

28 June 2021

Joint Venture - Family Violence and Sexual Violence

By email: Submissions@violencefree.govt.nz

National strategy and action plans to eliminate family violence and sexual violence in Aotearoa New Zealand

Dear Colleague

The New Zealand Medical Association (NZMA) wishes to provide feedback on the above consultation. The NZMA is New Zealand's largest medical organisation, with about 5,000 members from all areas of medicine. The NZMA aims to provide leadership of the medical profession, and to promote professional unity and values, and the health of all New Zealanders. We recognise the principles of te Tiriti o Waitangi and the special obligations to Māori, particularly to ensure equity and active protection. Current disparities in health outcomes between Māori and non-Māori are unacceptable. The NZMA is committed to advocating for policies in health and the social and wider determinants of health that urgently address these disparities and contribute to equity of health outcomes. Our submission has been informed by feedback from our Board and Advisory Councils.

We welcome the work of the Joint Venture in which multiple government organisations are working together to set a clear direction to reduce family violence and sexual violence, and to provide strategic whole-of-government advice to Ministers. We support the seven proposed focus areas including the centrality given to tea ao Māori as the first focus area. However, our view is that a national strategy to eliminate family violence and sexual violence will only be as useful as its ability to substantially inform more peripheral legislation that directly impacts on the upstream risk factors such as alcohol abuse, underage drinking, poverty, poor mental health, and aggressive juvenile offending.

The consultation documents do not give these upstream risk factors for family and sexual violence sufficient prominence. For example, the resource *Where should we Focus?* fails to have even a single mention of poverty and gives just a single mention to alcohol.¹ While focus area five relates to increasing the focus on prevention, our understanding is that more robustly targeting these upstream risk factors is likely to have a greater impact on reducing family violence and sexual violence than more 'direct' prevention strategies. As such, to achieve more

¹ https://violencefree.govt.nz/assets/National-strategy/5d6174fd3e/20210518_Where-should-we-focus_final.pdf

meaningful change, we suggest that it would be useful for the strategy to specifically identify which risk factors for family violence and sexual violence will be targeted and prioritised.

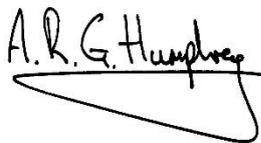
To help inform the Joint Venture's work, we draw attention to the UN Women's statement *RESPECT Women: Preventing violence against women*² which is determinants focussed. This publication provides a comprehensive framework to inform policy makers and implementers about designing, planning, implementing, monitoring, and evaluating interventions and programmes on preventing and responding to family violence. The framework outlines seven inter-related intervention strategies derived from the word 'respect':

- Relationships skills strengthened
- Empowerment of women
- Services ensured
- Poverty reduced
- Environments made safe
- Child and adolescent abuse prevented
- Transformed attitudes, beliefs and norms.

We also believe that it would be useful for the national strategy to acknowledge that family violence and sexual violence are commonly intergenerational problems. Solutions are required that break the cycle of violence by intervening early, particularly with regard to supporting and caring for children and young people, which is when the lifelong trajectory can potentially be altered. There is also a need for a much more joined up approach between services that is people- and whānau-centred. For example, mental health services and drug and alcohol services need to work more closely together. Interventions that need to be expanded and properly resourced include, but are not limited to, the following: drug and alcohol services; relevant programmes for people in prisons; mental health services that are provided free of charge (particularly to support people who have experienced trauma in early childhood), and the assessment of, and support for, children affected by *in utero* exposure to alcohol and other drugs.

We hope our feedback is helpful and look forward to seeing the first iteration of the national strategy and action plans to address family violence and sexual violence.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "A. R. G. Humphrey". The signature is written in a cursive style and is underlined with a long horizontal stroke.

Dr Alistair Humphrey
NZMA Chair

² <https://www.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2019/05/respect-women-preventing-violence-against-women>