



SCOA Submission: development of the Second Action Plan under the National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children 2010-22

The Settlement Council of Australia (SCOA) is pleased to provide this submission to the Department of Social Services on the development of the Second Action Plan under the National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children 2010-22. SCOA represents over 80 agencies in the settlement sector, which comprise the majority of agencies involved in funded settlement programs including Settlement Grants Program (SGP), Humanitarian Settlement Services (HSS) and Complex Case Support (CCS). SCOA members are involved in providing settlement support to recently arrived migrants and people of refugee background across Australia. Some member agencies provide specific services and programs oriented to women and families experiencing family violence, and other members provide referral related services. SCOA's consultation with members and our research into the area have informed the preparation of this submission.

SCOA's submission will focus on the questions raised for consideration and will cover the following key points:

- Ensuring mainstream family violence services are aware of the range of different visa categories refugees and recently arrived migrants are on and their impact on women and children in relation to:
 - Accessing and awareness of services
 - Eligibility for services
 - Impact of pre-migration experience on settlement
 - Progress through the settlement journey and its impact on family dynamics
- The need for consistent clear data and research on family violence, including both quantitative and qualitative data, and the importance of a solid evidence base in building responsive programs
- The positive impact culturally sensitive program delivery can have within communities and for individual families

Key questions for consideration

1. What have been the achievements/gaps under the First Action Plan?

Key achievements under the First Action Plan have been seen mainly in the area of improvements in cultural awareness and sensitivity of mainstream providers within the family violence sector.

From the perspective of settlement services a key gap remains in mainstream service providers understanding of the settlement journey, visa types and the impact of the migration experience on family dynamics (and family violence). The specifics of visa type can have enormous implications in terms of access to services, leading vulnerable people into a referral runaround that is counterproductive to provision of timely effective support at a time of need. Understanding whether a person is an asylum seeker, recently arrived refugee, person of refugee background who has been in Australia for some time, a permanent migrant, a temporary migrant, or the spouse of a migrant (permanent or temporary) will have significant impacts on the types of services each category of people are eligible for, and on the impact their settlement and migration journey may have on family dynamics. The settlement sector has developed a nuanced understanding of these issues through the provision of settlement support. While this has included supporting families experiencing violence there is a need to bridge the gap between the family violence and settlement sectors to ensure that each sector has a stronger understanding and awareness of the types of services, access to support and appropriate referral pathways within each sphere.

Additional gaps identified within the settlement sector include developing partnerships and projects with community or social housing to provide adequate and affordable housing to people affected by family violence. Housing is a broader issue which is a significant challenge within the settlement sector but it has particular relevance for those affected by and vulnerable to family violence. This issue also affects the availability of spaces in shelters as women and families are unable to be exited from shelters unless there is appropriate secure accommodation.

Community or capacity building programmes such as life skills programs for victims of family violence have been identified as needed within the settlement sector. Ensuring strong linkages with programs which engage directly with direct services staff are maintained and developed will be important in phase two of the action plan.

2. What are the opportunities for consolidating and building upon the actions undertaken under the National Priorities of the First Action Plan?

Consolidating the gains in community awareness and understanding of healthy relationships and respect for women is an opportunity which can be capitalised on in the Second Action Plan, extending community awareness raising campaigns and communications to a broader range of cultural groups and languages. Programs need to work with community leaders directly to empower them to organise campaigns and training for their own communities.

The Second Action Plan will need to ensure the strong research and a solid evidence base continues to underpin the program development of programs and projects for families (including men).

3. What types of other initiatives could benefit from a national focus?

The settlement sector has seen great benefits from pilot programs with specific communities. While it can be difficult to capitalise on the unique strengths demonstrated in programs at the local level in broadening the focus of programs, opportunities to expand such projects beyond individual communities and locations, and to shift from pilot phase to permanent programs would both provide significant gains at a community and family level in community support for strong resilient family relationships. At a recent National Settlement Policy Network discussion on family violence and settlement great examples of pilot programs focussing on prevention and healthy relationships through working with men from specific cultural groups were shared. The call for expansion of such programs geographically and to additional cultural groups was immediate.

Initiatives which focus on intensive case work and support for victims and their families could be strengthened, particularly in terms of cultural awareness and sensitivity to the migration journey as mentioned above.

A national focus on housing and developing stronger partnerships with housing providers to provide affordable and appropriate housing for women escaping family violence is needed.

Greater emphasis on developing public learning tools to assist women in family violence situations is needed at a national level.

4. In order to achieve greater efficiency and effectiveness in addressing violence against women, where is there scope to reduce duplication of programmes and services provided by the Commonwealth and the states and territories, as part of the Second Action Plan

In the experience of the settlement sector the issue is not so much one of duplication as it is that of understanding appropriate referral pathways, and the impact of the settlement journey on families (as mentioned above under question 1). Building the knowledge and relationships to make appropriate timely referrals requires an investment in services and service capacity which moves beyond the question of duplication of services. Service capacity, investment in networks and in staff training are all areas which require ongoing support and funding.

Development of a comprehensive online forum as a platform where organisations can access and share information would assist information distribution and sharing of best practice. Such a forum would need to be directly managed and supported by a specific organisation or department.

5. Which vulnerable groups and communities would benefit from an increased focus under the Second Action Plan?

Temporary migrants (such as 457 visa holders) and their spouses are not eligible for many direct services in the first few years in Australia. This a group who are expected to be able

to rely on their own resources, and those of their employer, to support their settlement and orientation to Australia. While this is true in most cases, as a group they are vulnerable, particularly the spouses, in the event that migration and settlement does not progress as planned, and fearful of reporting because of the threat of return. Provision of outreach services to the spouses of temporary migrants would reap benefits in a range of areas, including provision of services in the instances where family violence occurs.

6. How can we better engage our leaders and broader civil society to address the attitudinal and cultural change required to reduce violence against women and their children?

Continuing the excellent work in the First Action Plan, and strengthening the reach of programs into a wider range of cultural and community groups will engage a broader network of community leaders from diverse backgrounds. Connecting with community leaders and champions from a range of cultural backgrounds who have an understanding of settlement through their own lived experience or involvement within their community will increase support for the widespread cultural change required in this important area. Providing funding for community organisations will assist in training community members to conduct their own culturally appropriate programs raising awareness about family violence within their communities and the effects it has on the person, family and the wider community.

Developing family violence training package which focus on men, using a train the trainer approach will amplify the benefits, as men will follow on and provide the training for their respective communities. Early prevention training for newly arrived men regardless of their background, eg refugee, migrant and asylum seekers is needed.

The Settlement Council appreciates the opportunity to have input on this important issue. Attached for reference and further information are the:

- SCOA Discussion Paper on Domestic Violence
- National Settlement Policy Network Report – Domestic Violence and Settlement.

Please feel free to contact Sky de Jersey at eo@scoa.org.au should clarification or further information be required on any of the points in this submission.