

Chapter 3

National framework to address domestic and family violence

3.1 Australia's framework to address domestic and family violence is contained in the *National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children 2010-2022* (National Plan). This chapter outlines the development and content of the National Plan and the progress made with its implementation and evaluation.

The National Plan

3.2 The Commonwealth Government delivers some support and services to women who have experienced violence, including through family law, legal assistance, the social security system and some grants funding. State and territory governments have responsibility for delivering a range of services including justice, policing and legal assistance for victims and perpetrators. They also fund and coordinate many services provided by the non-government sector.¹

3.3 All governments have recognised that, despite responsibility for the delivery of various services being divided between the Commonwealth and state and territory jurisdictions, a national, coordinated approach is fundamental to making sustained and meaningful progress in this area. The Commonwealth Government has worked with state and territory governments to develop and deliver the National Plan, which was endorsed by the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) and released in February 2011.² The purpose of the National Plan is:

[T]o provide a coordinated framework that improves the scope, focus and effectiveness of governments' actions, ensuring women and their children receive the support and information they need.³

Background to the National Plan

3.4 The National Plan was developed from a recommendation made by the Commonwealth's National Council to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children (National Council), which was initiated by the Commonwealth in 2007.⁴

3.5 The National Council undertook national consultation on how to address domestic and family violence, by engaging with over 2,000 people in every state and territory, conducting expert roundtable discussions and interviews with victims and perpetrators of violence. The National Council also received over 350 submissions.⁵

1 Department of Social Services, *Submission 57*, Attachment 1 (National Plan), p. 4.

2 Department of Social Services, *Submission 57*, p. 1.

3 Department of Social Services, *Submission 57*, Attachment 1 (National Plan), Background, p. 4.

4 Department of Social Services, *Submission 57*, Attachment 1 (National Plan), p. 3.

5 Department of Social Services, *Submission 57*, Attachment 1 (National Plan), p. 3.

3.6 The National Council's 2009 report *Time for Action* recommended the development of a long-term national plan to reduce domestic and family violence, which should be formulated through and agreed to by COAG.⁶

3.7 While the National Plan was being developed, in 2009 the Commonwealth undertook some immediate actions recommended by *A Time for Action*, including: funding the national helpline, 1800-RESPECT, for victims of domestic and family violence; allocating \$26 million for primary prevention activities, including \$9 million for the respectful relationships program for school age young people and \$17 million for social marketing focused on changing attitudes and behaviours; \$3 million to support research on perpetrator treatment; and establishing a national scheme for the registration of domestic and family violence orders.⁷

The National Plan's aims and priorities

3.8 The National Plan's overall aim is to change social attitudes about violence against women and their children to reduce domestic and family violence over the long term. The National Plan states that:

It is the first plan to coordinate action across jurisdictions. It is the first to focus strongly on prevention. It is the first to look to the long term, building respectful relationships and working to increase gender equality to prevent violence from occurring in the first place. It is the first to focus on holding perpetrators accountable and encourage behaviour change.⁸

3.9 The National Plan sets out six national outcomes:

- 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
- perpetrators stop their violence and are held to account.⁹

3.10 Underpinning these outcomes is the intention that all Australian governments will build the evidence base about domestic and family violence because:

...data relating to violence against women and their children in Australia is poor. Data on services sought by, and provided to, victims is not readily available, and the way in which information is reported is generally

6 The National Council to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children, *Background Paper to Time for Action: The National Council's Plan for Australia to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children, 2009-2021* (March 2009).

7 *The National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women Immediate Government Actions* April 2009, pp 4-5.

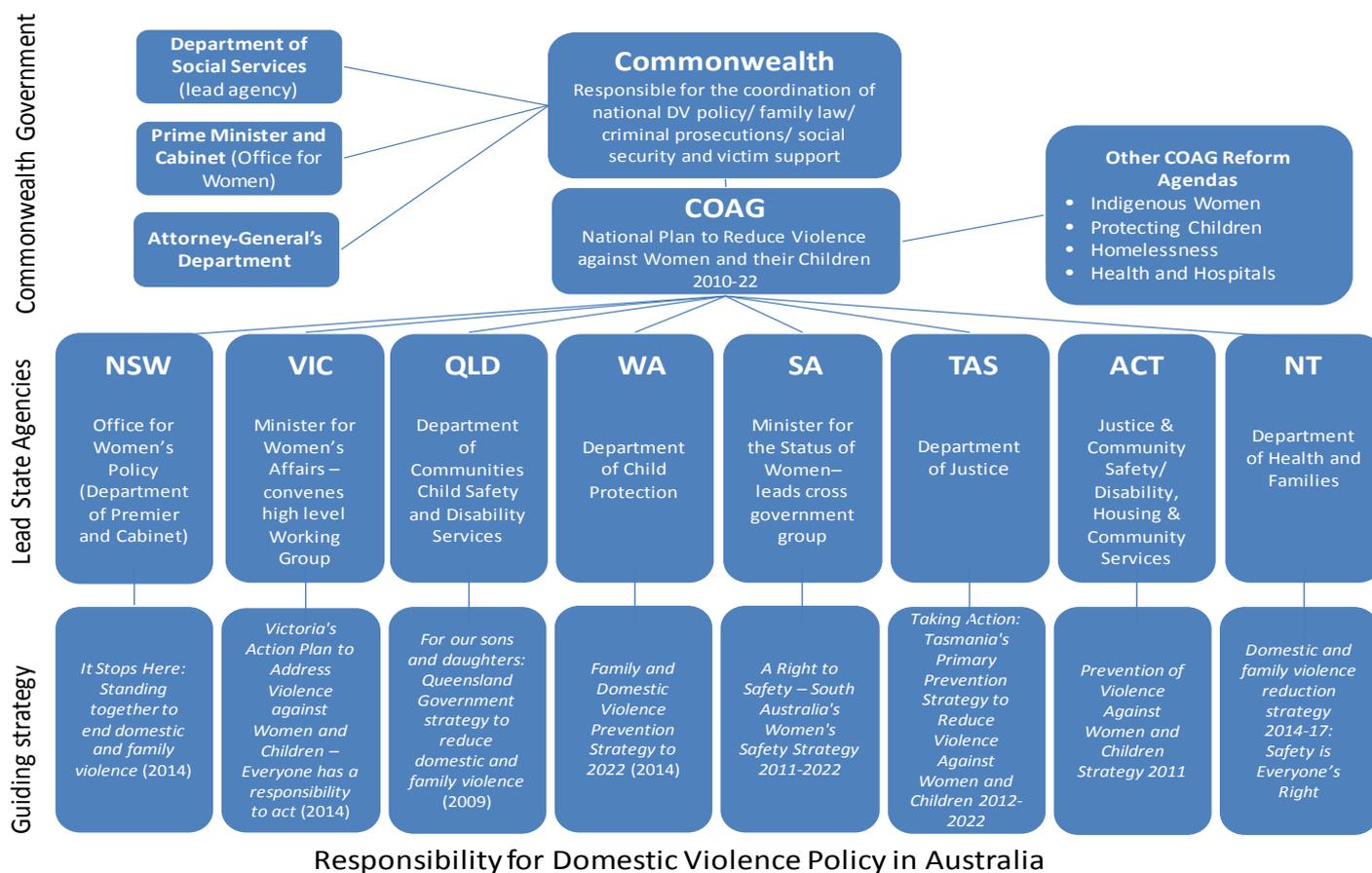
8 Department of Social Services, *Submission 57*, Attachment 1 (National Plan), Foreword.

9 Department of Social Services, *Submission 57*, Attachment 1 (National Plan), p. 3.

inconsistent and does not allow for a comprehensive understanding of violence against women.¹⁰

3.11 The National Plan sets out a framework for coordination of Commonwealth and state and territory responsibilities. Under the National Plan, all states and territories are responsible for developing their own strategies and jurisdiction-specific programs to tackle domestic and family violence (see Figure 1).

Figure 1: Responsibility for domestic and family violence policy in Australia



Acknowledging jurisdictional work

3.12 Since the development of the National Plan the committee notes that some states and territories have established various bodies specifically tasked with inquiring into the prevalence and effects of domestic and family violence, and how policy and legal frameworks can address this problem.

3.13 Some examples are the Special Taskforce on Domestic and Family Violence set up by the Queensland government in September 2014 and chaired by the Honourable Dame Quentin Bryce AD CVO, which released its final report on

10 Department of Social Services, *Submission 57*, Attachment 1 (National Plan), p. 47.

28 February 2015.¹¹ In January 2015, the Victorian government established a Royal Commission into Family Violence.¹²

3.14 The Victorian Government has also appointed a Minister for the Prevention of Family Violence.¹³ In March 2015, the NSW Government appointed a Minister for the Prevention of Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault.¹⁴

Advisory panel

3.15 Reinforcing the need for all levels of government to work together, on 28 January 2015, the Prime Minister noted that the 2015 COAG agenda will address the problem of violence against women at a national level:

All governments are determined to eliminate violence against women. Continued collaboration between the Commonwealth and the States and territories is crucial in achieving that objective.¹⁵

3.16 To advise COAG, the Prime Minister has established an advisory panel on violence against women which will be chaired by former Victorian Police Commissioner Mr Ken Lay, with Australian of the Year, Ms Rosie Batty, and CEO of Australia's National Research Organisation for Women's Safety (ANROWS), Heather Nancarrow, as Deputy Chairs. The experts included in the panel have been nominated by each state and territory and have specialised knowledge across domestic and family violence, sexual assault, online safety, violence within Indigenous and culturally and linguistically diverse communities, and people with disabilities.¹⁶

3.17 The committee understands that the panel has met a number of times, and that the Chair and Deputy Chairs presented the panel's first of three reports to COAG on 23 July 2015.¹⁷

11 Premier of Queensland, *Domestic violence taskforce to consult Queenslanders*, Media Release, 10 September 2015; see also www.qld.gov.au/community/getting-support-health-social-issue/dfv-taskforce/ (accessed 27 March 2015)

12 Premier of Victoria, *Royal Commission into Family Violence*, Media Release, 19 January 2015.

13 See Minister for the Prevention of Family Violence, the Hon Fiona Richardson MP, at www.vic.gov.au/contactsandservices/directory/?ea0_1fz149_120.&roleWithSubordinates&6368c918-b4ca-4bf7-b2a7-0544380ebe81 (accessed 27 March 2015)

14 See www.parliament.nsw.gov.au/prod/parlment/members.nsf/V3ListCurrentMinisters (accessed 7 April 2015)

15 Prime Minister of Australia, the Hon Tony Abbott MP, and the Minister assisting the Prime Minister for Women, Senator the Hon Michaelia Cash, 'COAG agenda to address ending violence against women', Media Release, 28 January 2015.

16 Prime Minister of Australia, the Hon Tony Abbott MP and Minister Assisting the Prime Minister for Women, Senator the Hon Michaelia Cash, 'COAG agenda to address ending violence against women', Media Release, 28 January 2015. On 14 May 2015, the full membership of the advisory panel was announced. See Prime Minister of Australia, the Hon Tony Abbott MP and Minister Assisting the Prime Minister for Women, Senator the Hon Michaelia Cash, 'Advisory Panel Announced to Reduce Violence Against Women', 14 May 2015.

17 COAG, Special Meeting Communique, 23 July 2015.

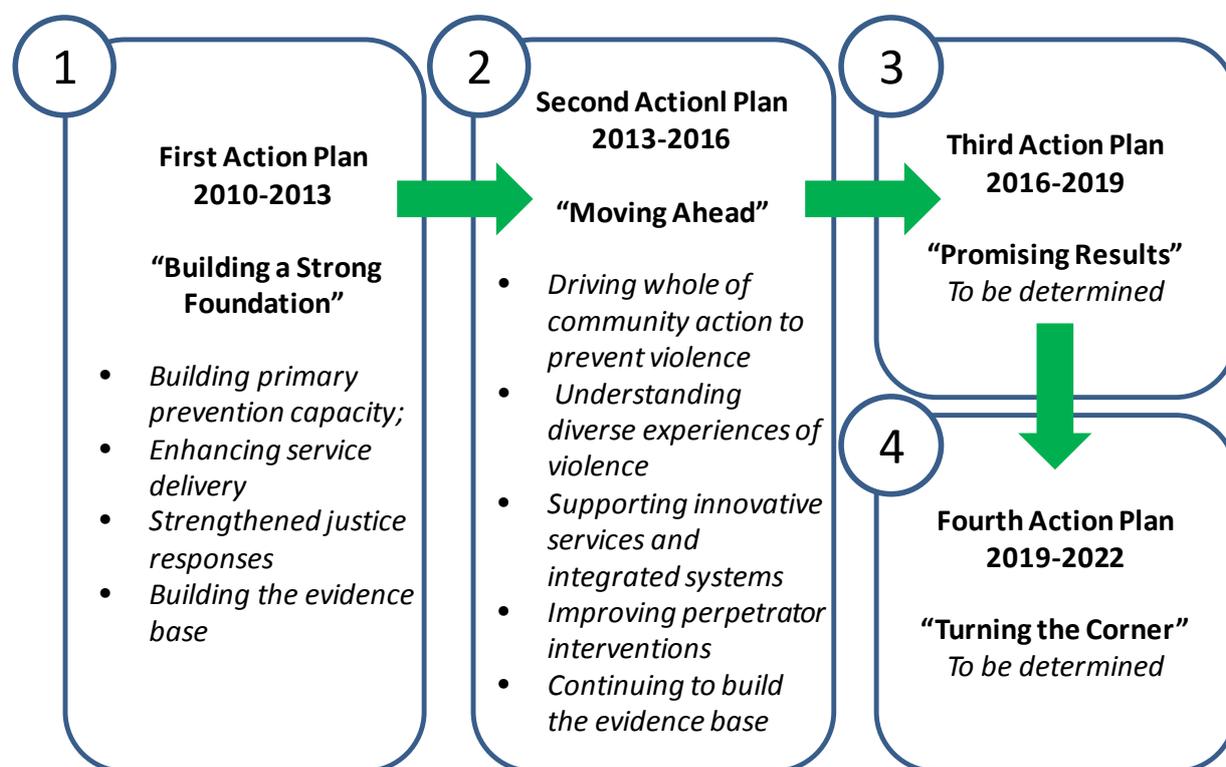
Phases of the National Plan

3.18 The National Plan sets out a 12-year framework from 2010 to 2022 to reduce domestic and family violence in Australia. The 12 year timeline is divided into four three-year Action Plans with specific aims and outcomes (Figure 2).¹⁸ This approach will enable governments to monitor the implementation and progress of individual three-year Action Plans, and so the development of future policy is informed by emerging evidence.¹⁹

The First Action Plan 2010-13

3.19 The First Action Plan focused on establishing the groundwork for the implementation of the National Plan, pursuing some short-term actions to address the causes and effects of violence against women, as well as putting in place strategic projects and actions to drive long-term change.

Figure 2: The Four Stages of the National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children 2010-2022



3.20 To support the existing services for women who have experienced violence, which is mainly delivered by the states and territories, the Commonwealth Government provided early funding under the National Plan for some measures, described above. The Commonwealth Government has also funded a number of other initiatives to reduce domestic and family violence – many of which are focussed on primary prevention, early intervention and building the evidence base - to reduce

18 Department of Social Services, *Submission 57*, Attachment 1 (National Plan), p. 12.

19 Department of Social Services, *Submission 57*, Attachment 1 (National Plan), p. 12.

violence against women and reduce the strain on services in the medium to long term. These include Our Watch,²⁰ ANROWS,²¹ and The Line.²² The Commonwealth has also funded DV-alert a national provider of training on domestic and family violence awareness and response for frontline community workers.²³

The Second Action Plan 2013-16

3.21 The Second Action Plan was released by the Prime Minister on 27 June 2014. It builds on the foundation of the First Action Plan by:

...increasing community involvement in actions that will prevent the violent crimes of domestic and family violence and sexual assault. It will focus on women and communities that have diverse experiences of violence, on strengthening and integrating services and systems, and on improving responses to perpetrators across the country.²⁴

3.22 The Commonwealth Government allocated more than \$100 million over four years to support the Second Action Plan, including:

- \$3.35 million for CrimTrac to develop and test a prototype for a National Domestic Violence Order (DVO) Scheme to strengthen the identification and enforcement of DVOs across state and territory borders;
- \$1.7 million to take the next steps in developing a national data collection and reporting framework by building a more consistent basis from which to gather, analyse and use data on all aspects of violence against women and their children. This includes \$300,000 for the Australian Bureau of Statistics to augment data sets on victims and offenders;
- More than \$1 million for 1800-RESPECT, Australia's first national professional telephone and online counselling service, to expand its service. The funding for 1800-RESPECT is in addition to the government's investment of \$28 million over the next four years to support existing services.²⁵

20 Formerly the Foundation to Prevent Violence against Women and their Children.

21 An organisation to improve the collection and sharing of data about domestic and family violence.

22 A social marketing campaign promoting respectful relationships to young people.

23 Department of Social Services, *Submission 57*, Attachment 1 (National Plan), p. 4.

24 Department of Social Services, *Submission 57*, Attachment 1 (National Plan), p. 3.

25 Prime Minister, the Hon Tony Abbott MP, 'Addressing Violence Against Women and their Children', Media Release, 27 June 2014. However, Ms Therese Sands, Co-Chief Executive Officer, People With Disability Australia, representing the Australian Cross Disability Alliance, told the committee that many women with disability feel they are treated differently by some domestic and family violence services for women in general, including 1800-RESPECT. For example, she commented that a common response to women with disabilities calling 1800-RESPECT was that they are referred to Women with Disabilities Australia, which is not funded to provide a crisis response. See *Proof Committee Hansard*, 11 June 2015, p. 10.

3.23 The measures contained in the Second Action plan have the support of all states and territories.

Governance, implementation and evaluation of the National Plan

Governance

3.24 The National Plan sets out a governance structure for its implementation and evaluation (Figure 3). Relevant Commonwealth and state and territory ministers are responsible for overseeing the implementation of the National Plan, monitoring progress and developing further Action Plans.²⁶

Figure 3: Governance Structure of the National Plan



3.25 The National Plan Implementation Panel (NPIP) was intended to report to ministers on emerging issues to inform the evaluation of Action Plans and the development of future subsequent Action Plans.

3.26 The National Plan described the NPIP as including:

...government and non-government representatives, such as leading researchers, practitioners and community representatives.²⁷

3.27 However, the committee understands the NPIP has been discontinued which has led to some confusion among stakeholders, as discussed below.

Implementation

3.28 The National Plan included provision for the development of a National Implementation Plan for each of the three-year Action Plans to identify key national priorities to be targeted as the goals of each Action Plan. The Implementation Plan for the First Action Plan was developed by all Australian governments and was released by COAG's Select Council on Women's Issues in September 2012.²⁸

26 Department of Social Services, *Submission 57*, Attachment 1 (National Plan), p. 32.

27 Department of Social Services, *Submission 57*, Attachment 1 (National Plan), p. 32.

28 Department of Social Services, *Submission 57*, Attachment 2 (National Implementation Plan for the First Action Plan), p. 8.

3.29 The National Implementation Plan will be supplemented by implementation plans made by every jurisdiction, outlining the actions being taken locally. These will all be made available on the relevant jurisdictional department website and should:

...reflect best practice reforms already underway in each jurisdiction or new initiatives being undertaken. In addition, the jurisdictional implementation plans will reflect on the initiatives being undertaken by states and territories that support key national priorities. States and territories will be undertaking initiatives that are tailored and responsive to local needs.²⁹

Evaluation

3.30 Under the National Plan, all states and territories are obliged to monitor progress against National Plan priorities and to provide an annual report to COAG outlining the progress they have made against the national and jurisdictional Implementation Plans. These jurisdictional annual reports will be submitted to COAG by COAG's Select Council on Women's Issues.³⁰

3.31 On 29 June 2015, Commonwealth, state and territory ministers endorsed the 2014-15 Annual Progress Report on the Second Action Plan which reviewed the collective efforts of governments to address violence against women and their children.³¹

3.32 Actions undertaken from 2010 to 2012 by all governments in relation to the National Plan were reported in the first Progress Report to COAG, published in 2013.³²

3.33 In May 2014, the Department of Social Services published a Progress Review of the First Action Plan,³³ which 'took stock' of progress made and informed the development of the Second Action Plan.³⁴

3.34 The Commonwealth also commissioned Health Outcomes International, a private consultancy firm, to develop an Evaluation Plan for the National Plan, which

29 Department of Social Services, *Submission 57*, Attachment 2 (National Implementation Plan for the First Action Plan), p. 9.

30 Department of Social Services, *Submission 57*, Attachment 2 (National Implementation Plan for the First Action Plan), p. 9, p. 34.

31 Minister for Social Services, the Hon Scott Morrison MP, and Minister Assisting the Prime Minister for Women, Senator the Hon Michaelia Cash, 'Annual progress report highlights achievements to address violence against women', Joint Media Release, 29 June 2015.

32 See *National Plan to Reduce Violence Against Women and their Children 2010-2022: Progress Report to the Council of Australian Governments 2010-2022* at www.dss.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/05_2013/final_edited_report_edit.pdf (accessed 20 April 2015).

33 Department of Social Services, *Submission 57*, Attachment 3 (Progress Review of the First Action Plan), p. 1.

34 Department of Social Services, *Submission 57*, Attachment 2 (National Implementation Plan for the First Action Plan), p. 9, p. 34.

was launched on 3 June 2014. The Evaluation Plan stated that the evaluation of progress of the National Plan would include the following processes:

- review of Action Plans, including consultations with stakeholders to analyse key achievements, barriers to progress and emerging issues;
- publicly available annual progress reporting, informed by Commonwealth and state and territory governments, and the non-government sector;
- evaluation of flagship activities in line with the Evaluation Plan, including ANROWS, Our Watch, 1800-RESPECT, The Line, and projects undertaken by Our Watch; and
- underpinning evaluation activities through the analysis of available data sources on reducing violence, including national surveys, the National Data Collection and Reporting Framework, and state and territory-based data, as well as the activities of ANROWS and Our Watch initiatives.³⁵

Support for the National Plan

3.35 The National Plan was universally supported by submitters and witnesses to the inquiry, who saw it as a positive step towards eliminating violence against women and their children, including domestic and family violence.

3.36 For example, Dr Mayet Costello, Research Manager, ANROWS, told the committee the National Plan demonstrated that all Australian governments were committed to addressing the issue of violence against women:

In the context of what we see as the role of the federal government, ANROWS did want to commend the national plan and commend the leadership and the bipartisan approach from all states, territories and the Commonwealth in continuing to support the national plan. As you probably know, the second action plan...has been strongly supported by all state, territory and Commonwealth governments. We think that is a great step in terms of demonstrating that leadership and demonstrating a consistent and coherent approach to violence against women. At least, it is a start on the right step.³⁶

3.37 Ms Irene Verins, Manager, Mental Wellbeing, Victorian Health Promotion Foundation (VicHealth), highlighted the importance of a long-term, national approach to tackling domestic and family violence:

We also congratulate the Commonwealth government on [the] second action plan under the National Plan to Reduce Violence Against Women and their Children...As a health promotion agency, VicHealth understands and knows how long it takes and what coordinated effort and resources it takes to change attitudes, cultures and behaviours, and we know that from our campaigns in tobacco, skin cancer et cetera. We believe that this is

35 Department of Social Services, *Submission 57*, Attachment 4 (Evaluation Plan), p. 5.

36 *Committee Hansard*, 4 November 2014, p. 2.

similar. It takes a long, sustained and coordinated effort by everyone to achieve some level of sustained change.³⁷

3.38 Ms Libby Davies, Chief Executive Officer, White Ribbon, stated that the National Plan demonstrates the Commonwealth has:

...a clear commitment to long-term efforts to reduce violence against women and their children. Through the first and second plans, prevention and awareness-raising efforts have been enhanced among other critical priorities. This has been complemented by efforts at state and territory levels.³⁸

3.39 Ms Liz Snell, Law Reform and Policy Coordinator, Women's Legal Services Australia, commended the National Plan's focus on promoting equality between men and women, as domestic and family violence is a gendered crime:

We commend the bipartisan support for the recognition of the gendered nature of domestic and family violence and sexual assault and initiatives to address this through the National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children.³⁹

Consultation, implementation and evaluation concerns

3.40 The committee heard general support for the way consultation was undertaken in the development and early stages of the National Plan. However, concerns were raised over ongoing consultation affecting implementation of Actions Plans and the need for independent evaluation.

3.41 Ms Fiona McCormack, Chief Executive Officer, Domestic Violence Victoria, noted that following the disbanding of the NPIP, there was no way for her organisation to communicate with the government:

The NPIP no longer meets. There are no mechanisms or opportunities through which NGOs and relevant government departments can communicate with each other about, say, what is happening through the national plan or identifying gaps in the system, and we really, really need that.⁴⁰

3.42 This concern regarding consultation was echoed by the Women's Legal Centre (ACT and Region):

The implementation of the National Plan to date has been disappointing in its engagement with civil society. The proposed Advisory Groups to the National Plan Implementation Panel never eventuated. Whilst there has been some consultation with relevant stakeholders, this has not been

37 *Committee Hansard*, 12 September 2014, p. 2.

38 *Committee Hansard*, 4 November 2014, p. 9.

39 *Committee Hansard*, 4 November, p. 40.

40 *Committee Hansard*, 12 September 2014, p. 20.

undertaken in a way that harnesses the experience and expertise of those working in the domestic violence and related sectors.⁴¹

3.43 Ms Julie Oberin, Chairperson, Australian Women Against Violence Alliance (AWAVA), commented that currently the government was not consulting with or harnessing the expertise of individuals working in the sector sufficiently in the development and implementation of Action Plans:

Even when I was on the NPIP I found that I had to wait for NPIP meetings to find out what was going on. I think that is an underutilisation of us as an alliance, focusing specifically on this area. We are all there for the same purpose. We have an incredible amount of expertise. I have been working in this field for almost 25 years in December, and if we counted up all of the other expertise...that we could bring in, I think we would get much further much more quickly.⁴²

3.44 Associate Professor Dea Delaney-Thiele, Chief Executive Officer, National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Women's Alliance, commended governments for taking a unified approach to domestic and family violence, but noted there was a need to continue consulting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians:

We say it is extremely important that process be developed to ensure the voices of communities, in particular women and children, inform the development, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of any policy initiatives that impact upon them. If I could be so bold, the old adage of 'Nothing about us without us' is very important consideration.⁴³

3.45 Dr Jessica Cadwallader, Advocacy Project Manager, Violence Prevention, Australian Cross Disability Alliance (ACDA), stressed that the mainstream policy solutions currently operating for women generally need to be more inclusive of women with disability.⁴⁴ Ms Therese Sands, Co-Chief Executive Officer, People with Disability Australia, ACDA, highlighted the need to adequately resource representative organisations that work in the area of violence against women with disabilities so they can harness their expertise.⁴⁵ Ms Sands also indicated the need for better interconnectedness between plans such as the National Disability Strategy, the National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children and the National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children.⁴⁶

3.46 Ms Maya Avdibegovic, Chief Executive Officer, inTouch, Multicultural Centre against Family Violence, noted her organisation had played an active role in informing the National Plan about particular issues faced by women from culturally

41 *Submission 67*, p. 2.

42 *Committee Hansard*, 15 October 2014, p. 28.

43 *Committee Hansard*, 4 November 2014, p. 18.

44 *Proof Committee Hansard*, 11 June 2015, p. 12.

45 *Proof Committee Hansard*, 11 June 2015, pp 11-12.

46 *Proof Committee Hansard*, 11 June 2015, p. 12.

and linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds. However, she felt that consultation had not given her the opportunity to address wider issues:

Yes, we went to the roundtables, and also consultations about the second action plan, and we welcome the focus on issues around CALD communities that are part of the second action plan. But, when I think about it, it is really the tip of the iceberg; because we really only have three or four issues and that are selected there and that is: women without permanent residency, forced marriages and female genital mutilation. They are really such a tiny part of that whole complex issue around women from CALD backgrounds and their experiences of family violence...[when] there is a whole complexity on the basic level that I think needs to be addressed first.⁴⁷

3.47 Ms Cate McKenzie, Group Manager, Department of Social Services (DSS), discussed some of these criticisms in relation to consultation. She stated that much of the consultation carried out by the National Council was still relevant to the work of the government:

In terms of the consultation that went on for the national plan that was led by Libby Lloyd as the chair of the national council—and there were 12 independent members in 2008—a lot of that consultation and the work they did set up the arrangements and the architecture for what should be considered over the 12 years, and in part they suggested having a longer term plan. That consultation still remained and still does remain a pertinent piece of work that we continue to look at, and to date we have not found from the consultations we have had with people have differed hugely from the responses that the national council received when it went out and did its consultations.⁴⁸

3.48 Ms McKenzie told the committee the department consulted with the sector about the development of the Second Action Plan through a series of roundtables⁴⁹ and sought ongoing advice from stakeholders about National Plan initiatives as necessary:

I think one of the things it is important to remember is that in each of the initiatives that has been set up under the national plan, whether it was Our Watch, ANROWS or any of the work that has been done, there has been a degree of consultation that has been wrapped around each initiative and how each initiative would be rolled out. There has never been a lack of communication or a lack of engagement across the broad community.⁵⁰

3.49 The implementation and evaluation of the National Plan has been criticised by some stakeholders. For instance, a 2012 report by the Australian Human Rights Commission and the UN Special Rapporteur on violence against women noted:

47 *Committee Hansard*, 5 November 2014, p. 25.

48 *Committee Hansard*, 15 October 2014, p. 54.

49 *Committee Hansard*, 15 October 2014, p. 54.

50 *Committee Hansard*, 15 October 2014, p. 55.

[The National Plan] is not sufficiently outcomes-focussed and measurement of outcomes is not embedded in the implementation plan;

the plan's monitoring, reporting and evaluation processes are not sufficiently transparent;

its implementation plan is tokenistic and has been badly managed, indicated by its publication in late 2012 – more than two years after the plans release.⁵¹

3.50 The need for independent evaluation of the plans was also stressed to the committee.⁵²

3.51 Ms Cate McKenzie, DSS, responded that the scale and complexity of the domestic and family violence issue meant independent evaluation plans had taken longer to develop than expected:

What became obvious over the first couple of years of working our way through the first action plan was that it was going to be a much more complex engagement that was going to be required [for an evaluation plan]. So, we did some consultations with [stakeholders and jurisdictions] and came up with the idea that it had to be a multi-level, multitargeted, multifocused evaluation and would need to take account of being able to evaluate single initiatives as well as being able to evaluate progress... [Health Outcomes International] have come up a plan that is quite workable. It looks at a progress report or a report on each of the action plans, so one after the first year, one after the second year, one after the third and one after the fourth... Over time those will be independent.⁵³

3.52 Since then, Commonwealth, state and territory ministers have endorsed the 2014-15 Annual Progress Report on the Second Action Plan.⁵⁴

Better coordination by the Commonwealth of plans, policy and governance

3.53 Submitters welcomed the National Plan's focus on improving the coordination of policy and services across governments and the domestic and family violence sector. However, some noted there were further opportunities for the Commonwealth to improve its coordination and leadership role regarding the National Plan and its governance, as well as domestic and family violence policy.

51 AHRC, *Australian study tour report - Visit of the UN Special Rapporteur on violence against women* (2012) at www.humanrights.gov.au/publications/australian-study-tour-report-visit-un-special-rapporteur-violence-against-women (accessed 21 July 2014).

52 Ms Julie Oberin, Chairperson, AWAVA, *Committee Hansard*, 15 October 2014, p. 23; Ms Sophie Hardefeldt, Program Manager, AWAVA, *Committee Hansard*, 15 October 2014, p. 22; Ms Liz Snell, Law Reform and Policy Coordinator, Women's Legal Services New South Wales and Women's Legal Services Australia, *Committee Hansard*, 4 November 2014, p. 41.

53 *Committee Hansard*, 15 October 2014, p. 55.

54 Minister for Social Services, the Hon Scott Morrison MP, and Minister Assisting the Prime Minister for Women, Senator the Hon Michaelia Cash, 'Annual progress report highlights achievements to address violence against women', Joint Media Release, 29 June 2015.

3.54 Mr Paul Linossier, Chief Executive Officer, Our Watch, noted better coordination and governance across government could take Australia to world's best practice in addressing domestic and family violence, which:

...requires a whole-of-government approach, so not an initiative led out of one department or one office but all departments and offices having related and joined up obligations and also across sectors in the governance and design of the solutions. So the area that we could add to the national plan and the second action plan is strengthening governance across governments and the third sector and industry in attending to the issue. That sort of joined up forum, mirroring the joining up of government-to-government departments, would take Australia to absolutely world's best practice in attending to the violence against women.⁵⁵

3.55 Mr Rodney Vlasis, Acting Chief Executive Officer, No to Violence, agreed the Commonwealth should improve its coordination across all levels of government:

...despite the national plan there is a real potential opportunity for the Commonwealth to take an active role in bringing together different state and territory departments, in particular, domains to really focus on lifting response and prevention, including perpetrator accountability in domestic and family violence.⁵⁶

3.56 Other witnesses highlighted the need for the Commonwealth to play a more active role alongside the states and territories in the coordination of legal systems and the delivery of services for victims. These issues will be discussed in following chapters.

Funding to support the National Plan

3.57 Some evidence highlighted the need for the National Plan to be supported by consistent funding. Ms Libby Davies, CEO, White Ribbon, told the committee that the good start that has been made on the National Plan needs to be supported by appropriate funding measures:

White Ribbon has, to some extent, been supported through the [initial phases of the] plan but there is still too little recognition of the inroads that primary prevention work is making. We also need to see these policy responses and commitments translated into more robust funding for primary and tertiary responses to violence against women. In many jurisdictions, this funding has shrunk.⁵⁷

3.58 Other evidence received by the committee discussed funding for particular organisations, programs, and the delivery of legal and service systems. These issues will be discussed in further chapters.

55 *Committee Hansard*, 12 September 2014, p. 7. See also Ms Julie Oberin, Chairperson, AWAVA, *Committee Hansard*, 15 October 2014, p. 23.

56 *Committee Hansard*, 5 November 2014, p. 9.

57 *Committee Hansard*, 5 November 2014, p. 9.

Committee View

3.59 The committee recognizes the National Plan represents a positive step taken by the Commonwealth and state and territory governments towards establishing a framework to reduce the prevalence of domestic and family violence in Australia. Evidence received by the committee shows there is support for the National Plan across organisations in the domestic and family violence sector, who see it as a clear commitment by all levels of government to addressing this problem.

3.60 The committee heard support for the consultation that informed the development and early implementation of the National Plan. However, it appeared to the sector that the level of consultation was subsequently reduced for the development of the action plans.

3.61 The committee understands that the NPIP is not continuing to play a role in the consultation for the National Plan, and is concerned there is now less opportunity for peak bodies and on-the-ground organisations working directly with victims to communicate directly with the Commonwealth about the National Plan. While DSS indicated that they continue to draw from previous consultation work, the long term nature of this issue means that extra effort needs to be taken by governments to maintain engagement and consultation with front line services in particular, which could include the development of a consultative framework, and ensure reporting on progress is centrally available. The committee acknowledges the availability of quarterly eNewsletters on the National Plan on the DSS website.⁵⁸

Recommendation 2

3.62 The committee recommends that the Commonwealth Government investigate ways to improve consultation with the domestic and family violence sector, particularly in relation to the evaluation of the National Plan and Action Plans and to inform the development of future Action Plans.

3.63 The committee notes that the comments made by the UN Special Rapporteur on violence against women are based on information from a study tour in April 2012. Since that time a Progress Review of the First Action Plan was released in May 2014, the Evaluation Plan on 3 June 2014 and the Second Action Plan on 27 June 2014. The committee recognises that some of the work of the Commonwealth to progress the National Plan has been more complex than anticipated, including the ongoing work to finalise a consistent and meaningful evaluation strategy. The committee heard how important it is for this to be an independent process and the committee understands work is being done to assure the evaluation process will be independent in the future.

3.64 Over the course of the inquiry, the committee noted clear and consistent support from stakeholders for the Commonwealth to lead relevant coordination strategies over the life of the National Plan.

58 See www.dss.gov.au/our-responsibilities/women/programs-services/reducing-violence/the-national-plan-to-reduce-violence-against-women-and-their-children-2010-2022 (accessed 8 April 2015).

3.65 The committee supports the Commonwealth continuing to play a lead role in coordinating policy, legal and other responses regarding domestic and family violence, and improving the way it drives increased coordination effort by all levels of government and the domestic and family violence sector. Areas where the Commonwealth is taking a lead role are discussed in following chapters.

3.66 While the committee welcomes the support and focus of the Prime Minister and COAG, it notes that victims of domestic and family violence need champions at all levels of our society, including the Prime Minister and First Ministers. In view of the size and dimension of the challenge to effect real change and the need to develop and foster an intentional and serious focus across all jurisdictions, the committee believes that the Prime Minister should table an annual report to Parliament on progress in the effort to eliminate domestic and family violence. This report should include the actions being undertaken by COAG. The committee notes that funding decisions affecting this area are available publicly, however, to improve accessibility they should be included in the annual report to Parliament.

Recommendation 3

3.67 The committee recommends that the Prime Minister table an annual report to Parliament on progress in the effort to eliminate domestic and family violence, including listing all relevant funding decisions.