

Budget 2021 – Reducing violence against women and their children

Violence against women overview

The ongoing impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic and recent public conversations about sexual violence continue to highlight the importance of addressing and preventing all forms of violence against women.

NFAW welcomes the Government’s investment of \$1.1 billion to address and prevent violence against women. This funding largely funds existing programs and initiatives, ensuring a continuation of services and in some cases expanding on what is currently in place, during a transition period while the next National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children is being developed (due to begin in mid-2022).

However, to see real change in both the way that our systems respond to and support women experiencing violence and in the underlying drivers of gender-based violence to prevent it, deep structural reforms informed by the expertise of women’s and specialist organisations is critical.

The Government has described this funding package as a “down payment” on the next National Plan. The design and resourcing of this next Plan will be critical to seeing real change on this issue.

Addressing and preventing violence against women

The Budget

The Government has committed \$1.1 billion over four years aimed at addressing, reducing and preventing violence against women and children.

This is made up of 3 key budget measures:

- Women’s Safety (cross-portfolio measure) - \$998.1 million over four years (and \$2.3 million in 2025-26).
- A Roadmap for Respect – the Respect@Work response implementation (Attorney-General’s) – the full cost of this measure has not been published.

- Family Law System – improving access and safety for children and families (Attorney-General’s) - \$123.8 million over four years.

Additionally, the Government announced in the Budget that it will not proceed with a measure to extend early release of superannuation to victims of family and domestic violence (Budget Paper 2, p. 15).

Women’s Safety

Payments (\$m)

	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24	2024-25
Department of the Treasury	-	161.6	189.1	60.2	61.2
Department of Social Services	-	122.1	131.9	29.0	39.1
Attorney-General’s Department	-	19.9	28.2	29.7	30.2
National Indigenous Australians Agency	-	12.8	10.9	2.3	-
Australian Communications and Media Authority	-	12.1	6.7	-	-
Department of Home Affairs	-	10.2	10.3	8.9	-
Services Australia	-	5.8	5.8	5.8	-
Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Communications	-	4.4	-	-	-
Total — Payments	-	348.8	382.8	135.9	130.5
<i>Related receipts (\$m)</i>					
<i>Australian Taxation Office</i>	-
<i>Department of Home Affairs</i>	-
Total — Receipts	-

Source: 2021 Budget Paper No 2, Women’s Safety, p. 83.

The Women’s Safety cross-portfolio measure includes funding to support women and children who have experienced family, domestic and sexual violence (\$507.3m) including a new National Partnership with states and territories to expand the funding of frontline support services, flexible financial support for women leaving violence relationships, and support for migrant, refugee, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women’s safety. Funds have been committed to assist women and children to engage with the legal system (\$320.1m) including funding for women’s legal centres, increasing access to Children’s Contact Services, and funds to support national discussions on strengthening justice responses to sexual assault, sexual harassment, and coercive control. Funds have also been dedicated to addressing online harms for Australians (\$23.2m over 2 years).

\$80.6m over 5 years has been committed to improve data collection and research capability including funding for a dedicated Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island survey on safety and violence and funding for the ABS, ANROWS and AIHW.

Commitments relating to the prevention of violence against women include funding to extend the *Stop It At the Start* campaign (\$24.4m), for additional resources for young Australians about respectful relationships (\$10.7m) and \$34.1m for further measures aimed at prevention and early intervention in violence including for women with disability.

Family Law System — improving access and safety for children and families

Payments (\$m)

	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24	2024-25
Federal Court of Australia	-	22.1	22.3	22.4	22.5
Attorney-General's Department	-	7.1	1.3	1.1	1.1
Department of the Treasury	-	3.6	6.8	6.8	6.8
Total — Payments	-	32.7	30.4	30.3	30.4

Source: 2021 Budget Paper No 2, Family Law System, p. 62.

The measure focusing on the family law system includes funding to reform family law case management processes (\$60.9m); improving information sharing between the family law and family violence and child protection systems (\$29m); funding to the Family Violence and Cross Examination of Parties Scheme (\$6.3m) and funding to support the Family Law Council to advise the Attorney-General on the operation of the *Family Law Act 1975* and other relevant matters (\$0.9m).

A Roadmap for Respect — Respect@Work response implementation

Payments (\$m)

	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24	2024-25
Attorney-General's Department	-	2.3	2.0	1.7	1.5
Workplace Gender Equality Agency	-	1.0	1.1	1.1	1.1
Australian Public Service Commission	-	0.5	0.5	0.3	0.3
Comcare	-	-	-	-	-
Department of the Treasury	-	nfp	nfp	nfp	nfp
Total — Payments	-	3.8	3.7	3.1	2.9

Source: 2021, Budget Paper No 2, A Roadmap for Respect, p. 61.

The measure setting out funding commitments for the Government's response to the *Respect@Work* report includes \$9.3m over 4 years to support the implementation of the response including for the Respect@Work Council Secretariat; \$6m over 4 years from 2021-22 to the Workplace Gender Equality Agency and the Australian Public Service Commission to strengthen reporting on sexual harassment prevalence, prevention and response; and funding for additional legal assistance.

The Government has also committed \$5.3m over 3 years to build evidence and further develop primary prevention initiatives for sexual harassment (Women's Budget Statement, p. 30, 2021).

Gender implications

This funding is described in the Women’s Budget Statement as ensuring essential services continue as governments transition to the new National Plan (Women’s Budget Statement, p. 21, 2021). The Minister for Families and Social Services and Minister for Women’s Safety, Senator the Hon Anne Ruston, has said that the package “represents the Commonwealth’s down payment on the next National Plan which will commence in mid-2022”.

Why is this an issue for women?

The recent March4Justice and national conversation around sexual violence have highlighted calls from women in Australia for action to be taken to address and prevent violence in all facets of our communities including in the home and workplaces.

The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated violence against women, and the impacts of this are likely to continue. This means that ensuring that women experiencing violence are appropriately supported is critical, as are efforts to prevent this violence in the longer term.

According to the ABS Personal Safety Survey, one in five Australian women have experienced sexual violence, one in five have experienced physical violence, and one in four have experienced emotional abuse since the age of 15. Women who experience multiple forms of discrimination and disadvantage experience higher rates of violence and/or greater severity of violence. For example, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women were 32 times as likely to be hospitalised due to family violence assaults as non-Indigenous women; and recent research shows that women with restrictive long-term health conditions reported high levels of physical and non-physical domestic violence during the initial stages of the COVID-19 pandemic.

What are the 2021 Budget impacts on women?

The \$1.1 billion funding package is an encouraging step that acknowledges the scale of the problem and requisite effort required to address violence against women. It is positive to see this funding described as a “down payment” on the next National Plan, recognising that funds are needed now to meet service demand, and that in the development of the next Plan there will be further requirements identified. Importantly, a high level of ongoing funding is needed to meet service demand and invest in sustainable prevention efforts – this package cannot be a one-off commitment to this issue.

There are many positive measures in the Budget which will enable the work of frontline services, begin work on addressing and preventing sexual harassment in the workplace and improve data collection and monitoring efforts.

The investments in the family law system are positive including funding to support information-sharing and expanding social supports under the Family Advocacy and Support Services. However, NFAW remains concerned about the abolition of the Family Court and implications that this will have for women’s safety.

Funding for support for migrant, refugee, Aboriginal, Torres Strait women and women with disability is welcomed however this needs to be accompanied by reforms to address the structural discrimination that these women face in accessing supports. For example, the introduction of a 4 year waiting period for social security eligibility (announced in this Budget) will have significant implications for migrant women, and the planned changes to the NDIS including introduction of independent assessment may impede access to supports for women with disability. These structural barriers create additional risk factors for women experiencing violence.

Addressing and preventing violence against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women is a key gap in this package. The Change the Record coalition has identified that the Budget delivers less than a quarter of the funding needed for the 14 family violence legal prevention services to provide crucial front-line services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women. The Government has announced an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Advisory Council which will play a role in guiding development and implementation of the next National Plan and responses to the Closing the Gap target (Women's Budget Statement, p. 23, 2021). This is a positive step but must be supported by secure and ongoing funding for critical Aboriginal community-controlled services and reforms to address institutional racism and prioritise self-determination.

The provision of affordable and appropriate housing is a critical component of addressing violence against women, however this Budget does not adequately address this issue. The women's safety package includes \$12.6m over three years for Safe Places projects to renovate, build or purchase emergency accommodation for women and children experiencing family and domestic violence. This funding is not sufficient to meet the significant demand for emergency accommodation. Additionally, the level of funding for the National Housing and Homelessness Agreement (which includes women and children affected by family and domestic violence as a priority cohort) has been maintained rather than increased. See the 'housing' section of the Gender Lens for further analysis of this policy area.

A small proportion of the \$1.1 billion funding commitment has been dedicated to preventing violence against women, however much of this funding appears to be focused on change at the individual level. To achieve deep and sustainable change in the drivers of violence against women, further investments are needed at all levels of society (organisational, institutional and structural). This includes the introduction of gender responsive budgeting and policy-making to identify and address inequalities in public policy. Funding of prevention recommendations from the Respect@Work report are a good start however the Government has not yet committed to introducing a positive duty on employers in the *Sex Discrimination Act*. This is an important reform that will contribute to preventing violence against women.

Recommendations

- With states, territories and specialist organisations, monitor and respond to the ongoing impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on violence against women, including through resourcing for increases in service demand.
- Address violence against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women by providing adequate and ongoing funding to Aboriginal community-controlled organisations and services, including the national family violence legal prevention services.
- Prioritise the provision of appropriate and affordable housing for women as part of the national approach to addressing violence against women (see 'housing' section for further information about NFAW's policy recommendations in this area).
- Invest in addressing the underlying drivers of violence against women including through initiatives that address these drivers at all levels of society (institutional/system, organisational, community and individual) and the introduction of gender-responsive budgeting and policy-making.
- Meaningfully and substantially engage women's and specialist violence against women organisations in the design of the next National Plan and decision-making processes about resourcing required to implement the Plan.