

The Treasury
By online submission
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Submission on priorities for the 2020-2021 Budget: Budget measures to address violence against women

Thank you for the opportunity to make a pre-budget submission ahead of the 2020-2021 Budget.

About Australian Women Against Violence Alliance

Australian Women Against Violence Alliance (AWAVA) is one of the six National Women's Alliances funded by the Australian Government to bring together women's organisations and individuals across Australia to share information, identify issues and contribute to solutions. AWAVA's focus is on responding to and preventing violence against women and their children. AWAVA's role is to ensure that women's voices and particularly marginalised women's voices are heard by Government, and to amplify the work of its member organisations and Friends and Supporters. AWAVA's members include organisations from every State and Territory in Australia, representing domestic and family violence services, sexual assault services, services for women in the sex industry and women's legal services, as well as organisations representing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women, young women, women educators and other groups. AWAVA's contract manager is the Women's Services Network (WESNET).

We acknowledge the work and expertise of specialist women's services and pay tribute to those who have experienced violence.

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Introduction: All forms of violence against women are preventable.

The high incidence of violence against women and their children cost the Australian economy \$22 billion in 2015-2016 alone.¹ We know, however, that violence against women is preventable. The government needs to be investing in holistic prevention and responses of all forms of violence against women

We know that the specialist women's and family violence response sector is gravely underfunded. For example, the Royal Commission into Family Violence in Victoria found that \$572 million was needed in one year alone to adequately resource the sector and introduce necessary changes in the sector.²

Similarly, the 2014 Productivity Commission recommendation of an immediate investment of an additional \$200 million a year for legal assistance services providing civil, including family law services, as well as a proper assessment of further additional funding requirements for legal assistance services is yet to be implemented.

Since the start of the pandemic, an increase in incidence of domestic, family and sexual violence have been reported globally³. According to the survey by the Australian Institute of Criminology⁴, 6.8% of all women and 13.2% of women in cohabiting relationships have experienced physical violence, sexual violence or coercive control. The same study reveals that for 33% of these women, it was the first time they had experienced domestic and family violence in their relationship. For one in five women who experienced coercive control, it was the first time their partner had been emotionally abusive, harassing or controlling. More than half that had faced previous abuse said this had escalated.

While the COVID-19 pandemic increased the incidence of all forms of violence against women and their children, it has also magnified already existing service gaps and demands. Approaches to prevention and responses to violence require ongoing, sustained and larger investment, holistic and intersectional approaches, and co-design with specialist women's and community-controlled services. In this submission we are providing additional information that was supplied through the Pre-budget submission in January, drawing on the COVID impacts and beyond.

1. Specialist women's services at the forefront of prevention and responses to all forms of violence against women

Specialist women's services operate within an evidence-based feminist model underpinned by a set of good practice principles that address experiences of violence holistically and achieve better outcomes for victims/survivors of violence. This model of practice has been built on feminist and social justice approaches to preventing and responding to sexual and gender-based violence against women and is informed by an understanding of the gendered drivers of violence.

We also include in our conceptualisation of specialist support community-controlled organisations (such as Aboriginal controlled organisations, LGBTIQ+ services, women with disability specific service, migrant and refugee services etc) who play an essential role in ending sexual and gender-based violence in their communities.

¹ KPMG, The Cost of Violence against Women and their Children in Australia, May 2016, p

² See more at <https://apo.org.au/node/172586>

³ Peterman, Potts, O'Donnell, Thompson, Shah, Oertelt-Prigione, and van Gelder, 2020. "Pandemics and Violence Against Women and Children." CGD Working Paper 528. Washington, DC: Center for Global Development. Available at: <https://www.cgdev.org/publication/pandemics-and-violence-against-women-and-children>

⁴ Boxall H., Morgan A. & Brown R. (2020) The prevalence of domestic violence among women during the COVID-19 pandemic. Statistical Bulletin no. 28. Canberra: Australian Institute of Criminology. Available at: <https://www.aic.gov.au/publications/sb/sb28>

In 2020, AWAVA ran a survey and published a report titled 'The role of the specialist women's services: Survey on the standards of service provision for victims/survivors of gender-based violence'.⁵ The survey aimed at victims/survivors of sexual and gender-based violence sought to compare and analyse the experiences of service use. Respondents were provided with a set of guiding principles and asked to reflect on their experiences having approached specialist women's services and/or generalist services. Based on the survey responses, specialist services whose sole purpose is to support victims/survivors of gender-based violence were rated as adhering to a set of good practice principles widely supported within the sector (50% yes for specialist services vs 37% yes for generalist services).

Specialist women's and community-controlled services are ensuring best outcomes for victims/survivors of violence.

Recommendations:

1. That the Australian Government prioritises and ensures adequate funding to specialist women's services to meet the service demand.
2. That the Australian Government involves specialist women's service and community-controlled organisations as partners in co-designing sustained and effective long-term strategies that are based on evidence and expertise. Co-design of responses needs to encompass all stages from inception to implementation, as well as monitoring and reporting.
3. That the Australian Government embeds an intersectional approach to funding allocation to ensure that marginalised groups have access to support.

1.1. Increased service demands

The COAG Women's Safety Council (comprising Ministers with responsibilities for women's safety across the Commonwealth, State and Territory jurisdictions)⁶ has noted the "growing demand for services"⁷, as well as "increasing complexity and severity of violence, [with] many women seeking help for the first time."⁸ Data from frontline domestic and family violence specialists found that 50% of frontline workers in NSW and 59% in Victoria reported an increase in client numbers, and an increase in complexity of needs (75% in NSW and 86% in VIC).⁹ Consistent with the data from the Australian Institute of Criminology, 47.5% of frontline workers from NSW and 42% of from Victoria reported an increase in the number of first-time cases since the outbreak and 40% increase in women approaching services for emergency assistance.¹⁰ There has been data that Google searches related to family violence have increased by 75%¹¹ and a 200% increase in urgent applications to the Family Court reported.¹² In Queensland, magistrates have been inundated with cases of domestic and family violence

⁵ AWAVA (2020) Survey Data Analysis Report: The role of the specialist women's services: Survey on the standards of service provision for victims/survivors of gender-based violence. Available at: <https://awava.org.au/2020/06/30/research-and-reports/survey-report-on-the-victims-survivors-experiences-of-seeking-help>

⁶ With the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) replaced by the National Cabinet, the Women's Safety Council is no longer continuing as a COAG council but continues as meetings of the relevant Ministers.

⁷ COAG Women's Safety Council (April, 2020) Meeting of the COAG Women's Safety Council. Available at: <https://pmc.gov.au/sites/default/files/files/communique-mar-apr-2020-coag-womens-safety-council.pdf>

⁸ COAG Women's Safety Council (May, 2020) Meeting of the COAG Women's Safety Council. Available at: <https://www.pmc.gov.au/sites/default/files/files/communique-coag-womens-safety-council-19may20.pdf>

⁹ For more information see: https://www.womenssafety.nsw.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/UDPATE_COVID19-Impact-on-DFV-in-NSW_2.04.20_WSNSW.pdf and

https://bridges.monash.edu/articles/Responding_to_the_shadow_pandemic_practitioner_views_on_the_nature_of_and_responses_to_violence_against_women_in_Victoria_Australia_during_the_COVID-19_restrictions/12433517

¹⁰ Source: <https://www.9news.com.au/national/coronavirus-domestic-abuse-women-seeking-help-hotlines-decline/147704ae-3f8f-42ca-97a3-3605bf95f5e2>

¹¹ <https://7news.com.au/lifestyle/health-wellbeing/coronavirus-lockdown-results-in-75-per-cent-increase-in-domestic-violence-google-searches-c-901273>

¹² Source: <https://www.abc.net.au/radio-australia/programs/am/huge-jump-in-urgent-family-law-cases-fuelled-by-lockdown-stress/12548762>

in their courtrooms, and paramedics are getting more calls for help.¹³ Also, in Queensland, service providers had reported a dramatic increase in the brutality and severity of attacks on women and children.¹⁴ In Victoria, presentations to St Vincent's hospital related to family violence had more than doubled in the first quarter of 2020 compared to 2019.¹⁵

Where a decrease in calls or service access has been reported, generally it has been found that it was not as safe for individual women to be in touch with services, due to proximity/surveillance by the perpetrator or not having phone credit or data to reach out for help. inTouch Multicultural Service Against Family Violence reported that a number of their clients expressed that there was no longer a safe time to talk to their case manager and they have subsequently disengaged from the service.¹⁶

Since the start of pandemic, AWAVA has run a survey with victims/survivors of domestic and family violence and services assisting them with housing to capture the impacts of the pandemic. Individual respondents raised the following issues:

- An increase in the incidence and severity of family violence, including escalation of financial abuse;
- Women who left their abusive partners during the pandemic found it difficult to find affordable housing as well as in some cases problems with securing their own places due to a lack of rental history under their names.
- 67% of respondents who did not make an attempt to leave an abusive partner reflected on the barriers. These included financial constraints, fear of losing connections with family and friends, having already left and return and having a disability that exacerbated restrictions on movement.

Escalation of family violence was also identified including compounded financial debts, impossibility of victims/survivors to approach services with perpetrators of violence being always around and returns to abusive partners due to lack of other options.

Experiences of violence during the COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated with some groups of women experiencing additional challenges. Some cohorts, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women,¹⁷ women living with disabilities,¹⁸ and women on temporary visas experienced more adverse outcomes. Violence against women has become a national emergency that requires a strategic policy response developed in partnership with experts in the specialist women's sector.

The demand has been rising during the pandemic due to increased incidence and it will continue to rise once the restrictions are lifted and more victims/survivors reach out for help. It has also been highlighted by the experts that the demand will continue to rise past the pandemic.¹⁹ Funding must be directed to meet this demand in order to minimise harm and increase safety.

The funding should be directed to the following:

¹³ Source: <https://www.brisbanetimes.com.au/national/queensland/queensland-courts-inundated-with-domestic-violence-cases-amid-lockdown-20200506-p54qis.html>

¹⁴ Source: <https://www.brisbanetimes.com.au/national/queensland/queensland-courts-inundated-with-domestic-violence-cases-amid-lockdown-20200506-p54qis.html>

¹⁵ Source: <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2020-05-09/victoria-family-violence-cases-double-at-melbourne-hospital/12227594%20>

¹⁶ Source: https://intouch.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/inTouch_COVID19IssuesPaper_April2020_website.pdf

¹⁷ Brown, C. (2020) Isolated from COVID-19, endangered by domestic violence: The heightened risk of violence against women in the Northern Territory, in Markham, F., Smith, D. & Morphy, F. (2020). Indigenous Australians and the COVID-19 crisis: perspectives on public policy, Topical Issue no. 1/2020, Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research, Australian National University, Canberra. <https://doi.org/10.25911/5e8702ec1fba2>

¹⁸ <http://wwda.org.au/wwdas-submission-to-the-senate-select-committee-on-covid-19/>

¹⁹ <https://awava.org.au/2020/05/08/media-release/2020-media-release/experts-warn-covid-19-impacts-on-womens-safety-just-beginning>

- The safety planning, risk assessment and wrap-around individual supports provided by specialist women’s services,
- The safe at home programs and emergency accommodation services provided by specialist homelessness providers working specifically with victim-survivors of violence,
- The legal assistance and representation provided by specialist women’s legal services, Family Violence Prevention Legal Services, community legal centres, Aboriginal legal services, and Legal Aid,
- The perpetrator intervention, men’s behaviour change programs and fathering programs provided by accredited men’s behaviour change experts,
- The specialist and culturally-safe services that are best able to assist Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and women from migrant and refugee backgrounds,
- The disability advocacy and domestic violence services needed to support women with disabilities to overcome the barriers to achieving safety after violence from a partner, carer or in an institutional setting,
- The safe phones program, which has been found be effective in delivering victims/survivors greater technology safety,²⁰
- Specialist trauma-informed telephone interpreter services,²¹
- LGBTIQ+ services and LGBTIQ+-specific resources, programs and targeted community education campaigns,
- Supporting community-based services to lead the conversations needed to change the attitudes and behaviours that enable violence, including empowering bystanders.

We also refer you the submission made by AWAVA on the COVID-19 impact for a more detailed discussion and the full list of recommendations.²²

Recommendations:

4. That the Australian Government provides additional funding for specialist women’s services to provide universal access to specialist outreach, support and safety planning where necessary remotely and if appropriate to support women and children being placed in temporary accommodation.
5. That the Australian Government increases funding for ongoing online and phone counselling services such as (but not limited) 1800RESPECT, Men’s Referral Service, Kids Helpline, Mensline and QLife.
6. That the Australian Government ensures that courts, legal systems and policing prioritise women’s and children’s safety.
7. That the Australian Government increases investment in Safe at Home programs from \$18 million to \$180 million and States and Territories Governments match this investment so that victims/survivors who want to be supported to stay home safely aren’t forced into homelessness.

²⁰ The WESNET Safe Connections program provides 500-600 women a month with smartphones through a network of trained frontline workers to ensure the new phones are activated safely. This program has been found be effective in delivering victims/survivors greater technology safety.

²¹<https://www.womenssafety.nsw.org.au/impact/publication/report-interpreter-services-in-domestic-and-family-violence-matters/>

²² AWAVA (2020) Submission to the Select Committee on COVID-19. Available at: <https://awava.org.au/2020/07/16/submissions/2020/awava-submission-to-the-select-committee-on-covid-19>

8. That the Australian Government increases capital works (expand and extend the Safe Places program) to increase refuge supply in light of the potential surge in demand once immediate crisis is over.
9. That the Australian Government provide additional funding to ensure universal access to accredited men's behaviour change programs nationwide.
10. That the Australian Government provide additional funding to ensure universal access specialist and culturally-safe services and state/territory-wide resource bodies for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women, women from migrant and refugee backgrounds, women with disability, and LGBTIQ+ communities experiencing violence and abuse.
11. That the Australian Government extends funding for technology safety measures established under the Women's Safety Package, including the e-Safety Commissioner's work on women's online safety and image based abuse, evaluate the technology safety trials, and continue funding for the WESNET's Safer Connections / Safety Net Australia – Safer Technology for Women program, and to ensure there is no funding gap which would cause loss of key expert staff and expertise.
12. That the Australian Government invest in Stage 1 of the implementation phase of the Our Watch Change the Story framework to begin addressing the drivers of violence against women through funding targeted workshops and community conversations in local communities across the nation coupled with a national campaign.

2. Development of the 12-year second National Plan to Reduce Violence Against Women and their Children allocating \$1 billion per year.

The National Plan to Reduce Violence Against Women and Their Children (2010-2022) has been instrumental in recognising the gendered drivers of violence against women as well as laying the foundation for the evidence-base and coordinated prevention and responses. It is crucial that this foundational work needs to be sustained and appropriately funded.

Violence against women and their children cost the Australian economy \$22 billion in 2015-2016 alone.²³ We know, however, that violence against women is preventable. It requires a long-term investment in both prevention and response.

Investing \$1 billion annually would allow Australia to fill gaps in supports and address violence against women and their children and violence towards LGBTIQ+ people holistically. This includes investment in primary prevention (funding the implementation to *Change the Story* Framework), funding to specialist women's services and community-controlled organisations; ensuring cultural competency, accessibility, inclusivity and availability of service across metropolitan, regional, rural and remote locations; investment in case management, safe at home programs, therapeutic programs, access to legal services, improvements in the family law system, availability of men's behaviour change programs.

For a further discussion about the Second National Plan, we refer you to AWAVA's Submission to the Inquiry into Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence.²⁴

²³ KPMG, The Cost of Violence against Women and their Children in Australia, May 2016, p

²⁴ AWAVA (2020) Submission to the House Standing Committee on Social Policy and Legal Affairs in response to the Inquiry into domestic, family and sexual violence. Available from: <https://awava.org.au/2020/08/18/submissions/submission-to-the-house-standing-committee-on-social-policy-and-legal-affairs-in-response-to-the-inquiry-into-family-domestic-and-sexual-violence>

Recommendations:

13. That the Australian Government commits to and funds the 12-year second National Plan to Reduce Violence Against Women and Their Children allocating \$1 billion per year.
14. That the Australian Government involves specialist women's service and community-controlled organisations and victims/survivors as partners for co-designing sustained and effective long-term strategies that are based on evidence and expertise. Co-design of responses needs to encompass all stages from inception to implementation, as well as monitoring and reporting.

3. Systemic responses to all forms of violence against women

3.1. Women's health

The impact of violence against women on the private and public health systems was estimated to have costed victims/survivors, their communities and government \$1.4 billion dollars in 2016.²⁵ With bushfires and COVID-19, the cost of violence against women to the health systems is set to rise. The increased demand for hospitals and other health services can impact on the availability of service provision, as well as workforce requirements and levels of utilisation of facilities. As a result, substantial challenges may arise within the health system in planning and ensuring adequate care for victims/survivors, as well as the broader community.

Recommendations:

15. That the Australian Government adequately resources the Women's Health Strategy 2020-2030 to meet milestones, which will require additional investment in light of the current public health crisis.

3.1.1. Maintaining access to sexual health, contraception and abortion care

COVID-19 is setting back progress on women's access to sexual and reproductive health and rights. During the pandemic, access to menstrual health products, contraception, emergency contraception, and methods to promote safe sexual activity are likely to decrease as a result of restricted access to health care, global manufacturing shortages and panic buying. Movement restrictions and reduced access to surgical abortion during the pandemic has led to women and pregnant people attempting unsafe abortion and a range of complex mental health support needs.²⁶

The increased risk of domestic, family and sexual violence, while access to contraception options crucial to plan pregnancies are reduced, will combine to increase rates of reproductive coercion,²⁷ unintended pregnancy and sexually transmitted infections. Delayed presentation of these sexual and reproductive health concerns can lead to congenital, chronic and intergenerational physical and mental health issues.²⁸

²⁵ KPMG, 2016. The cost of violence against women and their children in Australia. Available at: https://www.dss.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/08_2016/the_cost_of_violence_against_women_and_their_children_in_australia_-_summary_report_may_2016.pdf

²⁶ Marie Stopes (2020) Situational Report: Sexual and Reproductive Health Rights in Australia. Available at: <https://resources.mariestopes.org.au/SRRHinAustralia.pdf>

²⁷ Marie Stopes Australia. (2017). Hidden Forces: Shining a Light on Reproductive Coercion White Paper, Melbourne: Marie Stopes Australia, available from: https://www.mariestopes.org.au/wp-content/uploads/Hidden-Forces_MSA-RC-White-Paper_FINAL_WEB.pdf, accessed 9 April 2020.

²⁸ Marie Stopes (2020) Situational Report: Sexual and Reproductive Health Rights in Australia. Available at: <https://resources.mariestopes.org.au/SRRHinAustralia.pdf>

Recommendations:

16. That the Australian Government increases access to and affordability of medical abortion via Telehealth, and protect access to surgical abortion.
17. That the Australian Government increases support to women's specialist domestic and family violence services to respond to domestic, family and sexual violence and reproductive coercion during and after the pandemic.
18. That the Australian Government maintains Medicare Benefit Scheme (MBS) telehealth funding to enable access to GPs and broader health professionals throughout the pandemic, so that victim-survivors who cannot physically access or afford healthcare can at least have access to telehealth care.

3.1.2. Ensuring access to Medicare for all people regardless their migration status

People holding visa categories such as Students, Working Holiday Maker, Visitors, Pacific and seasonal workers, Temporary Graduate and Bridging Visa holders (with the exception of BVE) are not eligible for Medicare benefits. This means that they will be unable to use the increased Telehealth services provided as part of the government COVID-19 response measures. This also means that, in particular for women on temporary visas experiencing violence, they do not have equal access to health care.

Recommendations:

19. That the Australian Government expands access to social security and Medicare benefits to all people regardless of their migration status, in particular for women on temporary visas experiencing violence and people seeking asylum who receive or have lost access to SRSS payments.

3.1.3. Funding for the Australian Women's Health Network

The pandemic has magnified existing gender inequalities for women across communities in Australia. For example, the health sector is at the epicentre of COVID-19, women are disproportionately impacted as front line staff and health settings are one of the only places women can safely go at the moment. It is vital the decisions made relating to health in both these areas has a gendered analysis.

Currently, the Australian Women's Health Network, a peak body for the Australian women's health sector is not funded. Given the current health and hospital systems strain and gendered implications of COVID-19, it is important to fund the Australian Women's Health Network to respond to current demand for collaboration, partnership, policy development and systemic reform and enhance gendered outcomes for health and wellbeing in COVID-19 recovery and beyond.

Recommendations:

20. That the Australian Government provides ongoing funding for the Australian Women's Health Network, , to permit whole-of-government and policy engagement. Total cost is: \$300,000 per annum.²⁹

3.2. Safety in family law

Since the beginning of the pandemic, concerns have been raised about the responsiveness of the family law system in particular in situations where domestic and family violence escalates due to COVID-19. Issues arose in relation to supervised child contact where contact service were close, cross border travel, inter-state child abductions etc.

²⁹ <https://awhn.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/The-Voice-of-Womens-Health-1.pdf>

In April 2020 the joint practice direction has been issued by the Family Court of Australia and the Federal Circuit Court of Australia in relation to urgent family law matters that arose due to COVID-19. Examples for eligible matters under the COVID-19 list include:³⁰ matters related to supervised contact, border restrictions, medical and family violence. Any family violence matters where the violence has escalated because of COVID would qualify for these priority hearings.

Specialist women's services and women's legal services have welcomed the list and have been advising the government on the required risk identification and assessment for these matters. This is a positive step as once the risk assessment framework is established it can translate across the family law system for the first time.

The Federal Government has allocated \$63.3 million in extra funding for legal assistance services in light of COVID-19 impacts of which, \$20 million will be used to assist those dealing with domestic violence matters. This additional funding is welcome, but again needs to be complemented by further funding to address the long-standing (pre-COVID) shortfall in funding to community legal centres (particularly women's legal services), Legal Aid, ATSILS and FVPLSs.³¹ It is also noted, that notwithstanding this additional funding, there is still a significant disparity in the services that are available and that are being delivered to women experiencing domestic and family violence in metropolitan areas when compared to those in regional, rural and remote areas. AWAVA contends that greater use of teleconferencing and videoconferencing facilities could substantially increase access for victim-survivors of domestic and family violence in regional, rural and remote geographical areas to legal advice and representation, in addition to legal and court procedures, as has been demonstrated by recent innovations and practice in the Family Court.

Numerous family law inquiries in particular the ALRC Review of the Family Law system has put forward a number of recommendations that will ensure immediate and safer outcomes for victims/survivors of family violence. Yet the government has not formally responded to the final report.

For better outcomes within the family law system, we urge that the Australian Government incorporates specialist women's services into family law systems, and adequately funds these services, by:

- prioritising the engagement with specialist women's services in responses to family violence;
- funding specialist women's services that provide embedded services in state and territory courts to continue to support clients with family violence issues when they move to the family law system to seek parenting or other orders;
- embedding workers from specialist women's services in the family courts and Family Relationship Centres; and
- rolling out and better resourcing of Family Advocacy and Support Services within the family law system and women's domestic violence court advocacy services within local and district courts.
- removing presumption of shared parental responsibility.
- ensuring geographical equality of access to legal advice, representation and court proceedings through the use of teleconference and videoconference facility.

³⁰ Family Court of Australia and Federal Circuit Court of Australia (2020) Joint Practice Direction 3: JPD 3 of 2020 – The COVID-19 List http://www.familycourt.gov.au/wps/wcm/connect/e9de660a-a9b7-4407-8643-ca38753a53a6/JPD+3+of+2020+-+COVID-19+List.pdf?MOD=AJPERES&CONVERT_TO=url&CACHEID=ROOTWORKSPACE-e9de660a-a9b7-4407-8643-ca38753a53a6-n73Lksl

³¹ Funding increases to community legal services have been the subject of a longstanding advocacy effort by AWAVA, Law Council of Australia, and Women's Legal Services Australia.

We also bring your attention to the “Safety First in Family Law”, a policy platform that has been developed by the Women’s Legal Services Australia and outlines five steps to creating a family law system that keeps women and children safe.³²

For the most recent discussion on the reforms in the family law system, we refer you to AWAVA’s Submission to Joint Select Committee on Australia’s Family Law System.³³

For better outcomes within the migration system, a good practice example is Blueprint for Reform: Removing Barriers to Safety for Victims/Survivors of Domestic and Family Violence who are on Temporary Visas.³⁴

Resourcing and implementation of the National Outcome Standards for Perpetrator Interventions (NOSPI) needs to be given a high priority.

Recommendations:

21. That the Australian Government implements the 2019 ALRC family law review recommendations on the removal of the presumption of equal shared parental responsibility from the family law system and replacement with the focus on the child’s safety, wellbeing and long-term security.
22. That the Australian Government implements WLSA’s Safety First in Family Law plan.³⁵
23. That the Australian Government rolls out the Family Advocacy and Support Service (FASS) nationally so that all people engaging with the family law system have access to it, including people in remote and rural areas and incorporate a case management approach across all FASSs.
24. That the Australian, State and Territory Governments prioritise the involvement of specialist women’s services including women’s legal services in the design and delivery of an expanded FASS and incorporate a case management approach across all FASSs.
25. That the Australian Government incorporates specialist women’s services into family law systems and adequately fund these services.
26. That the Australian Government ensures comprehensive training for all professionals within the family law system
27. That the Australian, State and Territory Governments harmonise state and federal laws in regards to child protection, and develop a Memorandum of Understanding in the way the Family Court manages risk in relation to DFV and child sex abuse.
28. That the Australian Government initiates a standard screening, risk assessment and referral process nationally, to ensure public health, social and community services are trained to identify key safety risks early for people experiencing violence in their relationships, and able to refer them to the services that can help them achieve safety and recover.

³² Women’s Legal Services Australia Five Step Plan for Safety First in Family Law Available at: http://www.womenslegal.org.au/files/file/SAFETY%20FIRST%20POLICY%20PLATFORM.MAY%202016_FINAL.pdf

³³ AWAVA, National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Women’s Alliance (NATSIWA) and Harmony Alliance: Migrant and Refugee Women for Change (2018) Submission in response to the Australian Law Reform Commission’s Review of the Family Law System Issues Paper. Available at: <https://awava.org.au/2018/05/22/submissions/2018/submission-in-response-to-the-australian-law-reform-commissions-review-of-the-family-law-system-issues-paper>

³⁴ National Advocacy Group on Women on Temporary Visas Experiencing Violence (2019) Blueprint for Reform: Removing Barriers to Safety for Victims/Survivors of Domestic and Family Violence who are on Temporary Visas. Available at: https://awava.org.au/2019/10/02/research-and-reports/blueprint-for-reform?doing_wp_cron=1583195345.8148720264434814453125

³⁵ Women’s Legal Services Australia Five Step Plan for Safety First in Family Law. Available at: http://www.womenslegal.org.au/files/file/SAFETY%20FIRST%20POLICY%20PLATFORM.MAY%202016_FINAL.pdf

29. That the Australian Government agrees to institute improved AVO standards to make clear what is expected of police, magistrates and courts to hold perpetrators accountable, and ensure women and children subjected to domestic and family violence are able to rely on these orders to achieve safety and justice.
30. That the Australian Government ensures victims/survivors seeking help can access free translating and interpreting services, so that regardless of their disability, cultural or language background, or geographical location, any woman reaching out for help to build a safer future is able to access the assistance she needs.
31. That the Australian Government ensure geographical equality of access for victims/survivors to legal advice, representation and court proceedings through the use of teleconference and videoconference facility.

3.3. Women's economic independence

Access to social security is crucial for victims/survivors to enable them to re-establish their lives after experience of violence. Increases to the Jobkeeper payment and the additional supplements during the pandemic have made a huge difference in particular for victims/survivors to live free from violence.

While some social security responses have been positive, people with disabilities and people on temporary visas have been excluded from the announced social security measures. This has driven people to poverty and destitution. No one should be left behind.

Unlike those relying on most other forms of income support, people living with a disability haven't received an increase in their payment. And those on temporary visas face existing barriers to accessing services, income and basic healthcare due to strict eligibility criteria. The risks they face are likely to be compounded by perpetrators withholding and blocking access to healthcare and finances; and they face increased uncertainty about their migration status if they are to reach out for help. Women in these situations urgently need access to income support available to others – as well as housing, health services, interpreters and legal assistance.

The social security response requires an intersectional gender lens understanding how particular cohorts of people will be more at risk of violence, poverty and homelessness, as they will be among the first to lose income. This is particular true for women more generally and those women who are on temporary visas or women seeking asylum who overrepresented in informal employment.³⁶ Women on temporary visas experiencing violence are particularly of concern. We note the Australian government and States and Territory governments commitments to provide better supports for this group. We are referring you to the set of recommendations developed by the National Advocacy Group on Women on Temporary Visas Experiencing Violence on what's needed.³⁷

In addition, the AWAVA's pre-budget submission made to the Treasury in January 2020 we made a number of recommendations about the review of social security system such as overhaul of the ParentsNext Program and Cashless Debit Cards, as well as improved eligibility for disability support pensions and reforms of the crisis payments. The copy of the submission is attached.

³⁶ [UNGA A/70/723. Protecting Humanity from Future Health Crises: Report of the High-Level Panel on the Global Response to Health Crises; UNICEF Helpdesk, "GBV in Emergencies: Emergency Responses to Public Health Outbreaks," September 2018, p. 2.](#)

³⁷ National Advocacy Group on Women on Temporary Visas Experiencing Violence (2019) Blueprint for Reform: Removing Barriers to Safety for Victims/Survivors of Domestic and Family Violence who are on Temporary Visas.

Recommendations:

32. That the Australian Government maintains the full Jobseeker supplement the Coronavirus Supplement of \$550 beyond 24 September 2020, to abolish liquid assets waiting period and wait period for income support.
33. That the Australian Government expands access to social security and Medicare benefits to all people regardless of their migration status, in particular for women on temporary visas experiencing violence and people seeking asylum who receive or have lost access to SRSS payments.
34. That the Australian Government extends the Coronavirus Supplement of \$550 per fortnight to recipients of the Disability Support Pension (DSP).
35. That the Australian Government exempts women on temporary visas and women seeking asylum who have experienced domestic and family violence from meeting residency requirements for the purposes of full access to Centrelink and Medicare while their visa is being processed.
36. That the Australian Government exempts women who have experienced domestic, family and sexual violence and have been granted permanent residency from Centrelink newly arrived resident's waiting period (NARWP) similar to existing waiting period exemptions in place for people recognised as refugees.
37. That the Australian Government expands eligibility for Special Benefit to include people who are on all types of temporary visas and have experienced domestic and family violence. The rates of Special Benefit should be increased to make it liveable.
38. That the Australian Government ensure that victims/survivors of domestic and family violence are not disempowered or put at further risk through applying gender, intersectionality and family lens to social security policy.
39. That the Australian Government reviews the eligibility criteria for the Disability Support Pension to allow greater access for people with disability.
40. That the Australian Government amends the Guide to Social Security Law:
 - a) to allow a claim for Crisis Payment within 14 days;
 - b) to allow Crisis Payment to be paid to any person suffering severe financial hardship who has recently experienced family and domestic violence: removing the nexus of 'home';
 - c) that Crisis Payment be extended to victims of family and domestic violence who are not receiving income support but are experiencing or anticipating severe financial hardship resulting from their efforts to leave a violent relationship;
 - d) that Crisis Payment be increased to the equivalent of 'four weeks' single rate pension: approximately \$1640; and
 - e) that eligibility for Crisis Payment be extended to allow Crisis Payment to be paid up to six times per year.
41. That the Australian Government undertakes a comprehensive review of the appropriateness and efficacy of the social security system as a whole, including:
 - a) the adequacy and interaction of various payments and supplements; and
 - b) the efficacy of compliance requirements and activation methods as summarised in previous parliamentary inquiries including overhaul of the ParentsNext Program and abandoning the Cashless Debit Cards trials;

4. Sustained Funding for the National Women's Alliances

The six National Women's Alliances that were established by the government are a unique model of civil society engagement in policy development. They bring together the voices of over 180 women's organisations and thousands of diverse women including victims/survivors of violence to inform government decision-making to advance gender equality, women's safety, leadership and economic security.

The expertise, efficacy and coordination of the National Women's Alliances supports the government's work in building national policies and legislation, contributing to big impact at relatively low cost to the Government. Many transformational changes for women's safety in policy has been achieved. For example, AWAVA is really proud to be a part achieving the ban on cross-examination by perpetrators in cases of family law, have been brought about with strong contributions from National Women's Alliances amplifying the voices of our members and networks. It is vital that the Alliances, together with the Women's Leadership and Development Program, have secure and ongoing funding.

It is important that all priority cohorts of women are represented. At present there is no national alliance focusing on the rights of women with disabilities. We support the calls to fund a national women's alliance for women with disability, auspiced by Women with Disabilities Australia to permit whole-of-government engagement and which is critical considering the significant implications of COVID-19 for women with disability.

Recommendation:

- 42. For the Australian Government to reinstate multi-year funding for the National Women's Alliances (minimum three-year contracts) as part of an ongoing Women's Leadership and Development Program, with funding into the forward estimates and indexation and to include an annual CPI increase in the funding. Total cost over four years: \$7,088,010.**
- 43. Fund a National Women's Alliance for women with disability, auspiced by Women with Disabilities Australia, to permit whole-of-government and multi-year policy engagement, for a period of four years. Total cost over four years: \$1,181,335**

Once again, we thank you for the opportunity to make a pre-budget submission. If you would like to discuss the contents of the submission further, please contact Tina Dixson, AWAVA Acting Program Manager, using the details below.

Tina Dixson

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