

# ACT Prevention of Violence Against Women and Children Strategy

# 2011–2017

## ACT Prevention of Violence Against Women and Children Strategy

Our responsibility: Ending violence against women and children

### Violence affects many lives

Violence against women is “any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts as coercion, or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or private life”.<sup>2</sup>

As many as one in three Australian women have experienced physical violence and almost one in five Australian women have experienced sexual violence from the age of 15.<sup>3</sup> Violence against women is a crime and a human rights violation that occurs, often repeatedly, in the lives of many women. Statistics indicate that rates of reporting for incidents of sexual assault and domestic violence are extremely low. In 2006 only 34% of domestic violence incidents and 19% of sexual assaults were reported to police.<sup>4</sup> Women subjected to family violence or sexual assault are far more likely to tell a friend or family member than report to police. In the year 2009–10, ACT Policing report dealing with 338 offences of sexual violence, and 3902 incidents related to family violence. In reported incidents of domestic violence in the ACT, 82% of victims are adult females.<sup>5</sup> This Strategy aims to make it easier for those subjected to violence to apply for civil protection orders and engage with the criminal justice system, which will not only provide justice for victims and hold users of violence accountable, but better assist in determining levels of violence.

Violence against any person is wrong and should not be tolerated in our society. While women can sometimes be perpetrators of domestic and family violence and sexual assault, and men can sometimes be victims, evidence shows that women are more likely than men to experience physical violence at the hands of an intimate partner.<sup>6</sup> Specifically, the type of violence referred to in this strategy is coercive, controlling violence involving patterns of power imbalance and control over another.

### Commitment to gender equity is part of the solution

The World Health Organisation suggests that promoting gender equity is a critical part of violence prevention. Domestic and family violence and sexual assault are gendered crimes. Gender stereotyping, sex discrimination and unequal power relations between men and women are significant factors contributing to the prevalence of violence against women and children. Traditional gender-roles and attitudes, whether held by women or men, are associated with greater acceptance of violence against women, while attitudes that support gender equality are associated with less acceptance of violence.<sup>7</sup> Gender equality means access to economic resources, participation and leadership in decision making, and respect for human rights of women, including the right to live free of violence. Achieving gender equity and addressing violence against women are issues which are fundamentally connected. Evidence shows that school, community and media interventions can promote and contribute to gender equality.

## Engaging men in preventing violence against women and children

Violence against women is not only a women's issue, it is also a men's issue. Stereotypes of masculinity also shape men's attitudes towards violence against women. Effective responses require a focus on men's use of violence and the prevention of it. While not all men are violent, all men can play a role in addressing violence against women and children by speaking out against other men's sexism or use of violence and striving for a culture and community that is safe, respectful and just for all.

## Children are victims too

There is a strong correlation between domestic and family violence and child abuse. Studies indicate that children from families in which domestic violence is occurring are more likely to be abused, either emotionally, physically or sexually.<sup>8</sup> Exposure to domestic violence is itself a form of abuse. One in four 12–20 year old Australians are aware of domestic violence against their mothers or step-mothers by their fathers or step-fathers. Domestic violence has a clear and negative impact on children's and young people's behavioural, cognitive and emotional functioning and social development.<sup>9</sup> Child witnesses to domestic violence have higher rates of anxiety, conduct disorder, property crime and alcohol abuse/dependence in adolescence.<sup>10</sup>

In the ACT, a survey of young people showed 29% report experiencing an act of physical domestic violence against their mother or step-mother.<sup>11</sup> Over half of the young people surveyed had witnessed their father/step-father yell loudly at their mother/step-mother and 29% had witnessed him put down or humiliate her.

## Violence against women costs \$13.6 billion per year

Domestic violence and sexual assault perpetrated against women costs the Australian nation \$13.6 billion each year. The costs associated with domestic violence and sexual assault cover every area of our society and economy. They include: pain, suffering and premature mortality, health costs, loss of productivity due to absences from work and employer administrative costs, costs involved with replacing damaged property and moving house, child protection and childcare costs, law enforcement and court system costs, counselling and violence prevention costs, and the inefficiencies associated with the payment of government benefits.<sup>12</sup> Research suggests that intimate partner violence is "responsible for more ill-health and premature death in Victorian women under 45 than any of the other well known risk factors, including high blood pressure, obesity and smoking".<sup>13</sup> This finding can be reasonably applied to women across Australia, including in the ACT.

Domestic and family violence will not be tolerated in the ACT. The ACT Government holds the person using violence accountable and responsible for their violent and abusive behaviour, and is committed to supporting those who have been affected by violence and abuse.

ACT Government Statement on Family Violence

## Building a strong foundation

The Strategy has been developed in the context of the ACT Government's commitment to the National Plan. The development of the National Plan was informed by the National Council to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children who consulted with over 2000 Australians in every State and Territory, conducted expert roundtable discussions, interviewed women subjected to violence and men who used violence, and reviewed more than 350 written submissions. Given the significant consultation which was undertaken at the national level in the development of the National Plan, consultation in the development of the ACT Strategy was targeted, involving key stakeholders from across government and the community sector. Three key groups were consulted: a roundtable involving representatives from community organisations and government agencies including representatives from the ACT Ministerial Council on Women and the Domestic Violence Prevention Council; a community reference group made up of experts in the field which provided strategic and more focused advice following the roundtable; and an operational group of senior ACT Government Officials to ensure multiple cross portfolio engagement.

Consultation at the local level told us:

- a separate focus area for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander issues should be included;
- responses should be flexible, meaning a continuum of service provision which is flexible and holistic across a whole suite of services; and
- we must recognise that there is a perpetrator continuum—men who are at risk but not yet using violence, men who use violence who are not formally engaged with the criminal justice system and men who use violence who are engaged with the criminal justice system.
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This new ACT Strategy outlines four primary objectives which align with the six outcome areas of the National Plan and are informed by consultation at the local level.

National Plan outcome area	Communities are safe and free from violence	Relationships are respectful	Indigenous communities are strengthened	Services meet the needs of women and their children	Justice responses are effective	Perpetrators stop their violence and are held to account
ACT Primary Objectives	1. Women and children are safe because an anti-violence culture exists in the ACT		2. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and children are supported and safe in their communities	3. Women and children's needs are met through joined up services and systems	4. Men who use violence are held accountable and supported to change their behaviour	

## Response continuum

In order to address violence against women and children, provision of responses across a continuum that begins with prevention and continues through to post crisis situations, whilst addressing repeat use of violence is critical.

## Vulnerable communities

Although domestic and family violence is an issue that is known to cut across socio-economic barriers, some groups of women are known to be at increased risk of experiencing violence. There are two key groups of women and children subjected to violence that warrant a specific focus in the first three years of this Strategy. These are Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and children, and women with disability.

Although the focus of the first three year action plan is Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and children, and women with disability, recognition also needs to be given to other vulnerable groups in the community. For example, through consultation and research undertaken in the development of the National Plan it is evident that migrant and refugee women have specific needs such as increased protection under migration legislation.

## Setting the scene in the ACT

In the ACT, there have been significant and sustained activities to improve system responses to family violence and sexual assault. This has included the Family Violence Intervention Program (FVIP) established in 1998 and more recently the Sexual Assault Reform Program (SARP) established in 2007. In addition, crisis support and accommodation for people who have become homeless as a result of family and domestic violence is a significant focus of the ACT's homelessness sector.

FVIP and SARP have a focus on the interaction of victims of violence with justice systems and services, and provide responses after violence has occurred. These approaches contribute to the ease and confidence with which those subjected to violence

can engage with the criminal justice system. However, the ACT Strategy also encompasses a broader response to violence against women and children, including a focus on prevention and early intervention and provision of support to those who do not engage with the criminal justice system.

ACT Budget 2011–12 initiatives totalling \$1.03 million will provide for extra assistance for men and young men who use violence. The Family Violence Prevention Program will work intensively with men who use violence to effect long-term behavioural change and reduce re-offending. Funding for the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Guidance Partner and remuneration of Galambany Circle Sentencing Court Panel members will assist young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders who are referred to restorative justice or the Circle Court.

In 2010–11, the ACT Government provided new funding of \$2.8 million over four years to key services for women and children experiencing violence. The funding included establishing a court advocacy service provided by the Domestic Violence Crisis Service, increasing the capacity of Canberra Rape Crisis Centre's crisis support and providing recurrent funding to the Women's Legal Centre Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Women's Access to Justice Program.

This Strategy focuses on consolidating current work to lay the foundations from which future work can occur. This will involve significant cooperation between government and the community sector to improve the evidence base and measure effectiveness of responses. This includes assisting the Commonwealth to develop a national data collection and reporting framework by 2022.

Key strategies are identified under each of the primary objectives of this Strategy. Actions under each of the key strategies have been developed to follow a maturity model with short term and medium/long term actions. Short term actions will be undertaken in the first three years and are focused on building a solid base for future actions. An evaluation will be undertaken at the conclusion of the first three years and actions under the strategy may be revised or updated at this time. Future action plans will aim to strengthen existing strategies and actions, develop new and best practice approaches, contribute to the national evidence base and create momentum for achieving cultural change. This approach ensures a long-term systemic commitment to preventing violence against women and children.

## Scope

The Strategy aims to prevent violence against women both inside and outside their homes and to reduce the number of children exposed to violence against their mothers and other female carers. The prevention of all forms of child abuse and neglect is not within the scope of this Strategy. The underlying causes of child abuse and neglect are specific and are addressed in other government strategies. However, the needs of adult survivors of childhood sexual abuse are within the scope of this strategy.

# 1

Women and children are safe because an anti violence culture exists in the ACT

- 1.1 Increase safety and security for women and children in public spaces
- 1.2 Promote and support public discussions about violence against women and children
- 1.3 Build respectful relationships initiatives, identify gaps and new target groups for education

# 2

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and children are supported and safe in their communities

- 2.1 Develop an effective response by consulting with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community members
- 2.2 Build understanding and knowledge of cultural competence in our community
- 2.3 Develop collaborative service practices for supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and children

## 3

Women and children's needs are met through joined up services and systems

- 3.1 Identify first point of contact agencies in order to strengthen responses
- 3.2 Build understanding and knowledge of competence in understanding diversity
- 3.3 Achieve an integrated continuum of care comprising prevention, early intervention, secondary and targeted services

## 4

Men who use violence are held accountable and supported to change their behaviour

- 4.1 Identify gaps in current services and examine best practice approaches for support and education of men who use or are at risk of using violence
- 4.2 Expand options for men who use violence beyond existing justice
- 4.3 Strengthen legal frameworks and instruments

# Measuring success and reporting on progress

The key indicators of success outlined in this Strategy have been chosen to align with those in the National Plan. All jurisdictions have committed to collaboratively developing a national data collection and reporting framework. The Commonwealth has also committed to developing a National Centre for Excellence which will bring together existing research and undertake new research. Additionally, the Commonwealth has committed to funding a *People Safety Survey* and a *Community Attitudes Survey* during the life of the National Plan. However, measuring achievement under the long term indicators from the National Plan will take time and in some instances they have been supplemented with ACT level indicators.

Progress will be reported annually in line with the National Plan reporting requirements which will require a report against activities in the ACT that are aligned with the National Plan. Implementation of the Strategy will be guided by a Governance Group comprising senior executives from across government and representatives from the community sector. This group will drive reporting processes at both the Territory and national levels and meet at least twice a year in order to review progress to date and identify areas for further consideration.

## ACT primary objective 1

# Women and children are safe because an anti-violence culture exists in the ACT

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his Primary Objective draws together actions which aim to achieve a significant shift in the way society views violence against women. The attitudinal and behavioural changes necessary to achieve this require a long term, systemic approach. The focus of this Primary Objective is primary prevention. Primary prevention activities take place *before* violence has occurred to prevent incidences of violence from happening. Building respect in everyday dealings and relationships is necessary for an anti-violence culture to exist. There are strong links between gender equity and violence against women. Traditional gender-roles and attitudes, whether held by women or men, are associated with greater acceptance of violence against women, while attitudes of gender equality are associated with less acceptance of violence.<sup>14</sup> Opportunities for women and girls to engage in decision making processes and assume leadership roles begin to challenge gender stereotypes that contribute to greater tolerance of violence.

Violence against women can deny women and children the most fundamental of human rights: liberty, bodily integrity, freedom of movement, dignity and in some cases life. Fear of violence can constrain women's choices, options and behaviours since personal safety features strongly in decision making. Women are not able to occupy or use public space with the same freedom and ease as men and intimate relationships can be marred by the threat and reality of abuse. As a consequence, women monitor their own behaviour which can limit their participation and involvement in community and public life.<sup>15</sup> Women's Safety Audits have been piloted in public events in the ACT and action under this objective will consider the expansion of these audits with the aim to maintain high levels of women's perception and experience of safety in public in the ACT.

Safety audits are also suggested in crime prevention through environmental design code and associated resource manual development by Territory and Municipal Services Directorate.

Media and social media play an important part in shaping young people's attitudes. Children who see violence, whether through traditional media or through social media and cyber bullying, are more likely to view violence as an effective way of settling conflicts. The way that the media reports incidents of violence also has an influence on the way we think about these issues. Work to develop media codes of practice and educate women and young people about the safe use of social media are long term actions under this objective.

The education system also plays an important role in shaping young people's attitudes and building their ability to form respectful relationships. The ACT Education and Training Directorate has a strategic plan which includes values of fairness and respect and aims to support the development of students' capabilities for life. This includes facilitating effective student learning through safe and inclusive environments. Learning to deal with others with respect is an integral part of this.

Through the Commonwealth, there are a number of *Respectful Relationships* initiatives, many of them through the education system, but also in other locations such as sporting clubs. Some of these are taking place in the ACT. For example, the Sexual Assault Prevention Program for Secondary Schools is regarded as best practice and early indicators are showing that both teachers' and students' understanding of violence against women is increasing and attitudes are changing. This work also provides an opportunity to inform further work in this area.

Given the prevalence of violence against women in the community (one in three with one in five women since the age of 15),<sup>16</sup> it is inevitable that in any group there are likely to be women and children who have been subjected to violence. Research shows that the people most likely to be first told about being subjected to violence are friends, families, neighbours and work colleagues. An appropriate response at this point in time is critical to the decisions a woman will make about her future. This is why any attempt to increase and promote awareness of the issues and equip family and friends to respond effectively should be far reaching. Actions under this objective focus in the first instance on building the capacity of the ACT Public Service workforce in understanding and responding to violence against women, in an effort to lead by example.

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## Key actions

1.1 Increase safety and security for women and children in public spaces

Short term

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- 1.1.1 Apply the evaluation report on the Women's Safety Audits pilot to expand the use of audits to ACT Government funded public events and to environmental design in urban planning
- 1.2 Promote and support public discussions about violence against women and children
- Short term
- 1.2.1 Develop ACT Government Workplace capacity to respond to the needs of employees subjected to or living with violence
- 1.2.2 Support public awareness raising events and campaigns such as 'the Line', the National Day of Remembrance, YWCA Week without Violence, White Ribbon campaign, Reclaim the Night and 16 days of Activism
- 1.2.3 Promote gender equity by providing opportunities for women and girls to fully participate in and benefit from decision making and leadership opportunities
- Medium/long term
- 1.2.4 Work with the Commonwealth Government to develop media codes of practice for reporting sexual assault and domestic violence
- 1.2.5 Support emerging work on issues of Cyber Safety and the role of social media
- 1.3 Build on respectful relationships initiatives, identify gaps and expand provision to include new target groups
- Short term
- 1.3.1 Promote positive parenting skills, with specific programs for men
- 1.3.2 Encourage services to use male role models when working with men on sustaining respectful relationships
- 1.3.3 Educate and engage young people about acceptable and respectful behaviour in family and other relationships settings and how to report inappropriate behaviour
- Medium/long term
- 1.3.4 Examine synergies with the National Education Curriculum and explore opportunities for delivery partnerships
- 1.3.5 Use Respectful Relationships evaluation feedback to inform future expansion of education programs
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## Key indicators of success

### Success against this primary objective will be measured by:

- An increase in the community's intolerance of violence against women. Informed by the National Community Attitudes Survey to be undertaken every four years across the life of the National Plan.
- Improved knowledge of, and the skills and behaviour for, respectful relationships by young people. Informed by evaluation of respectful relationships education projects undertaken in the ACT.
- Keeping above the existing national average, women's perception of safety in the community (both inside and outside the home). Informed by ACT Policing data.

# ACT primary objective 2

## Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander

# women and children are supported and safe in their communities

Based on self-report survey data, Indigenous women experience higher levels of physical violence than non-Indigenous women.<sup>17</sup> Nationally, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander victims are over-represented in offences reported to police, particularly for assault, sexual assault and domestic violence.

According to police data, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are between six to fourteen times more likely to experience domestic violence related assault, and three times more likely to experience sexual assault.<sup>18</sup> Although this data indicates higher prevalence rates in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, it is acknowledged that this is not part of traditional culture, but rather, a result of the impacts of colonisation, forced removal of children, dispossession of lands and disruption of family and kinship ties.

The ACT Government acknowledges that solutions for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities need to have a whole of community approach, encompassing the individual, the family and the community with government support. The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community prefers a healing rather than a punitive approach when responding to those who use violence. The ACT Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Justice Agreement (2010) provides a holistic framework to improve the safety of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in the ACT and improve access to support services. It is vital that a holistic approach including social, emotional, spiritual, physical and cultural well-being is considered when developing plans, services and projects to address the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and children subjected to violence.

The strengths of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture should be celebrated as a way of overcoming this problem. Work under this strategy will focus on a healing approach. Changing the experience of sexual assault and violence in communities is a long term, inter-generational proposition. Victims of sexual assault and violence need access to responsive, culturally aware and supportive organisations for healing community members.<sup>19</sup> The needs of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community must be considered across each of the Primary Objectives in this Strategy with a focus on cultural competency of mainstream services. Actions under this objective reflect the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community's preference for a community driven, holistic approach to addressing violence against women. Development of any new programs will be guided by input from the ACT Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community. This will include work to attract, retain, support and connect Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff across government and community agencies.

The proposed Ngunnawal Bush Healing Farm was initiated by Elders of the ACT Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community. While the concept is focussed primarily on recovery from drug and alcohol issues, this environment provides an optimum setting for addressing issues of violence in a holistic way.

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## Key actions

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2.1 Develop effective responses through consultation with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community members

Short term

2.1.1 Develop a culture of learning from existing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander groups and networks

2.1.2 Work with the proposed Ngunnawal Bush Healing Farm to ensure that aspects of positive parenting, anger management and respectful relationships are integral to program development and delivery

2.2 Build on existing understanding and knowledge of cultural competence in our community

Short term

2.2.1 Encourage the development and use of Reconciliation Action Plans that support the creation and development of employment pathways for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander workers across government and community agencies

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Medium/long term

2.2.2 Evaluate the effectiveness of cultural competency tools currently in use across government and community agencies

2.3 Develop collaborative service approaches for supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and children

Short term

2.3.1 Develop a professional network for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander workers in both government and community organisations

Medium/long term

2.3.2 Promote and measure the development of links between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations and non Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations and government agencies working with those subjected to or using violence

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## Key indicators of success

**Success against this primary objective will be measured by:**

- A reduction in the proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women who consider that family violence, assault and sexual assault are problems for their communities and neighbourhoods. Informed by the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Survey.
- An increase in the proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women who are able to have their say within their communities on important issues, including violence. Informed by the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Survey and ACT level qualitative data from ACT Government Directorate client surveys.

# ACT primary objective 3

Women and children's needs  
are met through joined up  
services and systems

Joined up services and systems will strengthen the support available to women subjected to violence. Collaboration across the whole service delivery system including whole-of-government and whole-of-community service sector will ensure better knowledge transfer across sectors. Better communication between agencies will ensure the needs of individual women and children are met. A shared commitment, strong partnerships and collaborative approaches across sectors underpin this work. The ACT Government is committed to collaborative policy development and planning, working with non-government organisations as advocates and service providers, continuing to build the evidence base and accountability to the community on progress. This Primary Objective aims to promote the development and use of formal mechanisms to embed collaborative and coordinated efforts.

Work in this area has a strong foundation in the ACT with the Family Violence Intervention Program (FVIP) and the Sexual Assault Reform Program (SARP) providing formal mechanisms of collaboration. SARP and FVIP provide an integrated approach to support victims and to ensure that perpetrators are held to account. They have provided better connections between police and support agencies, a domestic violence ‘pro-arrest’ policy, and increased support for victims in the justice system. The outcome of this focus has been increased reporting of violence against women and children. Both programs have an on going plan of action, and there are opportunities to build incrementally on their work to date. Work under this objective will include evaluating and improving these programs to inform evidence based best practice approaches.

Services for women and children experiencing violence are primarily focused on ‘post violence’ responses, such as justice intervention and crisis accommodation. Anecdotal evidence shows that up to three-quarters of women who report violence to ACT Policing do not leave the relationship (at least in the short term) after reporting the crime. This means that specialist service flexibility is needed to meet the broad needs of women experiencing violence, including for women and children who do not leave a violent relationship.

Women and children experiencing violence can also be dealing with many issues including alcohol and other drug dependency, mental health issues, low self esteem, financial difficulties and diminished parenting ability. It is important that the continuum of care and holistic support including health, housing, education, employment and legal assistance are considered. Often women will disclose their experience of violence when accessing support for another issue from a service provider which does not specialise in violence against women. Identifying and strengthening this first point of contact (or first point of disclosure) is a key focus and will include a broad range of services.

Escaping domestic or sexual violence is cited as the main reason for seeking assistance from homelessness services in the ACT by 42% of women with children and 47.7% of single women.<sup>20</sup> Across Australia, escaping domestic or sexual violence remains the most common reason given by women accessing support from homelessness services. Housing ACT and the Domestic Violence Crisis Service have worked collaboratively to develop policies and approaches which aim to assist women to remain safely in their homes and therefore reduce rates of homelessness as a result of domestic violence.

We know that some groups of women are more at risk of experiencing violence and some groups of women have specific needs when accessing services. The diverse needs of women and children from vulnerable communities including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women, women with disability, migrant and refugee women, young women, older women and lesbians need to be considered. Similarly, the needs of children also require a specific focus and links with a range of children’s services in the ACT will be an important factor in bringing about positive change.

Two specific groups have been highlighted as needing priority attention in the first three years. However, this Primary Objective includes actions which aim to improve the ability of services and systems to meet the needs of different groups of women more broadly.

“Women with disabilities are far more likely to experience violence than women without disabilities. The available data, though scarce, also shows that there is a higher rate of violence against women with disabilities than against men with disabilities. Violence against women and girls with disabilities is not just a subset of gender-based violence: it is an intersectional category dealing with gender-based and disability-based violence. The confluence of these two factors results in an extremely high risk of violence against this group”.<sup>21</sup>

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## Key actions

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3.1 Identify first point of contact agencies in order to strengthen responses

Short term

3.1.1 Identify ACT Government services and community agencies which are a first point of contact for women and children subjected to violence

3.1.2 Pilot a joint service delivery model between a first point of contact agency and violence against women specialists

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- 3.1.3 Ensure that all front line workers know that 1800RESPECT is a referral pathway for women subjected to violence and also provides debriefing support to front line workers outside the domestic and family violence and sexual violence fields

Medium/long term

- 3.1.4 Develop a strategy for training front line workers in supporting women and children who have been subjected to violence

- 3.1.5 Provide regular opportunities for cross sector training and information sharing for police, lawyers, judicial officers, specialist support agencies and front line workers

- 3.2 Build understanding and knowledge of diversity competence

Short term

- 3.2.1 Build on the work of the Women with Disabilities Accessing Crisis Services report undertaken by the Women's Centre for Health Matters, Domestic Violence Crisis Service and Women with Disabilities ACT to increase accessibility and responsiveness for women with disability

- 3.2.2 Identify gaps in service provision for specific vulnerable communities such as children, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander, women, women with disability, women from Culturally, Linguistically and Religiously Diverse backgrounds, young women, older women and lesbian, gay, bi-sexual, transgender and intersex (LGBTI) community members

- 3.2.3 Ensure services for men who are subjected to domestic/family/sexual violence are available and appropriate

Medium/long term

- 3.2.4 Explore the potential for cross sectoral responses to enhance service provision to address the needs of vulnerable communities

- 3.3 Achieve a continuum of care approach for women and children which ranges from primary prevention through to tertiary intervention models of service

Short term

- 3.3.1 Identify and prioritise strategies to address gaps in the continuum of care, including prevention responses, crisis responses, on-going follow up and support responses, operational responses including the criminal justice system and child protection services, housing responses and referral pathways
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## Key indicators of success

**Success against this primary objective will be measured by:**

- An increase in the access to, and responsiveness of, services for victims of domestic and family violence and sexual assault. Informed by the ACT Service data and Personal Safety Survey to be conducted next in 2012.
- An increase in the rate of women reporting domestic violence and sexual assault. Informed by the Personal Safety Survey, Crime and Safety Survey and ACT Policing data.
- A decrease in the rate of attrition through the criminal justice system of victims involved in the Sexual Assault Reform Program. Informed by evaluation to be undertaken by the Australian Institute of Criminology.

# ACT primary objective 4

Men who use violence are  
held accountable and supported

# to change their behaviour

Preventing and reducing violence against women requires strong laws that are effectively administered and hold perpetrators to account, whilst always prioritising the safety of the women and children involved.

This Primary Objective marks a new focus on the development of consistent and effective responses to men who use violence. There is a strong link to two outcome areas in the National Plan: *Justice responses are effective*, and *Perpetrators stop their violence and are held to account*. Under the National Plan a perpetrator research program will be undertaken during the first three-year action plan, with an aim to develop national standards for provision of perpetrator programs.

The ACT currently provides *Family Violence Self-Change* programs through Corrective Services in the Justice and Community Safety Directorate, with a small percentage of convicted family violence offenders participating in these programs, if the offender is serving a community-based sentence. New funding in the ACT 2011–12 Budget provides for the development of an intervention program for adult males who are not necessarily engaged with the criminal justice system who perpetrate domestic violence, to effect long-term behavioural change and reduce re-offending.

ACT programs aiming to deliver behaviour change or prevention of repeat violence must be documented and evaluated for their effectiveness and must include collaboration with partner contact programs for the women and children subjected to violence. This in turn will contribute to a growing evidence base and the further development of best practice approaches.

The ACT 2011–12 Budget also provided additional funding to strengthen how the justice system connects with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander offenders in the ACT criminal justice system and assist their rehabilitation. Funding has been provided for a guidance partner to assist young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander participants through the restorative justice process and to remunerate community panel members associated with the ACT Galambany Circle Sentencing court. Given a high number of family violence matters which appear before the Galambany Circle Sentencing Court, this project indirectly supports reducing the incidents of family violence within the ACT Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community. These investments are in addition to a range of other initiatives that are outlined in the *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Justice Agreement 2010* and work in partnership with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community to change offending behaviours and improve community safety.

At a National Plan level, there is increasing focus on the development and provision of a range of interventions for men using or at risk of using violence, beyond the current focus on group-work based responses. This acknowledges that the points of intervention for men who use violence include addressing issues underlying or exacerbated by violence: alcohol and other drug dependency, mental health, accommodation and support and individual counselling. It also acknowledges that there is a perpetrator continuum—men and young men who are at risk of but not yet using violence, men who use violence who are not formally engaged with the criminal justice system and men who use violence and are engaged with the criminal justice system. This objective also acknowledges the need to address emerging use of violence amongst young people in the context of their families and other intimate relationships.

Actions under this primary objective position responses to men who use violence in both early intervention/ prevention and in the current focus area of ‘post-conflict, post-sentencing’ support. This objective is supported by research that shows the likelihood of recidivism may be reduced by addressing the underlying causes of offending behaviour. Focusing just on punishing perpetrators will not bring about behaviour change. Men who use violence need assistance to end their violence.

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## Key actions

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4.1 Identify gaps in current services and examine best practice approaches for support and education of men who use or are at risk of using violence

Short term

4.1.1 Identify potential services and settings to engage men and boys at risk of using violence

4.1.2 Expand the delivery of behaviour change programs to men and young men in correctional,

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youth justice and community settings

4.1.3 Contribute to the evidence base and development of national standards for perpetrator interventions

4.1.4 Promote positive parenting skills, with specific programs for men

Medium/long term

4.1.5 Develop education programs to work with men at risk of using violence, in collaboration with community agencies and in line with best practice standards

4.1.6 Ensure partner contact programs for women and children subjected to violence are in place and work in collaboration with the providers of perpetrator programs

4.2 Expand options for men who use violence to beyond existing justice sanctions.

Short term

4.2.1 Strengthen the operations of the Galambany Circle Sentencing Court

4.2.2 Develop strategies to improve ACT Policing responses for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander family safety

4.2.3 Ensure men who use violence are assisted to access support if removed from the family home

Medium/long term

4.2.4 Develop clear guidelines for the potential and appropriate use of restorative justice processes for men using violence with a central focus on prioritising the safety of women and children

4.3 Strengthen legal frameworks and instruments

Short term

4.3.1 Support the development of options for a national scheme for domestic and family violence orders

4.3.2 Contribute to the Australian Institute of Criminology's National Homicide Monitoring Program

4.3.3 Undertake an evaluation of the Sexual Assault Reform Program (SARP) to inform future improvements

Medium/long term

4.3.4 Monitor the impact of the Specialist Family Violence Court and explore and identify opportunities to improve coordination between the Specialist Family Violence Court and the Family Court in accordance with the Australian Law Reform Commission's 2010 Inquiry, Family Violence – A National Legal Response

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## Key indicators of success

Success against this primary objective will be measured by:

- A decrease in repeated partner victimisation. Informed by the Personal Safety Survey to be conducted next in 2012 and ACT Policing data.

# Definitions and terminology

**Domestic violence** refers to acts of violence that occur between people who have, or have had, an intimate relationship.

**Family violence** is a broader term that refers to violence between family members, as well as violence between intimate partners. Domestic and family violence includes physical, sexual, emotional and psychological abuse. While there is no single definition, the central element of domestic and family violence is an ongoing pattern of behaviour aimed at controlling a victim through fear, for example by using behaviour which is violent and threatening. In most cases, the violent behaviour is part of a range of tactics to exercise power and control over women and their children, and can be both criminal and non-criminal.

**Sexual assault** or **sexual violence** is any act of forced sexual contact without consent which can involve touching or penetration and can include rape, sexual assault, being forced to watch or engage in pornography, indecent exposure, or being made to have sex with associates of an offender. This includes sexual assault that occurs within domestic relationships.

**Violence against women** is referred to throughout the strategy and should be understood to include domestic violence, family violence, sexual assault and physical and psychological harm to children.

This strategy refers to **women and/or children subjected to violence** rather than using terms such as victim, survivor or witness because it more accurately portrays that women and children are not complicit in acts of violence perpetrated against them.

Similarly, rather than using terms such as perpetrator or offender, this document aims (where possible) to use the term **men who use violence**, because it more accurately portrays who is responsible for the act of violence. Although most men are not violent, the overwhelming majority of violence against women is perpetrated by men within the home. The term 'men who use violence' also includes men who are at risk of using violence.

Terminology in this Strategy reflects the wishes of the ACT Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community members, in using the term **Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander** rather than Indigenous. Where the term Indigenous is used, it is a reflection of a previous publication or initiative being undertaken in the National Plan.

Where the term **services** is used, this includes crisis and support services for those subjected to domestic violence or sexual assault, services working with those who use violence and the full array of services, including government and community services, disability services, alcohol and drug services, health services, mental health services and men's services.

## Linkages

Our Responsibility: Ending Violence Against Women and Children, The ACT Prevention of Violence Against Women and Children Strategy 2011–2017 is an ACT Government response that aligns with the International Convention of the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), the Beijing Platform for Action, and the United Nations Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women (1993). It also links strongly with strategies at both a national and ACT level which deal with homelessness, child protection, young people, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander disadvantage, health, and disability, as detailed below:

The National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and Children 2010–2022 agreed to by the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) and brings together the efforts of government across the nation to make a real and sustained reduction in the levels of violence against women and children.

The 2008 Canberra Plan—Towards our Second Century sets out the ACT Government's vision for Canberra. The vision is for an inclusive, sustainable and creative city; a centre of economic growth and innovation; a proud national capital and a place of great natural beauty.

*The 2008 Canberra Plan* is a future-looking, long-term plan. It sets directions and articulates goals for Canberra as the city approaches its second century in 2013. The direction and goals will be achieved in partnership with the community. The Canberra Spatial Plan is a related long-term strategic document that sets the direction for the spatial development of Canberra over 30 years and beyond.

Sitting underneath the Canberra Plan, the Canberra Social Plan highlights the ACT Government's commitment to individuals, families and the community. It is a medium-term plan that is complemented and supported by three other medium term plans: Capital Development (the ACT Government's economic strategy); Weathering the Change (climate change strategy);

and the ACT Infrastructure Plan (a plan to meet the infrastructure needs of Canberra).

The vision for Canberra is based on the themes of connection, belonging and collaboration. These themes are closely linked to keep people and communities at the centre of the ACT Government's work.

Connection means creating a socially cohesive community where people feel connected with each other and the place they live. Belonging means making sure every individual has the opportunity and resources to reach their potential.

Collaboration is working together across Government and with the community to improve the lives of all Canberrans.

The Canberra Social Plan is underpinned by a series of action plans. These more targeted documents detail the ways all members of the community can participate in, contribute to and benefit from living in Canberra. The action plans include, for example, the ACT Strategic Plan for Positive Ageing and the ACT Women's Plan 2010 -2015.

**Our Responsibility: Ending Violence Against Women and Children** has strong links to The Canberra Plan, particularly the goal of achieving 'an inclusive community that supports its vulnerable people and enables all to reach their potential'. This is also the central goal of the Canberra Social Plan and work under this strategy will contribute to the Social Plan's goal to 'create a safe environment for every member of the community'.

For more information on the 2008 Canberra Plan—Towards Our Second Century and the strategic plans which sit underneath it visit: [www.cmd.act.gov.au/policystrategic/canberraplan](http://www.cmd.act.gov.au/policystrategic/canberraplan)

The education system plays an important role in shaping young people's attitudes and building their ability to form respectful relationships. The ACT Education and Training Directorate Strategic Plan 2010–2013 includes values of fairness and respect and aims to support the development of students' capabilities for life. This includes facilitating effective student learning through safe and inclusive environments.

The ACT Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Justice Agreement 2010 is a strategy that includes actions by ACT justice agencies that work to reduce and prevent family violence in the ACT. This includes initiatives that promote community safety, support for victims, rehabilitation of offenders and improve access to justice. As part of the Justice Agreement a practical guide to services assists Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people access justice and support services in the ACT.

The National Indigenous Law and Justice Framework 2009–2015 signed by all States and Territories includes an objective to ensure that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people feel safe and are safe within their communities. The framework seeks to promote the reduction, incidence and impacts of all forms of family violence within Indigenous families, including sexual abuse.

The ACT Homelessness Charter aims to increase community, government and service recognition of the rights of Canberrans who are experiencing homelessness. The charter acknowledges that people who are experiencing homelessness have the same basic human rights afforded to the entire community. The ACT government is also committed to The Road Home: A National Approach to Reducing Homelessness, which sets a whole-of-government agenda for reducing homelessness to 2020. Women and children who have been victims of violence are a key target group under this approach.

The goals of the ACT Multicultural Strategy 2009–2013 are underpinned by legal parameters, rights and responsibilities to celebrate and respond to the needs of Canberra's multicultural community. The Strategy acknowledges that domestic violence is an issue faced by women in the multicultural community and identifies strategies to ensure their needs are met by appropriate and accessible services.

**Future Directions: Towards Challenge 2014** —framework for people with a disability sets strategic priorities to improve pathways and opportunities for people with disabilities to achieve positive outcomes that make a difference to their lives. It aims to provide a quality service system for people who have a physical, sensory or cognitive impairment and to develop initiatives to reduce violence, neglect and abuse.

The ACT Strategic Plan for Positive Ageing 2009–2014 sets strategic priorities to enable seniors to feel respected, valued and

safe and to be secure and comfortable to participate in the community. The Strategy includes an action to protect the rights and welfare of seniors who may be experiencing, or be at risk of experiencing, elder abuse through the Elder Abuse Prevention Program.

The ACT Young People's Plan 2009–2014 provides the framework for the ACT Government's vision that Canberra is a child and youth friendly city that supports all young people to reach their full potential, make valuable contributions and share the benefits of our community. It specifically aims to support young people to foster positive relationships with family and significant others acknowledging that young people need to be able to explore and learn about relationships in a supportive and safe environment. Building A Strong Foundation: A Framework for Promoting Mental Health and Wellbeing in the ACT 2009–2014 brings together the activities of a range of ACT Government departments and community agencies who deliver services that influence mental health and wellbeing to form an integrated framework to promote and enhance the mental health and wellbeing of all Canberrans. This plan together with the ACT Health Mental Health Services Plan 2009–2014 (the ACT MHSP) and Managing the Risk of Suicide: A Suicide Prevention Strategy for the ACT 2009–2014, sets out Mental Health ACT's commitment to support people who experience a mental illness in the ACT. This includes supporting consumers, their carers and family members in preventing and reducing the impact of violence and discrimination (in particular action areas one, three and four).

The ACT Alcohol, Tobacco and Other Drug Strategy 2010–2014 aims to improve the health and social well-being of individuals, consumers, families and carers, and the community in the ACT and minimise the harm in our community from alcohol, tobacco and other drugs while recognising the individual needs of all citizens in the ACT. The Strategy recognises the strong link between drug use, in particular alcohol use and the incidence of all forms of violence and seeks to address the underlying causes of drug use to address the harms to the individual and the community.

A New Way: The ACT Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health and Family Wellbeing Plan 2006–2011 is broad in scope and encapsulates the holistic nature of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health and family wellbeing. Its focus is on building strong communities through family resilience, through health in the context of overall wellbeing, and collaborative action.

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