

The Hon Tony Abbott, MP
Prime Minister
Australian Parliament House

15 April 2015

Dear Prime Minister

Urgent action needed to respond to the national epidemic of violence against women

We, the undersigned, are writing to you about this week's Council of Australian Governments (COAG) meeting to discuss ending violence against women.

The media reports that, this year alone, 31 women in Australia have died as a result of gender based violence. And we're not even half way through the year. Where we used to talk about the death of 'one women a week', tragically the figures are now closer to two women. Violence against women is a national emergency that requires urgent responses from the leader of our nation.

You have recognised this in directing COAG to address violence against women in 2015, by your establishment of the Advisory Panel on violence against women, including the participation of Australian of the Year, Rosie Batty, and in your support for the second phase of the *National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children* (National Plan).

Yet, the murders of these women as a result of gender-based violence (and countless other women, children and men) emphasises the need for further decisive action.

It is widely recognised, including in the National Plan, that a holistic approach to ending violence against women is needed – a strategic approach that encompasses **both primary prevention and specialist frontline services**. It is also widely recognised that both aspects of the approach need **adequate long-term funding** to effectively address the epidemic of violence against women.

Robust, long-term and adequate resourcing for all the elements of the National Plan is critical. At a time of heightened community awareness, political momentum, and a real appetite for cultural change, we urge you to ensure that the COAG meeting this Friday delivers the political commitment to allocate the funding required to end violence against women. We urge you to reconsider your funding priorities to ensure that desperately needed financial resources are spent on initiatives that will make the biggest and most profound impact on Australia's culture of violence. We need more than lip service to be paid to this issue.

Frontline services

Unprecedented demand for services, without commensurate funding to match this demand, has left family violence and sexual assault services struggling and under incredible pressure. Specialist health, counselling, housing and legal services, critical elements of the response to violence against women, are also experiencing unprecedented demands with inadequate funding and funding uncertainty. Long term, sustained funding for these services is essential.

Primary prevention

Violence is preventable, through long-term actions to address gender inequality and male entitlement. A critical element of prevention is respectful relationships education.

In the interim report released this month, the Senate Committee that inquired *into Domestic Violence in Australia* called for respectful relationships education to be implemented in all schools through the national curriculum, as a primary prevention measure to end violence against women in the long term.

We ask that the \$30 million earmarked for a national awareness-raising campaign addressing domestic violence (to be jointly-funded by the states and territories) is redirected to an urgent national rollout of evidence-based respectful relationships programs in our schools. In our view, this would be a more effective use of the funding.

Prime Minister, we are asking you to:

- Reconsider the allocation of the Australian Government's \$30 million awareness-raising campaign to ensure that primary violence prevention programming is embedded in the national curriculum.
- Ensure COAG provides robust, long-term and adequate resourcing of women's specialist violence and related services (including health, counselling, housing and legal services) to enable better outcomes for women who present in crisis and with complex needs.

We wish you every success in your meeting on Friday and for the work of COAG in the coming year.

Many of us have been working in this sector for years and we have never seen such a strategic alignment of political and cultural will to end violence against women – but we need your leadership, and the leadership of COAG, to resource and drive this change.

As Prime Minister, and the Minister for Women, you have a unique opportunity and capacity to address our culture of misogyny and violence against women and girls. We urge you to further steps to meet the challenge, and we look forward to working with you to create a safer nation for our community.

Yours sincerely,

1. Anglicare Victoria
2. Annie North Women's Refuge Inc
3. Australian Women Against Violence Alliance
4. Australian Women Educators
5. Australian Women's Health Network
6. Beryl Women Inc.
7. Canberra Rape Crisis Centre
8. Carrie's Place Domestic Violence and Homelessness Services Inc.
9. Centacare Limestone Coast Domestic Violence Service
10. Coalition of Women's Domestic Violence Services of South Australia
11. Connections UnitingCare
12. Domestic Violence Crisis Service
13. Domestic Violence NSW

14. Domestic Violence Resource Centre Victoria
15. Domestic Violence Victoria
16. Doris Women's Refuge Inc.
17. DVSM Domestic Violence NSW Service Management
18. Emerge Women and Children's Support Network
19. Ending Violence Against Women Queensland
20. Family Planning Queensland
21. Georgina Martina Refuges
22. Gippsland Women's Health
23. Immigrant Women's Health Service
24. Inanna Inc
25. Mallee Family Care
26. Mildura Rural City Council
27. National Association of Community Legal Centres
28. National Association of Services Against Sexual Violence
29. National Foundation for Australian Women
30. North Coast WDVCS
31. Nova for Women and Children
32. NSW Men's Behaviour Change Network
33. NSW Women's Alliance
34. Penrith Women's Health Centre
35. Port Macquarie Hastings Domestic and Family Violence Specialist Service
36. Queensland Domestic Violence Refuge Sector
37. Tablelands Sexual Assault Service in Far North Queensland
38. Toora Women Inc.
39. Warrina Women and Children's Refuge
40. WESNET (Women's Services Network)
41. WISHIN
42. Women & Their Children's Intervention Team
43. Women with Disabilities ACT
44. Women With Disabilities Australia
45. Women with Disabilities Victoria
46. Women's Community Shelters
47. Women's Housing
48. Women's Legal Services Australia
49. Women's Liberation Halfway House Inc
50. Women's Essential Service Providers Tasmania
51. Women's Health West
52. Women's Services Network (WESNET)
53. Young Women's Advisory Group of the Equality Rights Alliance
54. YWCA Australia
55. YWCA Canberra
56. YWCA Hunter Region
57. YWCA of Adelaide
58. YWCA of Broken Hill
59. YWCA of Darwin
60. YWCA of Perth
61. YWCA of Queensland
62. YWCA Victoria