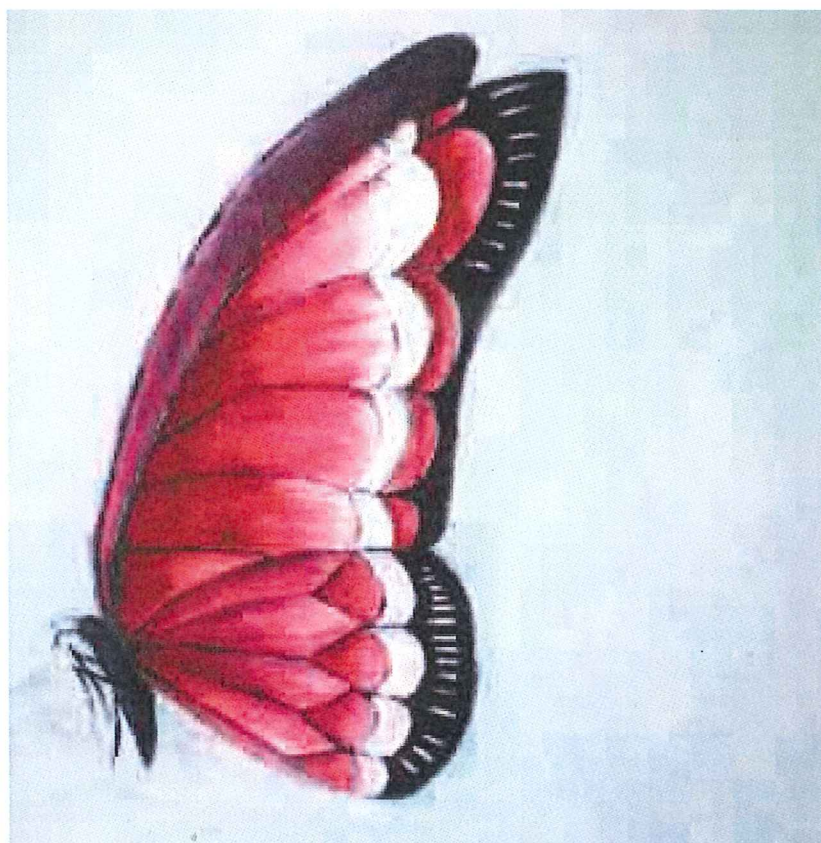
- Australia has zero tolerance towards violence against women and children — violence and disrespectful behaviour is not acceptable;
- Respect is the basis of all good relationships;
- Verbal abuse, sexual bullying, controlling behaviour and harassment are all forms of disrespect and violence, and
- Help is available if you experience violence, or if you need help to stop being violent.

At the centre of *The Line* is its website and Facebook page. Advertising in traditional media, such as radio, and online advertising on search engines is designed to attract people to the website. There are interactive activities to encourage people to engage with the campaign and to get the message across.

Since its launch in June 2010, *The Line's* Facebook page has evolved from people waiting to comment on the blog and poll topics to fans creating their own content and generating their own peer discussion. Currently, the Facebook page has over 65,000 fans.

To maintain momentum and help ensure it's not a static approach, new blogs and polls are regularly added or updated as well as competitions and free music downloads. The website is designed to appeal to young people and the content, in particular the webisodes, uses the language of young people. The website features a 'Parent and Teachers' tab containing fact sheets and a wealth of frequently asked questions answered by *The Line's* resident psychologist.

Recognising the need to reach different groups of young people in different ways, Indigenous specific materials were developed and launched in May 2011. The



website includes Indigenous specific material, such as a series of four comics, lesson plans and plays based on the theme of respect. *The Line* has approached a number of people to become “community champions” to engage others within their community to promote the campaign and its messages. Materials specifically for people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, such as press ads and brochures, have been developed and translated into 11 languages. This material is also available on the website.

*The Line*'s website also provides contact details for a range of services, such as 1800 MYLINE (1800 695 463) which is a professional counselling line funded by the Government to assist young people. It provides free, confidential and professional counselling 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

*The Line* has been around for just over a year and the tracking research indicates good progress. While recognising that social change takes time, there are early indications young people are thinking about their attitudes and behaviours, and what it means to be in a respectful relationship.

### Respectful Relationships

Respectful Relationships is a primary prevention strategy that seeks to prevent sexual assault and domestic and family violence through education. A series of projects are designed to test out different approaches in school and non-school settings. These projects work with young people (particularly young men) to raise their awareness of ethical behaviour, to develop protective behaviours, and to develop their skills in conducting respectful relationships.

To date 17 projects have been funded across Australia by the Australian Government. In addition, four Indigenous specific Respectful Relationships projects have been funded under the Indigenous Family Safety Program.

An evaluation of the Respectful Relationships projects has commenced. The evaluation aims to examine program outcomes, the efficiency of the implementation of different program models, and how models are delivering on aspects of the National Association of Services Against Sexual Assault's *National Standards for Prevention of Sexual Assault through Education*. This evaluation will be an important part of informing future directions.

### Community Action Grants

Community Action Grants will support communities in reducing violence against women through local initiatives. Community organisations and sporting codes will be funded to engage community members in a range of primary prevention activities. Projects may include activities which strengthen the community, increase awareness in the community and encourage community responsibility in reducing violence against women. The grants are being administered in two streams:

**Stream 1:** Community organisations to administer community based projects, with priority given to activities that assist specific communities of older women, women with disabilities, culturally and linguistically diverse communities and gay and lesbian communities.

**Stream 2:** Sporting codes to establish initiatives with local sporting clubs. It is anticipated the successful projects be announced and will commence later this year.

### Improved Services

#### 1800RESPECT

1800RESPECT is the National Sexual Assault, Domestic and Family Violence Counselling Service – 1800 737 732 and [www.1800RESPECT.org.au](http://www.1800RESPECT.org.au). It is a confidential service staffed by professional counsellors to assist people who have experienced, or are at risk of, domestic violence and/or sexual assault. The service is provided 24 hours a day, seven days a week, and offers:

- telephone and online counselling, information and referrals;
- an inclusive service to people with disabilities, Indigenous people, young people and people from culturally diverse backgrounds, and
- support for staff in other services who are working with victims of violence.

Since its commencement, 1800RESPECT has been building relationships with domestic violence and sexual assault services across the states and territories to help ensure they can work together to ensure the best possible outcome for their clients.

Between October 2010, when the telephone service commenced and 30 June 2011, 8,730 contacts have been made with 1800RESPECT; with more than 6,500 referrals to local, on-the-ground services.

The online counselling component of 1800RESPECT commenced on 30 June 2011. 1800RESPECT Online offers users an alternative way to access counselling in relation to any issue they may have in the area of sexual assault, domestic or family violence.

#### Frontline Workers – support for people working with victims of domestic violence and sexual assault:

Victims of domestic violence and sexual assault frequently need to access a wide range of different services and support: health and counselling, legal, housing, education and employment. Workers across the different sectors need to be able to respond effectively to victims of domestic and family violence and sexual assault. It is also recognised that they may also need support to deal with the vicarious trauma they may experience.

State and territory governments and individual service providers provide a wide range of different supports, training,

debriefing and professional supervision. The Frontline Workers Project is looking at the different support and training currently available to identify gaps and any particular opportunities to address these.

### Key Reform Projects

Under the *National Plan*, governments have committed to better understand how to help improve the quality of services and responses to women with children who are experiencing, or at risk of domestic and family violence. While the approach for individual projects may differ, the common aim is to help build knowledge and an understanding of what can work in key, sometimes difficult, service delivery areas.

The reform projects, to be developed over 2011–13, will focus on:

- improving service delivery for women with disability;
- risk assessments for the health sector;
- children exposed to domestic violence;
- the transition of women to stability post-violence;
- the national workforce agenda;
- community policing best practice for safe Indigenous communities, and
- Indigenous community safety planning.

The initial planning stage for the projects is being undertaken jointly by Commonwealth, states and territories.

### Building the Evidence Base

#### National Centre of Excellence

The National Centre of Excellence (NCE) will guide a national research agenda in the area of violence against women which reflects the research priorities of the Commonwealth, states and territories, and will lead to the significant advancement of capabilities and knowledge of violence against women and their children.

Work has been commissioned to develop governance and funding models for the NCE. A detailed consultation process is being undertaken with key stakeholders to identify the research needs of the sector, identify the parameters of that research agenda and to scope and develop suitable governance and funding models.

The NCE is expected to be established in 2012.

#### Personal Safety Survey and National Community Attitudes Survey

Two national surveys will be conducted on a four year cycle. The Australian Bureau of Statistics will conduct the Personal Safety Survey (PSS) in 2012 and results will be available in 2013. The last PSS was conducted in 2005. The 2012 survey will provide much-needed evidence for future policy development to prevent domestic and sexual violence.



The next National Community Attitudes Survey (NCAS) is planned for 2014 and work has started on this. This builds on the previous survey conducted in 2009. Understanding community attitudes is important for shaping and influencing future initiatives to prevent violence against women. This can include the development of interventions to build cultures of non-violence and value respectful relationships between men and women.

**Challenging Perpetrators to Change Strengthening Perpetrator Intervention Responses**

The *National Plan* recognises the need to strengthen the evidence base for what works to reduce offending and re-offending. As an initial step, work has commenced to identify current perpetrator interventions, which interventions work well, and for whom, guidelines for best practice approaches and the key steps involved in developing the perpetrator research agenda in the longer term.

As part of this project, a roundtable of experts was convened in August 2011. Roundtable participants included academics, practitioners, researchers and government officers, all with long-standing interest and expertise in the design, delivery, research and evaluation of intervention responses for male perpetrators of violence.

This work will help guide governments in setting future research priorities and to determine the criteria for a one-off reward payment to states and territories that increase the number and quality of their perpetrator intervention responses.

**National Plan Implementation Panel**

A tripartite National Plan Implementation Panel (NPIP) is being established to advise Ministers on the implementation of the *National Plan*. The NPIP will include Commonwealth, state and territory government as well as non-government representatives. By involving the non-government sector in the implementation process, governments can improve partnerships with the community sector, improve information flows and bring to life the vision of working together to ensure that Australian women and their children live free from violence in safe communities.

**Reducing Violence Against Women is Everyone's Responsibility**

Community engagement with the *National Plan* is crucial to reducing the levels of violence against women. Generating

discussion on physical and sexual violence in Australia raises awareness of this important issue and encourages communities to find local solutions to prevent violence. A suite of products including information sheets and an Easy English version of the *National Plan* have been developed to help communities understand and engage with the *National Plan*.

Information sheets are available on the following topics:

- Indigenous Women;
- Women with Disability;
- Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) Women;
- Rural and Remote Women;
- Older Women, and
- Primary Prevention.

The Easy English version of the *National Plan* aims to assist people with low literacy levels. It may also be useful as a summary or condensed version of the *National Plan*.

The *National Plan* and associated products are available on the Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (FaHCSIA) website at: [http://www.fahcsia.gov.au/sa/women/progserv/violence/nationalplan/Pages/safe\\_free\\_fromviolence.aspx](http://www.fahcsia.gov.au/sa/women/progserv/violence/nationalplan/Pages/safe_free_fromviolence.aspx).

If you prefer a printed copy of the *National Plan*, please phone freecall 1800 050 009 (calls made from mobile phones may incur additional costs). ■