

# FAMILY VIOLENCE in AUSTRALIA

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Submission to the Royal Commission into Family Violence  
May 2015

## ANROWS

AUSTRALIA'S NATIONAL RESEARCH  
ORGANISATION FOR WOMEN'S SAFETY  
*to Reduce Violence against Women & their Children*

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## Introduction

Australia's National Research Organisation for Women's Safety Limited is an independent, not-for-profit organisation established as an initiative under Australia's *National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children 2010-2022 (National Plan)*. ANROWS is jointly funded by the Commonwealth and all state and territory governments of Australia. ANROWS was set up with the purpose of establishing a national level approach to systematically address violence against women and their children, following consultations with key stakeholders, including academics within universities and other research bodies, government policy-makers, and on-the-ground service providers. Our mission is to deliver relevant and translatable research evidence which drives policy and practice leading to a reduction in the incidence and impacts of violence against women and their children.

Research over the past seven years shows violence against women remains alarmingly high. The Australian Bureau of Statistics Personal Safety Survey 2012 found one in five (19%) Australian women had been subjected to sexual violence since the age of 15, and one in six (17%) had experienced physical or sexual violence from a current or former partner since the age of 15. To tackle this significant issue, ANROWS submits that a coordinated, adequately resourced, ongoing national approach to build a strong evidence base for what policies and practices are the most effective for reducing violence against women and their children, is crucial. A strong research base is fundamental to informing policy responses to violence against women and "informs best practice principles to support victims and rehabilitate perpetrators" (ABS, 2013). Violence against women and their children affects everybody. It impacts on the health, wellbeing and safety of a significant proportion of Australians throughout all states and territories and places an enormous burden on the nation's economy across family and community services, health and hospitals, income-support and criminal justice systems. ANROWS is committed to reducing the burden of violence against women by supporting research that allows us to better understand this complex issue in terms of effects on the community, how best to address the problem and how to work towards its eradication.

ANROWS is very pleased to have the opportunity to assist the Royal Commission into Family Violence by providing information on elements of our current research program. We appreciate this opportunity to contribute to the Commission's deliberations and would be very pleased to assist further if required.

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29 May 2015

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## The importance of building the evidence base on violence against women and their children

A strong research evidence base is fundamental to understanding different aspects of family and domestic violence and sexual assault and to assist governments across Australia to further the goals of the *National Plan*. The development of an evidence-base for practice and policy further helps to inform strategies, such as the design of programs, to reduce sexual assault and domestic and family violence. Through the [ANROWS Research Program 2014-2016 \(Part 1\)](#), we support the development of an evidence-base at the national level on the prevalence, nature, causes and consequences, and prevention of violence against women and their children.

On 16 May 2014, ANROWS launched the [National Research Agenda to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children](#) (*National Research Agenda*) to support the implementation of the *National Plan*. The *National Research Agenda* has informed the development of our Research Program 2014-2016 (Part 1) and continues to provide a framework for, and guidance on, priority areas of research and research themes for academics, researchers, organisations and governments across Australia.

### The National Research Agenda- Strategic Research Themes

#### *SRT 1 - Experience and impacts*

We need to understand the experience and impacts of violence against women. This theme addresses the ‘what’ of violence against women including the scope of the problem and its effects. It provides an important foundation upon which we can develop and understand prevention, service responses, interventions and other efforts to reduce violence against women and their children.

#### *SRT 2 - Gender inequality and primary prevention*

We need to examine efforts to prevent violence against women before it occurs through actions that address social conditions that can lead to violence.

#### *SRT 3 - Service responses and interventions*

We need research that provides clear guidance about the effectiveness of the wide range of service responses and interventions in reducing the impact and incidence of violence against women.

#### *SRT 4 - Systems*

We need a better understanding of responses to violence against women within different systems and the impact of the intersection of these systems on the experiences of individuals, families and communities.

Integral to and embedded within the *National Research Agenda* are four Strategic Research Themes (SRT) which relate to all of the *National Plan*’s six national outcomes. The SRTs include: **SRT1** Experience and Impacts; **SRT2** Gender inequality and primary prevention; **SRT3** Service responses and interventions; **SRT4** Systems. Common across all SRTs is the need to focus research effort on ‘what works’ and on marginalised groups and under-researched populations. The focus and intent of

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each SRT was developed and validated through a national consultation with stakeholders from government, practice and research.<sup>1</sup>

The SRTs, through the *National Research Agenda*, provide a medium term vision and common reference point for the main issues about violence towards women and their children that warrant sustained research effort. In particular, the SRTs provide guidance for researchers about the needs of practice and policy for evidence about particular facets of violence against women and operate as a conceptual framework for the pursuit of research enquiry to deliver the outcomes of the *National Plan*.

### ANROWS Research Program 2014-2016 (Part 1)

ANROWS launched its Research Program 2014-16 (Part 1) on 31 October 2014. The Research Program consists of 20 projects across the four previously mentioned strategic research themes, and includes one project under an additional strategic research theme: Knowledge translation and evaluation. These projects have a combined total value of approximately \$3.5 million. The program of research incorporates:

- 1) Projects funded as part of ANROWS's Research Priorities Grants round, which was an open, competitive process for researchers to apply for grants in priority topic areas.
- 2) Multi-jurisdictional national projects, supported by advisory groups with appropriate expertise in the relevant topic, with researchers identified through a competitive, expression of interest process.
- 3) Small-scale, commissioned projects that provide a conceptual or theoretical underpinning for subsequent empirical research.

These projects have an ambitious reach with research sites in every state and territory and a spread of projects focusing on different types of violence against women as well as priority population groups identified in the *National Research Agenda*.

The Commonwealth Government has also funded ANROWS a total of \$3 million over the three years from 2013/14-2015/16 (\$1 million per annum) to establish a dedicated 'Perpetrator Interventions Research Stream' to support states and territories to implement the National Outcome Standards for Perpetrator Interventions. While the National Outcome Standards are being finalised by states and territories, ANROWS has commenced work to identify the current 'state of knowledge' on perpetrator interventions in responding to sexual assault and domestic and family violence. Later this year, ANROWS proposes to establish a program of research in the area of perpetrator interventions.

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<sup>1</sup> The national consultation was conducted by the Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute (AHURI) on behalf of ANROWS. An open invitation for written submissions elicited completed responses from 127 government and non-government organisations, research academics, practitioners, peak bodies and other stakeholders. In addition to this, six stakeholder roundtables were held, involving over 75 participants including representatives from: peak bodies; government; research organisations; sexual assault practitioners; domestic and family violence practitioners; researchers; and service providers working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

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## ANROWS's approach to knowledge production within the Research Program 2014-2016 (Part 1)

### *Research collaboration and active co-production of research*

ANROWS's Research Program 2014-2016 (Part 1) underscores the need for research to foster partnerships and collaborative process between the researchers and practitioners. Many of our current research projects are being undertaken in partnership with service providers and practitioners from both the domestic and family violence and sexual assault sectors. ANROWS firmly believes in the continuing importance of the active involvement of the practitioner community in developing the evidence base and in the transfer and exchange of research derived knowledge.

### *Research uses different disciplines and methodologies*

Given the complex nature of the field on violence against women research, ANROWS's Research Program 2014-2016 (Part 1) includes research using a range of different disciplines. It also utilises a wide range of methods, including qualitative (including in-depth interviews, focus groups, case studies, ethnographic research and life-course analysis), quantitative (surveys), desk based (literature reviews, content analysis and policy analysis) and mixed method studies.

### *Research acknowledges the 'voice' of women and children experiencing violence*

An important feature of research on violence against women and their children is the need for researchers to amplify the voice of women themselves, their articulation of their experience of violence, their needs and the needs of their children. In this respect, a range of projects from ANROWS Research Program 2014-2016 (Part 1) are working with victims/survivors of domestic and family violence by using participatory and qualitative research methodologies.

### *Research supports the use of national data sets and administrative by-product data*

The use of national data sets and administrative data to research violence against women and their children is an important feature of the *National Research Agenda*. There are a number of existing datasets that provide a broad picture of the nature and extent of some forms of family, domestic and sexual violence in Australia. This includes the Personal Safety Survey (PSS) and administrative by-product data, such as those collected or recorded by criminal justice agencies, that provide an indication of how frequently the police or courts are involved with cases of this type of violence, and resulting outcomes for perpetrators and those subjected to violence. In this respect, ANROWS is currently producing **Project 1.1 "Australian Bureau of Statistics Personal Safety Survey 2012 additional data analysis on violence against women"**. This project will summarise and analyse previously unpublished relevant PSS data to provide further insights into issues such as: the circumstances, severity and impact of the violence; factors affecting women's decision-making after violence; the links between sexual assault and domestic violence; and the presence of children in the context of domestic violence. Results of this project will be available in a form that is easily accessible for policy-makers and service providers and will provide them with useful resources to support and inform their work. This project will produce statistical, quantitative evidence on the nature and impact of violence against women beyond that which is currently in the public domain.

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### *Research is conducted in an ethical manner*

ANROWS acknowledges that there are particular issues researchers need to be mindful of when conducting research with those experiencing domestic and family violence and sexual assault. This includes issues of shame and difficulties in disclosure, which importantly include safety for themselves, family members and workers. Respect for the dignity and well-being of research participants must take precedence over the expected benefits to knowledge and research participants should ultimately benefit from, and not be disadvantaged by, the research. In light of these issues, projects undertaken as part of the ANROWS Research Program 2014-2016 (Part 1) must:

- comply with the [Australian Code for the Responsible Conduct of Research](#).
- comply with the relevant [National Health and Medical Research Council \(NHMRC\) codes](#), where research involves human beings as subjects. In particular, ANROWS research applicants must demonstrate access to an appropriate Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC), such as those [HRECs registered with the NHMRC](#).
- follow [AIATSIS Guidelines for Ethical Research in Australian Indigenous Studies \(2012\)](#), if conducting research with Indigenous peoples.

### *The conduct of research is culturally competent*

ANROWS is committed to conducting research in a manner that is culturally competent and informed and managed by Indigenous communities. We believe research involving Indigenous communities needs to be carried out in genuine partnership *with* Indigenous communities and that these communities have ownership of the research. ANROWS is currently funding three projects<sup>2</sup> focused on understanding the specificity of violence against women in Indigenous Australian communities, these include:

- Project 3.2- *Literature review on existing knowledge, practice and responses to violence against women in Australian Indigenous communities.*
- Project 3.3- *Advocacy for safety and empowerment: good practice and innovative approaches with Indigenous women experiencing family and domestic violence in remote and regional Australia.*
- Project 4.3- *Evaluation of innovative models of interagency partnerships, collaboration, coordination and/or integrated responses to family and/or sexual violence against women in Australian Indigenous communities.*

In addition to these, **Project 1.7 “National burden of disease study examining the impact of violence against women”** also includes a requirement for the researchers to specifically explore the burden of disease impacts of violence against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women.

Furthermore, **Project 1.3 “Seeking help for domestic violence: exploring rural women’s coping experiences”** includes a participatory research component with Aboriginal women to explore how

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<sup>2</sup> The principal chief investigator of Project 3.2 listed above is Indigenous (and also from the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies), while Projects 3.3 and 4.3 are being led by non-Indigenous researchers who all have demonstrated experience working with Indigenous people and have at least one (and often more) Indigenous individuals and/or organisations as part of their research team. These projects also include specific contracted requirements for the ongoing involvement of Indigenous organisations and/or research team members on the project.

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social and geographical isolation shape women's coping abilities and domestic violence service provision. Semi-structured interviews with Aboriginal women will assist in the exploration of the specificity of Aboriginal women's reasons for seeking help, how they seek assistance and what shapes their decision making.

### **ANROWS Research Program 2014-2016 (Part 1): projects of interest to Victoria**

ANROWS is pleased to provide further information on its current open applications projects which have a Victorian focus.

#### **1. Project 1.2 – Promoting community-led responses to violence against immigrant and refugee women in metropolitan and regional Australia: the ASPIRE project.**

**Principal chief investigator:** *Dr Cathy Vaughan, Lecturer, Gender and Women's Health Unit, Centre for Health Equity, Melbourne School of Population and Global Health, University of Melbourne.*

Immigrant and refugee women in Australia are known to face barriers accessing services aimed at preventing and responding to domestic and family violence. There is limited evidence available about the contexts, nature and dynamics of violence against immigrant and refugee women to inform development of responsive local and community-based interventions. This participatory research project is working with communities in eight geographic locations (two inner-city, three outer-suburban, and three regional) across Victoria and Tasmania, to generate evidence about immigrant and refugee women's experiences of violence. The project is engaging communities through extensive consultation prior to data collection and by facilitating community members' participation in generating and analysing data. A mix of qualitative methods will be used to generate rich data about the family, cultural and place-based contexts that shape the impact and dynamics of violence against immigrant and refugee women; women's help-seeking efforts; and participating cultural communities' attitudes and responses to violence and its prevention.

This project also uses Photovoice, a creative photographic methodology, to work with female and male leaders from participating cultural communities to document their perspectives on the need for, approaches to, and opportunities for supporting, community-led responses to violence against immigrant and refugee women. The results of the research will be communicated to communities, service providers and policy-makers through written, verbal and visual approaches. This project will produce evidence on violence against immigrant and refugee women that encourages culturally-appropriate prevention methods and support interventions; supports building local communities' awareness and capacity to respond to violence against immigrant and refugee women.

#### **2. Project 1.8 – Domestic and family violence and parenting: mixed method insights into impact and support needs.**

**Principal chief investigator:** *Dr Rae Kaspiew, Senior Research Fellow, Australian Institute of Family Studies (AIFS).*



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This project focuses on the impact of domestic and family violence (DFV) on parenting. The aim of this project is to improve understanding of how DFV affects parenting capacity to reduce the negative impact of DFV on women and children. Specifically, it addresses three key questions:

1. How does a reported history of DFV affect mother-child and father-child relationships?
2. How do mothers who have experienced DFV perceive it has affected their relationship with their children?
3. To what extent have these mothers had contact with relevant services and was this contact helpful or unhelpful?

The project is applying a mixed method approach incorporating: a literature review, a quantitative element using three existing, large-scale databases (the Longitudinal Study of Australian Children, the Longitudinal Study of Separated Families, and the Survey of Recently Separated Parents 2012), and a qualitative element providing insight into the experiences of mothers who have used services (in Victoria) across a range of areas in the context of a history of DFV. A range of publications for the general community, policy makers, practitioners and researchers will be developed from this project to inform policy and practice strategies that respond to the needs of mothers and children who have experienced DFV. The project will also support the further development of approaches to working with DFV perpetrators in the context of their parenting. This project will provide evidence on: the impact of domestic and family violence on parenting; and how to strengthen mother child relationships following domestic and family violence.

### 3. Project 1.9 – Women's Input to a Trauma-informed systems model of care in Health settings: The WITH study.

**Principal chief investigator:** *Professor Kelsey Hegarty, General Practice and Primary Health Care Academic Centre, The University of Melbourne.*

There is a strong association between sexual violence and mental health problems for women. Mental health and sexual violence services often support the same women, however the two sectors are not necessarily working together as effectively as they could. This is often due to differences in approach, bureaucratic alignment or organisational stress. Although sector specific trauma-informed guidelines have been implemented to varying degrees, there is no model outlining how services can implement trauma-informed practice more effectively when both issues are present. In response, this project, with a Victorian geographic focus, will build, implement and evaluate a model for systems of care that are trauma-informed. The model will take a whole-of-organisation approach for services, including: environment, management, direct contact with clients, practitioner support, referral pathways, information sharing, protocols and policies, and community linkages.

To develop the systems model, this project is drawing on existing literature and interviews with women who have experienced both mental health problems and sexual violence. The project is examining the directionality of the relationship between mental health problems and sexual violence, pathways to safety and care, and the benefits of digital storytelling as a therapeutic process. This material will be used in consultation with stakeholders to build the systems model. The model will then be implemented in three settings - a tertiary women's hospital with a sexual violence service, an area mental health service and a community mental health service. The systems model has the potential to improve women's experience by recognising and responding to their complex pathways

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to safety and care, no matter which service they approach first. The project will provide an approach (model of care) for mental health and sexual violence services to better support women seeking their help.

#### 4. **Project 3.4 – What does it take? Developing informed and effective tertiary responses to violence and abuse for women and girls with disabilities in Australia.**

**Principal chief investigator:** *Dr Patsie Frawley, Senior Research Fellow, Deakin University.*

This national project is identifying models of good practice for responding to women and girls with disabilities who have experienced domestic violence or sexual assault. A national survey will be conducted to understand the extent to which existing mainstream and specialist services are effective and accessible. Based on the findings of the survey, three services that represent models of good practice will be identified and invited to participate in in-depth case-studies. To inform the case-studies, interviews or focus groups will be carried out with women and/or girls with disabilities who have used the services as well as with service staff. These are likely to be conducted in Victoria and other select jurisdictions. A cross sector action group will also be formed at each project site, which will include women with disabilities and service providers. The groups will collaborate with the researchers to understand the research findings and to develop guidelines and recommendations for new and improved practice.

This research will result in an in-depth understanding of current mainstream and specialist approaches to supporting women and girls with disabilities who have experienced violence or abuse, provide three models of good practice, and guidelines for the provision of high quality, accessible services for this target group. This project will provide: better knowledge about the services available to women and girls with a disability experiencing violence; and evidence to support better services for women with a disability experiencing violence.

#### 5. **Project 4.5 – The PATRICIA Project: Pathways and Research in Collaborative Inter-Agency working.**

**Principal chief investigators:** *Professor Cathy Humphreys, Alfred Felton Chair of Child and Family Social Work, Department of Social Work, University of Melbourne and Professor Marie Connolly, Department of Social Work, University of Melbourne.*

In recent years, domestic violence referrals to child protection services have increased dramatically creating important interface issues between the two services. This project focuses on exploring the relationship between statutory child protection, family law, and community-based services who seek to support women and children exposed to domestic violence. The over-arching research question is: What are the elements that facilitate differential pathways and appropriate service system support for the safety and well-being of women and children living with and separating from family violence in an integrated intervention system? In this project, women's service pathways are being examined using New South Wales and Victorian administrative datasets. The findings, together with an international scoping review, will be synthesised through a participatory action research process to strengthen the co-design of the service systems in New South Wales, Victoria and Western Australia.

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The intended outcomes for the research findings are to foster the use of evidence to enhance greater cross-sector collaboration to support women and their children and support stronger accountability for perpetrators of domestic abuse. The research project, which is ambitious in scope, will be critically supported by an Advisory Group comprised of both government and non-government stakeholders. This project will provide evidence on the way that services can better work together to respond to the needs of women and their children who have experienced domestic and family violence and are involved with statutory child protection agencies.

### 6. **Project 4.6- Building effective policies and services to promote women's economic security following domestic and family violence.**

**Principal chief investigator:** *Dr Natasha Cortis, Research Fellow, Social Policy Research Centre, University of New South Wales.*

Economic security is central to the capacity of women to transition from violent relationships, and to achieve wellbeing following domestic and family violence. Poor economic wellbeing also has adverse national impact and costs, including income support payments and lost productivity. This research combines rigorous quantitative and qualitative methodologies, and an employment-focused research-to-practice partnership. The project is designed to build new evidence about the economic dimensions of domestic and family violence; women's economic circumstances and financial needs following violence; the impact of the income support, employment services, and financial support systems; and international best practice in building women's economic security following violence. A key contribution will be the analysis of women's economic pathways following violence, including their experiences of financial wellbeing and stress, and their use of various services and supports.

Through interviews with practitioners and sector leaders in New South Wales and Victoria, the project is assessing the efficacy and impact of income support, employment services, and other services and supports for promoting economic security. It is identifying ways services can better work together to improve job search outcomes and employment retention following domestic violence. Results will improve the targeting, timing, adequacy and co-ordination of services and supports to promote women's economic wellbeing. This project will provide evidence about the economic dimensions of domestic and family violence and how systems and services can best support the financial security of women who have experienced this violence.

### 7. **Project 1.4- Establishing the Connection [between alcohol and other drug use and sexual victimisation].**

**Principal chief investigator:** *Dr Rebecca Jenkinson, Research Fellow, Australian Institute of Family Studies (AIFS).*

'Establishing the Connection' is examining the complex intersections between alcohol and other drug (AoD) use and the severity of, or vulnerability to, sexual violence and revictimisation. The project aims to build the capacity of the sexual assault and AoD sectors to respond more effectively to the needs of affected women and their families. The research is being conducted in partnership with the Victorian CASA Forum and UnitingCare ReGen. This is a 12-month, qualitative project involving a detailed literature review, consultation interviews with clinicians and other stakeholders working in the sexual assault and AoD sectors, and a forum to bring together the practice knowledge and needs of

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both sectors and form collaborations for linked service responses and further work in this area. This research will investigate current practice in the field and highlight possibilities for service innovation and collaboration in Victoria; reflecting the service priorities of the Second Action Plan of the *National Plan* to support innovative services and integrated systems.

Findings from the research will inform the development and dissemination of practice guidelines to assist service providers with the identification, assessment, response and referral of women and families affected by co-occurring sexual abuse victimisation and substance use issues. This project brings together research and service provider organisations in the fields of sexual abuse/violence and alcohol and other drugs, and in so doing, will strengthen important links between researchers and service providers in both sectors. This project will provide evidence and strategies to assist sexual assault and alcohol and other drug services respond more effectively to women and their families affected by sexual assault and substance use.

### 8. Project 2.1- National Framework for the Prevention of Violence against Women and their Children.

**Researchers:** *Our Watch, ANROWS and VicHealth.*

The prevention of violence against women is an area of practice that works to change the attitudes, behaviours and environments to stop violence before it occurs. In a world-first, ANROWS is collaborating with Our Watch (as Lead Agency) and VicHealth to produce a national, evidence-based 'road map' to prevent violence against women and their children. The National Framework to Prevent Violence against Women and their Children will bring together the international research, and nationwide experience, on what works to prevent violence. Violence cannot be prevented 'project by project' – coordination and collaboration is fundamental to our success. The Framework will establish a shared understanding of the evidence and principles of effective prevention, and present a way forward for a coordinated national approach. Prevention of violence against women and their children requires a sustained effort across all levels of society where everyone has a part to play. The National Framework will provide the guidance and support to make this happen. It will:

- outline the latest evidence on what causes violence against women and their children;
- show what works to prevent it, in different sectors and from the individual to societal level;
- look at how different forms of disadvantage and discrimination can interact, and how prevention activity should take this into account;
- articulate the elements of a coordinated approach to prevention across jurisdictions and sectors.

This project will provide nationally consistent evidence and approaches to prevent violence against women.

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## The value of evaluating and measuring ‘what works’

International research suggests that programs and responses to violence against women provided by specialist services are “consistently the most responsive to women who have suffered violence” (Kelly, 2008, p.10). Globally, innovations in service response (which are now considered essential to responding to domestic and family violence) such as round-the-clock crisis support, outreach work, trauma-centered care models, domestic violence police liaison and court advocacy services, have originated in the historical activism of women’s movements (Dobash & Dobash, 1992; Kelly, 2008). Research shows the continuing value of specialist women’s services as key partners in an integrated, multi-agency, whole-of-community approach to violence against women. Specialist services for victims/survivors remain important to the ongoing implementation of more streamlined interventions by mainstream agencies, especially law enforcement and the justice system (Kelly, 2008). Yet despite decades of innovations in service responses to domestic and family violence, the current prevalence of domestic and family violence in Australia suggests more needs to be done, and done differently, to halt it. Despite a vibrant research culture on violence against women in Australia, “research and evaluation of the outcomes of interventions with women and children is limited” (Laing, 2003, p.1). ANROWS recognises the need to assess, review and evaluate the effectiveness of strategies, frameworks, policies, programs and services on an ongoing basis to promote a culture of continuous improvement and to continue to offer the best possible outcomes for women and children at risk of, or subjected to, violence.

### Evaluating service delivery

The *National Research Agenda* has identified the need to evaluate the effectiveness of current service delivery models for violence against women. This includes comparisons between jurisdictions, attention to medium-term (in addition to crisis) support, longitudinal studies of the impact of interventions over time and needs and gap analyses. ANROWS submits to the Royal Commission that without robust longitudinal evaluative studies, it is difficult to ascertain the effectiveness of interventions in responding to violence against women. Further, this means that the evidence base required by Governments to draw upon when making resource allocation decisions is effectively reduced. There is thus a need for strategic investment to support the research field of domestic and family violence response evaluation and to support services to embed a culture of evaluation in their work. This need is particularly acute in programs and services working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, given “a dearth of published evaluations of Indigenous violence programs in Australia” (Mommott *et al.*, 2006, p.13). Further, “evaluating the outcomes of intervention with women is an essential element of accountability to survivors of domestic violence” (Laing, 2003, p.11). ANROWS submits that prevention of and response to violence against women would benefit from Government support for evaluation research. This would contribute to a shared understanding of *what works* to protect women and children and *what works* in holding perpetrators to account.

ANROWS is currently funding a number of evaluative projects that research ‘*what works*’ and ‘*for whom does it work*’, in responding to and preventing domestic and family violence. Here, we would like to provide information on **Project 3.3 ‘*Advocacy for safety and empowerment: good practice and innovative approaches with Indigenous women experiencing family and domestic violence in remote and regional Australia*’**. This project is being undertaken by a team of researchers, led by

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the University of New England with Dr Judy Putt as principal chief investigator. The project responds to the sparse, fragmented and fragile knowledge-base of good practice with and for Indigenous women experiencing family and domestic violence (Memmott *et al.*, 2006). It further responds to the literature critiquing the adequacy of mainstream services and of women's specialist services to Indigenous women's priorities (Cripps & Davis, 2012; Nancarrow, 2006). In areas where there has been long-term and extensive engagement between women's specialist services and Indigenous women, there has been no comprehensive analysis and assessment of those efforts. Thus this project aspires to provide comprehensive documentation of the ways in which the services and related programs have, over 20 to 30 years, attempted to answer what works in the tertiary prevention of family violence in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. It will document effective approaches and practices for working with Indigenous women in regional centres and in remote regions, improve the capacity of specialist women's services to reflect upon, monitor and report on their work, and will lead to expanded knowledge of Indigenous women's perspectives on what counts as support, and conceptualising success in responses to family and domestic violence.

### Evaluating integrated responses to and interagency partnerships on violence against women

Central to any effective response to domestic and family violence is an integrated, coordinated response. Streamlined pathways for referrals and increased information sharing between agencies and service providers improve responses, reduce long term stress and trauma, and promote recovery for victim/survivors. The *National Plan* recognises the vital importance of services meeting the needs of women experiencing violence, and their children, through joined up services and systems. As the Second Action Plan of the *National Plan* notes, services and systems need to be integrated to work collaboratively for victim/survivors to be protected and supported. It is increasingly acknowledged that coordinated, multi-agency and integrated responses in interventions targeting both victim/survivors and/or perpetrators are best practice in responding to domestic and family violence. All Australian jurisdictions are developing, or have developed, some types of integrated response to domestic and family violence and a number of jurisdictions have conducted reviews or evaluations of these approaches (including South Australia, Victoria, Tasmania, Queensland and Western Australia). Further research is needed, however, to inform national directions and recommendations for the evidence-based development of these responses. In particular, there is interest in exploring how government agencies, especially within the same regional context, can collaborate more effectively with each other and with the NGO sector to develop:

- effective integrated interventions (such as 'one stop shops') for victims/survivors and/or perpetrators;
- effective local knowledge and information-sharing;
- other coordinated, multi-agency strategies to increase the safety of women and their children and to reduce violence; and
- responses and interventions for victims that address both domestic and family violence and sexual assault in the one approach.

ANROWS has therefore identified the need for a meta-evaluation that examines the key features of effective coordinated, multi-agency and integrated responses to violence against women. ANROWS is currently funding **Project 4.2 "Meta-evaluation of existing interagency partnerships, collaboration, coordination and/or integrated interventions and service responses to violence"**

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*against women*". This project is being undertaken by a team of researchers, led by The University of New South Wales with Dr Jan Breckenridge as principal chief investigator. This project is identifying the important program characteristics, outcome domains and research methods from the existing evaluations of Australian integrated responses. The project will provide direction for services and agencies by recommending key minimum elements and datasets in specific locations, contexts and circumstances to improve integrated responses, particularly focusing on diverse regional contexts. In addition, this critical assessment of available evaluations and review of integrated programs, partnerships and collaborative intervention strategies will establish a national, and potentially international, benchmark for future evaluations and projects in this field.

ANROWS is also funding **Project 3.1 "National mapping and meta-evaluation outlining key features of effective 'safe at home' programs that enhance safety and prevent homelessness for women and their children who have experienced domestic and family violence"**. This project is being undertaken by a team of researchers at The University of New South Wales with Dr Jan Breckenridge as Principal Chief Investigator. This project is mapping current Australian 'Safe at Home' programs and approaches to determine the important program characteristics, outcome domains and research methods in evaluations of Australian 'safe at home' programs, including the strengths and weaknesses of previous evaluations. The researchers are synthesising these evaluations and literature to produce evidence of the effectiveness of 'safe at home' models and identify what key features of these models are most effective in achieving safety for women and their children. The project will also make recommendations concerning key minimum elements to include in future evaluations and what minimum datasets would be required to provide meaningful data for individual programs and support the comparison of future evaluations. The project will provide evidence about how women who have experienced domestic and family violence can best be supported to stay safe in their own homes.

### The central role of ANROWS in building the evidence base on violence against women and their children

As the national research organisation on violence against women and their children, ANROWS has a key leadership role to play in knowledge transfer between research, policy and practice. Understanding *'what works'* in responding to and preventing violence against women and their children depends not only on the funding and delivery of research but also on the dissemination of research findings and communication between all sectors about the effectiveness of different approaches, organisational arrangements and methods. To capitalise on the commitment of all Australian Governments and the growing momentum within the broader community to reject violence against women, the National Council to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children (2009) had previously recommended that the establishment of a National Centre for Excellence- a "centralised, independent body to lead the thinking, and to drive and coordinate the Plan of Action's implementation". The National Council's vision for a national research body was that of a "collaborative consortium" linking the separate fields of sexual assault and domestic and family violence. The *National Plan* has also prioritised the development of a National Centre for Excellence "to build a strong and lasting evidence base" (COAG, 2012). Since being established in 2013 and in a relatively short time, ANROWS has progressed both the National Council to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children and the *National Plan's* vision for such a body. We have built a strong national level research infrastructure with the support of all Australian Governments. In 2014, we produced the *National Research Agenda* on behalf of the Australian Commonwealth, state and

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territory governments. All Australian governments have endorsed the *National Research Agenda* as providing cohesive and comprehensive strategic direction on identifying research opportunities and priorities that are nationally applicable.

As a national organisation, we have a research program that is Australia-wide, many involving two or more jurisdictions. Underpinned by best practices of competitive, merit-based, rigorous and transparent selection processes for research, the ANROWS Research Management System (RMS) clearly defines assessment and selection processes. These are underpinned by principles and guidelines consistent with national and international standards. The RMS helps to ensure that ANROWS's national research is of the highest theoretical rigour and methodological quality. Furthermore, all publications resulting from ANROWS's Research Program 2014-2016 (Part 1) undergo a rigorous peer review process in advance of publication. This attests to our ongoing commitment to produce research of the highest quality which is verified by independent subject experts from academia, policy, and practice. We are also very pleased to have received Category 1 status from the Australian Competitive Grants Register for all projects from both our Open Application Grants Round and the Multi-jurisdictional Expression of Interest Grants Round. This means that ANROWS's research projects from both the rounds have been placed in the same category as grants delivered by the Australian Research Council and National Health and Medical Research Council.

ANROWS's operational model conceptualises our role as one with three core intersecting functions: 1) knowledge production; 2) knowledge translation and exchange; and 3) leadership. In addition to our core grant funding and perpetrator research stream funding, ANROWS welcomes the opportunity to be commissioned by individual jurisdictions or other entities to conduct activities under our knowledge production and/or knowledge translation and exchange functions. We thank the Victorian Government for commissioning ANROWS to produce a world first Family Violence Index. In progressing this work, we will advise on measures on how well family violence is being addressed in Victoria. We will define what measures, statistics and data should be included in the Index. The development of the Family Violence Index is also intended to support the work of the Royal Commission in relation to recommendations on evaluation and performance measurement.

ANROWS is uniquely placed, through its national profile and reach, to inform understandings of "what works, what works best and why" (National Council to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children, 2009). By pursuing knowledge production and exchange in a cohesive national way, ANROWS provides valuable opportunities to support research that is responsive to policy-makers' and service providers' needs. We are grateful for the expert advice we have received from across Australia in developing our Research Program (Part I). This expertise has been crucial to the entire process, from setting our current research priorities, to assessing grant applications, advising on large scale projects, to undertaking peer review. Many of our research projects involve researchers and community organisations working together to produce innovative and relevant research. The goodwill that ANROWS has received from experts and the support we have received from across jurisdictions reiterates our commitment to produce evidence in support of the ongoing implementation of the *National Plan*. We are confident that well-chosen and well-designed research will make a significant contribution to the overall objective of the *National Plan*: to reduce violence against women and their children.



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## Concluding remarks

The *National Plan* has laid an important foundation for the long-term change required in supporting responses to and the prevention of violence against women and their children. It has established national policy and service delivery initiatives and infrastructure and taken a whole-of-community approach towards violence against women. ANROWS applauds all Australian Governments, including the Victorian Government, for their continued commitment to implementing the *National Plan*. ANROWS commends all Australian Governments for recognising the value and importance of 'building an evidence' base as a priority of the *National Plan* and for the establishment of ANROWS as the national organisation tasked to build the evidence for all jurisdictions. Through our research program, ANROWS is committed to building the evidence base by mapping and analysing good policy and practice models to prevent violence and improve access to, and responses of, services for women and their children experiencing or at risk of violence. We further commend all Australian Governments for the continuation of the PSS and NCAS, the establishment of an evaluation framework for the lifespan of the *National Plan*, and the establishment of the National Data Collection and Reporting Framework. The continuing development of these Australian research assets to support the evidence base on violence against women require ongoing commitment from all Australian Governments.

The Royal Commission should be aware that ANROWS's funding (\$3 million per annum, shared across the Commonwealth and all state and territory governments of Australia on a per capita basis) commenced on 1 July 2013 for a three-year period until 30 June 2016. That is, the current commitment of funding for ANROWS expires six years before the end of the *National Plan*. A longer-term funding commitment, at least to the end of the *National Plan* in 2022, is necessary to enable ANROWS to fulfil its potential including support for longer term research projects, which are crucial in understanding, for example, the effects of perpetrator intervention programs. To illustrate this point, the open grants applications process conducted by ANROWS for its Research Program 2014-2016, resulted in 50 applications for research projects to address current gaps in the evidence base with a total value of approximately \$15 million. As noted above, ANROWS has been able to fund a Research Program valued at \$3.5 million.

The need for, and capability to deliver an evidence base for effective activities to reduce and prevent violence is far greater than the current commitment of resources for this purpose. The need for evidence to support policy and practice in work towards eliminating domestic violence will continue well beyond the term of the current *National Plan*. A solid foundation and evidence base on family, domestic and sexual violence requires collecting consistent and comparable data (ABS, 2014) and producing and translating research and practice-based evidence. ANROWS remains deeply committed to producing nationally relevant and translatable research evidence to support the ongoing implementation of the *National Plan*.

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