



White Ribbon Australia Position Paper

National Summit on Women's Safety 2021

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About White Ribbon Australia

White Ribbon Australia (WRA) 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 WRA 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

White Ribbon Australia welcomes the upcoming National Summit on Women's Safety. This is an important opportunity to discuss the key issues that should be addressed in developing the next National Plan to Reduce Violence Against Women and Their Children.

As a primary prevention organisation focused on engaging men, boys and their communities in the global movement to end men's violence and abuse against women, there are a number of priorities we are eager to see addressed in the next National Plan.

First and foremost, we support the advocacy of specialist women's safety services and the broader domestic, family and sexual violence sector, who work tirelessly every day on the frontline of this 'shadow pandemic.'¹ We believe these services should receive secure, adequate, long-term funding to support the millions of women and children experiencing domestic, family and sexual violence in Australia.

Our work also draws on the significant evidence-base reporting and frameworks produced by OurWatch and ANROWS and we call for continued support of this vital work to strengthen their partnerships within the sector.

Throughout this paper we will be referring to submissions made by various organisations to the Australian Government's House of *Representatives Inquiry into Family, domestic and sexual violence*, which has formed part of the Federal Government's National Plan consultation process.

Overview of Recommendations

Our key recommendations include:

- 1. Investing in primary prevention, including:**
 - Supporting community-led primary prevention initiatives.

¹ UN Women (2020): <https://www.unwomen.org/en/news/in-focus/in-focus-gender-equality-in-covid-19-response/violence-against-women-during-covid-19>.

- Building a primary prevention workforce.
 - Rolling out respectful relationships education initiatives and WRA's Breaking the Silence school program across the country.
 - Focusing on the role of men and boys in preventing violence and investing in strategies like WRA's Community Engagement Program.
- 2. Supporting men's behaviour change programs and perpetrator interventions, including:**
- Investing in diverse, nation-wide services working with male perpetrators.
 - Building a workforce to engage with men who use violence.
 - Supporting early and secondary interventions for men who are worried they will use violence, such as 1800RESPECT.
 - Strengthening the evidence-base for perpetrator interventions.
 - Investing in services like the *Breathing Space* program in Western Australia across every State and Territory Jurisdiction.
- 3. Developing community-wide responses to gendered violence, including:**
- Implementing all 55 of the Respect@Work report recommendations, engaging employers in preventing sexual harassment.
 - Adopting an intersectional approach to violence that sees diverse communities develop and lead their own primary, secondary and tertiary initiatives.
- 4. Broadening support for women and children fleeing violence, including:**
- Legislating 10 days universal paid domestic violence leave.
 - Providing universal quality early childhood education.
 - Identifying children as victims in their own right.
- 5. Reforming government and justice responses to family, domestic and sexual violence, including:**
- Legislating a national definition of domestic violence that encompasses coercive control.
 - Working with states to reform the justice system, so that:
 - Women are safe, supported and believed when reporting gendered violence to authorities.
 - Perpetrators of violence are provided ongoing support and services to address and change their behaviour.
 - Alternative justice responses are adopted by governments, including restorative justice and justice reinvestment.

Investing in primary prevention

While we know that gendered violence is not unique to any one community, the solutions are. In the next National Plan, WRA recommends a significant investment in community-led, community-developed primary prevention initiatives, informed by the OurWatch *Change the Story* framework

To ensure primary prevention activities are meaningful and effective, we must urgently build a specialist workforce to deliver these initiatives. WRA supports OurWatch's recommendation to implement a national workforce development strategy, bringing key stakeholders together to inform and contribute to the development of a primary prevention workforce.²

² OurWatch submission to the 2020 House of Representatives *Inquiry into family, domestic and sexual violence*, page 8.

We know that education is fundamental to preventing men's violence against women. Australia needs a respectful relationships curriculum implemented across all schools (public and private) that is evidence-based, consistent, mandatory and adequately funded.

It is a fact that the majority of domestic abuse is perpetrated by men towards women. Statistics show 1 in 3 Australian women have experienced physical violence since the age of 15, and on average, one woman a week is killed by her current or former partner.³ In all primary prevention initiatives, we must focus on the role of men and boys in ending violence against women. We must educate and work with men and boys to reflect, challenge and address their beliefs, behaviors and actions that drive gendered violence.

Supporting men's behaviour change programs and perpetrator interventions

We cannot address men's violence against women without significant investment in effective perpetrator interventions. 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 Behaviour Change Programs like Communicare's *Breathing Space* program which provides men with up to six months of accommodation while they undertake an intensive therapeutic program, including individual counselling and case management.

These programs need comprehensive evaluation, and WRA supports NTV's call for further investment in building the evidence base – as well as evidence-based practice – for perpetrator interventions.⁴ Importantly, we must see further measures to expand the specialist workforce working with men who choose to use violence, to ensure practice is efficient and effective.

Developing community-wide responses to gendered violence

WRA believes in the importance of whole-of-community responses to men's violence against women. We believe that ongoing collaboration and coordination between frontline services, schools, workplaces, police, community members and groups create opportunities to prevent and address violence in a meaningful way.

Communities

We know the solutions to a community's problems can be found within that community. In developing the next National Plan, the Federal Government must take an intersectional approach to ending violence against women. They must support diverse communities to develop and lead their own initiatives – including primary prevention activities – that address the specific culture, challenges and circumstances of that community.

Work

The workplace must be free from all forms of violence against women. WRA is calling on the Federal Government to implement all 55 of the recommendations from the Australian Human Rights Commission's Respect@Work report to ensure sexual harassment at work is prevented and addressed.

³ OurWatch Quick Facts: <https://www.ourwatch.org.au/quick-facts/>.

⁴ No To Violence submission to the 2020 House of Representatives *Inquiry into family, domestic and sexual violence*, p6.

The workplace is also a key intervention point for women experiencing violence. The Australian Government must ensure employers are providing support and resources to women experiencing violence at home and offering training and education to prevent this violence from occurring.

Schools

Alongside respectful relationships education, whole-of-school initiatives that include and educate teachers, school staff and parents about gendered violence (like WRA's *Breaking the Silence*⁵ program) strengthen a culture of equality and respect at all levels of a school community.

Broadening support for women and children fleeing violence

Ending violence against women requires nation-wide reform, including in the economy, early childhood education and the legal system.

Universal paid domestic violence leave

WRA supports the Australian Services Union (ASU) campaign to include 10 days of paid domestic violence leave in the National Employment Standards. To quote the ASU: "The evidence is very clear that paid domestic violence leave provides survivors with an opportunity to undertake legal and medical appointments, relocation of home, school, childcare and other essential measures to address their situation without the risk of losing their job or income at a time when access to reliable income has been proven to be one of the most significant determinants in the decision to leave a violent relationship and remain away."⁶

Children as victims in their own right

Violence against children must be acknowledged and addressed in the next National Plan, including the lifelong impacts of abuse.

Universal quality early childhood education

Access to high-quality, universally accessible and affordable early childhood education is fundamental for women with young children who are experiencing violence, both economically and socially. WRA has been partnering with Thrive By Five to discuss the importance of universal early childhood education in addressing violence against women and children, including the need for young children impacted by violence to be supported in a safe setting.

Reforming government and justice responses to violence

WRA acknowledges that government and justice responses to gendered violence have not always supported women and children – and have, in fact, often exacerbated their abuse. WRA would like to see reform at a federal, state and territory level to change our systems and institutions so that they ensure women are safe,

⁵ White Ribbon Australia Breaking the Silence School Program: <https://www.whiteribbon.org.au/Workplaces-and-Schools/Register-School>

⁶ Australian Services Union submission to the 2020 House of Representatives *Inquiry into family, domestic and sexual violence*, p5.

supported and believed when reporting gendered violence; and that perpetrators of violence are intervened with and provided ongoing support and services to address and change their behaviour.

We urge the federal government to look at alternative justice responses, including restorative justice and justice reinvestment, which facilitate better outcomes for victim-survivors and communities.

Finally, White Ribbon Australia recommends the inclusion of coercive control in national, state and territory definitions of family violence, to recognise all forms of violence and abuse, and expand our society's understanding about what domestic and family violence looks like in all its forms.
