

# National Council to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children – Consultation Feedback Report

*NB: The information contained in this document is available in HTML from the Office for Women website at: <http://www.ofw.facs.gov.au/nationalcouncil/consultations/index.htm>. For ease of access to members, WWDA has compiled the information into this one document.*

*Date: November 29, 2008*

This document contains feedback from the extensive consultations undertaken by the National Council to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children throughout 2008 to inform the development of a *National Plan of Action* to reduce the incidence and impact of domestic and family violence and sexual assault on women and their children.

Throughout May to November 2008, the National Council has undertaken extensive consultations with service providers, policy makers, program managers, academics, legal practitioners, and victims, survivors and perpetrators of domestic and family violence and sexual assault. The Council also called for written submissions, undertook consultations in a number of rural and remote areas, and held three expert roundtables to further inform development of the *National Plan*.

The Council will deliver their proposed *National Plan* to Government by the end of December 2008.

# Written Submissions

*On 26 May 2008 the Government announced the formation of an eleven member National Council charged with the responsibility for providing expert advice to Government on measures to reduce the incidence and impact of domestic and family violence and sexual assault on women and their children and delivering a draft National Plan of Action to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children by the end of 2008.*

*The National Council to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children held its first meeting in June 2008 and embarked on an ambitious and comprehensive consultation process to ensure the development of the National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children was informed by the views and perspectives of victims, survivors, services, government representatives, women's groups, perpetrators, the legal sector and advocacy groups.*

*In early 2008, the Office for Women (OfW) commissioned extensive research to gather qualitative feedback from victims, survivors, perpetrators and witnesses of domestic violence and sexual assault.*

*The key research questions were:*

- 1. Why does family violence and sexual assault happen?*
- 2. What is being done to reduce it?*
- 3. What is being done that works?*
- 4. What else would prevent and stop re-occurrence? Where do we go from here?*

*The study included a desk-top review of OfW-funded projects, a call for written input from the community, consultations with professional stakeholders as well as feedback from victims, survivors, perpetrators, and witnesses of domestic and family violence and sexual assault.*

*Issues raised in the 370 written submissions received can be found below.*

Libby Lloyd AM Chair National Council to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children

## Summaries of the 370 written submissions

<b>Source</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
General public	116	31%
Services	105	28%
Victims/Survivors	50	14%
Advocacy groups	27	7%
Legal sector	19	5%
Academics	14	4%
Government	13	4%
Medical Professionals	12	3%
Education	6	2%
Other	8	2%
<b>Total</b>	<b>370</b>	<b>100%</b>

## Summary of Findings

### *Question 1*

*Why does domestic and family violence and sexual assault happen?*

The reasons for the use of violence against women and children covered a broad range of explanations. The common explanations included:

- **Personal issues** such as substance use and abuse, needs for power or control, low self esteem, mental health problems, ignorance of domestic and family violence or healthy relationships, lack of anger management or self control, poor education and the unwillingness of victims to ask for help;
- **Family issues** such as the cyclic or intergenerational nature of violence, and lack of positive parenting skills;
- **Relationship issues** such as the stresses created when relationships begin to breakdown;
- **Situational issues** such as economic stress;
- **Societal pressure or acceptance** such as the tensions created between the traditional roles of men and women, unequal power relations between the genders, the inability of men to cope with the changing roles of women, the lack of healthy role models, and that is accepted as normal in society;
- **Personal attitudes and social norms** such as a general lack of community education about the nature and forms of domestic and family violence, the stigma or shame suffered by victims, the general prevalence of violence in society, the breakdown of community values, religious influences, and cultural acceptance of violence;
- **Media exposures** such as exposure to violence in entertainment, the sexualisation of women and girls, easy access to pornography and poor celebrity role models; and
- **The nature of the legal system** such as inadequate responses to domestic and family violence, the system being in favour of the accused, and the lack of consequences for serial offenders.

Descriptions of barriers to family safety for women and children were also varied, complex and inter-related. Some of the barriers include:

- **Society, culture and attitudes** such as gender inequality, societal attitudes to domestic and family violence and sexual assault, the social stigma surrounding being affected by domestic and family violence and sexual assault, the fact that they are considered taboo subjects, ongoing stereotypical misconceptions about domestic and family violence and sexual assault, an expectation that families should avoid breaking up, the way that families are perceived as the last bastions of privacy, a general loss of community values like respect, responsibility and community cohesion, the normalisation of violence through the media, and the sex industry and pornography legitimising violence against women and girls;
- **Knowledge, education and awareness** such as a lack of community awareness of domestic and family violence and sexual assault, a lack of awareness of what assistance is available and how the legal system works in relation to domestic and family violence and sexual assault, the lack of a comprehensive national education program, the lack of effective media campaigns, and the lack of effective, nationally consistent, best practice training in domestic and family violence and sexual assault for generic services;
- **Individual issues** such as fear of the consequences of reporting, fear of losing social connections, lack of confidence in the system to protect victims and their children, concerns and stress about economic security and disruption to children, shame guilt and embarrassment, mental health issues, poor self esteem and perception, and love for their partner and commitment to the relationship;
- **Family and parenting issues** such as generational conditioning and the perception that violence is normal, along with poor parenting skills;
- **Legal issues** such as the perceived: lack of protection for victims; risks associated for families with a history of domestic and family violence within the Family Law system; lack of support for victims to remain within the family home while the perpetrator is forced to leave; lack of legal aid and legal support for victims; and, lack of a coordinated and consistent legal system.

- **Policing issues** such as the lack of coordination between police and other service providers, police offering inadequate protection for victims, a general lack of police resources and training in domestic and family violence and sexual assault, and the perceived attitudes of some police;
- **Service delivery issues** such as whilst public awareness campaigns encourage women to seek assistance they are not always backed up with adequate or coordinated services, complex interactions with Departments of Community Services and Child Safety, a perceived lack of political leadership to create a coherent service network, a lack of funding for research into domestic and family violence and sexual assault issues and a perceived lack of commitment to act on recommendations of existing research;
- **Housing issues** such as the insufficient availability of safe, affordable, crisis accommodation and long term housing;
- **Financial issues** such as inadequate financial and welfare provisions;
- **Service issues** such as a lack of services for men, a lack of mental health services, a lack of follow up with offenders/perpetrators, a lack of services for older women experiencing elder assault, a lack of holistic, personalised and tailored services, and a lack of integrated service systems between providers and between all levels of government; and
- **Structural and situational issues** such as physical and social isolation keeping victims in violent relationships.

## Questions 2 & 3

*What is being done to reduce it? What is being done that works?*

Characteristics of resources, programs and services that were considered to work included:

### Collaboration

- Services where men and women work together to solve problems, under the guidance of therapeutic professionals;
- Government and non-Government service provider partnerships that network together to identify the needs of those in their specific community for program and policy development; and
- Programs that are facilitated in such a way that they are truly participatory – based on ongoing relationships and support.

### Accessibility

- Ensuring regional coverage, beyond major towns and into surrounding rural areas;
- Providing 24 hour accessibility of services; and

### Representativeness/relevance

- Services where support workers reflect a broad cross section of the community; and
- Providing consumers with choice of service.

### Prevention

- Early intervention programs aimed at 'at risk' families;
- Services that deal with prevention rather than just cure;
- Services with fully trained workers to ensure appropriate servicing and referral for victims; and
- Referrals from other services to aid prevention of domestic and family violence in at- risk families.

## Question 4

*What else would prevent and stop re-occurrence? Where do we go from here?*

### *Education*

**Community education** was a major recommendation from many submissions. Teaching both adults and children the fundamentals of healthy and respectful relationships was assumed to contribute to the eradication of domestic and family violence and sexual assault. Awareness raising about domestic and family violence as a national issue, the signs of domestic and family violence and what to do or what services are available were all considered important elements of a national campaign.

Recommendations included:

- **Broad national community campaigns** that cover traditional media, school education curriculum, sporting groups and workplaces that would address the underlying causes of violence, communicate the fact that violence is wrong and a crime, and what victims and witnesses can do in response to violence;
- **Multi-dimensional campaign design** to include awareness raising and education, demonstrate healthy society values, provide positive role models for men and women, and clearly convey Australia's rejection of violence;
- **Reviewing advertising standards and Australian classification systems** to address the image of women and children in the media ;
- **Specific education at all levels** is required to address violence and challenge various cultural/ societal norms, such as:
  - Healthy relationships
  - Positive parenting
  - Anti-violence and bullying
  - Workplace safety and support;and
- **Specific education needs to be delivered to various target groups:** parents, children/teens, teachers, organisations, human services professionals, legal professionals, police, social services and the general community.

### *Services*

Immediate and ongoing services for victims of domestic and family violence received a great deal of attention in submissions. The most common recommendations included the provision of accommodation options, holistic or integrated services, and access to legal services, with lesser attention paid to counselling and financial support.

**Accommodation** options included:

- Increase the availability of *emergency accommodation* that meet the various needs of women and their children;
- Increase the availability of *long-term and affordable housing*;
- Ensure *access to safe housing* or accommodation options;
- Support *women and their children to stay in their family home*, and require the perpetrator of violence to leave the home instead; and
- *Design accommodation solutions that meet the short-, medium- and long-term needs of women and children in escaping a violent relationship.*

**Integrated service** options included:

- *One-stop-shop models* where victims can have all their service needs, including housing, financial assistance, court or legal assistance, counselling, and training and support to secure employment catered for.

**Legal services** options included:

- Legal and court support or advice that is *victim friendly*; and
- Provision of *accessible legal services* to domestic and family violence and sexual assault victims and witnesses.

**Offender/perpetrator** options included:

- *Educating men* about behaving well and being responsible for their actions;
- *Group work* with male facilitators;
- *Anger management* programs;
- *Emergency accommodation services* for perpetrators removed from the family home;
- *Mandatory rehabilitation programs* for repeat offenders; and
- Providing *integrated services* to address using violence and other contributing factors in men's lives.

**Child/Children** options commonly mentioned included:

- *Education on respect* and that violence is wrong; and
- *Education on healthy relationships* and violence prevention

**Financial support** options included:

- *Increase crisis support* to women escaping a violent environment;
- Provide sufficient funding for existing projects with a proven track record, to fill service gaps, and for locally based intake and referral services; and
- *Financial management assistance* for women who have escaped a violent environment, such as quarantining parts of government provided income so that household bills are serviced.

**Workforce** options include:

- Funding is also required for various service providers and agencies to *attract and retain skilled staff*.

In addition to the general population, education and service programs also need to be offered in a respectful and relevant fashion, to Culturally and Linguistically Diverse communities, Indigenous communities, disabled women, rural and remote communities, lesbian women, and women who have been imprisoned.

Other important recommendations were made with regards to service delivery, although with less frequency. These included improving access to the Department of Community Service for women and children, improving access to crisis and long-term counselling services for perpetrators and victims, the provision of support to men, and improvements to health and mental health services.

*Police and Legal responses*

Legal reforms to address the specific challenges of victims of domestic and family violence and sexual assault were a major focus of recommendations and covered a range of potential improvements to the legal response including:

- **The harmonisation of State and Territory laws** and responses relating to domestic and family violence and protection orders as part of a National Plan;
- **Aligning the Plan** with the National Child Protection Framework and other Human Rights obligations;
- **Officially recognising domestic and family violence as a criminal offence** at all levels of justice response (police and the courts) and expanding the legal definition of D&FV to include more subtle forms of abuse;
- **Reconsidering the Family Law Act** *as it relates to families with a history of domestic and family violence and sexual assault.*
- **Dedicated domestic and family violence courts** and *Death Review Boards* in each State and Territory;
- **Stronger sentencing** and *harsher penalties* imposed on *offenders/perpetrators* to act as a real deterrent;
- **Comprehensive training for police and court officials** on the causes and impacts of domestic and family violence and sexual assault;
- Increasing the use of evidence kits in domestic and family violence and sexual assault cases, particularly gathering photographic evidence to assist prosecution at a later date; and
- **Increasing police powers** *to arrest or issue interim Apprehended Violence Orders to offenders/perpetrators*, regardless of the wishes of the victim or the availability of the courts; and/or remove perpetrators from the family home.

## Recommendations for the National Plan

Many submissions provided broad guidance on potential principles, and content, of the National Plan, including that the National Plan needs to:

- Focus on *eradication rather than reduction* of violence against women and children;
- Focus on *long term solutions not short term fixes*;
- Have an overall focus on *victim safety and perpetrator accountability*;
- Aim for *integrated or holistic service provision* and development;
- Operate and inform *multiple levels* within the domestic and family violence and sexual assault industry, from national bodies through to local services;
- Be underpinned by *human rights, gender, health promotion, social determinants and child protection philosophies*;
- Operate across *multiple portfolios* and sectors;
- *Be informed by ongoing research* and new theoretical models;
- *Seek input* from Government, sector expert, service provider and interest group stakeholders;
- *Be sensitive to the needs of all women and children*, including Culturally and Linguistically Diverse communities, Indigenous and disability groups;
- *Set goals and targets*;
- *Include mechanisms to enhance legal equality*, such as better access to legal services and representation;
- *Include a workable governance structure* with coordinating, steering, monitoring and troubleshooting functions;
- *Include research that improves our understanding*;
- Include *public release of gendered crime statistics* with common definitions and measure of domestic violence between the state and territories;
- A *peak body that takes responsibility for the implementation* of the National Plan;
- Clearly identified *bodies with core responsibilities* so tasks do not 'slip through the cracks';
- The establishment of a *domestic and family violence death review process* to identify issues for reform, gaps in the system and imperatives for change;

- The *relationships and context* in which violence against women occurs should be made explicit within the Plan; and
- The Plan should be *informed by traditional and new theoretical frameworks*.

### Consultations at a Glance – Written Submissions

<b>What</b>	<b>Who</b>	<b>How Many</b>	<b>Where</b>	<b>When</b>
<b>Written Submissions</b>	Total	<b>370</b>	Australia wide	21 June 2008 – 31 July 2008
	- General public	116 (31%)		
	- Services	105 (28%)		
	- Victim & Survivor	50 (14%)		
	- Advocacy Groups	27 (7%)		
	- Legal Sector	19 (5%)		
	- Academics	14 (4%)		
	- Government	13 (4%)		
	- Medical Professionals	12 (3%)		
	- Education	6 (2%)		
	- Other	8 (2%)		

# Forums With Stakeholders

*As part of the consultation process forums were held with stakeholders in Sydney, Melbourne, Brisbane, Perth, Adelaide, Canberra, Hobart, Darwin, Bunbury and Albury Wodonga. Most participants were providers of services to victims, survivors and perpetrators of domestic and family violence or sexual assault; however, representatives of State and Territory government agencies, academics and people working in education and early childhood also attended.*

*Overall, 440 individuals participated in the 30 forums and made very valuable contributions to the development of the National Plan. Their time and commitment is greatly appreciated by the Council.*

Libby Lloyd AM

Chair National Council to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children

## Summary of Findings

- Whilst a wide range of services were considered to be effective there was very little strong supportive evidence of effect;
- Based on the observations of service providers, attendance in programs and some feedback from clients, some services were frequently nominated across the forums as being effective. These included: *Stay at Home, integrated models, extended police powers to issue restraining orders; some men's behaviour change programs; and a range of culturally specific programs;*
- Whilst there was a call for improved funding and resourcing across the sector, one of the key barriers to reducing the incidence of domestic and family violence and sexual assault was believed to be the lack of initiatives which focus on perpetrators of domestic and family violence and sexual assault; and
- There was felt to be a lack of strong leadership and no consistent national approach to addressing the issue.

When considering obstacles and solutions, participants' comments fell into seven key themes:

- Society/Social Marketing;
- Legal/Police;
- Education;
- Accommodation;
- Policy;
- Process; and
- Funding/Resources.

These themes were consistently presented across the forums throughout Australia and remained constant, whether discussing domestic, family violence or sexual assault. Similarly the themes were relevant whether focusing on victims, survivors or perpetrators of domestic and family violence and sexual assault.

## Recommendations

***Prevention through Australia wide social marketing efforts, law reform and an integrated whole of government approach.***

### **Social marketing options included:**

- Taking a long term, sustained, social marketing approach aimed at moving beyond increasing awareness and changing attitudes to influencing the behaviour of perpetrators of domestic and family violence and sexual assault;
- Communications outlining that there are negative consequences for abusive behavior and with reminders that it is everybody's responsibility to speak out if they see unacceptable behaviours occurring;
- Linking the issue to the Human Rights Model of Safety, emphasising that victims are not responsible and don't need to feel ashamed, that it is 'everyone's human right to feel safe';
- Holding a *high profile national award* for achievements in the reduction of domestic and family violence and sexual assault; and
- Developing a 'whole of society' education program, which looked at the issue across every stage of the life cycle.

### **Law reform options included:**

- Reviewing laws to improve the safety of women and children including: the effectiveness of *restraining orders*; the interplay between *Family Law and Child Protection*; and ensuring State and Federal laws work together.

### **Whole of government integrated approach to domestic and family violence and sexual assault options included:**

- Developing an integrated approach, articulating State and Commonwealth roles, and reducing the likelihood of clients slipping through the system; and
- Developing a co-sponsored or joint strategy between key Ministers including Health, Education, Women, Housing, Police and Justice.

### ***Reduced risk through early intervention programs for high risk segments***

- Continue to fund school based programs that define healthy relationships but include a follow up to make sure the programs are being implemented effectively;
- Extend such programs beyond 'healthy relationships' to clearly highlight the potential negative consequences of abusive behavior; and
- Consider developing programmes for children not attending school. Participants praised school based programs but also recommended reaching children 'where they live', for example through the internet, text messaging, street magazines ('zines'), posters etc.

### **Culturally and Linguistically Diverse communities - specific options included:**

- Funding professional interpreters and increasing the use of existing interpreters to reduce the incidence of women needing to communicate through their children, or their partner (who could be the perpetrator);
- Continuing education that sexual violence within marriage is illegal; and
- Educating potential immigrants about domestic and family violence and sexual assault during the process of immigrating to Australia, so they are aware of what is acceptable in Australia before they arrive.

### **Indigenous - specific options included:**

- Reviewing housing stock to reduce the incidence of overcrowding, which was seen to be a significant contributor to domestic and family violence and sexual assault; and.

- Developing a culturally appropriate framework for addressing domestic and family violence and sexual assault.

**Rural and Remote - specific options included:**

- Increasing the level of resources available in these areas, including housing stock.

**Women with disabilities- specific options included:**

- Ensuring they are represented at the policy level and in social marketing campaigns; and that care workers are adequately screened and trained to minimise the possibility of violence.

**Older women - specific options included:**

- Ensuring their voices are heard and that care workers are adequately screened and trained to minimise the possibility of violence; and
- Reviewing Power of Attorney laws to ensure they do not work against older women.

**Institutionalised people - specific options included:**

- Reviewing prison practices where it was suggested that 'legal sexual assault' can arise.

***Awareness that support is available in times of crisis, whether fleeing the family home, staying put, or being removed***

- Raise awareness about the support available as people need to know that there is support available, in particular that there is somewhere to go, and people who can help;
- Review the level of housing stock across Australia available for people escaping domestic and family violence and sexual assault. Similarly review the availability of housing for perpetrators, so they do not return to the family home prematurely;
- Ensure health, medical and social work professions are adequately educated about domestic and family violence and sexual assault through university and ongoing professional development programs; and
- Improve the quality and range of programs and increase the emphasis on programs for perpetrators of domestic and family violence and sexual assault.

***Ongoing support***

Participants stressed that domestic and family violence and sexual assault is a long term issue with long term effects, particularly those involving considerable trauma, and suggested the following options:

- Establish booster programs where perpetrators of domestic and family violence and sexual assault can gain access to help if required, even months after they have finished programs;
- Consider how to provide funding for long term accommodation, to prevent people leaving refuges and returning to the family home;
- Review the long term effectiveness of men's behaviour change programs;
- Consider providing more long term funding to existing 'effective' programs rather than new pilot programs; and
- Consider a National Workforce Strategy.

**Consultations at a Glance – Forums**

<b>What</b>	<b>Who</b>	<b>How</b>	<b>Where</b>	<b>When</b>
<b>Forums</b>	Stakeholders in domestic and family violence and sexual assault sectors, as well as representatives of State/Territory governments, academics and educators	30 Many 440 attendees in total	Sydney, Melbourne, Brisbane, Perth, Adelaide, Canberra, Hobart, Darwin, Bunbury and Albury-Wodonga	May and June 2008

# Face to Face and Telephone Interviews

*One aim of the consultation process was to ensure that the Government and the Council heard directly from those most affected by domestic and family violence and sexual assault and feedback was obtained via telephone and face-to-face interviews with 59 victims, survivors, perpetrators and witnesses of domestic and family violence and sexual assault including people from Culturally, Linguistically and Religious diverse communities, Aboriginal and Torres Strait people, Rural & Remote representatives and people with disabilities.*

*Interviews were held in Sydney, Melbourne, Brisbane, Perth, Canberra, Hobart, Darwin, and Bunbury and each interview lasted approximately one and a half to two hours. Due to the sensitive nature of this project all participants were provided with the contact details of an agency which could provide them with information and support.*

*The Council is privileged that so many individuals shared their experiences, views, perceptions and hopes with the researchers and will ensure their voices are heard as the National Plan is developed. Council members are also pleased that perpetrators had the opportunity to participate and recognise that solutions to family and domestic violence and sexual assault lie with all sectors working for a better future.*

Libby Lloyd AM

Chair National Council to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children

Summary of participants in telephone and face-to-face interviews

<b>Participants</b>	<b>Number of Interviews</b>
Canberra	4
Sydney	11
Brisbane	7
Hobart	5
Melbourne	15
Perth	5
Bunbury	5
Darwin	7
	<b>59</b>
Victim/survivor	41
Perpetrator of domestic and family violence or sexual assault	16
Child Witness	2
	<b>59</b>
Domestic/Family violence (Victims/survivors 29, perpetrators 15, 2 witnesses)	46
Sexual Assault (Victims 12, perpetrator 1)	13
	<b>59</b>
Culturally and Linguistically Diverse communities	8
Indigenous	23
Rural/Remote	15
People with disabilities	7

## Summary of Findings

Many of the participants who had been sexually assaulted had also experienced domestic and family violence, and there was a strong degree of consistency in the comments made by both victims and survivors of both domestic and family violence and sexual assault. Many of the same comments were also made by perpetrators of domestic and family violence and sexual assault and given the high level of consistency across states and groups, this summary focuses on the findings that were common across the groups.

### ***Question 1***

#### ***Why does domestic and family violence and sexual assault happen?***

Participants nominated a wide range of issues, the nine key issues are presented below. These were relevant for domestic violence and sexual assault and across target segments and were nominated by victims, survivors and perpetrators of violence. They include:

- Lack of awareness of what constitutes assault;
- Societal images and attitudes;
- Poor communication skills;
- Alcohol and drug use;
- The cyclical or generational nature of domestic and family violence and sexual assault;
- Power, control and manipulation;
- Frustration and anger;
- Impact of leaving on children; and
- Lack of trust and jealousy.

Victims/survivors also spoke about: the lack of clear consistent consequences for abusive behaviours; the lack of resources to leave (e.g. money, transport); isolation; fear; and the level of acceptance or confusion about what is acceptable in some cultures.

### ***Questions 2 & 3***

#### ***What is being done to reduce it? What is being done that works?***

Participants nominated a number of initiatives or approaches that they considered to be working, and some of the key comments included:

- **Advertising** which highlighted what was acceptable in Australia (nominated by victims/survivors and perpetrators of violence). Two specific campaigns nominated were ‘Australia Says No’ and ‘Freedom From Fear’ (which focuses on the children);
- **Help Lines** - which provided information, referrals and ensure confidentiality (victims/survivors and perpetrators of violence);
- **Counselling services** – particularly services that were confidential and run by people who had been through the situation themselves. Specific counselling elements that were said to be working were:
  - Group work which showed the person they were not alone and helped to break down isolation (victims/survivors and perpetrators of violence). For perpetrators of violence, these sessions also allowed them to open up and talk about their feelings amongst other men, which may have been impossible in their daily life;
  - Message – that sexual assault in marriage is still sexual assault (victims/survivors and perpetrators of violence);
  - Message – that it is not your fault and you are not a bad person (victims/survivors);
  - Message – take responsibility for your actions (perpetrators of violence);

- Anger Management, Drug/Alcohol and Parenting Skills courses (perpetrators of violence); and
- Group work with male facilitators (perpetrators of violence).
- **Accommodation** – refuges, Safe at Home (victims);
- **Financial assistance** – Centrelink payments (victims/survivors);
- **Changes in the Law** (victims) - Changes in police powers e.g. police being able to issue restraining orders; changes in police attitudes; Victim Impact Statements; Victim Notification Registry; Victim Mediation Unit; and the opportunity for victims to make submissions to the Parole Board;
- **General practitioners** – providing advice, referrals and medication;
- **Nightclubs** (victims/survivors) – Keeping lids on drinks campaign; and
- **Information provided at community centres.**

When asked what was **not working or which services were unhelpful** participants raised a wide range of concerns including:

- **Public attitudes**, with the issue still stigmatised. Victims/survivors of sexual assault added that the public was still reluctant to intervene at the time.
- **Social marketing campaigns.** Some of the victims/survivors felt that the advertisements were only effective if they were backed up with a range of services and support and ran long term.
- **Accommodation** issues including:
  - Difficulty staying in unfamiliar surroundings when in distress and that it may be easier to return home;
  - Safe at Home – Victims/survivors required greater security if they were to stay at home e.g. help with security systems; and
  - There was believed to be a lack of places for perpetrators of violence to go when they had been removed from the family home.
- **Policing** issues including poor initial experiences meaning victims wouldn't call again.
- **Counselling** including:
  - a 'one size fits all' approach was not appropriate for victims/survivors or perpetrators of violence;
  - **Group work** (Perpetrators of violence) - where the mix of people included disruptive people who had been ordered to attend but didn't want to be there, and where there was a mix of minor and serious offenders;
  - **Counsellors** (Perpetrators of violence) - Counsellors who are straight out of university without being through the experience themselves, and those who run 'textbook' groups; and
  - **Lack of continuity of services** (Perpetrators of violence) – For example, Men's groups that get closed down due to lack of funding.
- **Legal and child support and protection issues** (Victims of domestic and family violence) including:
  - Restraining orders not working; and
  - A concern that some Family Law outcomes compel children to spend time with the perpetrator of violence even if they were scared to go.
- **School Education** (Victims of sexual assault) – some younger victims said they saw the messages but ignored them since they believed it would never happen to them.
- **Poor street lighting** (Victims/survivors of sexual assault).
- **Hospitals** (Victims of sexual assault) - the stigma of entering the hospital and hospital employees who judged victims.
- **Courts** (Perpetrators of violence) – Information about courses and services was not freely available at some courts and they are not always held at convenient times, but there are consequences for non-attendance.

- **Lack of services for men** (Perpetrators of violence) including after hours services.

#### **Question 4**

*What else would prevent and stop re-occurrence? Where do we go from here?*

When considering what else could be done to **help people in domestic and family violence and sexual assault situations**, the most common responses were:

- **Before an incident** – Educating people about the different types of assault, reducing the stigma so it can be discussed, being aware of the warning signs (victims/survivors) or trigger points (perpetrators of violence) and addressing the cycle of domestic and family violence and sexual assault
- **During an incident** – Trying to focus on what they could do for themselves (victims/survivors). Perpetrators of violence talked about concentrating on keeping calm and thinking about the consequences e.g. losing everything; and
- **After an incident** - Both segments spoke about removing the perpetrator of violence (or taking a time out until they were calm), letting people know where to get help, providing support groups or counselling where they can mix with people in the same situation and Help Lines.

To make the situation safer, victims/survivors of both domestic and family violence and sexual assault focused on leaving the situation, having an exit plan and removing the perpetrator of violence. Other suggestions common to both groups were: having a support network; having a code word with friends so they know when to come immediately; being aware that what is happening is wrong; making someone aware of what is happening; moving to a public place; trying to retain some power; and talking in a calm manner so as not to upset the perpetrator of violence.

Victims/survivors of domestic and family violence also suggested, knowing about alternative accommodation options and being aware of other people or services that could help.

When asked what else could be done **to prevent or reduce** domestic and family violence and sexual assault the key things identified by both victims/survivors and perpetrators of violence were:

- **education to break the cycle** (e.g. school programs on anger management, self confidence, relationships, sex education and the real impact of their behaviours e.g. binge drinking);
- **better role models;**
- **recognising the warning signs and triggers;** and
- **removing people** from each other.

## **Recommendations**

The feedback provided three overall areas for recommendations:

*Prevention through Australia-wide initiatives, social education and awareness of strong consequences.*

- **Australia-wide initiatives**
  - Initiatives identified as working should be investigated with a view to rolling these out throughout Australia.
- **Education and prevention campaigns including mass media**
  - Campaigns highlighting the unacceptability of domestic and family violence and sexual assault are believed to have been effective in raising the issue; however, more

and sustained campaigns are required to reduce the stigma attached to domestic and family violence and sexual assault.

- When developing education campaigns the impact of use of the word ‘violence’ and whether this restricts the relevance of the message to physical violence should be considered.
  - Key phrases which appeared to have impacted on both victims/survivors and perpetrators of violence were: it is not acceptable in Australia; sexual assault in marriage is still sexual assault; and you are not alone.
  - Additional messages for victims/survivors were: it was not your fault, you are not a bad person and it could happen to anyone. Meanwhile additional messages for perpetrators of domestic and family violence were take responsibility for your actions and you could lose everything.
- **Law reform**
    - Aspects of the law which could benefit from review include: restraining orders, Family Law, Child support and Child Protection.

### *Reduced risk through early intervention programs for high risk segments*

- **Breaking the cycle for the next generation (School based programs)**
  - Continue to fund school based programs from early childhood to senior high school, and embed non-violence into the curriculum.
- **General Practitioners, Child Health Nurses and Community Centres**
  - General practitioners and child health nurses play an important role and these providers need to be knowledgeable about domestic and family violence and sexual assault and have access to current lists of service providers.
- **Victims/survivors.**
  - Continue to educate people recognising warning signs and having an exit strategy;
  - Exit strategy components could be presented on handbag pocket cards or on leaflets left at Community Centres; and
  - There is a need for affordable confidence building and self defence courses, which could be provided at Community Centres.
- **Culturally and Linguistically Diverse communities**
  - Continue to educate communities about what is acceptable in Australia. In particular that no one ‘owns’ anyone in Australia and that sexual assault can occur in a marriage;
  - Review Immigration Laws surrounding marriages that end quickly due to assault, and review access to employment opportunities; and
  - Provide information in different languages.
- **Indigenous**
  - Review the level of housing stock in Indigenous communities;
  - Maximise the number of indigenous workers employed in key services;
  - Continue dialogue with elders; and
  - Ensure Indigenous Legal and Medical Services are maintained.
- **Rural/Remote**
  - Consider alternative methods of service provision, e.g. e-counselling, travelling services and Help Lines;
  - Ensure victims/survivors can be guaranteed confidentiality from service providers;
  - Consider alternative ways to help people who do not have access to transport; and
  - Consider fostering strong neighbourhood watch systems in remote communities, if they do not already exist.

- **People with disabilities**
  - Enable people with disabilities to have greater choice in who acts as their personal care worker; and
  - Develop strict guidelines on what is acceptable in care worker contact.
- **Higher socio-economic**
  - Highlight in campaigns that domestic and family violence and sexual assault can happen in all walks of life; and
  - Don't assume that victims from a higher socio-economic area have access to money as they may be victims of financial abuse.
- **Night club segment**
  - Continue to work with establishments to maintain safe practices e.g. keeping tops on drinks.
- **Child witnesses**
  - Consider key messages of confidentiality and that getting someone else involved does not automatically mean that somebody goes to jail; and
  - Ensure that existing Kids Help Lines are adequately knowledgeable about domestic and family violence and sexual assault.

*Awareness that there is support available in times of crisis, whether fleeing the family home, staying put, or being removed.*

In addition to being aware that domestic and family violence and sexual assault is not acceptable, that there are strong consequences, and that it is okay to speak out about it, people also need to know that there is support available. Key recommendations include:

- Ensure there is adequate housing stock for emergency situations;
- Review what is expected of victims arriving at refuges, so they don't feel overwhelmed and simply return home;
- Review accommodation options available for perpetrators of domestic and family violence and sexual assault who have left the family home, so they are not breaching restraining orders to return home;
- Ensure victims staying in the home (e.g. under Safe at Home) have adequate security support such as security systems;
- Ensure Centrelink benefits are maintained; and
- Provide different programs for different levels of violence.

### Consultations at a Glance – Interviews

What	Who	How Many	Where	When
<b>Interviews (Face to Face and Telephone)</b>	Total	59	Sydney, Melbourne, Brisbane, Perth, Canberra, Hobart, Darwin, and Bunbury	12 May - 30 June 2008
	Telephone	34		
	Face to Face	(58%) 25		
	- Victims, survivors,	(42%)		
	- perpetrators	41		
	- Witnesses	(69%) 16		
		(27%) 2		
		(4%)		



# On-line Interviews

*Due to the need to quickly identify people who may not have come into contact with services, programmes and interventions, a substantial part of the research was conducted online via an on-line panel. This approach also had the advantage of offering participants the opportunity to provide feedback anonymously.*

*Feedback was received from 320 people including 175 victims/survivors, 65 perpetrators of domestic and family violence and sexual assault and 210 witnesses (many people were both witnesses and victims/survivors or witnesses and perpetrators of domestic and family violence and sexual assault).*

*The online interviews took approximately 50 minutes to complete and all interviews were conducted between 3 and 10 June 2008.*

*The Council is pleased that the on-line methodology allowed more people to be involved and share their experiences, and in addition to do so in an anonymous manner if they chose. The summary of what victims, survivors, perpetrators and witnesses said is found below.*

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Chair National Council to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children

## Summary of participants in online interviews

<b>Target Audience</b>	<b>Feedback received from No. of interviews</b>
<b>Victims of domestic and family violence and sexual assault</b>	<b>175</b>
Domestic and family violence victims who experienced violence in the last 12 months;	33
Domestic and family violence victims who experienced violence more than 12 months ago;	78
Sexual assault victims who experienced sexual assault in the last 12 months; and	19
Sexual assault victims who experienced sexual assault more than 12 months ago.	45
<b>Perpetrators of domestic and family violence and sexual assault</b>	<b>65</b>
Perpetrators of domestic and family violence in the last 12 months;	20
Perpetrators who last used domestic and family violence more than 12 months ago;	20
Perpetrators of sexual assault in the last 12 months; and	19
Perpetrators who last used sexual assault more than 6 12 months ago.	
<b>Witnesses of victims and perpetrators of domestic and family violence</b>	<b>210</b>
Witnesses of victims of domestic and family violence;	77
Witnesses of domestic and family violence perpetrators;	58

Witnesses of victims of sexual assault; and	44
Witnesses of sexual assault perpetrators.	30
<b>Total</b>	<b>320</b>

Many of the participants who had been sexually assaulted had also experienced domestic and family violence, and there was a strong degree of consistency in the comments made by both victims and survivors of both domestic and family violence and sexual assault. Many of the same comments were also made by perpetrators of domestic and family violence or sexual assault and given the high level of consistency across states and groups, this summary focuses on the findings that were common across the groups.

## Summary of Findings

### *Question 1*

#### *Why does domestic and family violence and sexual assault happen?*

The most frequently mentioned reasons why domestic and family violence and sexual assault happen were:

- Controlling or jealous partner;
- Influence of alcohol;
- Influence of drugs;
- Family history and upbringing;
- Lack of anger management and control;
- Money problems;
- Stress or frustrations;
- Psychological or mental illness (sexual assault);
- Perverse or strong sexual desires (sexual assault); and
- Miscommunication or poor communication within the relationship (perpetrators).

### *Questions 2 & 3*

#### *What is being done to reduce it? What is being done that works?*

Participants nominated a range of services or service characteristics that they felt were effective or helpful including:

- **Counselling** – particularly services which listen and provide someone to talk to; were non-judgemental; dig deeper into the problem; and help you move on;
- **Police** – when they were able to protect the victim by removing the immediate danger;
- **Help Lines**; and
- **Emergency accommodation** – refuges and shelters that offer protection.

With regard to services or service characteristics that participants felt were **least helpful**, the most frequent responses included:

- **Police** – when they lack the time and resources; are reluctant to press charges or take action until it is too late; and are unable to protect the victim on an ongoing basis; and
- **Service staff** – who lack experience and/or expertise in the area; make judgements about the victim or are unwilling to believe them; or are unwelcoming and unsupportive.

## Question 4

*What else would prevent and stop re-occurrence? Where do we go from here?*

When considering what else could be done to **help people in domestic and family violence and sexual assault situations**, the most common responses were:

- **Before an incident** – Education re how to recognise signs and what is acceptable behaviour; more counselling, encouragement to speak out earlier; and involving friends and family as a support network; and self defence classes and how to protect yourself;
- **During an incident** – Intervention to protect them including the police; a safe place to go; removing them from the situation; counselling available 24-7; support from family and friends; and use protective behaviours/self defence; and
- **After an incident** – Counselling and more counselling available 24-7; support services and awareness of them; a safe place to go; training and more help to rebuild victims' lives; financial assistance to start over; affirmation that it is not the victim's fault; discussing the situation in a rational and unbiased manner; talk to both sides; obtain medical assistance; harsher penalties; and introduce a monitoring and follow up system.

In relation to what else could be done **to prevent or reduce** domestic and family violence and sexual assault the key things identified by both victims/survivors and perpetrators of violence were:

- **education awareness** (e.g. signs to look for and encouragement to report; as well as from an early age and in schools);
- **better support systems being made available;**
- **removing the victim** from the situation and helping them re-establish themselves;
- **harsher penalties for offences;**
- **rehabilitation/re-education for offenders;** including long-term follow-up and help;
- **early intervention programs;** and
- **control of alcohol and drugs.**

# Recommendations

## *Systemic changes*

A set of national standards on the level of harm (in terms of domestic and family violence and sexual assault) that would trigger a formal police investigation and access to support and rehabilitation services for both the victim and perpetrator of violence should be developed.

A case management approach should be adopted for both victims and perpetrators of violence to ensure both parties have access to a full suite of services designed and tailored to meet their specific needs.

## *Resourcing*

More resources are required for victims. In particular:

- Counselling;
- Police staff who specialise in domestic and family violence and sexual assault and more female police officers;
- Shelters and emergency accommodation; and
- Early intervention programs and education programs starting in school aimed at building self esteem and respect for others.

More resources are required for perpetrators of violence, including:

- Counselling;
- Alcohol and drug rehabilitation programs;
- 24 hour confidential Help Lines offering confidential advice and referral service;
- Behaviour change programs; and
- Early intervention programs and education programs starting in school aimed at building self esteem and respect for others.

### ***Social marketing***

A national social marketing campaign could influence behaviours, encourage witnesses to support victims and perpetrators of violence and make it easier for people to access information and support to help them.

### **Consultations at a Glance – Online Interviews**

<b>What</b>	<b>Who</b>	<b>How Many</b>	<b>Where</b>	<b>When</b>
<b>On-line interviews</b>	Total	320	Australia wide	3 – 10 June 2008
	- Victims and Survivors	175 (55%)		
	- Perpetrators	65 (20%)		
	- Witnesses	210 (66%)		

# Rural & Remote Consultations

*During October and November 2008 National Council members travelled to several rural and remote locations to gain insight into the particular issues faced by victims of domestic and family violence and sexual assault, the issues faced by service providers and the issues impacting community wellbeing. We met with many local services, agencies and supports in the following localities:*

- Fitzroy Crossing and Broome (4-11 October 2008)
- Mt Isa, Bamaga and Torres Strait Islands (16-22 October 2008)
- Alice Springs and Darwin (2-6 November 2008)

*Rural and remote victims face many challenges including long distances, scarcity of services and safe housing, isolation of communities, and limited public transport, to name just a few. The unique perspectives of rural and remote Australia will be brought to bear in developing a truly National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children.*

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- A report is being prepared on the consultations and will be available on the Office for Women website shortly.

## Consultations at a Glance – Rural and remote consultations

<b>What</b>	<b>Who</b>	<b>How</b>	<b>Where</b>	<b>When</b>
<b>Rural and remote consultations</b>	Local services, agencies and supports	<b>Many</b> 6 locations	Fitzroy Crossing, Broome, Mt Isa, Torres Strait, Alice Springs, Darwin	October and November 2008

# Expert Roundtables

*The Council conducted three specific expert Roundtables during October and November 2008:*

- *Working with Perpetrators (Adelaide, 28 October 2008)*
- *Indigenous Healing (Sydney, 12 November 2008)*
- *Judicial & Restorative Justice (Sydney 13 November 2008).*

*Over 60 participants came from across the country and engaged actively in the discussions, providing expert opinions and advice around the issues. Their attendance was much appreciated and their input important in helping to shape the National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children.*

*On 2 October and 17 November 2008 I also hosted meetings with State & Territory women's officials, women's Ministerial advisers, State and Territory safety councils, and members of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Gathering's Working Group, seeking their input into the National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children.*

*These meetings had 32 and 46 participants respectively who shared their perspectives of work within their jurisdiction and identified areas in which the Australian Government could take a lead national role around domestic and family violence and sexual assault. Their input was thoughtful and comprehensive and I thank them for their participation.*

*Many shared issues were raised across the different roundtables, but each one also provided unique insights into the problem of violence against women and their children, as well as some possible solutions.*

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Chair National Council to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children

## **Women's Officials and Advisers, Brisbane, 2 October 2008**

In summary, participants were of the view that the following are important considerations:

- The Australian Government has an important role to play in providing leadership to support and assist the work of the States and Territories in reducing violence against women and their children. This includes taking a leadership role in helping create consistency and alignment in legislation, services, and the communication of critical messages where appropriate.
- Responding to violence needs to be placed 'front' and 'centre' with both government and the community. This means a more focused, defined and better understood profile within policy, funding streams, program delivery and communication.
- There is an urgent need to develop a shared understanding and definitions of what constitutes violence against women and their children. This needs to include agreement around principles, core components, actions and priorities that underpin all strategies aimed at reducing violence.
- The sector must develop an evidence base to underpin decision making, service responses, legislation and investment decisions.
- The evidence base must be built from robust data collection on activity and outcomes, research and evaluation and information sharing across government and the sector. We need to develop an understanding of what works in what situations.

- There is a need to integrate and align the service system. Responding to violence is currently spread across multiple programs and funding streams.
- There is a need to consider the way messages are delivered to the community regarding violence. Much of the message is negative - consideration should be given to positive images of men behaving and responding appropriately.
- Primary prevention programs educating young people about violence against women are fundamental to changing the culture long-term.
- Development of a sector-wide workforce development plan that values and supports the recruitment, retention and development of the sector is important for the long term.
- Embed the National Council (or similar body) as an ongoing governance structure to support and monitor the implementation of the National Plan of Action and long term initiatives.

## **Working with Perpetrators, Adelaide, 28 October 2008**

In summary, the main issues raised by participants were:

- Wherever possible we need to develop strategies that unite rather than divide - that bring men along and build women's leadership skills and capabilities.
- To achieve better outcomes for victims, perpetrators and the community, we need better integration and coordination of the criminal justice, restorative justice and social justice systems.
- To improve our understanding and monitoring of violence against women and their children, we need better data and information and our research needs to be Australian-based.
- To encourage successful outcomes, we need to connect the three dimensions: women and children's safety; behaviour change of men; and reconnection of victims and offenders with their communities. Programs should not just focus on "fixing the offender".
- We need to build our capacity to do longitudinal studies and tracking, and find ways to overcome privacy and confidentiality barriers.
- We shouldn't jump too quickly to accreditation and standards for perpetrator and offender programs as our knowledge is not yet advanced enough to confidently determine best practice.
- Central coordinating mechanisms that can guide practice improvements and the evolution of the knowledge base around what works and best practice would benefit the system greatly.
- Services and workers need the supports of recognised theoretical frameworks, support for collaboration, accredited training, and knowledge around how to evaluate their programs.
- Servicing remote areas is challenging and expensive; but very necessary.

## **Indigenous Healing, Sydney, 12 November 2008**

- A report is being prepared on the consultations and will be available on the website shortly..

## **Judicial and Restorative Justice, Sydney, 13 November 2008**

In summary, some of the issues discussed included:

- Different approaches to dealing with family violence in the legal system exist, for example:
  - (a) The mediation/treatment approach (which sees the violence arising out of unresolved family conflict contributed by both parties and emphasising the use of counselling etc);
  - (b) The protective or "special" approach which takes the view that the special nature of the relationship between the perpetrator and the victim makes normal criminal sanctions

inappropriate and hence an emphasis on protection such as the use of apprehended violence orders; and

(c) The law enforcement/attitudinal approach which emphasises family violence as criminal behaviour.

- No matter how well the policy or legislation is articulated or drafted; it will only work well if the legislation is interpreted and applied correctly.
- There is capacity for court procedures and the perceptions of participants to be improved.
- From the judicial perspective, the issue of impartiality is very important, but is often difficult to convey in an emotionally charged environment where any action on the part of judicial officers could conceivably be misunderstood.
- The importance of appreciating cultural differences was emphasised.
- Judicial understanding of domestic and family violence and sexual assault is also encouraged in particular the need for a sound understanding of the dynamics of family violence.
- The concepts of Restorative Justice, Therapeutic Jurisprudence and Indigenous Justice and their application to domestic and family violence and sexual assault should be further explored.

## **Women's Officials and Advisers, Canberra, 17 November 2008**

- A report is being prepared on the consultations and will be available on the Office for Women website shortly.

### **Consultations at a Glance – Expert Roundtables**

<b>What</b>	<b>Who</b>	<b>How Many</b>	<b>Where</b>	<b>When</b>
<b>Expert Roundtables</b>	Working with Perpetrators	3	Adelaide	October and November 2008
	Indigenous Healing	60 attendees in total	and Sydney	
	Judicial and Restorative Justice		Brisbane & Canberra	
	State & Territory women's officials, women's Ministerial advisers, State and Territory safety councils, and members of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Gathering's Working Group	2 meetings		October and November 2008
		78 attendees in total		

# **Presentations and Briefings**

*Not only did the Council undertake extensive consultations to gain input into the National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children, Council members also made many presentations and delivered a number of briefings to Ministerial Councils, government representatives, community organisations, corporate groups, academics, advocacy groups, women's groups, community leaders and the Federal Opposition.*

*Listed below is a sample of the groups Council presented to during the development of the Plan. We thank them for their time and for their commitment to the process.*

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Chair National Council to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children

**National Rural Women's Summit**

**Amnesty International**

**Federal Opposition members**

**Indigenous Women's Congress**

**Legal Family Violence Conference**

**Muslim Community members**

**National Women's Secretariats**

**NSW AIDS Council**

**NSW Office for Women's Policy**

**Penrith Women's Health Centre**

**South Australian Aboriginal Women's Gathering**

**South Australian Domestic Violence Coalition**

**South Australian Women's Health Coordinators Group**

**South Australian Victims of Crime Ministerial Advisory Committee**

**South Australian Women's Services Network**

**Standing Committee of Attorneys General**

**Joint AGM of Sera's Women's Shelter, the Women's Centre (North Queensland**

**Combined Women's Services), and the North Queensland Domestic Violence Resource Service.**

**Victorian Centres Against Sexual Assault Forum**

**WA Drug and Alcohol Office**

**National Association of Services Against Sexual Assault and Violence (NASAV) AGM**

**Representatives for the African Women's Organisation**

**White Ribbon Foundation**

**Women's Services Network (WESNET) AGM**