

The Roundtable to End Domestic Violence

COMMUNIQUE

“Violence against women is a serious issue – it is never acceptable, and it is preventable. If we are serious about stopping family and domestic violence, we need a holistic approach – from government, from business and from the community. It is time to end domestic violence.”

Debra Zanella, Chief Executive Officer, Ruah Community Services

In the lead up to the election, representatives from 17 leading Western Australian community service organisations and peak bodies hosted **The Roundtable to End Domestic Violence**.

Ruah Community Services, Yorgum Aboriginal Corporation, Anglicare WA, Starick, Zonta House, Centrecare, The Salvation Army, Women’s Health and Family Services, Uniting Care West, Rise, Communicare, Patricia Giles Centre, Wungening Aboriginal Corporation, The Lucy Saw Centre, Stopping Family Violence, the Women’s Council and the Women’s Community Health Network WA joined forces to send a clear message to Federal politicians and candidates.

The next Federal Government must commit to ending domestic violence.

More than 200 people added volume to the call for real change and gave Senator Rachel Siewert representing the Australian Greens, Dr Anne Aly of the Australian Labor Party and Liberal Senate Candidate, Matt O’Sullivan a fair hearing.

Every year, family and domestic violence costs Australians an estimated \$26billion dollars. Since 2013, the total contribution from the Federal Government towards ending domestic violence has been \$840million - less than four per cent of the annual cost.

In October 2018, more than 100 experts and key Government representatives attended the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) Summit on Reducing Violence against Women and their Children.

The summit called for urgent action to address this crisis.

Commitments to date don’t go far enough.

“Women are dying, and more are dying every year – their faces are all over the news. How many more need to die to constitute evidence? How do we get long-term funding commitments to make a real difference?”

Kelda Oppermann, Chief Executive Officer, Zonta House Refuge Association



Recent funding announcements by the major parties to expand services for women trying to leave a violent relationship fall far short of a long-term strategy to end family and domestic violence.

Government funding must move away from the legacy of ad hoc, competitive tendering for programs and services. Current procurement and funding processes stifle collaboration and innovation amongst - and with - the community services sector. It is a temporary and incidental approach, unlike family and domestic violence which is an entrenched social problem that should not fall subject to political will.

“Violence against women and their children is the public health, social and human rights issue of our time.”

Dr Alison Evans, Executive Officer, Women’s Community Health Network WA

Violence against women and their children is the number one public health issue of our time. It requires the same focus and commitment from Government that other successful public health campaigns, such as smoking, have received. We must turn the curve on the unacceptable statistics we see in family and domestic violence. We can, and should, do better.

One of the leading drivers of violence against women is gender inequality. It is not acceptable that this inequality is most prominently played out in our Parliament. Some of our most senior public officials refuse to demonstrate the importance of equality between men and women and our basic human right to respect, irrespective of gender.

Achieving #betterbalance starts with the individual.

The sector will call out bad behaviour from our politicians and community leaders and we will hold them to account, regularly reminding the community that this behaviour is not acceptable.

The sector will also watch closely as the Australian Government responds to the recommendations of the *United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women*.

Australia must meet its obligations as a member of this committee. We must act to improve gender equality and reinforce behaviour and cultural changes that discourage violence against women.

“The intergenerational abuse in my story stemmed back to 1942. I experienced domestic violence as a child, as had my mother before me. I had experienced sexual abuse multiple times from family members and was homeless at age 15.”

Kat Houareau, Survivor, and Chief Executive Officer, Changing Lives Australia

The Fourth Action Plan requires strong leadership and a substantial increase in funding to drive a whole of Government response, with coordination across all States and Territories.

A focus on reducing violence suggests that there is an ‘acceptable’ level of violence.

There is not.

Strong leadership at a National level will drive changes in our services and systems.

“The fourth phase of the National Action Plan retains focus on supporting women – and we need to keep doing that – but we also need to focus on supporting men and trying to fix the cause of this problem.”

Damian Green, Chief Executive Officer, Stopping Family Violence

Family and domestic violence is not a policy issue to fuel election campaigns or be limited by the term of any single Government – it requires a much greater commitment that goes beyond the usual three-year election cycle.

Outcomes from the 2018 COAG summit - and proposed recommendations for the Fourth Action Plan - must guide the new Federal Government in its commitment to end violence against women.

According to the *Red Heart Campaign*, already 10 women and two children have been killed in family violence-related murders around Australia this year alone.

We cannot afford to keep having the conversation while women and children die.

We cannot keep putting a Band-Aid on our nation's worst open wound.

And we can't afford to lose more, and more lives to domestic violence.

It has to end.

Violence against women and children must become core political business in Australia, demanding long-term policy and funding focus from successive governments.

The sector is committed to addressing the lack of political understanding of the issue.

It's time to educate the community and humanise the issue. Together with survivors, and perpetrators, the sector will use the power of personal stories and lived experience to make domestic violence relatable to those who have never experienced that environment.

We will make sure that domestic violence does not fall victim to political will.

The sector continues to visualise a day when every woman and child is safe and there is no need for them to seek support services.

FIVE STEPS TO TAKE RIGHT NOW

Roundtable participants have called for change. In no particular order, ideas included:

1. Commit to a National plan beyond 2022 ensuring that family and domestic violence has a long-term policy and funding focus from successive governments.
2. Make ending family and domestic violence core political business and the next successful public health campaign to address the number one health, social and human rights issue of our time.
3. Take a systemic, coordinated approach to end domestic violence that sees better alignment between the Commonwealth, States and Territories to ensure the plan accommodates for the local context and translates into better outcomes.
4. Improve the focus on primary prevention, children and youth. To end family and domestic violence, we must break the cycle and turn off the tap that is an endless stream into the crisis response system.
5. All drivers of family and domestic violence need to be addressed from gender inequality through to the ongoing impacts of colonisation and discrimination, and the heightened risk seen across disability, cultural and linguistically diverse LGBTI communities.

“How can you love if you have never been loved?”

“How can you nurture if you have never been nurtured?”

Aunty Millie Penny, Aboriginal Elder and Telethon KIDS Co-Researcher