

Submission to the Joint Committee of Public Accounts and Audit

Submission from the Department of Social Services on the Australian National Audit Office Auditor-General Report No. 45 of 2018–19: *Coordination and Targeting of Domestic Violence Funding and Actions*

Introduction

The Auditor-General's Report *Coordination and Targeting of Domestic Violence Funding and Actions*, released 13 June 2019, made five recommendations:

- *Recommendation 1: The Department of Social Services specify research and data projects as actions under each of the priority areas agreed by governments for the Fourth Action Plan.*
- *Recommendation 2: The Department of Social Services, in consultation across governments, develop a National Implementation Plan for the Fourth Action Plan.*
- *Recommendation 3: The Department of Social Services identify and develop new measures of success, data sources and specific outcomes for the Fourth Action Plan, and any future National Plan.*
- *Recommendation 4: The Department of Social Services work with the states and territories to plan evaluations of individual services and programs funded across jurisdictions under action plans to inform an outcome evaluation of the Fourth Action Plan and overall National Plan.*
- *Recommendation 5: That public annual progress reports for the Fourth Action Plan document the status of each action item and the outcomes of the National Plan as a whole.*

The Department of Social Services (the department) agreed to all recommendations.

The department welcomes the opportunity to provide a submission to the Committee.

Implementation status update on audit recommendations

The audit considered the effectiveness of the department's role in implementing the *National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children 2010–2022* (the National Plan). The audit coincided with the final year of the Third Action Plan of the National Plan, and during the final development phase of the Fourth Action Plan.

The National Plan

The National Plan is an initiative of the Commonwealth and state and territory governments. It is a 12-year plan that connects the work of all Australian governments, community organisations and individuals to ensure that each year, fewer women experience violence and more women and their children live safely. The National Plan focuses on family, domestic and sexual violence; types of violence where women are more likely to be victims.

The National Plan recognises that violence against women and their children is a complex problem that requires a long-term plan of action. Delivery of the National Plan is through a series of four three-year action plans, designed to build on each other over time.

Fourth Action Plan

The Council of Australian Governments (COAG) endorsed the Fourth Action Plan on 9 August 2019¹, agreeing on five national priorities to reduce family, domestic and sexual violence. See **Attachment A** for a copy of the Fourth Action Plan.

The audit report's insights helped strengthen the final development phase of the Fourth Action Plan and will continue to shape its implementation. While COAG only endorsed the Fourth Action Plan in August 2019, there has already been significant progress in responding to the audit recommendations.

Finding on governance arrangements to support implementation of the National Plan

The governance arrangements assessed as effective by the Auditor-General continue to support the Fourth Action Plan².

COAG continues to lead collective action to reduce violence. Women's Safety Ministers representing Commonwealth, state and territory governments maintain their oversight of implementation of the Fourth Action Plan, with support from Ministers in other portfolios. The National Implementation Executive Group, comprising senior officials from all jurisdictions, remains responsible for monitoring and reporting on the progress of the Fourth Action Plan to Women's Safety Ministers. Both of these have met regularly throughout and since the Australian National Audit Office (ANAO) audit.

The Fourth Action Plan was informed by extensive consultation with stakeholders, culminating in a statement on actions from delegates at the COAG Summit on Reducing Violence against Women and their Children 2018³. As with previous action plans, the Fourth Action Plan operates as a high-level guide to implementation.

A new national communications strategy to drive stakeholder engagement is a commitment in the Fourth Action Plan with details on the national strategy to be included in the forthcoming National Implementation Plan⁴. It is due to be launched by the end of 2019.

Details of actions taken in relation to each of the recommendations of the Auditor-General's Report are outlined below.

¹ <https://www.coag.gov.au/meeting-outcomes/coag-meeting-communique-09-august-2019>

² Australian National Audit Office, Auditor-General Report No. 45 2018–19, *Coordination and Targeting of Domestic Violence Funding and Actions*.

³ Department of Social Services, *Fourth Action Plan — National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children 2010–2022*.

⁴ <https://www.dss.gov.au/factsheet-fourth-action-plan-of-the-national-plan-to-reduce-violence-against-women-and-their-children-2010-2022-the-national-plan>.

Recommendation 1: The Department of Social Services specify research and data projects as actions under each of the priority areas agreed by governments for the Fourth Action Plan.

A growing evidence base has supported the National Plan. However, as acknowledged in the Fourth Action Plan, more evidence is needed. The Fourth Action Plan includes funding for dedicated research and data projects to support the five national priorities of the National Plan.

Under the Fourth Action Plan, Australia's National Research Organisation for Women's Safety (ANROWS) has received a \$5.639 million grant, executed on 25 June 2019, to undertake research in support of the five national priorities. ANROWS are currently scoping research projects, with research to commence this financial year to be carried through to 30 June 2022.

The Auditor-General noted there is scope for the National Plan to better target research to identify what works, for whom and in what contexts. The new research program will include a focus on program evaluation and research synthesis. Furthermore, a 'what works' framework will be developed by ANROWS to support future evaluations of the overall value of initiatives to reduce violence against women.

Additionally, as part of the National Plan, ANROWS will undertake the next wave of the National Community Attitudes towards Violence against Women Survey in 2021.

Recommendation 2: The Department of Social Services, in consultation across governments, develop a National Implementation Plan for the Fourth Action Plan.

Women's Safety Ministers are overseeing the development of the National Implementation Plan, which is on track for release by the end of 2019.

The COAG Meeting Communique from 9 August 2019⁵ noted the release of the National Implementation Plan later this year, and that it would set out initiatives being undertaken in all jurisdictions. Specifically, the National Implementation Plan will outline how governments will deliver actions, and measure their effectiveness in addressing the national priority areas⁶. It will provide transparency around the actions governments have committed to address the priority areas.

⁵ <https://www.coag.gov.au/meeting-outcomes/coag-meeting-communique-09-august-2019>.

⁶ Department of Social Services, *Fourth Action Plan — National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children 2010–2022*.

Recommendation 3: The Department of Social Services identify and develop new measures of success, data sources and specific outcomes for the Fourth Action Plan, and any future National Plan.

The department is developing a new performance monitoring and reporting framework for the Fourth Action Plan and National Plan and recently engaged KPMG to undertake some preparatory work on this framework. This work has considered options for new measures and the data that may be used to measure success. Consultation with states and territories and key stakeholders will inform the final product.

Complementing work on the performance monitoring and reporting framework, is a focus on improving data on all cohorts of women and children at risk of violence and on all forms of violence that women and their children could experience. This work will commence in December 2019.

Recommendation 4: The Department of Social Services work with the states and territories to plan evaluations of individual services and programs funded across jurisdictions under action plans to inform an outcome evaluation of the Fourth Action Plan and overall National Plan.

All grants funded under the Fourth Action Plan include an evaluation requirement. In addition, the Australian Government has committed to a meta evaluation of the Fourth Action Plan and overall National Plan. The evaluation will assess progress against objectives, and inform the future policy response to reducing violence against women and their children.

The first year of the Fourth Action Plan focuses on the development of the evaluation plan. This is occurring in consultation with states and territories. The evaluation work will be performed by an independent evaluator, with the process for selection of the evaluator and commencement of the evaluation planned for the first quarter of 2020.

Separate evaluations of key individual initiatives funded across jurisdictions will inform the meta evaluation. For example, an evaluation of Our Watch will inform the overall evaluation of the National Plan. The National Implementation Plan will capture details on planned evaluations and performance monitoring and reporting across all jurisdictions, where that information is available.

Recommendation 5: That public annual progress reports for the Fourth Action Plan document the status of each action item and the outcomes of the National Plan as a whole.

At the commencement of the National Plan, the Australian, state and territory governments committed to annual reporting on the progress of the National Plan and its associated Action Plans. The most recent annual progress report is for 2017–18. The report is available at plan4womenssafety.dss.gov.au.

The Third Action Plan evaluation will be released late 2019. It is a process evaluation that will report on progress against priorities and actions under the Third Action Plan. As the focus of the Third Action Plan evaluation overlaps with the progress reports, there will be no separate progress report for 2018–19.

The 2017–18 Annual Progress Report includes an assessment of progress on National Plan measures and indicators. It also tracks the nature and extent of violence against women using data from the Australian Bureau of Statistics' Personal Safety Survey, as well as measuring people's understanding of and attitudes towards gender equality and violence against women, using the results of the National Community Attitudes towards Violence against Women Survey.

The 2017–18 report provides a selection of activities undertaken between July 2017 and June 2018 that contribute to the six National Priority Areas and provides an indication of investment by jurisdictions during this time.

For the Fourth Action Plan, governments will report on their key achievements and progress through national progress reports. While timing will be influenced by data availability, the intention is for the first progress report of the Fourth Action Plan to be released in September 2020. Reports will be available at plan4womenssafety.dss.gov.au. The performance monitoring and reporting framework will shape the structure of the progress reports. It will be completed in July 2020.