Defence Family and Domestic Violence Strategy (2017–2022)

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MESSAGE FROM THE MINISTER

Family and domestic violence continues to be a major issue in Australia. It happens in all kinds of families and all kinds of relationships. Whilst domestic and family violence statistics do indicate a strong gendered nature to these crimes, people of any gender, background, culture, religion, sexual orientation, marital status or age may experience violence, or may use violence.

Many people who have experienced violence fear that reporting the violence will detrimentally impact upon themselves, their children and their partner. Inaccurate social perceptions of the causes of domestic and family violence have also resulted in a tendency to underestimate the extent and severity of family and domestic violence and reluctance to interfere in what some would regard as ‘a private matter’. Attitudes and culture are changing and there is now a national conversation and much greater recognition of issues pertaining to family and domestic violence. There is growing recognition of the importance of both preventing violence and responding effectively when violence does occur.

Family and domestic violence can have devastating and lifelong effects. Whether directly affected by family and domestic violence or not, everyone has a role to play and you can make a difference.

The release of the Defence Family and Domestic Violence Strategy 2017–2022 is a first step towards creating a more supportive and responsive workplace within the Department of Defence.

I encourage you to read about the issue, ensure that you understand how to support someone experiencing violence and continue to work together to ensure Defence is a safe and supportive workplace.

Marise Payne
Minister for Defence
INTENT

Defence has an embedded cultural strategy that demands strong ethical values. Defence, Service and Australian Public Service values form the basis of the behaviour expected of all Defence personnel at work, on operations and at home.

Values-based behaviour in Defence requires everyone to accept responsibility for fostering a safe environment free from all forms of unacceptable behaviour including family and domestic violence.

When a Defence member is subjected to or using violence in their relationships, very real costs and negative impacts flow to the workplace and detrimentally impact operational capability.

Our Family and Domestic Violence Strategy vision is for a Defence community that is safe and free from violence, and committed and ready to respond effectively to support those affected by violence whether they are people subjected to violence, people using violence or bystanders.

Family and domestic violence are complex issues and tackling them requires coordinated, comprehensive, and long-term initiatives. This strategy will be supported by targeted action plans that will describe the specific activities and initiatives to be undertaken by the Services and Groups to realise our objectives.

The plans will use the Defence cultural levers for change and build on the mechanisms already in place to assist personnel and their families who are affected by family and domestic violence.

WHAT IS FAMILY AND DOMESTIC VIOLENCE?

For the purpose of this strategy, family and domestic violence is defined as conduct that is violent, threatening, coercive, controlling or intended to cause the family or household member to be fearful.

It can include, but is not limited to:
- physical, verbal, emotional, sexual or psychological abuse
- neglect
- controlling money
- stalking
- harm to an animal or property
- restricting spiritual or cultural participation
- exposing children to the effects of these behaviours.
OBJECTIVES

The objectives of this strategy are to:

- ensure the safety of those subjected to or affected by the use of family and domestic violence
- provide those subjected to or affected by family and domestic violence with appropriate immediate supports and referral to professional services
- provide Defence personnel with the skills, knowledge and confidence to identify people subjected to and affected by family and domestic violence and respond effectively to their needs
- promote accurate understanding of family and domestic violence and its impact on the workplace.

PRINCIPLES

Our strategy is underpinned by five principles that provide the foundation for the development and implementation of family and domestic violence policies, programs and practices across Defence.

- **Family and domestic violence is never acceptable**
  Family and domestic violence is unacceptable in any form. Our first priority when responding to those subjected to or affected by family and domestic violence will be their safety and wellbeing. We will provide a safe workplace for staff who have been subjected to family and domestic violence.

- **We hold perpetrators accountable**
  We will manage those people who are identified as using controlling or violent behaviour in their relationships through informal and formal resolution options including referral to services that assist with violent behaviour cessation.

- **We respond with compassion**
  Family and domestic violence are traumatic events and disempowering in nature; they can be difficult to disclose. We will respond with compassion and sensitivity to people subjected to family and domestic violence and will help them to make informed decisions free of coercion.

- **We provide support**
  We will build the skills of staff to recognise and respond effectively to people subjected to or affected by family and domestic violence.

- **We work collaboratively**
  We will work collaboratively with all stakeholders to ensure an integrated and coordinated response to those subjected to or affected by family and domestic violence.
areas of focus

Five areas of focus guide our ongoing responses to family and domestic violence.

Culture

- We will harmonise with and complement Defence's Pathway to Change strategy.
- We will provide a supportive, flexible and safe workplace for staff subjected to or affected by family and domestic violence.
- We will be respectful of differences, including gender, sexuality, culture, religion, age and ability.
- We will work to embed a widespread acknowledgement that family domestic violence is unacceptable anywhere.

Communication

- We will raise awareness of family and domestic violence and the work Defence is doing in support of the national strategy.
- We will provide access to information about family and domestic violence including the support options available through Defence and external agencies.
- We will encourage participation in Defence White Ribbon Day activities and other family and domestic violence campaigns.

Training

- All Defence staff will undertake relevant and targeted training to build effective skills to support people subjected to or affected by family and domestic violence in a compassionate and culturally appropriate manner.
- Leaders at all levels of Defence will learn how to build engagement and create a department-wide supportive culture around the unacceptable nature of family and domestic violence.
Referrals and Support

• We will maintain and coordinate Defence support services to best meet the needs of people affected by family and domestic violence.

• We will refer those subjected to or affected by family and domestic violence to appropriate service providers.

• We will maintain up-to-date information about external service providers to ensure referrals are appropriate.

Policy

• We will examine our policies regularly to ensure that they are appropriate and flexible and meet the needs of people subjected to or affected by family and domestic violence.

• We will work with government and non-government stakeholders to ensure our policies and processes reflect best practice and align with national strategies.

INDICATORS OF SUCCESS

Evaluation of success in relation to preventing and responding effectively to family and domestic violence is challenged by the difficulties of ensuring robust and reliable data. Success will be indicated by:

• whether those subjected to family and domestic violence feel supported

• greater knowledge about the causes and consequences of family and domestic violence

• increased help seeking behaviours by people subjected to or affected by family and domestic violence

• a growing understanding that family and domestic violence are unacceptable anywhere.