

Family and Domestic Violence Strategy 2016–2019



Disclaimer: the people depicted are models and have been used for illustrative purposes only.



Australian Government
Department of Human Services



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Message from the Secretary



Australians have become increasingly aware of just how many people are affected by family and domestic violence. Intensive media coverage, as well as personal experience, awareness and prevention campaigns have all contributed to the country's current focus on the issue. The Department of Human Services (the department) comes into contact with just about every Australian at some point in their lives, through their interactions with Centrelink, Medicare and Child Support. When customers approach the department for a service, they may be trying to manage a difficult life experience or be in a period of transition stemming from events such as relationship breakdown or violence. The department is also one of Australia's largest employers. This means we are in a unique position to take action and play a vital role in assisting both our customers and our staff affected by family and domestic violence.

We have made significant progress since we released the first Family and Domestic Violence Strategy in 2013. We are training frontline staff to proactively ask customers about their safety at points where family and domestic violence is likely to be more prevalent. We also offer referrals to external service providers or departmental social workers if required. We have developed wide reaching communication materials with the theme *"Family and domestic violence. It's time to say enough"* which are accessible in a variety of formats and many languages across all service delivery channels. We have also implemented support for our staff who may themselves be experiencing family and domestic violence. Together we are creating a culture where people are encouraged and feel safe to tell their story and to access information and support.

Our customers come from all walks of life. Some interact only through Medicare and may never require Child Support services or Centrelink payments, while others have recently arrived as refugees, with limited or no English and little understanding of the services they can access. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians experience family and domestic violence at far higher rates and may also be living in remote locations. People accessing disability support and age pensions can also be affected by violence. To effectively support our staff and customers, differences must be respected and unique responses may be needed.

The next phase of the Family and Domestic Violence Strategy will build on our achievements, tailor our approaches and extend our reach. As we move forward, we will ensure that our customers, who interact through online accounts and phone self-service, can still be connected to support. The strategy provides an overarching framework which will be underpinned by a series of action plans to ensure we continue to meet the needs of all our customers and our staff.

This strategy is important to the department and its success depends on our staff and our community partners. By working together we can contribute to building a society where all families are safe, healthy and strong.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "K Campbell". The signature is fluid and cursive, written in a professional style.

Kathryn Campbell, CSC
Secretary
Department of Human Services

What is family and domestic violence?

Family and domestic violence is conduct that is violent, threatening, coercive or controlling, or intended to cause the family or household member to be fearful. This aligns with the definition in the *Family Law Act 1975* (Commonwealth).

It can include (but is not limited to):

- › physical violence
- › sexual assault and other sexually abusive behaviour
- › economic (financial) abuse
- › emotional or psychological abuse
- › stalking
- › kidnapping or deprivation of liberty
- › serious neglect where there is a relationship of dependence
- › damage to property, regardless of whether the person affected by violence owns the property
- › causing injury or death to an animal, regardless of whether the person affected by violence owns the animal
- › verbal abuse
- › spiritual or cultural abuse, or
- › exposing a child to the effects of these behaviours.

Working collaboratively

In 2011, the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) endorsed *The National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children 2010–2022* (the National Plan). The National Plan provides a coordinated framework to improve the scope, focus and the effectiveness of the government's actions, ensuring women and their children receive the support and information they need. This task is being implemented through four three-year plans:

- › *The First Action Plan: Building a Strong Foundation 2010–2013* sets the path for long-term change. A number of initiatives have been established to support, and help reduce violence against women and their children including Australia's National Research Organisation for Women's Safety (ANROWS), Our Watch, The Line social marketing campaign and 1800RESPECT.
- › *The Second Action Plan: Moving Ahead 2013–2016* (the Second Action Plan), will strengthen linkages with other significant national reforms to drive a holistic response to reducing violence against women and their children. It includes strategies to support people who may be more vulnerable to violence, such as Indigenous women and women with disabilities, as well as those from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. The Second Action Plan also aims to improve responses for those who use violence so that women are safe.
- › *The Third Action Plan: Promising Results* is planned for 2016–2019.
- › *The Fourth Action Plan: Turning the Corner* is planned for 2019–2022.

In 2015, COAG agreed that further action was urgently needed, identifying three priority areas of work:

- › a National Domestic Violence Order (DVO) national law model
- › national standards to ensure those who use violence are held to account at the same standard across Australia, and
- › strategies to keep women safe from technology-facilitated abuse.

An Advisory Panel was also established by COAG to help ensure that collaborative approaches are working and to identify areas for further national leadership. The panel is guiding COAG on practical ways to address family and domestic violence, including the future direction of the National Plan.

About the Department of Human Services

The department is responsible for delivering a range of health, social and welfare payments and services through Medicare, Centrelink and Child Support programs for the Australian Government. The department interacts with almost every Australian at some point in their lives and employs around 35 000 staff, more than 70 per cent of whom are women.

The department's *Strategic Plan 2015–2019* outlines our vision, mission and the four strategic themes that underpin our activities.

Our vision:

Excellence in the provision of government services to every Australian.

Our mission:

Connecting Australians to the services they need.

Our strategic themes:

1 Government outcomes, customer outcomes

We will support our Minister and the government in reducing violence and ensuring customers are supported.

2 Capable and engaged people

We will enhance the capabilities of our staff to support customers and colleagues who may be affected by family and domestic violence.

3 A strong collaborative approach

We will work with government and non-government stakeholders to support people experiencing family and domestic violence.

4 Service transformation

We will develop new and innovative approaches to improve and transform our services and systems.

Our approach to family and domestic violence

We use the term 'family and domestic violence' because violent behaviour is not necessarily limited to members of families connected by kinship or marriage, but may also include:

- › past or current intimate relationships—including people who are dating or living together, regardless of their gender or sexuality, or whether the relationship is of a sexual nature
- › relationships involving carers—where care is provided to older people, people with disability or a medical condition
- › relatives and guardians
- › Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander concepts of family including extended family, and
- › other culturally recognised family groups.

We recognise that both men and women can use violence. However, the majority of violence in Australia is perpetrated by men against women.

Family and domestic violence can affect people of any background, but research suggests that some individuals and groups are more vulnerable. These include:

- › Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians, and the situation can also be complicated by other factors such as historical trauma
- › women from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, especially newly-arrived immigrants and refugees with language barriers
- › people needing care, such as people with disability
- › people who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender or intersex
- › young women, pregnant women and women with children, and
- › people living in remote communities where there are fewer or no local supports available.

A key part of the department's commitment to service excellence is helping those most in need. We have developed this strategy to help our customers and staff affected by family and domestic violence, by providing information, support and referrals.

We will respect and protect the personal information of customers and staff who have disclosed family and domestic violence, and will comply with our obligations under the *Privacy Act 1988* when sharing and recording information.

Principles underpinning the department's approach

This strategy is underpinned by five principles.

Principle 1

Family and domestic violence is never acceptable

Family and domestic violence is unacceptable in any form. Our first priority when responding to affected customers and staff will be their safety and wellbeing. We will provide a supportive service environment for customers and a safe workplace for staff who have been affected by family and domestic violence.

Principle 2

We avoid placing blame

The responsibility for family or domestic violence always lies with the person who uses violence. We will avoid placing blame or an onerous burden of proof on the person affected by family and domestic violence.

Principle 3

We respond respectfully

Family and domestic violence is traumatic and disempowering, and can be difficult to disclose. We will respond with respect and sensitivity to customers and staff affected by family and domestic violence and will help them to make informed decisions free of coercion.

Principle 4

We provide support

We will continue to build the skills of staff to recognise and respond to family and domestic violence. We will offer support to customers affected by family and domestic violence, whether they are at risk of, experiencing or people who use violence. We will support differences, including gender, sexuality, culture, age, ability and background.

Principle 5

We work collaboratively

We will work collaboratively with government and non-government sectors and will share our approach to reduce the impact of family and domestic violence.

Looking ahead

Six strategic themes will guide our ongoing response to family and domestic violence.

1. Information

We will continue to ensure that customers and staff have access to information about family and domestic violence, including the support available through the department and from external service providers.

Aims

- › Customers and staff affected by family and domestic violence are aware that we can support them and connect them to appropriate support in the local community.
- › Customers and staff are not put at increased risk when accessing information about family and domestic violence services and support.
- › External service providers and stakeholders are aware of the services and support we offer and know that they can refer their clients to us.

Actions

- › We will provide accessible, up-to-date and accurate information about our payments, services and community supports available to people affected by family and domestic violence.
- › We will tailor information to meet the needs of specific groups, such as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians, people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds and customers living in remote locations.
- › We will make information available in a range of languages, formats and channels.
- › We will consider the safety of customers in the development and distribution of information.

2. Risk identification

We will continue to refine our risk identification approach to support customers who are concerned about their safety.

Aims

- › Early identification of customers affected by family and domestic violence allows us to provide support in a timely manner.
- › Family and domestic violence risk identification approaches are incorporated into core business processes.
- › Our risk identification approaches are included in all service delivery channels including online accounts and phone self-service.

Actions

- › We will provide a supportive environment which encourages customers affected by family and domestic violence to tell us their concerns.
- › We will continue to identify interaction points where we can better support customers at a higher risk of family and domestic violence—for example, people advising us that they have recently separated from their partner.
- › We will ask our customers if they are concerned about their safety at identified interaction points, and if they are, we will offer appropriate support.
- › We will continue to refine our risk identification approaches to ensure we can support customers who interact in the face-to-face, telephony and online channels.
- › We will tailor our risk identification approaches to accommodate the needs of specific customer groups, including customers from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians.
- › We will monitor and evaluate the risk identification model and referral approaches on an ongoing basis and refine as required.

3. Referrals and support

We will offer information and support to customers affected by family and domestic violence, and refer them to external service providers where appropriate.

Aims

- › Customers affected by family and domestic violence are offered the most appropriate payment and/or service according to their individual circumstances.
- › A strong network of external service providers is maintained to support customers affected by family and domestic violence.
- › Support is offered to customers who identify as people who use violence where this has the potential to help them change their behaviour and enhance the safety of people affected by violence.

Actions

- › We will offer direct support (such as a referral to a social worker or a Crisis Payment) where this best meets the needs of customers.
- › We will refer customers to external service providers for further assistance where appropriate.
- › We will maintain up-to-date information about external service providers to ensure referrals are appropriate and tailored.
- › We will assess eligibility for assistance and offer referrals for customers who identify as users of violence to help them change their behaviour and improve the safety of people at risk of or experiencing violence.
- › We will monitor our procedures to minimise the possibility that people who use violence manipulate our services to the detriment of those affected by family and domestic violence.
- › We will maintain regular engagement with local, state and national community service providers and other stakeholders to ensure that we are able to help customers affected by family and domestic violence access the support they need.

4. Training

We will ensure that our staff receive appropriate training to support customers and staff affected by family and domestic violence.

Aims

- › Managers and staff have the skills and confidence to support staff and customers affected by family and domestic violence.
- › Our staff have the capability to respond effectively and appropriately to the diversity of customers affected by family and domestic violence.
- › Our knowledge is shared with other organisations.

Actions

- › Our staff will undertake relevant and targeted training to build the skills and knowledge to support people affected by family and domestic violence.
- › We will continue to update training packages to ensure our staff are able to offer appropriate information, referrals and support.
- › We will align training packages to the needs of specific groups. For example, we will supplement with cultural awareness training for staff who engage with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians and with customers from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds.
- › We will train our managers, team leaders and people team consultants to build their ability to respond appropriately to staff who are affected by family and domestic violence.
- › Senior leaders will participate in training to build engagement and enhance their ability to create a department-wide supportive culture for our people.

5. Our people

We acknowledge our responsibility to provide a supportive, flexible and safe workplace for staff affected by family and domestic violence to enable them to continue their employment and receive assistance.

Aims

- › Our culture reflects the department's position that family and domestic violence is never acceptable.
- › Staff affected by family and domestic violence experience a safe and supportive workplace.
- › Staff, who may be affected by their interactions with people who are experiencing family and domestic violence, receive appropriate support.

Actions

- › We will develop consistent department-wide responses to leverage existing staff entitlements and provide support and flexible working arrangements for staff who are affected by family and domestic violence.
- › We will implement safety measures to ensure staff members affected by family and domestic violence are safe at work.
- › We will develop support mechanisms for staff who interact with customers or colleagues affected by family and domestic violence.
- › We will ensure information is readily available so staff are aware of the process for disclosing family and domestic violence and the available support.
- › We will support our Family and Domestic Violence Senior Leaders to strengthen a workplace culture that does not tolerate family and domestic violence, and promote the services and support available for staff and customers.
- › We will continue to refine our family and domestic violence awareness training packages for staff, managers, senior executives and the internal staff support network.
- › We will maintain a family and domestic violence contact officer network for staff, which includes staff from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, to provide support, information and advice.

6. Our systems and processes

We will continue to refine our systems and processes to enhance the delivery of this strategy.

Aims

- › Our strategies to support people affected by family and domestic violence are embedded in all core business processes.
- › Our systems and processes contribute to strengthening the services and supports available to staff and customers affected by family and domestic violence.
- › Our risk identification and referral processes are applied consistently across the department.

Actions

- › We will consider options for a safety flag which can be applied to the records of customers who have disclosed family and domestic violence concerns to improve our service and support.
- › We will develop assurance and governance processes to ensure the effective delivery of family and domestic violence related services for customers and staff.
- › We will enhance service delivery data collection to improve our knowledge of and responses to family and domestic violence.
- › We will monitor our policies and processes to ensure that customers affected by family and domestic violence are offered the most appropriate service or payment, and that our processes do not put them at greater risk of violence.
- › We will monitor the services provided by external referral services to ensure they reflect and support the department's approach.
- › We will keep informed of developments in family and domestic violence policy and service provision.
- › We will develop tools to ensure family and domestic violence is considered across all areas of the department as a core business process.