**Australian Women Against Violence Alliance**

**Quarterly Update**

**July–October 2016**

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The [Australian Women Against Violence Alliance](http://awava.org.au/) (AWAVA) is one of the five [National Women’s Alliances](https://nationalwomensalliances.org.au/) funded by the Australian Government. We bring together women’s organisations and individuals across Australia to share information, identify issues and their solutions, to respond to and prevent violence against women and their children. AWAVA’s role is to ensure that women’s voices and particularly marginalised women’s voices are heard by government, amplifying the work of our member organisations and supporters.

Our advocacy efforts are currently focussed on three main portfolios of work that relate to ending violence against women and children, which we recognise as a cause and consequence of gender inequality. These three areas are:

* The role of specialist women’s services in responding to and preventing violence against women and children
* Supporting the implementation of the National Plan to Reduce Violence Against Women and their Children 2010-2022
* Access to justice for women and children living with or at risk of violence

**Specialist Women’s Services**

AWAVA’s message is that if you care about ending violence against women and children, you need to care about services. Specialist women’s services, which are at the heart of developing and delivering best-practice responses, are drastically underfunded despite increasing demand for their services.

Currently, most domestic and family violence services rely on short-term homelessness funding or are juggling other small, short-term project-based funding streams which do not account for the breadth of their complex and indispensable long-term work. Further, homelessness service funding through the National Partnership of Affordable Housing (NPAH), which is a key source of funding for domestic and family violence services from the federal level, is still due to end at June 2017. This is of serious concern for AWAVA’s members because if the NPAH discontinues, so does much of the federal level funding for domestic and family violence services: the consequences to our sector will be devastating.

In August, AWAVA re-established our working group on specialist women’s services to advocate for better resourcing and recognition for the role of specialist women’s services, which will build on the findings and recommendations from our policy brief on [*The role of women’s specialist services in Australia’s response to violence against women and children.*](http://awava.org.au/2016/04/07/research/role-specialist-womens-services-australias-response-violence-women-children) This work is currently underway so please watch this space!

In the immediate term, funding security is needed for services funded under the NPAH, while governments work collaboratively with all stakeholders to develop a secure, dedicated and appropriate funding system that will work properly support and protect the breadth of work of the diverse services in our sector.

**The National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children**
The *National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children 2010-2022* (the National Plan) is an important document that aims to unify the Australian community towards a shared goal: ending violence against women and children. It also encourages often-disparate actors in the private, public and NGO sectors to combine their efforts towards achieving this goal. The four Action Plans (of three years each) under the National Plan are intended to build a set of defined and practical steps to respond to and prevent violence against women and their children. The Department of Social Services (DSS) “leads” on the implementation of the National Plan, although efforts to eliminate violence against women and children involve efforts taken across the breadth of government.

1800RESPECT

1800RESPECT is the National Sexual Assault, Domestic and Family Violence Counselling Service for people living in Australia and is a key initiative of the National Plan. 1800RESPECT is contracted through Medibank Health Solutions which until recently sub-contracted the whole of its call centre counselling work to Rape & Domestic Violence Services Australia. A recent evaluation of 1800RESPECT has resulted in the implementation of the “First Response” triage model and the establishment of an Implementation Clinical Advisory Group (ICAG) to guide the development of the triage function.

AWAVA continues to raise our members’ questions and concerns about changes to 1800RESPECT and to share information and opportunities to comment. In part as a result of our advocacy, the state-based specialist women’s domestic violence hotline services are now represented on the ICAG. We will continue to communicate with 1800RESPECT in order to better understand the changes to the services and to advocate for collaboration with other women’s services.

The Third Action Plan

Over the past few months, DSS has undertaken numerous roundtable consultations and workshops across the country to inform and develop the Third Action Plan (2016-19). The release of the Third Action Plan is expected to occur at the COAG National Summit on Violence Against Women on the 28th of October 2016.

Throughout the development of the 3rd Action Plan, AWAVA and AWAVA’s Advisory Group members have had ongoing communication with the Department of Social Services (DSS). In addition to contributing to the workshops and consultations, AWAVA continues to provide constructive feedback and recommendations on the Third Action Plan. Among other things, AWAVA and AWAVA’s Advisory Group members have been advocating for:

* A greater focus on protecting and resourcing services, especially specialist women’s services. We know that, national wide, specialist services have been struggling to meet the increasing demand for their services while often facing unsustainable funding cuts. These services are not only crucial to women and children’s safety but are also necessary to re-affirm and re-establish the rights of survivors/victims and their families to live free of violence after having left a violent relationship.
* Access to justice, particularly in relation to safety in family law.
* Increased attention on sexual violence, both within and outside of domestic and family violence contexts, which must be a focal point and mainstreamed throughout the Action Plan.
* Making sure that all women and children are meaningfully included within the plan, including but not limited to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women, women subject to racism on the basis of their cultural or linguistic background, women with disability, women living in poverty and or/with mental health, women in prison, women asylum seekers and refuges, LGBTIQ communities, women in regional, rural and remote areas, older and younger women.
* Improved consultation mechanisms and monitoring and evaluation for work under the National Plan, which continues to be a large concern regarding accountability and transparency in regard to the plan.

**Access to Justice**

The legal system is often a crucial part of women’s and children’s journey out of violence. However, women and children living with or at risk of violence regularly face serious barriers in accessing justice. AWAVA’s working group on access to justice came together to better understand some of these barriers and shortcomings.

In August, AWAVA released a policy brief on [*Access to justice for women and children living with or at risk of violence*](http://awava.org.au/2016/08/22/research/7424)*.* This paper draws on existing literature and community sector knowledge - including the expertise of AWAVA’s members - to highlight some of these barriers and shortcomings. It also foregrounds some of the efforts needed to enable the environment necessary for access to justice to exist and many steps that could be undertaken to improve legal system’s responsiveness and establish stronger safeguards for women and children experiencing and at risk of experiencing violence.

AWAVA has also advocated directly to the Attorney General’s Department to call for measures to improve access to justice for women and children living with or at risk of violence, particularly relating to family law and legal assistance. In addition to promoting the findings and recommendations within our policy brief, AWAVA continues to highlight that in the context of family law and family violence it is crucial that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community controlled organisations, and specialist women’s legal services and programs receive adequate and sustainable funding. We also stress the need to take a gender-transformative and human rights approach.

Our work in the following months will focus on an emerging issue of concern: sexual violence both within and outside of the context of domestic and family violence. Sexual violence has become increasingly invisible within the “violence against women” agenda and continues to be misunderstood in policy and practice. Additionally, law reform in the area of “sexual violence” has faltered although much work is needed within this area. Our working group on access to justice has recently begun working towards an issues paper on law reform on the area of sexual violence. Watch this space!

**Other recent work:**

* Prevalent & Preventable, a major international conference on preventing violence against women, was co-hosted by AWAVA in conjunction with Our Watch. Read the wrap-ups [here](https://storify.com/PPVAW).
* [Submissions](http://awava.org.au/category/submissions) on topics including migration, family law and the Budget.
* Our International Engagement Project is a joint project of the five National Women’s Alliances, focusing on international gender equality efforts through the Commission on the Status of Women meetings and the Sustainable Development Goals. Find out more [here](http://equalityrightsalliance.org.au/resource/international-engagement-project).
* Supporting member campaigns, such as Women’s Legal Services Australia’s Five Step Plan for [Safety First in Family Law](http://www.womenslegal.org.au/files/file/SAFETY%20FIRST%20POLICY%20PLATFORM.MAY%202016_FINAL.pdf) and the [National Union of Students Women’s Department](http://www.nus.org.au/women_s)’s work on stopping sexual violence at university
* Ongoing: Weekly News Round-ups (register to receive these by email [here](http://awava.org.au/), and catch up on past editions at our [website](http://awava.org.au/category/weekly-round-up)), social media (follow us on [Facebook](https://www.facebook.com/AWAVAaustralia/) and [Twitter](https://twitter.com/awava_women)) and two-monthly meetings of our [Advisory Group](http://awava.org.au/about-us/advisory-group-members).

Contact us! If you have ideas or feedback about our work, please email info@awava.org.au Visit our website at [www.awava.org.au](http://www.awava.org.au/)