

**Submission of the PHAA on National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women
and their Children (2010-2022)**



Public Health Association
AUSTRALIA

**Submission from the Public Health Association of Australia on
the National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and their
Children (2010-2022)**

The PHAA calls on the government:

- To exhibit strong leadership by ensuring that all six outcome areas stated in the proposed *National Plan* are implemented through the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) and reported on publicly
- To support COAG to take violence against women and children seriously by funding the establishment of death review processes in all states and territories
- To work with local Indigenous communities to implement local solutions and to implement its commitment to building adequate housing in Indigenous communities.

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10 December 2010

*The PHAA acknowledges the efforts of the Women's
Health Special Interest Group in the preparation of this
submission*

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Background

The Public Health Association of Australia Incorporated (PHAA) is recognised as the principal non-government organisation for public health in Australia and works to promote the health and well-being of all Australians. The Association seeks better population health outcomes based on prevention, the social determinants of health and equity principles.

The PHAA is a national organisation comprising around 1600 individual members and representing over 40 professional groups concerned with the promotion of health at a population level. This includes, but goes beyond the treatment of individuals to encompass health promotion, prevention of disease and disability, recovery and rehabilitation, and disability support. This framework, together with attention to the social, economic and environmental determinants of health, provides particular relevance to, and expertly informs the Association's role.

Key roles of the organisation include capacity building, advocacy and the development of policy. Core to our work is an evidence base drawn from a wide range of members working in public health practice, research, administration and related fields who volunteer their time to inform policy, support advocacy and assist in capacity building within the sector. The PHAA has been a key proponent of a preventive approach for better population health outcomes championing such policies and providing strong support for the government and for the Preventative Health Taskforce and NHMRC in their efforts to develop and strengthen research and actions in this area across Australia.

The PHAA has Branches in every State and Territory and a wide range of Special Interest Groups. The Branches work with the National Office in providing policy advice, in organising seminars and in mentoring public health professionals. This work is based on the agreed policies of the PHAA. Our Special Interest Groups provide specific expertise, peer review and professionalism in assisting the National Organisation to respond to issues and challenges as well as a close involvement in the development of policies. In addition to these groups the Australian New Zealand Journal of Public Health draws on individuals from within the PHAA who provide editorial advice, review and who edit the Journal.

In recent years the PHAA has further developed its role in advocacy to achieve the best possible health outcomes for the community, both through working with all aspects of government and promoting key policies and advocacy goals through the media and other means.

The PHAA is grateful for the opportunity to comment on the issues and express our support for *16 Days of Action*. This is the PHAA response to Federal Labor's proposed *National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children (2010-2022)* which has been prepared by the Women's Health Special Interest Group of the PHAA.

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Introduction

The Public Health Association Australia (PHAA) applauds the Federal Government on the release of the proposed *National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children (2010-2022)*.

For many years now the PHAA has recognised that violence against women and their children is a significant public health problem that dramatically harms the physical and mental health of women and children and has far-reaching consequences across all levels of society.

Response

In Australia most violence against women is perpetrated by their current or past intimate partners; rarely by strangers. Over one third of women have experienced violence perpetrated by their intimate partners and one in ten women has experienced sexual violence from an intimate partner. Too many Australian children are witnessing violence being perpetrated against their mothers. The PHAA highlights that violence against women and children is a human rights violation.

Federal Labor states in the proposed *National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children (2010-2022)* that it is committed to preventing domestic violence, with primary prevention being an immediate priority for the *First Action Plan 2010-2013*. At the most tragic end of domestic violence, approximately half of all homicides in Australia occur within the family. Women victims of homicide are most likely to be killed as a result of domestic violence. We now know that domestic violence deaths result from a predictable pattern of violent behaviour rather than one-off tragic events. When systematic reviews of these deaths were done in the USA, Canada, the UK, they discovered that many domestic violence deaths were preventable. Indeed, when systems-based action was taken in response to these reviews there were dramatic reductions in the number of deaths as well as an overall reduction in domestic violence.

The *Time For Action (2009)* report, which has guided the development of the *National Plan*, states that death review processes “would enhance our understanding of the primary risk factors leading to these deaths, improve system and service responses and inform policy designed to reduce rates of domestic-related homicide”. There is some action being taken in some Australian states, but it is now time for Federal Labor to make the elimination of violence against women and their children a priority by calling for the immediate establishment of domestic violence fatality reviews in all jurisdictions, and thus enable a systematic reduction of these predominantly preventable deaths.

The PHAA urges Federal Labor to exhibit strong leadership by ensuring that all six outcome areas stated in the proposed *National Plan* are implemented through the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) and reported on publicly. To guide action on primary prevention, a first step should be that the Federal Government supports COAG to take violence against women and children seriously by funding the establishment of death review processes in all states and territories.

The proposed *National Plan* draws on WHO data to state that primary prevention must start with reducing children’s exposure violence. Most separating families who go through the Family Court of Australia (FCA) are those in which domestic violence has been a factor; many FCA decisions have

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forced children to spend time with (usually) fathers who have perpetrated domestic violence. Sanctioning children's contact with a parent who has perpetrated domestic violence has resulted in perpetuating violence against women and children. If the *National Plan* is serious about reducing violence against women and their children, capacity building in FCA is crucial as part of primary prevention.

The PHAA welcomes the *National Plan* to be implemented in conjunction with *Closing the Gap (2010)* to reduce family violence in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. A first step should be to immediately abolish the Northern Territory Intervention (*Northern Territory Emergency Response 2007*) which is an unacceptable violation of Indigenous human rights. As stated in the proposed *National Plan* high rates of family and domestic violence in Indigenous communities are largely attributed to overcrowding and poor housing, in the context of a long history of institutional racism. The PHAA urges Federal Labor to work with local Indigenous communities to implement local solutions and to implement its commitment to building adequate housing in Indigenous communities.

Overall, the PHAA welcomes Federal Labor's commitment to reducing violence against women and children in Australia and urges that the *National Plan* be implemented systematically to reach the proposed outcomes.

Recommendations

The PHAA urges:

- Federal Labor to exhibit strong leadership by ensuring that all six outcome areas stated in the proposed *National Plan* are implemented through the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) and reported on publicly.
- the Federal Government supports COAG to take violence against women and children seriously by funding the establishment of death review processes in all states and territories.
- The PHAA urges Federal Labor to work with local Indigenous communities to implement local solutions and to implement its commitment to building adequate housing in Indigenous communities.

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Conclusion

The PHAA is hopeful that the recommendations included in this paper will encourage the government to move quickly on the issue of violence towards women and will take action to improve the health outcomes of the community. The PHAA would like to thank the government for the opportunity to make this submission and would be pleased to provide additional information to further assist should it be appropriate.



10 December 2010

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