

Family Violence Statement

Violence in family relationships is a serious problem affecting large numbers of Australians. The high prevalence of family violence has significant implications for victims, perpetrators and the wider Australian community. Aside from the personal and social costs, impacts include: unemployment, underemployment and lost productivity; public expenditure costs for property damage and default on debt; and burden on the justice, child protection, and health and welfare prevention and support systems.

In its most extreme physical form, family violence results in death, but in any form, family violence can result in life-long physical, emotional and psychological damage.

Relationships Australia believes that violence, coercion, control and inequality are unacceptable in family relationships. We believe in social justice and inclusion, and respect the rights of all people, in all their diversity, to live with dignity and safety, and to enjoy healthy relationships.

Relationships Australia is committed to responding to victims and perpetrators of family violence through the services we provide, advocacy and contribution to the evidence base. We believe that, with the right support, people have the capacity to change their behaviour and how they relate to others.

Relationships Australia has been a provider of family relationships support services for more than 60 years. In the course of that work we have developed a considerable body of knowledge and expertise in family violence and are able to contribute to public debate and the development of public policy in these areas.

Relationships Australia supports:

- The National Plan to reduce violence against women and their children;
- The Family Law Legislation Amendment (Family Violence and Other Measures) Bill that gives effect to the United Nations Conventions on the Rights of the Child and further prioritises the right of children to be safe; and
- Australian state and territory human rights legislation enshrining the rights of all to live in safety.

Relationships Australia supports a broad interpretation of family violence that captures all forms of an individual's intimidating and oppressive behavior that is directed towards a family member(s). This behaviour includes threats, humiliation, emotional abuse, physical assault, sexual abuse, financial exploitation, and social isolation, such as not allowing contact with family or friends.

Our organisations support people affected by family violence based on the principle that violence in family relationships is unacceptable and contravenes basic human rights. As such, Relationships Australia believes that effective prevention strategies require a legal framework in combination with broad community education that responds to inequality, coercion and control, and the use of violence in families.

In addition, there must be tailored service responses for individuals and families affected by violence and integrated, cross sector, multi-disciplinary responses that focus foremost on the safety of the victim. Underpinning all of our services are the principles of child and family centred practice and safety.

Relationships Australia is committed to:

- **Transparency with clients.** Violence is named for what it is and there are no excuses for it. Our practitioners make reports of concern to child protection agencies. Unless there is a safety concern, clients are informed about what is happening, encouraged to self-report, given explanations and supported through the reporting process.
- **Supporting children affected by family and domestic violence**, recognising the harm it does to them, regardless of whether they are the direct or indirect victims.
- **Working with people who have experienced violence** to ensure they are safe, and supporting them to take control of their lives.
- **Working with people who have been violent** in their family relationships to keep their family members safe and with the belief that they can, and do, change existing patterns of behavior.
- **Respecting cultural differences**, but not accepting them as an excuse for family violence.
- **Working in rural and remote areas**, recognizing that there are fewer resources available to people in these areas, and that they live with pressures, complexities and uncertainties not experienced by those living in cities and regional centres.
- **Collaboration.** We work collectively with local and peak body organisations to deliver a spectrum of prevention, early intervention and tertiary intervention programs with men, women, young people and children. We recognize that often a complex suite of services (for example, drug and alcohol services, family support programs, mental health services and public housing) is needed by people affected by family violence.
- **Enriching family relationships** and encouraging good and respectful communication.
- **Ensuring that social and financial disadvantage is not a barrier** to accessing services.
- **Contributing its practice evidence and skills** to research projects, to the development of public policy and to the provision of effective programs.