

Media Release

Australia's first National Survivor Advocate Program launched to put a full stop to sexual, domestic, and family violence

Tuesday, 23rd November 2021 - Full Stop Australia, formerly known as Rape and Domestic Violence Services Australia (RDVSA), today launched Australia's first National Survivor Advocate Program. The program will bring together people with lived experience of sexual, domestic, and family violence from all walks of life and cultural backgrounds to drive change to national policy, practice, and law reform in a safe and supportive way.

One in five women and one in 20 men over the age of 15 report having experienced sexual assault in Australia, and nearly 50 per cent of women and 25 per cent of men experience sexual harassment in the workplace. Moreover, in the last year alone, there has been a 13% increase in family and domestic violence related sexual assault, with 27,505 victims of sexual assault recorded by police in Australia - the highest number recorded in a 28-year period.

While these statistics are alarming, Full Stop Australia says it still does not paint the full picture.

"We know that only 13% of women sexually assaulted report it to police. And just 1.5% of sexual assaults result in a conviction. Sexual, domestic, and family violence is a major health and welfare issue and an urgent national priority. It affects people of all ages, gender identities and from all backgrounds," said Hayley Foster, CEO of Full Stop Australia.

"We believe changes to practice, law and policy reform must be survivor led. But this does not mean survivors should be left to advocate alone. Australia needs a national body that links and supports survivors of sexual, domestic, and family violence who want to speak publicly about their experience to influence change. Today's launch of Australia's first National Survivor Advocate Program is the first step forward to putting lived experience in the driver seat."

Full Stop Australia's vision is to stop violence in Australia through training, advocacy and support. Today they also welcome 12 official ambassadors who support the need for the survivor advocate program including Chanel Contos, Amani Haydar, Dr Manjula O'Connor, Nina Funnell and Tanya Hosch.

"Violence is not well understood in Australia, particularly sexual violence, with many Australians holding concerning perceptions of what constitutes violent behaviour that tend to only fit extreme stereotypes," added new Ambassador and sexual consent activist, Chanel Contos. "Every person has a role to play in understanding and preventing violence in all its forms. Ordinary people are experiencing violence, and ordinary people are perpetuating it."

The first of its kind National Survivor Advocate Program will provide wrap around support for people with lived experience to share their story in a safe and empowering way – including specialist

counselling support, legal advice about rights and obligations when speaking publicly as well as support and assistance engaging with media and the government.

“Sharing a personal experience of sexual, family or domestic violence can be overwhelming, and if no support is provided it can be traumatic. The National Survivor Advocate Program will help guide and support people, while also answering questions such as how do I safely speak about my experience for the first time, what legal advice do I need, where can I get counselling and other support,” said Tara Hunter, Director of Counselling Services at Full Stop Australia.

The launch of Full Stop Australia’s new name accompanies the introduction of a central counselling helpline (1800 FULL STOP) to enable people experiencing sexual, domestic, and family violence to connect more easily and readily with trauma-informed support.

“We provide confidential trauma specialist counselling online and over the phone, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, to all those who have been impacted by sexual, domestic and/ or family violence. We also provide support through online chat,” added Ms Foster.

“Perhaps one of our most unique services is our evidence-based training programs for workplaces, education settings and community organisations which focus on upskilling people to prevent and respond to violence. When you understand the drivers of violence, you can prevent it.

“At the forefront of everything we do is working alongside people with lived experience and across jurisdictions to advocate for the development and progression of national policies and systems that have zero tolerance to violence and prioritise victim-survivors, so that Australians can live in a country free from violence.

“The violence epidemic requires national action driven by survivors. The Survivor Advocate Program is just the start. National ongoing investment is needed, and everyone needs to play their part. Only then will we see real change.”

Full Stop Australia has organised a series of events to coincide with *16 Days of Activism Against Gender-Based Violence*, including:

- **Survivor Advocate Forum, on November 29, involving Amani Haydar**
- **The Future of Respectful Relationships Education, on November 29, with Chanel Contos**
- **The Full Stop Conservation Series, on November 30, led by Australian of the Year, Grace Tame.**

The full list of events can be viewed: <https://www.rape-dvservices.org.au/about/16-days-of-activism-against-gender-based-violence-events>

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