

Review of the National Plan to End Violence Against Women and Children 2022–2032

**Submission to the Consultation on the Second Action Plan
Children as Victim-Survivors in Their Own Right: Placing Children at the
Centre of Reform**

Submitted by:

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Key Message:

Australia will not end violence against women and children within a generation unless children move from the margins of policy to the centre of reform. Children are citizens, rights holders and victim-survivors in their own right.

This submission calls for stronger investment in child-focused data, participation, recovery, healing and accountability measures to ensure children are visible, heard and supported across Australia's response to family, domestic and sexual violence.

Table of Contents

1. The Valuing Children Initiative (VCI)	3
2. Executive Summary	3
3. What is Working	4
4. Where Further Development is Needed.....	4
4.1. Children's Experiences Remain Largely Invisible in the Evidence Base.	4
4.2. Children's Voices Remain Largely Absent from Decision-Making	4
4.3. Recovery and Healing Services for Children Remain Inadequate	5
4.4. Intergenerational Trauma Requires Greater Attention.....	5
5. Youth Involvement Council (YIC)– Port Hedland	6
5.1. Case Study	6
6. Opportunities for the Second Action Plan	7
7. Recommendations for the Second Action Plan.....	7
8. Conclusion	8
9. References	9

1. The Valuing Children Initiative (VCI)

The Valuing Children Initiative¹ (VCI), an initiative of Centrecare Inc², is dedicated to changing societal attitudes so that all children and young people are valued and their needs are the first priority for every Australian. We stand up for children's rights, voices and their place in decision-making in the community as standard practice in community, government, business and the corporate sector.

We do this through advocacy, research, workshops, training, campaigning and partnerships to effect meaningful change. We collaborate with stakeholders, policymakers, and like-minded organisations to create a collective positive impact on child well-being.

Despite the abundance of knowledge and resources, we continue to witness poor outcomes for children and young people due to this lack of prioritisation.

2. Executive Summary

VCI welcomes the progress made under the National Plan to End Violence against Women and Children 2022–2032³ (National Plan), particularly the recognition of children and young people as victim-survivors in their own right and the increased focus on recovery, healing and prevention. The National Plan acknowledges that children experience violence differently from adults and that exposure to family and domestic violence can have profound and lifelong impacts on their health, wellbeing, development, relationships and future life outcomes.

However, VCI believes that a significant gap remains between recognising children as victim-survivors in principle and responding to them as victim-survivors in practice. While children are increasingly visible in policy, they remain largely invisible in data collection, service design, funding priorities and outcome measurement. Australia still lacks comprehensive information about how many children experience family and domestic violence, the nature of their experiences, the supports they receive and the outcomes achieved. The National Plan itself acknowledges these limitations.

VCI is particularly concerned that children's voices remain largely absent from policy development and service design despite growing evidence that children can safely and meaningfully contribute to decisions affecting them. Children continue to be spoken about rather than meaningfully engaged in decisions that affect them.

At the same time, specialist therapeutic and recovery services for children remain insufficient, despite substantial evidence linking childhood exposure to violence with poorer mental health, educational outcomes, homelessness, future victimisation and intergenerational cycles of violence.

The Second Action Plan⁴ presents an opportunity to move beyond acknowledgment and create a genuinely child-centred response to family, domestic and sexual violence. VCI calls for stronger investment in child-focused data collection, child participation, specialist therapeutic services, workforce capability, and outcomes measurement. Children's recovery and healing should be recognised not only as a service response but as a

¹ <https://valuingchildreninitiative.com.au/>

² <https://www.centrecare.com.au/>

³ <https://www.dss.gov.au/national-plan-end-violence-against-women-and-children/resource/national-plan-end-violence-against-women-and-children-2022-2032>

⁴ <https://engage.dss.gov.au/second-action-plan/>

critical violence prevention strategy capable of reducing intergenerational trauma and helping achieve the National Plan's vision of ending violence within a generation.

VCI's central message

Australia will not end violence against women and children within a generation unless children move from the margins of policy to the centre of reform. Recognising children as victim-survivors in their own right must be matched by policies, funding, services and accountability mechanisms that genuinely respond to their experiences, needs and rights.

3. What is Working

- Greater recognition of children as victim-survivors in their own right.
- Increased focus on recovery and healing as a core component of the national response.
- Commitments to age-appropriate prevention initiatives and respectful relationships education.
- Growing awareness of the links between childhood trauma, family violence and intergenerational cycles of harm.
- New investments in specialist children's workers, counselling responses and initiatives for young people affected by family and domestic violence.
- Increased recognition of Aboriginal-led approaches, cultural healing and self-determination as essential components of family safety responses.

These developments provide a strong foundation for future reform.

4. Where Further Development is Needed

4.1. Children's Experiences Remain Largely Invisible in the Evidence Base.

The National Plan acknowledges that information about children's experiences of family, domestic and sexual violence is limited and that existing data sources likely underestimate the true extent of children's exposure to violence. Despite recognising this problem, Australia still cannot accurately identify:

- how many children experience family and domestic violence each year;
- the nature and severity of their experiences;
- what services they access;
- whether those services improve outcomes; and
- how recovery and healing are measured.

Australia routinely collects information about adult victims but lacks systematic information about the children affected alongside them. This limits effective service planning, funding allocation and accountability.

Without reliable child-specific data, it is difficult to determine whether the National Plan is achieving its intended outcomes for children.

4.2. Children's Voices Remain Largely Absent from Decision-Making

The National Plan commits to elevating children's voices and recognising their experiences. However, most lived-experience mechanisms continue to focus on

adult victim-survivors. Children are frequently consulted indirectly through parents, services or researchers rather than being asked directly about their experiences, needs and priorities.

Children can safely and meaningfully participate in research, service design and policy development when appropriate safeguards are in place. Children's perspectives often provide unique insights into safety, recovery, relationships and service responsiveness that cannot be obtained through adult perspectives alone.

4.3. Recovery and Healing Services for Children Remain Inadequate

The National Plan appropriately recognises that childhood exposure to violence can have significant impacts on health, development, relationships and future life outcomes. However, specialist therapeutic services for children remain inadequate relative to need.

There are very few services specialising in supporting children affected by family and domestic violence. Existing services often have long waiting lists, limited capacity and insufficient resources to provide early intervention. Children continue to be viewed primarily as accompanying family members within many services rather than as clients in their own right.

This is particularly concerning given evidence demonstrating links between childhood exposure to violence and:

- poor mental health;
- developmental delays;
- educational difficulties;
- homelessness;
- future victimisation;
- future use of violence; and
- intergenerational trauma.

A serious effort to end violence within a generation, necessarily requires significant investment in children's recovery and healing. These should be viewed as part of core violence-prevention infrastructure rather than an optional therapeutic response.

4.4. Intergenerational Trauma Requires Greater Attention

One of the strongest messages emerging from the current National Plan is that family violence is not confined to a single generation. Childhood exposure to violence has significant long-term consequences and can contribute to future victimisation, perpetration, mental health challenges and social disadvantage.

The National Plan identifies early intervention and recovery as priorities. However, current policy and funding settings remain heavily weighted toward crisis responses. While crisis services are essential, they are not sufficient to break cycles of violence.

VCI believes the Second Action Plan should place greater emphasis on preventing the transmission of trauma across generations by investing in long-term therapeutic and healing responses for children and families.

5. Youth Involvement Council⁵ (YIC)– Port Hedland

5.1. Case Study

A young person, referred to here as “Ari” to protect their identity, had been **moving between homes** after feeling unsafe due to family violence. Often arriving at school and community programs **tired and hungry**, Ari **worried about where they would sleep** and whether conflict at home would escalate.

Through ongoing conversations with a trusted youth worker, Ari gradually disclosed the challenges they were facing, **including housing instability, food insecurity and fear of returning home**. In response, the youth worker provided practical support, including access to food and connections to safe, culturally appropriate services.

With consistent support, Ari began identifying trusted adults, safe places and strategies to stay safe. Ari’s story highlights how childhood poverty is closely linked to housing insecurity, family violence, education and wellbeing, and demonstrates the importance of trusted, community-based services in identifying and responding to children’s needs before crisis deepens.

Context for the quotes: The quotes below were not collected through surveys or research interviews. They were captured through casual conversations with young people involved with the Youth Involvement Council in Port Hedland.

Why this matters: They were possible because children and young people trusted someone enough to tell them what was happening in their lives.

“Mum had been in a fight with Dad and Dad has stabbed Mum in the neck with a knife.” – Youth Involvement Council, Port Hedland records, June 2026

“He smashed her TV.” – Youth Involvement Council, Port Hedland records, May 2026

“He threatens he’s going to call DCP and get the kids taken off her.” – Youth Involvement Council, Port Hedland records, May 2026

“He always asks for money from her on her pay day.” – Youth Involvement Council, Port Hedland records, May 2026

“It was her Dad who was the one that was quite abusive.” – Youth Involvement Council, Port Hedland records, May 2026

“She has no shoes because her mum hit her face when we found out that she had been vaping.” – Youth Involvement Council, Port Hedland records, May 2026

“She was nervous and hopes that he is not released until next year.” – Youth Involvement Council, Port Hedland records, May 2026

“Her dad had choked her.” – Youth Involvement Council, Port Hedland records, March 2026

“He had recently had a fight with his dad on the weekend.” – Youth Involvement Council, Port Hedland records, March 2026

⁵ <https://www.yic.com.au/>

“Fighting often occurs when alcohol is involved.” – Youth Involvement Council, Port Hedland records, February 2026

“All good, I’m used to it.” – Youth Involvement Council, Port Hedland records, February 2026

“You better hurry up or else I’m going to hurt you and shame you in front of these people.” – Youth Involvement Council, Port Hedland records, February 2026

“When he got back, their dad started hitting him.” – Youth Involvement Council, Port Hedland records, January 2026

6. Opportunities for the Second Action Plan

- Develop a national child-focused family violence evidence and data framework.
- Establish child-specific outcomes and indicators within National Plan reporting and evaluation.
- Create formal mechanisms for child and youth participation in policy development and service design.
- Expand specialist therapeutic services for children affected by family and domestic violence.
- Introduce Child Impact Assessments for significant policy, funding and legislative reforms.
- Ensure Family Safety Hubs and integrated service models provide dedicated child-focused responses.
- Strengthen workforce capability in child-centred, child-safe and trauma-informed practice.
- Increase investment in prevention, recovery and healing to reduce intergenerational trauma.
- Improve coordination between the National Plan, Safe and Supported, the National Agreement on Closing the Gap, and the National Strategy to Prevent and Respond to Child Sexual Abuse to ensure children are not lost between policy frameworks.

7. Recommendations for the Second Action Plan

To strengthen the National Plan's commitment to recognising children as victim-survivors in their own right, VCI recommends that the Second Action Plan:

- develop a national child-focused family violence evidence and data framework to improve understanding of children's experiences, service access, recovery and long-term outcomes;
- establish child-specific indicators and outcome measures within National Plan reporting and evaluation to ensure children's wellbeing and recovery are tracked and assessed;
- create formal mechanisms for child and youth participation in policy development, service design, research and evaluation so that children are actively involved in decisions that affect them;
- expand access to specialist child-centred and trauma-informed support services, including therapeutic, cultural and early intervention responses that recognise children as clients in their own right;

- strengthen workforce capability across family, domestic and sexual violence systems through training in child-centred, child-safe and trauma-informed practice;
- introduce a child impact lens across policy, funding, service delivery and legislative reforms to ensure children's experiences, safety and recovery needs are consistently considered;
- improve coordination between the National Plan and related national frameworks, including Safe and Supported, the [National Strategy to Prevent and Respond to Child Sexual Abuse](#)⁶, and [Closing the Gap](#)⁷ initiatives, to ensure children affected by violence do not fall between systems; and
- recognise children's recovery and healing as a core violence-prevention strategy and increase long-term investment in responses that address childhood trauma and reduce intergenerational cycles of violence.

8. Conclusion

VCI welcomes the progress made under the current National Plan and supports its continued commitment to recognising children as victim-survivors in their own right. However, recognition alone is insufficient.

A genuinely child-centred response requires children to be visible in the data, heard in decision-making, prioritised in service design and supported through dedicated recovery and healing services. It requires governments to move beyond broad commitments and invest in the structures, services and accountability mechanisms necessary to meet children's unique needs. Australia cannot end violence against women and children within a generation unless children's experiences, wellbeing and recovery become central to the national response.

The Second Action Plan provides a critical opportunity to move beyond acknowledging children as victim-survivors and deliver a genuinely child-centred response ensuring they are acknowledged across policy, funding, service delivery and evaluation.

Children are not simply witnesses to violence. They are citizens, rights holders and victim-survivors in their own right. A National Plan that seeks to end violence within a generation must place children at the centre of reform if it is to achieve its vision.

⁶ <https://www.childsafety.gov.au/resources/national-strategy-prevent-and-respond-child-sexual-abuse-2021-2030>

⁷ <https://www.closingthegap.gov.au/>

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