



The Justice Portfolio

Domestic Violence Statement of Commitment

Prepared by:

Justice Strategy Division, AGD

&

the Justice Senior Officers Group on

Domestic Violence and Indigenous Family Violence

Endorsed by the Justice Portfolio Leadership Council, 20 September 2005

For Review: [.....]

OUR STATEMENT OF COMMITMENT AND INTENT

***Domestic violence** is violence between current or past intimate partners. It involves abuse of power and a pattern of behaviour over time which can include acts which are physical, sexual, psychological or emotional, social, spiritual, or involving deprivation or neglect. Domestic violence includes both actual and threatened behaviour.*

Building a safer community for all South Australians is a key commitment of the Government of South Australia.

Domestic violence is a serious matter of safety, justice and crime for South Australians and a major problem in many South Australian families. Domestic violence is unacceptable to the community. Where it involves violent crime or other criminal behaviour it will be treated as a criminal matter.

This statement aims to improve the safety, well-being and capacity to fully participate in life of South Australians by reducing the level and fear of domestic violence.

Domestic violence is an abuse of power, mainly (but not only) perpetrated by men against women during an intimate relationship or after separation. It occurs in relationships where people are: married, de facto, living together, dating, separated, or divorced. It occurs between partners of different sex or partners of the same sex.

Domestic violence tends to a pattern of repeated incidents of violent interpersonal crime and victimisation, and other behaviour. This pattern endures over time, becoming more serious and entrenched unless effectively prevented. The most commonly recognised forms are physical and sexual violence, verbal abuse, threats and intimidation, emotional and social abuse, stalking and economic deprivation. Some of these are clearly against the law.

Many Indigenous people prefer the term “family violence” when talking about domestic violence. This acknowledges that a range of relatives and in-laws can be involved, as well as the main person offending and the main person subjected to the domestic violence. This term also recognises violation of spiritual and cultural well-being as forms of domestic violence. For the sake of clarity, in this Statement we will talk about domestic violence, whether in Indigenous or non-Indigenous communities and relationships.

The Justice Portfolio is committed to effective intervention to reduce and prevent domestic violence and to the development of sound legislation and public policy in this area. This includes a commitment to the safety and protection of any children or young people who are living with domestic violence.

Justice Portfolio agencies have key roles in responding to domestic violence. These roles include:

- providing victims with access to justice and increasing their safety.
- intervening effectively with offenders to stop violence.

The Justice Portfolio aims to ensure consistent and integrated criminal justice responses to criminal threats to people's safety. We will continue to strengthen and build collaborative partnerships with one another, with the community and with other relevant Government and non-Government agencies. Portfolio agencies will implement effective strategies to increase safety and reduce domestic violence and the resulting personal, social and economic impacts to ensure the best possible outcomes for South Australia.

There are a number of other types of violence within family relationships that are not intended to be covered by this statement. These include child abuse, child sexual abuse, sibling bullying, elder abuse, abuse of a carer, or abuse of someone with a disability. These types of violence are important to recognise and address in their own right. They may occur within the same family alongside domestic violence. This statement addresses only domestic violence.

The Justice Portfolio is committed to ensuring that all people in South Australia who are involved in domestic violence have equitable access to appropriate intervention and support. For Indigenous people, that access should be available through both Indigenous specific and mainstream services.

Criminal justice agencies will develop and participate in collaborative approaches to address coexisting issues that may exacerbate or increase the complexity of domestic violence, such as drug and alcohol or mental health related issues.

The *Justice Portfolio Domestic Violence Statement* aligns with other relevant Government frameworks including:

- *Our Commitment to Women's Safety in South Australia*, Government of South Australia, 2005.
- the *Rekindling Family Relationships: Framework for Action* as the framework for responding to Indigenous family violence.
- the South Australian Government's Child Protection Reform Program, *Keeping Them Safe*.
- the *Justice Portfolio Strategic Directions 2004-2006*.
- the *Aboriginal Justice Strategic Directions 2004-2006*.

In order to ensure the most effective implementation of this statement of commitment and intent, the criminal justice policy and practice approaches to domestic violence:

1. Place priority on addressing victim safety.
2. Deal with victims and other affected family members at all times in a constructive, consistent and reassuring manner.
3. Highlight the unacceptable and criminal nature of this violence and hold offenders accountable.

4. Ensure fair and just outcomes for Indigenous people who either live with or who perpetrate domestic violence.
5. Recognise and address the diverse needs and circumstances of individuals and communities.
6. Ensure coordinated and integrated models of practice.
7. Use evidence-based approaches that include a sound understanding of the nature, profile and extent of domestic violence and current knowledge of good practice in these areas.
8. Promote principles of prevention and early intervention.
9. Monitor, evaluate and continuously improve Portfolio programs and initiatives.
10. Strengthen the capacity of our workforce to respond appropriately to the victims, perpetrators and others affected by domestic violence.