



YACWA Submission to the consultation on the Second Action Plan

National Plan to End Violence against Women and Children 2022–2032

Youth Affairs Council of Western Australia

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY

The Youth Affairs Council of Western Australia acknowledges Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as the traditional custodians of the lands, waterways and plains on which we live, work and play. This land always has been, and always will be, Aboriginal land.

ABOUT YACWA

The Youth Affairs Council of Western Australia (YACWA) is the peak body for young people and the youth sector that supports them in Western Australia. YACWA operates primarily as a human rights organisation that seeks to address the exclusion of young people in a rapidly changing society. YACWA represents around 500,000 young people and sector workers in Western Australia.

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youth affairs council
of western australia

Executive Summary

The Youth Affairs Council of Western Australia (YACWA) welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the Second Action Plan under Australia's National Plan to End Violence against Women and Children 2022-2032 (the National Plan) (Commonwealth of Australia, 2022). Children and young people experience family, domestic and sexual violence (FDSV) in ways distinct from adults, requiring age-appropriate, developmentally responsive and youth-centred support.

Although the First Action Plan strengthened recognition of children and young people as victim-survivors in their own right, YACWA's consultations with young people and the youth sector indicate that this recognition has not yet been consistently translated into policy, service design or practice. Young people continue to encounter adult-centred, fragmented systems, limited youth-specific support, barriers to safe disclosure, and inconsistent opportunities to influence decisions that affect them. These concerns are also reflected in national research and consultation findings (Australia's National Research Organisation for Women's Safety [ANROWS], 2026).

Ending FDSV within a generation requires meaningful and sustained action. To support this goal, this submission recommends five areas for action: stronger child- and youth-specific outcomes, data and accountability; permanent, meaningful participation of children and young people in whole-of-system reform; youth-specific, multidisciplinary One Stop Hubs; sustained investment in youth workers, educational engagement and safeguarding; and long-term, youth-led prevention and early intervention, including digital sexual literacy and therapeutic responses to harmful sexual behaviours.

The submission draws on feedback and reflections shared with YACWA by young people aged 12–25 and by the youth services sector from across Western Australia, including during targeted consultations, peer-led FDV Primary Prevention workshops, and at the lived-experience FDV youth reference group. The insights are woven throughout the submission and demonstrate that effective reform must be designed *with* children and young people, not only *for* them.

Recommendations

1. Establish a national child and youth FDSV outcomes framework for children and young people with clear accountability for government and services. This should include clear baselines, measurable and time-bound targets, disaggregated data, annual public reporting and independent oversight to show whether interventions improve safety, access to support, housing stability, educational engagement, recovery, and long-term wellbeing.
2. Commit to co-designing and implementing whole-of-system reforms that recognise children and young people as victim-survivors and rights-holders. Establish a permanent, adequately funded and safe national mechanism through which diverse children and young people, including those with lived experience of FDSV, can participate in the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies, programs and services.
3. Invest in youth-specific One Stop Hubs that provide tailored support, including counselling, advocacy, education, and a safe space for children and young people impacted by FDSV.
4. Provide long-term Commonwealth investment, in partnership with states and territories, to expand trauma-informed and culturally safe educational engagement, re-engagement and safeguarding programs for children and young people, and access to specialist FDSV services where required.
5. Invest in prevention and early intervention programs for children and young people. These must be long-term, co-designed, youth-led, developmentally appropriate and culturally safe. Programs should include peer-led education on respectful relationships, consent, emotional regulation, digital sexual literacy and online harms. Where harmful sexual behaviours emerge, responses should prioritise strengths-based, therapeutic and trauma-informed support.

Language and consultation evidence

The National Plan uses terms such as “violence against women and children”, “gender-based violence” and “victim-survivor”. This submission uses family, domestic and sexual violence (FDSV) as an inclusive term commonly used across Australian policy and practice. It uses “victim-survivor” where this mirrors the National Plan and “children and young people impacted by FDSV” where broader language is more appropriate. The phrase “in their own right” emphasises that children and young people are not merely witnesses to, or extensions of, an adult’s experience. They experience violence and its consequences in distinct ways and hold their own rights, needs and perspectives.

Direct quotes from YACWA consultations are de-identified. Minor punctuation has been added where required for readability without changing the meaning of participants’ words.

Introduction

The National Plan provides a critical framework for preventing and responding to FDSV across Australia. However, children and young people remain disproportionately affected. In 2024, they accounted for 56% of recorded sexual assault victims, and children aged 0-14 proportionately also experienced FDSV-related assault hospitalisations more than any other age group (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare [AIHW], 2026a). More than half of children and young people aged 0-14 who accessed specialist homelessness services have experienced FDSV (AIHW, 2026a). The Second Action Plan must therefore translate recognition of children and young people as victim-survivors into practical, measurable, and adequately funded action.

YACWA has extensive experience working with young people and the youth sector across Western Australia. Since 2025, YACWA has held five consultations with young people aged 12-25, including the participants of All It Takes primary prevention workshops, to gather their perspectives on FDSV, abuse, prevention and support. This submission draws on those insights and current evidence to propose actions across prevention, early intervention, recovery and healing.

Background

Children and young people's experiences of FDSV are shaped by age, gender, disability, culture, sexuality, geography and socioeconomic disadvantage. The Australian Child Maltreatment Study found that 62.2% of Australians experienced at least one form of child maltreatment before age 18, including physical abuse, sexual abuse, emotional abuse, neglect or exposure to domestic violence (Haslam et al., 2023). The estimated annual costs of childhood maltreatment include \$21.6 billion in health service use and \$24.1 billion in productivity losses (Le et al., 2026). These figures reinforce the need for sustained prevention, early intervention and recovery supports, rather than short-term or crisis-only responses.

The National Plan has advanced recognition of children and young people, yet YACWA's consultations indicate that implementation remains uneven. Youth sector workers report increasing contact with young people affected by FDSV, while services lack the capacity, specialist expertise and coordinated pathways to respond. The Second Action Plan should address this gap by centring young people's rights, strengthening the youth sector and ensuring services are accessible before a young person reaches crisis.

Establishing clear and accurate data points and numerical targets

Recommendation 1: Establish a national child and youth FDSV outcomes framework for children and young people with clear accountability for government and services. This should include clear baselines, measurable and time-bound targets, disaggregated data, annual public reporting and independent oversight to show whether interventions improve safety, access to support, housing stability, educational engagement, recovery and long-term wellbeing.

WHAT YOUNG PEOPLE TOLD YACWA

"I don't think they realise how many young people are impacted [by FDSV], the stats don't reflect it because young people are scared to speak about it because of shame or stigma".

"There is a lot of awareness of lesser-known forms of violence, such as coercive control, but they're targeted at relationships, but this is quite common in family situations, especially if you're queer".

Ending violence within a generation requires more than reporting on attitudes, activities, service contacts or intimate partner homicides. Governments must be able to determine whether policies and programs meet the unique needs of children and young people, improve their safety and contribute to measurable reductions in violence. The National Plan's monitoring framework should therefore include young people-specific outcomes across prevention, early intervention, response, recovery and healing. Consistent data collection, monitoring and reporting are needed (Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence Commission [DFSVC], 2026).

Measures should capture outcomes that matter to young people, including whether they were believed, received timely and appropriate support, could remain safely housed, stayed connected to education, avoided repeated storytelling, and experienced improved safety and wellbeing. Data should assess progress, identify unmet needs and demand, and be disaggregated by age, gender, disability, cultural background, sexuality and location. Disaggregated data should also make visible the intersecting factors and unequal outcomes experienced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people, young people with disability, culturally and linguistically diverse young people, LGBTIQ+ young people, and those living in regional and remote areas (AIHW, 2026b; DFSVC, 2026; Department of Social Services [DSS], 2023). Each target should include a baseline, be specific, measurable and time-bound, identify responsible agencies, and include annual public reporting with independent oversight (Department of Finance, 2025; DFSVC, 2026).

Service activity data must also be interpreted alongside unmet demand. Crisis, homelessness and specialist services cannot accurately reflect community need when young people are turned away, wait for support, or return to unsafe environments because no suitable option is available (Jackson & Blane, 2024). The National Plan Outcomes Framework provides a foundation, but the Second Action Plan should specify how child- and youth-specific outcomes will be measured and reported (DSS, 2023).

Sector workers tell us that historical experiences of FDSV are common in young people experiencing homelessness. Western Australian youth homelessness data illustrates the value of local, service-level evidence which is not widely visible for government or communities. Over a 60-day period in 2024, an average of 69 young people were competing for only 1.83 available crisis beds each night (Ending Child and Youth Homelessness Coalition, 2026). Young people also told YACWA that they experienced pressure to return to unsafe homes, including where FDSV was present. Annual public reporting should make this unmet demand visible and support governments and services to plan, fund and evaluate responses against real need.

Shaping FDSV policies, programs, and services with children and young people

Recommendation 2: Commit to co-designing and implementing whole-of-system reforms that recognise children and young people as victim-survivors and rights-holders. Establish a permanent, adequately funded and safe national mechanism through which diverse children and young people, including those with lived experience of FDSV, can participate in the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies, programs and services.

WHAT YOUNG PEOPLE TOLD YACWA

"Government needs to get to the root of the problem, which is early intervention with kids".

'It sucks something couldn't have happened before".

"Kids who aren't aware of certain outreach programs, or who've have bad experiences with certain services aren't keen to engage with others".

NATIONAL YOUTH SURVEY 2025

98% of young people said government should consider their views when developing policies and programs, but only 35% felt their perspectives were currently considered. A further 33% identified not being listened to as a barrier to engaging with government (Department of Education, 2026).

Responses to children and young people impacted by FDSV remain fragmented and inconsistent, making service pathways difficult to access and navigate (ANROWS, 2026). Policy and service narratives can position children and young people primarily as dependants of adult victim-survivors, rather than recognising them as individuals with distinct experiences, needs and rights (Gillfeather-Spetere & Watson, 2024; Moore et al., 2023). Whole-of-system reform must recognise children and young people as experts in their own lives and include them in decisions that affect their safety and wellbeing.

Centring the voices of young people throughout policy development can strengthen the national response and better reflect their needs and experiences, moving beyond one-off consultation activities. Young people should be involved in the design, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation of policies and services, with clear feedback on what was heard, what changed, and why (Department of Education, 2025). Participation must be voluntary, accessible, and appropriately supported. Engagement should be age- and developmentally appropriate, trauma-informed, and culturally safe. Children and young people should also be able to contribute without being expected to disclose personal experiences of violence. Where appropriate, they should receive financial recognition for their time and contributions (Department of Education, 2025).

A permanent national participation mechanism should also prioritise the inclusion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people, young people with disability, culturally and linguistically diverse young people, LGBTIQ+ young people, and those living in regional and remote communities. It should be adequately funded, independently facilitated, and directly connected to decision-makers, so that participation leads to demonstrable influence rather than tokenistic engagement. Sector workers told YACWA that long-term funding would enable services to establish, evaluate, improve, and sustain programs, rather than repeatedly commencing or rebuilding short-term projects.

Whole-of-system reform must also strengthen communication and coordination across health, community services, justice, education, housing and child protection. Better coordination would bring together diverse perspectives and expertise, reduce inconsistent responses, repeated storytelling, re-traumatisation and referral loops. The Second Action Plan Consultation Paper likewise recognises the need for more consistent, developmentally appropriate and violence-informed responses for children and young people across prevention, early intervention, response, recovery and healing (ANROWS, 2026).

National leadership and independent accountability are needed to maintain a child- and youth-centred focus across portfolios. The Australian Human Rights Commission has recommended establishing a Cabinet Minister for Children and a Ministerial Council for Child Wellbeing, both reporting to National Cabinet (Australian Human Rights Commission [AHRC], 2024). A dedicated Cabinet Minister for Children and Young People would strengthen cross-government leadership and ensure that children's rights and experiences are considered in decisions that affect them. This could be supported by independent oversight through the National Children's Commissioner, with adequate resourcing to enable direct engagement with children and young people and to publicly report on government progress.

Regardless of the mechanisms adopted, children and young people need a clear line of influence into national decision-making and transparent reporting on how their contributions have shaped decisions, policies and services.

EXISTING GUIDANCE THAT CAN SUPPORT CONSISTENT NATIONAL PRACTICE

Existing resources that can inform child- and youth-centred engagement, safeguarding, disclosure and service responses.

- Youth Engagement Toolkit (Department of Education, 2025)
- In their own right: Actions to improve children and young people's safety from domestic, family and sexual violence (Gillfeather-Spetere & Watson, 2024)
- Abuse and violence: Working with our patients in general practice, 5th edition (The Royal Australian College of General Practitioners [RACGP], 2022)
- Child protection in Department of Education sites procedures for allied professionals (Department of Education, 2024)

Multidisciplinary responses to improve safety and wellbeing outcomes for children and young people impacted by FDSV

Recommendation 3: Invest in youth-specific One Stop Hubs that provide tailored support, including counselling, advocacy, education, and a safe space for children and young people impacted by FDSV.

WHAT YOUNG PEOPLE TOLD YACWA

Young people need welcoming, age-appropriate places where they can seek help without first having to understand multiple service systems, repeat their experiences or fear an automatic punitive response or family separation.

"Kids who are homeless, poor, or struggling at home don't get the right support when they're at school... I really needed that early intervention, but it was missing".

Investment in One Stop Hubs has demonstrated the value of bringing specialist and community services together in accessible and culturally safe environments (Department of Communities, 2023). However, existing models primarily support children through services provided to adult victim-survivors. A youth-specific model is needed to recognise and support children and young people as victim-survivors in their own right.

FDSV refuges and crisis responses have historically been adult-centred and may lack the staffing, resources and practice frameworks needed to provide child- and youth-centred, trauma-informed support (Bastian et al., 2025). Access can be particularly difficult for young women and girls under 18, as well as for families with teenage sons. In Western Australia, having a teenage son has been identified as a potential barrier to refuge access, while national research has found that some services exclude young women under 18 or women accompanied by older sons (Centre for Women's Safety and Wellbeing, 2022; Flanagan et al., 2019). This can place families in an impossible situation, forcing a choice between seeking immediate safety for themselves and remaining together.

Young people currently navigate multiple systems with different thresholds, eligibility requirements and referral processes, including FDSV, homelessness, child protection, mental health and youth justice services (AHRC, 2024; Cullen et al., 2022; Gillfeather-Spetere & Watson, 2024). They may be required to repeat their experiences to multiple practitioners, receive conflicting advice or fall between services because no agency holds responsibility for coordinating their overall safety and wellbeing.

In adult-centred systems, children and young people are often not believed (Tucci & Mitchell, 2021) or fear that coming forward to share their lived experience of FDSV will result in punitive responses, family separation or other unwanted consequences, placing the responsibility back on them to anticipate, understand and manage the possible

consequences of seeking help. Community knowledge is limited, and many adults do not feel equipped to recognise signs of child sexual abuse, initiate a safe conversation or respond appropriately to a disclosure (National Centre for Action on Child Sexual Abuse, 2024). A response that recognises children and young people as true victim-survivors must be sustained and long-term to support the generational change envisioned under the National Plan (Allen et al., 2024).

The consequences of not receiving timely support can be severe. Suicide is the leading cause of death among Australians aged 15-24 (AIHW, 2026c). Between 2012 and 2023, on average, one child with a history of specialist homelessness service support died each week, and suicide was the leading cause of death for those aged 12-17 (AIHW, 2025). These findings are particularly concerning given the established association between childhood experiences of FDSV and other forms of maltreatment and increased risks of self-harm and suicide. Among Australians aged 16-24, 1 in 19 young people who had experienced childhood maltreatment, including exposure to domestic violence, emotional abuse and sexual abuse, reported attempting suicide in the previous year, making them 8 times more likely than those without such experiences (1 in 167 young people) (Mathews et al., 2023). These associations reinforce the importance of early, coordinated and sustained support.

Youth-specific One Stop Hubs should provide a clear point of access where trained practitioners work with young people, families and communities to coordinate tailored responses. Support could include counselling, healthcare, housing and financial assistance, advocacy, safety planning, education, mentoring, peer support, mental health interventions, and support navigating Services Australia, legal processes and other systems. The model could provide continuity of care and ensure that a young person is not left to coordinate complex services alone. The evaluation of Western Australia's Family and Domestic Violence One Stop Hubs found value in integrated, welcoming and culturally safe service delivery (Department of Communities, 2023). The Second Action Plan can build on this foundation by funding a distinct youth-specific model, co-designed with young people and the youth sector, with eligibility, staffing and environments tailored to young people's needs.

INTERNATIONAL PRACTICE EXAMPLE: BARNAHUS

In Europe and the United Kingdom, 28 countries have implemented or plan to implement Barnahus or similar standards (Greijer & Wenke, 2023). Barnahus encompasses a child-centred approach that uses multidisciplinary hubs comprising of child protection, specialised law enforcement, and physical and mental health workers to respond to FDSV and abuse. Evidence shows that, for children and young people, the experience of interacting with these systems is just as meaningful as the outcome, underscoring the need for relational and youth-friendly approaches (Herbert et al., 2026).

Educational engagement, safeguarding and youth workers in schools

Recommendation 4: Provide long-term Commonwealth investment, in partnership with states and territories, to expand trauma-informed and culturally safe educational engagement, re-engagement and safeguarding programs for children and young people, and access to specialist FDSV services where required.

WHAT YOUNG PEOPLE TOLD YACWA

Young people described youth workers as more relatable, approachable and easier to trust than formal services. Consistent relationships make it easier to ask questions, disclose concerns and seek help early.

"Full responsibility shouldn't be on teachers, but they're also with a young person for a majority of their childhood... If they see something and they don't act that can be considered neglectful. I've seen that happen in school... but I think that when they're corrected, then they take that on".

Schools and other educational settings are key places where the impacts of FDSV can become visible, making safeguarding and appropriate responses to concerns and disclosures essential (Department of Education, 2024; Stewart et al., 2026). Changes in a young person's attendance, behaviour, relationships, engagement or academic performance may indicate that further support is needed (Orr et al., 2023; Stewart et al., 2026). However, our consultations with the sector and young people indicate that many educational settings and teachers or other staff lack sufficient, sustained, trauma-informed supports and the time and capacity to understand and help children and young people remain engaged in learning while responding to the circumstances impacting their lives.

Dedicated youth workers can provide early, practical support, advocate for children and young people's needs, and facilitate connections with family, education, health and mental health, housing assistance, and specialist FDSV services (Gillfeather-Spetere & Watson, 2024; Wright et al., 2022). Their relational practice enables them to build trust over time, detect changes earlier, support safe disclosures, and work alongside young people to address barriers to learning and development (Wright et al., 2022). Strong school connectedness is also protective of young people's mental health, reinforcing the importance of roles that help young people remain included and engaged (Raniti et al., 2022).

When unsafe situations occur within the family or close to home, children and young people may also face the barrier that disclosure may lead to involvement of an abusive parent or carer. Young people have identified parental permission requirements, limited confidentiality, and the risk of private and sensitive information being disclosed to an abusive parent or carer as significant barriers to accessing services (DFSVC & ANROWS, 2026). Youth workers in schools should complement specialist FDSV services by providing a visible, less formal, and accessible pathway to information and support, with clear referral arrangements and appropriate supervision.

Sector workers have shared that access must extend beyond mainstream schools. Children and young people who are home educated, disengaged, excluded, living in unstable accommodation, or attending flexible learning settings may be at heightened risk of being

unseen by safeguarding systems. Commonwealth investment should support outreach and re-engagement programs, partnerships with youth services, and flexible pathways to specialist support, so that assistance is not conditional on regular school attendance.

Short-term funding undermines continuity, workforce capacity, knowledge retention, and the trusted relationships essential to effective youth work (Wright et al., 2022). Drawing on our work and sector consultations, we know that long-term Commonwealth investment, in partnership with states and territories, is needed to expand trauma-informed educational engagement and re-engagement programs that help children and young people affected by FDSV remain connected to education, support healing, and reduce the long-term impacts of trauma.

TRANSFERABLE PRACTICE EXAMPLE: STRENGTHENING SAFEGUARDING

The Western Australian Council of Social Service (WACOSS) in partnership with the Council of Aboriginal Services Western Australia (CASWA), currently delivers the Child Safe Project, to support small and medium-sized community service providers to embed child safeguarding into organisational policy and practice. The project provides webinars and in-person workshops, one-on-one advisory support, and policy templates and practical resources aligned with the National Principles for Child Safe Organisations (Western Australian Council of Social Service, n.d.).

This organisational capacity-building approach could be adapted for schools and flexible learning providers alongside dedicated youth workers. It offers a practical model for strengthening policies, staff confidence, responses to concerns and disclosures, and referral pathways to specialist FDSV services.

Youth-led prevention, early intervention and safe responses to harmful behaviours

Recommendation 5: Invest in prevention and early intervention programs for children and young people. These must be long-term, co-designed, youth-led, developmentally appropriate and culturally safe. Programs should include peer-led education on respectful relationships, consent, emotional regulation, digital sexual literacy and online harms. Where harmful sexual behaviours emerge, responses should prioritise strengths-based, therapeutic and trauma-informed support.

WHAT YOUNG PEOPLE AND SECTOR WORKERS TOLD YACWA

"I guarantee that young people are more likely to listen to peers because they resonate and relate to us."

"We're seeing a growing amount of misogyny online, and it's really impacting the attitudes of young people. I've seen it personally; you can tell the attitudes of those students are connected to the emerging misogyny"

"If you're treating kids like criminals, they're going to internalise that."

Peer relationships play a significant role in shaping attitudes, behaviours and help-seeking. The eighth Australian Survey of Secondary Students and Sexual Health found that young people were more likely to seek support from friends than from family members, teachers or general practitioners when navigating relationships, sexuality and sexual experiences (Power et al., 2026). Peer-led approaches can strengthen primary prevention by providing credible, relatable information and building young people's confidence to support one another and seek help.

Prevention programs must also address the gendered drivers of violence without alienating young people. ANROWS found that some young people adopted a "gender-ignoring" view of fairness, treating all individuals the same and overlooking structural inequality, harmful gender norms, and the disproportionate violence experienced by women and girls (Coumarelos et al., 2023). Youth workers told YACWA that well-designed programs can help young people understand the difference between equality and equity and critically examine the social conditions that shape FDSV, thereby building healthy relationship skills and preventing violence.

Prevention should begin early and increase in complexity across developmental stages. Children and young people have called for consistent, practical education on body safety, boundaries, consent, respectful relationships, emotional regulation, communication, sexism, diversity, digital sexual cultures, help-seeking, and how communities should respond to FDSV (DFSVC & ANROWS, 2026; Power et al., 2026). Programs should be co-designed, delivered and evaluated with young people, and should provide clear pathways for support when education prompts a concern or disclosure.

In our consultations, young people expressed a desire for greater focus on the social sciences and critical-thinking skills to better understand and discern media and other influences on their lives. Digital sexual literacy should be embedded within respectful relationships and consent education to help young people protect themselves. Children and young people need developmentally appropriate support to critically understand online sexual content, pornography and image-based abuse, including the sharing of intimate images (Power et al., 2026). Education should also address emerging trends, including the manosphere, gender stereotypes, scams and misinformation (e.g. deepfakes) (eSafety Commissioner, 2024). This education should build critical thinking, media literacy and practical safety skills, while supporting young people to understand consent, respect, boundaries and healthy relationships in both online and offline contexts (eSafety Commissioner, 2024, 2026; Power et al., 2026).

Although social media minimum-age restrictions came into effect in 2025, young people tell us that harmful content remains accessible (eSafety Commissioner, 2026). The need for education is clear. In a national research survey of 4396 young Australians, 77% reported they had viewed pornography. The average age at which children first viewed pornography unintentionally was 11.5, and the average age at which they viewed pornography intentionally was 13 (Power et al., 2026). Sector workers tell us that young people view their experience of pornography, in part, as a learning tool, which may be distressing or unrealistic and promote gendered violence, unhealthy dynamics and distorted expectations of sex.

In 2025, young people in Western Australia reported lower family cohesion, even though 71% felt they had someone to turn to for decision-making support; 52% felt social media was helpful as a source of support (McHale et al., 2025). Through our consultations, young people have told us that peer-led programs create relatable, safe environments where participants feel more comfortable discussing relevant topics and their lived experience, fostering engagement with support in a less formal, non-judgemental and low-risk way. The need for relevant education is also reflected in youth surveys; in the YEP (Youth Educating Peers) Project's 2024 Youth Annual Survey, 70% of participants (aged 12-25) disagreed that they had received an informative and positive sexual health education experience at school (The YEP Project, 2025).

Healthy relationship skills and education are vital for ending violence against women and children through early intervention. Analysis of the Australian Child Maltreatment Study found a strong association between childhood maltreatment and later intimate partner violence victimisation; 56.8% of participants who had experienced any childhood maltreatment also reported intimate partner violence, compared with 24.4% of those who had not experienced childhood maltreatment (Mathews et al., 2025). This highlights the need to equip young people and the youth sector with accurate information, practical skills, and the confidence to respond safely to concerns and disclosures. Evidence supports investment in child- and young-people-centred, trauma-informed, and coordinated responses across services that work with children and young people (Gillfeather-Spetere & Watson, 2024).

Responses to harmful sexual behaviours must be integral to prevention and early intervention. Assessment and intervention should consider age, developmental stage, relational and cultural context, trauma history, power dynamics, impacts on others, and whether the behaviour is escalating or recurring (Department of Communities, 2022). Targeted intervention can safeguard children and young people who have been harmed while addressing the needs and circumstances of the child or young person displaying harmful behaviour. Where safe and appropriate, therapeutic, diversionary and community-based supports should be prioritised over responses that unnecessarily criminalise young people, while maintaining safety and developmentally appropriate accountability. When children and young people who display harmful sexual behaviours come into contact with the justice system, responses should draw on the principles of Social Reinvestment WA's *Blueprint for a Better Future*, including holistic and therapeutic support, prioritised diversion and accessible community-based responses (Rothwell et al., 2022).

Long-term investment is required to embed peer-led education across mainstream schools, flexible learning environments, and community settings, ensuring it is not delivered as a one-off activity. Funding should support peer educators, ongoing youth-worker involvement, professional development for the youth sector, and clear links to specialist services. Evidence supports sustained school-based prevention initiatives and relational youth work over short-term interventions (Melendez-Torres et al., 2024; Wright et al., 2022).

CASE EXAMPLE: ALL IT TAKES

All It Takes, a primary prevention project delivered by YACWA, is curated and co-designed by young people with lived experience of FDSV, creating online and workshop content that they would seek. It is strengths-based, trauma-informed and peer-led, equipping young people to recognise unhealthy behaviours, challenge harmful attitudes, support peers and seek help early. It is delivered in settings including alternative education, residential care, accommodation and alcohol and other drug services, meeting young people in environments where they already feel connected.

The project delivers both professional development workshops for youth workers and sessions for young people on topics including respectful relationships, ethical engagement with pornography and the manosphere, and related issues. Its youth and sector reference groups help ensure that content remains relevant, culturally responsive and grounded in young people's language and experiences. Long-term investment would allow models such as All It Takes to be sustained, evaluated and extended to more young people and settings.

Conclusion

The Second Action Plan must move beyond recognising children and young people as victim-survivors and ensure systems respond to them as rights-holders with distinct experiences, needs and expertise. YACWA's consultations show that young people want accessible, trusted support, meaningful influence over decisions, practical education, safe pathways to disclosure, and responses that do not require them to navigate fragmented adult systems alone.

The Commonwealth can deliver tangible progress by setting child- and youth-specific outcomes and accountability, embedding young people in whole-of-system reform, investing in youth-specific multidisciplinary hubs, funding youth workers and educational engagement, and supporting long-term youth-led prevention and early intervention. Actions must be co-designed with children and young people from diverse backgrounds, adequately funded, independently monitored, and sustained for the life of the National Plan.

Ending FDSV within a generation requires meaningful and sustained action. YACWA urges the Australian Government to place children and young people at the centre of the Second Action Plan and to ensure their safety, recovery, participation and long-term wellbeing are visible at every stage of implementation and evaluation.

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