



25 September 2020

Standing Committee on Social Policy and Legal Affairs  
Department of the House of Representatives  
Parliament House  
Canberra ACT 2600

Dear Chair Wallace MP,

## **Response to Questions on Notice in the Inquiry into Family, Domestic and Sexual Violence**

Thank you for the opportunity to appear before the Standing Committee on Social Policy and Legal Affairs on 7 September 2020. I want to reiterate my support for your Inquiry, and my hope that your findings will enable Australia to take a much-needed leap forward in our efforts to prevent and respond to the scourge of family, domestic and sexual violence.

Please find below my responses to the questions I took on notice during my appearance before the Committee.

### **1. What is the cost of domestic violence in Australia on a yearly basis?**

In May 2016, KPMG estimated that the cost of violence against women and their children in Australia was \$22 billion in 2015-16.<sup>1</sup> KPMG also noted that the under-representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women, pregnant women, women with disability, and women who are homeless within national prevalence estimates could add a further \$4 billion to the cost of violence against women and their children in Australia in 2015-16.<sup>2</sup>

This cost was broken down by KPMG as follows:

- \$10.4 billion: pain, suffering and premature mortality reflecting the major ongoing health impacts of violence, including mental health problems and an increased risk of chronic illness and pain, and reproductive health problems.
- \$1.4 billion: Impact on the private and public health systems, with increased demand for hospital and other health services impacting the availability of service provision, workforce requirements and levels of utilisation of facilities.

- \$1.9 billion: Impact on production and the business sector, including from victim absenteeism from paid and unpaid work, victim inability to perform household tasks and voluntary work, perpetrator absenteeism and additional management costs.
- \$4.4 billion: impacted economic opportunities, including loss of economies of scale due to the breakdown of larger households and the financial consequences of substantial property damage.
- \$333 million: second generational impacts on children who are exposed to acts of violence, including psychological and behavioural issues, child abuse, health issues, and other effects on wellbeing and development.
- \$1.7 billion: impact on the justice, services and funeral sectors.
- \$1.6 billion: costs associated with transfer payments, and the associated cost to government in administering taxation revenue, including loss of income tax of victims, perpetrators and employers, additional social welfare payments, and victim compensation payments.

KPMG found that victims and survivors bore \$11.3 billion, or 52 per cent, of the total costs. The Australian Government, state and territory governments bore \$4.1 billion, or 19 per cent, of the total costs. The community, children of women experiencing violence, perpetrators, employers, and friends and family bore \$6.5 billion, or 29 per cent, of the total costs.<sup>3</sup>

**2. Can you elaborate on your statement that limited information exists about the extent that services available to support children affected by family and domestic violence are made available to or accessed by children, or the outcomes for children who use such services? Is there anywhere the government should be going to address that issue?**

In 2015, the former National Children's Commissioner, Megan Mitchell, conducted a national consultation on how children are affected by family and domestic violence.<sup>4</sup>

Participants in the consultation described a range of therapeutic services assisting children to manage the trauma associated with family and domestic violence. However, they also raised issues about the affordability, accessibility and availability of services and programs for children affected by family and domestic violence, and concern at the limited evidence of the efficacy of programs.

For example, the joint submission to the National Children's Commissioner made by the Australian Institute of Family Studies (AIFS) and Australia's National Research Organisation for Women's Safety Ltd (ANROWS) noted that:

Australian Human Rights Commission

Overall, there is a lack of evidence about the outcomes for children affected by DFV who engage with services, programs and support. This is largely due to a lack of rigorous evaluation of DFV services. DFV services often lack the resources to undertake or participate in evaluation. There is, however, a significant amount of high quality practice knowledge within the sector about the best approaches to take with children affected by DFV.<sup>5</sup>

The former National Children's Commissioner found that while there are a number of promising initiatives to support children affected by family and domestic violence, limited information exists about the extent that these are made available to or accessed by children, or the outcomes for children who use such services.<sup>6</sup> She also found that children are often supported in the context of the needs of the parent escaping family and domestic violence, rather than in response to their specific therapeutic needs.

Some examples of therapeutic programs focused on children affected by family and domestic violence, which the Committee may be interested in, include:

- the Expressive Therapy program in Queensland conducted by yourtown, <https://report.yourtown.com.au/annual-report-2016/what-we-do-supporting-children>
- The Anchor, a program conducted by Uniting in NSW that supports children and young people with the issues that can arise when their parents separate, [https://www.uniting.org/services/counselling-mediation/counselling/the-anchor?gclid=Cj0KCQjw0rr4BRCtARIsAB0\\_48NCKdgRwGPnlykhE2qRoJc-o9IFGsVVg\\_3obo\\_BWdluhrrFUgXEA4aArS6EALw\\_wcB&gclsrc=aw.ds](https://www.uniting.org/services/counselling-mediation/counselling/the-anchor?gclid=Cj0KCQjw0rr4BRCtARIsAB0_48NCKdgRwGPnlykhE2qRoJc-o9IFGsVVg_3obo_BWdluhrrFUgXEA4aArS6EALw_wcB&gclsrc=aw.ds)
- An early response program targeting family trauma in early learning contexts conducted by Goodstart Early Learning, [https://www.goodstart.org.au/news-and-advice/august-2018-\(1\)/early-response-program-targets-family-trauma](https://www.goodstart.org.au/news-and-advice/august-2018-(1)/early-response-program-targets-family-trauma)

The Committee may also find the recent work of Associate Professor Silke Meyer, Deputy Director, Gender and Family Violence Prevention Centre, a useful explanation of why we need to focus more on the needs of children in family and domestic violence - see <https://lens.monash.edu/@politics-society/2020/09/11/1381274/why-we-need-to-focus-more-on-the-needs-of-children-in-domestic-and-family-violence-responses> (published on 11 September 2020).

The importance of child-focused services such as helplines has also been demonstrated by the experiences of children and young people during COVID-19.

The Kids Helpline has received a significant increase in the volume of children and young people seeking help since the start of the pandemic – up 24% to the end of August compared with 2019.

In September 2020, a co-authored report by the Australian Human Rights Commission and the Kids Helpline analysed the concerns of children and young people who are actively seeking help about COVID-19 from Kids Helpline. The report is available at <https://humanrights.gov.au/our-work/childrens-rights/publications/impacts-covid-19-children-and-young-people-who-contact-kids>.

The impact of COVID-19 on family life was among the top three concerns for almost all age groups and both genders. Nineteen percent (494) of children and young people raised COVID-19 in the context of impacts on family life. Some children and young people spoke about experiencing violence and abuse at home, or being exposed to family violence between parents/carers, while others indicated they had been victims of abuse and violence by a parent, and in some cases siblings. Some children and young people in these situations said that the restrictions had heightened family tensions leading to violence. Others felt trapped and unable to run away. Some were unable to, or uncertain whether they could, access their usual support mechanisms when facing family conflict.

This report gives an indication about the types of assistance children and young people will require as they move forward. This includes:

- investing in child and youth-focused mental health services and support;
- promoting clear, accurate and child friendly information and resources;
- supporting schools and other educational institutions to deliver quality online learning and maintain help and connection for vulnerable students;
- extending economic support to all families and young people that need it, and making skills development and youth employment a key focus of recovery;
- prioritising services for vulnerable children and young people (such as children at risk of family violence, abuse and neglect, children with disability and children and young people at risk of homelessness); and
- involving children and young people in responses to COVID-19 and recovery plans.

**3. When will the Commission's work on the question of a national human rights charter be finalised?**

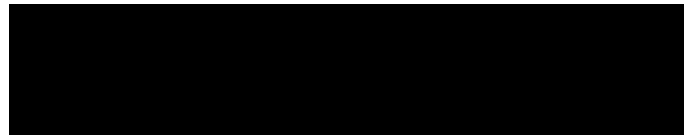
Australian Human Rights Commission

The President of the Australian Human Rights Commission is currently leading a national conversation on human rights. The conversation is exploring a number of technical areas including reform options for Australia's discrimination law framework and how to improve positive protections for human rights. The first part of this work, a report focused on reform of discrimination laws, is due to be released at the end of this year. The final report, including work on positively framed human rights protections and accountability mechanisms, will be released in mid-2021. The Commission will maintain consistency with its position of many decades that Australia should adopt a national human rights act using a 'dialogue model' to ensure human rights are considered in law and policy making decisions.

Yours sincerely



Kate Jenkins  
**Sex Discrimination Commissioner**



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<sup>1</sup> KPMG, *The cost of Violence against Women and their Children in Australia* (May 2016).

<sup>2</sup> KPMG, *The cost of Violence against Women and their Children in Australia* (May 2016).

<sup>3</sup> KPMG, *The cost of Violence against Women and their Children in Australia* (May 2016).

<sup>4</sup> Australian Human Rights Commission, *Children's Rights Report 2015* (2015) 138  
<[www.humanrights.gov.au/our-work/childrens-rights/projects/childrens-rights-reports](http://www.humanrights.gov.au/our-work/childrens-rights/projects/childrens-rights-reports)>.

<sup>5</sup> Australian Institute of Family Studies (AIFS) and Australia's National Research Organisation for Women's Safety (ANROWS), Submission No 6 to Australian Human Rights Commission, *National Children's Commissioner's examination into children affected by family and domestic violence*, 29 May 2015, 16.

<sup>6</sup> Australian Human Rights Commission, *Children's Rights Report 2015* (2015) 138  
<[www.humanrights.gov.au/our-work/childrens-rights/projects/childrens-rights-reports](http://www.humanrights.gov.au/our-work/childrens-rights/projects/childrens-rights-reports)>.