



PRE-BUDGET SUBMISSION

JANUARY 2026

WESNET Inc
Freecall: 1800WESNET
Email: wesnet@wesnet.org.au
Web: www.wesnet.org.au
ABN: 16 068 548 631



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Acknowledgements

Acknowledgement of Country

Wesnet would like to acknowledge and pay respects to all First Nations people, as the Traditional and only Custodians of this country we call Australia. In particular, we would like to acknowledge the people of the lands of the Dja Dja Wurrung where our main office stands. Throughout the year we have had staff working in other nations including Eora, and Naarm, and we would like to acknowledge those Traditional Owners as well. We recognise First Nations peoples' culture, wisdom, and connection to this land and pay our respects to Elders, past, present and future. We recognise the loss of land and culture, acknowledging the consequences of dispossession and colonisation on First Nations peoples. We acknowledge that sovereignty over this land was never ceded. This land always was and always will be Aboriginal land. First Nations women have multiple roles and identities relating to their culture, community, age, ability, sexual orientation and gender identity. Wesnet works tirelessly for an inclusive future free from violence. We acknowledge the strength and resilience of First Nations women, particularly those who have experienced domestic and family violence, and those who support and advocate for victim survivors of domestic and family violence. We pay our deepest respects to those who have lost loved ones as a result of domestic and family violence. Wesnet will actively work to be informed by the experiences and advocacy of First Nations women, and to support First Nations women in their quest for safety and equality.

Acknowledgement of Victim-Survivors

Wesnet also takes this opportunity to acknowledge all victim-survivors of gender-based violence. We pay respect to those who did not survive and to their family members and friends.

About Wesnet

We are the Peak body for Specialist Women's Domestic and Family Violence Services in Australia.

Our vision is a future where all women and children live free of domestic and family violence and its consequences.

With almost 350 eligible members across Australia, Wesnet represents a range of organisations and individuals including women's refuges, shelters, safe houses and information/ referral services.

Harnessing its large national network of members and associate members, Wesnet plays an important role in identifying unmet needs, canvassing new and emerging issues, facilitating policy and sector debate and providing expert advice to government to provide improved responses to the problem of domestic and family violence. We do this within our communities, and in partnership with non-government stakeholders.

Wesnet works within a feminist framework which promotes understanding domestic and family violence as gendered violence, and that women's and children's experiences are also intrinsically shaped by their ethnicity, culture, ability, age, gender identity and class.



Pre-budget priorities and recommendations

Wesnet welcomes the opportunity to offer our Pre-Budget submission to the Treasury. As we look towards 2026 and beyond, we welcome and support the Federal Government's commitment to end violence against women and children within a generation but remain acutely aware of the work still to be done in order to achieve this goal. The recommendations and priorities outlined below represent some of the critical investment opportunities open to the Federal Government to take real, coordinated and measurable action towards the stated aims of the *National Action Plan to End Violence against Women and Children (2022-2032)*. With only seven years left under the National Plan, we urge the Federal Government to maintain and strategically direct its significant investment towards realising the vision that is set out in this plan.

In addition to the need for dedicated funding to support meaningful action and progress towards ending violence against women and children, we reflect on the speed at which the national service system responding to survivors of domestic and family violence has developed and expanded from its feminist and activist roots. While this progress is overdue and much needed, there is much work still to be done in order to map and understand the emerging system. We also see a critical need to develop a nationally recognised understanding and definition of specialist domestic and family violence practice and service delivery. This is necessary in order to recognise and value the specialist nature of support provided by our Specialist DFV services, as well as supporting clear system mapping and funding streams.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and children

Recommendation 1: Long-term, dedicated and flexible funding to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and children escaping domestic and family violence.

As noted in our pre-budget submission last year, there continues to be an urgent need to prioritise increased and sustainable funding directly to Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations (ACCOs) delivering specialist domestic and family violence services. We know that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and organisations hold deep cultural knowledge and have always led the advocacy for systemic change towards safe and culturally responsive service responses for community.

Wesnet is also pleased to note the ongoing development of the *Our Ways – Strong Ways – Our Voices: National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Family Safety Plan*, and it will be imperative that the Federal Government support the implementation of this plan with sustainable investment in truly community-led and designed service responses to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander survivors of domestic and family violence.

Recommendation 2: Further investment to support data collection to monitor Closing the Gap Target 13

The Federal government must continue to demonstrate genuine and concerted commitment to Closing the Gap Target 13 and reducing the violence and abuse against First Nations women and children. In addition to increased and dedicated, long term funding for ACCOs, in line with Recommendation 15 in the DFSVC Report¹, Wesnet recognises the critical need for dedicated funding to support data collection and monitoring of progress towards Closing the Gap Target 13.

Recognising and supporting the work of specialist domestic and family violence services

Recommendation 3: Increased and sustainable funding to support rising demand on specialist DFV services

Specialist DFV services continue to report rising demand, yet our service sector continues to be hampered by fragmented and short-term funding streams. For example, our state sister peak body, Domestic Violence New South Wales reported last year that 94% of NSW specialist domestic violence services saw increased demand between May-March 2024-25 vs. prior year, with an average of 33 people per waitlist for critically needed support.²

The lack of a nationally recognised definition for specialist DFV practice and service delivery hampers not only the visibility of our sector, but also the capacity to effectively map and measure un-met demand as well as outcomes and impact of our services. As a critical first step towards addressing these issues, Wesnet supports the recommendation made by the Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence Commissioner in her report in 2025, in relation to the establishment of national funding mapping framework for DFV services, as noted later in this

¹ DFSVC Report 2025

² DVNSW (2025) *New data reveals NSW domestic violence services at breaking point: soaring demand and lengthy wait times* [Media release].
<https://www.dvnsw.org.au/press/new-data-reveals-nsw-domestic-violence-services-at-breaking-point-soaring-demand-and-lengthy-wait-times/>

submission. We acknowledge the Commonwealth's action in partnering with the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) to develop a pilot (prototype) data collection in relation to unmet demand for specialist DFV services³. In the interim however, the federal government must recognise the urgency of the funding shortfall, and increase the funding commitment to specialist DFV services through long term and flexible funding streams to meet this soaring demand and ensure that survivors have access to critical support while the system matures and develops.

A sustainably funded and integrated service system equipped to support survivors of DFV

Recommendation 4: Increased funding for social service sectors that play a critical role in the holistic system response to survivors of violence.

Holistic and effective responses for survivors of DFV are not possible without coordinated and well-resourced community services. Housing and homelessness services, disability support services and legal services for survivors are among the critical parts of the system that must be resourced in order for the vision of the National Plan to be realised. The specialist DFV sector is increasingly being called upon by other services, as it should be, for advice and co-design. But the sector is struggling to take on this additional workload in addition to client demand. Increased and sustainable funding for specialist DFV services must be accompanied by a federal commitment to adequately resourcing other parts of the service system that play essential roles in supporting survivors of violence to heal and regain independence.

Housing and homelessness services

Declining housing affordability, long waitlists for homelessness support and lack of available housing stock represent some of the most significant barriers for survivors of DFV to leave behind violent and unsafe relationships. We know that across Australia, we are experiencing a critical shortage of flexible and affordable housing options, and homelessness services are experiencing demand for support that far outstrips their capacity and funding. The Federal government must recognise and support efforts to address the critical shortfall in available social housing stock.

³ <https://www.aihw.gov.au/family-domestic-and-sexual-violence/resources/pilot-data-collection-for-specialist-crisis-fdv-services>

Disability support services

Women and children living with a disability have been identified as one of the priority populations within the National Plan, and we are acutely aware that women with a disability are three times more likely than men with a disability to have experienced intimate partner violence since the age of 15.⁴ We recommend two key priorities to the Federal government in relation to ensuring that survivors of violence living with a disability have access to safe and equitable specialist DFV support.

Firstly, people with disabilities who are survivors of DFV should be at the heart of specialist DFV system design and reform as lived experience experts and paid for their time and advice. Advice and testimony offered by disability advocates through existing inquiries and reports including the Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of People with Disability (2023) and Australia's Disability Strategy (2021-2031) must also be mapped and aligned in relation to the National Plan and improving service responses to survivors of violence living with a disability.

Secondly, as recommended by our colleagues at Safe and Equal in their 2026-27 pre-budget submission, family violence must be a key consideration in the development of the forthcoming framework for the NDIS.⁵ The federal government and the National Disability Insurance Agency (NDIA) should commit to adjusting the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) to better respond to NDIS participants who are experiencing DFV, including clear practice guidance for disability support practitioners, processes for ensuring that participants at risk of DFV can change and access supports quickly and responsively.

Legal services

It is imperative that legal services that provide dedicated advice, representation and support to survivors of domestic and family violence receive an uplift in funding from the Federal government. As noted by our colleagues at First Nations Advocates Against Family Violence (FNAAFV) in their 2026-27 pre-budget submission, despite the uplift in funding through the National Access to Justice Partnership (NAJP) Agreement, family violence prevention legal services (FVPLS) remain underfunded. FVPLS, including ACCOs are most commonly providing crisis-driven support and representation, and while this is essential work, we endorse recommendations made by FNAAFV that there be uplifted funding to

⁴ Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence Commission (2025) Yearly Report to Parliament, Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence Commission, Australian Government., p.33

⁵ Australian Government (Department of Health, Disability and Ageing) (2026) *New framework planning*. Accessed: 27 January 2026.

facilitate early intervention and prevention work as core functions of FVPLS, and dedicated and sustainable funding to boost workforce capacity and sustainability.

Realising the vision of the National Plan to End Violence against Women and Children

The success of the National Plan will be contingent on coordinated and dedicated work across the Federal government and in partnership with State and Territory governments.

Recommendation 5: Development of national coordination and accountability mechanisms in relation to the progress of the National Plan

We echo the Recommendation 5 in the Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence Commission's report (2025), which calls for mapping and alignment of relevant Commonwealth Plans, across all government portfolios, as to how they contribute to the National Plan.⁶ Without concerted efforts to coordinate a cross-governmental understanding and coherence in relation to this work, we cannot expect true accountability and meaningful progress. As noted by the DFSV Commissioner, the risk of failing to develop clear lines of accountability, "duplication persists, agencies can defer responsibility and systemic reforms stall."⁷ We particularly reflect on the importance of mapping actions and cross-plan dependencies and synchronicities between the following plans:

- Safe and Supported - National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children
- National Agreement on Closing the Gap
- National Housing and Homelessness plan
- Australia's Disability Strategy
- National Plan to End the Abuse and Mistreatment of Older People

Recommendation 6: National data collection of DFV funding streams and outcomes to support monitoring of the progress of the National Plan.

There is currently no national data collection in relation to DFV service provision, outcomes, unmet demand or funding streams. We are critically in need of federal commitment to developing a comprehensive national picture of service systems

⁶ Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence Commission (2025) Yearly Report to Parliament, Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence Commission, Australian Government., p.19

⁷ Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence Commission (2025) Yearly Report to Parliament, Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence Commission, Australian Government., p.47

and delivery. This would represent a critical step towards effective monitoring of the progress of the National Plan, as well as better understanding and representing the critical role of the specialist DFV sector and would logically be done with close involvement of the national peak body, Wesnet.

Recommendation 6: Ongoing commitment to the growth and wellbeing of the specialist DFV workforce

Wesnet welcomes the current work being undertaken by the Social Research Centre in partnership with The Australian Centre for Social Innovation on the 2026 National Family and Domestic Violence and Sexual Violence Workforce Survey. The rapid growth and reform of the domestic and family violence system have placed greater pressure on our existing specialist DFV workforce and created rising demand for workforce expansion and training. The current workforce survey is welcome and greatly needed, and we eagerly anticipate the forthcoming data and insights. It must be followed up with dedicated funding and investment which recognises the unique and specialist skills of our workers, and supports their professional development, wellbeing and longevity in the work.

Recommendation 7: Early and genuine consultation with sector to support the development of the Second National Action Plan

Meaningful partnership and planning with the people, communities and services on the ground is the only way for the Federal government to realise the vision of the National Plan. The First Action Plan is due to end in 2027, and the next will be critical in shaping the coming years of collaborative work between the Federal, and State and Territory governments, and the communities and services committed to the work of ending violence against women and children. Genuine consultation and planning are predicated on relationships and trust and cannot be rushed. We urge the Federal government to begin planning and consultation for the Second National Action Plan immediately. This planning must be coordinated carefully with State and Territory governments with the support of local Peak bodies where they exist.

We also urge the Federal government to ensure that ACCOs lead dedicated consultation and planning, and are paid for their time, expertise and cultural knowledge.

The pivotal role of the peak national body

Recommendation 8: Fund the Women's Services Network (Wesnet) as the peak national body for women's specialist services

Wesnet has played a pivotal and unique role as the National peak body for specialist DFV services since the 1990s, however has not received funding from the Federal Government since being defunded in the late 1990s. Despite this, we have continued to facilitate critical consultation and collaboration between the government and the specialist DFV sector. As we noted in our pre-budget submission last year, the specialist domestic and family violence sector remains one of the few service-delivery sectors without a funded, coordinated, cross-jurisdiction, non-government specialist sector voice. We are currently at a critical juncture in the lead up to the development of the Second Action Plan for the *National Plan to End Violence Against Women and Children 2022-32*, and we feel that meaningful engagement and progress will be hampered without federal funding and support for a specialist DFV peak body, and the critical coordination and consultative functions that Wesnet would be able to provide in this capacity.

Recommendation 9: Fund Wesnet to continue the secretariat function for the National Alliance of Domestic and Family Violence Service Sector (NADVVSS)

Wesnet has recently taken over secretariat responsibility for the National Alliance of Domestic and Family Violence Service Sector (NADVVSS), as well as continuing to offer member support, information dissemination and sector training. The NADVVSS has emerged as a powerful and expert voice representing the specialist and DFV sector in national conversations. As an alliance, we are regularly approached by academic researchers, Federal ministers and senior government officials who wish to consult and seek advice from the NADVVSS. With a busy period of consultation, planning and implementation imminent, including but not limited to the development of the Second National Action Plan and the implementation of forthcoming SCHADS Award restructure, Wesnet requests dedicated funding to support the Secretariat function, to ensure that the essential work of the National Alliance continues to support both our own sector and the government's efforts to end domestic and family violence.

Children and young people as survivors in their own right

Recommendation 10: Dedicated focus on specialist DFV responses for children and young people

Children and young people experiencing domestic and family violence deserve and have a right to have access to tailored and dedicated support in their own right. As noted by the Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence Commission's report (2025), "if we are serious about ending DFSV within a single generation, we must focus on children and young people"⁸.

In particular, Wesnet recommends that the Federal government review and amend the age-related eligibility criteria for the Leaving Violence Payment to include young people who are between 15 and 17 years old. We know that survivors of violence in this age bracket who are seeking help independently of a parent/carer (sometimes due to this person perpetrating violence), are often woefully under-supported due to systemic gaps in available supports. We know that young people experiencing violence perpetrated by a parent or carer, but who are unable to support themselves to leave home and prove 'independence' are ineligible for Centrelink's *Youth Allowance Unreasonable to Live at Home* payment⁹. Extending the eligibility of the Leaving Violence Payment would be a small but critical step towards supporting young survivors of violence to access independence and safety.

Regulation of private security firms to protect survivors

Recommendation 11: The development of sector-driven standards to apply to private security providers working within the DFV sector

As in our pre-budget submission last year, we again urgently draw the federal government's attention to our members' widespread concerns relating to unregulated private security companies taking advantage of survivors of DFV.

Wesnet data shows that 99.7% of all DFV caseworkers are supporting survivors experiencing TFA as part of their experience of violence¹⁰. Due to such extreme prevalence, the need for case workers and survivors to seek specialist security and

⁸ Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence Commission (2025) Yearly Report to Parliament, Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence Commission, Australian Government, p.90.

⁹ Corrie, T & Moore, S (2021), *Amplify: Turning up the Volume on Young People and Family Violence (Research Report)*, p.39.

¹⁰ Wesnet et al. (Forthcoming) *Third National Survey of Tech Abuse and Domestic Violence in Australia*. Wesnet Inc.

technology support and advice is unavoidable. While there are some skilled and ethical security firms supporting DFV survivors through technology sweep services, in-home security audits and upgrades including CCTV, duress alarms, and 'bug' detection, our members are increasingly reporting concerns about unethical behaviour and price gouging on the part of private security firms. In these cases, the result is either that survivors who are already under immense financial pressure may be charged exorbitant prices for security responses, or that taxpayer dollars are wasted via specialist DFV brokerage.

Wesnet recommends federal funding must be dedicated to developing sector-driven standards to apply to private security firms to ensure safe, trauma informed and ethical security responses are available to all survivors of DFV.