Working with Women Alliance

Public reporting on domestic, family and sexual violence expenditure

Submission to the Australian National Audit Office

August 2026

Submitted by
Dr Gemma Killen
Executive Director
Working with Women Alliance

Acknowledgment of Country

The Working with Women Alliance acknowledges the Traditional Custodians of the land on which we work and live.

We pay our respects to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elders past and present, and we value the enduring connection Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have to this land.

We value Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories, cultures, and knowledge.

About WwWA

The Working with Women Alliance (WwWA) represents two key portfolios: National Women's Safety (NWS) and National Women's Equality (NWE).

The WwWA connects the critical areas of gender-based violence prevention and the advancement of women's economic equality and leadership, bridging these important policy fields for greater impact.

We work with members and stakeholders, including the Australian Government, to provide expertise and advice on gender equality and women's safety.

Executive Summary

WwWA strongly supports the proposed ANAO audit into public reporting on domestic, family and sexual violence expenditure under the *National Plan to End Violence against Women and Children 2022-2032*. The Australian Government frequently relies on large headline figures to demonstrate progress, including references to more than $4 billion, $4.4 billion and $4.7 billion in National Plan investment. However, current public reporting does not make it easy to understand what these figures include, how much has been spent by state and territory jurisdictions, or how much has reached the services victim-survivors rely on.

This matters because specialist family, domestic and sexual violence services continue to report chronic underfunding, rising demand and unmet need. In this context, headline investment figures can appear to answer the funding question without showing whether funding is reaching frontline services or relieving pressure on the sector.

WwWA recommends that public reporting be strengthened so National Plan expenditure can be traced from announcement through to actual spend. This should include clearer reconciliation of headline figures, clearer definitions of frontline service funding, funding status in the Activities Addendum, and reporting that links expenditure to demand and unmet need. If government is going to rely on the $4.4 billion figure as evidence of progress, that figure must be publicly traceable.

Introduction

WwWA strongly supports an audit into the effectiveness of public reporting on domestic, family and sexual violence expenditure under the *National Plan to End Violence against Women and Children 2022-2032*.

The Australian Government has repeatedly pointed to major investment under the National Plan. Public materials refer to more than $4 billion, $4.4 billion and $4.7 billion in different contexts, alongside earlier references to $3.4 billion invested since 2022. WwWA members frequently ask: where is the money going?

To date, there has been insufficient public reporting on the Family, Domestic and Sexual Violence National Partnership Agreement 2023-25 (NPA). The opaqueness of the funding relationship between the Commonwealth and the states and territories can be a considerable barrier for public understanding of domestic, family and sexual violence expenditure. WwWA considers this a key area for strengthening funding transparency.

When government relies on large headline figures to demonstrate progress, the public should be able to understand what those figures mean. At present, public reporting does not make this clear. It remains difficult to tell what has been announced, what has been spent, how

much has reached frontline services, and whether investment is meeting the scale and scope of need.

Mechanisms currently exist to track DFSV recommendations and implementation, including the Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence Commission, the National Access to Justice Partnership and the Family, Domestic and Sexual Violence National Partnership Agreement 2023-25 (NPA). However, WwWA holds concerns about the capacity of these mechanisms to report on expenditure, funding outcomes and impacts in a timely and transparent manner.

The timing of this audit is significant. The Department of Social Services is currently consulting on the Second Action Plan, which will shape the next phase of implementation under the National Plan. This creates a pivotal opportunity to scrutinise how expenditure is publicly reported, and to ensure government is clearly communicating how and where funding is being used.

The gap between investment claims and service reality

Specialist family, domestic and sexual violence services have called for funding that is commensurate with the scale of the crisis for many years. This reflects what services are seeing every day. Frontline services have been chronically underfunded and are often forced to operate in crisis mode, including by conducting brief lethality assessments to determine who they can assist.

In this context, the repeated use of headline investment figures matters. When the Australian Government cites $4 billion in National Plan funding in response to sector concerns, that figure can appear to answer the funding question. But without clearer public reporting, it does not show whether funding is reaching frontline services, whether it is meeting demand, or whether it is relieving pressure on the services carrying the crisis. This is further complicated by the lack of national demand data to determine how much funding is needed and if current investment is adequate.

Frontline service funding is framed inconsistently

A publicly released Freedom of Information document dated 19 December 2025, FOI LEX 54830, includes a DSS Question Time Brief prepared for the question: “If asked, how is the Government supporting family, domestic and sexual violence frontline services who are saying they are under-resourced?” One dot point states that “$3.1 billion (or 78.4%) of the $4 billion in funding to date to deliver the National Plan has been committed to initiatives that support frontline services.”

The 2026–27 *Women’s Budget Statement* appears to answer a similar question about frontline service support, but uses different figures. In the Foreword, it states that the Government has invested over $4.4 billion under the National Plan, and that $985.7 million has been provided to

states and territories to support frontline service delivery.[i] Later, under "Strengthening frontline services", it states that since June 2022 the Government has invested $934.8 million to strengthen the frontline workforce, in partnership with states and territories.[ii]

These figures are not interchangeable, but they are all presented in the context of frontline service support. The difference between $3.1 billion, $985.7 million and $934.8 million is significant, and appears to turn on the language used. The $3.1 billion figure relies on the broad phrase "initiatives that support frontline services", while the Women's Budget Statement uses more specific language about funding provided to states and territories and investment in the frontline workforce. This is an over $2 billion difference that appears to hinge on how "frontline services" are being framed.

Further, initial press releases on domestic, family and sexual violence funding cite $3.9 billion to fund the National Access to Justice Partnership (NAJP)[iii], as a majority part of the $4.4 billion of new funding allocated to address violence. However, it is not clear how much of the NAJP funding is ringfenced for clients experiencing DFSV, and how much is allocated to services working with a broader cohort of clients experiencing vulnerability. This funding is essential for frontline legal services working with people experiencing violence.

Expenditure vs commitment

Public reporting must be clearer about whether funding is new, already announced, extended, matched by states and territories, or already counted in a broader National Plan total. At present, it is difficult to tell the difference. Many figures used in public reporting are multi-year commitments. For example, the Leaving Violence Program is described as $925.2 million over five years, and the Family, Domestic and Sexual Violence Responses Federation Funding Agreement includes funding through to 2029-30. If these amounts are included in headline investment figures, public reporting should make clear how much has already been spent and how much is committed for future years.

The Activities Addendum does not track expenditure

The First Action Plan Activities Addendum is a useful implementation tracker, but it should also provide clearer information about funding. The Addendum already records whether activities are in planning, current, ongoing or finished. It should also identify the funding status of each activity, including whether funding has been committed or spent. This would make it easier to understand whether activities under the National Plan are backed by funding, whether that funding is still in planning or delivery, and how it connects to broader National Plan expenditure reporting.

Example: National Student Ombudsman

At the beginning of 2025, the Australian Government established the National Student Ombudsman (NSO). The establishment of the NSO was a key recommendation of the Universities Accord Final Report and the first action under the *Action Plan Addressing Gender-based Violence in Higher Education*.[iv][v]

More notably, it is listed in the First Action Plan Activities Addendum under Action 6, Sexual violence, as an activity to "deal with higher education student complaints, including complaints about gender-based violence."

WwWA welcomes the establishment of the National Student Ombudsman. However, its remit is much broader than gender-based violence. The NSO deals with student complaints about higher education providers across a wide range of matters, including course administration, teaching, facilities, complaint processes and reasonable adjustments.

This matters for expenditure reporting. The Government committed an initial $19.4 million over two years to establish the NSO as part of work to address gender-based violence in universities. However, early reporting indicates that gender-based violence complaints made up only 1.6 per cent of the NSO's initial complaint caseload, with 28 of 1,711 complaints between February and June involving gender-based violence[vi]. This does not diminish the seriousness of those complaints. It does show why public reporting should distinguish between dedicated DFSV expenditure and broader initiatives that have a partial or enabling connection to gender-based violence.

More recently, the 2026-27 Budget committed a further $44.3 million over four years from 2026-27 to continue funding the NSO[vii], however it is unclear whether this further funding is also counted as National Plan expenditure. The ANAO should examine whether broad-purpose initiatives like the NSO are included in National Plan expenditure totals, and whether the public is given enough information to understand the basis for that classification.

Recommendations

WwWA makes the following recommendations for the ANAO's consideration in assessing the effectiveness of public reporting on National Plan expenditure.

1. Funding should be added to the Activities Addendum

As part of the Second Action Plan, the next Activities Addendum should be updated so that each activity includes funding status. Where relevant, this should show where the funding is up to, including whether funding has been committed, contracted, paid, spent or acquitted. It should also identify how the activity is funded, for example through a Budget measure, funding

agreement, grant program, or existing departmental resources. This would allow the Addendum to operate as both an implementation tracker and a basic expenditure tracker.

2. Funding should be publicly reconciled

Public reporting should include a clear reconciliation of the major funding figures used to describe National Plan investment, including the $4 billion, $4.4 billion and $4.7 billion figures. This should explain what each figure includes, the time period it covers, whether it includes Commonwealth-only or matched state and territory funding, and whether it refers to funding announced, committed, paid or spent.

3. Frontline service funding should be clearly defined

Public reporting should define what is being counted as "frontline services" and distinguish between funding that goes directly to specialist services, funding provided to states and territories for service delivery, and broader initiatives that support frontline work indirectly

4. Expenditure reporting should be linked to demand and unmet need

Public reporting should show whether investment is meeting the scale of need. This should include available data on service demand, waitlists, turn-aways, workforce gaps and unmet need. Without this, it is not possible to assess whether National Plan funding is relieving pressure on the services that victim-survivors rely on.

---

[i] Australian Government, *Women's Budget Statement 2026–27* (12 May 2026)
[ii] Ibid.
[iii] Prime Minister and Cabinet Portfolio, 2024, *Commonwealth investments to prevent and respond to gender-based violence* – 6 September, 2024, Australian Government, https://ministers.pmc.gov.au/mccarthy/2024/commonwealth-investments-prevent-and-respond-gender-based-violence
[iv] Australian Government Department of Education, *Australian Universities Accord Final Report* (February 2024).
[v] Australian Government Department of Education, *Action Plan Addressing Gender-based Violence in Higher Education* (23 February 2024).
[vi] National Student Ombudsman, *National Student Ombudsman Annual Report 2024–25* (Commonwealth Ombudsman, October 2025).
[vii] Australian Government Department of Education, *2026–27 Budget Factsheet: National Student Ombudsman: Funding and Cost Recovery* (2026).