

Safety Frist

Draft National Plan to End Violence against Women and
Children 2022-2032

The National Council & of Single Mothers Their Children Inc.

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Eliminate and respond to violence, hardship and inequality for single mothers and their children.

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The National Council of Single Mothers & their Children Inc (NCSMC)

An organisation dedicated to single mothers and a platform whereby both the community and the Government can communicate. NCSMC can comment on policy and legislation and ensure that the lived experience is available and presented. NCSMC provides information, referrals, and assistance to single mothers through our electronic platforms. In the past year we have responded to tens of thousands individual requests whilst our information post can reach up to 100,000+ per week. One of our greatest strengths is our expertise and commitment in working with and for the advancement of single mother families affected by poverty, hardship, and/or domestic violence.

The National Council of Single Mothers and their Children Inc welcomes an opportunity to respond to the Draft Plan to End Violence against Women and Children 2022-2032. Our response builds upon a sustained history of active engagement, including the support and work to achieve the enactment of the first Plan, effective 2010.

The broad direction of the draft Plan (2022-2023) includes worthy tone and sentiment. However, to turn intentions into progressive outcomes the Plan requires measurable indicators, it needs practical implementation plans, with inclusive and frequent monitoring, which occurs at specified time points. It is critical that the plan is measurable for success with flexibility that enables new and different approaches. The Plan needs to be dynamic and alert.

The National Council of Single Mothers and their Children Inc have expertise of post separation gendered violence. It is now known that separation does not unlock the key to safety, conversely it can also be one of the most unsafe times for women and their children. Emphatically, we know through the lived experience, qualitative and quantitative data that the journey and quest to seek and stay safe is much harder, more complicated, and more elusive because of the government's own policy settings. It is these matters to which NCSMC is focusing upon within our submission.

Our expertise is derived from our own research, collaboration with others and steeped in the rich but often tragic experience of women who have sought our service. It is from this unique but clear vantage point that we present our submission and recommendations

Recommendations

1. The 2022-2032 Plan must include targets, timeframes, monitoring and an evaluation process that is transparent. Moreover, the agreed framework is outlined and part of the consultation process. It would be substandard for an evaluation process to be developed by a particular entity without the collective expertise.
2. The governance of the Plan requires the legitimacy and wisdom of victim-survivors of gendered violence. This should occur at every timepoint and juncture over the next 10 years. Support and capacity enhancing to be available so that their engagement can remain continuous and robust.
3. An outcome of the Women`s Summit was a call for a separate plan as developed by First Nation women. The Plan to End Violence against Women and Children can only proceed with the full approval and ownership of our Frist Nation women.
4. Financial hardship, economic insecurity, and financial safety to be legitimately recognised as a vulnerability indicator. Thus, granting visibility to both a contributor of gendered violence as well as prohibitor in seeking and staying safe. Currently, the plan does not contain specific recommendations regarding economic abuse. Furthermore, the nexus between gendered violence and financial hardship can be life long and intergenerational. NCSMC is aware of women returning to the place of abuse and to the hands of the abuser because of a lack of financial capacity and a failure of our income support system. Mechanisms where the Government has full control of policy settings such the Australian Social Security System, Mutual Obligations and the Australian Child Support System be evaluated against the targets of the Plan to reduce violence against women and children. Too often Government legislation and administration replicates the hallmarks of a gendered violence with forced compliance and the inherent power to control critical resources. Please see the attached addendum.
5. The social security system to be amended to provided financial support to women leaving violent relationships with the minimum amount equal to the Parenting Payment Single. Newstart and or

Special Benefit is completely inadequate. Financial Safety would also necessitate the expansion of access for women on temporary visas.

6. Provide flexible support packages, at a minimum of \$5,000, and that it is cash transfer.
7. Abolish the cashless debit card, ParentsNext and improve the mutual obligations systems. Currently exemptions are too difficult to obtain, it requires the retailing of personal trauma, and the amount of time is too limited. A far superior approach would be for women to gain an exemption, with the option of online or in person, and that the exemption is available for as long as they require.
 - a. Example
The Parliamentary Joint Committee on Human Rights (PJCHR) on Friday 25 June 2021 found that the ParentsNext program impinges on human rights, and presented a much welcomed [recommendation](#) to remove 'compulsory participation' from the programⁱ. The program continues despite the knowledge that it compounds harm and stress as experienced by victim-survivors of gendered violence.
8. The Plan needs to recognise that recovery and healing takes time, it is individual and maybe lifelong. Support needs to be through resolute and tailored services and interventions. Ensure victim-survivors are supported in all aspects of their daily lives through trauma informed, culturally sensitive and accessible services that support longer-term recovery. The process of recovery be elevated above mutual obligation requirements.
9. Initiate a response campaign to combat concerning attitudes that are either continuous or emerging, as per the findings of the personal safety survey and other specialist research. It is a step beyond, but complimentary to primary prevention, it supports community awareness and can assist with bolstering bystander assistance and strengthening informal networks. It is important that the Plan acknowledges that women do not always reach out to the formal services system. Inclusive is this recommendation is research, targets, and evaluation.
10. The Plan to incorporate targets that ensures that family law legislation is nationally consistent, and that it can be amended and is responsive to new needs that increase women's and children's safety. A current and outstanding need is legislation that prohibits women and children's ability to relocate to a geographical location of their choice, to a place of safety, to their networks, and away from the reach and close proximity of the abuser and his networks. Currently, the Australian law does not place any

restrictions upon the non-primary carer, but the legislative settings can control the living arrangements of victim-survivors of gendered violence if they have dependent children. It is these anomalies that the Plan needs to address.

ⁱ *ParentsNext: examination of Social Security (Parenting payment participation requirements - class of persons) Instrument 2021*. 4 August 2021. Commonwealth of Australia 2021. Available at https://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Committees/Joint/Human_Rights/ParentsNext/Report