



National Legal Aid welcomes consultation on Second Action Plan to end violence against women and children

22 May 2026

National Legal Aid (NLA) has welcomed the Australian Government's commencement of consultation on the Second Action Plan under the National Plan to End Violence Against Women and Children 2022–2032, commending the Government's continued commitment to driving action to address gender-based violence.

"This consultation is a critical opportunity to refocus national efforts and ensure the next phase of the National Plan delivers meaningful, system-wide change for victim-survivors," NLA Chair, Annmarie Lumsden said.

The urgency of this work is underscored by the devastating toll of violence in Australia. In the past week alone, five women and two children have been killed. This brings the total so far in 2026 to 29 women and 9 children who have lost their lives to domestic and family violence.

"Behind these numbers are individuals, families and communities. It is a stark reminder that a sustained, coordinated response is urgently needed," said Ms. Lumsden.

NLA has emphasised that legal assistance is often the only pathway to safety, stability and justice for victim-survivors and their children. Access to legal assistance is a cornerstone of an effective response to gender-based violence and must be a critical component to this Action Plan.

Across Australia, Legal Aids are seeing increasing demand. ABS data shows a 7% increase in family law duty and representation services in 2024–25, with the majority relating to parenting disputes. In the same year, Legal Aids delivered more than 7,000 Independent Children's Lawyer representations, supporting children in complex and high-risk cases.

"Victim-survivors often require legal help across multiple areas, be it protection orders, family law, financial abuse, migration or criminal processes. Trauma-informed and culturally safe legal support is essential for them to navigate these systems safely," said NLA Executive Director, Yvette D'Ath.

Legal assistance not only supports victim-survivors but also plays a vital role in preventing systems abuse and ensuring perpetrators are held to account.

NLA welcomed the opportunity to work closely with government on the development of the Second Action Plan.

“National Legal Aid brings frontline expertise and looks forward to partnering with government to design reforms that improve justice system responses and remove barriers for those seeking help.” said Ms. D’Ath.

NLA highlighted that strengthening safety in the family law system must be a central priority of the Second Action Plan.

Family law matters are increasingly complex and risk-laden. Data from the Federal Circuit and Family Court of Australia shows that over the past four years:

- The proportion of parenting cases involving allegations of family violence has increased from 80% to 86%
- Cases involving allegations of child abuse have risen from 70% to 77%
- Cases alleging four or more risks, across family violence, child abuse, mental health concerns, drug alcohol or substance misuse and threats of harm or abduction, have increased from 66% to 73%

Relationship separation can be one of the most stressful and challenging times in a person’s life. It also increases the risk of family violence.

Family court proceedings are a risk factor that can increase the risk of family violence escalating in a very short time frame* and yet a recent study found that victim-survivors considered family law proceedings and intervention orders a critical and often overlooked indicator of family violence risk**.

“At the very point where risk is highest, many victim-survivors are still being forced to navigate complex and fragmented legal systems without support,” Ms. D’Ath said.

Despite increasing demand, Legal Aids can currently assist only around 8% of people in need, including about half of those living below the poverty line.

This gap in access is already having consequences. With limited resources, services are being stretched, and impossible decisions are being made about who can receive representation.

“Ensuring that victim-survivors can access legal help - from initial disclosure through to resolution and recovery - is essential to delivering safety, stability and justice,” Ms. Lumsden said.

NLA reiterated its support for the Government’s ongoing commitment under the National Plan and the importance of ensuring the Second Action Plan delivers practical, system-wide improvements.

“Continued investment in legal assistance will be an important part of ensuring the system can respond effectively to growing demand and increasingly complex cases. By working together, we can build a more responsive, accessible and safer justice system for victim-survivors and their children.” Ms. D’Ath said

For comment, please contact NLA Executive Director, Yvette D’Ath on **02 6173 5417** or via **NLA@nationallegalaid.org.au**



*Victorian Government. Evidence-based risk factors and the MARAM Risk Assessment Tools (2021).

** McCulloch et al. (2022) National Risk Assessment Principles for domestic and Family Violence: Companion Resource.