

# FAIR AGENDA

## No-one left in danger

Right now, Australia is in the midst of a family violence crisis. Partners are abusing and murdering women in shocking numbers, yet our government is still leaving many women without access to the service support they need to live free from danger, and their investment in the services needed to prevent further violence is only short term and piecemeal.

That means too many women in Australia are left in fear, trapped in their own homes – while their partners continue to emotionally, physically and financially abuse them.

Finding a way to escape your abuser is generally difficult and dangerous. In fact, when a woman tries to escape her abuser is a time she's in increased danger. That's why it's so important that everyone who reaches out for support to escape abuse can access it; and that we invest in the programs needed to stop violence in the future.

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### What Services Need Funding?

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#### Specialist family and domestic violence services

Specialist women's services are the critical pillar of any response to family violence. They provide a unique, specialist understanding of the nature and dynamics of family and domestic violence; assessment and management of risk, and provide a safe space for women and children living with family violence.

To escape danger, it's critical that women and children in need have 24-hour specialist, accessible and culturally safe integrated support – including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women, women from culturally and linguistically diverse communities and women with a disability. But right now, the federal government aren't providing these specialist services with the resources they need to support all the women reaching out for their services.

The most recent data on emergency accommodation services across the country (including women's refuges) shows that they were forced to turn away 2,800 women seeking to escape their abusers because of inadequate resourcing. In Victoria alone, there are 70,000 police attendances at family violence incidents, yet outreach services are only funded to respond to 6,000.

What's even more horrifying is that family violence services expect current levels of demand to increase – which means this service gap stands to increase.

#### Legal assistance services

For those trying to escape a violent abuser, access to free legal advice and assistance is critical. In order to escape, a woman will often need community legal assistance to find out where she stands with family law, including how she'll be able to keep her children safe; how she'll be able to access shared funds or property; and untangle debts and loans that might have been put in her name by her abuser.

Community Legal Centres provide critical support in all these areas - but they don't have the funding they need to provide that support to everyone who needs it. The most recent

data shows that a third of the work Community Legal Centres do is family violence related; and that they are forced to turn away more than 150,000 people annually.

Family Violence Prevention Legal Services are a critical specialist Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander legal assistance service who provide assistance to those affected by family violence, do education and advocacy work in communities to reduce violence. This year an indexation freeze meant their ability to deliver their existing services was effectively cut by \$464,000. What's more, they don't have the government funding they need to respond to all the demand for their services – estimated at more than \$28 million.

### **Men's behaviour change programs**

Working with men who use violent and controlling behaviour is critical to preventing and minimising the harm of family violence. Men's behaviour change programs work towards the safety and well being of women and children by attempting to engage men who use violence on a transformative journey towards non-violence.

Men's behaviour change experts are calling for further investment in national minimum standards and accreditation to ensure all agencies are delivering the programs in line with best practice; integrate perpetrator accountability across the justice and social service system, and to expand on current men's behaviour change services – estimated to require \$56 million of federal funding.

### **Primary prevention programs**

Primary prevention focuses on strategies to prevent violence before it occurs – a critical component of a whole of system approach to reducing and stopping violence against women and their children. It involves challenging the deeply ingrained attitudes, social norms and power inequalities that give rise to men's violence against women.

Primary prevention work can take years, if not a generation, to achieve - therefore long term funding at a level sufficient to affect whole of community change is important. But achieving a reduction in violence against women will never be achieved 'project by project' - Australia needs a significant scale-up and systematisation of primary prevention work in a coordinated way across settings and jurisdictions.

Right now, primary prevention work is coordinated by Our Watch – the National Foundation for the Prevention of Violence Against Women and Their Children – tasked with driving this long term cultural and attitude change. But their critical work is only funded until June 2017.

What's more, experts say Australia needs significant investment in primary prevention, both the infrastructure needed to coordinate and sustain change; and funding for the immediate expansion and development of programs, including:

- Expansion of best practice Respectful Relationships Education, to ensure every school, every student and every teacher is properly supported to receive this transformative education. While this work should be primarily state or territory funded, Commonwealth investment should also be made, especially for quality assurance, safety, evaluation and coordination.
- Increased funding of "The Line" campaign,
- Increased work with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities on an action research project to identify effective strategies to prevent violence,
- Working with organisations across the community to promote gender equality,
- Supporting local government to drive prevention activities at a local level,
- Continuing programs focused on media engagement regarding reporting of violence against women, to make sure media coverage helps to address the attitudes that lead to violence.