ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Families ACT recognises the Ngunnawal people as the traditional owners and continuing custodians of the lands of the ACT and values their contribution to the life of our community. We pay our respects to their elders past and present.

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INTRODUCTION

The aim of this briefing paper is to give an overview of current national and local research initiatives relating to domestic and family violence, and local service providers’ priority issues for further research. This information will inform Families ACT’s decision making on future research and advocacy activities on this topic.

Families ACT is keen to ensure that scarce research funds are used on studies that have relevance for communities and service providers in the ACT so that the research findings are used for advocacy and future service development. Families ACT has identified a few potential research topics:

- How can the legal system better support women and children?
- What does the research/evaluation evidence tell us about the effectiveness of perpetrator programs?
- Which early intervention initiatives have demonstrated effectiveness for the groups of young men who have been exposed to family violence and show signs of becoming violent?

Consultations were undertaken with service providers in the domestic, family and sexual assault field to identify current research activities and to obtain feedback on the suggested lines of inquiry. Consultations also provided participants with an opportunity to suggest topics for future research.

BACKGROUND

The majority of incidents of domestic, family and sexual violence go unreported, so it is not feasible to describe the true extent of the problem. However, prevalence estimates show that domestic, family and sexual violence in Australia is widespread and that the majority of those who experience these forms of violence are women.

The most recent data on the prevalence of domestic and family violence in Australia shows that round 1 in 6 women (16.9 per cent) have experienced physical or sexual violence from a current or former partner since the age of 15. According to the Australian Institute of Criminology, the majority of family homicides occur between intimate partners, and the majority of intimate partner homicides involve males killing their female partners. During the period 2002-03 to 2011-12, a total of 654 women were killed by their current or former partner. This equates to over one woman every week.

Of those women who had experienced violence from an ex-partner, 73 per cent had endured more than one episode of violence. Around two thirds of women had children living at home when the violence happened. Nearly 50 per cent of women stated that their children had seen and heard the violence. Over 50 per cent of women had never contacted the police for assistance.

In the ACT, the Australian Bureau of Statistics estimates that 8,900 women had experienced some form of violence in the 12 months prior to the Personal Safety Survey 2012 being conducted. In this group of

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women, 6,900 had experienced physical violence and 3,200 had suffered sexual violence. Around a quarter of women who had been subjected to violence were born overseas although this proportion is likely to under represent women from a non-English speaking background as bi-lingual interviewers were not always available to conduct interviews. Nearly half (46 per cent) of all women who had experienced violence were those with a disability or long term health condition.

Domestic and family violence affects not only women’s mental and physical health, and their education and employment outcomes. There are also significant costs arising from domestic violence for employers, governments and the broader community. Violence against women and their children was estimated to cost the Australian economy around $13.6 billion in the 2008-09 financial year. This is expected to rise to $15.6 billion by 2021. For governments, domestic violence increases the costs of welfare provision, healthcare, and expenditure relating to legal and justice systems.

- Domestic and family violence is the leading cause of homelessness for women and children. In 2013-14, 22 per cent of all clients (55,535) seeking support from specialist homelessness services were women and girls (15 years and over) escaping violence. An additional 9 per cent (22,421) were children aged 14 and under.

- Across the country in 2009-2010, there were 2,847 hospital admissions due to assault by a partner. Of these, 83 per cent involved a female patient.

- In Victoria, a study on the burden of disease resulting from partner violence highlighted that this type of violence was the leading preventable contributor to death, disability and illness in Victorian women aged 15-44 years. It is responsible for more of the disease burden than many well-known risk factors.

The demand for domestic and family violence, including sexual assault support services in the ACT is increasing. The Domestic Violence Crisis Service (DVCS) reports that:

- During 2013 - 2014, 1408 people received face-to-face crisis intervention. This represents an increase of 25 per cent from the previous year.

- 15,644 calls were made to the 24/7 crisis line during 2013 - 2014 which equates to 42.8 calls a day in that 12 month period.

There is a similar picture of increasing demand for sexual assault support services provided by Canberra Rape Crisis Centre (CRCC):

- 10,858 calls were received on the crisis line during 2012 - 2013. This is a 21 per cent increase from the previous year and equates to 30 calls a day.

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CURRENT AUSTRALIAN RESEARCH ACTIVITIES

Significant Commonwealth and State and Territory funding has been invested in Australia’s National Research Organisation for Women’s Safety (ANROWS). The ACT government is investing $24,150 a year, as part of the total contribution from all governments of $3 million per annum over three years. This funding will enable the recently established organisation to undertake its own research projects and provide funding to other researchers. The Commonwealth has also invested an additional $1 million per annum over three years to support specific research on interventions with perpetrators of violence against women. This amounts to a total of $12 million over the next 3 years for research on domestic and family violence.

In August 2015, the Commonwealth government announced an additional $160,000 for the Diversity Data project to be conducted by ANROWS. This initiative will review current knowledge about how CALD women, Aboriginal women and women with a disability experience violence, identify gaps in data and propose recommendations on improving data and information relevant to these groups of women.

ANROWS launched the National Research Agenda in May 2014 which has been used to develop the organisation’s research program as well as providing a framework for, and guidance on, priority areas of research and research themes for academics, researchers, organisations and governments across Australia. The strategic research themes are:

1. Experience and impacts
2. Gender inequality and primary prevention
3. Service responses and interventions
4. Systems
5. Knowledge translation and evaluation.

Research projects for each of these strategic research themes that are currently being funded by ANROWS are detailed below.

1. Experience and impacts
   - Australian Bureau of Statistics Personal Safety Survey 2012: additional data analysis on violence against women
   - Promoting community-led responses to violence against immigrant and refugee women in metropolitan and regional Australia
   - Seeing help for domestic violence: exploring rural women’s coping experiences
   - Establishing the connection between alcohol and other drug use and sexual victimisation
   - State of knowledge on the co-occurrence, intersection and differences between forms of, and responses to, violence against women and their children
   - National burden of disease study examining the impact of violence against women
   - Domestic and family violence and parenting: mixed method insights into impact and support needs
   - Women's input to a trauma-informed systems model of care in health settings: the WITH study.

11 ANROWS, Notepad, 19 August, 2015
2. Gender inequality and primary prevention
   - National framework for the prevention of violence against women and their children.
   - Media representations of violence against women and their children.

3. Service responses and interventions
   - 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
   - State of knowledge, practice and responses to violence against women in Australian Indigenous communities
   - Advocacy for safety and empowerment: good practice and innovative approaches with Indigenous women experiencing family and domestic violence in remote and regional Australia
   - What does it take? Developing informed and effective tertiary responses to violence and abuse for women and girls with disabilities in Australia.

This strategic research theme also includes research on the characteristics of men who use violence and interventions targeting men who use violence. ANROWS highlights the need to expand the current knowledge base on the characteristics, attitudes and behaviour of men, and to develop typologies of perpetrators from different backgrounds.

As well, more research is required on adolescent violence in the home which explores prevalence, gender, relationship to domestic and family violence, violence against mothers and graduation to violence in adulthood. In particular, ANROWS proposes that a research topic warranting further investigation relates to successful frameworks, models and early intervention programs for boys and young men who have experienced domestic or family violence and have used violence and/or sexually abusive behaviour towards others, especially other children including siblings.

ANROWS acknowledges that research into interventions with men who use violence has been extensive. However they identify a need for more rigorous evaluations that explore recidivism, the factors assisting men to end their violent behaviour in the long-term, and effective interventions with particular groups of men such as those from CALD backgrounds and Aboriginal communities. ANROWS notes that court mandated or referred perpetrator programs together with those interventions that remove perpetrators from the family home require further evaluation in terms of unintended consequences, particularly on victim safety.

ANROWS is currently preparing a paper scoping current knowledge on perpetrator interventions and developing perpetrator intervention research priorities, both of which are expected to be released later in the year.

4. Systems
   - Improving legal and justice responses to violence against women. To date, an 'existing state of knowledge' paper examining judicial education in relation to domestic and violence has been produced. This paper identifies good practices and initiatives, and identifies a range of issues that need to be addressed to improve judicial officer education
   - Meta-evaluation of existing interagency partnerships, collaboration, coordination and/or integrated interventions and service responses to violence against women

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14 ANROWS, Notepad, 5 August 2015
• Evaluation of innovative models of interagency partnerships, collaboration, coordination and/or integrated response to family and/or sexual violence against women in Australian Indigenous communities

• Integrated child protection and domestic and family violence approaches and practice: The PATRICIA project - pathways and research in collaborative inter-agency working

• Building effective policies and services to promote women’s economic security following domestic and family violence.

5. Knowledge translation and evaluation
• Review of the evidence on knowledge translation and exchange in the violence against women field.

CURRENT LOCAL RESEARCH
Consultation participants highlighted a range of local research initiatives that are currently underway or have been recently conducted. A summary of these studies is presented below.

WOMEN’S EXPERIENCES OF HELP SEEKING FOR DOMESTIC AND FAMILY VIOLENCE IN THE ACT, WOMEN’S CENTRE FOR HEALTH MATTERS
This study aims to explore:
• The points in women’s lives at which they seek help and support for domestic and family violence
• The types of help and support that women seek
• The reasons they seek help and support from the places they go
• The outcomes of seeking help and support
• What, if anything, women would change to ensure that they would be able to access the help and support they need, when they need it.

The research will gather insights into what works well and what could be improved about current responses to domestic and family violence in the ACT. The research findings will be used to advocate for improvements in the design of future responses to domestic and family violence in the region based on what women who have been subjected to violence think is required.

TRANSFORMING DOMESTIC VIOLENCE IN THE ACT, WOMEN’S CENTRE FOR HEALTH MATTERS
The focus of this research is to identify gaps in service provision for LGBTIQ (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Intersex, Questioning) people experiencing domestic violence in the ACT. The research will highlight those areas that require change in terms of domestic violence service accessibility. The findings will also be used to develop a resource that will assist domestic violence service providers to make their services more appropriate and accessible for same-sex attracted, gender diverse, intersex and transgender people.

ACT DOMESTIC VIOLENCE DEATHS REVIEW, DOMESTIC VIOLENCE PREVENTION COUNCIL
The Domestic Violence Prevention Council has been reviewing 72 domestic violence related deaths that occurred between 1988 and 2012 in the ACT. The review’s findings will be released shortly, and it is intended they will be used to inform changes in legislation, policy, service and practice domains.\textsuperscript{15}

RECENT LOCAL RESEARCH

STAYING HOME AFTER DOMESTIC VIOLENCE (ACT DVCS, 2014)

The majority of women experiencing violence in the ACT continue to stay at home post crisis. DVCS assisted 1053 women with crisis visits in 2013; of these only 8 women moved into a refuge post crisis. The research aimed to provide a better understanding of the ongoing supports needed by women who stay in their homes post domestic violence, identify those services and supports that are working well for women, and provide recommendations to tackle current service deficits.

The research findings highlight significant service and support deficits resulting in women not receiving holistic assistance and support from the service system. Of particular concern is the extent of homelessness experienced by women within 12 months of separating from their violent partners. Over half of the women who were home owners and nearly two thirds of those living in private rented accommodation lost their homes in this 12 month period.

The research suggests that a heavy reliance on legal processes to enable women to stay at home is inadequate. A more integrated response across a diverse range of services is required to address the multifaceted nature of domestic violence. One recommendation relates to the establishment of an integrated Staying at Home Program that complements the current structure of the ACT Family Violence Intervention Program. Additional recommendations include: increasing women’s access to financial aid as well as affordable health services, legal assistance and child care; improving entitlements for women in paid work; and providing better supports for women who are studying.

DEFINING DOMESTIC VIOLENCE IN PROTECTION ORDER LEGISLATION: A PILOT OBSERVATIONAL STUDY IN THE ACT

The ACT’s protection order legislation provides weak protection for victims of domestic violence as it fails to mention specific types of domestic violence in its definition of domestic violence for interim and final orders. The ACT Domestic Violence and Protection Orders Act 2008 defines domestic violence as conduct that causes physical or personal injury, damage to property as well as conduct that is threatening, harassing or offensive. Threats and violence against pets is also included in this definition. The Act does not provide a definition of physical or personal injury nor harassing or offensive conduct. Emotional, psychological and economic abuse are also omitted in this definition.

This pilot study made observations at the ACT Legal Aid Domestic Violence and Personal Protection Orders Unit over an eight week period in 2014. The researchers observed eighteen women together with five judicial officers and four lawyers. The authors of the study conclude that despite these definitional deficits, judicial officers did recognise emotional abuse, economic abuse, intimidation and stalking as grounds for a protection order.

The limitations of this study include the absence of observations of contested final hearings where lawyers may use more limited interpretations of domestic violence. The researchers also acknowledge that the same observational methods with a different group of legal practitioners may have produced contrary findings. They conclude that to reduce the risk of women’s actual experiences of violence being ignored and subsequently, excluding women from legislative protection, the ambiguity of the ACT’s domestic violence legislative language should be rectified. Expanding the scope of the definition of domestic violence.

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violence to include emotional abuse, economic abuse, intimidation and stalking would align ACT legislation with other jurisdictions and better reflect the reality of women’s experiences of domestic violence.

**WOMEN WITH DISABILITIES ACCESSING CRISIS SERVICES IN THE ACT (WOMEN’S CENTRE FOR HEALTH MATTERS, 2009)**

This research explored current practices of supporting women escaping domestic and family violence with the aim of assisting domestic violence and crisis services in the ACT to become more accessible for women with disabilities.

**ADDITIONAL RELEVANT REPORTS**

**REPORT ON DOMESTIC AND FAMILY VIOLENCE INCLUDING SEXUAL ASSAULT IN THE AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY**

The Domestic Violence Prevention Council (DVPC) held an Extraordinary Meeting in April 2015 with the aim of providing advice to the ACT government on how to address critical domestic and family violence issues. The Extraordinary Meeting, involving 55 participants, generated a range of practical measures to improve outcomes for women and children experiencing domestic and family violence. This information was aggregated with DVCP Death Review consultation data, DVCP community consultation data collected between November 2014 and February 2015, and feedback from frontline community experts at a meeting held before the Extraordinary Meeting.

The report provides 33 recommendations to improve the safety and security of victims of domestic and family violence, including sexual assault in the ACT. The following areas were identified for priority action:

1. Cultural change
2. Reliable practical supports for victims from skilled service providers
3. Integrated service delivery system, as a whole-of-government priority
4. Evidence-based perpetrator interventions
5. Meeting the diverse needs of victims and their families
6. Improvements to the legal and justice system’s response to domestic and family violence, including sexual assault
7. The provision of ongoing long term supports
8. Maintain adequate services to meet demand.

On the basis of relevance to the work and interests of Families ACT, several recommendations are highlighted below.

**Action priority 1: Cultural change**

- Consideration needs to be given to putting in place prevention and early intervention initiatives for children and young people and the development of healthy, respectful relationships, as well as early interventions which are targeted towards specific individuals or groups who show evidence of becoming perpetrators or victims.

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Action priority 2: Reliable practical supports for victims from skilled service providers
- The ACT Government supports the use of a common risk assessment framework to support a more integrated service response (designed for use across all generalist and specialist services, non-Government and Government and the criminal justice system) and based on the work of other Australian jurisdictions which have commenced work to develop a common risk assessment approach.
- The ACT Government considers allowing information sharing between agencies (government and non-government) within integrated responses, with appropriate safeguards, particularly where a risk assessment indicates it is important for the purpose of protecting the safety of the victim and their immediate family.

Action priority 3: Integrated service delivery system, as a whole-of-government priority
- The ACT Government considers establishing a specialist and high-level policy & programs unit within the Government to be responsible for coordinating, facilitating, developing and implementing initiatives (including research, evaluation and law reform) on violence against women and children – e.g. managed in a single portfolio to ensure a whole-of-government approach.
- The ACT Government ensures that new and changing government initiatives such as the Justice Reform Strategy, the Justice Reinvestment Strategy, the Better Services Initiative, the review of Mental Health Services, and the implementation of NAHA and youth/family funding decisions all incorporate consideration of domestic, family and sexual violence as a priority.
- Integrated service responses are driven from knowledge of the particular needs of victims of domestic and family violence as the key to the design and resourcing of response and support services – it is crucial that responses are not based only on what a service delivery system believes is needed.
- Integrated service responses incorporate generalist service providers to ensure the early identification of people affected by domestic and family violence and to support appropriate referral pathways.

Action priority 4: Evidence-based perpetrator interventions
- An assessment tool such as ACT Policing’s Risk Identification Assessment to identify relationships and families which have not yet experienced domestic or family violence for prioritisation of referral to support services.
- Public education campaigns aimed at supporting people to self-identify their own risk (or someone they know) for committing domestic or family violence and encourage them to self-refer to identified services with violence prevention experience.
- Justice and community-based options for anyone at risk of or breaching AVOs and other orders related to domestic or family violence to be referred to services with violence prevention and breach experience.
- Perpetrator programs in the Alexander Maconochie Centre and those that take place in the community to be mandatory.

- There are currently no programs for those [children and young people] with sexualised behaviours - this is a significant gap within the ACT which needs to be addressed as it is currently managed through very costly ‘out of home care’ strategies.

- Ensure that programs for perpetrators of domestic, family and sexual violence are delivered in conjunction with an integrated response in order to establish adequate safety controls.

**Action priority 6: Improvements to the legal and justice system’s response to domestic and family violence, including sexual assault**

- Justice reinvestment needs to be used to focus on what can be done about preventing domestic, family and sexual violence and where to reinvest upfront.

**Action priority 7: The provision of ongoing long term supports**

- Financial and social supports are put in place post crisis to ensure that victims can maintain stable housing and have the economic, social and psychological resources to establish a ‘safe’ life post violence.

**DEVELOPING AN ACT CRISIS RESPONSE TO WOMEN WITH DISABILITIES WHO EXPERIENCE DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AND/OR SEXUAL ASSAULT (ACT DISABILITY & COMMUNITY SERVICES COMMISSIONER, 2014)**

This report by the ACT Disability & Community Services Commissioner proposes that a Crisis Services Scheme for women with disabilities escaping violence is established in the ACT. It builds on previous work that has identified gaps in service delivery for women with disabilities (e.g. WCHM, 2009). The proposed scheme focuses on women's immediate needs to establish safety from violence in crisis situations. It aims to strengthen existing integrated crisis service responses so that women with disabilities have appropriate supports to draw on.

**FUTURE RESEARCH IN THE ACT**

**A GAP ANALYSIS OF THE DOMESTIC AND FAMILY VIOLENCE SUPPORT SERVICE SYSTEMS IN THE ACT**

This analysis will be conducted by the ACT government’s Community Services Directorate and completed in late 2015\(^\text{18}\). It will focus on the whole system from early intervention to sustainable and safe long term outcomes for women and children. Opportunities to improve integrated service responses to family and domestic violence will also be identified in the gap analysis. Findings and recommendations from this analysis will inform future efforts to develop more effective service provision as well as timely and equitable access to the justice system. The ACT government indicates that "both Government and non-government organisations may need to refocus their efforts and consider resourcing allocations".

\(^\text{18}\) Legislative Assembly for the ACT. (2015). Government Response to the Domestic Violence Prevention Council's Report on Domestic and Family Violence Including Sexual Assault in the ACT.
ACT DOMESTIC VIOLENCE SERVICES EVALUATION

An evaluation is planned for later this year to assess whether current domestic violence services in the ACT are effective\(^1\). The study will determine how many women and children are being affected by domestic and family violence, and whether the services that women access are helpful.

SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE FAMILIES ACT RESEARCH

Consultations with key stakeholders in the domestic, family and sexual violence arena provided participants with an opportunity to consider the research topics suggested by Families ACT as well as identify additional topics that are viewed as having particular relevance for the ACT.

Several stakeholders commented that there is an abundance of recent and current research on a range of domestic and family violence issues. Although one stakeholder thought that national research is not often relevant or hard to translate to the ACT context. Generally it was felt that there is considerable current investment in research on perpetrator programs and required changes to the legal system to better support women and children.

A few potential research topics were identified during consultations as having some relevance for local communities and service providers. Some proposed topics relate to issues raised in the DVPC report\(^2\) for the ACT government. Suggestions for future research are listed below.

1. A literature review on residential early intervention programs for men who use violent behaviour in their intimate relationships. There has been some discussion in the community, as a result of Tara Costigan’s death in 2015, of establishing a residential support program based on the Breathing Space model provided by Communicare in Western Australia. Breathing Space offers a behaviour change program to men and provides them with approximately three months of accommodation while they undertake a range of group and individual counselling to address their issues. This allows women and children to continue living in their family homes.

   The findings of the literature review could be used to inform the model of early intervention for residential support.

2. A literature review on effective early intervention perpetrator programs for young men (18 to 25 years) who have started to use violent behaviour in their intimate relationships.

3. A literature review on effective programs that achieve intergenerational change for both boys and girls who have witnessed and/or been subjected to domestic and family violence. The research needs to be “grounded” with clear guidance on how the research and evaluation evidence could be used in the context of the ACT at a service, system and community level.

4. A literature review on effective early intervention trauma-informed therapeutic service responses for children (boys and girls) with sexualized behaviours. There are currently no programs for children and young people with sexualised behaviours in the ACT. Current responses in the ACT are located in the justice system or managed through expensive out-of-home care strategies.

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\(^{2}\) Domestic Violence Prevention Council above note 17.
Rape Crisis Centres in other parts of Australia are funded to do this type of work. The findings of the literature review could be used to advocate for funding to establish a trauma informed therapeutic service.

5. A literature review exploring what restorative justice programs may have to offer in cases of domestic and family violence.

CONCLUSION AND CONSIDERATIONS FOR THE FUTURE

Significant government funding is being invested in a relatively comprehensive research program being implemented by the national women's safety research organisation, ANROWS. In addition, several recent local research initiatives have been undertaken or are in the process of being conducted. Given the extent of current research activity on domestic and family violence, it may be a more judicious use of Families ACT’s resources to focus on advocating for evidence-based policy and practice and supporting services working with children and families in their endeavours to provide evidence based programs. As Rosie Batty recently commented: "research is really important, but now it is time for action"21.

A considerable challenge for stakeholders in the women’s safety arena is finding and utilising opportunities to maintain the current Australia-wide momentum for change on issues relating violence against women. Sustaining momentum over a long period is necessary as only long term change will bring about a reduction in domestic and family violence.

In the ACT context, the focus for action is clearly delineated in the series of recommendations in the DVPC report22, the ACT government's responses to these recommendations23 and the current implementation plan of ACT Prevention of Violence against Women and Children Strategy 2015-201724. Families ACT has a role to play to ensuring there is accountable implementation of the recommendations in the DVPC report. Relevant stakeholders in the region need to work collaboratively with the ACT government to ensure it fulfils its responsibilities to act on the considerable consultation and research that has already taken place. It is suggested that Families ACT develop and implement a medium-term domestic and family violence strategic plan in consultation with its member organisations.

Some suggestions for possible future action by Families ACT to include in the strategy are given below.

- Strengthen working relationships with the Domestic Prevention Violence Council and the ACT government’s Domestic Violence Coordinator-General.

- Identify mechanisms to encourage agencies working with children, young people and families to place a stronger focus on domestic and family violence in their workforce development activities. The would be to promote the adoption and effective implementation of research into practice and enable practitioners to provide a more skilled response to families experiencing or at risk of

22 Domestic Violence Prevention Council, above note 17.
23 Legislative Assembly for the ACT, above note 18.
experiencing domestic and family violence. Mechanisms could include conducting a training/knowledge translation needs assessment and implementing a research to practice series.

- Identify and promote opportunities for greater integration of services (e.g. common risk assessment tool, information sharing protocol) and support the child, youth and family service sector in their endeavours to contribute to a more responsive and cohesive service system.

- Ensure that all capacity building mechanisms take into account the diverse experiences of violence including those of women with disabilities, women from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women.

- Monitor the research output of ANROWS, particularly the evidence regarding effective early intervention perpetrator programs for men who use violence. An assessment of the range of research will determine the need for future research on effective early intervention perpetrator programs for young men (18 to 25 years) who have started to use violent behaviour in their intimate relationships.

- Advocate for an increased investment of resources for early intervention programs for young men that demonstrate effectiveness or are promising.

- Monitor the impact of domestic and family violence reforms on the child, youth and family sector’s capacity to deliver services to vulnerable families.