



Domestic Violence Crisis Service

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Submission to Consultation on the Second Action Plan (National Plan to End Violence against Women and Children 2022–2032)

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About DVCS

The Domestic Violence Crisis Service (DVCS) is a non-government, not-for-profit organisation delivering services on Ngannaw Country. As a specialist domestic and family violence service we draw on evidence and research to best inform our service delivery. One that brings people - and safety - closer together.

We are here to support people, both during and after crisis situations delivering services to anyone in the ACT region impacted by domestic and family violence.

DVCS delivers a range of programs including:

- 24-hour crisis intervention program via crisis phone line and in-person responses
- Legal Advocacy and Court Support including navigation of civil and criminal matters
- Crisis Case Management; short term case management to support those getting caught in crisis because of systems
- Longer term case management for those experiencing high risk and ongoing family violence
- Partnership service delivery including within statutory child protection, child and family centres, GP linkage program, and within multi agency high risk case coordination program, the Family Violence Safety Action Program
- Group work programs for women supporting peer connection and healing and recovery
- Group work program in partnership with LGBTIQ+ services for community members supporting peer connection and healing and recovery
- Men's Behaviour Change Program, Room4Change using Duluth as well as delivering the Caring Dad's program, Partner Support and engaging in research work regarding longer term desistance through the ANROWS research program
- Education and Training
- Community Awareness raising and prevention of domestic and family violence education and support

Introduction

DVCS welcomes the opportunity to respond to the call for consultation on the Second Action Plan under the National Plan to End Violence Against Women and Children (the Second Action Plan).

The ACT is one of the only jurisdictions across Australia which does not have a peak or a funded peak function in the Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence sector. This in part is due to the small nature of the specialist sector in the ACT, as well as recent expansion of government policy investment in the ACT Public Service and the limitations in resource generation for the Territory. As the only specialist domestic and family violence agency in the Territory we at times provide a policy and engagement function for DFV programs and intersecting sectors to enable shared understanding of the needs of the ACT Community, despite receiving no dedicated funding to do so.

We note, however, that DVCS is not a peak body and does not speak on behalf of the broader sector. Many services across the ACT will be making submissions of their own, contributing the wide experience of the ACT sector.

Overview of Community Roundtable Reflection

In mid-July DVCS convened a roundtable workshop with members of the broader ACT

community sector to explore themes and alignment with priorities across the system. That workshop pulled out some key themes of success or opportunity for success, some of which are reflected below.

There is value that has come from the National Plan and First Action Plan simply existing. The impact of having these frameworks has demonstrated a commitment and generated public awareness as well as discussion about domestic, family and sexual violence. The inclusion of intersecting experiences of marginalised community groups and the disproportionate impact DFSV can have on individuals and communities centred diverse experiences. The National Plan and First Action Plan also provided some scope to look for or identify work which may be happening in other jurisdictions which could be modelled, scaled, contextualised and perhaps adopted in other jurisdictions.

Yet the Roundtable reflected there is still so much work to be done.

One of the core threads in Roundtable discussions, and what has helped frame DVCS's submission, is the need for connection to the plan for the frontline service sector. The community sees the National Plan as a commitment to action to end gender-based violence and the Commonwealth Government sees it as a frame for guiding investment and reform. The frontline service system is often the vehicle to deliver on reform and action, and as such we are a vital partner to achieving the goals of the Plan. Engaging strategically and meaningfully with frontline services and sector is a key enabler of success under the Second Action Plan.

Transparency in the governance of the National Plan and the Action Plan.

The current system of reporting on progress against the National Plan and Action Plans creates State and Territory Government reporting pathways to the Commonwealth Government. But success is broader than just delivery through the Federal Funding Agreement.

What is missing is the translation and insight from frontline services about what tangible deliverables are under an initiative and what impact it is having in community. This means there is missed opportunity to be able to clearly articulate what is being delivered, how everyday Australians can see the policy turned into action in their community and enable a clearer understanding of opportunities, gaps and cross jurisdictional learning.

There is an opportunity for good governance and good community engagement to combine to build understanding, buy-in and clarity around impact and investment.

Local, place-based systems and service mapping

Victim-survivors and people using violence continue to experience a lack of clarity about the services available to them when they need support. This is true across every population group and every jurisdiction. Feedback we hear from clients and sector partners is that the roll out of nation-wide support is not changing that for people at a community level. For example, we continue to hear reports from clients who have not been referred to local services from national programs.

While the vast size of Australia is evidence of the need for national programs, and they play an important role in visibility of services, there is equally a need for local services that are connected to communities and reflect local community need. What works in one location or fits the needs of one local community may not be the same in others. The ACT's population size and geographic location put us in a strong position to engage in local, place-based work, with strong communication between local partners.

Ensuring that local areas can map service offerings across all pillars of the National Plan and across the population groups it serves would enable better service referral pathways and clearer service system connections. The requirement of engaging in mapping work could be

embedded within Government contracts; requiring services to maintain up to date information about service offerings, referral pathways and expectations of process time. Making this digital exchange of up-to-date service based information enables equitable access to information for any individual coming into the service system.

Creating this as a service system responsibility with accountability in each funded service creates the need for monitoring and evaluation but not administrative resource of a consultant or program having to “map” the sector.

Leveraging change in Government run services

Government’s role in achieving the aspirations of the National Plan are broader than just legislative reform and budgetary decision-making. The single largest opportunity for impact that the Commonwealth can hold in community wide reform is working to reform the operation of the services it controls. The same can be said for State and Territory Government working to reform the systems they operate to ensure the safety of those services. This includes, but is not limited to, Child Support Agency, Centrelink, employment services, public service departments and commissioned services like courts, police and health systems.

This could include ensuring that underlying societal values and attitudes which enable violence to occur in our communities is engaged with and that systems reform does not simply rely on the hope that everyone operating in the system believes that domestic, family and sexual violence is an issue or is not ok in our community.

Government must understand itself as not just part of the system which can create harm, but as part of the system which can also prevent harm and needs the support, expertise and partnership of specialist frontline service agencies. It must create an environment of collaboration, in which the expertise of frontline services and people with lived experience is heard and harnessed. Government services should be led, informed and delivered by people who know how our community experiences the system. Relying on Government services to change their own internal cultures is an approach doomed to fail. External eyes, including from people with lived experience and frontline workforces, with expertise in how the community experiences the system and services are needed to build the capability and understanding of family violence risk and accountability across the system.

Government services must then be subject to the same measures of accountability that are placed on non-government organisations that deliver DFSV services. This could mean, for example, contributing to national data collection and sharing data at a local level in a way that is transparent and available to other services. It could mean agreed targets and measurables that align across government and non-government sectors. For example, many DFSV non-government service contracts require reporting and data that demonstrates LGBTIQ+ inclusivity. But government agencies like Police are not required to report the same, to maintain their funding.

Actions for inclusion in the Second Action Plan

We note the following themes and actions for inclusion in the Second Action Plan:

- Marginalised population groups experience great harm from systems engagement due to racism, ableism, homophobia, transphobia, discrimination. The systems were not built for them and enable those forms of systems violence to be perpetrated by people in the system and enables them to avoid accountability.
- Understanding that working with men and boys requires working with people of all genders to reframe the social and cultural underpinning of the expectations of men and boys.

- Additional layers of criminal reform to increase powers for policing does not address the underlying issues relating to police misidentification or criminal justice system harm cause to victim survivors.
- While working to prevent violence, we must also adequately fund the response to violence
- Children and Young People cannot be solely responsible for engaging in respectful relationships and preventing gender-based violence. They continue to live in a society which has enabled gender-based violence for generations and often have the least amount of power in those dynamics.
- We must work with children impacted by, exposed to or who have family and sexual violence used against them. Not purely to prevent the possibility of them causing harm to others but to ensure they have access to the right support to ensure they come to no further harm and they can heal and recover.
- The increasing legal connection and engagement in response to domestic, sexual and family violence, including for example, the criminalization of coercive control across multiple jurisdictions, can increase demand for frontline organisations and change risk assessment for victim-survivors. If the system, including frontline services are not adequately resourced to respond, people will be left disappointed and let down by the system they hoped would support them. This may make them less trustful of support services, and vulnerable to further harm and control by people using violence. Systems engagement is also an identified point of escalation of risk of lethality. If the system is unable to respond, we are contributing to the conditions of risk while limiting support for safety.
- Reduction in administrative burden placed on frontline services is not a call for a reduction in accountability. We are committed to accountability and demonstrating outcomes for the community, in a way that reduces unnecessary red-tape and maximises efficiency.
- Men's health policy should be for all men and not utilised to build a framework which enables excusatory language around their use of violence. Men may need health and wellbeing responses alongside accountability-based programs in response to their use of violence and harm caused to others.
- Men's health policy is not women's safety policy. Gender-based violence impacts us all not just those within the gender binary and therefore we must address domestic, family and sexual violence across our whole community.

In this submission we call for coordination between the Commonwealth, the States and Territories, service delivery agencies, research bodies, and the voices and reality of the lived experience of those impacted by domestic, family and sexual violence. Enabling sharing of expertise, shared accountability in delivering best practice jurisdictionally informed approaches to ending gender-based violence across our country.

As a frontline service, working in a system which is deeply flawed, and in advocacy for those needing access to services as well as those we hope will never need to because our prevention efforts have worked, we see this as a vital opportunity to ensure everyone is working together towards our shared goals.

DVCS looks forward to working with the Government to make sure we achieve them.

To discuss anything contained in this submission, please contact admin@dvcs.org.au or 02 6280 6999.

