

NATIONAL PRINCIPLES TO ADDRESS COERCIVE CONTROL OVERVIEW



Why are we creating the National Principles?

Coercive control is often a significant part of family and domestic violence. Coercive control involves perpetrators using abusive behaviours in a pattern over time in a way that creates and maintains power and dominance over another person or persons. Perpetrators may use physical or non-physical abusive behaviours, or a combination of both.

Coercive control is a pressing issue that requires a coordinated, national approach. The Australian Government and state and territory governments are working together to develop National Principles to Address Coercive Control to create a shared understanding of the issue, which is important for improving the safety of Australians, particularly women and children.

How will the National Principles be used?

Once finalised, the National Principles will support government and non-government organisations involved in addressing coercive control to help raise community awareness of coercive control, inform more effective responses to family and domestic violence, and promote more consistent support and safety outcomes for victim-survivors.

Focus of the draft National Principles

The eight draft National Principles are on page 2 of this document. They focus on:

- common features and impacts of coercive control
- community understanding of coercive control
- effects of discrimination and inequality
- listening to and working with victim-survivors of family and domestic violence
- coordinated approaches to addressing coercive control
- criminalisation of coercive control, including any potential unintended consequences.

Public consultation on the draft National Principles closed on **11 November 2022**.



NATIONAL PRINCIPLES TO ADDRESS COERCIVE CONTROL

NATIONAL PRINCIPLE 1: COMMON FEATURES

The Australian Government and state and territory governments recognise the following common features of coercive control:

- Coercive control is often a significant part of a person's experience of family and domestic violence.
- Coercive control involves perpetrators using abusive behaviours in a pattern over time in a way that creates and keeps power and dominance over another person or persons.
- As part of this pattern, perpetrators may use physical or non-physical abusive behaviours, or a combination of the two. The specific behaviours can look different in each relationship.
- In intimate partner relationships, coercive control is most often used by cisgender male perpetrators against women (both cisgender and transgender) who are their current or former partner, and their children.
- Coercive control can be used by or against people of all genders, sexual orientations, cultures and classes. People of all ages may also have coercive control perpetrated against them, including children and young people.
- Coercive control is most often identified in the context of intimate partner relationships, it can also be used by perpetrators in broader family relationships (including cultural kinship and family of choice relationships).
- Family and domestic violence, including coercive control, is driven by gender inequality within society. Gender inequality can also combine with other forms of inequality and discrimination, which can influence a victim-survivor's experience of coercive control.

NATIONAL PRINCIPLE 2: IMPACTS

The Australian Government and state and territory governments recognise that coercive control has significant short and long term harmful impacts on victim-survivors and communities.

- The effects of coercive control can build up and become worse over time.
- Coercive control can affect a victim-survivor's whole life, and take away their independence, dignity, sense of self-worth, identity, feeling of security, and health and wellbeing.
- Escalation of patterns of coercive control is a significant factor in intimate partner homicide cases.
- Coercive control is one of the factors that can keep victim-survivors trapped by perpetrators in relationships.
- In an intimate partnership context, coercive control does not always end when a relationship is ended, with perpetrators' abusive behaviour at risk of increasing during and after separation.

NATIONAL PRINCIPLE 3: COMMUNITY UNDERSTANDING

The Australian Government and state and territory governments recognise that coercive control has not been consistently recognised, understood or responded to as family and domestic violence.

- The community, legal system, law enforcement bodies and courts can have a focus on physical violence and single acts of violence, rather than a pattern of abuse over time.
- Community attitudes, and perpetrator behaviours that are controlling and isolating, can prevent victim-survivors from understanding that they are experiencing abuse or from seeking support.

All jurisdictions recognise and are actively responding to these identified gaps in understanding and response.

NATIONAL PRINCIPLE 4: EFFECTS OF DISCRIMINATION AND INEQUALITY

The Australian Government and state and territory governments recognise that discrimination and inequality within the practices, policies and behaviours of organisations, institutions and communities can impact a victim-survivor's experience of coercive control. These issues must be considered in any policies or solutions to address coercive control.

- Discrimination and inequality can underpin barriers that victim-survivors face in accessing justice and support, impact a victim-survivor's ability, confidence or willingness to seek help, as well as the quality of support they receive; and increase the negative effects coercive control has on victim-survivors.
- Discrimination and inequality can create an environment where perpetrators feel enabled and empowered to use coercive control.
- Discrimination and inequality can increase the likelihood of victim-survivors being misidentified as the perpetrator of family and domestic violence.

NATIONAL PRINCIPLE 5: LIVED EXPERIENCE

The Australian Government and state and territory governments recognise the importance of ensuring that the lived experience of victim-survivors, including children and young people, informs policies and solutions to address coercive control.

NATIONAL PRINCIPLE 6: COORDINATED APPROACH TO PREVENTION, EARLY INTERVENTION, RESPONSE AND RECOVERY

The Australian Government and state and territory governments recognise the importance of coordinated approaches to addressing coercive control.

- Approaches should be based on a shared understanding of coercive control.
- Governments, civil society, businesses, academics, communities and families all have roles to play to support the safety of victim-survivors and accountability of perpetrators.
- There is no single approach to addressing coercive control, but all areas involved in addressing family and domestic violence should work together to reduce duplication and gaps in services.
- Actions should be evidence-based, trauma-informed and occur across prevention, early intervention, response and recovery.
- Approaches should focus strongly on education and training.

NATIONAL PRINCIPLE 7: CRIMINALISATION OF COERCIVE CONTROL

Whether coercive control should be a specific criminal offence, and the form this may take, is a matter for individual state and territory governments to determine. State and territory governments agree that the development and implementation of any specific coercive control offence should involve consideration of the National Principles to Address Coercive Control. It is also only one part of a broader approach to addressing coercive control.

NATIONAL PRINCIPLE 8: UNINTENDED CONSEQUENCES OF CRIMINALISATION

State and territory governments agree that the decision to criminalise, and the development and implementation of any coercive control offence, should involve careful consideration of unintended consequences for victim-survivors and perpetrators, particularly those already disadvantaged by the justice system. This includes the risk of victim-survivors being misidentified as perpetrators of family and domestic violence or further traumatised through difficult criminal justice processes, and the risk of increasing the over-representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in the criminal justice system.