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NEW SENATE INQUIRY AN OPPORTUNITY TO GENUINELY LISTEN

Central Victoria's leading specialist family violence response service Centre for Non-Violence welcomes the Federal Government's announcement of a new inquiry into family, domestic and sexual violence.

Centre for Non-Violence united with the specialist response sector earlier this month, expressing disappointment when a senate committee tasked with examining domestic violence in Australia missed an opportunity to address how governments can best support, contribute to and drive the social, cultural and behavioural shifts required to eliminate violence against women and their children, as set out in the terms of reference.

The Senate referred an inquiry into domestic violence with particular regard to violence against women and their children to the Legal and Constitutional Affairs References Committee in February, following the deaths of Brisbane mother Hannah Clarke and her three children in February.

The committee was given six months to examine the issue, but delivered the report three months ahead of schedule - without any recommendations, and without input from the domestic and family violence sector.

Centre for Non-Violence chief executive officer Margaret Augerinos said at the time, the report failed to address the terms of reference and was a missed opportunity to 'really get to the heart of how we start to address the drivers of domestic violence and gender inequality'.

She says this weekend's announcement by Minister for Women Marise Payne and Minister for Families and Social Services Anne Ruston of new terms of reference* for a comprehensive inquiry was encouraging.

"We hoped the earlier inquiry would help us move forward into the future, providing advice on what government and community need to do, to address the social and cultural behaviours required to eliminate violence against women and children," she said.

"This new inquiry is an opportunity to explore at systemic level the voices of women and children with lived experience," she said. "It is also an opportunity to genuinely listen to advocates, and how working to prevent family violence can be informed through that lens.

"Specialist women's services and peaks across the country have very clear views about what and how change needs to happen, and we welcome any opportunity to share our experiences and knowledge."

Ms Augerinos says the terms of reference proposed by the ministers, offer the potential for a thorough examination.

“We see potential for this inquiry to draw on what we have learnt and the many successful models in place to prevent and respond to women and children who are victim/survivors of family and domestic abuse – and to offer sector-informed solutions to some of the system failings,” she said.

“We also encourage the government to continue to acknowledge the immediate needs in our sector, and for the Women’s Safety Council to focus on the urgent actions and longer term reforms identified by Australian Women Against Violence Alliance (AWAVA), in March.”

Those actions are to:

1. Fully fund the specialist services women and children rely on to be safe.
2. Put kids’ safety first in the family law system.
3. Ensure women and children facing major safety risks can be identified and referred correctly by frontline workers in health, social, family and community services.
4. Improve AVO standards so that women and children can rely upon them for their safety, and perpetrators are held accountable for ongoing patterns of violence and abuse.
5. Ensure everyone’s calls for help can be heard.

**The Ministers have asked the new inquiry to report on:*

- Immediate and long-term measures to prevent violence against women and their children, and improve gender equality
- Best practice and lessons learnt from international experience, ranging from prevention to early intervention, which could be considered in an Australian context
- The level and impact of coordination and accountability for services and policy responses across the Commonwealth, state and territory governments, local governments, non-government and community organisations, and business
- The way that health, housing, and women’s economic independence affect the ability of women to escape domestic violence
- All forms of violence against women, including, but not limited to, coercive control and technology-facilitated abuse
- The adequacy of the evidence base around the prevalence of domestic and family violence and how to overcome limitations in the collection of nationally consistent and timely data including, but not limited to, court, police, hospitalisation and housing
- The efficacy of perpetrator intervention programs and support services for men to help them change their behaviour
- The experiences of all women, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women, rural women, culturally and linguistically diverse women, LGBTQI women, women with a disability, and women on temporary visas
- The impact of COVID-19, including health requirements such as staying at home, on the prevalence of domestic violence and provision of support services
- The views and experiences of frontline services, advocacy groups and others throughout this unprecedented time

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