

A Strategic Response to Youth Violence

- 5.1 Chapter 5 considers the need for a strategic response to youth violence and the role of the Australian Government in leading such a response. Specifically, the Chapter outlines the importance of a response to youth violence that is evidence-based, prevention focused, collaborative, coordinated and inclusive.
- 5.2 In addition Chapter 5 considers the role of the Australian Government in addressing societal level factors which influence youth violence. This includes consideration of the need to support national policies that address broader issues of social and economic disadvantage, which although they do not directly target youth violence, are likely to impact on youth violence to varying degrees. The Chapter also considers population based initiatives to reduce youth violence and its impact on young Australians by reinforcing social norms and, where required, by fostering widespread cultural and attitudinal change.

The Role of the Australian Government

- 5.3 Preceding Chapters of the report have examined what is known about youth violence in Australia, the influence of various risk and protective factors and investigated options for prevention, early intervention and rehabilitation strategies. With so much known about the underlying causes of youth violence, and so many initiatives and programs supported by various levels of government that aim to address these issues, the question remains: why does youth violence seem to be a growing problem?
- 5.4 The issue here is the absence of a coherent, national violence prevention and rehabilitation framework. The need to build and implement a national

strategic framework and the role of the Australian Government in leading and facilitating this is examined.

- 5.5 As with many social issues, youth violence is complex. Therefore, it is unlikely that simple solutions will be effective. Added to this, to be effective, many interventions will require implementation to be sustained in the longer term. To achieve an effective national response to youth violence, Ms Deirdre Croft representing the Australian Research Alliance for Children and Youth (ARACY) observed:

What is apparent is that there are individual factors, there are factors that occur at a family level, there are mental health issues, there are drug and alcohol issues. At a government level each of those are being addressed by discreet portfolio areas, and some excellent programs are occurring. But my perception ... is that it is fragmented and often it is not sustained, so there has to be some top-level commitment. It cannot be initiated from one government agency; it has to be a top-level commitment.¹

- 5.6 The following comment was made by a respondent to the inquiry's online youth survey:

*Violence, like other issues affecting modern societies, has its roots in multiple issues. These include lack of or poor education (both formal and values-based), abusive or neglectful homes, unemployment and poverty. These issues will not change overnight - it requires an entire shift of how we view our country and ourselves. As a people, we need to be better educated, more open minded and amenable to change. We need to accept responsibility for our actions - both locally and on a global scale. **Female, 18-24 years, capital city***

- 5.7 It is likely that in some family and community situations, breaking the cycle of violence will require generational change to resolve issues associated with long-term and embedded social and economic disadvantage. Similarly, addressing some of the issues associated with youth violence will also require significant cultural and attitudinal change at population level. Fostering these changes will require sustained effort and will only come about over a prolonged period of time. According to the submission from Voices Against Violence:

This is about cultural change and the government is the key driver of that change. We need a government that provides strategic leadership with foresight to look ahead at what needs to be done.

1 Ms Deirdre Croft, Transcript of Evidence, 24 February 2010, p 2.

‘Voices Against Violence’ is strongly of the view that just as this is a societal and cultural issue it will take all members of our community to step and accept some degree of responsibility. We do all need to do more - but we need a government that provides stronger leadership and sets the tone and context for the community we live in.²

- 5.8 The role of governments in addressing youth violence from the Australian Government’s perspective is outlined in the joint submission from Australian Government departments as follows:

The issue of violence in the community is complex and multi-faceted, requiring all levels of government, community organisations, parents, and young people themselves to work in partnership towards a range of solutions. State and territory governments, for example, have a direct role on important issues to do with violence such as the administration of policing and juvenile justice.

The Australian Government plays an important role in supporting the wellbeing of young Australians, including by:

- identifying national concerns and priorities for young people
- delivering targeted initiatives to support young people at risk
- working through the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) to implement reform agendas to strengthen the foundations in early childhood, education and in the employment participation of young people
- leading national collaborative work to strengthen connections across governments and improve integrated, coordinated service delivery
- directly engaging with young people at the national level and promoting positive opportunities for the participation of young people.³

Identifying the Priorities and Concerns of Young Australians

- 5.9 A key strategy for identifying the priorities and concerns of young people was the establishment of the Australian Youth Forum (AYF) in 2008 by the

2 Voices Against Violence, Submission No 67, p 5.

3 Australian Government – Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR) et al, Submission No 62, p 7.

Australian Government. The AYF provides a communication channel between the Government and young people, as well as organisations in the youth sector. In early 2009, following extensive consultations and discussions with young people, the AYF identified violence and safety as major concerns for young Australians.⁴ One result of this feedback was the reference of this inquiry from the Minister for Early Childhood Education, Child Care and Youth, The Hon Kate Ellis MP.

5.10 Building upon previous engagement with young people through the AYF, during October and November of 2009, the Australian Government conducted a 'National Conversation' with young people. The aim of the National Conversation was to ensure widespread consultation to feed into the development of a *National Strategy for Young Australians* (the National Strategy) to guide future government policy.⁵ The National Strategy was released on 14 April 2010. It identifies the following eight priority areas for Government action to help young Australians:

- improve their health and wellbeing;
- shape their own futures through education;
- support them within their families;
- empower them to take part and be active in their communities;
- equip them with the skills and personal networks they need to get work;
- enable them to participate online confidently and safely;
- help them get their lives back on track through early intervention; and
- establish clear-cut legal consequences for behaviours that endanger the safety of others.⁶

Committee Comment

5.11 The Committee believes that the National Strategy represents significant progress in determining issues of concern to young people, identifying priorities for action, and allowing young people to have a say in the development of policy which impacts on them. Considering the multiple

4 Australian Government - DEEWR et al, Submission No 62, p 17.

5 Australian Government website, *National Strategy for Young Australians*, viewed on 30 May 2010 at <http://www.youth.gov.au/Documents/NatStrat.pdf>.

6 Australian Government Social Inclusion website, viewed on 28 May 2010 at <http://www.socialinclusion.gov.au/LatestNews/Pages/NationalStrategyforYoungAustralians.aspx>.

and complex influences associated with youth violence, the Committee concludes that addressing youth violence will require a range of initiatives that relate to all eight of the priority areas identified in the National Strategy. This will include support for early intervention and prevention, initiatives that support strong relationships with families and communities, which enhance educational and employment opportunities, and which improve levels of safety strengthening law enforcement and raising awareness of the consequences of perpetrating violence.

- 5.12 While recognising the value of the National Strategy as an overarching framework of priorities for young people, in view of the requirement to provide a diverse range of programs delivered across portfolios and by all levels of government, the Committee believes that a specific national youth violence and rehabilitation strategy is essential to achieving a holistic and integrated policy response.
- 5.13 Importantly, the Committee emphasises that in order to be effective a national youth violence strategy must be founded on a robust evidence-base, particularly in relation to the efficacy and value of government supported interventions and programs. On the basis of evidence to the inquiry, the Committee also suggests that an evidence-based national youth violence strategy should be founded on the following key principles:
- implementation of a diverse range of multi-level interventions that target risk and protective factors that are influences at various levels in a young person's life (e.g. individual, peer, family, community);
 - a focus on prevention and early intervention measures first, supported by more targeted interventions for those at increased risk of experiencing violence and rehabilitation programs for violent offenders and for victims of violence;
 - collaborative, coordinated and inclusive response bringing together the efforts of different levels of government and portfolios, the non-government sector and the community, including young people themselves;
 - the establishment of well defined linkages to existing government strategies and programs addressing social and economic disadvantage (e.g. poverty, unemployment, poor engagement with education, family and domestic violence); and

- a focus on influencing and shaping societal factors at population level to reinforce social norms and to foster positive cultural and attitudinal changes.⁷

Recommendation 7

5.14 **The Committee recommends that the Australian Government, in consultation with state and territory governments and other key stakeholders, establish a national youth violence and rehabilitation strategy to guide the provision of a holistic and integrated policy and program delivery framework. The national youth violence and rehabilitation strategy should:**

- **be founded on a robust evidence-base;**
- **support multi-level interventions;**
- **be focused on prevention and early intervention;**
- **be collaborative, coordinated and inclusive of all levels of government, the non-government community sector and the wider community, including young people;**
- **link to existing strategies that target social and economic disadvantage; and**
- **include population level strategies to reinforce social norms and foster positive cultural and attitudinal changes.**

5.15 Each of the proposed elements for a national youth violence and rehabilitation strategy is considered in more detail below.

7 See for example: The Smith Family, Submission No 14, p 3; Commissioner for Children and Young People (WA), Submission No 33, p 3; Youthlaw & Frontyard Youth Services, Submission No 35, p 10; Centre for Multicultural Youth (CMY), Submission No 44, p 9; Victorian Aboriginal Legal Service Co-operative Ltd (VALS), Submission No 51, p 5; Voices Against Violence, Submission No 67, p 4; Province Promotions Pty Ltd, Submission No 71, p 4; Professor Paul Mazerolle, Transcript of Evidence, 30 March 2010, p 24.

The Need for a Robust Evidence-Base

5.16 A sound evidence-base which provides a thorough understanding of the factors that influence young persons' risks of experiencing violence and includes rigorous evaluation of interventions and programs targeting youth violence is crucial to supporting the development of an effective national youth violence strategy.⁸ The importance of an evidence-base was emphasised by Mission Australia as follows:

While much is known about youth violence, its causes, and the interventions which are effective, a broader and more detailed evidence base – particularly one that is grounded in an Australian context – would be invaluable in deepening decision-makers' knowledge of the various dimensions of youth violence and improving the effectiveness of programs and interventions.⁹

5.17 However, there is scope for the evidence-base to be expanded to include more information about youth violence at national level and to monitor emerging trends and changes in patterns of youth violence at national, regional and local levels.¹⁰ Furthermore, evidence to the inquiry suggests that there are also significant gaps in the evidence-base, particularly in relation to assessing the efficacy of strategies and interventions that target youth violence. As observed by the Australian Institute of Family Studies (AIFS):

Although numerous prevention strategies have been implemented in Australia, very few prevention programs have undertaken formal evaluations. More comprehensive evaluation is therefore needed that can identify aspects of programs that bring about change in the lives of young people.¹¹

5.18 It is in this context that the submission from the 20th Man Fund Inc cautions against implementing well-intentioned interventions that have not been adequately evaluated, saying:

We must not embrace 'common sense' approaches to complex social problems like youth violence. Programs need to be targeted,

8 Professor Paul Mazerolle, Transcript of Evidence, 30 March 2010, p 24.

9 Mission Australia, Submission No 59, p 20.

10 See for example: Professor Paul Mazerolle, Transcript of Evidence, 30 March 2010, p 17.

11 Australian Institute of Family Studies (AIFS), Submission No 39, p 7. See also: Associate Professor Sheryl Hemphill, Transcript of Evidence, 15 February 2010, p 50.

evidence based and routinely assessed to ensure they are relevant and effective.¹²

- 5.19 Similarly, Mission Australia expressed the following concern with regard to implementing programs that are not supported by a strong evidence-base:

There are significant risks associated with the implementation of programs without a strong theoretical and/or evidence base. As well as channelling community resources and funds towards endeavours that may have little success, in some cases programs or approaches lacking in theoretical and design integrity can do harm.¹³

- 5.20 Mission Australia described a University of Colorado initiative called *Blueprints for Violence Prevention*. The initiative, supported by the University's Center for the Study and Prevention of Violence, assesses intervention programs to determine what works and what does not.¹⁴ According to the Centre's website:

Across the country [USA], a raft of programs aimed at preventing violence and drug abuse is underway. All of these programs are well-intentioned. Yet very few of them have evidence demonstrating their effectiveness. Many are implemented with little consistency or quality control.¹⁵

- 5.21 Interestingly, Mission Australia notes that of more than 800 programs assessed under the *Blueprints for Violence Prevention*, only 11 have been identified as 'model' programs and 17 as 'promising'. Mission Australia also proceeded to note:

The 'model' and 'promising' programs shared the following characteristics: they promoted developmentally appropriate ways of working with clients at key transition points (early childhood, transition to school, transition to adolescence); and, they identified and worked with schools as a place for intervention and multi-systemic approaches that involved the whole community.¹⁶

12 20th Man Fund Inc, Submission No 19, p 1. See also: Ms Linda Chiodo et al, Submission No 78, p 7.

13 Mission Australia, Submission No 59, p 23.

14 Mission Australia, Submission No 59, p 23. See also: Professor Paul Mazerolle, Transcript of Evidence, 20 March 2010, p 17.

15 University of Colorado, Center for the Study and Prevention of Violence, *Blueprints for Violence Prevention* website, viewed on 19 May 2010 at <http://www.colorado.edu/cspv/blueprints/index.html>.

16 Mission Australia, Submission No 59, p 23.

Committee Comment

- 5.22 The Committee recognises the importance of developing and maintaining a strong evidence-base to underpin a national youth violence and rehabilitation strategy. While existing national and international research provides the current basis of understanding risk and protective factors, the Committee understands that issues of youth violence are not static. Therefore, the Committee supports the need to ensure that the evidence-base is continuously updated so that emerging issues and changing trends can be identified and proactive responses developed.¹⁷ The Committee's recommendation in Chapter 2 of the report, to improve data collection systems, will contribute to the evidence-base. By providing reliable and consistent information on levels of offending and victimisation over time, it will facilitate the identification of changing patterns of violence and assessment of the impact of policies to reduce levels of violence.
- 5.23 However, with regard to anti-violence interventions and programs specifically, while acknowledging the need for innovation to respond to emerging trends, the Committee is also aware of the need 'not to reinvent the wheel'. With so many anti-violence programs already being used throughout Australia and internationally, the Committee believes that a rigorous and systematic approach to evaluation is an essential undertaking to ascertain what is working and what isn't, and to establish why.
- 5.24 In the absence of a strong evidence-base, the Committee is concerned that limited resources may be diverted to ineffective interventions. Furthermore, in the absence of sufficient evidence some interventions and programs may have unintended or even harmful consequences. To address these concerns, and as an initial undertaking, the Committee recommends a full audit of existing interventions and programs that aim to address the issue of youth violence. Where information is available, the audit should detail program assessment and evaluation outcomes, and include commentary on the rigour of evaluation.¹⁸ The audit findings should be made available to inform government policy makers, non-government and community organisations operating within the youth sector, and other interested parties.

17 See for example: Ms Lynne Evans, Transcript of Evidence, 15 February 2010, p 55; Professor Paul Mazerolle, Transcript of Evidence, 30 March 2010, p 17.

18 Although not available at the time of writing this report, the Committee understands that Australian Research Alliance for Children and Youth (ARACY) has recently undertaken a review of evidence relating to the efficacy of diverse youth violence intervention strategies and programs. The outcomes of the review are due to be published in mid 2010.

Recommendation 8

- 5.25 **The Committee recommends that the Australian Government conduct an audit of existing initiatives and programs that aim to address youth violence. The audit should detail the outcomes of any assessments or evaluations, and provide commentary on the rigor of evaluation.**

Further, the Committee recommends that the audit findings be made publicly available.

- 5.26 In addition, the Committee recommends that the Australian Government, in consultation with state and territory governments, identify and establish an appropriate mechanism to support the development of a strong evidence-base through ongoing, systematic and rigorous evaluation of anti-violence interventions and programs. The Committee suggests that the University of Colorado's *Blueprints for Preventing Violence* initiative provides a useful model for consideration. A clearinghouse for the dissemination of information to policy makers and other interested parties should be an integral part of the considerations.

Recommendation 9

- 5.27 **The Committee recommends that the Australian Government, in consultation with state and territory governments and other key stakeholders, identify and establish an appropriate mechanism to support the development of a strong evidence-base through ongoing, systematic and rigorous evaluation of anti-violence interventions and programs.**

A clearinghouse for the dissemination of information to policy makers and other interested parties should be an integral part of the considerations.

- 5.28 Despite gaps in the evidence-base regarding the efficacy and value of specific interventions and programs, there is sufficient national and international evidence to identify a number of general principles that are

likely to be crucial to successfully addressing youth violence. These are examined in more detail below.

Multi-Level Interventions

5.29 Given the range of factors and circumstances that influence youth violence, it is clear that a holistic approach comprising a diverse range of strategies and interventions is required.¹⁹ As explained by Professor Sheryl Hemphill of the University of Melbourne:

What is really important in this area is to accept that violence is a complex problem and not to look for one single solution. You have a lot of different young people with a lot of different problems and different backgrounds. I think that we need to be thinking about the different areas of a young person's life – the family, the school, the community and the individuals themselves – and targeting each of those areas to try to make a difference. I guess I am talking more at the prevention end: having bullying-prevention programs in schools; teaching the young people social skills; helping families to handle those situations if they are going through a stressful time; and creating positive opportunities for young people in the community so that they can engage in social ways and have constructive things to do and hopefully are less likely to get involved in other behaviours. So I think we as a community need to be looking at an integrated, multifaceted approach if we really want to make a difference.²⁰

5.30 Similarly, Victim Support Australasia identified a range of strategies, both preventative and remedial, that it suggests are required to address multiple risk and protective factors that are influences occurring at different levels, stating:

The community needs strategies to address:

- family dynamics;
- parenting;
- school approaches to bullying and childhood violence;
- what the entertainment multimedia inaccurately portrays as a representation of 'normal' society;

19 See for example: The Hon Dr Bob Such MP, Submission No 15, p 6; Nepean Domestic Violence Network, Submission No 18, p 4; Alcohol and other Drugs Council of Australia (ADCA), Submission No 28, p 9; NSW Government, Submission No 76, p 1.

20 Associate Professor Sheryl Hemphill, Transcript of Evidence, 15 February 2010, p 55.

- the behaviour of role models in sport, music and community leadership;
- appropriate health and justice system responses to those who are dependent on alcohol, drugs, or similar; and
- a justice system approach to sanctions for unacceptable behaviour which is serious and consistently applied.²¹

5.31 Advocating also for a holistic approach that addresses not only individual risk factors, but also wider societal risks, Mission Australia observed:

It is therefore important that strategies seeking to address the risk factors associated with youth violence and to enhance protective factors consider the individual's place within the broader community context, and also focus on family and peer relationships, other influential actors in young people's lives (such as educators and those in sporting clubs), and structural factors such as policing strategies, media influences, recreational opportunities (or the lack thereof) and so on.²²

5.32 The *Pathways to Prevention* program, jointly supported by Mission Australia and Griffith University, is an example of an intervention that aims to address risk and protective factors occurring different levels. The program was described as follows by Dr Kate Freiberg of Griffith University:

Our work is guided by the understanding that outcomes for children are actually intimately bound up in the welfare of their whole families and communities, and it is also guided by the understanding that it is better to intervene early in pathways that can lead to poor developmental outcomes rather than wait until problems start appearing and become entrenched ... In *Pathways to Prevention*, what we do is try and work directly to support the development of the children's social and cognitive skills. But we also work to promote nurturing and supportive contexts for their development, both at the family level but also within schools, neighbourhoods and communities.²³

5.33 The following comments were made by respondents to the inquiry's on-line youth survey:

21 Victims Support Australasia Inc (VSA), Submission No 1, p 7.

22 Mission Australia, Submission No 59, p 21. See also: Ms Jen Sainsbury, Transcript of Evidence, 15 February 2010, pp 31-32.

23 Dr Kate Freiberg, Transcript of Evidence, 30 March 2010, p 26.

I think this issue requires a multifaceted approach encompassing education (schools), raising awareness (advertising, political campaigning and a show casing of real life negative consequences to the community) and provision of alternative activities (engagement between youth and the community to achieve and complete cooperative projects in local areas). Female, 18-24 years, capital city

It's complex and seems connected to so many other things – drug and alcohol use, mental health issues (i.e. drug induced psychosis/paranoia), homelessness, etc so there should be a holistic approach. Female, under 18 years, capital city

Committee Comment

- 5.34 The Committee recognises the need for a range of interventions and programs which address the diverse risk and protective factors which influence young people in different areas of their lives. Given the diversity and complexity of these various factors, responding in a holistic way will require effort across a broad range of portfolio areas and at all levels of government. The need for a collaborative and coordinated government response to youth violence is considered in more detail later in this Chapter, as is the need for an inclusive and whole-of-community approach to address wider social and economic issues.

Prevention and Early Intervention

- 5.35 The importance of prevention and early intervention strategies to break the cycle of violence has been a consistent theme throughout the inquiry.²⁴ Research demonstrates that behavioural problems in early childhood if unaddressed can lead to anti-social behaviour, aggression and violence in later life.²⁵ As noted in the submission from the NSW Government:

... people display physical aggression more often during the preschool period than during any other age period. To be maximally effective, interventions that target physical aggression should start when children are below the age of five.²⁶

24 See for example: The Hon Dr Bob Such MP, Submission No 15, p 5; ACT Government, Submission No 37, p 6; AIC, Submission No 57, p 11; Youth Affairs Council of Australia Inc (YACVic), Submission No 60, p 18; Queensland Commission for Children and Young People and Child Guardian, Submission No 66, p 6; Dr Adam Tomison, Transcript of Evidence, 10 February 2010, p 10; Roshen, Transcript of Evidence, 15 February 2010, p 13

25 See for example: The Smith Family, Submission No 14, p 4; Mission Australia, Submission No 59, p 6, NSW Government, Submission No 76, p 2.

26 NSW Government, Submission No 76, p 2.

- 5.36 However, while early intervention targeting infants and young children was emphasised, so too were interventions targeting older children and young people as they transition across key development stages.²⁷ The importance of these key transitions was emphasised as follows by Mission Australia:

There are many key transition points for children and young people, including the commencement of pre-school, transitioning to school, transitioning to adolescence and moving from school into the labour market. While a source of excitement and opportunity, these transition points are also a time of change and potential instability, and can be critical periods for which support is required.²⁸

- 5.37 Critically, evidence also emphasised the need for interventions to be sustained across the development pathway and to be appropriate to the child's or young person's developmental capacity. As explained by Dr Freiberg:

... it is really critical that we do not pretend to ourselves that something that happens when the child is in grade 1 is necessarily going to carry over and continue to be some sort of magic potion that lasts for the rest of their lives. There has to be continuing support and engagement as the children grow older and as they change ... So it cannot be an all-in-one shot in the primary school years.²⁹

- 5.38 Similarly, as outlined in the submission from Ms Linda Chiodo et al:

In general, the importance of the early years as the critical period to implement early interventions, such as teaching life skills or socially appropriate behaviours in preschool, has been emphasised ... However, it is strongly argued that strategies to reduce youth violence should be continuous in nature. That is, they should be implemented across developmental stages and tailored according to the risk and protective factors relevant to the stage (i.e. developmentally appropriate).³⁰

27 See for example: ARACY, Submission No 55, p 35.

28 Mission Australia, Submission No 59, p 25.

29 Dr Kate Freiberg, Transcript of Evidence, 30 March 2010, p 30.

30 Ms Linda Chiodo et al, Submission No 78, p 5. See also: ARACY, Submission No 55, p 35. Ms Deirdre Croft, Transcript of Evidence, 24 February 2010, p 3; Professor Paul Mazerolle, Transcript of Evidence, 30 March 2010, p 15.

5.39 Illustrating the importance of appropriately targeting interventions, Professor Paul Mazerolle told the Committee of the unintended outcome of an intervention which had increased police contact in schools with grade 9 children. Rather than acting as a crime deterrent, the intervention actually resulted in increased delinquency. Professor Mazerolle observed:

... it almost appeared as if the involvement of the police officer kind of primed their delinquency because they had higher rates of delinquency and violence after the intervention when we compared it to the control schools. So there was probably a priming effect of 'Isn't it cool to be tough and isn't it cool to be anti-authority?', and so part of the message is we need to intervene earlier. Grade 9 is probably too late if we are trying to shape attitudes about authority, violence, risks.³¹

5.40 Although there was overwhelming support for a 'prevention first' approach, a number of inquiry participants also acknowledged the importance of providing interventions which target young people at particular risk of experiencing violence, and rehabilitation programs to support victims of violence and to reduce recidivism among young offenders.³² While a number of submissions also called for harsher penalties for young offenders to be included in the mix³³, others observed that stronger punitive measures do not appear to be effective deterrents to offending or reoffending.³⁴ As noted by Mission Australia:

What does not appear to work, where youth violence is concerned, are programs that are of a punitive and coercive nature. For example, boot camps have proven to be ineffective and in some cases increase the incidence of youth antisocial behaviour ... There is growing knowledge about other punitive approaches that do not work, including punitive approaches in schools (i.e. school suspensions) which serve to further disconnect students from learning environments, and young offenders being tried in adult courts.³⁵

5.41 Similarly, in its submission ARACY states:

31 Professor Paul Mazerolle, Transcript of Evidence, 30 March 2010, p 15.

32 See for example: Mission Australia, Submission No 59, p 20.

33 See for example: Mr Keith Holman, Submission No 7, p 1; Neighbourhood Watch Broadbeach 20, Submission No 9, pp 1-2; Voices Against Violence, Submission No 67, p 5.

34 See for example: VSA, Submission No 1, p 7; Professor Kerry Carrington, Submission No 47, p 13.

35 Mission Australia, Submission No 59, p 23.

While punitive approaches to violent and antisocial behaviour among young people (including school suspension or incarceration in juvenile justice facilities) may have short-term political and public appeal, we submit that policies and programs which have the effect of further alienating young people from constructive social engagement are likely to be counter-productive in the long term.³⁶

5.42 The following comments were made by respondents to the inquiry's online youth survey:

Jails are not the answer. Most violent young people come from troubled homes. Most physically violent people have been physically abused themselves. It's not a cop out, and it's not an excuse, but it does seem to be a very common co-occurrence. People don't need a jail. They need someone who CARES AND, they need to learn how to do things differently. We can't just take the behaviour away without providing an alternative solution. At the same time, there needs to be consequences for their actions. These consequences should not be jail, where there cycle of pain and violence and recidivism is just likely to continue to another generation. Things like mandatory programs to handle violence/anger/emotions, community service (not just mowing lawns but actually seeing people who are worse off, like in a soup kitchen or something), and education for emotional intelligence in schools would be among some of the solutions **Female, 18-24 years, regional city**

Make it when a kid fights, he/she should have to go to court and then jailed straight up. None of this stupid rehabilitation crap as it doesn't work as they just keep doing it over and over. **Male, under 18 years, regional city**

Make harsher penalties and ENFORCE them every time. **Female, 18-24 years, rural/remote**

Lock them up and throw away the key they are a burden to society' and bring back joining up the armed forces again. **Male, 18-24 years, regional city**

Violence in general is a serious problem and I think one of the best ways to counteract it is to punish violent behaviour more strongly than is being done now. **Female, 18-24 years, capital city**

Committee Comment

- 5.43 While supporting the focus on a prevention first approach to the issue of youth violence, the Committee recognises the need to support a multi-faceted approach which also includes secondary interventions for young people at increased risk of violence and tertiary interventions to support young victims of violence and reduce recidivism by young offenders. Noting that it is likely to be some time before the results of prevention and early interventions such as social development programs manifest, the Committee believes that introducing measures to address situational factors that contribute to violence, such alcohol, will complement longer term initiatives by having a more immediate impact on youth violence.
- 5.44 In addition, while recognising the need for young people to have a clear understanding of acceptable behavioural boundaries and of the consequences of transgressing those boundaries, from evidence the Committee understands that harsher penalties for offenders do appear to be effective deterrents. Instead the Committee concludes that the implementation of best practice policing is more likely to provide constructive outcomes. As outlined in Chapter 4, the Committee supports best practice policing measures which ensure that young offenders are dealt with quickly so that the linkages between actions and consequences are clearly established. The Committee also supports the increased use of restorative justice measures which require young offenders to confront consequences of their actions on victims and to make reparations.

A Collaborative and Coordinated Approach

- 5.45 Responsibility for addressing the numerous and complex factors associated with youth violence is shared between federal, state/territory and local governments, and across multiple portfolios. Furthermore, to be effective, approaches will also need to engage broadly with communities, including young people and their parents. Therefore, an effective response to youth violence will only be achieved if the approach taken is collaborative, coordinated and inclusive. As summarised in the Australian Government's submission:

... there is of course no simple answer. The issue of youth violence is a complex, multi-faceted problem and one that demands all levels of government, community organisations, parents, and

young people themselves to work in partnership towards a range of solutions.³⁷

5.46 Ms Linda Chiodo et al also concluded in their submission:

Most importantly, strategies should not be considered in isolation. Therefore, collaboration and partnership across sectors (governments, business, civil society, and religious sectors), and across fields or disciplines (e.g., criminal justice, psychology, public health, education) are essential.³⁸

5.47 As previously stated, no single program will address the complexity and diversity of young people's needs in the community. This requires support for a diverse range of programs that meet the different needs of young people and the specific issues facing local communities. Targeted interventions involving families, education, law enforcement and juvenile justice, urban planning and infrastructure, as well as, and measures associated with the regulation and control of alcohol. The result is a patchwork of interventions and programs which are supported to varying degrees by federal, state/territory and local governments. The need for an integrated and whole-of-governments response to violence committed against and by young people was identified as a priority need.³⁹ As observed by Ms Lynne Evans of the Adolescent Forensic Health Service at the Royal Children's Hospital in Melbourne:

Different services are working around this problem, but sometimes there is a lack of coordination about who is doing what and synergy between things happening at a similar time.⁴⁰

5.48 The Commissioner for Children and Young People (WA) also noted the importance of developing an integrated approach, identifying the following as being critical to effective intervention:

Services are provided in a coordinated, accessible and integrated way to deal holistically with the needs of children, young people and their families and to ensure that they reach the most vulnerable members of our community.⁴¹

37 Australian Government - DEEWR et al, Submission No 45, p 45.

38 Ms Linda Chiodo et al, Submission No 78, p 7. See also: Associate Professor Sheryl Hemphill, Transcript of Evidence, 15 February 2010, p 50.

39 See for example: ADCA, Submission No 28, p 4; ARACY, Submission No 55, p 36; Mr Adair Donaldson, Transcript of Evidence, 30 March 2010, p 49.

40 Ms Lynne Evans, Transcript of Evidence, 15 February 2010, p 45.

41 Commissioner for Children and Young People (WA), Submission No 33, p 5.

- 5.49 Evidence to the inquiry included reference to a number of programs involving collaboration across portfolios, such as the Tasmanian Government's police led interagency support team (IAST) which is described as follows:

The IAST program is an important Tasmanian Government initiative which provides a collaborative, multi-agency approach to the case coordination of those young people and their families in Tasmania with complex needs. These young people are frequently known to police and other government agencies, have histories of offending, and are recipients of a broad range of government services.

IASTs are convened and led by Tasmania Police, and bring together key government agencies and local government. Through the coordination of service delivery, the IAST model seeks to avoid duplication, identify and respond to gaps in service delivery, and provide a tailored response.⁴²

- 5.50 A number of submissions have indicated that addressing youth violence effectively requires a whole-of-community response. This would involve supporting active engagement between governments, government funded entities (e.g. schools), non-government agencies (e.g. community based youth organisations and sporting clubs), community leaders, families and young people. With regard to engaging with young people specifically, inquiry participants have emphasised the need for youth to be involved in developing the solutions rather than being viewed solely as the problem.⁴³ As suggested below:

[The] views of young people should be included in community decision making, especially when considering youth issues. For example, youth should be encouraged to participate in the development, implementation, and evaluation of programs and services. In addition, incentives or recognitions should be offered to motivate young people to participate in such activities.⁴⁴

42 Tasmanian Government, Submission No 56, pp 4-5.

43 See for example: National Council of Single Mothers and their Children Inc (NCSMC), Submission No 2, p 1; Commissioner for Children and Young People (WA), Submission No 33, p 4; Youthlaw & Frontyard Youth Services, Submission No 35, pp 11-12; Centre for Multicultural Youth (CMY), Submission No 44, p 11; ARACY, Submission No 55, p 32; Queensland Commission for Children and Young People and Child Guardian, Submission No 66, p 1; Mr Adair Donaldson, Transcript of Evidence, 30 March 2010, p 48.

44 Ms Linda Chiodo et al, Submission No 78, p 6.

5.51 To support a more collaborative and coordinated response to youth violence, the Men's Advisory Network (MAN) recommended:

... the establishment of a reference group made up of the relevant government agencies, plus non-government organisations to plan the most effective approach to addressing the issue of abuse and violence in the community.⁴⁵

5.52 It has also been suggested that governments might take a leadership role in promoting partnerships by engaging with the private sector (e.g. sporting clubs, telecommunication providers) to encourage support for anti-youth violence initiatives as part of corporate social responsibility activities.⁴⁶

Committee Comment

5.53 The Committee agrees that a collaborative, coordinated and inclusive response involving governments, non-government organisations and the wider community, including young people themselves will be critical to addressing the issue of youth violence. The Committee understands that there are several ways in which the Australian Government can take a leadership role in this regard. The Committee has already outlined a number of areas where cooperation between Federal government and state/territory governments is being supported through COAG and the appropriate Ministerial Councils.⁴⁷

5.54 The release of the *National Strategy for Young Australians*, developed following extensive consultation with young people and organisations operating within the youth sector, provides guidance in the form of an overarching framework of priorities to be addressed to improve the health and wellbeing of young Australians. With regard to moving forward in a collaborative and coordinated way to address these priorities identified, the Committee notes the COAG communiqué of December 2009 which indicates that:

45 Men's Advisory Network (MAN), Submission No 40, p 2.

46 See for example: Matthew Stanley Foundation, Submission No 52, pp 14, 28; Mr Michael Jeh, Transcript of Evidence, 30 March 2010, p 6.

47 See for example: Ministerial Council on Police and Emergency Management support for best practice policing; Ministerial Council on Drug Strategy approach to addressing binge drinking.

Commonwealth will consult the States in developing key elements of the Strategy to ensure it is appropriately targeted and effective, and complements State action.⁴⁸

- 5.55 The Committee also believes that its recommendation for a national youth violence and rehabilitation strategy, informed by a robust evidence-base relating to the efficacy and value of various interventions and programs would significantly assist in achieving a cohesive, collaborative, coordinated and inclusive response to youth violence.

Acknowledging Social and Economic Factors

- 5.56 In addition to interventions that target specific individual, relational and community factors associated with increased risks of experiencing violence, a holistic response will also necessitate addressing social and economic influences (e.g. social exclusion, poverty, unemployment, limited engagement with education etc). As noted in the Australian Government's submission:

... interpersonal violence is strongly associated with such macro-level social factors as unemployment, income inequality, rapid social change and access to education. Any comprehensive violence prevention strategy must ... also be integrated with policies directed at these macro-level social factors and harness their potential to reduce the inequities which fuel interpersonal violence.⁴⁹

- 5.57 The importance of acknowledging and linking to policies that while not specifically targeting youth violence, are likely to reduce the risks of experiencing youth violence by improving social conditions and reducing social inequalities was noted by The Smith Family as follows:

To address the broader social determinants of violence, a comprehensive violence prevention strategy needs to be integrated with policies directed at reducing disadvantage and the social pressures that can fuel youth violence. These include unemployment, income inequality, rapid social change,

48 Council of Australian Governments website, viewed on 4 January 2010 at http://www.coag.gov.au/coag_meeting_outcomes/2009-12-07/index.cfm.

49 Australian Government – DEEWR et al, Submission No 62, pp 45-46.

intolerance of cultural differences, gender inequality and a lack of access to education.⁵⁰

5.58 The submission from Youthlaw & Frontyard Youth Services recommends a multi-pronged approach to addressing the underlying causes of youth violence which aims to:

- improve the economic well-being of families, particularly those with several dependent children
- reduce the burden of child care and increase the availability of practical support
- reduce social isolation
- provide greater support for young parents
- enhance parental skills in coping with the stresses of infant and child care, especially where the child has been drug exposed or suffers some form of disability
- adequately funds a range of strategies to support young people to remain engaged at school and improve the educational achievements of young people.⁵¹

5.59 The relevance of the Social Inclusion Agenda which articulates the Australian Government's vision of an inclusive society in which all Australians feel valued and have the opportunity to participate fully has been noted by some inquiry participants. The Social Inclusion Agenda includes the following priorities for action:

- Supporting children at greatest risk of long term disadvantage by providing health, education and family relationships services
- Helping jobless families with children by helping the unemployed into sustainable employment and their children into a good start in life
- Focusing on the locations of greatest disadvantage by tailoring place-based approaches in partnership with the community
- Assisting in the employment of people with disability or mental illness by creating employment opportunities and building community support
- Addressing the incidence of homelessness by providing more housing and support services
- Closing the gap for Indigenous Australians with respect to life expectancy, child mortality, access to early childhood

50 The Smith Family, Submission No 14, p 8. See also: NSW Government, Submission No 76, p 2.

51 Youthlaw & Frontyard Youth Services, Submission No 35, p 11.

education, educational achievement and employment outcomes.⁵²

- 5.60 A range of initiatives are supported under these priorities, including initiatives to increase engagement with education, to develop skills and reduce unemployment, to support families and communities, to protect children and to reduce Indigenous disadvantage.

Committee Comment

- 5.61 While recognising the important influences of social and economic factors on youth violence, the Committee is aware that a comprehensive review of the social and economic policies is beyond the scope of this report. However, to be effective the Committee believes that a strategic approach to addressing youth violence will require well articulated linkages between targeted anti-violence polices and broader social policies which may also impact on youth violence by addressing other fundamental issues associated with social and economic disadvantage.
- 5.62 At a minimum, the Committee believes that a national youth violence and rehabilitation strategy will need to acknowledge the influence of broader social and economic disadvantage on youth violence, and establish clear linkages with a range of initiatives, including those operating under the Government's Social Inclusion Agenda.

Influencing Social Attitudes and Reflecting Cultural Norms

- 5.63 On many occasions during the inquiry the Committee heard about the influence of modern Australian culture in shaping attitudes toward youth and violence, and in reinforcing social norms. Specifically, evidence included references to the potential detrimental effects on values and behaviour occurring as a result of exposure to violence in the media (i.e. television, films, music, computer games and internet). Interestingly, at the same time the Committee also heard evidence highlighting the potential for the media to be used as a social marketing tool in campaigns to foster positive cultural change and attitudinal changes. These issues are considered below.

52 Australian Government Social Inclusion website, viewed on 31 May 2010 at <http://www.socialinclusion.gov.au/SIAGenda/Priorities/Pages/default.aspx>.

Exposure to Media Violence

5.64 A general concern expressed in evidence relates to the depictions of violence in the media and its role in influencing social norms and behaviour.⁵³ According to Mission Australia, there is a body of research which shows that exposure to media violence has a significant impact on young people as it can:

... 'teach' young people aggressive behaviours, it desensitises young people to violence, and it can generate levels of fear and anxiety that are disproportionate to the actual risk of violence based on the recorded incidence of crime ...⁵⁴

5.65 Evidence linking exposure to violence in the media with promotion of violent behaviours was extensively reviewed in a submission from the Australian Council on Children and the Media (ACCM).⁵⁵ According to the ACCM:

Short term exposure to media violence increases the predisposition to aggress for both children and adults regardless. Repeated exposure to media violence is likely to have further deleterious effects, including greater fear, a hostile bias whereby others are seen as threatening and dangerous, greater hostility, desensitisation to further depictions of violence, beliefs normalising aggression and detailed and generalised scripts for aggressive behaviour.⁵⁶

5.66 The concern as outlined by Voices Against Violence is:

[The] depiction of violence without impact or consequence provides a view that real violence has no impact and there is no consequence for it. Young people that have become desensitised to the consequence of violence also have no sense of respect for authority because they do not see a genuine consequence for their actions.⁵⁷

53 See for example: National Abuse Free Contact Campaign, Submission No 5, p 8; Protective Mothers Alliance, Submission No 11, pp 1-2; Dr Susan George, Submission No 13, p 7; The Smith Family, Submission No 14, p 2; VicHealth, Submission No 26, p 8; Mr Gary Anderson, Transcript of Evidence, 1 March 2010, p 29.

54 Mission Australia, Submission No 59, p 8.

55 Australian Council on Children and the Media (ACCM), Submission No 31, pp 4-7.

56 ACCM, Submission No 31, p 3.

57 Voices Against Violence, Submission No 67, p 3.

- 5.67 Feedback from young people who participated in the inquiry's Youth Forum held in Melbourne also indicated a level of concern among young people themselves, with one group spokesperson observing:

People as young as primary school age are watching these high-violence movies or playing these high-violence video games where they take away the message that violence is okay, that maybe one punch will not do any damage and that they can get away with it, whereas it is not seen as appropriate by others. Also, the glorified sports stars that are out there might get into a pub brawl and it will be in the media. The children see it and think, 'Our sports stars – our heroes – are doing it; maybe it's okay for us.' Maybe the sports stars should not be so glorified and put under so much pressure by the media. The music industry also has a part to play in that. The videos from the rappers and all the other hip-hop music includes violence and shows other people participating in violence. Young people may look up to that and deem it to be okay as well.⁵⁸

- 5.68 The following comments on media violence were made by respondents to the inquiry's online youth violence survey:

The media and government sensationalisation of violence makes us think it is common place and therefore somewhat socially acceptable. Male, 18-24 years, capital city

Violence and deaths in movies I think takes away the real meaning and consequences, not that they should be banned, but death/murder/violence/suicide should not be taken so lightly. Female, under 18 years, regional city

- 5.69 In contrast however, the Queensland Commission for Children and Young People and Child Guardian noted alternative perspectives from young people who considered that media violence had very little influence on their behaviour. In fact more than one young person suggested that playing violent computer games actually provided them with a non-violent outlet for aggression.⁵⁹
- 5.70 To address its concerns the ACCM suggests a review of media classification levels relating to depictions of violence. Specifically the ACCM called for classification levels to focus not only on the 'traumatic' impact of violence on the individual viewer but also the possible

58 Simon, Transcript of Evidence, 15 February 2010, p 9.

59 Queensland Commission for Children and Young People and Child Guardian, Submission No 66, p 6.

psychological influences in relation to behaviour. The ACCM further suggests that classification levels should align more closely with what is known about key developmental stages occurring during childhood and adolescence.⁶⁰

- 5.71 Mission Australia and others have proposed introducing strategies to increase media literacy among children, young people, parents and the wider community to enhance the capacity to make discerning decisions about the media and informed choices about exposure to violent content.⁶¹

Committee Comment

- 5.72 Despite evidence to the inquiry linking exposure to media violence with higher levels of aggression in young people, establishing a definite link with violent behaviour continues to be the subject of rigorous debate.⁶² With regard to media classifications, and in the absence of consensus about the influence of media violence on behaviour, the Committee appreciates the need to consider the views of Australian community. An important consideration in media regulation is the balance between freedom of communication and regulation to protect the community from exposure to harmful or disturbing material.
- 5.73 Media classification is currently regulated under the National Classification Scheme (NCS), a cooperative arrangement between the Commonwealth, states and territories. Any change to classification categories requires amendments to the *Commonwealth Classification (Publications, Films and Computer Games) Act 1995*, the associated code and guidelines, as well as to state and territory enforcement legislation. Under the *Intergovernmental Agreement on Censorship* and the Commonwealth Act, the code and guidelines can only be amended with the agreement of all jurisdictional Censorship Ministers.⁶³

60 ACCM, Submission No 31, pp 8-9. See also: NCSMC, Submission No 2, p 10; Dr Susan George, Submission No 13, p 7.

61 Mission Australia, Submission No 59, p 10. See also: ACCM, Submission No 31, p 5; Mr Harry Hukin, Submission No 72, p 3; Dr Wayne Warburton, Transcript of Evidence, 1 March 2010, pp 3, 6.

62 Correspondence to the Committee from Associate Professor Christopher Ferguson dated 2 March 2010 referring to the following article: *Much Ado About Nothing: The Misestimation and Overinterpretation of Violent Video Game Effects in Eastern and Western Nations: Comment on Anderson et al*, (2010) Psychological Bulletin.

63 Australian Government – Attorney-General’s Department website, viewed on 17 May 2010 at http://www.ag.gov.au/www/agd/agd.nsf/Page/Classificationpolicy_Nationalclassification_scheme.

- 5.74 There are currently six classification categories for films (G, PG, M, MA 15+, R 18+, X 18+) and four classification categories for computer games (G, PG, M and MA 15+). The R 18+ and X 18+ categories do not apply to computer games in Australia. Films and computer games can also be classified RC (refused classification). RC films and computer games cannot be legally sold or distributed in Australia.
- 5.75 The Committee is aware that the Attorney-General's Department has recently undertaken a public consultation in relation to classification categories of computer games. The aim of the consultation was to ascertain views as to whether Australia should introduce an R18+ classification for computer games.⁶⁴ Public submissions closed 28 February 2010 and nearly 60,000 submissions were lodged. In May 2010 the Attorney-General's Department published a status report containing preliminary figures and information about the public consultation.⁶⁵ The Committee notes that the Censorship Ministers are currently deliberating on the feedback received from the public consultation. To assist the Censorships Minister with their deliberations, the Committee will make available the information that it has received in relation to classification categories of computer games as part of its inquiry into youth violence.
- 5.76 In addition, given the emergence of new technologies and of access to the media generally, the Committee considers that examination of current classification categories for film and TV, particularly with regard to levels and depictions of violence is warranted.

Recommendation 10

- 5.77 **The Committee recommends that the Attorney-General's Department examine the need for change to current classification categories of film and TV in relation to violent content. Consideration should be given to the potential impacts on children and young people of exposure to media violence with a view to better aligning classification categories with key developmental stages occurring in childhood and adolescence.**

64 Australian Government – Attorney-General's Department website, viewed on 13 January 2010 at <http://www.ag.gov.au/gamesclassification>.

65 Australian Government – Attorney-General's Department website, *Status report on the public consultation on the possible introduction of an R 18+ classification for computer games*, viewed on 17 May 2010 at <http://www.ag.gov.au/gamesclassification>.

- 5.78 In addition, children, young people and adults need to be supported to develop media literacy skills in order to make well-informed and discerning choices regarding media content and levels of exposure to media violence. In particular, parents of young children should be encouraged to monitor their children's access to the media, and supported to develop their capacity to make responsible and discerning decisions on behalf of their children.
- 5.79 To assist young people and adults to develop their media literacy skills, the Committee proposes the establishment of a media literacy resource website similar to the Australian Communications and Media Authority's (ACMA) website described in Chapter 4 of the report.⁶⁶ The Committee suggests that a 'Mediasmart' website could provide children, young people and their parents with up-to-date, comprehensive and age appropriate information which will assist them to make informed, discerning and responsible choices in relation to media content, including exposure to media violence.

Recommendation 11

- 5.80 **The Committee recommends that the Australian Communications and Media Authority establish a 'Mediasmart' website aimed at providing children, young people and their parents with up-to-date, comprehensive and age-appropriate information to assist them to make informed, discerning and responsible choices in relation to media content, including exposure to media violence.**

Social Marketing to Achieve Cultural Change

- 5.81 To effect widespread cultural, attitudinal and behavioural changes in relation to youth violence, there has been considerable support in evidence for social marketing campaigns. Essentially proposals for social marketing campaigns have fallen into two broad categories:
- promoting more positive community attitudes towards young people; and

66 Australian Government Cybersmart website, viewed on 1 June 2010 at <http://www.cybersmart.gov.au/>.

- promoting social norms through anti-violence messages, encouraging pro-social behaviour and supporting responsible drinking.

Negative Community Perceptions of Young People

- 5.82 As noted in Chapter 2, community attitudes towards young people are often negative and even hostile.⁶⁷ Media portrayals of young people as anti-social and violent often belie the fact that young people themselves are most frequently the victims of violence.
- 5.83 To effect cultural and attitudinal changes within the community, there has been some support for the implementation of a social marketing campaign which portrays young people in a positive way.⁶⁸ The submission from Hume City Council suggests breaking the cycle of negative perceptions and violence:
- ... through social marketing initiatives aimed at addressing poor perceptions of young people in the community, with an emphasis on young people guiding the development and the delivery of the campaign. Campaigns should also emphasise equal and respectful relationships and that reject violence in the community in any form.⁶⁹
- 5.84 In adding its support for a social marketing campaign to promote positive images of young people, ARACY highlighted the success of long-term social marketing campaigns in effecting change in community attitudes to depressive illness, drink driving and smoking. ARACY suggests:
- the introduction of public education campaigns that promote tolerance of diversity, as well as countering negative stereotyping of young people of different ethnic backgrounds;
 - the development of responsible reporting guidelines for media coverage of the involvement of young people in violent and antisocial behaviours (particularly relating to the ethnicity of the alleged offenders);
 - the development of standards for the release of information by police on the ethnicity of young people engaging in criminal behaviour.⁷⁰

67 See for example: YouthLaw & Frontyard Youth Services, Submission No 35, p 1; CMY, Submission No 44, p 5, 8; ARACY, Submission No 55, p 17; YACVic, Submission No 60, p 8; Ms Linda Chiodo, et al Submission No 78, p 3.

68 20th Man Fund Inc, Submission No 19, p 3. See also: Cairns Community Legal Centre Inc, Submission No 23, pp 7-8; ADCA, Submission No 28, p 14; MAN, Submission No 40, p 2.

69 Hume City Council, Submission No 43, p 2.

70 ARACY, Submission No 55, p 19.

5.85 Given the importance of the media in shaping community perceptions, it was suggested that the media could be instrumental in promoting more positive views of younger people.⁷¹ As noted by the Protective Mothers Alliance:

The media has a significant impact on how our community understands and responds to violence. It is therefore important that reporting the community is responsible and balanced.⁷²

5.86 Ms Linda Chiodo et al have recommended that:

... the media should be utilised as a channel to increase awareness regarding the issue and alter existing norms condoning the use of violence (e.g. social norms marketing). It is believed that the media has the capacity to alter such misconceptions regarding youth violence by portraying positive images of youth; rather than solely depicting youth as 'trouble makers', and moving away from equating youth crime with ethnicity and race.⁷³

5.87 CMY also suggests that the following strategies might also be employed to encourage more positive media coverage relating to young people:

- Encourage efforts to counter misleading media through letters to the editor, Mediawatch and other ways;
- Provide community-based organisations with media information and resources explaining how to make a complaint to media outlets, Australian Communication and Media Authority, and other media-monitoring mechanisms, as well as information about relevant legislation, such as the *Racial Discrimination Act (2001)*;
- Distribute information on good media practice (e.g. the Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission Media Guide) and to ensure that the media is aware of the Industry Code on the Portrayal of Cultural Diversity, which advises against using racial descriptors; and
- Develop a social-marketing campaign to address negative attitudes and behaviours towards culturally diverse young people, to educate and dispel stereotypes in order to overcome interpersonal discrimination that includes victim blaming and scapegoating.⁷⁴

71 NCSMC, Submission No 2, p 10.

72 Protective Mothers Alliance, Submission No 11, p 3.

73 Ms Linda Chiodo et al, Submission No 78, p 7. See also: Farah, Transcript of Evidence, 15 February 2010, p 5.

74 CMY, Submission No 44, p 8.

Committee Comment

- 5.88 The Committee is fully supportive of measures to promote positive images of young people in the community. In this regard the Australian Government is proud to lead by example showcasing in its recently released *National Strategy for Young Australians* the positive contributions that young people make to the community and supporting initiatives such as the Young Australian of the Year.
- 5.89 However, the Committee also believes that promoting positive images of young people through a social marketing approach would be a valuable component of a multi-faceted approach to achieving cultural and attitudinal change within the community. Importantly, the Committee is mindful of the need for social marketing campaigns to be well designed in order to reach target audiences effectively, and to be adequately resourced in the longer term.

Recommendation 12

- 5.90 **The Committee recommends that the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations develop and implement a social marketing campaign to promote positive images of young people and combat stereotypical and negative community perceptions.**
- 5.91 With regard to responsible reporting of violent incidents involving young people, the Committee recognises achieving an appropriate level of media regulation is challenging. The difficulty for Government is to achieve a balance which allows freedom of communications while also providing adequate protections for the community.
- 5.92 Although the ACMA is the Government agency responsible for regulating and monitoring television and radio broadcasting, most aspects of program content is determined by the industry and governed by industry developed codes of practice.⁷⁵ For print media, the Australian Press Council is the industry's self-regulatory body.⁷⁶ The context of industry developed principles and explanatory guidelines aims:

75 Australian Communication and Media Authority (ACMA) website, viewed on 11 May 2010 at http://www.acma.gov.au/WEB/STANDARD/pc=PC_90078.

76 Australian Press Council website, viewed on 11 May 2010 at <http://www.presscouncil.org.au/pcsite/apc.html>.

... to help preserve the traditional freedom of the press within Australia and ensure that the free press acts responsibly and ethically.⁷⁷

- 5.93 Both the ACMA and the Australian Print Council have complaints mechanisms which can be used to investigate complaints regarding media content.

Promoting Pro-Social Behaviour and Responsible Drinking

- 5.94 Although acknowledging that social marketing alone will not solve the issue of youth violence, evidence included significant support for social marketing as part of a multi-faceted approach to addressing a complex problem. As explained by Mr Philip Huzzard, Managing Director of Accelerator Communications, when discussing a proposal for an anti-knife advertising campaign:

Our position ... though is that an advertising campaign in its own right is not the sole answer. It is a combination of legislation, enforcement ... along with intervention and effective communications. The last two are significant.⁷⁸

- 5.95 Evidence to the inquiry has included support for a range of social marketing campaigns at various stages of planning, implementation and evaluation which seek to achieve cultural, attitudinal and behavioural change.⁷⁹ These include social marketing campaigns to promote tolerance of diversity, respectful relationships, anti-violence messages, pro-social behaviour and responsible consumption of alcohol.⁸⁰
- 5.96 While promoting social norm messages that violence at any level is not acceptable, achieving changes to the way Australians view and consume alcohol is likely to be challenging due to the broad cultural acceptance of

77 Australian Press Council website, viewed on 11 May 2010 at <http://www.presscouncil.org.au/pcsite/activities/gprguide.html>.

78 Mr Philip Huzzard, Transcript of Evidence, 15 February 2010, p 39.

79 A large number of social marketing campaigns were referred to in evidence to the inquiry for example: *Homophobia: What Are You Scared of?*; *One Punch Can Kill*; *Don't Turn a Night Out into a Nightmare*; *What are you doing to yourself? Championship Moves*.

80 See for example: Nepean Domestic Violence Network, Submission No 18, p 3; 20th Man Fund Inc, Submission No 19, p 3; Cairns Community Legal Centre Inc, Submission No 23, p 7; VicHealth, Submission No 26, p 9; ADCA, Submission No 28, p 14; MAN, Submission No 40, p 2; Queensland Government, Submission No 46, p 3; Matthew Stanley Foundation, Submission No 52, p 21; Gold Coast City Council (GCCC), Submission No 68, p 2; NSW Government, Submission No 76, p 4; Ms Karen Price, Transcript of Evidence, 1 March 2010, p 20; Ms Karen Bevan, Transcript of Evidence, 1 March 2010, p 67; Various witnesses, Transcript of Evidence, 12 May 2010, pp 7, 15.

drinking. Hence the social marketing focus on raising awareness of the potential harmful effects of alcohol, while also discouraging binge drinking and encouraging responsible drinking rather than total abstinence. As observed by Youthlaw & Frontyard Youth Services:

In general terms Australia needs a seismic attitudinal shift where getting drunk and violent becomes as socially unacceptable as lighting a cigarette in a restaurant, not wearing a seat belt, refusing to use a condom during casual sex or repeatedly getting sun-burnt.⁸¹

5.97 However, some reservations about the potential impact of broad based social marketing campaigns were raised. For example, Mr Jono Chase of Step Back Think who observed:

... mainstream advertising in this area is very difficult and fraught with problems in terms of addressing the right target audience. Often this kind of advertising, like [Transport Accident Commission] or even the binge drinking, does a lot to ease the concerns of parents of this audience but does not do a whole lot to actually make the young people think about their behaviour.⁸²

5.98 In its submission, the Queensland Government urged caution in the use of advertising 'fear campaigns' observing:

Research indicates that careful consideration is needed in using fear campaigns ... fear appeals generated favourable cognitive responses and consequent attitude change only if participants felt vulnerable to the threat. Furthermore, in order for fear messages to be effective, recipients must be provided with a clear, feasible means for reducing their fears.⁸³

5.99 Mr Adair Donaldson also noted the importance of appropriately designed advertising campaigns to effectively convey intended messages to target audiences. However, while recognising the potential usefulness of advertising, Mr Donaldson was concerned that too great an emphasis on advertising alone might divert limited resources from other valuable interventions.⁸⁴

81 Youthlaw & Frontyard Youth Services, Submission No 35, p 10. See also: ADCA, Submission No 28, p 6.

82 Mr Jono Chase, Transcript of Evidence, 15 February 2010, p 19.

83 Queensland Government, Submission No 46, p 3.

84 Mr Adair Donaldson, Transcript of Evidence, 30 March 2010, p 49.

- 5.100 The following comments were made by respondents to the inquiry's online youth violence survey:

I also feel that the 'Australian way to behave is to 'smash' anyone who says something slightly wrong, looks slightly wrong, or even hanging with the slightly wrong crowd. I think it goes a lot deeper than that though ... it's definitely Society that is making this kind of disgusting behaviour acceptable. Female, 18-24 years, regional city

We need to redefine what it means to be Australian - and please, can we spare the meat and three veggie eating, beer drinking jobbo who can hardly construct an intelligible sentence? Our only role-models are sportspeople, and nowadays that just is not good enough - promote the Arts, the Sciences, the Politics, the Lawyers, the Academics - We have enough of them!!! Male, 18-24 years, regional city

Committee Comment

- 5.101 The Committee notes that a significant volume of written and verbal evidence to the inquiry included at least some level of support for social marketing to promote social norms and to effect cultural, attitudinal and behavioural changes. The Committee is aware that, between them, federal and state and territory governments are currently providing of support for a number of social marketing campaigns.⁸⁵ Notably as part of its *National Alcohol Strategy* the Australian Government Department of Health and Ageing has provided \$20 million to support a *National Binge Drinking Campaign* to fund advertising which confronts young people with the costs and consequences of binge drinking. While an initial evaluation of the campaign found that there were some promising improvements in awareness of risks associated with binge drinking and attitudes towards binge drinking it is unclear to what extent these improvements have lead to behavioural change.⁸⁶ The Committee understands that the outcomes of subsequent evaluations may provide more information in this regard.
- 5.102 In addition, at federal level the Committee notes the \$17 million social marketing campaign announced in April 2007 as a component of the Respectful Relationships program administered through the Department

85 See for example: Queensland Government, Submission No 46, p 3; Australian Government - DEEWR et al, Submission No 62, p 40; NSW Government, Submission No 76, p 5.

86 Australian Government - Department of Health and Ageing (D0HA), *National Binge Drinking Campaign, Evaluation Survey 2009*, viewed on 1 June 2010 at <http://www.health.gov.au/internet/drinkingnightmare/publishing.nsf/Content/research-eval>.

of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs. As part of a strategy to reduce violence against women, the campaign aims to:

.... convey the message to young people that all forms of violence are unacceptable, including bullying, cyber bullying, harassment, stalking, sexual abuse, and domestic violence.⁸⁷


- 5.103 While proponents of social marketing campaigns point toward their success in raising awareness and achieving attitudinal and behavioural change the Committee understands that the evidence-base relating to the behavioural change is less compelling. Therefore while supportive in principle of social marketing campaigns, the Committee wishes to make the following observations. Firstly, the Committee notes that social marketing campaigns will only be effective in promoting cultural change if underpinned by a range of other interventions which also address other risk factors and structural influences associated with youth violence. The Committee is also mindful that to stand any chance of success, social marketing campaigns need to be well designed and appropriately implemented to convey the intended messages to the target audience.
- 5.104 Ultimately, the Committee's main concern is the absence of a robust evidence-base which demonstrates the long-term impacts of anti-violence social marketing campaigns on behaviour. Noting existing levels of Government support for a number of national anti-violence social marketing campaigns the Committee considers that a recommendation for the further allocation of resources is not required at this time, particularly as this would also divert resources from other interventions. Instead the Committee suggests that further work is required to identify the best practice with regard to the design and implementation of social marketing campaigns.
- 5.105 As noted throughout this Chapter, a sound evidence-base is necessary to ensure that resources are directed to effective interventions and programs. Therefore, while not underestimating the difficulty of establishing cause and effect, the Committee believes that in addition to assessing changes in knowledge and attitudes, evaluations of social marketing campaigns that are intended to modify behaviour should also seek to establish effectiveness in terms of behavioural outcomes. Therefore, the Committee recommends that the Australian Government ensures that evaluations of social marketing campaigns undertaken in relation to youth violence or

87 Minister for Housing, The Hon Tanya Plibersek MP, Media Release: *Lead Agency Announced For Respectful Relationships Campaign*, viewed on 1 June 2010 at http://www.tanyaplibersek.fahcsia.gov.au/mediareleases/2010/Pages/agency_rr_campaign_7apr10.aspx.

anti-social behaviour that can lead to youth violence, incorporate evaluation methodology to assess rates of behavioural change where this is an intended outcome.

Recommendation 13

- 5.106 **The Committee recommends that the Australian Government ensures that evaluations of social marketing campaigns undertaken in relation to youth violence or anti-social behaviour that can lead to youth violence, incorporate evaluation methodology to assess rates of behavioural change where this is an intended outcome.**
- 5.107 In concluding, the Committee considers that the implementation of a national youth violence and rehabilitation strategy, developed in consultation with key stakeholders, including young people, and founded on the key principles outlined in this Chapter will be an integral part of addressing youth violence in Australia and reducing its impact on young Australians.



Annette Ellis MP
Chair