

Executive Summary

In 2013, the World Health Organisation found that more than one third of all women have experienced either physical and/or sexual intimate partner violence and that these findings show it is a 'global public health problem of epidemic proportions requiring urgent action'.¹

In Australia, women are over-represented in intimate partner homicides. 89 women were killed by their current or former partner between 2008-10 which equates to nearly one woman every week.² However, in 2015, the statistics to date shows that this number is increasing with two Australian women killed by domestic violence each week.³

Australia's National Research Organisation for Women's Safety (ANROWS) notes that data from the 2012 Australian Bureau of Statistics Personal Safety Survey shows that one in three Australian women have experienced physical violence and Australian women are most likely to experience physical and sexual violence in their home at the hands of a male current or ex-partner.⁴

The most commonly reported reason for seeking assistance from specialist homelessness services was domestic and family violence.⁵ A study of Victorian women demonstrated that domestic violence carries an enormous cost in terms of premature death and disability. As VicHealth stated: 'It is responsible for more preventable ill-health in Victorian women under the age of 45 than any other of the well-known risk factors, including high blood pressure, obesity and smoking'.⁶ In addition, more than one million children in Australia are affected by domestic violence which can leave them with serious emotional, psychological, social, behavioural and developmental consequences.⁷

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- 1 World Health Organisation, Global and regional estimates of violence against women: prevalence and health effects of intimate partner violence and non-partner sexual violence, Executive Summary, 2013.
 - 2 Australian Government, Australian Institute of Criminology, Homicide in Australia: 2008-09 to 2009-10 National Homicide Monitoring Program annual report, 2013, p. 18.
 - 3 730, 'Thirty-one women killed in Australia in 15 weeks renews call for action', 13 April 2015.
 - 4 Australia's National Research Organisation for Women's Safety, Violence against women: key statistics.
 - 5 Australian Government, Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, Specialist homelessness services 2012-13, 2013, p. 19.
 - 6 VicHealth, The health costs of violence, Measuring the burden of disease caused by intimate partner violence, A summary of findings, 2004, p.8.
 - 7 The Australian Domestic and Family Violence Clearinghouse, The University of New South Wales, The Impact of Domestic Violence on Children: A Literature Review, August 2011,

The committee acknowledges that the cost of domestic and family violence is great in terms of lives lost, the effects on children, physical and mental health, employment, risk of homelessness and financial security. The economic cost is also substantial with a 2009 study by KPMG finding that violence against women, including domestic violence, cost the nation \$13.6 billion and this was expected to reach \$15.6 billion in 2021-22 if steps were not taken.⁸

The committee heard there are a broad and complex range of social and personal factors that can contribute to the incidence and severity of domestic and family violence. These include gender inequality, social norms and attitudes as well as exposure to violence, social isolation, relationship conflict, income, divorce or separation and the use of alcohol and drugs. The committee is particularly concerned by the statistic that alcohol is involved in up to 65 per cent of family violence incidents reported to police (see chapter 10).

The terms of reference referred to the prevalence of domestic violence as it affects vulnerable groups including 'women living with a disability' and 'women from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander backgrounds'. The committee recognises these are not the only vulnerable groups which also include culturally and linguistically diverse, non-English speaking new and emerging migrant communities, people experiencing mental health issues, people in same sex relationships, transgender and intersex persons.

The committee recognises that there is no silver bullet to stop domestic and family violence. Rather, a coherent, strategic and long term effort by all levels of governments and the community is required to take effective action.

The committee heard the areas which will make a real difference are:

- understanding the causes and effects of domestic violence (chapters 1 and 2)
- the need for cultural change which involves prevention work to change attitudes and behaviours towards women (chapter 6);
- a national framework and ensuring ongoing engagement with stakeholders (chapter 3);
- early intervention measures (chapter 7);
- effective data collection to ensure programs and policies for women, their children and men are evidence-based (chapters 4 and 5);
- coordination of services (chapter 8);
- more information sharing between stakeholders (chapter 8);
- better legal responses/enforcement to hold perpetrators to account (chapter 9);
- sufficient and appropriate crisis services (chapter 8); and

⁸ National Council, *The Cost of Violence against Women and their Children*, March 2009, p. 34; see also Department of Social Services, *Submission 57*, Attachment 1 (National Plan), p. 2; Department of Social Services, *Submission 57*, Attachment 1 (National Plan), p. 2.

- providing long term support to victims of domestic and family violence (chapter 10).

Work in these areas is underway and it will take time to see the effects of this work flow through. The long term nature of this challenge is recognised in the National Plan to reduce Violence against Women and their Children which spans the period 2010-2022.

Over the course of the inquiry the committee spoke to many people working in the sector, policy and law makers, victims, as well as people in the community who have been appalled at the unacceptable toll domestic and family violence has taken in women and children's lives. The committee was heartened by their view that there is the beginning of a genuine shift in attitudes on violence and also the will to fund, educate and resource the programs, services and victims of domestic and family violence.

The committee believes this report has the potential to become an important contribution to community awareness of the challenges, collective effort and commitment required to prevent and ultimately eliminate domestic and family violence. It should be read in conjunction with the large body of work completed and underway in this area, including the report by the Queensland Special Taskforce on Domestic and Family Violence, chaired by the Honourable Dame Quentin Bryce AD CVO, the Victorian Royal Commission into Family Violence, along with the work of COAG and the Second Action Plan.

The committee is of the view that for all the work being undertaken to have real and lasting effects, there must be a sustained effort at all levels of government to act to prevent this unacceptable crime wave against women and their children from continuing.

Senator Katy Gallagher

Chair

