

# VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

## The Nation Plan of Action to Reduce Violence Against Women: Calling for adequate, sustainable funding across all levels of government

Violence against women reaches across all facets of society, affecting each and every member of the community, directly or indirectly. The National Plan of Action to reduce Violence Against Women is in the final stages of review before the Council of Australian Governments (COAG). While this is an extremely welcome achievement, there is more work to be done to ensure that the implemented Plan is effective.

In the lead-up to the 2010 Election, the Australian Government must continue the good work already done in cooperation with State and Territorial Governments by establishing a National Plan of Action which commits both levels of Government to a comprehensive, funded and sustainable approach. To effect real and lasting change, the National Plan of Action must encompass comprehensive approaches in tackling the problem of violence against women, and must be sustainable in the long term, in order to prevent the problem from re-emerging. An awareness and preventative campaign with a 24 hour helpline is an insufficient response if there are not also mechanisms in place to deal with the resultant influx of women seeking help.

The United Nations has called for a “systematic, comprehensive, multi-sectoral and sustained approach, adequately supported and facilitated by strong institutional mechanisms and financing, through national action plans”<sup>1</sup> in the push to eliminate violence against women. A number of countries have already implemented comprehensive plans of action, from which Australia can draw a great deal of best practice advice in establishing its own National Plan of Action.

<sup>1</sup> 'Setting the Standard for a National Plan of Action', Amnesty International Brochure

**Each year, violence inflicted upon women costs Australia an estimated \$13.6 billion. The Australian Government simply cannot afford to fail in providing a National Plan of Action which encompasses an integrated, sustainable approach to the elimination of violence against women.**

## KEY ELEMENTS FOR A NATIONAL PLAN OF ACTION TO REDUCE VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

### 1. Prevention:

Undermining violent and sexist attitudes towards women is fundamental to eliminating violence against women. The National Plan of Action should provide for education and public-awareness campaigns which strike at the roots of those societal conventions and attitudes which contribute to violence against women.

### 2. Service Provision:

Without the provision of adequate services, including medical, psychological, housing and accommodation services, to back up the outreach programs also necessary as part of the Plan, those already affected by violence will not receive the help they need. They cannot be expected to then reach out again in the future. The National Plan of Action must ensure the appropriate provision of therapeutic services after abuse has occurred, as well as services which prevent sufferers from falling victim to violence again.

### 3. Prosecution of offenders:

Violence against women is a criminal offence, and should be consistently treated as such in a practical and legal sense. The National Plan of Action should include provisions establishing nationally-standardized police response and legal approaches towards violence against women.

These are the “3 Ps” which must be established in a plan that is:

### 4. Structural:

A whole government approach is fundamental to the effectiveness of the the National Plan of Action. The Plan must be implemented at all levels of government and across all relevant portfolios, systematically imbedding good practice throughout core institutions. It is also important within the structure of the NPoA to recognise and subsequently address the diversity of women. Levels of violence against women from diverse life situations, including women with disabilities, immigrant and refugee women and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women must be acknowledged and dealt with in an all-encompassing manner, in all facets of the National Plan of Action.

### 5. Strategic:

The National Plan of Action must clearly define targets, objectives, activities, commitments and indicators in order to maintain accountability and accurate monitoring. In this way, the Australian Government can show leadership and effect real change.

### 6. Sustained:

A one-off provision of funds and/or a single-dimension approach will not have an effect in halting violence against women. The National Plan of Action must implement long term solutions to what has been a long term problem, and it must do this insofar as both sustained funding schemes and the maintenance of leadership bodies are concerned.