Submission on the Safe and Supported Second Action Plans

Prepared by Our Watch

Date: September 2026

Our Watch

Preventing violence against women

Acknowledgement

Our Watch acknowledges the Traditional Owners of the land across Australia on which we work and live. We pay respects to Elders past and present and recognise the continuing connection Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have to land, culture, knowledge, and language for over 65,000 years.

About Our Watch

Our Watch is a national leader in the primary prevention of violence against women and their children. All Australian governments are members of Our Watch, including the Commonwealth Government. Our Watch values its ongoing partnership with the Commonwealth Government to support primary prevention policy and delivery. We undertake a broad range of primary prevention work, including under the *National Plan to End Violence against Women and Children 2022-2032*.

Our Watch aims to drive nationwide change in the culture, behaviours, attitudes, institutions, systems and social structures that drive violence against women. Guided by our national evidence-based frameworks, *Change the story* (2nd ed 2021)[1], *Changing the picture* (2018)[2], and *Changing the landscape* (2022)[3], we work with governments, practitioners and communities across Australia to address the drivers of violence in all settings where people live, learn, work and socialise.

Overview and purpose

Our Watch welcomes the opportunity to provide feedback on the development of the Second Actions Plans under *Safe and Supported: the National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children 2021-2031* (Safe and Supported).

This submission outlines the mutually reinforcing nature of preventing violence against women and preventing violence and harm against children. Both action plans under *Safe and Supported* can recognise the role primary prevention can play in supporting the framework's vision and goals.

Our Watch provided an extensive submission (see **Attachment A**) to the development of the Second Action Plan (2027–2032) under the *National Plan to End Violence against Women and Children 2022 2032* (***the National Plan***). Our Watch's submission to the *National Plan* and recommendations can inform the Second Action Plans of *Safe and Supported*.

Our Watch recognises the dedicated consultation process being led by SNAICC – National Voice for our Children and the Safe and Supported Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Leadership Group to inform the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Second Action Plan. This process provides a critical mechanism for ensuring self-determination and community identified solutions and priority actions.

Summary of recommendations:

Recommendation 1: Align approaches to primary prevention activity across the Second Action Plans under *Safe and Supported*, the Second Action Plan under the *National Plan* and the First Action Plan under *Our Ways – Strong Ways – Our Voices.* Ensure clear connections between prevention activity across health, education, disability, housing, justice and family, domestic and sexual violence services and systems.

Recommendation 2: Strengthen investment in primary prevention alongside early intervention and targeted support, including through the settings and services that reach children and families across the life course.

Recommendation 3: Embed primary prevention capability within existing child and family workforce development and practice approaches as part of a national approach.

The intersection between preventing violence against women and preventing violence and harm to children

Safe and Supported sets out a vision that children in Australia reach their full potential by growing up in safe and caring homes, free from harm and neglect. It aims to make significant and sustained progress in reducing the rates of child abuse and neglect, and its intergenerational impacts. This requires sustained action further upstream to prevent violence and harm from occurring in families in the first instance. Preventing violence against women is an important part of this upstream work.

While Our Watch's remit is focused on violence against women, we recognise that children and young people have their own, unique experiences of violence. Children and young people of all genders can experience or be exposed to violence, both directly and as a consequence of family or domestic violence between adults in their lives.

Family violence is also a common factor in child protection notifications, including those resulting in the removal of children from their families. This has particularly devastating implications for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, given the ongoing legacies of the Stolen Generations, colonisation, systemic racism and the continued disproportionate rate of removal of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children from their families.[4]

Exposure to violence has profound and long-term impacts on children's health and wellbeing, including their physical and mental wellbeing, behavioural, cognitive and emotional functioning, social development and – through a process of 'negative change effects' – education and later employment prospects.[5]

Our Watch recognises that preventing violence against children requires a separate approach through *Safe and Supported*. At the same time, preventing violence against women will contribute to the child protection goals in *Safe and Supported* by preventing children's exposure to and experience of violence between adults in their lives, and reducing the significant associated harms. Preventing violence against women is therefore important for and complementary to preventing violence and harm to children.

Recommendations relating to specific areas in the discussion paper

Our Watch's recommendations are focused on the areas of the Families Australia Discussion Paper, where our expertise in the prevention of violence against women can most usefully contribute to the development of the Second Action Plans.

Services and system coordination

To begin to fulfil the overlapping visions of *Safe and Supported*, the *National Plan* and *Our Ways – Strong Ways – Our Voices*, there needs to be a clear acknowledgement of the importance and role of primary prevention across each. There is an opportunity to align approaches to primary prevention across these plans and emphasise the contribution different systems and settings can make to stopping violence and harm to both women and children before it starts.

Primary prevention is not the sole responsibility of domestic, family and sexual violence or child protection portfolios. Health, education, justice, disability services and other systems all have a role in creating the social conditions that support safety, equality and respectful relationships.

In Our Watch's submission to the *National Plan* Second Action Plan (see **Attachment A**, p. 20), we noted that the most significant opportunity to prevent and ultimately end gender-based violence is to scale primary prevention nationally, as a universal, whole-of-population approach. This requires deliberate action across three dimensions — scaling out to reach more people, scaling up to shift structural and institutional drivers, and scaling deep to shift cultural norms — always balanced with, and grounded in, community leadership.

There is also an opportunity to ensure alignment between *Our Ways – Strong Ways – Our Voices* and any prevention initiatives included in the *Safe and Supported* Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Second Action Plan. This includes strengthening and supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families through holistic, culturally strong and community-controlled approaches, as supported by the evidence, principles and actions outlined in *Changing the picture*.

The concurrent development of all four action plans provides the Commonwealth Government with the opportunity to scale prevention across all 3 frameworks, by embedding:

- A strong national approach to primary prevention, supported by greater cross-jurisdictional collaboration and knowledge sharing, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander evidence.
- A stronger whole-of-government approach within each jurisdiction that activates prevention levers across multiple portfolios, including areas such as primary and preventive health.
- Moving beyond individual initiatives to focus on systemic change, embedding prevention principles across policy, legislation and funding systems.

Stronger alignment across the action plans would also help connect prevention activity occurring across the different systems and national frameworks and would assist governments to identify opportunities for mutually reinforcing action. This is consistent with the Commonwealth Government's intention that the related action plans work together in recognition of the overlapping systems and services that those affected by violence and harm may interact with.

Recommendation 1: Align approaches to primary prevention activity across the Second Action Plans under *Safe and Supported*, the Second Action Plan under the *National Plan to end Violence against women and children* and the First Action Plan under *Our Ways – Strong Ways – Our Voices*. Ensure clear connections between prevention activity across health, education, disability, housing, justice and family, domestic and sexual violence services and systems.

Supporting children, young people and families early

Reducing violence against women, and its intergenerational impacts on children and young people requires action across the four pillars of the *National Plan*. Our Watch's submission to the *National Plan* Second Action Plan (see **Attachment A**, p. 18) emphasised the importance of treating the two pillars of primary prevention and early intervention as complementary but distinct approaches.

While early intervention seeks to respond to emerging needs, vulnerabilities or risks before they escalate, primary prevention works further upstream to stop violence before it occurs by addressing the social conditions that drive and enable it. Both approaches are essential and complementary, and in practice when delivered alongside each other are mutually reinforcing.

The *First Action Plans 2023-2026* under *Safe and Supported* provide an important foundation for this approach. They recognise that *all governments have a role in driving early intervention and prevention* and providing universal services for children and young people.[6] They also recognise that keeping children safe requires collective action across governments, sectors, communities, including early childhood education and care (ECEC), health, domestic family and sexual violence, housing and other systems that influence children's safety and wellbeing. [7]

The Second Action Plans provide an opportunity to commit to and invest in primary prevention approaches. This means investing not only in support once vulnerability or risk is identifiable but also embedding primary prevention in the universal systems and settings that reach children and families before violence and harm occur.

Recent consultation undertaken by the Australian Human Rights Commission found that children and young people have a sophisticated understanding of violence. This includes the gendered drivers, relationships and the continuum of prevention, response, recovery and healing.[8] Children and young people identified connections between societal problems, violence in their communities and homes, and their experiences of relationships. They also identified the need for action across systems and settings they engage with.

Children and young people are important agents of change. The key to this will be working across the life course, including from the early years. This provides multiple opportunities to prevent harmful norms, attitudes and behaviours from becoming entrenched and to support children to develop positive and respectful relationships. Addressing these norms and behaviours early can also help disrupt the intergenerational transmission of violence, helping to prevent violence over the long-term and sustain generational change.

In Our Watch's submission to the *National Plan* Second Action Plan, we highlight various prevention approaches which aim to reach children and young people, through a settings-based approach where they live, learn, socialise and play. This includes recommendations specifically related to:

- Early childhood education and care settings (see **Attachment A**, pp. 30-32)
- Whole-of-school-community settings including Respectful Relationships Education (RRE) (see **Attachment A**, pp. 22; 30-32)
- Tertiary education settings (see **Attachment A**, pp. 30-32), and
- National prevention campaigns e.g., *The Line* (see **Attachment A**, pp. 29-32).

Recommendation 2: Strengthen investment in primary prevention alongside early intervention and targeted support, including through the settings and services that reach children and families across the life course.

Workforce capability and cultural safety

A capable and connected prevention workforce is foundational to achieving consistent, population-level prevention outcomes. Our Watch's submission to the *National Plan* Second Action Plan (see **Attachment A**, pp. 25) emphasised the important of a national approach to primary prevention workforce development.

As part of this national approach, building primary prevention capability across the child and family workforce will be important for strengthening understanding of the drivers of violence and the role that different services and settings can play in addressing these drivers to prevent violence and harm before it occurs.

Recommendation 3: Embed primary prevention capability within existing child and family workforce development and practice approaches as part of a national approach.

Conclusion

Preventing violence against women and preventing violence and harm to children are interconnected goals. Sustained action across the multiple settings, systems and services can help create the conditions in which children, young people and families are safe and supported.

The development of the Second Action Plans provides an important opportunity for the Commonwealth Government to begin to fulfil the overlapping visions of *Safe and Supported*, the *National Plan* and *Our Ways – Strong Ways – Our Voices*, by scaling and aligning approaches, and maximising the contribution that different systems and settings can make to stopping violence and harm before it starts.

Our Watch welcomes the opportunity to provide further advice or assistance. please contact **Dr Sanjugta Vas Dev, Director of Government Relations, Policy and Evidence** at sanjugta.vasdev@ourwatch.org.au.

Attachment A: Our Watch submission to the Second Action Plan (2027–2032) under the *National Plan to End Violence against Women and Children 2022 2032*.

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[1] Our Watch. (2021). Change the story: A shared framework for the primary prevention of violence against women in Australia (2nd ed.). Melbourne, Australia: Our Watch.

[2] Our Watch. (2018). Changing the picture: A national resource to support the prevention of violence against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and their children. Melbourne, Australia: Our Watch.

[3] Our Watch, & Women with Disabilities Victoria. (2022). Changing the landscape: A national resource to prevent violence against women and girls with disabilities. Melbourne, Australia: Our Watch.

[4] Australian Institute of Family Studies. (2020). *Child protection and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children* (CFCA Resource sheet).

[5] Fredrick, J., & Goddard, C. (2007). Exploring the relationship between poverty, childhood adversity and child abuse from the perspective of adulthood. *Child Abuse Review*, 16, 323–41; Humphreys, C., & Houghton, C. (2008). The research evidence on children and young people experiencing domestic abuse. In C. Humphreys, C. Houghton, & J. Ellis (Eds.), *Literature review: Better outcomes for children and young people affected by domestic abuse* – Directions for good practice, Scottish Government. Several jurisdictions now recognise this harm as a form of family violence in and of itself.

[6] See Commonwealth of Australia. (2022). *First Action Plan 2023-2026 under Safe and Supported: the National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children 2021-2031*; and Commonwealth of Australia. (2022). *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander First Action Plan 2023-2026 under Safe and Supported: the National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children 2021-2031*.

[7] See Commonwealth of Australia. (2022). *First Action Plan 2023-2026 under Safe and Supported: the National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children 2021-2031*; and Commonwealth of Australia. (2022). *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander First Action Plan 2023-2026 under Safe and Supported: the National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children 2021-2031*.

[8] Charles, S., Gibbs, M., O'Donohue, K., Marticorena Politoff, V., Rafty, I. & Blood, J. (2026). *'We're talking about stopping violence before it begins': Supporting Quality Engagement with Children*. Australian Human Rights Commission. ISBN: 978-1-921449-26-0.