



Submission to the  
Australian Human Rights  
Commissioner's  
Examination of children  
affected by family  
and  
domestic violence

*Promoting the interests of families*

June 2015

## **About Families Australia**

Families Australia is a national peak, not for profit organisation which strives to improve the wellbeing of all Australian families. Families Australia focuses especially on seeking policy solutions to meet the needs of the most vulnerable and marginalised families and individuals. Our vision is that Australian families, in all their diversity, enjoy the greatest possible wellbeing.

Families Australia's 750 member organisations operate across Australia in a diverse range of social support services, such as family support, early childhood care, counselling, youth work, mental health and disability support.

Families Australia has been at the forefront of efforts to devise Australia's first-ever national policy roadmap to tackle child abuse and neglect: the National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children 2009-2020. In 2007, Families Australia led in establishing, and continues to coordinate, the Coalition of Organisations Committed to the Safety and Wellbeing of Australia's Children (the 'NGO Coalition'), which is Australia's largest grouping of NGOs and researchers working in the area of children's wellbeing and protection, to assist on the National Framework.

In addition, Families Australia has auspiced the Alliance for Forgotten Australians (AFA) for eight years from its inception in 2007 to September 2014, when AFA incorporated in the Australian Capital Territory as a national peak policy and advocacy organisation. AFA is a national body which represents the interests of the estimated 500,000 people across Australia who as children experienced serious abuse and exploitation in out of home care settings in the twentieth century.

In all matters, Families Australia works to promote a national public policy environment in which the needs and interests of families, especially the most vulnerable and marginalised, are heard and addressed.

## **Contact and legal information**

Families Australia

Address: Suite 3, 7 National Circuit Barton ACT 2600

Phone: 02 6273 4885

Web address: [www.familiesaustralia.org.au](http://www.familiesaustralia.org.au)

Contacts: Brian Babington, CEO, and Eileen O'Brien, Policy Officer

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## Introduction

Families Australia appreciates the opportunity to provide a submission to the National Children's Commissioner's examination of children affected by family and domestic violence. We welcome this analysis of children's experience of family and domestic violence, and the outcomes for children of current public policy, support services and educational campaigns.

Children, regardless of age, are always affected if they live in an environment of anger, violence and fear. Family and domestic violence often results in break-up of the family unit and separation of children from other family members, their friends and familiar surroundings.

Family and domestic violence is a major issue in Australian society covering a wide range of government policy areas and service systems, including health, mental health, housing, income support, child protection, education, and family support. Currently, policy development and responses in relation to both victims and perpetrators of family and domestic violence are fragmented, lacking national consistency, and remain largely 'siloed' in separate policy and service sectors. This presents serious impediments to the development and implementation of an effective response to the impact of family and domestic violence on children in Australia.

Families Australia recognises the efforts of all levels of government to prevent and effectively respond to family and domestic violence through the National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children 2010-2022 and its Second Action Plan, *Moving Ahead*, launched in June 2014. We endorse the six National Outcomes identified for all governments to deliver in the course of the implementation of the National Plan. While we strongly commend this important national initiative, we note ways in which the implementation of the National Plan might be strengthened. They include:

- 1) the need for increased attention to the impact of family and domestic violence on all members of a family, in particular, children, young people and grandparents,
- 2) the need for greater emphasis on early intervention family support in order to prevent stress in families from escalating into violence and the consequent harmful impact on children, and
- 3) the importance of Federal Government leadership in developing nationally coherent policy and service responses.

This submission will primarily address Questions 3, 4, 5, and 6 of the Commissioner's call for submissions.

### **Question 3 What are the impacts on children of family and domestic violence?**

The unique needs of children as victims of and/or witnesses to family and domestic violence must be recognised in addressing the impact of family and domestic violence. It cannot always be assumed that the needs of children in families experiencing violence or with a history of violence are identical to that of their non-abusive parent. It is important to understand that children and young people are not mere bystanders in homes where family and domestic violence occurs. They might: witness one parent abusing another, intervene to protect one parent, and/or be victims of violence themselves. Children must be regarded, and respected, as fully equal victims of family and domestic violence. Their voices need to be heard in relation to their experience of family and domestic violence and interventions.

A growing body of academic literature shows that children who have been exposed to family and domestic violence can suffer wide-ranging, long term, deleterious effects from this, and are more likely than their peers to develop problems in the following areas.

#### Developmental impact

- Behaviour –including impulsive, withdrawn, aggressive or defiant behaviour, and drug and alcohol misuse
- Cognition – with normal cognitive development impaired or delayed
- Relationships – either avoiding close relationships or attaching inappropriately to peers or adults who may be unsafe for them
- Emotions – including fearfulness, anxiety, depression, and anger.
- Learning – negatively affected by anxiety-induced inability to concentrate, poor school attendance and/or frequent changes of schools
- Physical health – including headaches, stomach aches, stress reactions such as immune system related illnesses, and sleep disturbances<sup>1</sup>

#### Social impact

##### 1) Homelessness and/or housing insecurity

Family and domestic violence is a major reason children and adolescents are homeless or live in insecure accommodation, and is a key risk factor for future chronic homelessness. Children are one of the largest groups experiencing homelessness, with under-18 year olds comprising 27% of people who are homeless. There were over 70,000 children using homelessness services in 2011/12.<sup>2</sup>

Children and young people are also affected by the impact of family and domestic violence interventions, which can include the involvement of police, a traumatic move to a refuge or to relatives, and the subsequent dislocation from family, friends and education. Many women's refuges do not accept boys over the age of 15. If a woman cannot find accommodation in a

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<sup>1</sup> *How does domestic and family violence affect children?* National Sexual Assault, Domestic and Family Violence Counselling Service. <https://www.1800respect.org.au/family-friends/common-questions/how-does-domestic-family-violence-affects-children/>. Richards, Kelly, 2011. "Children's exposure to domestic violence in Australia". *Trends and Issues in Crime and Criminal Justice*. Sourced 3 June 2015.

<sup>2</sup> Homelessness Australia 2013. *Homelessness and Young People Fact Sheet, Homelessness and Children Fact Sheet*. [www.homelessnessaustralia.org.au](http://www.homelessnessaustralia.org.au). Sourced 3 June 2015.

refuge for herself with her children, the family may have to be split up, with the children being placed in out-of-home care. Children are often placed into out-of-home care, such as foster care. Many adolescent boys end up homeless, when such out-of-home care arrangements cannot be made or fail.

## 2) Financial insecurity and/or poverty

Family and domestic violence creates complex financial issues for women, disrupting their lives and that of their children over the short and long term. Regardless of their prior economic circumstances, many women experience financial risk or poverty as a result of family and domestic violence. A woman's ability to protect herself and her children by leaving a violent environment or relationship often hinges on the capacity to achieve a degree of financial security and independence. She needs to be able to have some income of her own, control over that income, and the ability to save enough money to finance an escape to ensure her safety and that of her children. Regardless of their family's prior economic circumstances, many children experience poverty as a result of family and domestic violence. Teenagers are often forced to leave home on their own to escape the violence, and often end up on the streets, 'sleeping rough' or couch surfing.<sup>3</sup>

### Intergenerational impact

Research shows that there may be a link between children's exposure to family and domestic violence and the intergenerational transmission of violence and re-victimisation. Studies have shown that boys who are exposed to family and domestic violence as children are more likely than their peers to be perpetrators of violence as adults. Likewise, girls who live with family and domestic violence as children are more likely to be victims as adults.<sup>4</sup>

## **Question 4 What are the outcomes for children engaging with services, programs and support?**

Family and domestic violence is the result of a complex set of interdependent factors operating at three levels: 1) individual & family, 2) local community, and 3) broader society. In order to bring about effective change, services, programs and support must be targeted to all three levels. In order to reduce the negative impact on children who experience family and domestic violence, to improve their life outcomes, and to break the intergenerational cycle of violence, it is vital that comprehensive support be available as early as possible, and on a long term basis if necessary<sup>5</sup>. In particular, there is a need for a more child-focused approach in family and domestic violence support services, focusing on children's psychological and developmental well-being as well as their physical safety.

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<sup>3</sup> Australian Institute of Criminology, 2011. *Children's Exposure to Domestic Violence in Australia*. <http://aic.gov.au/publications/current%20series/tandi/401-420/tandi419.html>

<sup>4</sup> Holt, S, H Buckley and S Whelan, 2008. "The Impact of Exposure to Domestic Violence on Children and Young People: A Review of the Literature" *Child Abuse and Neglect*, #32.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

Children require access to child-specific supports, such as:

- Programs or strategies that aim at strengthening the bond between the child/young person and the non-abusing parent
- Intensive in-home family support services
- Child and adolescent counselling and mental health services
- Safe and secure housing options for children and young people affected by family and domestic violence
- Domestic violence awareness/education programs designed for children and adolescents

Such services and resources are limited in Australia. Some examples of past and current initiatives are outlined below.

- The Addressing Family Violence Programs (AFVP) of the Royal Children's Hospital of Melbourne developed a number of programs for children affected by family violence. The AFVP ceased to operate in 2011, but the Royal Children's Hospital of Melbourne's website continues to make available its publication and resources. [http://www.rch.org.au/mhs/services/Addressing\\_Family\\_Violence\\_Programs/](http://www.rch.org.au/mhs/services/Addressing_Family_Violence_Programs/)

The initiatives of the Addressing Family Violence Programs included:

- **Parkas** (Parents Accepting Responsibility - Kids Are Safe) a two tiered group work intervention for children (ages 8 - 12) and their mothers
- **FisT** (Feeling is Thinking) a school based intervention for primary school aged children to assist them with dealing with strong emotions
- **The Peek-A-Boo Club**™ for infants and mothers affected by family violence
- **BuBs** (Building Up Bonds) on Board pilot intervention for infants and mother in refuge
- **'Dads on Board'**™ for men who have participated in a Men's Behaviour Change Program and their infants/toddlers
- The Domestic Violence Resource Centre of Victoria has web-based resources for children and young people affected by family and domestic violence. <http://www.dvrcv.org.au/help-advice/children>
- Child and Family Services Ballarat has a children's group as part of its Family Violence Prevention Programs. <http://www.cafs.org.au/programs-and-services/family-violence-intervention-program>
- The Tasmanian Family Violence Counselling and Support Service (FVCSS) offers individual and group counselling for children affected by family and domestic violence. This is part of part of its *Safe at Home* initiative, a Tasmanian Whole of Government response to family violence. [http://www.dhhs.tas.gov.au/children/family\\_violence\\_counselling\\_and\\_support\\_services](http://www.dhhs.tas.gov.au/children/family_violence_counselling_and_support_services)
- The Salvation Army in Tasmania's initiative Safe from the Start developed a training program and therapeutic resource kit to assist children aged 0-5 affected by family violence. <https://www.salvationarmy.org.au/Global/State%20pages/Tasmania/Safe%20from%20the%20start/Final%20Research%20Report%20reduced.pdf>
- *Through Young Black Eyes*, an initiative of SNAICC, the Secretariat of National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care, has developed family violence training workshops and resources. <http://www.snaicc.org.au/training/dsp-default.cfm?loadref=225>

- The Domestic Violence Prevention Centre of the Gold Coast has developed *SUPA Kids* in partnership with a local state school, which is a whole-of-school approach to family and domestic violence. <http://www.domesticviolence.com.au/pages/supa-kids-program.php>

### Grandparent and kinship carers

High levels of extended family support have been shown to have a beneficial effect on children's capacity to cope with family stress.<sup>6</sup> Grandparents and kinship carers play a crucial role in supporting children living in conflicted family situations, and often end up providing full-time care for children due to family break-up as a result of family and domestic violence.

Grandparent and kinship care is a growing trend in Australia. It is the fastest growing form of out-of-home care for children in all Australian jurisdictions. Key findings from a recent study of grandparents as primary carers of their grandchildren found that 2/3 of grandparent carers are severely financially disadvantaged, relying on a government benefit, pension or allowance as their main source of income.<sup>7</sup> The Australian Parliament Senate Standing Committee on Community Affairs conducted an Inquiry into *Grandparents who take primary responsibility for raising their grandchildren* in 2014. One of the common themes in the submissions to the inquiry was the extreme financial stress and insecurity experienced by many grandparent carers.<sup>8</sup> In order for grandparent and kinship carers to continue to play this important role of providing a safe and secure environment for children who have experienced family and domestic violence, it is critical that there are support services designed to meet their particular needs. Such supports include, but are not limited to:

- financial support for grandparent and kinship carers
- effective systems to disseminate information about the payments and services that are available to grandparent and kinship carers, including Grandparent Advisers in Centrelink Offices
- specialised counselling support to help with the often very conflicted family relationships which grandparent and kinship carers must negotiate.

### Marginalised groups

Family and domestic violence occurs in all sections of the Australian community; however, some children experience a greater risk of harm from family and domestic violence, related to their social marginalisation and isolation. These include Aboriginal and Torres Strait

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<sup>6</sup> Humphreys C 2007. *Domestic Violence and child protection: challenging directions for Practice*. Issues Paper 13. Sydney: Australian Domestic and Family Violence Clearinghouse.

<sup>7</sup> Brennan, D., Cass, B., Flaxman, S., Hill, T., Jenkins, B., McHugh, M., Purcal, C., & Valentine, K. 2014. *Grandparents Raising Grandchildren: Towards Recognition, Respect and Reward*. (SPRC Report 14/13). Social Policy Research Centre, University of New South Wales.

<sup>8</sup> Parliament of Australia, 2014. *Grandparents who take primary responsibility for raising their grandchildren*. [http://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary\\_Business/Committees/Senate/Community\\_Affairs/Grandparent\\_Carers](http://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Committees/Senate/Community_Affairs/Grandparent_Carers), sourced 5 June 2015.

Islander (ATSI) children, children from culturally and linguistic diverse (CALD) communities, children with disability, and children living in rural and remote communities.

In recent years there has been considerable attention and resources directed to family violence in ATSI communities, yet it remains the case that the impact of family and domestic violence is experienced by ATSI children disproportionately compared to non-Indigenous children in Australia. The rate of family and domestic violence victimisation among Indigenous Australians is four to six times higher than rates among non-Indigenous Australians.<sup>9</sup> An Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander child is around eight times more likely to be in the child protection system and eleven times more likely to be in out-of-home care than a non-Indigenous child.<sup>10</sup> Families Australia commends the Secretariat of National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care (SNAICC) for its work in the area of family and domestic violence and its impact on children, with the development of training resources such as *Through Young Black Eyes, A handbook to protect Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children from the impact of family violence and child abuse*.

Insufficient attention has been given to the needs of children from CALD communities who experience family and domestic violence. It is acknowledged that in contemporary Australia many CALD women and children experience social isolation, have little or no knowledge of support services and are disadvantaged in accessing services. The limited research available suggests a greater risk of family and domestic violence, and a higher risk of death of a mother from family and domestic violence in CALD communities. Women from CALD backgrounds are less likely to report family and domestic violence to police or access mainstream services. Mainstream approaches to family and domestic violence support often have an inadequate understanding of the complex intersection of such factors as culture, gender and previous trauma related to their refugee experience, and the impact this has on women and children experiencing family and domestic violence. There is a need for deeper consideration to be given to how CALD children, especially refugees, and children of refugees, can most effectively be helped when they experience family and domestic violence. Families Australia commends the *CALD Safe from the Start* project of the Phoenix Centre in Hobart which has conducted research and developed training resources on the needs of CALD children who have experienced family and domestic violence.<sup>11</sup>

Australian governments have a number of national frameworks and strategies that include mention of children with disability. These include the National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children 2009-2020, the National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children 2010-2022, and the National Disability Strategy 2010-2020. While implementation of these frameworks/strategies is progressing, much more needs to be done

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<sup>9</sup> Australian Institute of Criminology, *Indigenous Justice*  
[http://www.aic.gov.au/crime\\_types/in\\_focus/indigenousjustice.html](http://www.aic.gov.au/crime_types/in_focus/indigenousjustice.html). Sourced 5 June 2015.

<sup>10</sup> Australian Institute of Family Studies, *Child Protection and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children*, 2014  
<https://aifs.gov.au/cfca/publications/child-protection-and-aboriginal-and-torres-strait-islander-children>. Sourced 5 June 2015.

<sup>11</sup> Spinney, Angela, 2014, *Everyone deserves to feel safe: the culturally and linguistically diverse Safe from the Start Project Final Report*.  
<https://www.salvationarmy.org.au/Global/State%20pages/Tasmania/Safe%20from%20the%20start/CALD%20Final%20report%20June%202014.pdf>. Sourced 5 June 2015.



to address the issues facing children with disabilities experiencing family and domestic violence. Such measures might include, for example: access to targeted respectful relationships programmes for children and adolescents with disability and their families, and training for professionals about how to identify and respond appropriately to children with disability experiencing family and domestic violence.

A literature review of studies of family and domestic violence in regional Australia in 2000 found that a greater proportion of people living in rural and remote communities are victims of family and domestic violence compared to those living in urban settings. Rates of domestic homicides are substantially higher in rural areas than urban.<sup>12</sup> It can reasonably be concluded then, that children living with violence in rural and remote Australia are a particularly at-risk group. Owing to geographic isolation, lack of public transport, financial disadvantage, and inaccessibility of support services, women and children in rural and remote locations find it more difficult to seek help and/or leave a violent household. The inadequacy of mental health and counselling services, especially for children, is a serious risk factor in regional Australia.

## **Question 5 What are the outcomes for children of a) public policy approaches and b) educational campaigns targeting family and domestic violence?**

### 5a) Public policy approaches

In our role as a peak body for organisations providing family support services, Families Australia receives feedback from the community sector about the impact of government policy on Australian families. Recent policy approaches identified as potentially detrimental to children living with violence include the following.

1. Mandatory reporting of child abuse and neglect, coupled with the inclusion of exposure to domestic violence as a form of child abuse

Policy and legislative approaches that mandate the reporting of children's exposure to domestic violence may discourage women from seeking help for fear of losing their children. This is particularly concerning for Indigenous women, given past government practices of child removal and the current over-representation of Indigenous children in out-of-home care.<sup>13</sup>

2. Presumption of shared parenting responsibility

One of the most significant factors in enabling the continuation of violence post-separation and increasing the risk of harm to children is the presumption of 'shared parenting' after

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<sup>12</sup> <http://wesnet.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2012/04/WESNET-Domestic-Violence-in-Regional-Australia-A-Literature-Review.pdf> *Domestic Violence in Regional Australia, A Literature Review* and [www.aph.gov.au/About\\_Parliament/Parliamentary\\_Departments/Parliamentary\\_Library/pubs/BN/2011-2012/DVAustralia#\\_Toc309798384](http://www.aph.gov.au/About_Parliament/Parliamentary_Departments/Parliamentary_Library/pubs/BN/2011-2012/DVAustralia#_Toc309798384). Sourced 5 June 2015.

<sup>13</sup> Australian Institute of Criminology, op. cit.

separation, and the culture that presumes that all children need contact with their fathers, and that fathers have a right to access to their children – *regardless of the history of family and domestic violence*. Amendments to the Family Law Act in 2011 addressed this issue by declaring that the presumption of shared parenting does not apply if there are reasonable grounds to believe that one parent has engaged in family and domestic violence. However, it appears that this presumption continues in practice, putting women and children at continued risk of violence. It is imperative that custody and parenting arrangements be made on the basis of the best interests of the child, determined on a case by case basis.

### 3. National family and domestic violence protection orders scheme

Families Australia endorses the Council of Australian Governments' commitment to introduce a national Domestic Violence Order (DVO) scheme. This is a measure with the potential to reduce the harm to children significantly. The initiative for the development of the national DVO scheme was announced in February 2011 and worked commenced early in 2012 with an initial implementation date of 2013. It is disappointing, therefore, that recent announcements by the Australian Government indicate that the scheme is not likely to be fully implemented before the end of 2016.<sup>14</sup> The implementation of this scheme must be made a greater priority for action. Every year in Australia, about 27 children are killed by their parent.<sup>15</sup> Many more children are left without a mother when in Australia women are killed by a partner or ex-partner at a rate of over one per week<sup>16</sup>.

### 4. Housing and Homelessness

The critical shortage of appropriate, affordable housing options is one of the greatest impediments to women, children and young people's ability to leave a violent home. In light of the critical dearth of housing options for women and children fleeing violence, it is worrying that recent policy decisions seem to be likely to exacerbate this situation. They include:

- The decision to end the National Rental Affordability Scheme, despite the government acknowledging the undersupply of affordable housing in Australia.
- The uncertainty about the long term future of programs funded under the National Partnership Agreement on Homelessness. Programs under this agreement provide crucial services for women and children escaping family and domestic violence.

It is of particular concern that what appears to be a move by the Federal Government to reduce or terminate its leadership role in social housing is occurring at a time when some State Governments are making major changes in their services for women escaping family and domestic violence, leading to actual and anticipated closure or reduced capacity of

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<sup>14</sup> Statement by Senator Michaelia Cash, Minister Assisting the Prime Minister for Women, 4 May, 2015. <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2015-05-04/national-dvo-scheme-may-not-be-completed-until-end-of-2016/6443070>, Sourced 5 June, 2015.

<sup>15</sup> Kirkwood D, 2012. *Just Say Goodbye: Parents who kill their children in the context of separation*. Discussion Paper #8 Melbourne: Domestic Violence Resource Centre. <http://www.dvrcv.org.au/knowledge-centre/our-publications/discussion-papers/just-say-goodbye>. Sourced 5 June 2015

<sup>16</sup> Australian Institute of Criminology, 2015, Domestic/Family Homicide in Australia. <http://www.aic.gov.au/publications/current%20series/rip/21-40/rip38.html>. Sourced 5 June 2015.

women's refuges. It is important that the Federal Government maintains a leadership role in social housing policy in order to maintain national principles, objectives and equity of access. This would assist in maximising the effectiveness of the bi-partisan support for implementation of the National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children 2009-2020, the National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children 2010-2022.

## 5. Income support

Policy decisions which present impediments to the ability to escape family and domestic violence and reduce harm to children include:

- The inadequacy of Newstart Allowance to provide a reasonable standard of living for a woman and her children who want to escape family and domestic violence
- Change in income support payments which moves single parents from Parenting Payment to the much lower Newstart Allowance
- Proposed changes in eligibility for Newstart and Youth Allowance which enforce waiting periods, and expect young people to re-locate to find employment, removing them from vital family and community support
- The inadequacy of the Transition to Independent Living Allowance (TILA) and support services for young people leaving out-of-home care, which may force them back into violent environments
- Compulsory income management, which leaves a woman with little or no capacity to save money needed to leave a violent environment

## 6. Legal assistance services

Access to timely, affordable legal assistance is perhaps the most crucial consideration in enabling women and children to leave a violent home or relationship and to re-establish a safe, stable environment for children. This is especially so in relation to negotiating child custody and parenting arrangements and in seeking protection from a violent parent/partner/ex-partner.

One of the six National Outcomes of the National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children 2010-2022 is "Justice responses are effective" in recognition that "the legal response remains inadequate for many women and their children". A key Strategy to achieve that outcome is to "enhance legal aid funding arrangements to ensure women and their children at risk of violence are a key priority".<sup>17</sup> While some recent Federal Government funding cuts to legal assistance services have been reversed, there is still a significant level of unmet need. Of particular concern is any reduction of culturally competent legal services given the vast over-representation of ATSI women and children among victims of family and domestic violence. As long as on-going government support for Community Legal Centres and other legal assistance services remains uncertain and there is inadequate access to legal assistance for women and children living with violence, it is unlikely that the outcomes

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<sup>17</sup> Australian Government, *National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children 2010-2022*, p.29, 30.

of the National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children 2010-2022 can be achieved.

All of the above policy decisions stand in contrast to the Priorities of the National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and Children and the Outcomes it has set out to achieve, and hence, work against the reduction of harm to children from the impact of family and domestic violence. Any policy approach that in any way inhibits a woman's capacity to leave a violent relationship thereby increases her children's risk of violence and/or exposure to violence, and is inherently harmful to children.

#### 5b) Public educational campaigns

In relation to public education campaigns targeting family and domestic violence, there is a need initially for responsible, respectful messaging which raises awareness of the wide array of serious long term effects on children of living in a violent environment. Then the campaign must move beyond awareness-raising to constructive action focusing on:

- 1) prevention of family and domestic violence, and
- 2) attention to the needs of children experiencing family and domestic violence.

This should include a public media campaign, and critically, the delivery of community-based educational programs. These educational programs must be designed to:

- 1) influence the attitudes and behaviour of men and boys in relation to gendered violence, and
- 2) inform professionals and the general community about how to identify and respond appropriately to children living with family and domestic violence.

It is particularly important that this be culturally appropriate for people coming in contact with ATSI and CALD children and families. It is crucial that public education campaigns communicate a consistent prevention message, informed by research-based evidence. The public health model of primary prevention provides many examples of successful community education campaigns.

#### **Question 6 What are the surveillance and data gaps/needs in relation to children affected by family and domestic violence?**

Australia currently has inadequate national data about the incidence and response to family and domestic violence where children are involved.<sup>18</sup> In order to develop more effective evidence-based practice in this area, there is a need for data to determine the incidence, reporting, and access to services by children experiencing family and domestic violence,

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<sup>18</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2013, *Defining the data challenge for family, domestic and sexual violence: Summary*. 2013. <http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/Lookup/4529.0.00.001main+features42013>. Sourced 5 June 2015.

particularly by the marginalised groups of: ATSI children, CALD children, children with disability, and children in rural and remote locations.

Australian research related to the impact on children of exposure to family and domestic violence, and effective interventions, is limited. There is a need for further research that:

- examines the support needs of children, young people and extended family members, especially grandparents, in relation to family and domestic violence
- evaluates the effectiveness of intervention strategies addressing the needs of children and adolescents exposed to family and domestic violence
- targets the support needs of: 1) children from CALD backgrounds, 2) children from ATSI backgrounds, 3) children with disability, and 4) children from rural and remote Australia, who have experienced family and domestic violence
- allows the voices of children and adolescents to be heard in relation to their experience of family and domestic violence and interventions

Additionally, there is a need for the development of nationally consistent practice standards for working with children affected by family and domestic violence. Such a standard exists for women affected by family and domestic violence, but none for children despite the unique impact of family and domestic violence on children.

## **Conclusion**

Family and domestic violence occurs in all sections of Australian society, results from a complex mix of interrelated underlying factors, and its harmful impact on children is a serious national issue. Simply addressing the violent behaviour, or the need to escape it, will not be effective in the long term in eliminating the harm done to children through family and domestic violence. Integrated responses are necessary from service systems across the range of contributing factors. Addressing the impact of family and domestic violence on children in Australia requires both short and long term attention, with adequate funding to support services, and a consistent national policy approach in relation to the many policy areas involved, and with an agreed strategic approach that includes the needs of children as a priority.

The community looks to the Federal Government to play a leading catalytic and coordinating role in this important area of social policy. With continued strong national Government leadership, the state/territory jurisdictions working with the community service and research sectors can:

- help communities gain greater awareness about the impact of family and domestic violence on children, and develop appropriate local responses,
- build an effective, integrated service system which pays greater attention to the needs of children,
- implement innovative practices where the voices of children are heard, respected, and responded to, and
- continue to build the evidence base about what works and what doesn't in preventing and responding to the harm caused to children through family and domestic violence.