



Women's lives will be at risk because of decision not to act today - domestic violence experts

For immediate release

Key women's safety advocates have denounced the woeful outcomes from today's COAG meeting in relation to women and children's safety.

The groups say that the lack of action coming out of today's COAG meeting shows an absence of leadership; and a decision to abandon the women and children whose safety would be improved by the 5 expert-backed actions.

Last week, the Australian Women Against Violence Alliance and women's rights campaigning movement Fair Agenda, alongside 84 groups working for women's safety - sent a [joint letter](#) to all governments outlining five key changes they need to make to dramatically improve women's safety. Those actions were:

1. Fully funding the specialist services women and children rely on to be safe.
2. Putting children's safety first in the family law system.
3. Identify women and children at immediate risk
4. Improving AVO standards to hold perpetrators accountable and interrupt their escalating violence
5. Ensuring everyone's calls for help can be heard.

"Heads of government have left this meeting having done nothing to address the urgent safety issues experts have laid out; and which contribute to one woman's future and life being stolen from her every single week. The women and children in danger right now deserve better than this weak commitment to more discussions about possible action in the future." - Dr Merrindahl Andrew, Program Manager, Australian Women Against Violence Alliance.

"Responsibility for implementing most of these 5 desperately needed changes sits with the federal government, so Prime Minister Morrison's lack of leadership is particularly disappointing." Renee Carr, Executive Director, Fair Agenda.

"The Prime Minister told parliament all of us need to reflect on how and where the system failed Hannah and her children. Experts have since told his government five key areas where the systems are failing women and children at risk, and that he could fix immediately - and today he's ignored that advice." - added Ms Carr.

Instead, coming out of today's meeting COAG has committed to no immediate action. Their only commitments are promises of further discussion: including creating a new COAG council, and working to "understand the current status" of crisis accommodation and housing support.

“The women at risk right now deserve immediate changes that can help make them and their children safer. Experts laid out five immediate interventions that governments could have, and should have, locked in today. Those changes would have improved women’s safety within weeks. Instead, with each passing day the government delays these desperately needed actions, women in incredible danger will be turned away from services; forced by courts to deliver their children to a parent who is a known safety risk to them; and unable to access basic interpreting services so their calls for help can be understood.” Ms Carr.

“We have a broken Family Law system that is placing kids with violent parents. Actually forcing them to spend time with them. We have women reaching out for help, and having to be left unassisted, because governments are making decisions they know will lead to women being turned away. We have men using violence, being turned away from services that are supposed to help them change their behaviour.” Dr Merrindahl Andrew added.

“The excuse that governments need more information about service gaps before taking action is absurd. We know that every day 63 women in NSW alone are reaching out for help; but unable to get access to the safe at home programs that are best placed to improve their safety. We know Family Violence Prevention Legal Services have to turn away 30-40% of people contacting them for support. We know that a program that helps 600 women a month access safe technology is about to be cut. This isn’t a question of information, it’s a question of priorities.” said Hayley Foster, Women’s Safety NSW.

“Major investment is needed to ensure women aren’t left on their own to escape an abuser who is trying to stalk, harass and punish them. Today’s decision will leave many, many women at risk.” Ms Foster added.

“We still have federal laws in operation that mean every day kids are forced into care arrangements with parents where there are real concerns of violence and abuse.” - added Ms Lynch.

“Government’s can’t just focus on either prevention or response. They need to do both.” - Dr Andrew added.

“We need governments to commit to the comprehensive reform needed for women’s safety in the long-term. But there are women and children at risk right now, who can’t wait for *future* action. They need these five changes we know can improve their safety immediately.” – Dr Andrew concluded.

“Prevention is incredibly important but we also need the urgent, additional and sustained funding that experts have been calling for for years. Preventing violence in the future takes not just changing attitudes; but also fixing the systems that keep women and children unsafe.” added Joanne Yates, CEO of Domestic Violence NSW.