



Senator Rex Patrick
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Senate
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

CC: Stella Majury, Adviser to Senator Patrick

Dear Senator

Closure of Senate Inquiry into Domestic Violence

Thank you for raising awareness of the major issue of family violence. No to Violence is Australia's largest peak body for the sector that works with men who use violence. We also operate the Men's Referral Service, which provides one-off counselling and referral pathways for men who have been referred to our service, or men who are ready to account of their behaviours and get help.

Due to the increases in demand and our responses to the current COVID-19 pandemic, we had not had an opportunity to provide a full submission to the Senate Inquiry into Domestic Violence. Many Men's Behaviour Change Programs have been unable to operate, and we are seeing increases in calls to the Men's Referral Service. No to Violence has been busy supporting our members, the workforce and men who use violence.

Extensive bodies of research show that in additional times of stress the rates of domestic violence rise. As you would know, the impacts of COVID-19 have been profound on the domestic violence sector. Initially victim support services were seeing depressed demand – which is indicative of victims of violence not having opportunities to reach out for assistance. We are seeing these rates increase now that physical restrictions are being gradually lifted.

The Men's Referral Service has seen increases in our call rates, with peaks corresponding to major announcements. For example, the Men's Referral Service saw a 92 per cent increase in calls on the day Stage 3 Restrictions were announced by the Prime Minister in early-April.



We are yet to see the biggest impacts of the pandemic – with many across the sector and industry highlighting that the morbidity and mortality of the health impacts of COVID-19 are likely to be eclipsed by the social and economic impacts we are going to see in coming months.

No to Violence is excited to have recently received a one-off grant of \$2.4 million from the Commonwealth Department of Social Services, to assist us over the next six months in:

- Expanding the Men’s Referral Service to take calls nationally; the first time that all jurisdictions will have access to this service;
- Establishing a Brief Intervention Service, which inserts a new level of support in the system as the men progress through long waiting lists or because the Men’s Behaviour Change Program has been closed due to physical distancing restrictions; and
- The rollout of a Remote Working Toolkit, including training across numerous related sectors across Australia, to provide guidance to workers during times where they cannot work directly with their clients.

This service will be a game-changer for the next six months; although it is still unclear how long the social, economic and health impacts of COVID-19 will remain. We are excited about drawing on the lessons of the temporary national expansion to inform future policy and program development.

The Family Violence System:

As you and the Senate Committee have highlighted in the Terms of Reference, we already know the impacts of family and intimate partner violence. We already understand the causes and factors that are contributing to it. We already know the things that need to be done to reduce the rates of violence.

It is with some remorse that we acknowledge the number of inquiries, reports and policies across the Commonwealth, state and territories which have considered this issue of family violence.



To note some from recent years:

- Fourth Action Plan of the National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children 2010-2022 (2019)
- Consultation for the Fourth Action Plan (2019)
- Senate Inquiry into practice of dowry and the incidence of dowry abuse in Australia (2019)
- Western Australian 10-year strategy for reducing family and domestic violence (2019)
- Australian Law Reform Commission Review of the Family Law System (2019)
- NSW Domestic and Family Violence Prevention and Early Intervention Strategy 2017 – 2021 (2017)
- Ending Family Violence: Victoria’s plan for change (2016)
- Victorian Royal Commission into Family Violence (2016)
- Third Action Plan of the National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children 2010-2022 (2016)
- Consultation for Third Action Plan (2016)
- Senate inquiry into Violence, abuse and neglect against people with disability in institutional and residential settings, including the gender and age related dimensions, and the particular situation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people with disability, and culturally and linguistically diverse people with disability (2015)
- Not Now, Not Ever: Putting an End to Domestic Violence in Queensland (2015)
- South Australian Inquiry into Domestic and Family Violence (2015)
- Senate Inquiry into Domestic Violence (2014)
- Second Action Plan of the National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children 2010-2022 (2014)
- NSW Government Inquiry into domestic violence trends and issues in NSW (2011)
- Senate Inquiry into the Family Law Legislation Amendment (Family Violence and Other Measures) Bill 2011 (2011)
- National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children (2011)
- National Council to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children (2008)



- *Victorian Family Violence Protection Act 2008 (2008)*
- *Victorian Law Reform Council Inquiry into Family Violence (2006)*

People are literally dying as we read and reminisce over existing inquiries and reports about the problems and solutions. This year, at least 21 women have had their lives taken prematurely by men’s use of violence.

What this inquiry had the opportunity to do was draw on these lessons and plan about how we can all work together to reduce and end family violence. No To Violence hopes that, although the inquiry is now closed, you and your colleagues will still be able to carry on this work and continue to advocate for a reformed and coordinated system which draws on these lessons.

What is needed

Simply put, there are four critical areas of the system to prevent family violence and support those who have experienced it.

| Prevent it | Intervene Early | Support those who are in crisis | Support the recovery of those who experienced it |
|--|---|---|--|
| Addressing the underlying causes of family and domestic violence, in particular power imbalances caused by behaviours and attitudes. | Early identification and referral of people experiencing violence, and referral of abusive partners to resources to address behaviours. | Responding to the severe and crisis driven impacts of family violence, including emergency accommodation and justice responses. | If person is removed from violence, support to deal with the longer term impacts of experiencing violence (including financial, social and psychological impacts). |

The social, economic and financial impacts of family violence are significantly reduced when people intervene earlier.



No to Violence and its members across all states and territories provide opportunities for early intervention and respond to crisis situations. The majority of perpetrators of family violence are men. Addressing their behaviour before they escalate and responding to the men who are using abuse and violence, is an important part of this system.

Last year at our Australasian Working Together to End Men's Violence Conference 2019, we brought together experts from across the family violence sector to talk about what was needed in the future. The conference report is available [here](#).

Aside from the Commonwealth funding for the next six months, the Men's Referral Service is funded by governments only in New South Wales, Victoria and Tasmania. There is a need for a longer-term plan about how we as a country work with men who use violence, with the focus on supporting victims of family violence, and supporting men to change their abusive behaviour and actions.

What is needed to address perpetrator behaviour?

All governments work together to increase expenditure for family and domestic violence, in particular:

- Increase in and ongoing certainty for primary prevention funding, preventing violence before it starts.
- Greater funding for early intervention, including intervention with men who use violence.
- Greater funding for Men's Behaviour Change Programs, to prevent future perpetration of violence.

An issue that impacts our whole community

There are a number of reasons why we do not have a system that adequately prevents violence and supports those who experience it. But one of the issues we have found lies with tension between the responsibilities between Commonwealth and state and territories.

Family violence costs the Australian economy \$22 billion per year according to modelling by KPMG and funded by the Department of Social Services (2016).

Australian police deal with at least 5,000 domestic violence matters on average every week.



Aboriginal women are 27 more times likely to be hospitalised as a result of family violence.

The impacts of family violence are felt across all Australians, all jurisdictions, all sectors and all levels of government. What is needed is a plan which brings this together, and where people are held account for their roles.

A New National Plan

When the National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children 2010-2022 was launched in 2011, it was a good start. For the first time, there was a proper national focus on family violence. The outcomes of the plan have established greater evidence with ANROWS and Our Watch, the Personal Safety Survey. It has invested in prevention approaches. It has established 1800RESPECT.

All of these are now critical parts of the family violence infrastructure in this country and we cannot do without them.

However, since the National Plan's inception there has become an increasingly distinct inequity of the supports you will receive based on where you are in Australia – both based on which state or territory you reside in, and whether you live in the city or regional or rural areas.

We are told it is a state issue. We are told it is a Commonwealth issue. Australians do not care where funding comes from. They do not care which level of government is delivering these services. They just want something done.

In the context of the development of a new National Plan at the close of the current one, we need to take this more seriously. We need a coordinated system, which holds different governments accountable for their roles, and draws on the important roles of the community sector and businesses, large and small, across Australia.

How can we make a better and more integrated system to address family violence?

Establish a National Agreement under the auspices of the Intergovernmental Agreement on Federal Financial Relations. Include state-by-state reporting of funding levels and rates of violence to enable monitoring of what works.



There are many more issues which No to Violence would welcome to have a conversation about. Please extend an open invitation to your colleagues about having a conversation with us, or if you would like for us to arrange a visit to our call centre.

Yours sincerely

Jacqui Watt
Chief Executive Officer
27 May 2020