

# TAKING A STAND RESPONDING TO DOMESTIC VIOLENCE





## A message from Premier Jay Weatherill

As the father of two young girls, the statistics around violence against women in our community horrify me.

One in six Australian women has experienced physical or sexual violence at the hands of a current or former partner. One woman is killed nearly every week in Australia by a male partner or former partner. Often these tragic deaths occur when a woman is trying to leave a relationship and this ultimate act of violence follows a long history of men treating women as their "property".

At the heart of the issue of domestic violence is the image of women in the minds of men. When women are seen as the property of men, a broken relationship is somehow a justification for a man to retrieve what he regards as his own and that is the foundation of violence. There is a fundamental disrespect for the choices women make about how they live their own lives. I believe we need to take a strong stand against the ingrained attitudes that breed this violence.

That is why I have made domestic violence prevention a priority. In particular, I want to shine a light on the role men play in reducing the prevalence of domestic violence. By speaking up publicly against domestic violence and actively supporting campaigns that reject domestic violence, men can help to change the cultural environment in which violence against women exists. The truth is, men have to change their attitudes towards women. It's men's lack of respect for women that lies at the heart of domestic violence. This is a men's issue as much as it is a women's issue. We need to teach our boys as they grow up about respecting women. We need to support women to call out this lack of respect when they see it.

Earlier this year, the Coroner directed a series of recommendations to me regarding the death of Zahra Abrahamzadeh, who was murdered by her estranged husband. I am tabling in Parliament a response to the Coroner that is two-fold. It includes a detailed response by SAPOL to the ten recommendations – as well as additional policy responses aimed at addressing domestic violence in our community.

A new early warning system, assistance for women to navigate the courts and the roll-out of a significant workplace program to prevent and respond to domestic violence are included. As foreshadowed before this year's State Election, we are implementing a Multi Agency Protection Service – an information sharing initiative to manage domestic violence and child protection issues. We recently joined Our Watch (Our Women and their Children) – a national foundation dedicated to stopping violence before it happens. These steps follow a series of policy initiatives over a number of years that have been aimed at the respect and safety of women in our community.

But there is more to do and this response is just one step. South Australia has been a leader in promoting gender equity – we were the first Australian state to allow women to vote and the first to allow women to stand for parliament. We introduced the nation's first Equal Opportunity Act. This paper is about continuing that strong tradition in the face of the national emergency that is domestic violence.

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## Making domestic violence prevention a priority

Early this year, Premier Jay Weatherill pledged that domestic violence prevention would be a priority for him and for his government. Since the 2014 State Election, the State Government has embarked on a series of initiatives to address domestic violence in our community. This policy paper forms part of that work.



36% of women had experienced physical or sexual violence from someone they knew.



15% of women had experienced physical or sexual violence from an ex-partner (the most likely type of known perpetrator for a female victim).



For 62% of the women who had experienced physical assault by a male perpetrator, the most recent incident was in their home.



\*According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics 2012 *Personal Safety Survey*.

## What impact does violence against women have across the community?

Violence against women has a much broader impact on our community than the harm caused to individual women. It can destroy families. Children who are exposed to domestic violence experience serious long-term harm. The economic impact is estimated to be \$13.6 billion across Australia in 2013. Domestic violence affects workplace productivity and results in increased demand on health, welfare, social housing and crisis care service and support.

## What is this policy?

This paper brings together a whole-of-government response to the findings of the State Coroner regarding a tragic domestic violence case that ended in the murder of a South Australian woman.

Zahra Abrahamzadeh was repeatedly stabbed by her estranged husband at a cultural event held at the Adelaide Convention Centre in March 2010.

Zahra and her children had been physically and psychologically abused for many years and the horrific crime shocked the State.

Citing the Premier's concerns about the prevalence of domestic violence, the State Coroner published a series of recommendations, which he directed to the Premier.

This document includes a number of policy responses – some directly relating to the issues raised by the Coroner, as well as other broader measures to help prevent domestic violence.

## What have we done so far?

The State Government launched “A Right to Safety” – the next phase of South Australia’s Women’s Safety Strategy – in 2011.

The strategy is organised around four key themes: Prevention, Service Provision, Protection and Performance.

The main initiatives that have commenced under this strategy are:

- » The implementation of a South Australia Police domestic violence strategy
- » A commitment to establish a Coronial Domestic Violence Information System to track domestic violence related deaths and provide analysis
- » The commencement of the Intervention Orders (Prevention of Abuse) Act, which allows police and courts to issue intervention orders if there is a reason to suspect a defendant may commit an act of abuse

» The operation of a Family Safety Framework in 19 regions across South Australia, which co-ordinates responses to individual high-risk cases

» The operation of Violence Against Women Collaborations, which are longer-term partnerships to respond to and prevent violence against women, involving government agencies, non-government organisations and local government.

In fulfilling an election commitment, the State Government this year established a Multi-Agency Protection Service. MAPS brings together staff from police, corrections, education, health, Housing SA and Families SA in one location to share information and intervene early in domestic violence and child protection matters. The first stage of this service – dealing with domestic violence is now in operation.

By co-locating these staff, agencies will be able to share information faster and identify emerging patterns of harm before they escalate so that at-risk families do not slip through the net.

## What are the challenges we face?

Among the disturbing statistics about violence against women is the fact that one in three women have experienced physical violence since the age of 15 and one in five have experienced sexual violence. One in six Australian women have experienced physical or sexual violence from a current or former partner.

A reduction in the prevalence of domestic violence will not be achieved with law and order responses alone.

The community attitudes that underpin domestic violence need to be changed.

It needs to be recognised that domestic violence is a men’s issue as well as a women’s issue.

## Achieving cultural change

While many South Australian government domestic violence prevention efforts focus on service provision to victims - including funding for crisis support, forensic and medical care, refuges and on-going support - cultural change is important in any work around ending domestic violence. A number of steps have already been taken towards this end.

South Australia is:

- » a founding member of Australia’s National Research Organisation (ANROWS) - the national centre of excellence in research on ending violence against women and their children
- » operating through SHine SA both the Focus Schools program in most state secondary schools, which focuses on respectful relationships for young people to improve safety and the Yarning On Aboriginal Sexual Health Program, which is an Aboriginal focused schools program to prevent violence.

The national, male-led White Ribbon campaign also creates awareness of the problem of domestic violence and identifies the roles men can play in ending domestic violence. Premier Jay Weatherill is an ambassador.

## How will men also benefit?

Achieving a shift in attitudes towards women will not just be of benefit to women in the community. Many of the community attitudes that underpin domestic violence are also a burden to men. Men do not necessarily want to be the sort of men that society demands that they be. Often men are expected to be in control to handle any situation without expressing stress, to be less involved in the lives of their children and to be the ‘breadwinner’ of the family. These expectations can have many effects, such as distant relationships with children, prioritising work rather than relationships, poor physical and mental health, even suicide.

## Our Watch

South Australia is taking a leadership role on this issue.

In September this year, the Foundation to Prevent Violence against Women and their Children launched itself as Our Watch.

South Australia became the first state to join founding members the Commonwealth and Victoria, along with the Northern Territory.

The objective of this independent, not-for-profit organisation is to change attitudes, behaviour, social norms and practices that underpin and create violence against women and their children.

Striving for gender equality will provide relief to men who are struggling under these demands. It will assist in helping a new generation of boys and young men to better relate to the world and to the women in their lives, leading to happier personal relationships.

This work needs to focus as much on discussions with men as it does with discussions with women. There is a need for male role models taking a leadership role.

This represents a huge opportunity to take a completely new approach to the way in which men and women are represented in the world.

## Response to the Coroner's findings by SAPOL

A comprehensive response to the Coroner's findings is being released in State Parliament along with this policy paper.

The response addresses each of the ten recommendations and actions including:

- » A new prosecutions staffing model that utilises unsworn prosecuting solicitors to manage complex matters, with each metropolitan prosecution unit as well as Port Augusta having a dedicated domestic violence prosecutor
- » Enhanced domestic violence training programs which include a full day visit to a metropolitan domestic violence service to provide cadets with a more direct and personal understanding of the issues facing victims and families of domestic abuse
- » Formal protocols between the Department for Communities and Social Inclusion and SAPOL to flag and update domestic violence safe houses.

SAPOL has also established a new domestic violence portfolio, headed by Deputy Commissioner Grant Stevens, which aims to drive a systemic and cultural change in the way police address the issue of violence against women.

## Additional responses to the Coronial inquiry

The Coroner's findings highlight that we need to better identify at an early stage any gaps and flaws in our system of responding to domestic violence.

In addition to SAPOL's actions in response to the Coroner's recommendations, the State Government is announcing further domestic violence initiatives.

The government will establish a Women's Domestic Violence Court Assistance Service, an Early Warning System and White Ribbon Accreditation in all government departments.

# 23,584

**Of all Australian women aged 18 to 24, 23,584 reported they had experienced sexual assault in the 12 months prior to the survey.**

# x2

**Twice as many women in this 18 to 24 age bracket experience sexual assault, compared to all women.**

## Women's Domestic Violence Court Assistance Service

In the Abrahamzadeh case, the perpetrator's permanent intervention order was modified to permit him to attend cultural and religious functions on the basis he not approach or speak to his estranged wife.

The Coroner found that "it was that very outcome that he clearly desired bearing in mind that the ... event at which he murdered Zahra was just such an occasion".

Consultation with various government and non-government agencies has highlighted a need to better support victims of violence to navigate the justice system and negotiate intervention order conditions where they do not have legal representation.

Commencing in 2015, the Women's Domestic Violence Court Assistance Service will provide a greater level of support within the court system for victims of violence.

Women who attend court for domestic violence and family violence matters will receive the assistance they might require to successfully deal with the courts system and increase their access to justice.

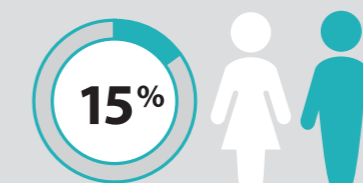
Legal officers will provide support and advocate on behalf of women who have difficulties applying for an intervention order, reporting a breach or raising safety concerns.

The service will be free and confidential and will work closely with police prosecutors. The service will be funded from the Victims of Crime fund.



**Australian women are more likely to be sexually assaulted by a person they know than a stranger.**

**Young women are particularly vulnerable to sexual assault.**



**Of all Australian women, 15 % had been sexually assaulted by a person they knew, since the age of 15. 3.8% had been sexually assaulted by a stranger.**



## Early warning system

A criticism by the Coroner in the Abrahamzadeh case was the operation of the SAPOL call centre, in particular an instance where the Central Domestic Violence Service rang the call centre flagging concerns that there was a threat to Zahra Abrahamzadeh's safety.

Based on transcripts, it would appear that there was some confusion in relation to the most appropriate response given the information provided.

The State Government will introduce an early warning system, which will provide a circuit breaker in such instances.

It is designed to increase accountability and provide an escalation point where there have been process flaws or gaps in the response of a government agency to domestic violence.

It will be a point of call for domestic violence services and government agencies when a situation occurs where they believe the response was not adequate.

The early warning system is not intended to be either a complaints service or another avenue for individual case management. Rather, Women's Domestic Violence Services and government service delivery agencies will advise the early warning officer of instances where the response of a government service delivery agency to domestic violence, or lack thereof, compromises the safety of

women who are victims of domestic violence.

The early warning officer will:

- » Log the process gap or flaw
- » Determine whether the incident has already been referred to MAPS
- » Work with the relevant MAPS agency staff member and external agencies to ensure that the incident is analysed, prioritised and actioned as appropriate
- » Identify opportunities for training and service delivery improvements
- » Keep records of actions and responses.

All early warning reports will be provided as an aggregated report to the A Right To Safety chief executives group.

This mechanism is designed to provide an avenue to inquire into and address circumstances where there are concerns regarding service delivery.

It provides an opportunity for service delivery agencies to address these shortcomings when they occur so that they are promptly rectified. Alternatively, agencies may be able to provide an assurance that the response or service provided was appropriate.

It also provides the opportunity for continuous improvement where trends within particular agencies can be identified that signal potential cultural or expertise gaps that need to be addressed.

## White Ribbon Accreditation

Workplaces play an important role in preventing violence against women. Two out of three Australian women who report violence are in paid employment and most of the men perpetrating this violence are in paid work.

The South Australian Government, as the largest employer in the state must lead by example.

The South Australian public sector employs more than 100,000 people. Every one of these employees has the potential to contribute to the cultural shift required to reduce violence against women and promote gender equity.

By championing gender equity in the workplace it is hoped that public sector employees will also become champions of gender equity at home, with their friends, and their communities.

Under this policy, all South Australian Government departments will obtain White Ribbon Workplace accreditation. This will build upon existing workplace policies on domestic violence.

The White Ribbon Workplace Accreditation Program recognises workplaces that have taken active steps to prevent and respond to violence against women by accrediting them as a White Ribbon Workplace.

Through this program, organisations become accredited to:

- » Prevent men's violence against women
- » Drive social change
- » Refine support offered to employees who are victims of violence.

The work done in achieving accreditation could include strengthened policies to promote gender equality in the workplace, as part of influencing the social and cultural attitudes underpinning violence against women.

The Commissioner for Equal Opportunity will lead this work in close collaboration with the Office for Women.

The Government will work with the private sector to encourage similar initiatives in private sector workplaces.

## Further Measures

Our approach to domestic violence is about supporting and protecting the victim. The State Government is looking at ways to further strengthen our laws to better protect domestic violence victims from perpetrators.

The Government will consider changes to make it easier for children and partners of abusive individuals to change their names. This will ensure they are better protected and less able to be tracked by the perpetrator.

The Government has also recently passed legislation that guarantees that people who commit serious violent crimes, and receive a sentence in excess of two years, cannot have their sentence wholly suspended. They will spend time in jail.

The Government will also consider strengthening penalties for people who are proven to be consistent domestic violence offenders. We want to send a strong message to the community. Domestic violence is not acceptable and will not be tolerated.



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