

## Response to the Australian Government's Draft National Plan to End Violence Against Women and Children 2022-2032

### Communicare & White Ribbon Australia Position Paper

#### Communicare Inc.

Since 1977, Communicare has been recognised as a leader in community service excellence, delivering high quality, holistic and integrated social support services in Western Australia. We acknowledge diversity and seek to inspire and empower children, young people, individuals and families to participate safely and fully in their communities.

Over the past 45 years, we have distinguished ourselves as a provider of innovative services and an advocate of social and economic inclusion.

Our organisation is supported by a workforce of passionate staff and volunteers. Our alliances with government, non-government and corporate partners, has enabled us to make a difference in people's lives.

We provide a range of Family and Domestic Violence (FDV) services, including Tuart House (Refuge and residential support for women and children), as well as leading men's behaviour change programs, including Breathing Space (the first residential men's behavior change program in the Southern Hemisphere), Safe at Home (perpetrator response), Choose Change (early intervention program), Connect and Respect (working with people charged with FDV offences) and Safe Communities (supporting both men and women to improve how they interact with partners and their families). Our Men's Support Services provide behaviour change programs to hold perpetrators of FDV accountable and responsible for their behaviour, focusing on maximising the safety, wellbeing and advocacy of victims.

Communicare has developed and established a broad range of innovative response to men who use violence and abuse spanning residential, co-located, criminal justice, community, outreach and custodial approaches.

Our programs directly address the needs of women and children through partner support work conducted separately, but alongside our work with men. We achieve short-term behavioural and attitudinal changes regarding the use of controlling behaviours, with the aim of reducing the likelihood of violence being perpetrated again. In the case of Communicare Breathing Space, an evaluation by Curtin University released in February 2021 found the program was effective, although a larger sample size is now required.

We also contribute to the success of coordinated community responses to FDV, through information sharing, assessing and managing risk in collaboration with all levels of government and community sector agencies.

#### About White Ribbon Australia

White Ribbon Australia is a part of a global social movement working to eliminate gendered violence. We strive for an Australian society where all women and children are safe. White Ribbon is the world's largest movement engaging men and boys to end men's violence against women and girls, promote gender equality and create new opportunities for men to build positive, healthy and respectful relationships.

The White Ribbon Australia movement works through a primary prevention approach in communities, schools

and workplaces across the country. Through our programs and campaigns, we engage with men to become active in the social change needed to stop men's violence against women and children.

## Introduction

Communicare and White Ribbon Australia welcome the opportunity to provide feedback on the Australian Government's Draft National Plan to Reduce Violence Against Women and Children 2022-2032.

First and foremost, we want to emphasise the importance of ensuring this plan is supported by significant funding for primary, secondary and tertiary responses to domestic, family and sexual violence. Frontline services need sufficient, secure and long-term funding to support the thousands of women and children experiencing violence across the country.

Communicare and White Ribbon Australia have several recommendations for inclusion or reinforcement in the National Plan.

### 1. Investment in primary prevention.

As a primary prevention organisation focused on engaging men, boys and their communities in ending men's violence against women, we support the inclusion of prevention as Pillar 1 in the draft National Plan.

We would like to see primary prevention both in theory and practice. This would mean tangible commitments to:

- Supporting community-led primary prevention initiatives like White Ribbon Australia's Community Engagement Program.
- Building a primary prevention workforce to deliver on the goals of the National Plan.
- Supporting the implementation of consistent, evidence-based respectful relationships education across the country.
- Supporting workplaces to adopt primary prevention initiatives, such as becoming White Ribbon Accredited, including all Federal Government agencies.

We recognise the focus on the role men and boys must play in ending violence against women in the National Plan. We would welcome further information about how the Government will support this work over the next decade.

We note the addition of the international context and would strongly encourage consideration given to the nationally coordinated efforts addressing the gendered drivers of violence against women and children. It is important to highlight the ongoing and growing commitment to national days and campaigns, including (but not limited to), International Women's Day, the International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women, White Ribbon Day, and the 16 Days of Activism.

Furthermore, we would encourage the principle of collaboration to be reflected under the section relating to National Infrastructure. The 2012-2022 period saw a number of collaborations across the sector, including with White Ribbon Australia, establishing pathways, networks and campaigns that contributed to national primary prevention infrastructure - these should be strengthened in the 2022 – 2032 National Plan. The work of these foundational collaborations has developed a degree of expertise in delivering primary prevention programs and initiatives to men and boys that needs to continue and expand across the broader public sector. The

augmentation of collaboration with national organisations like OurWatch, 1800RESPECT, White Ribbon Australia and No To Violence must be supported by the newly formed National Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence Commission in 2022.

Finally, we welcome the formation of the National Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence Commission in 2022 and requests the Australian Government to ensure it is:

- Adequately funded.
- Consultative.
- Effective.
- Accountable to victim-survivors and the domestic, family, and sexual violence sector.

We would strongly recommend that the Commission coordinates an ongoing roundtable with the Sector and Thought Leaders, including White Ribbon Australia.

**2. Supporting men’s behaviour change programs and perpetrator interventions, particularly the Communicare Breathing Space residential model; investing in diverse, nation-wide services to work with male FDV perpetrators.**

We would encourage a stronger outcome focus on building a workforce to engage with men who use violence, supporting early and secondary interventions for men who are worried they will use violence, strengthening the evidence base for perpetrator interventions and financial targets. Investing in services like Breathing Space in Western Australia to be established across every State and Territory Jurisdiction requires an ongoing funding commitment.

We cannot address men’s violence against women without significant investment in effective perpetrator interventions and this is not as strong as we would have hoped as reflected in the initial draft. WRA supports the advocacy of No To Violence (NTV) in calling for diverse, evidence-based perpetrator interventions across Australia, at a primary, secondary and tertiary level. From a tertiary perspective, WRA recommends further investment in residential men’s behavior change programs like Communicare’s *Breathing Space* program, which provides men with up to six months accommodation while they undertake an intensive therapeutic program, including individual counselling and case management. These programs need comprehensive evaluation, and White Ribbon Australia supports NTV’s call for further investment in building the evidence base – as well as evidence-based practice – for perpetrator interventions.<sup>1</sup> Importantly, we must see further measures to expand the specialist workforce working with men who choose to use violence, to ensure the practice is efficient and effective.

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<sup>1</sup>No To Violence submission to the 2020 House of Representatives *Inquiry into family, domestic and sexual violence*, p6.