

Response to questions from AWAVA on current Government policy around violence against women and their children

1. *What are your party's priorities for addressing violence against women and their children?*

The Australian Labor Party has a zero tolerance approach to violence against women and their children. Everyone in Australia deserves to live free from violence. Everyone deserves to feel safe in their homes, and in their communities.

The Australian Labor Party had a commitment at the 2010 election to secure agreement from States and Territories to the *National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children 2010-2022* (the National Plan) and delivered on this commitment.

Violence against women affects us all. One in three women have experienced physical violence since the age of 15, and almost one in five have experienced sexual violence. These statistics show it is very likely that women in each and every one of our lives have been subject to violence.

The emotional and personal costs of violence against women cannot be measured: the effects reach all levels of society. Violence not only affects the victims themselves, but the children who are exposed to it, their extended family, their friends, their work colleagues and, ultimately, the broader community. A study commissioned by our Government in 2009 also shows the enormous economic cost of violence. Domestic violence and sexual assault perpetrated against women costs the nation \$13.6 billion each year. By 2021, this figure is likely to rise to \$15.6 billion if extra steps are not taken.

We must work together to reduce violence against women and their children and its impacts - as governments, as communities and as individuals.

This is why, in partnership with states and territories and the non-government sector, the Australian Labor Government is acting on its policy by driving change through the National Plan.

The National Plan is a long term, 12-year strategy for achieving a significant and sustained reduction in violence against women and their children. It has been built from an evidence base of research and extensive consultation with experts and the community. The National Plan is the first plan in Australia to coordinate across jurisdictions. It has been praised internationally and recognised as a best practice policy framework for responding to violence against women and their children.

The early years of the National Plan have been focussed on building a strong foundation for future change and working together in new ways, across governments and sectors

Since 2009, the Australian Labor Government has committed over \$86 million to key initiatives under the National Plan. These initiatives include:

- The internationally acclaimed *The Line* social marketing campaign, which encourages young people to think about what is acceptable in a relationship and what crosses the line.
- Funding for a new national Foundation to advocate and engage with the community about preventing violence against women and their children.
- Thirty-two respectful relationships projects in our communities and schools around the nation, and the embedding of respectful relationships education in the National Curriculum from 2014.
- Seventeen Community Action Grants to support activities that prevent, respond to, and speak out against violence against women, including three projects through national sporting bodies.
- The first national telephone and online professional counselling service for victims of domestic and family violence and sexual assault, their friends, family and for people who work with victims (1800RESPECT).
- Free, accredited training for health and allied health workers (DV-Alert) to enable them to better respond to victims of domestic and family violence.
- Establishment of a National Centre of Excellence to build the evidence base on violence against women and their children and improve policy and service responses.
- A commitment to four yearly cycles of the Personal Safety Survey and National Community Attitudes Survey.
- The creation of a dedicated research stream on perpetrator interventions through the National Centre of Excellence, which will support the implementation of national outcome standards for perpetrator interventions.
- Establishment of a Foundation to Prevent Violence against Women and their children to prevent violence from occurring in the first place through community actions.

2. *What does your party see as the major challenges in addressing violence against women and their children?*

The Australian Labor Party sees gender inequality and changing community attitudes as the key challenges in addressing violence against women. Related challenges are vulnerability, the interaction between violence against women and other challenges for communities and individuals, and emerging challenges.

One of our major challenges is around changing attitudes that support violence and gender inequality. While research tells us that 98 per cent of people in Australia recognise that violence against women is a crime, a national survey undertaken in 2009 revealed there are still some alarming attitudes within our community. Shockingly, around one in six people agreed that a woman is partly responsible if she is raped when drunk or drug affected, and thirty four per cent believed that rape results from men being unable to control their need for sex.

This is why the National Plan has such a strong focus on long term cultural and attitudinal change, in order to stop violence from happening in the first place. Promoting respect and achieving equality between men and women more broadly is a critical part of this shift in attitudes. Our efforts in the National Plan to reduce violence are underpinned by work to

advance gender equality – something the Australian Labor Party has a proud history of delivering in government. Paid Parental Leave, unprecedented investments in child care and quality early childhood education, the Workplace Gender Equality Act, the Fair Work Act, superannuation reforms, the National Women’s Alliances, and the target for Gender Balance on Australian Government boards, are all reforms of an Australian Labor Government. They play an important role in improving women’s economic security, supporting women’s leadership and will, ultimately, contribute to women living safer lives.

Violence is a complex and multifaceted issue. It does not occur in isolation from other challenges faced by individuals and communities. We are continuing to learn about, and sometimes grapple with, these intersections. This includes the interplay between domestic and family violence and child abuse and neglect, the long term health implications of violence against women, and the impact of violence against women across service systems. The National Plan provides a holistic policy response to violence, through having strong links with other significant COAG reforms, such as the National Partnership Agreement on Homelessness, efforts to Close the Gap on Indigenous disadvantage, and the *National Framework for Protecting Australia’s Children 2009–2020*.

Diverse groups of women have different experiences of violence, are sometimes more vulnerable and can face difficulty in accessing services and support. We know, for example, that rates of violence against Indigenous women are unacceptably high, with Indigenous women and girls being 35 times more likely to be hospitalised due to family violence related assaults than other women and girls. The National Plan recognises this, and contains actions to prevent and respond to violence against diverse groups of women and their children, including Indigenous women, culturally and linguistically diverse women, and women with disability.

New challenges are also constantly emerging. Issues like forced and servile marriage and female genital mutilation (FGM), which are of ongoing concern around the world. The Australian community is becoming increasingly aware of these types of issues, and the Government is addressing them. Earlier this year, forced marriage became a criminal offence in Australia. Late last year, the Government announced a series of immediate actions to end FGM in Australia, including a national summit and a review of Australia’s legal framework in relation to FGM.

We cannot, and will not, lose sight of these issues, even though they might be challenging.

3. Given that ending violence against women and girls requires long-term investment and a sustained approach, will your party continue to commit to the National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children?

The Australian Labor Party has an unqualified commitment to the National Plan. Commitment to the National Plan and funding measures to support it was an election commitment in 2010 and delivered by a Australian Labor Government.

The National Plan is a long-term investment with a sustained approach to reducing violence against women and their children. The Australian Labor Government is committed to

continuing to deliver the series of three-year Action Plans designed to give effect to the National Plan.

The First Action Plan is focused on building a strong foundation for future work. As well as acting on immediate priorities to challenge attitudes that support violence, build gender equality and enhance service responses, we are setting foundations for future work and evolving the way we work together across governments and sectors. The outcomes of the work we are doing now may not be seen immediately but, over time, they will build a platform for change across the community.

Most of the strategies and actions in the First Action Plan are ongoing, paving the way over time for a significant and sustained reduction in violence against women and their children. Much of the work will continue across the life of the National Plan, adapting and growing as new evidence emerges.

The Second Action Plan, which will start in 2014, will take stock of what has worked well over the past three years. We will use this to build upon and strengthen existing strategies and, where necessary, inform the development of new approaches to reduce domestic and family violence and sexual assault.

Under the Second Action Plan, we hope to see cultural change advancing, and will build on primary prevention work to further drive this change. We will keep working to enhance services for women and their children who have experienced violence. We will continue with our work to ensure perpetrators stop their violence and are held accountable. As the evidence base builds, we will be learning more about violence against women and their children and how we can work together to improve policy and service responses.

Under the Second Action Plan, we won't shy away from the difficult and complex issues. We will keep exploring and making linkages with other national reforms, recognising that violence against women so often occurs hand in hand with other challenges experienced by individuals and communities. We will also work with and pay particular attention to those groups of women who can be more vulnerable to violence, including Indigenous women, culturally and linguistically diverse women and women with disability.

The Australian Labor Government has already delivered considerable reforms under the National Plan. We are committed to continuing to lead this critical work. We will work with the states and territories and with the non-government sector to develop the Second Action Plan, and future Action Plans, to improve the safety of women in Australia.

4. What funding commitment is your party making to address and prevent violence against women and their children?

The Australian Labor Government has committed funding beyond the election commitments of 2010 to address and prevent violence against women and their children. We have progressed existing initiatives, invested further funding, extended our commitments and made new commitments to prevent and respond to violence.

As announced in the 2013-2014 Budget, we are providing \$5.2 million to June 2017 for the establishment and operation of the Foundation to Prevent Violence against Women and their Children. This Foundation will, at a national level, bring together all of the important work being done, strengthen engagement across the broader Australian community, and provide opportunities for community leadership in preventing violence. We will be consulting with the non-government sector, with governments and with other experts across Australia about the work of this Foundation.

We have invested \$7.6 million to June 2016 to continue and extend the DV-alert training program. Training is available to health and allied health workers to better understand and identify domestic and family violence, and to improve referral and support skills. Through DV-alert, specialist training is available for Indigenous workers and new training will be developed for culturally and linguistically diverse workers. Priority is given to training in rural and regional areas, recognising the difficulty victims can face accessing services in these locations.

We have committed \$28.5 million to June 2017 to continue and expand 1800RESPECT. This additional funding will go towards more counsellors and increased service availability. It will provide for the translation of online information for victims and workers into a range of community languages. The support for workers will also be expanded to create an online community where information can be exchanged and workers can access specialist professional support.

In partnership with all the states and territories, we have established the National Centre of Excellence in Sydney. The Centre's first priority is to develop a national research agenda to improve policy and service delivery in preventing and responding to violence against women and their children across Australia. It will also serve as a national research hub to enable researchers, policy makers and practitioners to link-up and provide evidence based responses to reduce domestic and family violence and sexual assault. The Commonwealth has provided initial funding of up to \$1 million for the Centre. From the middle of 2013, it is receiving annual funding of \$3 million, with the Commonwealth providing \$1.5 million annually and the remaining \$1.5 million to be provided by states and territories on a cost-shared basis.

We have also committed \$14.9 million to conduct the Personal Safety Survey and the National Community Attitudes Survey on a four-yearly rolling basis – these surveys make Australia a world leader when it comes to the collection and reporting of prevalence and attitudinal data on violence

Later this year, we will work with the states and territories and the non-government sector to develop the Second Action Plan. This will give us another opportunity to reflect on the investments we've made, and determine where we should direct future funding to continue driving a reduction in violence against women and their children.