

ANROWS

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

Queensland Women's Strategy Consultation
Office for Women and Violence Prevention
Department of Justice and Attorney-General
GPO Box 149
BRISBANE QLD 4001
By email: women@qld.gov.au

Re: Consultation for a new Queensland Women's Strategy – Discussion paper

Dear Minister Fentiman

ANROWS thanks the Office for Women and Violence Prevention for the opportunity to respond to *Consultation for a new Queensland Women's Strategy – Discussion paper*.

ANROWS is an independent, not-for-profit company established as an initiative under Australia's *National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children 2010–2022* (the National Plan). Our primary function is to provide an accessible evidence base for developments in policy and practice design for prevention and response to violence against women, nationally. Every aspect of our work is motivated by the right of women and their children to live free from violence and in safe communities. We recognise, respect and respond to diversity among women and their children, and we are committed to reconciliation with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians.

Primary (core) funding for ANROWS is jointly provided by the Commonwealth and all state and territory governments of Australia. ANROWS is also, from time to time, directly commissioned to undertake work for an individual jurisdiction, and successfully tenders for research and evaluation work. ANROWS is registered as a harm prevention charity and deductible gift recipient, governed by the Australian Charities and Not-for-profit Commission (ACNC).

The submission provided below is focused on selected questions outlined in the discussion paper. It draws on evidence from rigorous peer-reviewed research, including relevant ANROWS-funded research. This submission is not confidential, however some information, clearly identified, is provided under embargo until the respective research reports are released on 11 October 2021 and 1 November 2021.

We would be very pleased to assist the Office for Women and Violence Prevention further, as required.

Yours sincerely



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Response to selected questions

What are the top three issues that need to be addressed to achieve gender equality in Queensland, and what are the most important actions to respond to?

A useful way to determine the key issues that need to be addressed to achieve gender equality in Queensland is to explore the key findings of the [2017 National Community Attitudes towards Violence against Women Survey](#) (NCAS). The NCAS is a national population survey that is conducted every four years to examine Australians' understanding of and attitudes towards violence against women, and what influences their understanding and attitudes, and to track progress in community knowledge and attitudes over time. It also gauges attitudes to gender equality and people's preparedness to intervene when witnessing violence or its precursors. The results of the 2017 NCAS were published in 2018 (Webster et al., 2018). The NCAS went into the field again this year, with a report due for publication at the end of 2022.

The 2017 NCAS findings show that the strongest predictor of attitudes condoning violence against women are attitudes rejecting gender equality. In particular, there is a need to address attitudes that deny gender inequality is a problem (Webster et al., 2018, p. 74). For example, half of those surveyed (50%) agreed that many women mistakenly interpret innocent remarks or acts as being sexist, and two in five (40%) respondents agreed that many women exaggerate the level of inequality women experience in Australia (Webster et al., 2018, p. 72).

The 2017 NCAS findings also indicate that many Australians do not support gender equality in their private lives, particularly attitudes that position men to be in control of the relationship (Webster et al., 2018, p. 68). These attitudes can have negative flow-on effects on women's independence and ability to participate in other aspects of public life. For example, the attitude that the "man of the house" has the final say in who works and who stays at home to take on a greater share of parenting can impact a woman's capacity to participate in the workforce, and therefore to be economically self-sufficient. Attitudes like these are important to address because women's economic dependence on men is a continuing barrier to women seeking safety from violence (Meyer, 2012 as cited in Webster et al., 2018, p. 68). In heterosexual intimate relationships, attitudes that normalise male control of decision-making and limit women's independence can also normalise controlling behaviours, making it difficult for individuals to recognise when men's control over decision-making might constitute abuse (Webster et al., 2018, p. 69).

The 2017 NCAS also revealed that there was room for improvement in attitudes that reject women's independence and decision-making in public life, in addressing rigid gender roles and stereotypes, and in rejecting male peer relations involving aggression and disrespect towards women.

The strong link between problematic attitudes towards gender equality and attitudes condoning violence against women in the 2017 NCAS results demonstrates the importance of addressing these attitudes towards gender equality by strengthening prevention policy and practice design.

The 2017 NCAS findings also highlight the need for responses to gender equality to have an intersectional approach, including a whole-of-community response to strengthening Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. The findings show that there is a need for targeting:

- men and boys, noting the gender differences found in this sample – men are also the majority perpetrators of violence and certain male peer group cultures have been implicated (DeKeseredy

& Schwartz, 2013). Importantly, the majority of men do not perpetrate violence and are potential allies in violence prevention

- Elders, who play important leadership roles in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities
- people with a low level of education
- people living in outer regional and remote areas (Cripps et al., 2019).

Although the NCAS results presented above refer to the general Australian population, these findings are likely applicable to Queensland given that there were no significant differences between Queensland and the national population in *overall* attitudes towards gender equality and violence against women (Webster et al., 2018, p. 132).

In summary, the 2017 NCAS findings offer insights into the three main areas that need to be addressed to achieve gender equality in Queensland:

- overcoming attitudes denying gender inequality is a problem
- overcoming attitudes undermining women's independence and decision-making, particularly in private life
- ensuring any response to address gender equality applies an intersectional approach.

Recommendation 1

Implement a new Queensland Women's Strategy focused on improving community attitudes around gender equality including:

- overcoming attitudes denying gender inequality is a problem
- overcoming attitudes undermining women's independence and decision-making, particularly in private life
- ensuring any response to address gender equality applies an intersectional approach.

Recommendation 2

Fund further research, particularly qualitative research, to better understand attitudes in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and why they are changing. Funding for research in regional and remote communities is especially required in the Queensland setting, given that the NCAS findings demonstrate the need to carefully tailor research approaches when conducting research in remote communities.

What learnings from the COVID-19 pandemic are critical to inform a new Queensland Women's Strategy?

The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the gendered impact the pandemic has had on women's lives, including exacerbating already existing gender inequality, financial insecurity and the risk of violence against women (WGEA, 2021). International and national research conducted during the onset of the pandemic shows that increased time spent on caring responsibilities can heighten feelings of stress and limit women's economic opportunities (AIHW, 2021; Harvard Business Review, 2020). An Australian study found that along with more time spent at home due to social distancing measures, financial hardship is also placing women at risk of domestic violence (Morgan & Boxall, 2020).

In forthcoming ANROWS research, under embargo until 11 October 2021, 10,000 women living in Australia were asked about their experiences of intimate partner violence (IPV) during the first 12 months of the pandemic. The report found that women experienced a range of physical and non-physical

forms of abuse, often in combination. The research also indicates that a significant proportion of women experienced first-time and escalating violence, and many women attributed these changes to factors associated with the pandemic (Boxall & Morgan, in press, p. 47).

The findings highlight the diverse experiences of violence among women, in terms of the types of abuse experienced, but also in terms of whether violence had stayed the same, started for the first time, increased or decreased during the pandemic. Where there were reports of decreases in violence, the researchers suggested that this could not be attributed to relationship breakdown alone; rather, other factors – including those influenced by the COVID-19 pandemic and responses to it – may be contributing to these decreases. Alternatively, the decreases could also be attributable in part to violent and abusive behaviours being “masked” by the COVID-19 pandemic, with perpetrators controlling their partners’ movements and behaviours under the guise of concern for the health and wellbeing of their partners (Usher et al., 2020 as cited in Boxall & Morgan, in press, p. 45). These diverse experiences of violence reinforce that the support needs of many women who experience IPV during the pandemic (and more generally) are likely to be complex, and that the impacts of this violence will extend beyond the pandemic period (Boxall & Morgan, in press, p. 44).

One of the types of abuse captured in the study is technology-facilitated abuse, with the findings – that a large proportion of women had experienced this kind of abuse perpetrated by their current or most recent partner in the last 12 months – highlighting the need to support women to protect themselves in online environments (Boxall & Morgan, in press, p. 44).

The study also shows the impact of the pandemic for women experiencing IPV on seeking assistance, with many who wanted to seek help unable to due to safety concerns, leaving a significant proportion without access to formal support services. These findings highlight the need for ongoing proactive outreach programs to support women to engage with support services during periods of high risk in the pandemic (Boxall & Morgan, in press, p. 46).

Finally, the study noted that conditions associated with the pandemic, and particularly more time spent at home, may increase the likelihood of children witnessing IPV and also becoming targets of family violence. The researchers suggest that responses to the pandemic should focus on the safety of women as well as children (Boxall & Morgan, in press, p. 47).

In addition to the above research, ANROWS is partnering with the University of Melbourne on the [DAHLIA-19](#) project, “Domestic abuse: Harnessing learning internationally under COVID-19”. This is an international research study funded by the UKRI’s Economic and Social Research Council. The study explores domestic and family violence (DFV) service and system responses during the pandemic, across four countries (Australia, the United Kingdom, Ireland and South Africa), that react to the increased risks of experiencing DFV; it also examines the impact of emerging policy and practice initiatives to address these risks.

The Australian in-country report, [under embargo until 1 November 2021](#), examines policy and practice responses to DFV in Australia during the pandemic. The Australian report assesses initiatives through in-depth interviews with 10 experts from relevant policy and practice sectors and a rapid review of 32 documents. The international study’s aim is to inform approaches to inform policy and practice that can be used to build strategies for recovery, any further lockdowns and the longer term future of DFV services (McKibbin et al., in press).

The Australian report made a number of recommendations including shifting to a hybrid model of online and face-to-face services; maintaining the high level of collaboration between government, service providers and peak bodies; and the continuation of untied funding models with pared-back bureaucratic processes to allow for flexible responses to DFV during the pandemic. These recommendations are drawn from the lessons learned from policing and court responses across the country during the pandemic. For example, Queensland Police Service introduced online reporting for women and initiatives which proactively targeted respondents with multiple domestic violence orders against them (McKibbin et al., in press, pp. 23, 35). In addition, the pivot to online for courts including the Magistrates' Court of Queensland meant that victims and survivors were able to be present for a hearing remotely and provide evidence via telephone (McKibbin et al., in press, p. 20).

The report also highlighted the need for further funding for the diverse needs of marginalised groups and further research into the impact of COVID-19 on marginalised groups. The Queensland Government should be commended for its approach involving multiagency collaboration and the design of services to specifically target the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and women from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds during the pandemic. However, the research noted that funding could have been increased for community-controlled services to work with marginalised groups (McKibbin et al., in press, pp. 30).

Through ANROWS's work on various interagency meetings, we can anecdotally report that the pandemic has provided some opportunities for online engagement for specialist services. [WorkUP Queensland](#) (WorkUP) is a partnership between the Healing Foundation and ANROWS, funded through the Queensland Office for Women and Violence Prevention. The service was created in May 2019 to provide workforce capacity- and capability-building support to services funded by the Office for Women (this includes specialist sexual violence, women's health, and domestic and family violence services).

Throughout this pandemic, WorkUP has had the capacity to pivot online as it is well resourced and located in a capital city with access to strong internet connections. WorkUP has observed a positive shift in attitudes from practitioners and leaders in the sector who were previously either reluctant about or actively against utilising technology for purposes such as professional development. Some of the benefits of this pivot to online capacity- and capability-building include enabling people from regional and remote areas of Queensland to access short sessions easily and cheaply, which has meant that certain content has been more widely available. Additionally, bringing people together from across the state has increased the likelihood of networking and building relationships across the sector which would not have otherwise been possible. However, WorkUP has also observed the difficulties that some services have experienced, with poor internet coverage or limited IT skills and support reinforcing existing disadvantages between urban, regional and remote services.

Recommendation 3

Fund programs that respond to the complex and diverse needs of women experiencing IPV during the COVID-19 pandemic, and that take into account that the impacts of this violence will extend beyond the pandemic period. These programs should include initiatives that support women to protect themselves online, and those that enable women to access support services during periods of high risk in the pandemic and beyond.

Recommendation 4

Fund further research and programs that focus on the safety of women experiencing IPV as well as children who are victims and survivors of domestic and family violence during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Recommendation 5

Maintain the high level of collaboration between the Queensland Government, service providers and peak bodies, and extend untied funding models to allow for flexible responses to DFV in future phases of the COVID-19 pandemic (including the recovery phase).

Recommendation 6

Fund further research into the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on marginalised groups, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and women from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, and fund programs that meet the diverse needs of these groups.

What do you think would be the most positive difference a new Queensland Women's Strategy could make for women, girls and gender equality in Queensland?

As highlighted above, ANROWS is uniquely placed to provide information and recommendations on attitudes towards gender equality through its implementation of the NCAS. The NCAS is a key mechanism for monitoring progress against the National Plan, and hence a key means of informing policies and programs to prevent violence and to improve gender equality. The Queensland Government can fund Queensland-specific research projects and ANROWS can then support the Queensland Government to evaluate the long-term impact that the new Queensland Women's Strategy could have for women, girls and gender equality.

WorkUP is also uniquely placed to provide evidence-based implementation projects for women and girls in Queensland. WorkUP is currently funded by the Queensland Government until 2024. Providing funding past 2024 will enable WorkUP to continue to invest in evidence-based implementation projects, and consequently to continue to support specialist services across Queensland to reduce and prevent violence against women and improve gender equality.

Recommendation 7

Central to monitoring the success and impact of the new Queensland Women's Strategy, is specific research to understand the impact of the new Queensland Women's Strategy, and any proceeding strategy, to enable continued improvement in policy and programs aiming to improve gender equality. It is recommended that the Queensland Government consider funding this research.

Recommendation 8

Fund WorkUp Queensland beyond 2024 so that it can continue to invest in evidence-based implementation projects to continue to support the Queensland specialist services across the sexual violence, DFV, and women's health and wellbeing sectors to reduce violence against women and improve gender equality.

What do you consider to be the key role of the Queensland Government in addressing the needs of women and girls and driving gender equality?

The Queensland Government has a key role to play in supporting all parts of the sector to work together to address the needs of women and girls, improving gender equality, and preventing and reducing domestic violence. ANROWS research consistently highlights the need for a whole-of-system response to the complex needs of victims and survivors, and for improving gender equality more generally, with area-specific recommendations outlined in more detail in [Working across sectors to meet the needs of clients experiencing domestic and family violence](#) (ANROWS, 2020).

The evidence shows that integrated approaches are efficient and cost-effective ways to respond to victims and survivors with complex needs. However, successful specialist responses will require further investment to provide infrastructure, expertise, pathways and practices, as well as to develop workforce capability and capacity at the local level (Wendt et al., 2017 as cited in ANROWS, 2020). Support to overcome the challenges of integration and the barriers to collaboration is also recommended in the research and would represent an investment in service systems' capacity and capability.

Research shows that integration can be achieved through effective cross-sector collaboration, by enabling the development of programs and policies that are guided by evidence. These can include training, coaching and implementation resources that support collaboration based on key principles and resources emerging from the literature (ANROWS, 2020).

Research has also shown that achieving gender equality is significant in reducing the incidence of coercive control, and more importantly that achieving gender equality in the absence of racial equality is unlikely to have a significant impact on rates of violence, for example those experienced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women, or improve gender equality (Nancarrow, 2019). This suggests the need for extensive cross-sector consultation with diverse groups of women and the service providers they engage with to create any meaningful systemic change and achieve gender equality.

Case study: WorkUP and Gympie Community Action

The Queensland Government has a strong record supporting the implementation of research evidence into practice (for example, the Safe & Together™ Model) and should continue to develop the capacity of community services to do this work. WorkUP Queensland has observed that services that have been involved in previous projects build implementation skills that can be leveraged in future projects. Staff at Community Action Gympie, as a result of their strong involvement in the rollout of the Safe & Together Model, were well prepared to further enhance their practice and improve outcomes for clients when they applied to host a practice studio. During this process they found that the social entrapment framework built on the learnings they had gained with the implementation of the Safe & Together Model, and this greatly contributed to their success. With the support of funding provided through WorkUP Queensland, Community Action Gympie was able to overcome barriers such as ensuring sufficient staff hours to cover both service delivery and evidence implementation. Resources and tools, as well as a full implementation report emerging from this project will, be made publicly available early 2022.

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The Queensland Government plays a coordinating role that facilitates cross-sector collaboration and funds resources and ongoing training developed out of evidence-based literature.

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