

A Youth Safety Strategy for SA

A framework for action specifically for young South Australians



**Government
of South Australia**

Department for Communities
and Social Inclusion



Throughout this document, the term “relationship violence” refers to domestic and intimate partner violence.

We would like to acknowledge that we work on the land of the Kurna people. In this document, the term Aboriginal is used to refer to Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people in South Australia. The term Family Violence is used in this document and includes Aboriginal Family Violence, which is the preferred term to describe domestic violence, family violence and sexual assault for Aboriginal South Australians.

Executive summary

Young people are disproportionately affected by relationship, family and sexual violence, with obvious consequences for development and wellbeing. Nationally, young women aged 18-24 are more likely to experience physical or sexual violence than any other age group (2). Young men aged 16-24 are at greatest risk of perpetrating violence. (3)

Current policy and service responses mostly address the needs of adults and children and often fail to recognise and respond to specific issues related to young people, including dating violence and violence against siblings or parents.

Better prevention and early intervention responses would lessen the likelihood of negative patterns of behaviour becoming entrenched into adulthood. Stopping the violence early – both for young victims and young perpetrators – gives young people the best chance to develop and thrive.

A series of consultation forums held over 2017, including three sector workshops involving over 90 government and non-government representatives, a number of sector-led engagement sessions involving around 100 young people, and an opportunity for public feedback on YourSAy, identified current gaps and issues, and informed the development of a strategy framework around a vision for change and three areas for action.

This Strategy builds upon the achievements of the Women's sector and the Domestic and Family Violence sector, and is complementary to *A Right to Safety: The Next Phase of South Australia's Women's Safety Strategy 2011-2022*.

Our vision

All young people live free from relationship, family and sexual violence.

- Fewer young people are experiencing relationship, family and sexual violence.
- Young people who use violence are supported to change and are held accountable.
- Young people do not support violence, inequality or gender stereotypes.

Our three areas for action

1. Services – support that helps
2. Systems – we work better together
3. Society – people know the causes and are respectful.

Strong sector support for a youth safety strategy was evident in the unified voice for change across the large number of participants at the three workshops. Likewise, youth engagement sessions strongly affirmed the issues and directions proposed.

Next steps

To turn this Youth Safety Strategy into action we will:

- Work to achieve the necessary across-government support for an effective and sustained focus, in particular by aligning the Youth Safety Strategy and its implementation with existing domestic and family violence governance mechanisms, primarily the State Government's A Right to Safety committee.
- Co-design an action plan with government, sector and young people to deliver on the Strategy's priorities.

The fundamental rights of young people

Engagement with young people and the sector strongly identified that the rights of young people are fundamental to all aspects of this work.

The right to inclusion

Relationship, family and sexual violence affects people regardless of age, gender, sexual orientation, race, religion, disability or economic status but may be further compounded by multiple, simultaneous discriminations. The unique needs of young people must be explicitly recognised and prioritised in the development of responses.

The right to safety

All young people should have the knowledge, capacity and confidence to enact their rights and respect the rights of others. Young people have a right to safety that extends beyond their immediate family and caregivers and into their own relationships.

Young people who experience or engage in relationship, family or sexual violence should have the same rights as adults and the same (or age appropriate) legal recourse and service responses.

The right to be heard

Young people should have the right to express their views and real opportunities to inform and influence decisions about their safety.

Why we need a strategy for young people

Young people are disproportionately affected by relationship violence, but this is not reflected in current policy and services. Most current policy addresses relationship violence as it relates to adults and children, and does not address the specific issues that arise for some young people, including dating violence and violence against siblings or parents.

Current service responses often fail to adequately recognise and address the specific needs of young people and their families. There is growing recognition that we need to develop policies and services that recognise these needs. Better prevention and early intervention will lessen the likelihood of negative patterns of behaviour becoming entrenched into adulthood. Stopping the violence early – both for young people who experience violence and young people who may engage in violence – gives them the best chance to develop and thrive.

“It is understated how much violence occurs in all formats It is very hard to get out of situations.”

– Young person

What we know

- The incidence of sexual assault for young women aged 18 – 24 is twice that of all women and estimated to be up to four times more for young women aged 15 – 19 years. (1)
- Nationally, young women aged 18-24 are more likely to experience physical or sexual violence than any other age group. (2)
- Young men aged 16-24 are at greatest risk of perpetrating violence. (3)
- Young women are almost five times as likely to experience sexual assault than young men. (4)
- Higher rates of domestic family violence are estimated for those who may be more vulnerable within our community, including young women, young Aboriginal people, young people with disability, young people from new and emerging multicultural communities, LGBTIQ young people and young women from non-urban communities. (5)
- Aboriginal people are between two and five times more likely than non-Aboriginal people to experience violence as victims or offenders. (6)
- In a survey of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex and queer (LGBTIQ) young people, 61% of respondents reported verbal and 18% physical abuse because of their gender identity or sexuality. (7)

Young people's attitudes

While young people think that the same behaviours constitute domestic violence and dating violence, they perceive dating violence to be less common. 83% of young women and 60% of young men think domestic violence is common or very common. 70% of young women and 50% of young men think that dating violence is common or very common. (8)

“Many young people are falling through the gaps and nobody is taking responsibility”

– Sector workshop participant

The Line Campaign surveyed 2000 young people and found:

1 in 3 young people don't think that exerting control over someone else is a form of violence.

1 in 4 young people don't think it is serious when guys insult or verbally harass girls in the street.

1 in 4 young people think it is normal for a guy to pressure a girl into sex.

1 in 4 young people don't think it's serious for a guy who is normally gentle, to sometimes slap his girlfriend when he is drunk and they are arguing (9).



Our journey to a strategy

2015 Youth Strategy: It Starts with YOUth.

Committed to exploring the issue of homelessness through a White Paper.

2015 White Paper on Homelessness: Pathways: Improving the economic and social participation for young people experiencing homelessness in South Australia, Service to Youth Council.

Acknowledged domestic violence as the main reason for youth homelessness.

2016 Youth Strategy: Connected to YOUth.

Committed to exploring the relationship between homelessness and relationship and family violence.

Sector Engagement - 3 half-day sector workshops

More than 90 representatives from 55 government and non-government stakeholder organisations generated recommendations.

2017 Youth Strategy: youTHRIVE.

Committed to the development of a Youth Safety Strategy.

Youth Engagement.

Engaged 100 young people through 11 government and non-government organisations.

Public engagement (YourSAy)

Next steps

Development and implementation of a Youth Safety Strategy Action Plan

Our strategy so far...

What we have developed so far through engagement with young people and the sector.

Youth Safety Strategy

Our Vision

All young people live free from relationship, family and sexual violence.

- Fewer young people are experiencing relationship, family and sexual violence.
- Young people who use violence are supported to change and are held accountable.
- Young people do not support violence, inequality or gender stereotypes.

Services

Support that helps

- Service providers are trained to recognise and respond to the diverse safety needs of young people.
- Services use a consistent evidence-based practice framework.
- Services inform and empower young people.
- Services follow rules about information sharing to keep young people safe.

Systems

We work better together

- One safety assessment tool for young people.
- Clear referral pathways and service standards.
- Responses to meet the needs of differing groups of people.
- Coordinating body to oversee the system.
- Information and data sharing.
- Funding arrangements that improve collaboration.

Society

People know the causes and are respectful

- Respectful relationships education in all schools across SA.
- Use the Our Watch “Change the Story” framework.
- Build a body of evidence of prevention programs that work.
- Encourage young people to break the silence.

The right to inclusion - The right to safety - The right to be heard

Services – Support that helps

“Connections, word of mouth, services, can be involved in informing of options, building comfort-ability in trying to have these conversations. Not allowing it to be taboo. Reaffirm. We should talk about it.”

– Young person

Better service responses require improved awareness of the issues and operation of abuses, specifically as they relate to the experiences of young people. Service providers need to be skilled at developing and maintaining supportive relationships, but also need to work together to develop a shared practice framework around common understandings and better practice responses.

Service providers and others who work with young people, including those not directly related to relationship and family violence, must be skilled at responding to disclosures about young people’s experiences, given that young people may disclose to any person they trust. Those who work with young people must also be highly skilled in the use of information sharing guidelines to ensure that young people are kept safe.

Service providers must be able to connect young people to clear and culturally appropriate information and resources. This includes information about healthy relationships, rights and available services to meet their needs.

“[We need a] consistent practice framework to respond to young people’s experience of relationship violence and build their capacity to negotiate/ navigate services/systems”

– Sector workshop participant

Systems – We work better together

“Strong relationships between non-government and government services e.g. fostered by joint funding rather than competitive funding”

– Workshop participant

No single agency or organisation can address entrenched, complex issues alone, nor can we provide the most effective responses without integrated effort and resources across a range of interventions to address the needs of specific populations and locations. We will achieve our common goals through a determined, collaborative effort to identify and overcome systemic barriers and create improved ways of working.

Prevention and intervention strategies occur across many systems including education, homelessness and youth justice. These service systems involve multiple government and community services agencies. Integrated responses aim to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of access to available resources, help to minimise duplication and address service gaps.

Feedback from the sector and young people strongly identified the need for a consistent approach to assessing the safety of young people, including the development of a standardised, evidence-based assessment tool.

We must also take steps to develop clear, agreed pathways to services. These referral pathways should link to the assessment tool and be well known and accessible to service providers and young people.

Strongly identified through consultation was the need for a flexible and comprehensive service system that provides timely and appropriate responses across the continuum, from prevention to tertiary interventions, and that accommodates the diverse needs of groups including Aboriginal young people, young people with disability, LGBTIQ young people and those from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds.

Governance structures must be developed to ensure high performance and accountability, and provide mechanisms for ongoing communication, collaboration and data sharing across contributors.

“Ensure that there are clear, agreed pathways to required services, and that these are well known to workers and young people”

– Sector workshop participant

Society – People know the causes and are respectful

“Educate young people and others about how to be assertive, don’t be a bystander, how to speak up, ways to communicate with confidence”

– Young person

Underlying any sustainable change is a change in culture – namely a fundamental change to attitudes and beliefs at a societal level. Cultural change can be achieved through primary prevention strategies including education, programs and community development for young people, their families and communities. Prevention strategies should promote healthy, respectful relationships, gender equality and social inclusiveness.

Education should be age appropriate and address the range of related issues including sexuality, exposure to pornography, sex-based bullying including technology-facilitated abuse and other issues affecting the wellbeing of young people.

Respectful, healthy relationships training should be delivered in education and care settings for children and young people from childcare through to universities and TAFEs. Simultaneous complementary initiatives such as social media campaigns, local community initiatives, and sports or recreation-based programs, should also be delivered to create a mutually reinforcing effect that strengthens the impact of prevention initiatives.

We need to build a body of evidence about those prevention programs that work, and we need to identify where the gaps are in available programs. We need to ensure that best practice programs are widely used across the sector. Workshop participants frequently cited the *Change the Story* framework (developed by Our Watch, Australia’s National Research Organisation for Women’s Safety and VicHealth), as an evidence-based framework that seeks to address the drivers of gender inequality and gendered violence across a range of settings across the lifespan.

Most of all, we need to create a culture where young people feel safe to discuss and disclose relationship, family and sexual violence.

“Use an educational framework that is evidence-based and is shown to work”

– Sector workshop participant

International, national and state policy context

State Government

A Right to Safety: The Next Phase of South Australia's Women's Safety Strategy 2011-2022 is the State Government's commitment to prevention and intervention strategies that address factors that contribute to violence against women, and provides the whole of government focus and direction for embedding an aligned Youth Safety Strategy.

National and international

UN Convention for the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (1979)

Seeks equality between men and women of human rights and "freedoms in the political, economic, social, cultural, civil or any other field".

UN General Assembly Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women (1994)

The right of all women to a life free from violence including physical, sexual or psychological harm, in public and private life.

UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (1990)

Recognition of the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family including children, who should be afforded special protection and assistance in order to fully develop and participate in society. This includes protection from abuse or exploitation.

The National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and Children – Third National Action Plan (2016 - 2019)

Sets out 36 practical actions across six priority areas that individuals, businesses, communities and government can take to reduce violence against women.

Closing the Gap

National commitment that seeks health equality for Aboriginal people with respect to life expectancy, child mortality, access to early childhood education, educational achievement, and employment outcomes.

National Affordable Housing Agreement and National Partnership Agreement on Homelessness

Provides accommodation and support services to improve the safety and wellbeing of those experiencing or at risk of homelessness including those experiencing domestic, family or sexual violence.

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We would especially like to acknowledge the contributions of young people, for their generous consideration of relationship, family and sexual violence, and for those organisations that enabled such a diverse group of young people to have a say. It was evident from the comments received that young people were most interested to offer their views on what they considered to be a very important topic.

The Youth Safety Strategy is a collaborative effort between stakeholders, young people and government. It has greatly benefited from the experience, wisdom and guidance from the Office for Women, SA Health - Women and Young People's Wellbeing and Safety Services, Housing SA, Uniting Communities and Multicultural Youth SA.

Finally, a special thanks to the young guest speaker for sharing her experience of domestic violence with participants at our first workshop. Her presentation set the scene for the workshop series by highlighting how invisible domestic violence can be in the lives of young people. Her candid and eloquent presentation was a testament to her bravery, capability, and love for her family.



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