

August 30, 2022

Project Team - Draft NSW Sexual Violence Plan
DFV Strategic Priorities
Women, Family and Community Safety Directorate
Strategy, Policy and Commissioning Division
Policy, Reform and Legislation Branch
Department of Communities and Justice
Locked Bag 5000, Parramatta NSW 2124

E: dfsivr@justice.nsw.gov.au

Dear Project Team,

Draft NSW Sexual Violence Plan 2022-2027

Barnardos Australia (Barnardos) thanks the Department of Communities and Justice for the opportunity to provide our feedback on the draft NSW Sexual Violence Plan 2022-2027 (Plan). In doing so we note and express concern at the very short period available for consultation and input by non-government organisations such as Barnardos, who possess deep community expertise in this crucial area of safety (13 business days for feedback on the Draft Plan). Barnardos urges further community input on such an important NSW Plan, from a diverse range of perspectives and experiences and within a culturally sensitive, informed and safe approach.

Barnardos is a not for profit, children's social care charitable organisation providing direct support to 15,000+ children and their families in the Australian Capital Territory (ACT) and New South Wales (NSW) each year, in addition to foster care and open adoption (the latter for non-Aboriginal children) for over 1,000 children and young people. We work in areas with significant Aboriginal populations such as Central Western NSW, the South Coast, Western Sydney and Inner Sydney. For close to 100 years, we have been working together with children, young people and families to break the cycle of disadvantage, and create safe, nurturing and stable homes, connected to family and community.

Barnardos' knowledge of this area

As a large non-government provider of safety and prevention and out-of-home care (OOHC) services to children and families vulnerable to sexual violence and child sexual assault, Barnardos is deeply committed to successfully implementing the measures under the draft NSW Sexual

Barnardos Australia

60-64 Bay Street Ultimo NSW 2007
GPO Box 9996 Sydney NSW 2001

Chair Janett Milligan

Chief Executive Officer Deirdre Cheers

ABN 18 068 557 906 • A Company Limited by Guarantee

Contact

Reception (02) 9218 2300
General enquiries 1300 237 507

barnardos.org.au

Donations 1800 061 000
Foster care 1800 663 441



Violence Plan, draft National Plan to End Violence against Women and Children, and National Strategy to Prevent and Respond to Child Sexual Abuse. We are well known for our substantial investment in service excellence and best practice, based on a foundation of child centered culture and practice. The children, young people, families, kin, and carers we work closely with fall within all the NSW Sexual Violence Plan's priority groups for trauma-informed service responses necessary to support well-being, healing and recovery. They include (Plan, p.24):

- Aboriginal victim-survivors
- culturally and linguistically diverse victim-survivors
- LGBTQIA+ victim-survivors
- victim-survivors with a disability

Barnardos suggests inclusion of the following groups on the list of priority groups for trauma-informed service responses:

- children and young people victim-survivors who have been removed into OOHC
- children and young people victim-survivors and their support networks
- victim-survivors living in regional and remote communities

Further, Barnardos has extensive experience in working with the following important groups who are at high risk of sexual violence (Plan, p.6), and we would be happy to provide our expertise and knowledge when individual actions are being implemented for the draft NSW Sexual Violence Plan and draft National Plan:

- women who are homeless
- women who have previously been victims of sexual assault at any point through their life

Barnardos suggests inclusion of the following groups who, from our practice experience, are also at high risk of sexual violence:

- children and their mothers in contact with the child protection system, for example those receiving family preservation and support services for non-offending parents and their children
- young people who have left OOHC both as victim-survivors of child sexual assault and/or exhibiting harmful sexual behaviours

Given the extremely tight timeline provided for the consultation, and that it has coincided with overlapping requests for example feedback on the Coercive Control Exposure Draft Bill and the Draft NSW Domestic and Family Violence Plan, we have focussed our written comments below on the overall vision, principles and outcomes of the Plan and achieving outcomes in our areas of expertise.

It is important to note that the benefits to be realised from the Plan will be determined by the extent of new investment that the NSW Government commits to realise the outcomes. This includes a focus on enhanced funding for direct service delivery and commitment to quantitative targets (developed collaboratively with the sector). Transparency of reporting of progress under the Plan will also be critical.

Vision, principles and outcomes

Barnardos strongly endorses the proposed shared vision that *'all NSW communities are free from domestic, family and sexual violence.'* The proposed vision aligns with Barnardos Towards 2025 Strategic Directions Vision *'to empower every child in Australia to reach their full potential.'* If the NSW Sexual Violence Plan is effective the future and potential for NSW children will be greatly enhanced.

We endorse the six identified guiding principles that underpin all aspects of the proposed NSW Sexual Violence Framework for Action. Barnardos particularly welcomes the recognition that for the Framework to be effective in preventing and responding to sexual violence in NSW for the next five years, an inclusive and intersectional approach is needed. We strongly endorse the emphasis that responses must be victim-survivor-centred and where affecting Aboriginal people and communities, should be led and driven by their people and communities.

We believe it is essential to listen to the voices of children and people with lived experience of sexual harm and their expertise should shape the design, delivery, and evaluation of responses to sexual violence. Barnardos welcomes the opportunity to see how their voices will be prioritised within the governance framework.

Barnardos notes that significant reforms are required within the NSW legal system to support and empower victim-survivors to pursue criminal charges and ensure that in doing so they are not further victimised or traumatised. It is unfortunate that the Plan hasn't sufficiently addressed the opportunities to remove the barriers for victims seeking justice against perpetrators.

We agree that the proposed outcomes should be informed by and align with the vision five pillars of the National Plan, and that the logical first step is to seek to align with the National Outcomes and Evaluation Framework.

Reducing sexual violence risks in key populations and settings

Barnardos strongly supports early intervention to address risks of sexual violence victimisation and perpetration among high-risk groups and settings (Pillar 2). However, we believe the focus areas and actions for Pillar 2 need more elaboration concerning delivery of targeted interventions to address sexual violence risk factors. Notably:

- The action to implement strategies to prevent and respond to problematic and harmful sexual behaviours by children and young people (Plan, p.21) should highlight important sub-groups of elevated risk
- Our practitioners frequently observe the high vulnerability of children in contact with the child protection system (including those who have entered OOHC) and their mothers to sexual assault and also exhibiting harmful sexual behaviours. This group needs to be explicitly targeted
- To support these children and families we would suggest consideration of the inclusion of the following targeted interventions:
 - increased family preservation and support services for non-offending parents and their children
 - access to support for Aboriginal children and families experiencing or at risk of sexual assault and exhibiting harmful sexual behaviours (delivered by Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations)
 - access to support for culturally and linguistically diverse background children and families experiencing or at risk of sexual assault and exhibiting harmful sexual behaviours
 - support services for frontline workers working with children and young people as victims-survivors of sexual violence and/or exhibiting harmful sexual behaviours
 - developing the understanding of the relationship between child sexual abuse and harmful sexual behaviours and other non-sexual forms of abuse to inform more holistic service responses
- We welcome the inclusion of implementing strategies to prevent and respond to the sexual exploitation of children and young people in OOHC (Plan, p.21). This should be a priority noting the damaging impacts on children, the impact on the capacity to establish and maintain relationships and therefore achieve permanency and stability of care
- Barnardos is highly concerned by the vulnerability of children and young people who have left care, both as victims-survivors of child sexual assault and/or exhibiting harmful sexual behaviours. This group also needs to be explicitly targeted
- In the OOHC sector, work needs to be urgently undertaken towards providing increased support services for children exhibiting harmful sexual behaviours and offender prevention and intervention, where significant and concerning service gaps remain

Barnardos is strongly committed to contributing to the improvement of the domestic, family, and sexual violence (DFSV) service system and the implementation of NSW Sexual Violence Framework for Action. We understand the Department of Communities and Justice is seeking to consult widely and flexibly and have engaged WSP Australia to support this, and our Executive Leader, Children and Families, Penny Hood is available to provide more detailed verbal feedback to the consultants. If the opportunity is available, we could also provide input from our clients who have been directly affected by sexual violence.

Thank you once again for the opportunity to provide this written submission, and please contact Dr Robert Urquhart, Head of Knowledge, Outcomes & Research on rurquhart@barnardos.org.au, tel (02) 9218 2392 or mobile 0431 404 199 should you require further information on our feedback.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Deirdre Cheers', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Deirdre Cheers
Chief Executive Officer
Barnardos Australia