

ANROWS

AUSTRALIA'S NATIONAL RESEARCH
ORGANISATION FOR WOMEN'S SAFETY
to Reduce Violence against Women & their Children



Time for renewed national commitment to action

ANROWS Inaugural National Research Conference 2016

Emeritus Professor Anne R. Edwards AO | 23 February 2016

Abstract

This conference is taking place at the half-way point of Australia's twelve-year National Plan to reduce violence against women and their children. The first two action plans take us from 2010 to 2016 and we anticipate the third action plan to be finalised by mid-year. It was only towards the end of the first action plan in 2013 that the National Centre of Excellence to reduce violence against women and their children, which became ANROWS in 2014, was created.

The impetus for a comprehensive multi-jurisdictional approach to tackling the violence against women largely perpetrated by men, came, as we all know, from the National Council established in 2008 by the then Labor Federal government and which produced in March 2009 its major report under the title of Time for Action. This led to a National Plan supported by all governments announced in February 2011 with an Implementation Plan for the first three-year action plan, in September 2012 followed by a second action plan launched in July 2014. This national plan was explicitly linked to other relevant national reform agendas coming under the Council of Australian Governments (COAG), initially child protection, homelessness, and Closing the Gap, and later the National Indigenous Law and Justice Framework and the National Disability Strategy.

This brief history sets the context for this presentation and hence my choice of title. I propose to focus on the period since Australian governments accepted the main recommendations of the Time for Action report, look at some of the principal areas of activity including for obvious reasons research activity by a variety of agencies, identify some trends and gaps in what has been done to date, and provide the basis for us to examine the research that is to be reported at this conference and how to ensure that it contributes to future policy and practice.

Taking a relatively recent starting point does not mean disregarding a much longer history of attempts to tackle violence against women. I personally, like many of you, have been associated in various ways for many years with feminist, women's and other community organisations committed to bringing domestic and family violence and rape and sexual assault to public and political attention and to gaining legislative reforms, better services and wider community support for those subjected to such violence. There would not have been a National Plan had it not been for the efforts of those who have worked in this field since at least the 1970s.

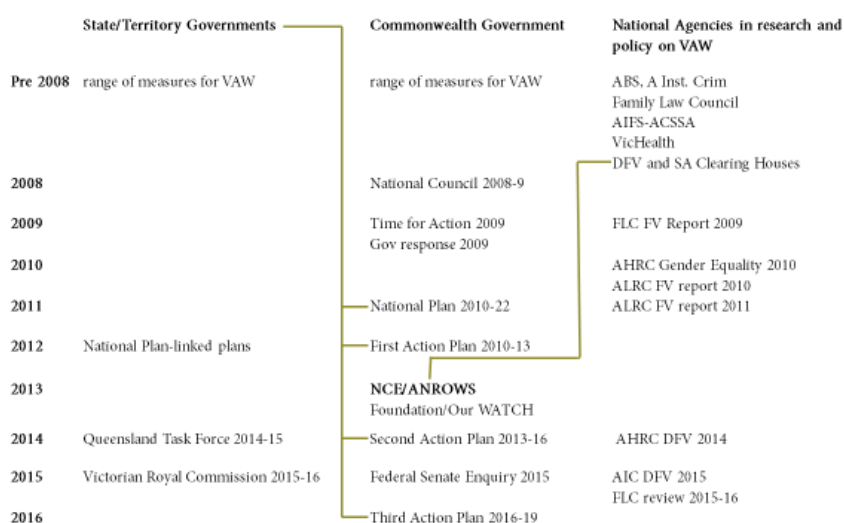
Having the National Plan has required governments to give greater consideration to how they are addressing violence against women, to allocate greater resources and to investigate mechanisms for more effective inter-agency collaboration. This puts extra pressure on them to assure themselves that this greater effort and expenditure is delivering or potentially will deliver the results they seek. This is why Time for Action and the National Plan puts such an emphasis on research and evaluation and why we have ANROWS.

The momentum has continued to build since the commencement of this national initiative. ANROWS and Our WATCH are now active players with specific roles in this sphere in addition to those already in existence like Vic Health and White Ribbon Australia. States and Territories all have their own plans in addition to being integral to the collective effort towards achieving agreed actions in each of the action plans to deliver the six outcomes of the National Plan. As well as the Australian Senate's Finance and Public Administration Reference Committee enquiry into Domestic Violence which reported in 2015, several states have also undertaken separate and extensive investigations in their own jurisdictions, among these are: in Queensland a Special Task Force on Domestic and Family Violence which presented its report Not Now Not Ever to the Queensland Government in February 2015; Victoria's Royal Commission into Family Violence is due to report in March this year; and the South Australian Parliament's Social Development Committee has a current enquiry on Domestic and Family Violence.

Certain other national organisations also add to the body of work being produced some at the direct instigation of the federal government and linked to the National Plan. Public agencies such as the Australian Human Rights Commission, the Australian Law Reform Commission and the Family Law Council have undertaken and/or are currently undertaking specific pieces of work that address matters related to domestic, family or sexual violence that fall within their scope, a major report from the Family Law Council is due mid-2016. Two more of the many

examples of this work are research collaborations involving social science researchers at the University of NSW; one, the Stop the Violence Project in 2013 undertaken in conjunction with two organisations representing people with disability supported by the Commonwealth Government and with the assistance of Liz Broderick from the AHRC; and another, the ‘Safe at home, Safe at Work’ project also funded by the Commonwealth, supported as a workplace and discrimination issue by the AHRC, which has resulted in changes to legislation and workplace conditions.

Various research institutes including the Australian Institute of Family Studies and the Australian Institute of Criminology, and university researchers operating independently of designated research funding channels like ANROWS, prior to the national plan and subsequently, have chosen to conduct projects on topics ranging across the spectrum of incidence, impact and intervention with respect to violence against women. In 2014 the valuable clearing-house functions previously provided by the Australian Centre for the Study of Sexual Assault (part of AIFS) and by the Australian Domestic and Family Violence Clearing House at UNSW transitioned to ANROWS. I have attempted to capture the diversity and complexity of this extensive array of activities in a visual form, it is necessarily selective and cannot include everything.



In 2015 violence against women, particularly in the form of domestic and family violence, attained a level of prominence never previously seen in Australia and, largely due to the Australian of the Year Rosie Batty, it retained high visibility and strong public sympathy for the whole year. One manifestation is that the media reporting is increasingly taking the form of serious treatment of this phenomenon looking at social causes and social remedies including cultural change, rather than simply sensationalising individual tragic incidents and their perpetrators.

We have seen a massive increase in quantity and quality of activity across the full range of investigation and critical assessment of needs, and the appropriateness and efficacy of measures to address those needs; the delivery of services and programs, policy analysis and development; how the inter-organisational structures and systems that exist in the different jurisdictions as well as nationally are operating, and what improvements should be made. It is essential that the process of deciding what needs to be done and how to get the results we want is informed by systematic knowledge and analysis of the nature of the phenomena we are experiencing in Australia and what we are currently relying on to deal with this major national problem.

This is why ANROWS was created and why an ambitious National Research Agenda has been developed from which a range of specific initial projects was agreed and commenced in late 2014. This conference provides the opportunity for reports on all these projects to be presented to an audience drawn from all those who work in one way or another to advance the objectives of the National Plan. Even more important is the opportunity to share ideas about where the research might lead for policy and practice and to open up channels of communication between government policy makers and funders, service providers, practitioners, and advocacy groups that can result in substantial improvements and innovations across our systems.

Time for Action and the National Plan – a closer look

As we know, the National Plan was crafted from Time for Action, the blueprint constructed by the National Council who had been given the task in 2008 by the Federal Labor Government “to draft a national plan to reduce violence against women and their children”. The National Council, with Libby Lloyd as the Chair and Heather Nancarrow as the Deputy Chair and other members, including ANROWS Board director Dr Melanie Heenan, who are present at this conference, drew on extensive consultations, systematic evidence gathering that they commissioned, rigorous analysis and deliberation, and they delivered their report in April 2009 along with several substantial supporting volumes in just under one year, an extraordinary effort. The Commonwealth Government immediately issued an initial response indicating some immediate actions under each of the proposed six outcome areas, two of which are worth noting here under Outcome One, Communities that are safe and free from violence, one immediate action was a funding allocation for primary prevention and the other was the setting up of the National Centre of Excellence. Negotiations with all the other jurisdictions then followed and in due course (actually close to two years later) in February 2011 the full National Plan was published and subsequently in September 2012 the Implementation Plan for the First Action Plan.

While the broad vision, scope and overall structure were retained, some aspects were further developed; one being, for example, elaboration of measures in both the First and Second Action Plans directed at perpetrators; and another, the increased emphasis on the different experiences, circumstances and needs of certain sub-populations, with specific attention

devoted in the Second Action Plan under priority two to three categories in particular, those from CALD backgrounds, and those with disability as well as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities (already identified under Outcome 3). The twelve-year time frame 2010-2022 remained, although slippage had occurred (two of the first three years having already passed) the dates were not changed. There were some changes that are worth noting here.

In the 2011 National Plan and the 2012 Implementation Plan for the First action Plan, the six outcomes were changed from those in Time for Action. Although there were still six outcomes for the National Plan, one had gone – systems working together effectively – and a new one inserted – Indigenous communities strengthened. The need for system integration became instead one of four so-called “foundations for change” that would underpin all four phases of the Plan. One other outcome relating to the legal and justice systems was modified by changing the terminology: responses were to be “effective” rather than “just” as previously. In Time for Action, “Building the evidence base” (which included establishing a NCE) was a key component of Outcome One (Communities are safe and free from violence) but in the 2011 National Plan it had been moved to become one of the four “foundations for change” and the emphasis on prevention in Outcome One was enhanced.

To remind ourselves of the basic architecture of the National Plan as outlined in 2011:

The six outcomes are:

- Communities are safe and free from violence
- Relationships are respectful
- Indigenous communities are strengthened
- Services meet the needs of women and their children experiencing violence
- Justice responses are effective
- Perpetrators stop their violence and are held to account

The four foundations for change are:

- Strengthen the workforce
- Integrate systems and share information
- Improve the evidence base
- Track performance

The four action plans seen as a progression:

- The first 2010-2013 Building a strong foundation
- The second 2013-2016 Moving ahead
- The third 2016-2019 Promising results
- The fourth 2019-2022 Turning the corner

The First Action Plan set itself four national priorities and nominated 17 Actions. Building the evidence base is given prominence as one of the priorities in both the first and the second action plans. In the 2012 National Implementation Plan for the First Action Plan, the NCE, after disappearing altogether in the 2011 version of the Plan (despite references in various places to research), had its role described as being a major contributor to building this strong evidence base, now elevated to being also one of the four national priorities for this First Action Plan. The NCE was to achieve this through:

“...leadership of national efforts to enhance the research base”, through a “focus on translating evidence into information to support ongoing improvements in the work of practitioners” and through “helping inform policy development and service delivery responses” (2012 p.5)

In the Second Action Plan with five national priorities and 26 actions, specific references are made to how the National Research Agenda and work undertaken by ANROWS will contribute to actions across four of the five priority areas, and not only the one which deals with the continuing need to build an evidence base. ANROWS’ own initial three year Strategic Plan, approved in 2014, sets four main goals:

- to deliver high quality, innovative and relevant research;
- to ensure the effective dissemination and utilisation of research findings;
- to build, maintain and promote collaborative relationships with and between stakeholders; and
- to be an efficient, effective and accountable organisation.

If we look back at the development of the National Plan and at the two action plans to date, there are certain underlying elements that give coherence and continuity to this ambitious endeavour but there are also challenges, unresolved issues and alternative ways forward that face us as we move into the third and fourth phases. Hence my choice of title for this address “Time for Renewed National Commitment to Action”.

Key components

- The focus is on violence against women primarily, also including their children, with the specification that it is gender-based violence in the forms of domestic and family violence and sexual assault involving physical, psychological, emotional and sexual dimensions, noting the scope covers sexual assault as well as domestic and family violence.
- Violence involves perpetrators as well as victims/survivors and potential victims, and strategies must be targeted at both victims and perpetrators.
- The objective is described in the title as the reduction of such violence but other terms “prevention” or “elimination” are also used – prevention is probably the more

useful generic term as it encompasses the diversity of strategies represented by the technical distinction between primary, secondary and tertiary prevention. Reduction and elimination describe an outcome but not how to get there.

- “National” is a critically important descriptor and defining characteristic of the plan but can carry different meanings and implications. National in the most basic sense means something that applies to the whole country and therefore presumably there will be structures or mechanisms in place across all parts of the country that can provide uniform, standardised conditions and processes. This could be achieved through creating a huge single system but more realistically through effective integration of multiple agencies and institutions. In either case in a federal system like ours, it necessarily requires all governments to agree to common strategies and a collaborative mode of operation.
- The scope of the Plan is comprehensive, extending across systems, agencies, services, and programs in all jurisdictions, and including public, private and community sectors.
- The recognition that causes and consequences of violence and therefore appropriate responses may vary in different population groups and cultures, particularly this applies to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples but also to others.
- The Plan was conceived from the outset as having a twelve-year duration and being cumulative, divided into four separate phases each with specific priorities and some degree of flexibility, but all directed towards the same broad objectives.
- A commitment to evidence as providing a critical underpinning of the whole plan, serving both as the basis for regular monitoring and evaluation of overall progress; and as a key source of information to guide innovation and implementation across the range of the structures, policies, programs and services that are needed to deliver the desired results. Associated with this commitment is support for a dedicated research organisation.

Some challenging aspects

- The strength of the plan is that it is national and has secured the ongoing engagement of all governments and major political parties for the duration of the plan, but political and financial circumstances, state and local priorities, community pressures, and the visibility of and public reaction to different social problems are constantly changing.
- The value of having the grand plan and the longer-term perspective can get lost in the everyday world of media and politics with the appeal of the new, the now and a quick fix.
- Addressing such a multi-dimensional problem as violence against women requires the involvement of a number of major structures and systems – these include law

and justice, housing, community services, income security, children's services, health, employment, and others in the non-government sector. Each has its own bureaucracy, capabilities, accountabilities and preoccupations, and these pose formidable obstacles to achieving the continuing levels of coordination and collaboration necessary to deliver a set of ambitious national objectives over time.

- There is also the difficulty of obtaining and maintaining successful collaboration across all governments while each government also pursues its own comprehensive strategy to achieve its own objectives (assisted at times by a state-based enquiry into how best to do so), and which, necessarily, means actively engaging for planning and implementation purposes with those in the non-government and community sectors in their respective jurisdictions.
- A need to balance strategies that are directed at all parts of Australia and all sections of society with approaches that address the diversity of situations and needs of different population groups by devising and utilising different measures.
- Making a commitment in a plan to having and using evidence in policy and practice does not of itself ensure that this happens. Research refers to the processes of gathering, analysing and interpreting data to answer questions and evidence refers to the products of such processes. Interesting though open-ended information-seeking can be, more useful is research designed to answer questions about what is currently happening, and which includes also critical analysis and evaluation. From this is derived evidence that enables us to offer advice on how things could be done differently and better. All those who are part of this national plan need to share a common understanding of what is meant by evidence, how evidence is to be used to improve the choices made about approaches, policy directions, planning and delivery of services, and how evidence is to be built into the monitoring and evaluation of their effectiveness.
- An additional complexity is that evidence is coming from many different sources. The high degree of public concern about violence against women and indeed the national plan itself have given rise to an increase in the volume of large-scale investigations and data collection and analysis exercises. States and territories are running their own enquiries (often with a similar broad scope to the national plan), national agencies are being tasked with special references, (the Family Law Council's current review of family law, child protection and family violence being just one example), and many agencies and research institutions are responding by undertaking their own investigations on particular topics and issues relating to violence against women.

The last two of these are of most relevance for ANROWS and for us here.

Although many agencies will play a part in this, ANROWS has been set up with the specific function of providing the evidence that relates directly to the actions and desired outcomes of the National Plan.

The National Research Agenda that was published in 2014 describes four broad areas in which research needs to be conducted so that relevant information is available to assist the implementation of the plan; these four strategic research themes that are linked to the six outcomes of the plan are: experience and impacts; gender inequality and primary prevention; service responses and interventions; and systems. I am sure you are all familiar with the 20 projects that comprise ANROWS first Research Program 2014-2016 based on the NRA. Separately the Commonwealth is funding a perpetrator research stream, a priority in the Second Action Plan being to improve quality, quantity, access and effectiveness of perpetrator intervention programs. Some of the projects in the Research Program are deliberately designed to address the particular circumstances of specific sub-populations, with several involving Indigenous communities. This corpus of research work is the subject of this conference.

In the NRA document also it was acknowledged that evidence may be produced through a variety of methodological approaches and research tools, and the choice of the most appropriate would depend on the topic and purpose of the research.

A further fundamental point is that gathering information is of limited value without mechanisms for dissemination, translation, adoption and application. Knowledge needs to be put to use. When ANROWS formulated its Research Program, a fifth strategic research theme of Research Translation and Evaluation was added which captures this critical dimension and a review of the literature has already been published.

This is a very complex and relatively new subject but one that ANROWS has recognized as fundamental to its whole research endeavour. This is reflected in our operating model and organisational structure, which have three components (as you can see represented in our banner): knowledge production; knowledge translation and exchange; and leadership. Our Chief Executive Officer Heather Nancarrow will say more about this in her presentation. Here is the list of ANROWS strategic research themes and the topics that sit under them.

1. Experience and Impacts
 - prevalence and incidence of violence against women
 - disclosure and reporting
 - context, vulnerabilities and risk
 - co-occurrence and victimisation
 - experiences, effects and impacts

2. Gender Inequality and Primary Prevention
 - gendered nature of violence
 - social determinants of violence
 - design, evaluation and monitoring of primary prevention programs
3. Service Responses and Interventions
 - service responses to women and their children
 - characteristics of men who use violence
 - interventions targeting men who use violence
4. Systems
 - criminal justice and legal systems
 - pathways, intersections and integrated responses
 - government policy
5. Knowledge translation and evaluation

Finally, having reached the halfway stage of the National Plan, and as the third action plan is being developed, certain conclusions can be drawn from our experience to date and from my analysis, that have direct implications for ANROWS. I have selected three among the many confronting issues that we face at this time which, in my view, ANROWS will need to address: so that, building on our achievements, we can further strengthen our capacity to increase knowledge and the application of knowledge to assist those tackling this complex problem and so give maximum value to our funders and all those committed to ending violence against women.

The first is one that ANROWS is already well aware of and has strategies to tackle and this is how to integrate research into planning, policy, program and service design, and practice, so that it is not an optional and separate activity, conducted independently from the ongoing business of governments and those agencies dealing with domestic and family violence and sexual assault, but is embedded in all these processes. This has philosophical, methodological and practical aspects and has substantial political, organisational and financial requirements.

The second is responding adequately to the social, cultural, economic, locational and other demographic sources of diversity in the Australian population which have a powerful and interactive influence on the circumstances, experiences, exposure to risk, and consequences of domestic, family and sexual violence (diversity is a 2nd Action Plan priority). ANROWS has included within its principles of operation and its research priorities the critical importance of taking account of the unique history and culture of Indigenous Australians but progress in realising the full implications of such a commitment is slow. Our society contains a number of other population categories that also deserve recognition of their distinctive characteristics and

needs and the opportunity to participate in the development of policies and programs that affect them. This deserves more careful attention and more thorough consideration of the implications than it has received up to now.

The third may be less readily apparent to those engaged in putting the National Plan into effect but I think is emerging as a growing challenge and one that merits serious attention. As violence against women has gained prominence as a major public issue and attracted much increased attention and resources from all our governments, the inter-relationship has become more complicated between the National Plan's focuses of activity as the national plan, and the extensive range of activities now undertaken within each of the states and territories under their own now much more holistic plans for addressing violence against women and their children. How is it decided which initiatives are best pursued as part of the National Plan and which are regarded as more effectively managed by and within the states and territories? And how to ensure universal coverage and, where required, consistency, and what are the most appropriate mechanism of coordination and integration?

There are consequences for ANROWS as we seek to fulfill our obligations to our government funders collectively and individually and, with research projects in all states and territories, to be actively engaged with those working in each jurisdiction as well as with those responsible for the overall direction of the National Plan and each of the action plans. This conference we hope will shed light on these and other issues that we need to better understand and resolve for the future.