

18 October 2021

Office for Women and Violence Prevention
Department of Justice and Attorney-General
GPO Box 149
BRISBANE QLD 4001
Via email: women@qld.gov.au

Dear Colleagues

Consultation on Queensland Women's Strategy

1. Rape & Domestic Violence Services Australia ("RDVSA") warmly welcomes the invitation to provide input on the Queensland Women's Strategy.
2. We are grateful for the extension to the consultation deadline till today, 18 October 2021. We note that we were only advised that there was the possibility of an extension on Thursday, 14 October 2021. Unfortunately, because of this, we have been unable to prepare a more fulsome submission which comprehensively addresses all of the issues that we might like to see covered. However, we are more than happy to be contacted at any time to provide additional feedback.
3. RDVSA is a non-government organisation that provides a range of trauma specialised counselling services for people who have experienced sexual, domestic or family violence and their supporters. Our services include Sexual Assault Counselling Australia for people accessing the Redress Scheme resulting from the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse; a counselling service and support for people experiencing domestic and family violence across Australia; the LGBTIQ+ violence counselling service and the NSW Rape Crisis counselling service for people in NSW whose lives have been impacted by sexual violence.
4. In the 2020/21 financial year, RDVSA provided 16,195 occasions of service to 3,984 clients nationally. 84% of callers identified as female and 90% identified as someone who had experienced sexual, domestic and/or family violence.

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ABN 58 023 656 939

Counselling Services

24/7 NSW Rape Crisis:	1800 424 017
Domestic Violence Impact Line:	1800 943 539
Sexual Assault Counselling Australia:	1800 211 028
LGBTIQ+ Violence Service:	1800 497 212
rape-dvservices.org.au	

5. The focus of this letter submission will be a high-level discussion of the key areas RDVSA considers need actioning to ensure meaningful and concrete steps towards gender equality in Queensland.

Gender equality and sexual, domestic and family violence

6. It is widely acknowledged that one of the key underlying causes of sexual, domestic and family violence is gender inequality, which manifests in misogyny, gender stereotypes, unconscious bias and discrimination. RDVSA's position is that preventing and responding to sexual, domestic and family violence is **absolutely essential** to addressing gender inequality and vice versa.
7. We acknowledge the work of the Queensland Government to-date in preventing and responding to sexual, domestic and family violence including taking action such as further investment in crisis accommodation for women fleeing violence, paid domestic and family violence leave, the implementation of the *Not Now, Not Ever; Putting an end to domestic and family violence in Queensland* report and the creation of the Independent Women's Safety and Justice Taskforce (**Taskforce**).
8. However, we note with great concern the latest report released by ANROWS and the Australian Institute of Criminology in relation to intimate partner violence during the COVID pandemic. Their research paints an alarming picture of the work still left to do in responding to sexual, domestic and family violence across all of Australia (including in Queensland).¹ Key results of relevance include:
 - a. Only one in five (21.3%) women who had experienced physical or sexual violence in the 12 months prior to the survey said they had sought advice or support from police, while only one in four (24.7%) had sought advice or support from non-government or government services
 - b. One in four respondents (25.8%) who had experienced physical or sexual violence in the 12 months prior to the survey said they had been unable to seek assistance on at least one occasion when they wanted to due to safety concerns. Among these women, one in three had not sought advice or support from police or government or non-government services
 - c. The majority of respondents (86.2%) who had experienced physical or sexual violence in the 12 months prior to the survey had also experienced at least one form of emotionally abusive, harassing and controlling behaviour²
9. What this research demonstrates (among other things) is that, despite recent improvements to the system, there still remain strong barriers for women in reporting sexual, domestic and family violence. In addition, the research also demonstrates the

¹ Australia's National Research Organisation for Women's Safety. (2021). At a glance: Respondents' experiences of intimate partner violence (IPV) since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic [Fact sheet]. ANROWS.

² Ibid.

prevalence of non-physical forms of violence, despite the emphasis placed on physical violence in the criminal justice system. It is clear that the system is still failing women survivors.

10. RDVSA acknowledges the work of the Taskforce to-date in improving outcomes for women survivors in the criminal justice system. We look forward to providing further feedback to the Taskforce on these reform priorities in due course. We are also happy to provide further, more detailed feedback to your office in relation to sexual, domestic and family violence more generally.

11. At a high-level, some of the reforms that RDVSA advocate for include:

- a. The introduction of affirmative consent laws and the explicit recognition of grooming conduct in criminal laws
- b. Universal changes to evidence and procedural laws to make the court process more accessible, safe and trauma-informed for survivors including
 - i. Access to give evidence via AVL
 - ii. Access to culturally appropriate witness intermediaries
 - iii. Jury directions to counter rape myths and gender stereotypes
 - iv. Abolishing good character as a mitigating factor
- c. Specialist domestic and family violence courts
- d. Independent legal representation for survivors
- e. Wrap-around holistic support for survivors including forensic, psycho-social, and case management support. This should be accompanied by high-level training and professional development across the specialist sexual, domestic and family violence sector to ensure that all frontline workers have the skills and capability necessary to appropriately assess and respond to violence and abuse
- f. The introduction of automatic referral processes so that all reports of sexual violence result in proactive support from adequately funded specialist sexual violence counselling and case management services (for victims and low-risk offenders such as children and young people)
- g. Regular, comprehensive and specialist training in sexual, domestic and family violence for all staff in the criminal justice system including first responders, police, lawyers and the judiciary
- h. A whole-of-community primary prevention strategy for QLD, in line with the national framework *Change the story: A shared framework for the primary prevention of violence against women and their children in Australia* including primary prevention initiatives in every local community and a state-wide advertising campaign
- i. Mandatory and timely reporting of sexual assault complaints (while protecting the confidentiality and agency of complainants) in all institutional settings (government, non-government and business) and a trauma-specialist, survivor-led response to disclosures

- j. Large scale investment in housing and economic support for women fleeing violence and women from vulnerable populations such as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women, women with a disability and culturally and linguistically diverse women
12. All of the above-mentioned reforms must be considered in the context of the diverse needs of women from all different kinds of cultural backgrounds and walks of life including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women, older women, women with a disability and culturally and linguistically diverse women. In addition, any reforms should be driven by the views of those with lived experience. In this regard, a specific plan should be developed to respond to sexual, domestic and family violence in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

Gender Equality and Women's Health

13. RDVSA acknowledges the work of the Queensland Government to-date and its investment of \$8.4 million in Women's Health and Wellbeing Services. However, if gender equality is to be fully achieved then further, targeted investment needs to occur into women's wellbeing and in particular, investment in counselling and therapeutic interventions targeted to addressing complex trauma for survivors of sexual, domestic and family violence. In this regard, we note that there is no specific mention of a women's health strategy in the *My Health, Queensland future: Advancing Health 2026 plan* nor does there appear to be any specific plan to address the trauma impacts of sexual, domestic and family violence for men, women and children.
14. Research has shown that there is a clear link between reduction in violence and the improvement of health outcomes for women. The research also shows that addressing the mental and emotional impact of violence (i.e. Trauma) is key to improving the health burden occasioned by violence. For example, the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare has found that if no female aged 15 and over had experienced partner violence in 2015 there would have been (among females aged 15 and over) (our emphasis):
 - a. 41% less homicide & violence (where females were the victim)
 - b. 18% less early pregnancy loss
 - c. **19% less suicide & self-inflicted injuries**
 - d. **19% less depressive disorders**
 - e. **12% less anxiety disorders**
 - f. **4% less alcohol disorders.**³
15. Furthermore, in our view, addressing trauma is crucial to ensuring economic independence for survivors as without therapeutic intervention, many women survivors struggle to fully re-integrate into society (including re-gaining employment).

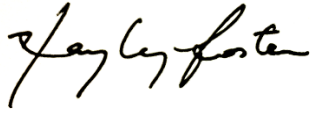
³ AIHW (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare) 2019. Australian Burden of Disease Study: impact and causes of illness and death in Australia, 2015. Australian Burden of Disease series no. 19. Cat. no. BOD 22. Canberra: AIHW.

16. In this regard, RDVSA's position is that addressing gender equality necessitates Government funding into long-term trauma specialist mental health support (over 200 hours) for survivors of sexual, domestic and family violence.

Gender Equality in other areas

17. As the discussion paper has pointed out, almost two in five women have experienced sexual harassment in the workplace in the past five years, with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women more likely to experience workplace sexual harassment than women who are non-Indigenous. This, and the figures quoted relating to the gender pay gap clearly show that there is much work to do in improving gender equality in the workplace.
18. RDVSA's position is that all State and Territory Governments should be implementing (as much as is possible) all the recommendations of the Respect@Work: Sexual Harassment National Inquiry Report (2020). In addition, RDVSA advocates for the introduction of compulsory sexual violence information in workplaces and a well-funded workforce training package for sexual violence.
19. Finally, RDVSA notes the following policy priorities are crucial to addressing gender inequality (acknowledging that not all of these areas are the primary responsibility of the States):
 - a. Universal access to childcare and/or early education
 - b. Universal access to paid parental leave for men and women on a shared and equal basis
 - c. Further award wage reviews to ensure feminised industries receive equal remuneration for work of equal value
 - d. Amendment of the Workplace Gender Equality Act 2012 to capture more Australian non-public sector workplaces (from a threshold of 100 or more employees down to 50 or more employees) in the reporting of the Workplace Gender Equality Agency
 - e. Social services reform to place greater value on unpaid care work and to abolish the couple rule
 - f. Taxation reform to address higher effective income tax rates for women undertaking casual and part-time work and caring for family members
 - g. Family law reform to recognise family violence as both a negative financial contribution to the relationship and an additional future need
 - h. Reforms to superannuation to ensure that women are not disadvantaged when leaving the workforce to care for children
20. Thank you again for the opportunity to make a submission. If you have any questions or would like to discuss further, please do not hesitate to contact myself or Laura Henschke on 02 8585 0333 or legal@rape-dvservices.org.au.

Yours faithfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Hayley Foster". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Hayley Foster
Chief Executive Officer
Rape & Domestic Violence Services Australia