



Government of **Western Australia**  
Department for **Child Protection**

# WA Strategic Plan for Family and Domestic Violence

2009—2013

## Message from the Minister



Domestic and family violence should not happen to anyone. When it does, it directly affects the victims, their children, their families, employers, co-workers and has repercussions for the quality of life in the community.

Domestic and family violence occurs when a partner or former partner attempts to psychologically dominate or harm the other with physical violence.

Children who live with domestic and family violence are at greater risk of being abused. Children of victims are also at risk of continuing the violence with their own children and partners with a heightened risk of alcohol, drug abuse and delinquency in later life.

This year I transferred the Family and Domestic Violence Unit into the Department for Child Protection to give a holistic approach to what is a very complex issue.

Our Government's Family and Domestic Violence Strategic Plan 2009-2013 focuses on delivering major reforms to the sector which aims to provide better integrated service responses to families who find themselves victims of domestic and family violence.

Key strategies included in the State Strategic Plan that aim to support the integrated response are to:

- Strengthen community understanding and awareness that family and domestic violence is not acceptable,
- Focus family and domestic violence prevention and early intervention initiatives on children, young people, health and respectful relationships,
- Provide an accessible, integrated 24 hour response throughout the State that includes crisis and post crisis intervention, and
- Ensure that a range of evidence based programs and interventions for perpetrators of family and domestic violence are provided.

This Strategic Plan will send a clear message that abuse in all forms will not be tolerated in our homes, or our communities.

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "R. McSweeney".

Robyn McSweeney MLC

**MINISTER FOR CHILD PROTECTION; COMMUNITY SERVICES;  
SENIORS AND VOLUNTEERING; WOMEN'S INTERESTS**

# Introduction

Family and domestic violence is a complex problem requiring a multi-agency response across both State and Commonwealth Government departments and community sector organisations. It requires the involvement of the WA Police, the courts, corrective services, child protection, health professionals, legal professionals, advocacy services, accommodation and support services, counselling services and the education system.

Across Australia and internationally, it is now recognised that responding to family and domestic violence requires a holistic and integrated response across government and community sector agencies underpinned by effective legislation, as well as the support of the broader community.

The Western Australian Safety and Accountability Audit of the Armadale Domestic Violence Intervention Project undertaken in 2005 provided clear evidence that government departments, community sector organisations and the community must have the capacity to respond and work together as seamlessly and consistently as possible if family and domestic violence is to be effectively addressed.

This Strategic Plan aims to raise the community's understanding and awareness of family and domestic violence. However, the first priority of the Plan is to ensure that each part of the system has the capacity to take action and, through their combined, integrated efforts, maximise the safety of victims and the accountability of perpetrators. The Plan builds on the progress made in the 2004–2008 Strategic Plan, which saw:

- amendments made to the *Restraining Orders Act 1997*, giving police greater powers to intervene in domestic violence incidents
- the development of the first Family Violence Courts to provide for a better response to perpetrators
- the establishment of protocols between the Western Australia Police and the Department for Child Protection to better support children who are present in situations of domestic violence.

By establishing a shared vision and working towards common goals, the incidence of family and domestic violence can be reduced, victims can more effectively be kept safe from further harm and perpetrators made accountable for their violent behaviour.

The Plan provides the foundation on which State Government departments with responsibilities for responding to family and domestic violence, can develop key actions that are required to ensure service capacity and integration across the system.

If we do not take more effective action to build capacity to respond and support an integrated response, the risk is that victims, including both adults and children, will continue to die or be injured as a direct result of family and domestic violence.

In financial terms, the risks of not better addressing the burden of family and domestic violence on the Western Australian economy are considerable. In 2004, Access Economics estimated that the total annual cost of domestic violence to the Australian economy for 2002–2003 was \$8.1 billion.

# Background

Family and domestic violence is a devastating issue that affects the health and wellbeing of Western Australians every year. Large numbers of women and children suffer daily as a result of family and domestic violence. Over a twelve month period between 2008 and 2009, the WA Police attended 30,933 incidents of family and domestic violence in Western Australia. Of these incidents 12,329 were linked to criminal offences. From May 2008 to April 2009, 17 people lost their lives as a direct result of family and domestic violence.

While there has been debate about the reliability of research that quantifies the incidence of family and domestic violence, there is general agreement that:

- family and domestic violence is largely unreported,
- an overwhelming majority of people who experience family and domestic violence are women, and
- Aboriginal women are more likely than non-Aboriginal women to be victims of family violence.

Family and domestic violence is particularly acute in Aboriginal communities. In Western Australia, it is estimated that Aboriginal women are 45 times more likely to be the victim of family violence than non-Aboriginal women, accounting for almost 50 per cent of all victims.<sup>1</sup>

Family and domestic violence affects every member of the family, including children, and it creates a home environment where children live in constant fear. Children who witness domestic violence are affected in ways similar to children who are physically abused. Numerous studies have found that children who witness their parents using violence against each other are at increased risk of being involved in an abusive relationship as an adult. A focus on breaking the intergenerational cycle of abuse is critical to reducing the incidence of family and domestic violence.

In all relationships, family and domestic violence is unacceptable in any form, in any circumstances and in all cultures. In Western Australia, all forms of family and domestic violence are against the law.

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<sup>1</sup>Ferrante et al (1996) "Measuring the Extent of Domestic Violence In Western Australia"

## Development of the Strategic Plan

The development and endorsement of the Strategic Plan has been undertaken by a Senior Officers' Group, with representatives from the following agencies:

### State Government

- Department of the Attorney General
- Department for Child Protection
- Department of Corrective Services
- Department of Education
- Department of Health
- Department for Housing
- Department of Indigenous Affairs
- Disability Services Commission
- Legal Aid WA
- Western Australia Police
- WA Drug and Alcohol Authority

### Commonwealth Government

- Attorney General's Department
- Centrelink
- Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs

### Community Sector

- Women's Council for Domestic and Family Violence Services Inc.

The development of the Plan has also been informed by feedback through a targeted consultation with the following key stakeholders:

- Representatives from the Regional Coordination Responses to Family and Domestic Violence which are funded throughout the State to facilitate a coordinated response across agencies who have a primary responsibility for responding to family and domestic violence.
- The Women's Council for Domestic and Family Violence Services Inc. which is a peak community sector body for women's refuges and family and domestic violence advocacy services throughout the State.

- The Advisory Committee for Family and Domestic Violence Prevention and Early Intervention, with representation across both government and community sector agencies.
- Strong Survivors Against Violence Everywhere (SSAVE) Group comprising women survivors of family and domestic violence who provide advice on policy and practice issues to improve outcomes for individuals who access domestic violence services.

The implementation of the Strategic Plan, monitoring of its progress and the evaluation of its success will be managed by an interagency Senior Officers' Group, with executive support provided by the Department for Child Protection.

## Definition

Family and domestic violence is considered to be behaviour which results in physical, sexual and/or psychological damage, forced social isolation, economic deprivation, or behaviour which causes the victim to live in fear.<sup>2</sup> The term is usually used where abuse and violence take place in intimate partner relationships including same sex relationships, between siblings, from adolescents to parents or from family carers to a relative or a relative with a disability. A key characteristic of family and domestic violence is the use of violence or other forms of abuse to control someone with whom the perpetrator has an intimate or family relationship.

The term 'domestic violence' usually refers to abuse against an intimate partner, while family violence is a broader expression encompassing domestic violence and the abuse of children, the elderly and other family members.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people generally prefer to use the term 'family violence'. This concept describes a matrix of harmful, violent and aggressive behaviours and is considered to be more reflective of an Aboriginal world view of community and family healing. However, the use of this term should not obscure the fact that Aboriginal women and children bear the brunt of family violence.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Western Australian Family and Domestic Violence State Strategic Plan 2004-2008

<sup>3</sup> The Western Australian Family and Domestic Violence Information Kit. Department for Communities, Government of Western Australia, Family and Domestic Violence Unit.

## Vision

All people in Western Australia are free from family and domestic violence and abuse.

## Target Group

The Strategic Plan is concerned with addressing intimate partner violence, which is characterised by an imbalance of power and a pattern of behaviours which are used consciously by one person to control another.

## Principles

The following principles have been designed to provide the foundation for the development and implementation of family and domestic violence policies, programs and practices. Each principle is considered of equal value and importance.

1. Family and domestic violence and abuse is a fundamental violation of human rights and will not be tolerated in any community or culture.
2. Preventing family and domestic violence and abuse is the responsibility of the whole community and requires a shared understanding that it must not be tolerated under any circumstance.
3. The safety and wellbeing of those affected by family and domestic violence and abuse will be the first priority of any response.
4. Perpetrators of family and domestic violence and abuse will be held accountable for their behaviour and acts that constitute a criminal offence will be dealt with accordingly.
5. Responses to family and domestic violence and abuse can be improved through the development of an all-inclusive approach in which responses are integrated and specifically designed to address safety and accountability.
6. An effective system will acknowledge that to achieve substantive equality, partnerships must be developed in consultation with specific communities of interest including people with a disability, people from diverse sexualities and/or gender, people from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds.
7. Victims of family and domestic violence and abuse will not be held responsible for the perpetrator's behaviour.
8. Children have unique vulnerabilities in family and domestic violence situations, and all efforts must be made to protect them from short and long term harm.

## Outcomes

The outcomes of the State Strategic Plan for Family and Domestic Violence 2009-2013 are:

- **Prevention and early intervention.**  
Individual attitudes and behaviours within the community reflect that family and domestic violence in any form is not acceptable.
- **Safety for victims.**  
Adult and child victims are safe and kept free from harm through timely and accessible services.
- **Accountability for perpetrators.**  
Perpetrators are held accountable for their actions and are actively supported to cease their violent behaviour.

## Key Strategies

The key strategies to be implemented will:

1. Strengthen community understanding and awareness that domestic violence is not acceptable.
2. Focus family and domestic violence prevention and early intervention initiatives on children and young people and healthy, respectful relationships.
3. Support Aboriginal and new and emerging communities to develop greater awareness and understanding of family and domestic violence.
4. Develop a state-wide integrated response to those experiencing family and domestic violence.
5. Provide an accessible, integrated 24 hour response to family and domestic violence throughout the State including crisis and post-crisis intervention.
6. Ensure a range of safe and supported emergency and longer term accommodation and housing options for those affected by family and domestic violence, with priority consideration given to regional and remote locations and Aboriginal communities.
7. Provide advocacy and support responses that address the health and wellbeing of those affected by family and domestic violence, with priority consideration given to regional and remote locations and Aboriginal communities.
8. Ensure access to specialist short and long term counselling and support services for children who are victims of family and domestic violence.
9. Ensure a range of evidence based programs and interventions for perpetrators of family and domestic violence.
10. Maintain and continue to develop a strong civil and criminal justice and statutory response to family and domestic violence.
11. Include family and domestic violence as a core unit in social science, justice and health related tertiary qualifications.

## Performance Indicators

The performance indicators we will report on are the:

- Number of family and domestic violence incidents reported to the WA Police.
- Number of Police Orders issued, by order length.
- Number of Violence Restraining Orders applied for, where circumstances of domestic violence are, and are not, present.
- Number of Violence Restraining Orders granted, where circumstances of domestic violence are, and are not, present.
- Number of perpetrators charged as a result of family and domestic violence for:
  - » Assault,
  - » Breaches of Violence Restraining Orders and Police Orders, and
  - » Other (eg property damage, deprivation of liberty, stalking).
- Number of victims of intimate partner violence hospitalised as a result of family and domestic violence.
- Number of homicides as a direct result of family and domestic violence.

## Evaluation

An evaluation of the Strategic Plan will be integral to the process. The evaluation framework will include the following:

- Changes in performance indicator data over time.
- The degree to which an integrated interagency response has been achieved and associated outcomes.
- Use of national data, such as the Australian Bureau of Statistics' Personal Safety Survey, to measure and monitor the incidence and prevalence of family and domestic violence.

# Notes

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