

24 February 2022

Department of Social Services
71 Athllon Drive
Greenway ACT 2900

Via email: nationalplanfeedback@dss.gov.au

To whom it may concern:

Re: Draft National Plan to End Violence against Women and Children 2022-2032

The Royal Australian College of General Practitioners (RACGP) strongly supports the commitment of the National Plan to elicit ongoing change and cooperation across different sectors to end violence against women and children. We provide the following comments on the Plan.

The role of GPs

Australians visit their general practitioner (GP) more than any other health professional¹. This provides opportunities for GPs to provide comprehensive and coordinated care and build trusting long-term supportive relationships with their patients. As such, GPs are well placed to play a central role in all the pillars of the Plan, in early intervention and managing those affected by all forms of abuse and violence. Current survivors disclose to GPs more than to any other professional group, even more than to the police.²

The Plan supports the capacity building of the police, justice system, educators, and other frontline services to identify diverse forms and experiences of violence, and provide appropriate responses; but it does not explicitly include the role of GPs. Without a key focus on GPs many families will not be reached at an early intervention stage.

GPs are key in this process as they play a central role in the healthcare system and are often the only health professional seeing both the victim-survivor, the perpetrator, and their children. Increased support for general practice, through ongoing education and peer support groups, will greatly assist GPs to identify and safely work with victims, children, and perpetrators as well as work with other domestic violence services.

The RACGP's [Abuse and violence - Working with our patients in general practice](#) (White Book) guideline for GPs offers a set of accessible, evidence-based recommendations and strategies ranging from how to respond to patients presenting with signs of abuse or violence, through to legal options to consider with their patients and guidance on working with perpetrators. This guideline also includes a specific chapter on education and training for healthcare professionals. The RACGP is working in collaboration with the [Safer Families Centre](#) to roll out training nationally. However, the investment to date is less than what is required to upskill this essential workforce.

Recommendation: The role of GP's should be explicitly acknowledged and supported in the Plan.

Perpetrators and perpetrator programs

The Plan reflects the needs and experiences of diverse communities and individuals quite well, but in order to protect women and children, it should address the behaviour of perpetrators and hold them accountable.

The Foundation Principles and National Pillars should explicitly include measures for working with perpetrators. These issues are discussed later in the document, but they also need to be addressed in the Foundation Principles and Pillars in order for the Plan to be implemented successfully. More research is needed in this area, including evidence-based interventions that are adequately evaluated.

Recommendation: The Foundation Principles and National Pillars should explicitly include measures for working with perpetrators.

Specify targets

The Plan would benefit from the inclusion of specific targets that need to be met to effectively monitor outcomes across the Pillars. For example –targets for the protection of children in intimate partner violence.

Recommendation: Plan should include specific targets to effectively monitor outcomes across the Pillars.

Thank you again for the opportunity to provide feedback on the draft Plan. For any enquiries regarding this letter, please contact Stephan Groombridge, Manager, eHealth and Quality Care on 03 8699 0544 or stephan.groombridge@racgp.org.au.

Yours sincerely



Dr Karen Price
President

Reference

1. Australian Department of Health. Annual Medicare Statistics – Financial Year 1984-85 to 2019-20. Canberra: Department of Health; 2020.
2. Australian Institute of Health and Welfare. Family, domestic and sexual violence in Australia 2018. Cat. no. FDV 2. Canberra: AIHW; 2018.