

Media Release: It's Time to Put a Full Stop to Sexual, Domestic and Family Violence.

Thursday, 2 September 2021

What we need to see from the National Women's Safety Summit

The nation's leading social workers, psychologists, lawyers, academics, corporates and people with lived experience are all set to engage in a conversation about how we can build off the first National Plan to Reduce Violence Against Women and Their Children 2010-22 and craft a robust and ambitious plan to address sexual, domestic and family violence over the next 10 years.

The Women's Safety Summit kicks off today with the first instalment of Roundtables which will focus on:

- Service delivery reform and innovation, and measuring success,
- Health and wellbeing responses,
- Protecting and supporting children,
- Improving outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders,
- Perpetrator interventions and working with men, and
- Experiences of the LGBTQIA+ community.

Hayley Foster, Chief Executive Officer of Rape & Domestic Violence Services Australia and the Full Stop Foundation is a member of the Morrison Government's National Plan Advisory Group. She says hopes are high.

"We've seen significant investment in consultation for the development of this Plan. **Now we're at the pointy end, and we need to make this count.**"

Ms Foster said that on top of the comprehensive parliamentary inquiry report handed down last year on the issue, there had been some "really rigorous debates and discussions" that had taken place as part of the consultations in the lead up to the Summit, and **some strong themes have emerged.**

"The area where there appears to be the most agreement is that we can no longer afford to tinker around the edges with underfunded services trying desperately to help people and families pick up the pieces in the wake of horrific violence and abuse."

"We need to address the underlying systemic drivers of gender-based violence; the main one of which is gender inequality in our families and communities. Violence and abuse is about power, and whilst ever we accept an imbalance of power along gender lines, we're going to have gender-based violence."

Ms Foster points to macroeconomic policy levers to correct this inequality, such as tax policy, social security reform, industry awards, childcare, and parental leave.

“When we trap women in inferior economic positions, we not only make them targets for abuse, we disable them from breaking free from grips of their abuser. You can’t escape if you can’t keep a roof over your own head and that of your kids’.”

“There is also clear sense that this Plan needs to acknowledge and systematically address the barriers faced by particular priority populations, such as our First Nations peoples, culturally and linguistically diverse people, people with disability, LGBTIQ+ people, and people of all ages from all socio-economic backgrounds, and in every geographical location, most of whom experience violence at higher rates and in different ways, and yet don’t have the same access to services and protections.

Another key focus, says Ms Foster, is recognising children and young people as victims in their own right. “We need to find ways for them to be heard and invest in the services and support they say they need to be safe and live lives free from violence.”

Ms Foster notes with approval the increased emphasis by the Morrison Government on developing clear, nationally consistent laws on sexual, domestic and family violence to send a clear signal to the community that this behaviour is criminal and won’t be tolerated and to reform the justice system so it’s fit for purpose to deal with these offences. **“We need to make sure we’re holding people using violence and abuse to account and stopping repeat offenders in their tracks.”**

Support services for people impacted by violence and abuse need to be “universal”, says Ms Foster. “And we have to upskill service providers in effectively identifying and responding to people impacted by violence and abuse. **We can’t continue with the postcode justice and service lottery system we have going on.** Everybody should have the right to be treated with dignity and respect and have the services they need to be safe and supported to manage the trauma impacts of their experiences.

Sexual violence is also set to be a feature of the next national plan, with the Minister for Women’s Safety, Anne Ruston including it as a stand-alone issue. “When we recognise the significance of sexual violence, we bring in all the other settings throughout our communities where this occurs, including our schools, workplaces, universities, service and justice institutions, faith-based and religious settings, and in sport,” says Ms Foster. “It’s a much more comprehensive picture and means we all have a role to play in stamping it out.”

When asked what is going to make the difference as to whether this plan really is going to lead to dramatic reductions in sexual, domestic and family violence, Ms Foster points to its targets. **“We have to be even bolder this time around and put a number on what we’re trying to achieve. Let’s halve the rate of violence and abuse per capita over the next 10 years. And let’s halve the deaths by 2032.** It’s time we got on a serious path towards putting a full stop to sexual, domestic and family violence.”

For further information or comment, call Hayley Foster on (02) 8585 0333 / 0477 442 122 or email ceo@rape-dvservices.org.au

If you or someone you know needs support dealing with the impact of sexual, domestic or family violence (including childhood sexual abuse and vicarious trauma), our expert counsellors are available on the phone or online, 24/7.

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Domestic Violence Impact Line: **1800 943 539**
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LGBTIQ+ Violence Service: **1800 497 212**
Online: **rape-dvservices.org.au**