



# Sexual Violence **Prevention and Response** Strategy 2025-2035

Addressing sexual violence together

# Accessibility statement

This document has been prepared in accordance with the Western Australian (WA) Government's Accessibility and Inclusivity Guidelines,<sup>1</sup> which ensures that digital content is inclusive and accessible to all members of the community. We are committed to providing information that is easy to access, understand, and use, including for people with disability. If you require this document in an alternative format or experience any accessibility issues, please email [enquiries@communities.wa.gov.au](mailto:enquiries@communities.wa.gov.au).

## Our contributors

The Sexual Violence Prevention and Response Strategy (the Strategy) has been shaped by extensive consultation and research, expert guidance, and cross-sector collaboration. It draws on insights from public engagement across Western Australia with input from people with lived experience, and advice from government, community, and specialist sexual violence services.

Development was informed by researchers, consultants, and subject matter experts, and guided by an expert Reference Group and cross-government steering groups. This collective input ensures the Strategy reflects the diverse needs and experiences of Western Australians and is grounded in evidence, practice, and community voice.

The WA Government sincerely thanks all those who contributed to the development of the Strategy.





# Acknowledgement of Country

The Government of Western Australia acknowledges the Traditional Custodians throughout Western Australia and their continuing connection to the land, waters and community. We pay our respects to all members of the Aboriginal communities and their cultures, and to Elders both past and present.

# Dedication to victim-survivors

The Strategy has been developed with acknowledgement and respect for all people who have been impacted by sexual violence in Western Australia.

There is a recognition of the ongoing strength and courage of victim-survivors, and an acknowledgement of the devastating impacts of sexual violence for individuals, families and communities. The WA Government sincerely thanks those who have bravely and importantly spoken out and shared their stories to inform the Strategy, as well as the tireless advocacy of individuals and organisations who continue to speak out against sexual violence.

# Services and support

Support is always available if you or someone you know has experienced sexual violence. Reading about sexual violence can be distressing.

If you or someone close to you is in immediate danger, please call 000.

If you need support after reading this information, you can contact the services listed below. You may also find it helpful to reach out to an Elder, a trusted family member, friend, work mate, teacher or other person to help you access supports.

## **1800 RESPECT** **1800 737 732**

The national domestic, family and sexual violence counselling, information and support service offering free, confidential and 24/7 service for people impacted by domestic, family or sexual violence.

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## **Sexual Assault Resource Centre** **24-hour Crisis Line** **1800 199 888**

The Sexual Assault Resource Centre (SARC) is a free service located in Perth providing crisis services to people who have experienced a recent sexual assault (rape) in the last two weeks; and counselling for sexual assault or sexual abuse experienced recently or in the past.

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## **Women's Domestic Violence Helpline (WA)** **1800 007 339**

Provides support for women, with or without children, who are experiencing family and domestic violence in Western Australia (including referrals to women's refuges).

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## **Men's Domestic Violence Helpline (WA)** **1800 000 599**

Provides telephone information and referrals for men who are concerned about their violent and abusive behaviours and for male victims of family and domestic violence in Western Australia.

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## **Crisis Care** **1800 199 008**

Provides Western Australia's after-hours response to reported concerns for a child's safety and wellbeing and information and referrals for people experiencing crisis.

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## **MensLine Australia** **1300 789 978**

A national telephone and online support, information and referral service for men with family and relationship concerns. This free service is available from anywhere in Australia and is staffed by professional counsellors experienced in men's issues.

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## **Lifeline Australia** **13 11 14**

A national charity providing all Australians experiencing emotional distress with access to 24-hour crisis support and suicide prevention services.

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## **13 Yarn** **13 92 76**

A 24-hour national crisis support offering a culturally safe space to yarn about your needs, worries or concerns.



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# Ministers' Foreword

Western Australia's first Sexual Violence Prevention and Response Strategy 2025-2035 (the Strategy) marks an important milestone in our collective journey towards a safer, more equitable State – one where every person is free from sexual violence.

Sexual violence is a profound violation of human dignity that causes lifelong harm and deeply affects individuals, families, and communities. It is a complex and significant issue that demands a coordinated and sustained response. There is no place for sexual violence in our State.

We acknowledge the courage and strength of victim-survivors who have shared their stories and experiences to inform this Strategy. Their voices are instrumental in shaping our collective understanding of sexual violence and the actions needed to drive change.

We know the statistics are confronting – 1 in 4 women have experienced sexual violence since the age of 15, and 1 in 8 have experienced sexual abuse by an adult before turning 15. Yet we know that sexual violence remains significantly underreported, and these numbers tell only part of the story.

Every Western Australian deserves to feel safe – at home, at work, and in the community. Building safe and inclusive communities is a priority for the WA Government, and the Strategy reflects this commitment. Through a coordinated, whole-of-government approach, we will work to prevent sexual violence, support victim-survivors, and hold perpetrators to account.

This is why the Strategy has been developed: to provide a clear framework for all levels of government, sectors and communities to work collectively towards one vision – that all Western Australians are free from sexual violence.

The Strategy acknowledges sexual violence as a distinct and pervasive form of harm, encompassing harassment, abuse, and threats.

The Strategy calls for:

- community-wide prevention efforts,
- targeted support for people of all genders,
- stronger accountability for perpetrators, and
- enhanced, trauma-informed services.

We are committed to specialist services that support victim-survivors and to working collaboratively across government, industry, and community to strengthen service delivery and drive cultural change.

We thank the many individuals, organisations and sector leaders who have contributed to developing this Strategy – and in particular, the victim-survivors whose strength and advocacy continue to inspire change.

When we speak openly about sexual violence – what it is, why it happens, and how we can stop it – we lay the foundation for a safer, more respectful future.

Together, we can build a community where everyone is safe, supported, and free from sexual violence.



**Hon Simone McGurk MLA**  
Minister for Women



**Hon Tony Buti MLA**  
Attorney General



**Hon Meredith Hammat MLA**  
Minister for Health





# Language

The WA Government acknowledges that no single set of terms suits all situations and people. The language used in the Strategy aims to be inclusive and respectful, without causing harm. Language used in this document reflects the language of key national frameworks, including the [National Plan to End Violence Against Women and Children 2022-2032](#), the [National Strategy to Prevent and Respond to Child Sexual Abuse 2021-2030](#) and [Our Watch: Change the Story: A shared framework for the primary prevention of violence against women in Australia](#) and language used in key WA Government documents. A glossary to describe and define terminology used throughout this document is included on page 70.

In this document, the term **Aboriginal** is used in preference to Indigenous or Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, in recognition that Aboriginal people are the original inhabitants of Western Australia.

The term **victim-survivor** refers to a person who has experienced sexual violence, to recognise both victimisation and resilience. This term is used because it is familiar. It is acknowledged that this may not be the preferred terminology of all persons and that people who experience sexual violence do not have one shared identity.<sup>2</sup>

The term **perpetrator** refers to an adult who has used sexual violence against another person, including offenders who have been convicted by a court.

The acronym **LGBTIQA+** is used as an umbrella term to embrace diverse sexualities, genders and sex characteristics. In a Western context, the acronym typically stands for lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, intersex, queer or questioning, and asexual. There is not one LGBTIQA+ community. There are many different communities, groups and individuals with distinct experiences.

# Structure of this document

**The Strategy is presented in two parts:**

**Part 1 – The Strategic Framework** provides a structure for all levels of government, the non-government sector, community, education settings and workplaces to work in a collective effort to end sexual violence in Western Australia. It contains the principles, the domains for action, the change we need to see and guidance on implementation.

**Part 2 – Understanding Sexual Violence** is a supplementary resource for the Strategy, which provides information about the drivers, impacts, and patterns of sexual violence. It also explores the importance of trauma-informed, culturally safe responses, highlights emerging issues such as technology-facilitated abuse and harmful sexual behaviours in children and young people and reflects the evidence base on which the Strategy is built.



# Part 1 – The Strategic Framework

## Introduction

Sexual violence is a complex and significant concern within our communities, reflecting a challenging reality across Western Australia. The available data highlights the widespread nature of this issue, and its impact on individuals and communities is profound.

The Sexual Violence Prevention and Response Strategy (the Strategy) is Western Australia's first dedicated sexual violence strategy. It provides a framework for all levels of government, sectors and communities to work in a coordinated effort towards a single vision: a Western Australia where all people are free from sexual violence. Achieving this vision requires long-term, systemic change across prevention, early intervention, responses, and recovery and healing.

While acknowledging the relationship between sexual violence and other forms of violence, the Strategy focuses on the unique risks, experiences, and impacts of sexual violence. It aims to deliver an effective, tailored response that reflects the Western Australian context.



## Defining sexual violence

The Strategy adopts a definition of sexual violence drawn from the [National Plan to end Violence against Women and Children 2022 – 2032](#):

**Sexual violence is sexual activity towards another person who does not consent, has withdrawn consent, or cannot consent due to age or other factors.**

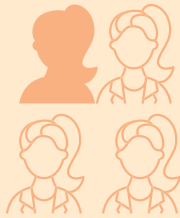
Sexual violence is a distinct and pervasive form of harm. It can occur in many settings, including homes, supported accommodation, workplaces, schools, transport, care facilities, online spaces, and recreational settings. It can be an everyday occurrence and may occur at multiple points across the life course.

Sexual violence can occur both within or outside the contexts of intimate partner, family, and domestic violence. The term sexual violence encompasses a wide range of behaviours including sexual assault, sexual harassment, sexual threats, child sexual abuse, technology-facilitated abuse, and grooming.

Further information and other forms of sexual violence considered under this definition are provided in [Part 2 – Understanding Sexual Violence](#).

## Impact and prevalence of sexual violence in Western Australia

Sexual violence is a widespread issue in Western Australia.



It is estimated that almost **one in four women** in Western Australia (23%) have experienced sexual violence since the age of 15.<sup>3</sup>



In 2024, the **number of sexual assault victims in WA increased by 9%** to 3,721, marking the highest figure recorded by the ABS in 32 years.<sup>4</sup>



Many **regional areas in Western Australia have recorded higher rates** both of recent and historical sexual offences than metropolitan areas.<sup>5</sup>

## In Australia:



An estimated **2.8 million people** aged 18 years and over (14%) experienced sexual violence (assault and/or threat) since the age of 15.<sup>6</sup>



**1 in 5 women** experienced sexual violence (22 per cent or 2.2 million women).<sup>7</sup>

**1 in 16 men** experienced sexual violence (6.1 per cent or 582,400 men).<sup>8</sup>



An estimated **11% of women** (one in eight) and **3.6 % of men** (one in 33) experienced sexual abuse by an adult **before they turned 15**.<sup>9</sup>



The Australian Child Maltreatment Study estimated that nationally, more than **1 in 3 girls and almost 1 in 5 boys** experienced **child sexual abuse**.<sup>10</sup>

In the last 5 years, about **1 in 3 people** (33%) have been **sexually harassed at work** (41% of women and 26% of men).<sup>11</sup>



**Aboriginal people are 3 and a half times more likely** to have been the victim of sexual assault compared to non-Indigenous Australians.<sup>12</sup>



**Women with disability were more likely** to report experiencing sexual violence (4.0%) within the preceding past two years, than women without disability (2.5%).<sup>13</sup>

In a 2023 study, **46% of migrant and refugee women** had experienced at least one form of sexual violence in the workplace in the last five years.<sup>14</sup>



**Over 80% of LGBTQ+** surveyed reported having experienced sexual violence in their lifetime.<sup>15</sup>

Sexual violence can cause profound, long-lasting and devastating impacts to individuals, families and communities. This can include profoundly negative impacts to health and wellbeing, education, economic outcomes and workforce participation, relationships and housing outcomes.<sup>16</sup>

Victim-survivors may experience ongoing physical, emotional, social, spiritual and psychological impacts. Timely, trauma-informed responses are critical to reducing long-term impacts and supporting recovery.



## Perpetrators of sexual violence

Sexual violence is overwhelmingly perpetrated by men – **97% of sexual offenders in Australia are male.**<sup>17</sup>

**93%** of alleged sexual offenders **proceeded against by police** in 2022–23 in WA were **male.**<sup>18</sup>

**Even where men are victims of sexual violence**, the perpetrator is almost always another male.<sup>19</sup>



**Perpetrators are frequently known to the victim-survivor**, including acquaintances (31%), family members (18%) and intimate partners (15%).<sup>20</sup>



**74%** of the sexual assaults in WA in 2024 were perpetrated **at a residential location.**<sup>21</sup>



People who use sexual violence often do so **repeatedly.**<sup>22</sup>



Perpetrators who target **children and young people** are most likely to access their victims through **community and family settings**, with nearly eight in ten victims abused by a relative, friend or acquaintance.<sup>23</sup>



Perpetrators are increasingly using technology to perpetrate sexual violence, with an estimated 60% of Australians experiencing **online sexual harassment or abuse.**<sup>24</sup>



Around **two in five** (41%) sexual assault incidents were **family and domestic violence related.**<sup>25</sup>

Perpetration is driven by gender inequality and other forms of discrimination that reinforce power imbalances. It arises from a complex interplay of beliefs, behaviours, and experiences, alongside broader societal factors such as community attitudes, social and cultural norms, and institutional structures.

These drivers of sexual violence also contribute to the barriers faced by people subjected to sexual violence. For example, if a community holds beliefs that minimise sexual violence or blames victims, this not only increases the likelihood of violence occurring but also makes it harder for victim-survivors to seek help or be supported when they do.

## Reporting sexual violence

Most sexual violence is never formally reported. Among women who experienced sexual assault by a male, just over half (57 per cent) sought advice or support about the most recent incident. Support was most commonly sought from informal sources such as family or friends (45 per cent), while fewer disclosed to professionals like counsellors (15 per cent) or other health workers (14 per cent). Only 7.7 per cent of women contacted police themselves about the most recent incident.<sup>26</sup>

Court data and police reporting rates show that formal disclosures remain rare.

**Over 90% of sexual assaults were not formally reported to police.**<sup>27</sup>

In 2021 **only one in eight reports of sexual violence were proceeded with in WA**. Sexual offences, when compared with other offences, had the **highest attrition rate and lowest conviction rate**.<sup>28</sup>

**Less than one quarter (24%) of people aged over 65 living in the community who experienced sexual abuse reported that they sought help or advice** about their experience.<sup>29</sup>

It often takes a long time to disclose sexual violence. The Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse found that, on average, it takes a victim of child sexual abuse 23 years to tell someone.<sup>30</sup>

Grooming by perpetrators and poor initial responses can delay or prevent disclosure. If someone is not believed or receives a response that lacks understanding or care, they may not speak up again.

There are many reasons why people don't disclose or seek help. These include:

- The depth of the trauma and the emotional pain experienced when thinking about or retelling experiences.
- Stigmas around sex, gender roles, and sexual behaviour.
- Myths and misconceptions about sexual violence.
- Feelings of shame.
- Lack of accessible or culturally safe services.
- Fear of not being believed, minimised or blamed.

Barriers to safety, justice and support are not experienced equally. They are shaped and intensified by overlapping forms of marginalisation and systemic inequality – including racism, intergenerational trauma, and other structural forms of discrimination. These intersecting factors can compound risk, limit access to support, and create additional challenges in seeking or receiving help.

Further discussion on how the drivers of sexual violence and power, identity and systemic inequality shape experiences of sexual violence is provided in [Part 2 – Understanding Sexual Violence](#), under Intersectionality.





## The change needed

To build a community where all people in Western Australia are free from sexual violence, we must address both the drivers of sexual violence, and the social and systemic conditions that sustain it. This means shifting community attitudes and behaviours to promote respect, sexual safety and gender equity, ending victim-blaming, and building a culture where sexual violence in any form is not tolerated.

Achieving this vision requires a whole-of-community approach to prevention and a shared commitment to accountability – both to shift the norms and systems that excuse or minimise harm and to reinforce responsibility on those who perpetrate sexual violence. It must also ensure that people impacted by sexual violence can access timely, inclusive, appropriate, culturally safe, and trauma-specialised supports, when and where needed.

The WA Government is committed to driving change and action needed to stop sexual violence. Responsibility for addressing sexual violence does not lie with one group or sector alone.

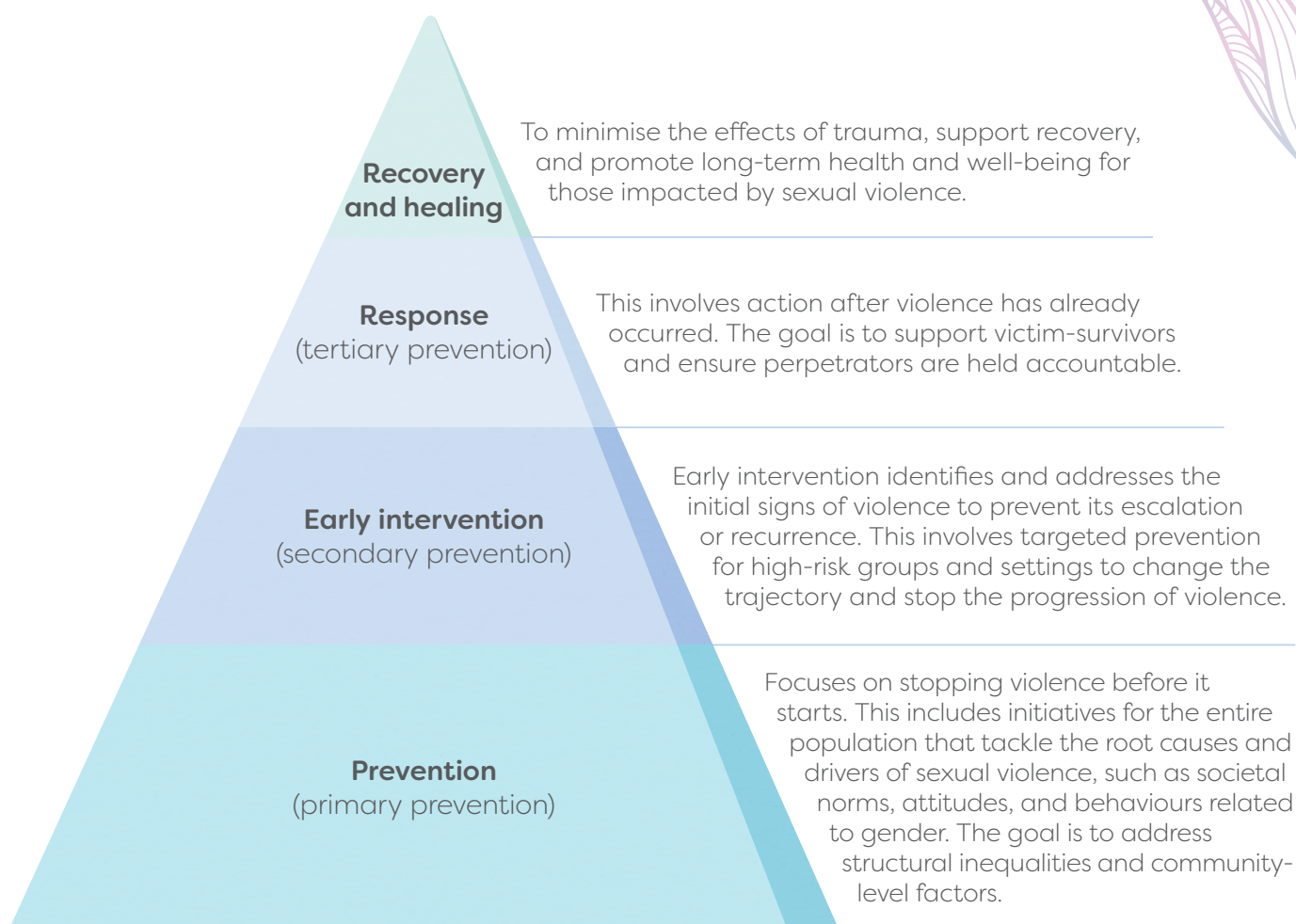
This Strategy provides a coordinated framework for government, service providers, community, and industry to take collective action across four interconnected domains:

- |                  |   |                      |
|------------------|---|----------------------|
| <b>Domain 1:</b> |    | Prevention           |
| <b>Domain 2:</b> |  | Early intervention   |
| <b>Domain 3:</b> |  | Responses            |
| <b>Domain 4:</b> |  | Recovery and Healing |

The domains for action align with the [National Plan to end Violence against Women and Children 2022 – 2032](#) and adopt a public health approach to sexual violence prevention.

By seeking to understand and address the drivers of violence across personal, community, institutional, and societal levels, the public health approach provides a comprehensive framework for prevention. This framework views prevention both as a public health measure and a collective responsibility, aiming to benefit the greatest number of people. This is achieved through the implementation of multiple, mutually reinforcing strategies across different population levels and settings.





# Sexual Violence Prevention and Response Strategy 2025-2035 at a glance

The Vision: All people in Western Australia are free from sexual violence



Principles

Person centred and accessible

Holistic and integrated

Life course

Domains

Strategic objective	Prevention	Early intervention
	<p>Stop sexual violence before it happens by promoting healthy, respectful, safe and consensual relationships (sexual and non-sexual) and prevent sexual violence across all settings – private, public, social, institutional, online, and workplace.</p> 	<p>Stop sexual violence from escalating or reoccurring.</p> 
	<p>Governments, organisations, service systems and the broader community work together to promote healthy, respectful and safe relationships.</p> <p>Prevent sexual violence by changing attitudes, behaviours and conditions that drive sexual violence.</p>	<p>Identify and address known risk factors and early signs of sexual violence at individual, organisational, community and institutional levels.</p>
Focus areas	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Increase awareness and address the drivers of sexual violence</li><li>• Programs for children and young people to promote consent and respectful relationships and build skills to recognise and challenge problematic or harmful content</li><li>• Partner with community organisations and Aboriginal Organisations for responsive prevention</li><li>• Improve system-wide coordination and pathways for prevention of sexual violence</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Address risk factors that enable sexual violence</li><li>• Support children and young people displaying concerning and harmful sexual behaviours</li><li>• Implement measures to eliminate sexual harassment</li></ul>

System Enablers

Partnership and Collaboration

Monitoring and Evaluation

Change Outcomes

Shifting Community Attitudes and Behaviours

Community attitudes, knowledge, awareness and behaviour reflects an understanding of positive, respectful and safe sexual and non-sexual relationships and sexual behaviours. Myths, misconceptions and harmful attitudes around sexual violence are reduced.

Accessible and Effective Specialist Services

Appropriate and effective specialist sexual violence services and supports are accessible for Western Australians who need them.

Intervention and Accountability for Perpetrators

Perpetrators of sexual violence are held accountable and receive intervention to stop their behaviour.



Intersectional

Aboriginal self-determination

Evidence-based

Accountable

## Responses

Recognise and respond to all forms of sexual violence when it occurs.



## Recovery and healing

Support long-term recovery and healing approaches for victim-survivors, families and communities.



Strategic objective

Provide victim-survivors with access to integrated and coordinated, trauma-informed and culturally safe responses and services that support their individual needs. Hold perpetrators to account and support them to change their behaviours and attitudes to prevent further harm.

People who have experienced sexual violence have access to effective approaches that support immediate and long-term recovery and healing for victim-survivors, including those with complex support needs, and those who may have repeated current or historical experiences of violence and abuse.

How it will be achieved

- Develop a sustainable specialist support system for victim-survivors
- Build mainstream service capability to identify and respond to victim-survivors in a trauma-informed, culturally safe and responsive way
- Strengthen evidence-based interventions for perpetrators to support behaviour change and increase accountability
- Reform criminal justice agencies, processes and laws to meet community expectations, increase perpetrator accountability, and improve experiences for victim-survivors
- Enhance service collaboration for comprehensive victim-survivor support

- Strengthen the services and supports that assist victim-survivors' healing and recovery, including specialist and mainstream responses
- Collaborate with community organisations and Aboriginal Organisations for responsive healing
- Embed lived experience in sexual violence reform decision-making

Focus areas

Data Collection

Information Sharing

Resourcing

Workforce Development

## Support for Recovery and Healing

People impacted by sexual violence are supported in their recovery and healing by coordinated accessible specialist and trauma-informed mainstream services that address their individual needs, underpinned by a skilled and capable workforce.

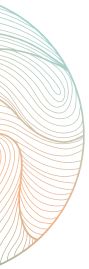
## Coordinated, Evidence-Based, and Responsive System

Sexual violence prevention and response is coordinated, evidence based and informed by people with specialist expertise and lived experience.

## Evidence-Driven Prevention and Response

Government builds an evidence base that informs comprehensive, inclusive and culturally safe action in preventing and responding to sexual violence.





# The Strategy

Vision:

**All people in Western Australia are free from sexual violence.**

## The Principles

The following principles underpin the Strategy and are intended to guide the design and implementation of actions.

### Person centred and accessible

Responses to sexual violence must be inclusive, respectful, and responsive to individual needs.

People with lived experience, and those who support them, are central to the design, delivery and evaluation of responses to sexual violence.

Dignity, agency and self-determination are upheld through person-centred, trauma-informed, and inclusive approaches.

### Holistic and integrated

Sexual violence often intersects with intimate partner and family and domestic violence, sharing common social and structural drivers.

Integrated approaches can help prevent and respond to all forms of violence more effectively<sup>31</sup> and provide victim-survivors with holistic support that addresses their diverse needs.

### Life course

Sexual violence can occur at multiple points over the life course and as a consequence, there are high rates of revictimisation.

This approach recognises the lifetime impacts of experiencing sexual violence and the need for flexible supports that change as a person's circumstances change across the life course.

### Intersectional

Sexual violence is shaped by unequal power relations – some people face greater risks due to overlapping forms of marginalisation. These risks are not inherent to individuals, rather they arise from structural and systemic inequalities – including discrimination, exclusion, and limited access to safety and support.

Approaches to prevent and respond to sexual violence must be designed and delivered in ways that recognise and address the structural inequalities that shape people's experiences, ensuring responses are inclusive, equitable and effective across diverse settings and communities.

### **Aboriginal self-determination**

Improved outcomes for Aboriginal people must be led in genuine partnership with Aboriginal communities and in ways that uphold Aboriginal self-determination.

Aboriginal people emphasise the links between colonial patriarchal violence and the ongoing legacies of racism, intergenerational trauma, systemic discrimination and experiences of sexual and other forms of violence today.

As a result, Aboriginal communities emphasise the need for different approaches to preventing and responding to sexual violence, prioritising Aboriginal community-led and owned responses that are culturally informed and secure.

### **Evidence-based**

Approaches to preventing and responding to sexual violence should be informed by the current and emerging evidence.

The Strategy will build on this knowledge to shape effective responses across different populations and settings in Western Australia.

### **Accountable**

Accountability is central to shifting entrenched norms that excuse or minimise sexual violence. Individuals, institutions, and systems must take responsibility for both their role in perpetuating sexual violence and their responsibility to address it.

Whole-of-community engagement is needed to challenge harmful attitudes, foster safety, and promote respectful relationships.

Government, workplaces, and other institutions must lead by example, while perpetrators must be held to account and supported to change harmful behaviours.



## Domain 1: Prevention

**Stop sexual violence before it happens by promoting healthy, respectful, safe and consensual relationships (sexual and non-sexual) and prevent sexual violence across all settings – private, public, social, institutional, online and workplace.**

Governments, organisations, service systems and the broader community work together to promote healthy, respectful and safe relationships. Prevent sexual violence by changing attitudes, behaviours and conditions that drive sexual violence.

To end sexual violence, the attitudes, behaviours and conditions that drive it must be challenged and changed.

Sexual violence is a learned behaviour, which means it can also be prevented. Preventing sexual violence requires whole-of-community action to foster a culture of respect, equality and safety. Governments, organisations, services and communities must work together to shift social norms and build environments where sexual violence is never tolerated.

Primary prevention involves whole-of-population initiatives that address the underlying drivers of sexual violence. These include rigid gender roles and stereotypes, power imbalances, disrespect, and the social norms, structures and practices that condone, excuse or minimise violence.

Prevention efforts include:

- Engage individuals and communities to promote change
- Embed whole-of-setting approaches
- Drive policy and system reform across government.

Together, these efforts help to create safe environments in relationships, homes, neighbourhoods, schools, online spaces, workplaces and communities, strengthening our collective ability to prevent sexual violence.

The Strategy supports a collective commitment to embedding prevention across systems and sectors, promoting healthy, respectful and safe relationships (sexual and non-sexual) for all Western Australians.

## Examples of work to date

The WA Government has prioritised investments addressing drivers of violence, including gendered drivers, that work across systems and contribute toward sexual violence prevention.

- Leading public awareness campaigns on family and domestic violence such as the annual 16 Days in WA Stop Violence Against Women campaign and the ‘Coercion Hurts’ campaign. Launched in 2024, the Coercion Hurts campaign is a two-year, \$5 million initiative raising awareness of coercive control and includes an online hub with resources to help individuals identify coercive behaviours and seek support.
- Supporting WA Schools with the Growing and Developing Healthy Relationships resource to increase teacher confidence to deliver relationships and sexuality education from Pre-Primary to Year 10 through lesson plans and policy guidance.
- Implementing the Respectful Relationships Sport and Recreation Program, a primary prevention initiative promoting respectful relationships and gender equality in sport and recreation clubs.
- Supporting sexual violence prevention initiatives through the 2024–25 Women’s Grants for a Stronger Future program, including funding to the Family Planning Association of WA to co-design a culturally safe, trauma-informed, and strengths-based prevention initiative tailored for young people and women in detention.

## Focus areas

### Increase awareness and address the drivers of sexual violence

National surveys, such as the ANROWS National Community Attitudes Towards Violence Against Women Survey<sup>32</sup> and the Australian Child Sexual Abuse Attitudes, Knowledge and Response Study (Australian Attitudes Study)<sup>33</sup> show that many Australians continue to hold views that excuse, minimise, or condone sexual violence.

Challenging these social norms – particularly those related to gender, power, consent and victim-blaming – is essential to prevention, reducing stigma and promoting a culture of belief, support and accountability.

A key part of this is supporting individuals and communities to recognise and understand what sexual violence is, including its various forms and impacts. Equipping people with this knowledge is essential to identifying harmful behaviours, challenging misconceptions, and fostering environments where violence is not accepted.

To change this, the Strategy will seek to **implement measures that promote healthy, respectful and safe relationships (sexual and non-sexual) and communities, address the drivers and reinforcing factors of sexual violence, and increase community awareness of consent, grooming, and sexual violence.**

Through consistent, age-appropriate education across life stages and settings, from early childhood to workplaces, the Strategy will build a culture of safety, respect and equality.





### **Programs for children and young people to promote consent and respectful relationships and build skills to recognise and challenge problematic or harmful content**

Research highlights the importance and opportunity for age-appropriate education to support children and young people to develop respectful attitudes toward sexual activity, sexual behaviour, sexuality and relationships when beliefs about gender, power, consent and relationships are still forming.

Comprehensive relationships and sexuality education has been shown to improve young people's knowledge, skills, attitudes, and values, contributing to better social, emotional, and academic outcomes.<sup>34</sup>

The Strategy recognises the need to reach children and young people across diverse settings- including in schools, community-based programs and informal learning environments. This ensures that all young people, regardless of their educational context, have access to the knowledge and skills they need to navigate relationships safely and respectfully.

Evidence shows that harmful gender norms and stereotypes are increasingly reinforced through both overt and subtle messages in media and across online platforms and materials. This messaging, often embedded in content related to health, fitness, humour and self-help, can shape young people's beliefs about sex, power and relationships.

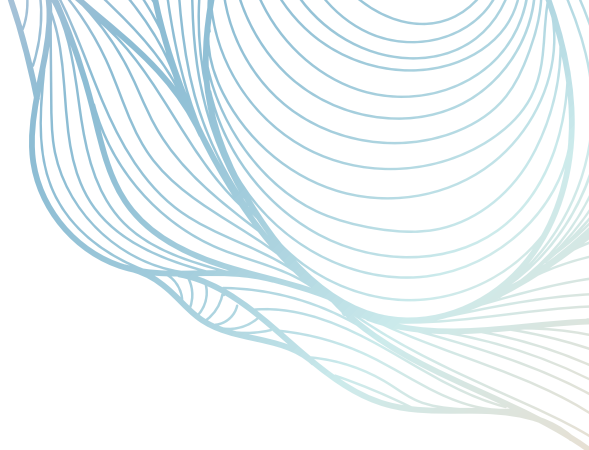
Pornography plays a significant role in normalising coercion, aggression and gendered power imbalances. Educational initiatives must respond by equipping young people with the skills to critically assess these influences and foster respectful, safe behaviours.

The Strategy will work towards actions that **develop and deliver programs for children and young people that promote relationships that are gender equitable, healthy, respectful, safe and consensual. This also includes building skills to recognise and challenge harmful messages that are often found in online spaces, including pornography and content related to online sexual violence.**

Every young person in Western Australia must have access to education and support that enables them to develop the understanding, critical thinking skills, and support networks necessary to engage in healthy, respectful, and safe consensual relationships throughout their lives.

### **Partner with community organisations and Aboriginal Community-Controlled Organisations for responsive prevention**

Prevention efforts must be culturally secure, inclusive, and led by those with lived experience and cultural authority. Community organisations, which hold trusted relationships and deep understanding of their communities, are key to ensuring these efforts are relevant, respectful and effective.



The Strategy will focus efforts to **partner with community-based organisations and Aboriginal Community-Controlled Organisations to design, deliver and lead place-based, inclusive, culturally responsive sexual violence prevention actions.**

By respecting and elevating the expertise and knowledge of community organisations, these partnerships will reflect community priorities and support the development of tailored and strength-based prevention actions that address the drivers of sexual violence within community contexts.

### **Improve system-wide coordination and pathways for prevention of sexual violence**

Addressing sexual violence requires a coordinated, whole-of-systems approach. Sexual violence intersects with multiple policy domains and service systems and fragmented or siloed efforts can result in duplication, service gaps and inefficient use of resources. A public health approach recognises that prevention is most effective when embedded across systems, institutions and communities, with every action creating safer environments and reducing risk.

National frameworks, including the [National Plan to End Violence against Women and Children 2022-2032](#), and the [National Strategy to Prevent and Respond to Child Sexual Abuse 2021-2030](#) identify coordination as a key pillar for success.

A key focus for the Strategy is to **coordinate sexual violence prevention actions across government, service systems and community** ensuring that efforts are aligned, strategic and mutually reinforcing.

The Strategy recognises that lasting change requires action at multiple levels, from individual approaches to transforming organisational practices and influencing policy. An integrated and collaborative approach strengthens institutional accountability, builds trust, and ensures consistency in prevention messaging and service delivery. It also supports culturally responsive, inclusive and trauma-informed practice, while reducing duplication and closing service gaps.

By embedding prevention across systems and structures, the Strategy reinforces a collective commitment to eliminating sexual violence and replacing harmful norms with those that promote safety, respect and equality.



## Domain 2: Early Intervention

### Stop sexual violence from escalating or reoccurring.

Identify and address known risk factors and early signs of sexual violence at individual, organisational, community and institutional levels.

Early intervention is critical to reducing risk and preventing harm. By recognising known risk factors, strengthening protective factors and addressing the conditions that allow sexual violence to persist, we can stop violence before it escalates or reoccurs.

These efforts must be timely, evidence informed and embedded across systems and settings. Early intervention works hand-in-hand with prevention and response, by fostering accountability, supporting behaviour change and reducing the likelihood of further harm.



## Examples of work to date

The following examples reflect recent initiatives prioritised by the WA Government that strengthen early intervention efforts to reduce risk and prevent the escalation of sexual violence.

- The Chief Psychiatrist's Standard for Sexual Safety of Consumers of Mental Health Services was introduced in July 2024 as a statutory standard under the *Mental Health Act 2014*. The Standard requires mental health services under the remit of the Chief Psychiatrist, as defined in the Act, to prioritise sexual safety and to ensure everyone accessing mental health services is free of, and feels safe from, behaviour of a sexual nature that is unwanted, or makes a person feel uncomfortable, afraid or unsafe. It is also intended to support clinicians delivering care through the establishment of systems that prevent and manage specific risks of harm.
- Establishing the WA arm of the Australian Centre for Child Protection to enhance responses to children displaying harmful sexual behaviours. This includes the development of the Framework for Understanding and Guiding Responses to Harmful Sexual Behaviours in Children and Young People, the rollout of foundational training for professionals and carers in child protection and community services, and a \$2.7 million investment to pilot two specialist intervention programs.
- Launching the Drink Spiking Protocol Initiative, enabling individuals who suspect their drink has been tampered with to access self-administered testing kits at any 24-hour police station. Samples are analysed by the Chemistry Centre of WA, with confidential results returned to individuals, who can choose to pursue a criminal complaint or seek support services.
- Enacting reforms to the *Industrial Relations Act 1979* to explicitly prohibit workplace sexual harassment, including by third parties, and to introduce vicarious liability for employers and principals.





## Focus areas

### Address risk factors that enable sexual violence

Evidence shows that certain factors can enable the perpetration of sexual violence. These factors can include harmful attitudes towards women and other population groups, the influence of pornography, rigid gender norms, substance misuse, childhood exposure to violence, and prior perpetration. The influence of these factors is shaped by broader social, institutional and environmental conditions.

The Strategy aims to **identify and build on interventions that recognise and reduce risk factors and conditions that enable sexual violence**. This includes addressing the conditions that contribute to re-perpetration, such as geographical and social isolation, community victim-blaming and a lack of access to support services, safe housing and transport.

Early intervention is central to this approach, including a focus on identifying patterns of risk, strengthening protective factors and acting early to disrupt the conditions that enable sexual violence. This involves recognising how environments interact with perpetrator behaviour, particularly in higher-risk settings such as online spaces, care and supported accommodation facilities and entertainment venues. In these contexts, people must have access to education, protective measures and timely support.

The Strategy also prioritises strengthening the visibility of perpetrators across systems and organisations, enabling earlier identification and response. It seeks to build community confidence and capability to recognise sexual violence, challenge its normalisation and intervene when appropriate – reinforcing a culture of accountability and early action that contributes to a safer Western Australia.



### Support children and young people displaying concerning and harmful sexual behaviours

Early trauma-specialised intervention for children and young people exhibiting concerning or harmful sexual behaviours is essential to address underlying needs, support healthy development, and prevent further harm.

Effective responses prioritise safety, therapeutic support, and developmentally appropriate strategies that recognise the potential impact of trauma and emphasise guidance, learning, support and safety to reduce the likelihood of behaviour escalation.

The Strategy sets out to **develop and implement initiatives aimed at identifying, assessing and providing specialist intervention for children and young people displaying concerning and harmful sexual behaviours.**

Establishing a coordinated and readily accessible system in Western Australia to deliver evidence-based interventions remains a priority. Through early and supportive action, we aim to disrupt harmful pathways, safeguard the wellbeing of children and young people, and equip them to build safe, respectful, and healthy relationships.

### Implement measures to eliminate sexual harassment

Sexual harassment is a pervasive form of sexual violence that undermines individuals' safety, wellbeing, and ability to participate fully in both public and private life. It occurs across workplaces, educational institutions, public transport, social and community spaces, and online environments, causing significant harm.

If left unaddressed, sexual harassment normalises harmful behaviours and fosters a culture that can enable other forms of sexual violence.

Through this Strategy, we will **build on and expand measures eliminating sexual harassment in all settings.** This includes strengthening legislative frameworks, improving reporting and response mechanisms, and fostering cultures of zero tolerance.

The Strategy will empower individuals to recognise and challenge sexual harassment, by building capacity in the community to recognise and call out sexual harassment, and empower individuals to challenge harmful norms and contribute to safer environments.

Our goal is to ensure all Western Australians can live, work, learn, and participate safely and with respect – free from fear of unwanted sexualised behaviour.



## Domain 3: Responses

### Recognise and respond to all forms of sexual violence when it occurs.

Provide victim-survivors with access to integrated and coordinated, trauma-informed and culturally safe responses and services that support their individual needs.

Hold perpetrators to account and support them to change their behaviours and attitudes to prevent further harm.

Effective responses must centre on the needs of victim-survivors, while ensuring perpetrators are held to account. This requires accessible, specialist and culturally safe services, supported by strong legal frameworks and coordinated systems with trauma-informed mainstream services.

Delivering high-quality, integrated and person-centred, trauma-informed responses ensures that anyone impacted by sexual violence receives the support they need to heal and recover.

High-quality, person-centred responses go beyond legal processes. They encompass a spectrum of coordinated supports that promote safety, address harm, and enable recovery. The justice system must be equipped to prosecute sexual offences fairly and effectively, while minimising the risk of re-traumatisation.

At the same time, broader community attitudes must reinforce that responsibility for sexual violence lies solely with perpetrators, and that victim-survivors deserve to be heard, believed, and supported.



## Examples of work to date

The WA Government has invested in coordinated, trauma-informed and culturally safe responses to sexual violence across justice, health and community sectors.

- Launching Safe2Say, an online reporting platform for members of the community to anonymously report sexual offending, including child sexual abuse, direct to specialist sex crime investigators.
- Supporting the Sexual Assault Legal Service Western Australia pilot partnership between Women's Legal Service WA, Aboriginal Family Legal Services and Ruah Legal Services to provide ongoing trauma-informed and culturally safe legal assistance to ensure victim-survivors have the appropriate support and are connected to other services as required.
- Establishing the Kimberley Sexual Abuse Prevention and Support Service to provide Child Sexual Abuse Therapeutic Services to Broome, Kununurra and surrounding remote Aboriginal communities.
- WA Health has prioritised several trauma-informed initiatives to respond to sexual assault, including the implementation of the Responding to a Recent Sexual Assault Policy to ensure consistent, respectful care, a first response tool for healthcare workers and a free eLearning module to support appropriate responses to disclosures. Regional access has been strengthened through improved coordination with the Sexual Assault Resource Centre Forensic Training Program and the rollout of Early Evidence Kits to collect time-sensitive forensic specimens across WA Health.
- Expanding mandatory reporting of child sexual abuse to eight new professional reporter groups and introducing a Reportable Conduct Scheme to strengthen institutional accountability.



## Focus areas

### **Develop a sustainable specialist support system for victim-survivors**

Delivering consistent, high-quality specialist sexual violence services requires a sustainable and well-resourced service system. Access to timely, appropriate and trauma-informed care is essential for recovery and safety.

Western Australia has a highly skilled network of specialist sexual violence services. Sustainability is impacted by persistent challenges in workforce recruitment, retention, and remuneration – including in regional and remote areas, where prevalence of sexual violence is high but access to services is impacted by the state's vast and dispersed geography. A coordinated approach to workforce development is needed to strengthen and sustain services across the state.

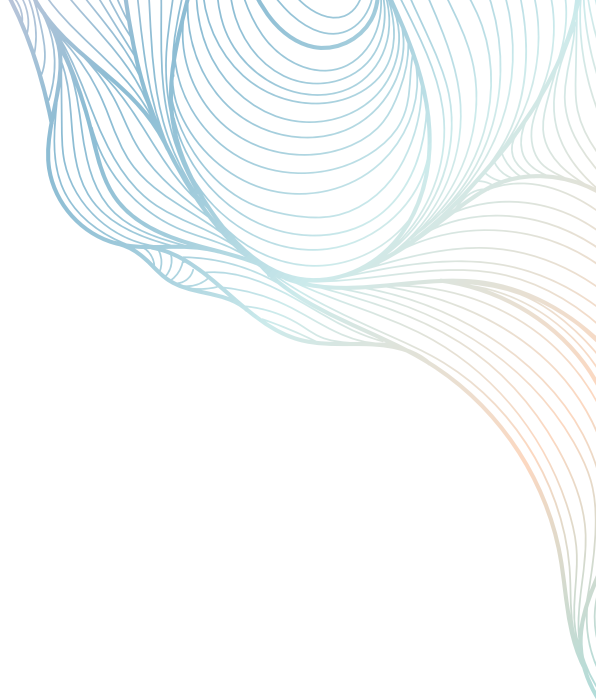
Through the Strategy we intend to **build a sustainable specialist service system to ensure victim-survivors have access to specialist sexual violence responses.**

### **Build mainstream service capability to identify and respond to victim-survivors in a trauma-informed, culturally safe and responsive way**

Research shows that many victim-survivors of sexual violence may never formally disclose their experiences. However, some do seek help or choose to disclose for the first time, through mainstream services.

Mainstream services, including healthcare, education, housing, and community services are not designed to provide specialist trauma support, however they play a critical role in recognising signs of trauma, responding appropriately to disclosures, and facilitating access to specialist and other services and supports in a trauma-informed and culturally safe way.

Services must be trauma-informed in both the presence and absence of disclosure. This means anticipating that anyone may have experienced trauma and ensuring that environments, practices, and interactions promote safety, dignity, and choice.



When victim-survivors do choose to disclose, the way frontline staff respond can have significant implications for their long-term recovery. Sensitive, trauma-informed, and culturally safe responses are essential to ensuring victim-survivors feel believed, supported, and empowered to access further care.

A key focus of this Strategy is to **build mainstream service capability to identify and respond to victim-survivors in a trauma-informed, culturally safe and responsive way.**

In line with the [National Plan to End Violence against Women and Children 2022-2032](#), and the [National Strategy to Prevent and Respond to Child Sexual Abuse 2021-2030](#), the WA Government is working to enhance the capability of mainstream workforces to meet this need.

### **Strengthen evidence-based interventions for perpetrators to support behaviour change and increase accountability**

Early and effective intervention with people who perpetrate sexual violence is critical to breaking cycles of harm and enhancing community safety.

The WA Government is committed to creating a culture where perpetrators are held accountable and provided with genuine opportunities to change. This includes supporting the development of accessible, community, and sector-led responses that reflect best practice and are tailored to diverse contexts.

This Strategy aims to **strengthen evidence-based interventions for perpetrators to support behaviour change and increase accountability.** Responding to sexual violence when it occurs – and affirming that responsibility lies solely with perpetrators – is essential to preventing further harm and addressing the entrenched social norms that justify, excuse or minimise sexual violence.

There is also a need to continue building the evidence base for what works in perpetrator interventions. The Strategy supports the development of evidence-based guidance, and the implementation of best practice approaches informed by research, lived experience, and sector expertise.



### **Reform criminal justice agencies, processes and laws to meet community expectations, increase perpetrator accountability and improve experiences for victim-survivors**

Victim-survivors' interactions with the criminal justice system can be complex, confusing and re-traumatising. Improving these experiences is critical, not only for access to justice but also for long-term recovery and healing.

There is strong momentum for reform at both state and national levels, with multiple reviews and initiatives completed or underway. This Strategy will align with and build on these reforms to:

- **reduce barriers to victims-survivors engaging with the justice system**
- **increase perpetrator accountability and conviction rates**
- **improve victim-survivor experiences.**

Criminal justice reform will be integrated into a whole-of-government approach, ensuring justice responses are accessible, fair, and meet community expectations.

### **Enhance service collaboration for comprehensive victim-survivor support**

Victim-survivors often face fragmented services, gaps in support and re-traumatisation when systems fail to work together. Strengthening collaboration across systems is key to delivering more trauma-informed, integrated, and responsive support that meets the diverse needs of victim-survivors.

This Strategy will work to **enhance collaboration and coordination between specialist, mainstream and government services to provide holistic, integrated and trauma-informed responses which support victim-survivors with their individual needs.**

An element of effective service collaboration is a shared understanding of how and where services are accessed, who is accessing them, and what outcomes are being achieved. Without this visibility, it is difficult to identify service gaps, duplication, or areas of need.

Data is currently fragmented across systems such as health, police, and community services.<sup>35</sup> Improving the consistency, coordination and use of data collection, is essential to inform strategic service planning, enable targeted interventions, and support equitable access.

A more integrated data approach will also help identify patterns of unmet need, support cross-sector collaboration, and drive continuous improvement in service quality. By understanding how services are used and experienced, government and sector partners can better align efforts, coordinate responses and develop integrated models of care, and ensure that victim-survivors receive timely, appropriate, and trauma-informed support.<sup>36</sup>

Building a collaborative service system requires strengthening workforce capacity through training, developing integrated referral pathways, and fostering a culture of continuous learning and cross-sector partnerships. This includes supporting organisations and services best placed to deliver safe, community-led responses tailored to the needs of diverse groups, including Aboriginal communities, people with disability, and LGBTIQ+ individuals.

## The WA Government is progressing reforms to strengthen service integration.

The Family and Domestic Violence System Reform Plan 2024–2029 outlines a vision for a collaborative, connected, and accountable service system that prioritises safety and recovery.

Sexual violence is a key indicator of heightened family and domestic violence risk, yet intimate partner sexual violence remains significantly underreported.

Through the Strategy there are opportunities to enhance coordination and improved collaboration between family and domestic violence and sexual violence services, recognising the intersection of these issues.

The Family and Domestic Violence System Reform Plan 2024–2029 provides a strong foundation for this work, offering a framework to strengthen integrated responses across sectors and ensure that intimate partner sexual violence is addressed as part of a broader, connected system of family and domestic violence safety and recovery.





## Domain 4: Recovery and Healing

### Support long-term recovery and healing approaches for victim-survivors, families and communities.

People who have experienced sexual violence have access to effective approaches that support immediate and long-term recovery and healing for victim-survivors, including those with complex support needs, and those who may have repeated current or historical experiences of violence and abuse.

Recovery from sexual violence is often a deeply personal and non-linear journey that requires sustained support. Victim-survivors must have access to trauma-informed, culturally safe and person-centred services that support healing and empowerment. This includes supports for complex support needs, and those who may have repeated current or historical experiences of violence and abuse.

Healing does not occur in isolation. Families and support networks can be profoundly impacted by sexual violence and play a critical role in recovery for victim-survivors. They may also require their own support to navigate trauma and assist and support victim-survivors.

Communities are also central to recovery, providing connection, cultural identity, and opportunities for collective healing. Strengthening family and community-based approaches is essential to ensure recovery is holistic, sustainable, and grounded in the lived realities of victim-survivors.

### Examples of work to date

The WA Government has invested in initiatives that strengthen recovery pathways for victim-survivors, families and communities. While not all initiatives are solely focused on sexual violence, many intersect with and contribute to healing through trauma-informed, culturally safe and community-led approaches.

- Funding the Aboriginal Family Safety Grants Program and evaluation to fund initiatives aligned to the Aboriginal Family Safety Strategy, including Focus Area 1: Healing.
- Developing an Aboriginal Healing Framework to guide culturally secure healing approaches.
- Convening the cross-government Victims of Crime Reference Group to provide strategic advice to the Attorney General on matters relating to victims of crime in WA, including sexual violence.



## Focus areas

### **Strengthen the services and supports that assist victim-survivors' healing and recovery, including specialist and mainstream responses**

Sustained healing requires reliable, well-resourced services that are available to all who need them.

Victim-survivor access to specialist and mainstream services is a persistent challenge in Western Australia, mirroring national trends due to inconsistent funding and workforce retention issues.

Central to the Strategy is the goal to **build sustainable, specialist and mainstream service capabilities to support long-term healing and recovery.**

A sustainable and resilient service system across WA, provides victim-survivors with equitable access to timely, comprehensive, and healing-focused responses to support their healing and recovery journey.

### **Collaborate with community organisations and Aboriginal Organisations for responsive healing**

Inclusive, culturally secure, and community-led approaches are essential to supporting recovery for victim-survivors from diverse backgrounds.

Marginalised groups – including Aboriginal communities, people with disability, culturally and linguistically diverse communities, and LGBTIQ+ people – often face systemic barriers to accessing support.

Evidence shows that culturally safe, community-led, and place-based approaches are most effective in supporting healing from trauma.<sup>37</sup> These approaches ensure that responses are grounded in local knowledge, culture and strengths.

This Strategy is committed to **partnering with community organisations and Aboriginal Community-Controlled Organisations, to design and deliver healing initiatives that are place-based, inclusive and responsive to the communities they serve.** By elevating community leadership and fostering cross-sector collaboration, these partnerships will strengthen recovery pathways and ensure that healing is accessible, meaningful and sustainable.

### **Embed lived experience in sexual violence reform decision-making**

The authentic, safe and supported engagement of people with lived experience is paramount to ensure that reforms are relevant, effective and survivor-centred. National frameworks, including the [National Plan to End Violence against Women and Children 2022-2032](#), and the [National Strategy to Prevent and Respond to Child Sexual Abuse 2021-2030](#) emphasise the critical role of lived experience in shaping systems and services.

The Strategy is committed to **embedding ways to safely engage people with lived experience and expertise in decision-making about sexual violence reform in all settings.**

Australian research has found that the opportunity for victim-survivors to engage in systems advocacy can be an important part of relational and social repair which is essential for recovery.<sup>38</sup>

Mechanisms to engage lived experience will be designed with care to ensure that participation is safe, empowering, and trauma-informed. Recognising lived experience as a form of expertise strengthens the design of services and systems that respond effectively to sexual violence and support long-term recovery.

# Change outcomes

Achieving the sustainable social and cultural change needed to address all forms of sexual violence will take time. While the impact of prevention and early intervention efforts is rarely immediate, change can be measured through broad scale data sources such as the Australian Bureau of Statistics Personal Safety Survey and the National Community Attitudes towards Violence against Women Survey.

At the same time, some outcomes, such as improvements in service access, perpetrator intervention and the effectiveness of programming, can be shown in the short to medium term. Monitoring and evaluation are critical to ensure progress towards the Strategy's vision of a Western Australia free from sexual violence.

An evaluation framework will be developed to measure the Strategy's progress towards the six change outcomes.

## **Change outcome 1:**

Community attitudes, knowledge, awareness and behaviour reflects an understanding of positive, respectful and safe sexual and non-sexual relationships and sexual behaviours. Myths, misconceptions, and harmful attitudes around sexual violence are reduced.

## **Change outcome 2:**

Appropriate, and effective sexual violence services and supports are accessible for Western Australians who need them.

## **Change outcome 3:**

Perpetrators of sexual violence are held accountable and receive intervention to stop their behaviour.

## **Change outcome 4:**

People impacted by sexual violence are supported in their recovery and healing by coordinated accessible specialist and trauma-informed mainstream services that address their individual needs, underpinned by a skilled and capable workforce.

## **Change outcome 5:**

Sexual violence prevention and response is coordinated, evidence based and informed by people with specialist expertise and lived experience.

## **Change outcome 6:**

Government builds an evidence base that informs comprehensive, inclusive and culturally safe action in preventing and responding to sexual violence.



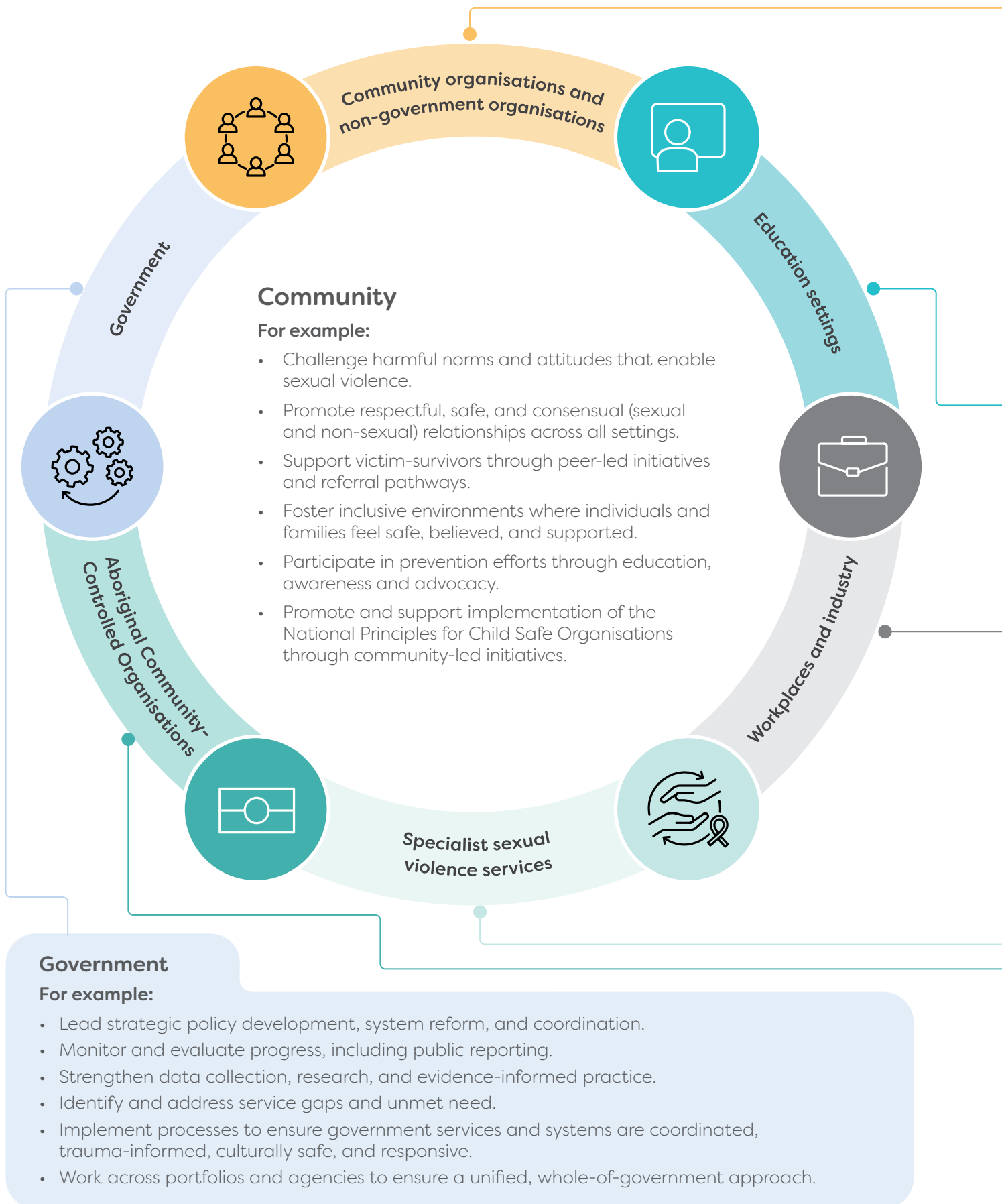
# Implementing the Strategy

The Strategy will be implemented through a coordinated, whole-of-community approach. All levels of government, alongside community organisations, workplaces, and industry, share responsibility for developing and delivering policies, programs, and practices that prevent and respond to sexual violence. Each must act within their sphere of influence to address sexual violence.

The National Principles for Child Safe Organisations provide a framework to guide organisations in developing child safe cultures and practices, including the ability to identify risks and take agreed actions to prevent, respond to and report child abuse. Implementation of the National Principles is a shared responsibility across government, education, and community sectors – ensuring that environments where children live, learn, and engage are safe, inclusive, and responsive.



# Whole-of-community approach



## Community organisations and non-government organisations

### For example:

- Deliver inclusive, trauma-informed services across diverse settings.
- Share data and insights to inform policy and practice.
- Identify gaps and advocate for tailored responses and resourcing.
- Collaborate with specialist services and communities to strengthen support systems.
- Support design and delivery of inclusive, accessible culturally safe and community-led sexual violence prevention, early intervention, response and recovery initiatives.

## Education settings

### For example:

- Implementation of whole-of-setting approaches that embed respectful relationships, consent, and safety across curriculum, leadership, policy and culture.
- Deliver inclusive, age-appropriate education on sex, sexuality, consent, gender equity, and respectful relationships.
- Promote safe and inclusive learning environments through physical design and school culture.
- Review incident response, reporting, and monitoring systems.
- Engage students, educators, families, and communities in prevention and support efforts.

## Workplaces and industry

### For example:

- Implement training, education, and frameworks aligned with national standards (e.g. Respect@Work).
- Promote zero tolerance for sexual harassment and violence.
- Strengthen trauma-informed, victim-survivor-centred responses in organisational policies and practices.
- Identify and address gaps in safety, support, and reporting systems.
- Partner with government and community organisations to co-design sector-specific initiatives.
- Support workforce development and cultural change through leadership, policy reform, and accountability.

## Specialist sexual violence services

### For example:

- Deliver trauma-specialist, developmentally appropriate, and culturally safe support for people of all ages.
- Share data and insights to inform system-wide improvements and early intervention.
- Collaborate with mainstream services to strengthen referral pathways and integrated responses.
- Identify gaps in specialist services where expansions, tailoring and or further support is needed.

## Aboriginal Community-Controlled Organisations

### For example:

- Identify gaps where expansions, tailoring and/or further support is needed.
- Design Aboriginal-led place-based programs that support community.
- Elevate local knowledge, priorities, and strengths to inform system reform and community safety.
- Deliver inclusive, trauma-informed services across diverse settings.



## Implementation and governance

Strong and sustained leadership is essential to achieving the Strategy's vision of a Western Australia free from sexual violence.

Government will play a central role in overseeing implementation and ensuring alignment with national and state priorities. To be effective, this leadership will be informed by diverse perspectives, including:

- the voices of people with lived experience of sexual violence
- Aboriginal knowledge, leadership, and cultural authority
- the expertise of specialist organisations, practitioners, researchers and advocates
- input from communities, industry, and key advisory groups including those representing diverse communities.

It is intended that Government be supported by a multi-level governance structure that enables strategic alignment and effective delivery. This may include senior executive oversight, interagency coordination, and working groups where appropriate.

## Action plans

Implementation of the Strategy will be guided by action plans and commence with a First Action Plan.

Key components of the First Action Plan will be the establishment of governance mechanisms to support implementation of the Strategy and considering the **system enablers** that are needed for the Strategy to be effective, including:

- Strengthening **coordination** through **partnerships and collaboration** across government, community, industry and the service sector.
- Sustainable **resourcing** to support long-term implementation and system capacity.
- **Monitoring and evaluation** to track progress, inform continuous improvement, and support accountability.
- Improving consistency of **data collection and reporting** across systems to build a clearer picture of need, service use, opportunity, and outcomes.
- Generating knowledge and embedding safe and ethical **information sharing** to promote learning across sectors, support evidence informed practice and to enable coordinated responses.
- **Workforce development** to build the capability and confidence of workforces to prevent and respond to sexual violence in trauma-informed, culturally safe, and person-centred ways.

## Working with other strategies, plans and priorities

This Strategy provides a coordinating framework to strengthen Western Australia's collective response to sexual violence. It does not seek to duplicate the work of existing or intersecting strategies. Instead, it aims to align and amplify efforts across government, community, and service sectors to ensure a cohesive, effective, and person-centred approach to prevention, early intervention, response, and recovery.

The Strategy recognises that sexual violence intersects with a range of issues – including gender inequality, family and domestic violence, and child safety – and that collaboration across systems is essential. It is designed to work in partnership with existing WA Government strategies, national frameworks, and community-led initiatives to drive long-term, systemic change.

Existing WA Government strategies will intersect with and support the implementation of this Strategy.



## Existing WA Government strategies

### **Stronger Together: WA's Plan for Gender Equality**

is WA's first plan to support a gender equal community. It provides a framework for coordinated action by Government, business, organisations and individuals, with practical steps to advance gender equality. Addressing gender inequality is central to stopping violence against women.


Stronger Together sets out how the Government will lead the way to bring about generational change and create a better, fairer and more equitable community in Western Australia.

### **Path to Safety: Western Australia's Strategy to Reduce Family and Domestic Violence 2020 – 2030**

sets out a clear whole-of-government and community plan for reducing and responding to family and domestic violence to contribute towards the long-term vision of all Western Australian's living free from family and domestic violence.

### **The Strengthening Responses to Family and Domestic Violence System Reform Plan 2024 to 2029**

builds on the strengths and resources of existing services and responses to respond more effectively to family and domestic violence. The Plan is organised around four interrelated pillars to embed ways of working that provide consistent, quality, safe and effective responses to family and domestic violence that safeguard victim-survivors and holds perpetrators to account through workforce development, information sharing, risk assessment and risk management. Sexual violence often occurs within the context of family and domestic violence and requires mutually reinforcing approaches across systems and services to ensure a coordinated, person-centred approach.



The [Aboriginal Family Safety Strategy 2022-2032](#) sets the vision that Aboriginal families and communities in Western Australia are safe, strong, and happy, enabling future generations to thrive. It recognises that Aboriginal-led initiatives and community-controlled services are foundational for support and healing for Aboriginal people impacted by family violence. Actions and planning will be integrated, coordinated and Aboriginal-led across community, government and other sectors, and informed and led by Aboriginal voices wherever they impact Aboriginal people.



The [Aboriginal Empowerment Strategy – Western Australia 2021 – 2029](#) (AES) also emphasises the need for Aboriginal people to have a genuine say in the design and delivery of policies, programs and services that affect them, including having a role in the relevant decision-making processes.

The AES aligns with the WA Government's commitments under the National Agreement on Closing the Gap.

Other key national and state strategies that will work with this Strategy towards shared goals are listed in [Appendix A](#).

## Child Sexual Abuse

Alongside the WA Government's implementation of recommendations of the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse, nationally there are several plans and strategies working specifically to address child sexual abuse, including the [National Strategy to Prevent and Respond to Child Sexual Abuse 2021-2030, Safe and Supported: The National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children 2021-2031](#) and implementation of the [National Principles for Child Safe Organisations](#).



## Criminal justice and legislative reviews

Three concurrent and complementary reviews are examining Western Australia's criminal justice systems, laws and practices related to sexual violence and sexual offending. The Law Reform Commission of WA completed its review of WA's sexual offence laws and the legal concept of 'consent' in November 2023.<sup>39</sup>

The Department of Justice completed two further reviews, the first examined the end-to-end criminal justice process for victims of sexual offending, from reporting an offence to the release of the offender. The second is a statutory review of the operation and effectiveness of laws introduced through the *Criminal Law Amendment (Intimate Images) Act 2019* which criminalises intimate image-based abuse.

This work is complemented at the national level through the efforts of the Standing Council of Attorneys-General, which is progressing the [Work Plan to Strengthen Criminal Justice Responses to Sexual Assault 2022-2027](#) and will be informed by the 2025 Australian Law Reform Commission report, [Safe, Informed, Supported: Reforming Justice Responses to Sexual Violence](#).

The outcomes of these reviews will guide future reform to the criminal justice response to sexual violence and build upon other recent significant legal reform, such as the introduction of offences for non-fatal strangulation and persistent family violence in Western Australia.

## Safer workplaces

The WA Government understands its role in creating safer, more respectful and accountable workplaces across all sectors. It has substantially completed the implementation of recommendations from the Respect@Work Report through law reform, advocacy and education – demonstrating a strong and sustained commitment to addressing workplace sexual harassment.

The Mental Awareness, Respect and Safety (MARS) Program has been created in response to the sexual harassment and assault of women in the fly-in fly-out mining industry. MARS is being rolled out in phases to address serious mental health, culture and safety concerns in the mining industry.



# Current responses to sexual violence

Western Australia has a network of dedicated specialist services, peak bodies, community organisations (including Aboriginal Community-Controlled Organisations), industry and government agencies that has developed over time and in response to particular needs.

Responding to sexual violence is often addressed in a fragmented manner – treated separately as a health, education, workplace or criminal justice issue. There is significant opportunity to strengthen the system by developing coordinated, collaborative and integrated approaches to support victim-survivors and respond to people who use sexual violence. As community awareness and understanding of sexual violence grows, so too does the demand for services.

## Key specialist services

The **Sexual Assault Resource Centre (SARC)**, part of the North Metropolitan Health Service (NMHS), leads the specialised clinical response for people aged 13 years and over who have experienced recent sexual assault and/or past sexual assault or abuse. This includes the delivery of a crisis service providing medical and forensic services, including forensic medical examinations, short-term crisis intervention counselling and longer-term trauma processing.


SARC provides critical navigation of the medical and psychosocial complexities that coexist and intersect in the response required for a recent sexual assault.

Outside the metropolitan area, the **WA Country Health Service (WACHS)** provides medical and forensic services to people who have experienced recent sexual assault, ensuring access to care across regional and remote communities. This is closely supported through SARC, who provide expert advice and guidance to WACHS clinicians on an immediate case-by-case basis.

SARC also deliver the specialised Forensic Training Program for nominated clinicians across WA, as well as statewide education and training services to health employees, non-government organisations and the education and mining sectors, through online resources, e-learning and face to face training. These diverse and tailored supports are informed through SARC engagement with national and international trauma treatment research projects.

The **Perth Children's Hospital Child Protection Unit** provides medical, forensic, social work and therapeutic services for children and families when there is a concern that a child may have been sexually abused.

There are five community-based specialist **Sexual Assault Support Services (SASS)** across Western Australia that support people aged 13 years and above affected by recent or past sexual assault or abuse, as well as their partners and family members. SASS provide a variety of crisis and ongoing counselling services, information and resources, referrals as well as, in some areas, therapeutic support groups and health promotion activities.



There are also 15 specialised community based sexual assault support services for children, including the:

- **Child Sexual Abuse Therapy Services**
- **Indigenous Healing Services**
- **Kimberley Sexual Abuse Prevention and Support Service.**

These services provide healing, support, counselling and therapeutic responses to children, young people and their families affected by child sexual abuse, and adults who have experienced childhood sexual abuse. They also support young people who display harmful sexual behaviours.

The Multi-Agency Investigation and Support Team (MIST) is delivered by Parkerville Children and Youth Care, providing coordinated and multi-disciplinary support to children and young people (and their families) following disclosures of child sexual abuse.

MIST offers trauma-informed, child-centred services including emotional support, guidance through police and court processes, and long-term therapeutic care.

MIST is co-located with Western Australian Police and operates from centres in Midland, Armadale and Rockingham, ensuring integrated responses that also address intersecting issues such as family and domestic violence and harmful sexual behaviours.

The service is currently funded by the Department of Communities and philanthropic organisations.

## System connections

Child protection systems play a vital role in safeguarding children and young people from harm. They provide early intervention, support, and protective measures for those at risk or who have experienced sexual violence, working closely with families, communities, and service providers to ensure safety and wellbeing.

The criminal justice system is also a critical part of the service response. It is an overarching term used to describe all the processes and organisations that provide a legal response to sexual offending. It starts from the point an offence is reported to police to the point at which the offender is released from custody.

The criminal justice system includes organisations and people such as the Western Australian Police, the Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions, court staff, judges, lawyers and corrective services.

Working alongside criminal justice agencies are organisations and people that provide support to victim-survivors, including sexual assault specialist services, victim-support services, and healthcare providers.

The criminal justice system does not operate in isolation; there is a complex interplay of circumstances that impact the victim-survivor in the criminal justice system and many factors that contribute to victim-survivors' decision to engage with or disengage from the criminal justice system.





## Part 2

### – Understanding Sexual Violence

This section highlights the drivers, impacts, and patterns of sexual violence and underscores the importance of understanding sexual violence in the context of power, intersectionality and trauma-informed and culturally safe responses. It aims to build shared knowledge across government, community, industry, and service sectors and reflects evidence that informs the Strategy.



## Understanding the impacts of sexual violence and the role of trauma-informed support

Sexual violence can cause profound and lasting harm to victim-survivors, their families and communities. Its effects may be immediate or persist long after the incident, affecting health, education, employment, relationships, socio-economic wellbeing and housing.<sup>40</sup> The physical, emotional and psychological impacts can be significant and enduring.<sup>41</sup>

Trauma may result from events perceived as physically or emotionally harmful or life threatening.<sup>42</sup> Each person's experience of trauma is unique and influenced by factors such as prior trauma, mental health and access to support.<sup>43</sup>

Early access to the right kind of specialist support – such as trauma-specialised counselling, health and forensic care and advocacy – can make a significant difference. It can help reduce long-term harm, support recovery, and improve outcomes across all areas of life.

Person-centred, culturally safe and trauma-specialised responses create environments where victim-survivors feel believed, respected, and empowered to seek healing and justice.<sup>44</sup>

Trauma-informed support must also recognise that responding to sexual violence can have an impact on professionals and support people. This highlights the importance of a sustainable trauma-specialised specialist service system that supports access to clinical supervision, debriefing and ongoing professional development to sustain a safe, skilled and trauma-informed workforce.<sup>45</sup>



## Support for sexual violence victim-survivors across the life course

Research shows that sexual violence can affect people of all ages.

**28.5%** of participants responded that they had experienced **sexual abuse before age 18** in the National childhood Maltreatment Study 2023

(n = 8,500)



**An estimated 12%** of women in WA experienced **sexual abuse by an adult before the age of 15**

(ABS Personal Safety Survey 2021-22)



**An estimated 23%** of women in WA have experienced **sexual violence since the age of 15**

(ABS Personal Safety Survey 2021-22)



**1% of participants, 65 years and older,** reported that they had experienced **sexual abuse in the past year of the survey** in the National Survey of Older People 2021

(n = 7,000)



Many victim-survivors experience multiple incidents of sexual violence throughout their lives. Perpetrators may deliberately target or groom individuals, increasing the risk of both initial and repeated victimisation across different stages of life and in various settings, including home, school, residential and aged care facilities.

Protective factors such as strong family and peer support, and access to effective and timely therapeutic interventions, can reduce the impacts of sexual violence and improve long-term outcomes.

Efforts to prevent and respond to sexual violence must be responsive to people's changing needs across their lives. This includes strengthening protective factors, addressing known risk factors and environments that enable violence, and supporting recovery at different life stages. Acknowledging that victim-survivors may need different types of support at different times – for example, when entering a new relationship, becoming a parent, or facing illness, they may wish to re-engage with counselling or other services.<sup>46</sup>

## Child Sexual Abuse

Child sexual abuse often co-occurs with other types of abuse, including physical and emotional abuse, and exposure to family and domestic violence.<sup>47</sup> It occurs in multiple settings, including within families, and is frequently perpetrated in environments where children should feel safest.

The National Strategy to Prevent and Respond to Child Sexual Abuse 2021-2030 recognises that abuse in these trusted contexts, particularly intra-familial, can make disclosure and intervention especially complex.<sup>48</sup>

Like other forms of sexual violence, the effects of child sexual abuse can be cumulative, complex and long-lasting with impacts affecting a person's development, psychological, wellbeing, physical and social outcomes.<sup>49</sup>

For children, young people, families and communities affected by child sexual abuse, timely access to the right therapeutic services is critical. Early and appropriate support can aid healing and recovery, prevent further harm and improve long-term outcomes.

## Harmful Sexual Behaviours in Children and Young People

As part of normal development, children and young people go through stages of sexual development. Not all sexualised behaviour is considered concerning or harmful, however, when these behaviours fall outside of what is considered developmentally, socially, and culturally expected – and may cause harm to themselves or others, they are referred to as harmful sexual behaviours.<sup>50</sup>

These behaviours may involve a lack of consent, coercion, force, or misuse of power when directed toward another child or young person.<sup>51</sup> The term encompasses a continuum of behaviour, from concerning to serious and extreme,<sup>52</sup> recognising the severity of harm that can occur, especially when responses are inadequate.<sup>53</sup>

Harmful sexual behaviours are distinct from adult-perpetrated sexual violence and require specialised, developmentally appropriate, and trauma-informed responses.<sup>54</sup> Under the National Strategy to Prevent and Respond to Child Sexual Abuse 2021-2030, national clinical and therapeutic frameworks are being developed to support understanding of developmentally expected sexual behaviours.

This work complements efforts in Western Australia to implement the Royal Commission's recommendations and will guide consistent, evidence-based prevention and intervention initiatives.



# Intersectionality

Building on the Strategy's intersectional principle, the concept of intersectionality helps us understand how as a result of power imbalances, sexual violence does not affect all people equally.

Individuals may face multiple, overlapping forms of discrimination and disadvantage. Systems of power and privilege can enable the perpetration of sexual violence onto those who face additional challenges increasing both the risk of sexual violence and creating barriers to accessing safety, justice, and support. Understanding these differences is essential to designing prevention, early intervention, response, and recovery approaches that are effective, inclusive, and culturally safe.

## Aboriginal people

Sexual offending against Aboriginal people in Western Australia is often underreported and undisclosed. This is shaped by a range of complex and systemic factors, including the use of sexual violence within the context of colonisation and the ongoing impacts of colonisation.<sup>55</sup> These include systemic racism, intergenerational trauma, and mistrust of government institutions such as police, and child protection systems.<sup>56</sup>

Available data regarding sexual offending against Aboriginal people is limited.<sup>57</sup> However, indicative evidence suggests that Aboriginal people experience sexual violence at rates approximately 3.5 times higher than non-Aboriginal people.<sup>58</sup>

Barriers to reporting and accessing support are compounded by fears of child removal, concerns about family and community relationships, and the lack of culturally safe and accessible services.

Effective responses must be developed in genuine partnership with Aboriginal communities, addressing systemic discrimination that:

- Increases the risk of sexual violence;
- Shapes the experiences and trauma of victim-survivors; and
- Creates barriers to accessing safe, equitable, and effective support.

## People with disability

People with disability experience higher rates of sexual violence than people without disability.<sup>59</sup>

Over their lifetime, women with cognitive disability face especially high risk, with reports indicating between 39 per cent and 60 per cent sexually assaulted before the age of 18.<sup>60</sup> Men with disability are also at increased risk, they are 2.6 times more likely to report sexual violence over their lifetime than men without disability.<sup>61</sup>

While people with disability may be subjected to the same types of violence as the broader population, they can also be exposed to distinct forms of abuse that occur in a wider range of contexts (including institutional settings, group homes, residential group homes and extended hospital stays) and from a wider range of people (such as formal support workers and carers).<sup>62</sup> Children and adults with disability are particularly vulnerable in institutional settings, where the nature of their disability, the discrimination they encounter, and their greater exposure to these environments compound risks.<sup>63</sup>

A history of systemic oppression, denial of fundamental human rights, disbelief and minimisation of disclosures by people with disability continues to present barriers to safety and justice.<sup>64</sup> People with disability may face disbelief or minimisation when they disclose, and the withdrawal of disability supports when family and domestic violence or sexual violence is present can leave them without help at the point they most need it. Paternalistic attitudes within disability support create power imbalances that increase vulnerability to abuse, neglect, and exploitation, and inherently discourage autonomy, self-determination and disclosure.<sup>65</sup>

To better support people with disability who have experienced sexual violence, strengthening the capability of disability services to recognise, believe, and appropriately support disclosures is crucial. This includes acknowledging the specific risk factors and barriers that people with disability face. Equally, sexual violence, justice, and perpetrator intervention services must build their knowledge of disability, communication needs, and systems such as the NDIS. Building sector-wide capability to understand and respond appropriately to people with disability who are victim-survivors of sexual violence is critical to providing safe, accessible, and effective responses.

Prevention and response efforts must focus on accessibility, cultural and disability competency, and systemic reform to ensure the rights of people with disability are supported with safety, dignity, and equity.

## **LGBTIQA+ communities**

LGBTIQA+ people may experience sexual violence differently from the general population, including identity-based abuse and harassment, dating app-facilitated sexual violence, and coercive behaviours linked to sexual orientation or gender identity. These harms often occur in contexts of stigma, prejudice, and systemic discrimination.

**In WA, trans and non-binary young people (71%) and young women (50%) were more likely than young men (33%) to report that they had experienced unwanted sex. LGBTQ+ young people (57%) were more likely than heterosexual young people (44%) to report that they had experienced unwanted sex.<sup>66</sup>**

These experiences are compounded by service-level and systemic barriers, including non-recognition of non-physical violence, risk of discrimination, and deeply entrenched cisnormative and heteronormative frameworks that misidentify perpetrators or overlook non-cisgender survivors.<sup>67</sup>

Additionally, shortcomings in data collection – including inconsistent recording of sexual orientation, gender identity, and sex characteristics, render LGBTIQA+ communities largely invisible in national datasets. This invisibility impedes targeted service design, resourcing, and risk mitigation.

Effective responses to sexual violence must explicitly include LGBTIQA+ people, provide culturally and structurally inclusive services and responses for diverse gender identities, and strengthen data collection.



### **CALD communities**

People from migrant, refugee, and culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds may face unique risks due to social isolation, language barriers, limited knowledge of Australian legal and support systems, and experiences of trauma or displacement. Cultural norms, fear of community stigma, or mistrust of authorities can also discourage reporting or engagement with services.<sup>68</sup>

Effective prevention and response must be culturally responsive, linguistically accessible, and informed by the expertise of community organisations.<sup>69</sup>

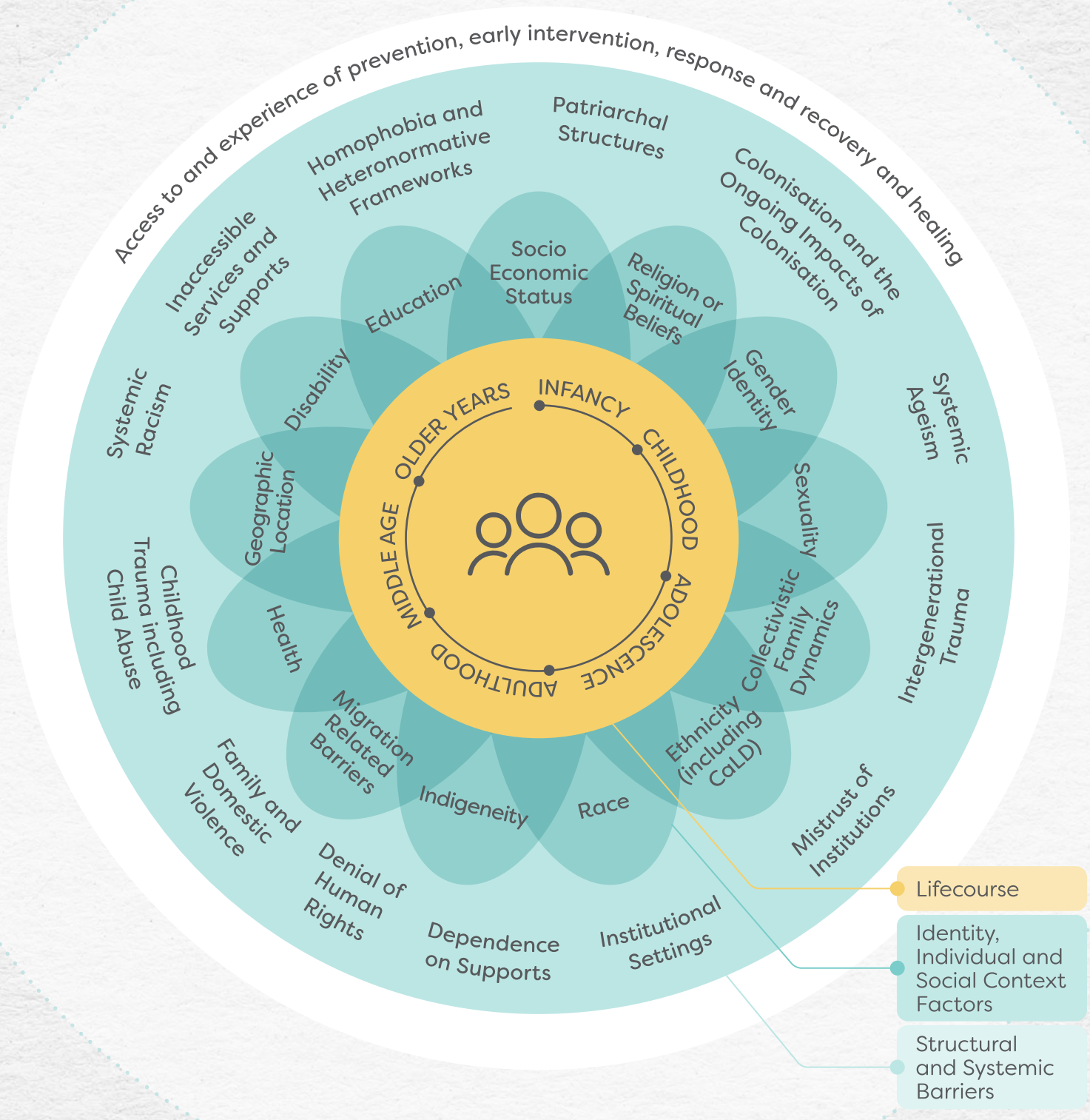
### **Other considerations**

Other groups may experience specific risk factors or consequences, including older people, people experiencing homelessness, mothers and pregnant people, and children and young people.

Risk factors and impacts can vary across the life course, requiring tailored interventions, protective supports, and specialised services to prevent harm, promote recovery, and address systemic inequities.

While some intersectional data is available, there is limited Western Australian-specific data. Data limitations are particularly evident for certain groups, including people from CALD communities, people experiencing homelessness, those with complex mental health needs, and individuals facing multiple layers of disadvantage. These gaps can hinder effective policy and service responses and reinforces the need for improved data infrastructure and targeted investment to ensure equitable access to support across diverse communities.<sup>70</sup>

## All people in Western Australia are free from sexual violence



This diagram is not exhaustive, however intends to demonstrate how intersecting experiences of disadvantage – such as gender inequality, ableism, homophobia, racism, and other forms of social exclusion – can compound the risk and impact of sexual violence.

Structural and systemic discrimination occurs when policies, institutions or cultural norms unintentionally exclude or limit access to support for certain groups.

These inequalities can increase the power of perpetrators to use sexual violence

and reduce the likelihood of consequences or accountability.

Understanding how power operates across systems and identities is essential to designing inclusive, effective prevention and response strategies.

# Perpetrators of sexual violence

Every act of sexual violence involves a perpetrator. Given the high number of victim-survivors in Western Australia, it is likely that a substantial portion of the population has used some form of sexual violence.

Research suggests that nearly one in four Australians aged between 18 and 45 have engaged in behaviours that meet the definition of sexual violence, with men significantly more likely to have perpetrated any and each form of sexual violence examined and to have perpetrated multiple forms of sexual violence.<sup>71</sup> These findings point to the need for targeted interventions to prevent abuse and support behaviour change.

Preventing sexual violence requires a clear and sustained focus on those who perpetrate it – by intervening early, addressing harmful behaviours and ensuring accountability. There is no single profile of a perpetrator.



People who use sexual violence come from all socio-economic, cultural, educational and familial backgrounds.

**While any individual can perpetrate sexual violence, there are some factors associated with a greater likelihood of perpetration. These include individual factors (such as alcohol and drug use), relationship factors (such as family history of violence), community factors (such as socioeconomic disadvantage) and society factors (such as attitudes that support or minimise sexual violence).<sup>72</sup> Factors associated with violence perpetration do not necessarily cause violence.<sup>73</sup>**

Sexual violence is a way to exert power and control. Gendered power imbalances – particularly between men and women, and between adults and young people – are central to most cases.<sup>74</sup>

Creating a culture of accountability requires more than individual action – it demands a whole-of-community approach. This includes:

- increasing the visibility of people who use sexual violence
- delivering diverse and accountable interventions
- reinforcing that responsibility lies solely with the person who caused harm

Public education and awareness initiatives must challenge harmful attitudes, reject behaviours that excuse sexual violence, and promote accountability as essential to safety and justice.



# Drivers of sexual violence

Sexual violence is an abuse of power and control, involving an individual's choice to assert dominance, entitlement, and control over another person. It is also shaped and enabled by social norms and conditions that normalise, excuse or tolerate such behaviour.

Sexual violence arises from a complex interplay of individual beliefs, behaviours, and experiences, and the wider social, cultural, and institutional structures.<sup>75</sup> These structures can create environments where perpetrators feel entitled to act without consequence, and where victim-survivors are silenced, disbelieved, or blamed.

## Gendered drivers of sexual violence

Sexual violence is a gendered issue. It is almost always perpetrated by men against women and is driven by gender inequality and other forms of discrimination that reinforce power imbalances. These imbalances are embedded not only in personal relationships but also in social, cultural, and institutional systems.

Evidence identifies **four key gendered drivers of violence against women**, including sexual violence:<sup>76</sup>

1. **Condoning of violence against women.**
2. **Men's control of decision-making and limits to women's independence.**
3. **Rigid gender roles and dominant forms of masculinity.**
4. **Male peer relationships and cultures of masculinity that emphasise aggression, dominance and control.**

These drivers are often reinforced by factors such as exposure to violence, limited prosocial behaviour, and resistance to gender equality.<sup>77</sup>

Given the high prevalence of sexual violence against girls and young women, a dual approach is needed focusing on long-term prevention by engaging men and boys, while empowering women and girls with skills in self-advocacy and resilience – without placing responsibility on victims.

The 2019 Speaking Out Survey revealed that girls' attitudes often fail to distinguish between pressure and consent, and wrongly place the responsibility for preventing sexual assault on young women.<sup>78</sup> These views highlight a lack of understanding regarding consent and gender equity that would benefit from targeted programs that teach young people to recognise and challenge coercion, harmful sexual behaviours, and traditional gender expectations.

It is vital to foster environments that support boys and young men to develop positive beliefs and attitudes about gender, relationships, and identity. Promoting healthy masculinities, emotional literacy, and respectful relationships helps young men to be their best selves, build empathy, and form meaningful connections.

When boys and young men feel misunderstood, stereotyped, or blamed, they may become disengaged, resistant to change or seek out alternative spaces that reinforce harmful norms. Creating inclusive, affirming spaces for boys and young men is critical to countering these influences and fostering long-term cultural change. This includes equipping educators, parents, and community leaders with tools to engage men and boys in meaningful conversations about respect, consent, and gender equality – while also recognising their strengths and potential as leaders in violence prevention.

Engaging men and boys as allies is critical to ending sexual violence. This involves supporting them to reflect on personal and community attitudes and behaviours, speak out against sexism and violence, and actively contribute to cultural change.<sup>79</sup>

## Social and environmental contributors

Sexual violence can occur across all socio-economic groups. However, certain environmental factors can enable and increase rates of sexual violence, including:<sup>80</sup>

- poverty and economic disadvantage
- housing insecurity
- limited access to essential services.

Other intersecting factors – such as densely populated communities, male reputation, geographical and social isolation, community victim-blaming, structural disadvantage, lack of support services and systemic re-victimisation such as dismissal of victim-survivor disclosures by services and supports – can further compound risk and contribute to cycles of harm.

Importantly, none of these factors are known causes of sexual assault. Rather, they reflect the burden of sexual violence experienced by women facing multiple forms of disadvantage.<sup>81</sup>

## Myths, misconceptions and harmful community attitudes

Myths, misconceptions, and harmful attitudes can drive sexual violence, contribute to the shame, stigma and silencing experienced by victim-survivors and reduce accountability for perpetrators.<sup>82</sup> These attitudes are shaped by norms which work to ignore, excuse, condone, and even encourage sexual violence and are reflected in national data on community beliefs and perceptions.

Two major national studies provide insight into these attitudes:

- The **National Community Attitudes towards Violence against Women Survey** is the world's longest running population level survey of Australian community attitudes towards violence against women.
- The **Community Attitudes Study** released by the National Centre for Action on Child Sexual Abuse explores public understanding, victim-blaming, and responses to disclosures of child sexual abuse.

The **2021 National Community Attitudes towards Violence Against Women Survey** showed that a substantial proportion of people held incorrect and harmful attitudes and beliefs about sexual violence.

**1 in 3 (34%)** respondents believed it is common for sexual assault accusations to be made against men as a way of 'getting back' at them

**1 in 4 (24%)** believe that often women who say they were raped had led the man on and had regrets

**1 in 4 (25%)** believe that once aroused men "may not realise" a woman does not want to have sex.

**1 in 8 (13%)** people believe that women being persistently pursued without consent and catcalls are flattering for women

**1 in 11 (9%)** respondents didn't recognise sending an unwanted sexual picture as technology facilitated sexual violence

**1 in 3 (30%)** thought intimate partner sexual violence was 'less severe and more acceptable' than sexual violence committed by a stranger

**1 in 5 (20%)** respondents did not know that non-consensual sex in marriage is an offence.<sup>83</sup>



Findings from the **2024 Community Attitudes Study** reveal concerning levels of victim-blaming and disbelief toward children and adolescents who experience sexual abuse.

**2 in 5 (40%)** respondents agreed that older children have a responsibility to actively resist adults' sexual advances.

**1 in 8 (12%)** agreed that adolescent girls who wear revealing clothing are 'asking' to be sexually abused.

**1 in 5 (22%)** were neutral on whether children should always be believed when they disclose abuse.

**1 in 6 (18%)** were neutral on whether children are too unreliable to take their word over an adult's.

**4 in 5 (80%)** adults had never received a child's disclosure of sexual abuse; of those who had, less than half provided support or reported it.<sup>84</sup>

Together, these studies highlight the urgent need for public education and system reform to challenge misconceptions and improve responses to sexual violence across all age groups.

Community attitudes in relation to sexual violence can be shaped – both positively and negatively – by media and communication, including social media, marketing, cultural narratives, education and government policy. These influences can reinforce harmful norms or challenge them, depending on how sexual violence is represented and discussed.

Activities aimed at addressing sexual violence should work to address harmful attitudes and misconceptions and promote accurate and respectful narratives that centre perpetrator accountability.

Victim-blaming remains a significant barrier to justice and recovery. It shifts responsibility away from those who perpetrate violence and contributes to the silencing, shame, and stigma experienced by victim-survivors and can retraumatise individuals and delay recovery. This includes questioning a person's behaviour, clothing, or credibility, rather than focusing on the actions of the perpetrator.

The media plays a powerful role in shaping public understanding of sexual violence. Ethical and evidence-informed reporting is essential to avoid sensationalism, challenge myths, and prevent reinforcement of victim-blaming narratives. Coverage that highlights perpetrator behaviour and systemic accountability can help shift community attitudes and foster a culture where victim-survivors are believed and supported.<sup>85</sup>



## Common myths and misconceptions

✗ Sexual violence is always committed by a stranger

✗ Sexual violence always involves force or physical violence

✗ Victim-survivors always scream or fight back

✗ Victim-survivors are to blame for sexual violence because they wore revealing clothing, were intoxicated or are a sex worker.

✗ Victim-survivors will report sexual violence immediately, act upset and remember the experience clearly.

## What the evidence actually says

✓ Evidence shows that sexual violence is most often perpetrated by men, and someone known to the victim-survivor.<sup>86</sup>

✓ Sexual violence is not always physical and includes a range of behaviours including sexual comments, online abuse and grooming. The use of verbal coercion or alcohol or drug-facilitated or incapacitated coercion by sexual violence perpetrators is significantly more common than the use of physical force.<sup>87</sup>

✓ There is no "right" way to react to sexual violence. Victims of sexual violence are often afraid of being killed or seriously injured. A survival instinct can commonly kick in, and victim-survivors may freeze or be co-operative due to fear and shock or to save their own life.<sup>88</sup>

✓ None of these factors mean a victim-survivor consents to, or is to blame for, sexual violence.<sup>89</sup>

✓ Most victim-survivors of sexual offending never report to police and when they do, it is normal for their memory to be impacted by trauma and for victim-survivors to have a range of emotional responses.<sup>90</sup>

## Common myths and misconceptions

✗ Men cannot be victims of sexual violence.

✗ People often lie about sexual violence victimisation.

✗ Violence against Aboriginal women is solely or predominantly perpetrated by Aboriginal men.

✗ Sexual violence is a crime of passion or is motivated by an uncontrollable sexual urge.

✗ A person cannot sexually assault their partner or spouse.

✗ If a person had a prior sexual relationship with the perpetrator, they cannot be sexually assaulted by them.

## What the evidence actually says

✓ More than 4 per cent of men across Australia have experienced sexual assault.<sup>91</sup> Men with psychological or physical disability<sup>92</sup> and gay or bisexual men are more at risk.<sup>93</sup>

1 in 5 Australian boys have experienced child sexual abuse.<sup>94</sup> Rigid gender norms can create barriers to help-seeking for male victim-survivors and victim-survivors of female perpetrators.

✓ False allegations of sexual assault are exceedingly rare.<sup>95</sup> Victims are more likely to be silent about their experience than to make it up.

✓ Violence against Aboriginal women is perpetrated by men of all cultural backgrounds.<sup>96</sup>

✓ Sexual violence is about power, control, and domination, not passion.<sup>97</sup> It is a deliberate act of violence.

✓ Sexual violence can occur in any relationship, including marriage and long-term partnerships.<sup>98</sup>

✓ Prior sexual history with a person does not constitute consent for future sexual activity. Consent must be given freely and willingly for every single sexual act.<sup>99</sup>

# The role of technology and online behaviour in sexual violence

Technology has expanded the ways in which sexual violence can be perpetrated.<sup>100</sup> Online platforms are increasingly used to facilitate harm through behaviours such as sexual harassment, exploitation, coercion, cyberstalking, and intimate image abuse. This includes the non-consensual creation and distribution of deepfake or AI-generated pornography without consent.<sup>101</sup>

## Key statistics:

A 2022 study found that **72.3% of dating app users** in Australia had **experienced online sexual violence** in the past five years.<sup>102</sup>

A recent Australian Institute of Criminology (AIC) study found that **11% of adolescents aged 16 to 18 had experienced sexual extortion**, with more than half of those victims targeted before turning 16. While all genders are equally likely to experience sextortion, male victims were more often targeted by strangers demanding money, while female victims were more likely to receive demands for intimate photos or videos.<sup>103</sup>

In 2024-25, there was a **41% rise in reports of online child sexual abuse material** made to the Australian Centre to Counter Child Exploitation (ACCCE).<sup>104</sup>

A 2022 national survey into tech-based abuse found that almost **one third of women (28.9%) surveyed had experienced sexual and image-based abuse**, compared with 19.3% of men.<sup>105</sup>

**Digital spaces can also play a powerful role in shaping attitudes and beliefs that contribute to sexual violence.** Online communities promoting misogynistic ideologies can reinforce sexual entitlement, hostility toward women, and rigid gender norms. These spaces can be particularly influential for boys and young men seeking identity and belonging, especially when disconnected from traditional support systems.

Recommendation algorithms on mainstream platforms can amplify and normalise this content over-time by pushing content to users towards increasingly extreme content, without them actively searching for it.<sup>106</sup> This form of online radicalisation is increasingly recognised in national security and violence prevention frameworks due to its links with gender-based violence and ideologically motivated extremism.<sup>107</sup>

To effectively address these risks, it is essential to acknowledge the role of digital platforms and their rapidly evolving nature. Building digital literacy and equipping individuals, especially young people, with the tools to navigate online spaces safely is critical for prevention, early intervention and long-term cultural change.

## Pornography, attitudes and sexual violence

### A 2024 survey found

the **average age at which participants had first seen pornography was 13.6** years (young men: 13.2, young women: 13.9)

**age of exposure was relatively consistent across ages, genders, sexuality** and whether they had a non-English speaking parent

of those who had seen pornography, **53% of young men and 19% of young women watched pornography at least once a week**

**31% of young people were watching pornography as a form of sex education**

**79% agreed that pornography impacts how women are viewed in real life** (young men: 72%, young women: 85%)

**young people recognised that online pornography can negatively impact their understanding of consent** (74%), ideas about intimate relationships (76%), expectations of sex (76%) and views on gender stereotypes (64%).<sup>108</sup>

Pornography is widely accessible online and frequently encountered by young people, often unintentionally.<sup>109</sup> Exposure can shape attitudes toward sex, relationships, and gender roles,<sup>110</sup> and may contribute to harmful sexual behaviours.<sup>111</sup>

Mainstream pornography often depicts sexual violence (including strangulation), and degrading portrayals of women. Exposure is linked to reduced sexual safety,<sup>112</sup> such as lower condom use, and to risky behaviours, including choking during sex – a practice many young people first learn about through pornography.<sup>113</sup>

Young people have identified education as the most helpful tool to counter these harms.<sup>114</sup> Comprehensive, age-appropriate education can help build critical thinking, promote safe, respectful and consensual sexual activity and relationships, and reduce the influence of harmful sexual scripts.<sup>115</sup>



# Forms of sexual violence

## Sexual assault

An over-arching and widely used term that refers to any physical contact of a sexual nature directed toward another person where that person does not give consent, gives consent as a result of intimidation or deception, or where consent cannot legally be given.<sup>116</sup>

Sexual assault can occur in many different settings where the victim does not consent or is incapable of giving consent due to age or other factors.

For example, some people living with cognitive impairment need appropriate support to be able to consent to or express their will and preference to engage in sexual activity. These people may experience increased vulnerability to sexual assault in a residential facility, supported accommodation or similar spaces.

Sexual assault does not always involve penetration, however, often rape and sexual assault are used interchangeably to refer to penetration of the mouth, vagina or anus by any part of the attacker's body or by an object, without the consent of the victim.

In WA criminal legislation, rape of an adult is referred to as sexual penetration without consent.

## Child sexual abuse

The [National Strategy to Prevent and Respond to Child Sexual Abuse](#) defines child sexual abuse as any act that exposes a child or young person to, or involves a child or young person in, sexual activities that: they do not understand; do not or cannot consent to; are not accepted by the community; and are unlawful.<sup>117</sup>

This can include grooming or the use of technology to groom or facilitate the sexual abuse of a child or produce or share child sexual abuse material online.

## Sexual harassment

An unwelcome sexual advance or comment, an unwelcome request for sexual favours or other unwelcome conduct of a sexual nature which makes a person feel offended, humiliated and/or intimidated, where a reasonable person would anticipate that reaction in the circumstances.<sup>118</sup> It includes publishing a statement of a sexual nature about a person online or making a comment of a sexual nature about one person in the presence of another person.

Sexual harassment can include unwelcome comments about an individual's gender identity, gender expression or sexual orientation.

Sexual harassment occurs in workplaces at every level and in every industry.<sup>119</sup> It can also occur in educational environments, online, in sporting and recreation venues, pubs, bars and other public, entertainment or retail spaces as well as in private, family or intimate partner contexts.

## Intimate partner sexual violence

Intimate partner sexual violence is the intentional perpetration of sexual acts without consent in intimate relationships and can be characterised by deliberate intimidation or coercion.

Intimate partner sexual violence can encompass all forms of sexual violence including sexual assault and sexual harassment.



Intimate partner relationships can include current or past marriages, domestic partnerships or the early days of dating. Intimate partner sexual violence is both a form of sexual violence and domestic violence.<sup>120</sup>

Coercive control is almost always an underpinning dynamic of domestic violence. Sexual violence can be used as one tactic in a range of behaviours to control or dominate another person.<sup>121</sup> Coercive control is different in every relationship and can be used to normalise sexual violence or perpetrate sexual violence.

Evidence also shows that sexual violence in an intimate partner relationship can be an indicator of escalating domestic violence and that women who experience intimate partner sexual violence are at increased risk of being killed.<sup>122</sup>

### **Sexual comments**

Can be ordinary remarks which aren't explicitly sexual in nature but have a sexual implication to them, such as innuendo. Sexual comments happen in many different places but when occurring in the street or public spaces it can include wolf whistling or cat calling.

### **Sexual threat or coercion**

Can be verbal, gestural or written, is sexual in nature, and is intended to scare, hurt or annoy a person, pressure a person into having sex, or make them watch pornography.

Sexual coercion can include any sexual activity that happens when a person is tricked, pressured, threatened or forced in a non-physical way.

Sexual threats can include a threat to spread rumours about a person's sexuality or sexual relationships or threatening to share a sexualised image of a person.

### **Technology-facilitated sexual violence**

A wide-ranging term that can encompass many subtypes, including unwanted explicit and offensive communication by word, graphic image or social media, online harassing behaviours, posting intimate images, generating fake intimate images, cyberflashing, sextortion, and monitoring and controlling behaviours (for example, surveillance and tracking) and coercing or forcing a person to watch pornography.

### **Stalking**

Repeatedly following, watching, or harassing someone in a way that makes them fear for their safety or causes them substantial emotional distress. It can be done in person, electronically, and it may involve actions that are not illegal by themselves, such as sending flowers or love notes.

### **Stealthing**

Removing or intentionally breaking a condom without consent.

### **Modern slavery**

Forms of modern slavery, such as forced marriage, servitude or trafficking in persons may involve sexual violence.

### **Reproductive coercion and abuse**

Reproductive coercion and abuse may include behaviours that are pregnancy promoting or pregnancy preventing and refers to a range of behaviours such as pressure, manipulation, emotional blackmail, trickery, threats and the use of various kinds of abuse to dictate a person's reproductive choices or interfere with their reproductive autonomy and may include involuntary non-therapeutic sterilisation.<sup>123</sup>

# Glossary

**ACCO:**

Refers to Aboriginal Community-Controlled Organisations. A business, charity, not-for-profit organisation, incorporated under Commonwealth, state or territory legislation, that has at least 51 per cent Aboriginal ownership and/or directorship and is operated for the benefit of Aboriginal communities.<sup>124</sup>

**CALD communities:**

CALD stands for 'culturally and linguistically diverse'. This term refers to individuals and communities who differ along the lines of language, religion, culture, or ethnicity, and whose ancestry is not Aboriginal, or Anglo Saxon.<sup>125</sup>

People from CALD backgrounds in Australia are not one group. They are diverse in their cultures, languages, religious affiliations, migration histories, and social or economic backgrounds.

**Consent:**

Sexual consent is a free, voluntary and informed agreement between people to participate in a sexual act. This agreement is only present when these people mutually and genuinely want to engage in that sexual act, and actively ensure their partner does too.<sup>126</sup>

Consent requires ongoing and mutual communication and decision making and can be withdrawn at any point. Legal definitions of sexual consent and age of consent differ between jurisdictions.

In Western Australia:

- People under 16 years old cannot legally consent to sex or sexual acts, even if they said 'yes' at the time.
- The age of consent is 18 years old if there is a relationship between people where one person is in a position of power or authority over the other person. An example of this is the relationship between a teacher and a student, or a sports coach and a team member.

- A person must also have the cognitive capacity to consent to the sexual activity at the time and must not be misled about the nature or purpose of the sexual activity and not be influenced by someone abusing a position of authority, trust or dependency.

In the context of forced marriage, a person does not freely or fully consent to the marriage because of threats, deception or coercion, or because they are incapable of understanding the nature and effect of the marriage ceremony, or the individual is under the age of 16 years.<sup>127</sup>

**Coercive control:**

The [National Principles to Address Coercive Control in Family and Domestic Violence](#) defines coercive control as almost always an underpinning dynamic of family and domestic violence. Perpetrators exert power and dominance over victim-survivors using patterns of abusive behaviours over time that create fear and deny liberty and autonomy. Perpetrators use many types of abusive behaviours, including physical or non-physical abusive behaviours, or a combination of both.<sup>128</sup> Coercive control is perpetrated predominantly by men against women and may include: threats to harm; physical, sexual, verbal and/or emotional abuse; psychologically controlling acts; financial abuse; social isolation; systems abuse; stalking; deprivation of liberty; intimidation; technology-facilitated abuse; and harassment.<sup>129</sup>

**Cultural safety:**

A culturally safe environment is one that is safe for people to have their identity and community acknowledged and respected. It creates conditions of shared meaning, knowledge and understanding, in an atmosphere of mutual dignity and respect to work towards each other's specific needs.<sup>130</sup>

For Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, a culturally safe environment is one where they feel safe and secure in their identity, culture and community.<sup>131</sup>



**Evidence-based:**

Refers to models, strategies, approaches or practices that have been shown to be effective through evaluation or research. These findings are typically published or documented in academic studies, program evaluations, policy submissions or organisational reports.

There is a well-established evidence base for preventing gender-based violence, and as our understanding of the drivers of sexual violence across different communities and settings grows, this evidence base will continue to develop.<sup>132</sup>

**Grooming:**

Behaviours aimed at manipulating and controlling a child, their family and carers or other support networks, or organisations to facilitate sexual abuse.

Grooming is a form of sexual violence where the intent of the manipulation is to gain access to the child, obtain the child's compliance, maintain the child's silence, or to avoid discovery of sexual abuse.<sup>133</sup> It can include a deliberate transition process to gain trust, manipulate power differences and build emotional connections to facilitate sexual abuse.

Grooming can be done by people well known to the child and can take place in-person and online, and also be difficult to identify.<sup>134</sup> Perpetrators may also use grooming behaviours to facilitate sexual violence against people living with cognitive disability and other vulnerable persons.

**Harmful sexual behaviour:**

Sexual behaviours displayed by children and young people that fall outside of what may be considered developmentally, socially, and culturally expected, and may cause harm to themselves or others, and occur either face to face and/or via technology.<sup>135</sup>

When these behaviours involve another child or young person, they may include a lack of consent, reciprocity, and mutuality, and may involve the use of coercion, force, or misuse of power.

The term 'harmful sexual behaviours' is an inclusive term that includes concerning, very concerning and serious and extreme behaviours across a continuum. Behaviours in this spectrum vary considerably and include behaviours that are problematic to the child's own development as well as those that are harmful to others.<sup>136</sup>

Harmful sexual behaviours are impacted by a variety of factors, including developmental expectations, past history of trauma, the context within which the behaviour occurs, persistency and frequency of the behaviour, and the level of coercion, power and control displayed by one child over another.<sup>137</sup>

**High priority settings:**

Settings where there is higher risk and prevalence of sexual violence, including online environments, supported accommodation for people with disability and care facilities or settings which have reduced access to supports and services, including some regional and remote areas.

**Image-based abuse/sexual violence:**

Refers to the non-consensual creation, distribution or threatened distribution of nude or sexual images as a means of extortion, control, sexual gratification, voyeurism, increased social status or monetary gain.<sup>138</sup>

**Intergenerational trauma:**

A form of historical trauma transmitted across generations. In Australia, intergenerational trauma particularly affects Aboriginal people, especially the children, grandchildren and future generations of the Stolen Generations.<sup>139</sup>

**Intersectionality:**

Intersectionality refers to how different aspects of a person's identity expose them to overlapping forms of discrimination that greatly increase their marginalisation.<sup>140</sup>



These intersecting experiences of disadvantage – such as gender inequality, ableism, homophobia, racism, and other forms of social exclusion – can compound the risk and impact of sexual violence.

Structural and systemic discrimination occurs when policies, institutions or cultural norms unintentionally exclude or limit access to support for certain groups. These inequalities can increase the power of perpetrators to use sexual violence and reduce the likelihood of consequences or accountability.

Understanding how power operates across systems and identities is essential to designing inclusive, effective prevention and response strategies.<sup>141</sup>

### **Intimate partner violence:**

Also referred to as ‘domestic violence’, refers to any behaviour within an intimate relationship that causes physical, sexual or psychological harm. Intimate partner violence can also occur outside of a domestic setting, such as in public and between two people who do not live together.<sup>142</sup>

### **Life course approach:**

A life course approach is based on the view that vulnerabilities and strengths change across a person’s life span, and that the experience of harm in adulthood and later in life may be linked to the experience of harm earlier in life. This perspective also seeks to understand social pathways in the context of socio-historical conditions across an individual’s life.<sup>143</sup>

### **Perpetrators:**

Refers to people who use sexual violence or commit an act of sexual violence. This Strategy acknowledges that not all communities use the term ‘perpetrator’, including Aboriginal communities who may prefer to use the term people who use sexual violence.

### **Population groups:**

A collection of individuals who share common characteristics, such as age, ethnicity, or socio-economic status, within a specific geographical area.

### **Public health approach:**

A framework for preventing violence that examines how risk and protective factors operate across individual, community, institutional, and societal levels. It focuses on addressing the social and structural determinants of health through coordinated, population-level strategies. The approach is characterised by the following principles:

- Can be directed at specific subsets of the population through comprehensive, whole-of-setting initiatives, rather than being universally applied to all individuals.
- Recognises that obstacles to positive health and life outcomes exist beyond individual control and that addressing structural factors is necessary to reduce inequality.
- Focus is on addressing the social and environmental determinants of health and life outcomes (for example, gender, housing, early childhood experiences, social inclusion, income, education, and employment).
- It applies a range of strategies and interventions—such as financial, regulatory, or social policies—to tackle a problem effectively.

### **Relationships:**

Refers to the diverse connections individuals form with others, encompassing emotional, social, romantic, and sexual dimensions.

In the context of relationships education, relationships can be explored to help individuals:

- Understand different types of relationships, including sexual, friendships, family and romantic
- Recognise healthy versus unhealthy relationship dynamics, such as respect, consent, communication, boundaries, and equality
- Develop skills for building and maintaining respectful relationships
- Promote safety and wellbeing, including understanding consent, managing peer pressure, and accessing support services.

**Sexual violence:**

Sexual violence is sexual activity towards another person who does not consent, has withdrawn consent or cannot consent due to their age or other factors. Sexual violence includes:

- sexual assault
- sexual threats or coercion
- child sexual abuse
- street-based harassment
- intimate partner sexual violence
- grooming
- technology-facilitated abuse (e.g. image-based abuse, online harassment).

Sexual violence occurs in many contexts, both inside and outside intimate or family relationships, in public and private settings, and across all communities.

**Settings:**

Environments in which people live, work, learn, socialise and engage. This includes homes, schools, workplaces, online platforms or community spaces.

**Trauma-informed:**

Trauma-informed care and practice recognises the prevalence of trauma and its impacts on the emotional, psychological and social wellbeing of people and communities. It recognises that each individual's response to traumatic events is unique and reflects a complex interplay of factors.

Trauma-informed practice means integrating an understanding of past and current experiences of violence and trauma into all aspects of service delivery. The goal of trauma-informed systems is to avoid re-traumatising individuals and support safety, choice and control to promote healing.<sup>144</sup>

**Victim-blaming:**

Victim-blaming refers to attitudes, behaviours or responses that place responsibility for sexual violence on the person who experienced it, rather than the person who perpetrated it.

This can include questioning a victim-survivor's actions, choices, credibility or appearance, and contributes to stigma, silence, and underreporting.

Victim-blaming reinforces harmful myths about sexual violence and undermines efforts to hold perpetrators accountable.

**Victim-survivor:**

A victim-survivor is a person who has experienced or is experiencing sexual violence. It is also used to refer to people who have experienced family and domestic violence or gender-based violence. This term acknowledges the strength and resilience shown by people who have experienced or are currently living with violence.

People who have experienced violence have different preferences about how they would like to be identified and may choose to use 'victim' or 'survivor' separately, or another term altogether. Some people prefer to use 'people who experience, or are at risk of experiencing, violence'.<sup>145</sup>

**Whole-of-government approach:**

A coordinated approach where government agencies work across portfolio boundaries to achieve shared goals reflective of each agency's roles and responsibilities. It aims to achieve policy coherence to improve effectiveness and efficiency.

**Whole-of-systems approach:**

A way of understanding and responding to complex social issues by recognising that they are not isolated issues, but are interconnected within broader systems, highlighting the need for collaboration across government, non-government, and community sectors.<sup>146</sup>

# Appendix A:

## Alignment to national and state policies

The Western Australian Sexual Violence Prevention and Response Strategy is informed by and aligned with policies at a national and state level, particularly the [National Plan to End Violence against Women and Children 2022-2032](#). The Strategy interacts with other mechanisms to address sexual violence at a whole-of-population level.

A key principle of the Strategy is an emphasis on collective responsibility and collaboration. It is Western Australia's first dedicated sexual violence strategy – it is designed to operate in conjunction with a range of other protections, strategies, actions and frameworks.

**Table 1: Overview of Government of Western Australia policies and frameworks**

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A Safe Place: A Western Australian strategy to provide safe and stable accommodation, and support to people experiencing mental health, alcohol and other drug issues 2020–2025

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A Trauma-Informed Approach Guidance for Western Australian State Government (in development)

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A Western Australia for Everyone: State Disability Strategy 2020–2030

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Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisation Strategy 2022 to 2032

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Aboriginal Empowerment Strategy – Western Australia 2021–2029

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Aboriginal Family Safety Strategy 2022–2023: Western Australia's Strategy to Reduce Violence Against Aboriginal Women and Children

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All Paths Lead to a Home: Western Australia's 10 Year Strategy to Homelessness 2020–2030

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At Risk Youth Strategy 2022–2027

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Closing the Gap Implementation Plan 2023–2025 – Western Australia


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Family and Domestic Violence (FDV) System Reform Plan

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Foundations for Change: A Western Australian Framework to guide primary prevention of violence against women (2024)

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Framework for understanding and guiding responses to harmful sexual behaviours in children and young people

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Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex, queer and asexual plus (LGBTIQA+) Inclusion Strategy (in development)

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Path to Safety: Western Australia's Strategy to Reduce Family and Domestic Violence 2020–2030

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Rapid Response Framework for children and young people in care and those with a care experience

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Stronger Together: WA's Plan for Gender Equality

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WA Aboriginal Health and Wellbeing Framework 2015–2030

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WA Housing Strategy 2020–2030

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WA Language Services Policy 2020

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WA Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Intersex (LGBTI) Health Strategy 2019 – 2024

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WA Multicultural Policy Framework 2020

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WA Strategy to Respond to the Abuse of Older People (Elder Abuse) 2019–2029

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Western Australian Government response to the Community Development and Justice Standing Committee Report 2: 'Enough is Enough.' Sexual harassment against women in the FIFO mining industry

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Western Australian Men's Health and Wellbeing Policy: A roadmap for healthier Western Australian men and boys

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Western Australian Mental Health Promotion, Mental Illness, Alcohol and Other Drug Prevention Plan 2018–2025

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Western Australian Suicide Prevention Framework 2021–2025

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Western Australian Women's Health and Wellbeing Policy

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Whole-of-Government Aboriginal Community-Controlled Organisation (ACCO) Strategy for community services to Aboriginal People

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**Table 2: Overview of relevant national policies and frameworks**

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Action Plan 2023-2025

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Action Plan Addressing Gender-based Violence in Higher Education

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Australia's Disability Strategy 2021-2031

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Change the Story: A shared framework for the primary prevention of violence against women in Australia (2nd Ed.)

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Changing the landscape: A national resource to prevent violence against women and girls with disabilities

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Changing the Picture: A national resource to support the prevention of violence against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and their children

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Engage! A strategy to include young people in the decisions we make

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Minimum Practice Standards: Specialist and Community Support Services Responding to Child Sexual Abuse

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National Action Plan for the Health of Children and Young People 2020-2030

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National Agreement on Closing the Gap

---

The National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children 2021-2031

---

National Higher Education Code to Prevent and Respond to Gender-based Violence

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National Men's Health Strategy 2020-2030

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National Plan to End Violence against Women and Children 2022-2032

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National Plan to Respond to the Abuse of Older Australians (Elder Abuse) 2019-2023

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National Principles to Address Coercive Control in Family and Domestic Violence

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National Strategy to Prevent and Respond to Child Sexual Abuse 2021-2030

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National Women's Health Strategy 2020-2030

---

Respect@Work National Inquiry into Sexual Harassment in Australian Workplaces

---

Royal Commission Final Report into Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of People with Disability

---

Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse 2017

---

Standards of Practice Manual for Services Against Sexual Violence (3rd edition)

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The Commonwealth Consent Policy Framework

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Work Plan to Strengthen Criminal Justice Responses to Sexual Assault 2022-27

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Vision 2030: Blueprint for Mental Health and Suicide Prevention

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