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Prevention, intervention, and financial security key to women's safety outcomes

The inaugural National Summit on Women's Safety has shone a light on Australia's urgent issue of the safety of women and their children.

The UnitingCare network is a large employer with a national footprint and over 80% of service delivery staff are women. More than half of the people accessing services are women.

Speaking on the virtual sidelines of the Summit UnitingCare Australia National Director, Ms Claerwen Little said that while it was encouraging to see so many important conversations, it is the collaboration post-event which will make the difference.

"The National Plan on the Prevention of Violence against Women and their Children must involve partnerships from all sectors with local community engagement being the focal point.

"We must ensure the National Plan also meets the needs of First Nations women and children through a commitment to the principles of self-determination.

"Preventing violence against women is everyone's business. We all have a role to play in changing the attitudes that drive violence but to really achieve this, we need ongoing commitments from all governments, workplaces, education facilities, service organisations, the media and communities to address the drivers of violence and abuse against women.

"Australia must urgently address the underlying causes of gendered violence – including the social and economic disadvantage that come from this.

"We need to ensure women have the means to meet the cost of living. Too many women are trapped by the inability to afford a safe place to live, food and the most basic of necessities", said Ms Little.

In the AIHW *Family, domestic and sexual violence in Australia: continuing the nation story 2019* report stated that of 121,000 people who sought emergency housing, 78 per cent of these people were women and 38 per cent were single parents.

"The availability of immediate and long-term housing options for women leaving violence, including crisis accommodation, social and affordable housing, rental assistance, and "Safe at home" programs need to be increased in order to cater for the diverse needs of women escaping violence" Ms Little said.

"We need to engage with men early to prevent the cycle of violence and develop evidence based, trauma informed solutions that achieve behaviour change.

"We must continue to come together and strive every day to create a community where women can live freely and without fear.

"UnitingCare Australia will continue working with Government on the development of the National Plan including through a submission grounded in the experience of our network".

UnitingCare Australia is the national body for the Uniting Church's community services network and an agency of the Assembly of the Uniting Church in Australia. The UnitingCare network supports 1.4 million people every year across urban, rural and remote communities, supported by 50,000 staff and 30,000 volunteers. We work on the front line supporting women in all circumstances to seek safety and security for themselves and their children.