



Australian Government

Australian Institute of  
Health and Welfare



# Responding to family violence

**Evidence-based information is vital for understanding the tragic impacts of family and domestic violence that have become an almost weekly feature of news bulletins in Australia.**

The heartbreak caused by violence in families was brought to the fore in 2015 by a Royal Commission established by the Victorian Government and the naming of domestic violence campaigner Rosie Batty, whose son Luke was killed by his father, as Australian of the Year.

As part of the response to what continues to be regarded as a major health and welfare issue, the AIHW released Family, [Domestic and Sexual Violence, 2018](#), its first comprehensive report of this type. Family and domestic violence often goes unreported, which can make it difficult to measure the true extent of the problem. However, for the first time, the AIHW brought together information from more than 20 different major data sources throughout the country to build a picture of what is known about this social issue in Australia. It also identified where there are significant data gaps and explored what could be done to fill them. A companion report, [Family, Domestic and Sexual Violence: Continuing the National Story](#), followed 12 months later.

These consecutive reports received much media attention and contributed hugely to the national conversation, with the AIHW revealing that traffic to its website increased by 29% when the second report was released when compared to traffic on that day for the previous year. It's apparent that these reports have also had an ongoing role in continuing to inform the public in an authoritative way about what is often a highly emotional issue.

'Each time there has been another significant domestic violence event reported by news media, the AIHW sees an increase in website traffic created by people accessing its reports in this area,' says Marilyn Chilvers, Executive Director of the NSW Department of Family and Community Services and AIHW board member. 'Downloads have also been high for companion products, such as infographics, created by the AIHW to improve the accessibility and usability of what are complex and authoritative reports.' The AIHW has also continued to receive a steady stream of public inquiries about future updates.

These reports have shed light at a national level on family and domestic violence and conveyed the complexity of the issue by triangulating a range of different data sources across topics, settings and service types. This has been seen as particularly valuable to policy and program design. The data have clarified, for example, that the rate of domestic and sexual violence in Australia has remained stable over time while the rate of overall violence has declined. And yet, the reports also highlight that the use of services, such as police, hospital and homelessness services, for family, domestic and sexual violence in Australia, has been increasing.

As well as its role in reporting family violence statistics, the AIHW carries out a range of development work to try to improve the quality and/or availability of existing data collected in Australia on family violence. That requires working with different jurisdictions and a range of different agencies and stakeholders with expertise in a wide range of areas, including health, homelessness, community services and research.

The AIHW is a critical point for the dissemination of information about family violence at a level that is suitable for government use and policy development and in a way that is understandable by the general public as well,' says Professor Deborah Loxton, Deputy Director of the Australian Longitudinal Study on Women's Health, which both provides the AIHW with data and uses its statistics.

'They do a lot of different reporting that has been useful for all sorts of people, particularly for service providers that support those who have experienced family and domestic violence. I know those services use AIHW figures to apply for their own funding.'

The Australian Government concedes that it's difficult to know the full extent of the family and domestic violence problem in Australia, with inconsistencies in reporting across states and territories, but has welcomed the AIHW's capacity to draw the data together to provide a national perspective. The Institute's reports in this area have helped support the decision announced in March 2019 for the Commonwealth to invest \$328 million in support of the Fourth Action Plan of the National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children 2010-2022.

As part of this, \$11 million is being directed to improving information sharing and coordination between the family law, family violence and child protection systems. 'The country's domestic violence crisis isn't going away anytime soon,' says Hayley Foster, CEO of Women's Safety NSW. 'We're heading into a deep economic downturn, and we know that with recessions come increased violence against women and children.'

'What we need is a coherent, coordinated, sustainable plan with flexible features built in so we can be confident that women, children and families impacted by violence and abuse have real options for achieving safety in their homes. We need to ensure we are evidence-based in targeting our funding.'



**1 woman was killed every 10 days** and **1 man every 26 days** by a partner between 2016-17 and 2017-18

**27,000 victims of sexual assault** were recorded by police in 2019, **2% more** than the 26,000 victims in 2018, and the **highest annual number since 2010**



**116,400 clients** assisted in 2018-19 by specialist homelessness services had experienced family or domestic violence, equating to **40% of all clients**

Help and support:

- Call 000 if you are in immediate danger.
- Contact 1800RESPECT to find out more information and get support.