



lucy's project

Safe Families - Paws and All

NATIONAL ROUNDTABLE ON DOMESTIC AND FAMILY VIOLENCE PERPETRATED AGAINST PEOPLE AND ANIMALS

AUGUST 2026



ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY

Lucy's Project was founded on the land of the Widjabul Wia-bal People of the Bundjalung Nation in the Northern Rivers of New South Wales. We acknowledge the continuing connection to Country of First Nations Peoples and pay our respects to Elders past and present. We value the knowledge and ways of knowing of First Nations people and stand in solidarity with First Nations people in the ongoing struggle for justice.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF VICTIM-SURVIVORS

Lucy's Project acknowledges the strength, resistance and resilience of people and animals who experience domestic and family violence. We recognise the trauma that is inflicted when people and animals witness their loved ones being harmed, and the immense grief and loss they feel when their loved ones are killed. We advocate for the right to safety of all human and animal victim-survivors of domestic and family violence.



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1. ABOUT LUCY'S PROJECT

Lucy's Project is a national organisation working to create a future where every person and animal across Australia is safe and can live free from domestic and family violence (DFV).

Lucy's Project's work is delivered through its CARE approach:

- **Collaboration** to bring together survivors, policymakers, researchers, leaders and practitioners across sectors to promote coordinated and holistic responses to people and animals experiencing DFV.
- **Advocacy** to drive legislative, policy and program changes that strengthen protections and supports for people and animals and improve accountability for people who use violence.
- **Research** to ensure evidence-based policy reform and practice, amplify the voices of people with lived expertise and experience, and to highlight data and research gaps.
- **Education** to increase community awareness and capability of practitioners across sectors to recognise and respond to violence perpetrated against people and animals.

To discuss the National Roundtable report, please contact Monique Dam, CEO of Lucy's Project via hello@lucysproject.com.

2. PURPOSE OF THE NATIONAL ROUNDTABLE

Lucy's Project organised and convened a National Roundtable to collaboratively develop recommendations for policy, program and legislative change to improve the safety and wellbeing of people and animals experiencing DFV across Australia.

The roundtable was held across three sessions:

- Melbourne on Friday 24 October 2025
- Sydney on Friday 31 October 2025
- Online on Friday 7 November 2025

Each session brought together survivors, researchers, advocates and practitioners across the DFV, homelessness, community, animal welfare and veterinary sectors. More than 100 people from over 80 organisations across Australia participated in the roundtable (refer to Appendix A).

Based on the discussions, Lucy's Project has developed a National Roadmap for Change to Prevent and End Family Violence against People and Animals. This roadmap sets out recommendations for policy, programs and legislative change to improve the safety and wellbeing of people and animals experiencing DFV across Australia.

The Roadmap is a valuable resource to inform Federal, State and Territory and Local Government plans for preventing and responding to DFV, including the Second Action Plan under the National Plan to End Violence Against Women and Children 2022-2032.

Preventing and responding to DFV requires a collaborative, whole-of-community, and cross-sector approach if Australia is to achieve the goal under the National Plan of ending gender-based violence in one generation.

Lucy's Project identified five key questions to guide the Roundtable discussions. These are the main topics covered in this report. They are:

1. What has been achieved across Australia in the past 5 years?
2. What is the future we want to create in the next 5 years and beyond?
3. What legislative changes and legal supports could improve the safety and wellbeing of people and animals experiencing DFV?
4. What are the data and research gaps in relation to DFV perpetrated against people with animals and animals?
5. How can we prevent and end DFV perpetrated against people with animals and animals?

3. BACKGROUND

3.1 Use of the term DFV

Different definitions of DFV are used across Australia. In this report, the term DFV is used to refer to violence used by a person against another person or animal within a domestic or family context.

DFV includes violence perpetrated against a person by a current or former partner, parent, relative, carer, adult child or grandchild, and a person living in the same household or residential facility.

DFV also includes violence perpetrated against an animal by their 'owner', 'custodian', 'guardian' or another person with whom the animal has a domestic or family relationship.

3.2 Scope

The National Roundtable discussions focused on the issues faced by people with animals, and animals, experiencing DFV in Australia.

First Nations people, people with disability, LGBTIQ+ people, people from migrant and refugee backgrounds, people living in rural, regional and remote areas, children, young people and older women experience DFV in different and unique ways.

The recommendations in this report are intended to improve the safety, wellbeing and recovery of people with animals, and animals, experiencing DFV. Broader systems change is required to address the specific and intersecting barriers to safety experienced by people with animals, and animals, in diverse communities.

3.3 Acknowledgements

Lucy's Project is grateful for the support of the Petstock Foundation and White & Case LLP International Law Firm which enabled us to organise the National Roundtable.

Thank you to everyone who contributed their expertise to the National Roundtable discussions, which shaped the findings and recommendations outlined in this report.

It is important to note that the participation of individuals in the National Roundtable does not constitute endorsement by the organisations they represent or work for.

Thank you to the current and former team members and volunteers at Lucy's Project who worked on the National Roundtable and the report: Monique Dam, Natalie Liotta, Alison Waters, Alicia Bennett, Alex Joseph and Madison Martin.

4. OVERVIEW OF THE ISSUES

73% of Australian households live with animals and many people regard animals as family members.[1] Perpetrators of DFV often threaten, harm, and kill animals to control and intimidate women and children.[2] Violence is perpetrated against companion animals, as well as assistance, farmed and wild animals. In NSW, 55% of DFV and community workers said clients have disclosed that the perpetrator killed an animal or animals in the context of DFV.[3] Research has found that “more severe domestic abuse and animal abuse within the household should be markers of a high-risk environment for domestic homicide”. [4]

DFV perpetrated against animals can include physical, sexual, emotional, psychological, verbal abuse and neglect. Women's Legal Services Australia has reported that: “Clients of Women's Legal Services frequently report intentional animal abuse as a form of sexual, domestic and family violence, whereby abusers exploit the close emotional bond shared by them, their children, and their animals, to inflict significant harm upon our clients. Clients have disclosed various abuse, torture, and death of their animals at the hands of abusers.”[5]

People who use DFV may also exploit the relationships between people and animals to exert power and control. For example, a person using violence may sell, give away, surrender, abandon or euthanise an animal; withhold funds to pay for food, medication or veterinary treatment for the animal; or claim legal ownership of the animal. For older women and women with disability, a person using DFV may use an animal as leverage to gain access to the woman's home, money or property; remove the animal while the woman is in hospital, respite or residential care; or tell the woman she is “too old”, unwell or incapable of caring for the animal.

People often delay leaving, or do not leave, a violent partner due to concerns for the safety and wellbeing of their animal companions. 86% of NSW DFV and community workers said their clients expressed concern for their animals or disclosed animals experiencing violence to them, and 48% said their clients delayed leaving a perpetrator by more than a year due to fear or threat of an animal being harmed.[6] People and animals subjected to DFV also face additional barriers to accessing the supports they need to be safe, such as animal-inclusive accommodation.

[1] Animal Medicines Australia (2025). Pets in Australia: A national survey of pets and people. Animal Medicines Australia. <https://animalmedicinesaustralia.org.au/resources/pets-in-australia-anational-survey-of-pets-and-people-3/>

[2] Butler, K. & McDonald, J. (2024). Violence against family animals in the context of intimate partner violence: policy and practice paper. Australian Institute of Family Studies. https://aifs.gov.au/sites/default/files/2024-04/2403_IPV_pets.pdf

[3] Dam, M. & McCaskill, C. (2020). Animals and people experiencing domestic and family violence: How their safety and wellbeing are interconnected. Domestic Violence NSW. <https://apo.org.au/node/311962>

[4] Diemer, K., Gallant, D., Mosso Tupper, N., Hammond, K., Ramamurthy, A., & Humphreys, C. (2024). Exploring the linkages between animal abuse, domestic abuse, and sexual offending: A scoping review. Health & Social Care in the Community. <https://doi.org/10.1155/2024/1170505>

[5] Women's Legal Services Australia (2024). Submission to the Inquiry into family violence orders. <https://www.wlsa.org.au/inquiry-into-family-violence-orders/>

[6] Dam, M. & McCaskill, C. (2020). See [3] above

4. OVERVIEW OF THE ISSUES

People with animals experiencing DFV may also experience other intersecting barriers to accessing the supports they require to be safe. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, LGBTQI+ people, people living in rural areas, and households with children aged under 18 years are more likely than other Australians to live with companion animals.[7] People with disability can be subjected to DFV perpetrated against them and their assistance animals. The 2024 Report of the Rapid Review of Prevention Approaches included a case study of a woman with disability whose partner committed sexual assault and forced her to have sex with him by repeatedly harming her assistance dog.[8]

The National Risk Assessment Principles for DFV recognise that "cruelty and harm directed to pets and other animals can indicate risk of future or more severe violence".[9] The National Principles to Address Coercive Control in Family and Domestic Violence recognise that "a perpetrator may harm animals, particularly when a victim-survivor has a strong emotional connection to a pet or when the animal has a service or support role for the person".[10]

The National Plan to End Violence Against Women and Children 2022-2032 includes 'animal abuse' in a list of behaviours that perpetrators may use as part of a pattern of coercive control and acknowledges that 'pet owners' face additional barriers to accessing emergency accommodation.[11] However, there is a lack of funded initiatives under the National Plan that are specifically designed and implemented to address the unique barriers faced by people with animals and animals experiencing DFV.

[7] Animal Medicines Australia (2022). Pets in Australia: A national survey of pets and people. Animal Medicines Australia.

<https://animalmedicinesaustralia.org.au/resources/pets-in-australia-anational-survey-of-pets-and-people-2022/>

[8] Campbell, E., Fernando, T., Gassner, L., Hill, J, Seidler, Z, Summers, A. (2024). Unlocking the Prevention Potential: Accelerating action to end domestic, family and sexual violence. <https://www.pmc.gov.au/office-women/womenssafety/rapid-review-prevention-approaches>

[9] Toivonen, C., & Backhouse, C. (2018). National Risk Assessment Principles for domestic and family violence (ANROWS Insights 07/2018). Sydney, NSW: ANROWS.

<https://www.anrows.org.au/research-program/national-riskassessment-principles/>

[10] Commonwealth of Australia (2023). National Principles to Address Coercive Control in Family and Domestic Violence. Attorney-General's Department.

<https://www.ag.gov.au/families-and-marriage/publications/nationalprinciples-address-coercive-control-family-and-domestic-violence>

[11] Commonwealth of Australia (2022). National plan to end violence against women and children 2022 – 2032. Department of Social Services.

<https://www.dss.gov.au/system/files/resources/national-plan-end-violenceagainst-women-and-children-2022-2032.pdf>

5. WHAT HAS BEEN ACHIEVED ACROSS AUSTRALIA IN THE PAST 5 YEARS?

Participants generally agreed that there has been important progress in recognising and responding to DFV perpetrated against people with animals and animals. However, the level of progress has varied significantly across states, territories and regions.

Positive changes have included program and legislative reform recognising the significance of the relationships between people and animals, increased awareness of DFV perpetrated against people and animals, and enhanced collaboration across the DFV and animal welfare sectors.

It is important to note that there was limited time for discussion, and this summary does not capture all the progress made by different organisations and governments across Australia to support people and animals experiencing DFV.

5.1 Program reform

Participants commented on how the 'Core and Cluster' model of refuges being rolled out in NSW and Victoria facilitate animals being co-housed with their families. These refuges consist of independent, self-contained accommodation located next to communal facilities. The NSW Government has committed to ensuring that all 49 'Core and Cluster' refuges will accommodate companion animals once completed.[12]

Sector development programs have increased understanding of DFV used against people with animals and animals. In 2022, the Victorian Government funded Safe and Equal to undertake a project to increase the capacity of DFV refuges to accommodate animals, including by developing practice guidelines.[13] In 2023, the NSW Government funded Lucy's Project to build the capacity of practitioners across sectors to recognise and respond to DFV used against people and animals by delivering education sessions,[14] and a conference.[15]

Participants noted collaboration among a number of DFV services and animal welfare organisations across Australia, as well as growing interest in the field of veterinary social work in Western Australia and Victoria. There is greater awareness of DFV being used against people and animals, including among police, local governments, and veterinary professionals. However, participants emphasised that this varies significantly between organisations and regions.

[12] NSW Government (2026). Core and Cluster Program. <https://dcj.nsw.gov.au/children-and-families/family-domestic-and-sexual-violence/support-programs/core-and-cluster-program.html>

[13] Safe and Equal (2023). Supporting Victim Survivors of Family Violence with Family Animals. <https://safeandequal.org.au/resources/supporting-victim-survivors-of-family-violence-with-family-animals/>

[14] Lucy's Project (2025). Education. <https://lucysproject.com/education/>

[15] Lucy's Project (2025). 2024 Conference Report. <https://lucysproject.com/2024-conference-report/>

5. WHAT HAS BEEN ACHIEVED ACROSS AUSTRALIA IN THE PAST 5 YEARS?

5.2 Legislative reform

Participants highlighted the following examples of legislative reform:

- Family law courts are now required to take into consideration a number of factors when making decisions about companion animals as a form of property, including any DFV and any history of actual or threatened cruelty or abuse by a party towards the companion animal.[16]
- The Queensland Criminal Code now includes “causing or threatening to cause the death of, or injury to, an animal, whether or not the animal belongs to the person to whom the behaviour is directed, so as to control, dominate or coerce the person” in the definition of DFV.[17]
- The South Australian parliament has passed coercive control laws, citing threats against an animal as an example of coercive control,[18] while DFV law in Tasmania now recognises threats to harm or neglect harm to animals as a form of DFV regardless of ownership and domestication of the animal.[19]
- In New South Wales, the definition of domestic abuse now includes “behaviour that causes death or injury to an animal, or otherwise makes use of an animal to threaten a person”, and every Apprehended Violence Order prohibits harm to an animal belonging to, or in the possession of the protected person.[20]

It should also be noted that since the National Roundtable was held, the Victorian parliament has passed significant legislative amendments to:

- Expand the definition of family violence to include: causing or threatening to cause the mistreatment of an animal (such as by withholding food, water, shelter or medication), and causing or threatening to cause the sale, removal, abandonment, rehoming or surrendering of an animal.
- Enable the court to include conditions in a family violence intervention order to: prohibit the respondent from being anywhere within a specified distance of the specified animal of the protected person, and direct the respondent to return the specified animal to the protected person.[21]

Whilst there has been some progress in addressing DFV perpetrated against people and animals within the last five years, there are ongoing challenges. This includes a lack of accommodation where human and animal victim-survivors of DFV can live in together, a lack of recognition of animals as victim-survivors of DFV in their own right, and a lack of coordination between human and animal services and law enforcement agencies.

[16] Family Law Act 1975 (Cth) Div 14, s 79(7)

[17] Criminal Code Act 1899 (Qld) s 334B

[18] See the Criminal Law Consolidation (Coercive Control) Amendment Act 2025 (SA). Note that the amendments are yet to come into effect.

[19] Family Violence Amendment (Protecting People and Their Pets) Act 2024 (TAS)

[20] Crimes (Domestic and Personal Violence) Act 2007 (NSW)

[21] Family Violence Protection Act 2008 (VIC)

6. WHAT IS THE FUTURE WE WANT TO CREATE IN THE NEXT 5 YEARS AND BEYOND?

6.1 Safe and accessible housing

Human and animal victim-survivors of DFV can find a safe home together

Participants highlighted the need for increased funding and resourcing to be provided to service providers of emergency, crisis and transitional accommodation to support people and animals experiencing DFV to stay safely together. A national or statewide directory of services that can accommodate and support human and animal victim-survivors should be established to facilitate identification of these services.

There should also be increased availability of long-term animal-inclusive housing options, including social and affordable housing and private rental housing. Whilst there have been changes to residential tenancy law in some jurisdictions, further reform is needed across Australia to make it easier for people with animals to find a safe home.

6.2 Recognition of animals as victim-survivors

Animals are recognised as victim-survivors of DFV in their own right

Participants emphasised the need for legislative reform to ensure the legal recognition of animals as sentient beings and as victims of DFV under civil and criminal law. Key priorities include legislative amendments to enable protection orders (such as Apprehended Violence Orders) to be made for animal victims of DFV in their own right.

The safety and welfare of animal and human victim-survivors should be the primary consideration for courts and government authorities to determine legal ownership of an animal, regardless of species. This would help to address the barriers to safety that arise due to people claiming ownership of animals as part of a pattern of coercive control or systems abuse.

Funding should be provided to animal welfare organisations to provide emergency boarding, crisis accommodation, foster care, veterinary care, transport and rehabilitation for animals who are victim-survivors of DFV. This should include services for companion, assistance, and farmed animals, including in rural, regional and remote communities.

6.3 Recognition of the link between human and animal safety

Practitioners across sectors understand that the safety and wellbeing of human and animal victim-survivors is interconnected and know how to respond

Participants raised that education across sectors is required to increase understanding of the link between violence against people and animals. Practitioners in human and animal services should have the capability to recognise and respond to DFV perpetrated against people and animals, and to make referrals and reports where appropriate.

6. WHAT IS THE FUTURE WE WANT TO CREATE IN THE NEXT 5 YEARS AND BEYOND?

Education about violence against people and animals should be included in core units of study for students of social work, veterinary science, law and other relevant degrees at university and TAFE. This education should also be made compulsory or offered as part of continuing professional education for practitioners across disciplines.

Practitioners in DFV, homelessness and community services should be trained and supported to undertake animal-inclusive intake, risk assessment and safety planning. Practitioners in animal welfare, animal management and veterinary services should be trained to recognise, respond and refer people with animals who are experiencing DFV.

6.4 Coordinated responses across sectors

Services across sectors and law enforcement agencies provide coordinated responses to people and animals experiencing DFV

Participants highlighted the importance of greater collaboration and information sharing across sectors to ensure the safety and wellbeing of human and animal victim-survivors. Cross-sector referral pathways and partnerships and multidisciplinary teams within services would facilitate an integrated response to people and animals experiencing DFV.

There is a need for greater coordination between law enforcement agencies responding to reports of violence and harm against people and animals, including neglect. Animal welfare inspectors should be trained to recognise and respond to DFV, and police should be trained to recognise and respond to animal abuse, including as part of DFV.

Participants discussed how information sharing between animal welfare organisations and police about animal cruelty and DFV matters varies significantly across jurisdictions. If any information is shared, this is generally ad hoc on a case-by-case basis, rather than in a consistent and systemic way. Enhanced information sharing and cross-reporting could contribute to earlier support of DFV victim-survivors and earlier identification of people using DFV and could facilitate the collection of evidence for prosecutions.

7. WHAT LEGISLATIVE CHANGES AND LEGAL SUPPORTS COULD IMPROVE THE SAFETY AND WELLBEING OF PEOPLE AND ANIMALS EXPERIENCING DFV?

Participants acknowledged the complex legislative and regulatory frameworks relating to DFV perpetrated against people and animals. In part, this complexity stems from the constitutional division of powers which prescribes and limits the legislative powers of the Commonwealth, states and territories. Legislative and regulatory responsibilities also sit with local governments. A range of legal issues can arise across multiple areas of law, including DFV, family, criminal, animal welfare and residential tenancy law.

7.1 Findings

- Animals are not recognised as victim-survivors of DFV in their own right. Under DFV laws across Australia, violence against animals is viewed as a form of DFV against human victim-survivors.
- Animals are classified as property under the law. This enables people using DFV to perpetrate systems abuse and exert power and control over human and animal victim-survivors by claiming ownership of an animal.
- Without evidence of legal ownership, a human victim-survivor may be exposed to civil or criminal liability if they take an animal or animals with them. This is the case even if they are concerned for the safety of their animal or animals.
- People who use violence may be registered as the owner of an animal or listed on the microchip of the animal, reflecting a dynamic of power and control.
- There are significant inconsistencies across jurisdictions regarding information sharing between police and animal welfare enforcement agencies. This means that critical information about whether a person has previously been alleged or found to have used violence against people and animals is not shared between agencies.
- People who use violence may harm farmed and wild animals as part of DFV, including by withholding food, shelter and water. However, farmed and wild animals are often overlooked in DFV legislation and law enforcement responses.
- Legal definitions of assistance animals vary across jurisdictions and can be narrow in scope. This can mean a lack of protection from discrimination for human victim-survivors with disability with assistance animals who do not meet the legal definitions in their jurisdiction.
- Residential tenancy laws vary across Australia. People with animals continue to face discrimination and barriers to accessing rental housing, including at the application stage.
- Police, lawyers and judicial officers need to be trained on the intersection of DFV perpetrated against people and animals. This could improve responses to complex cases involving DFV perpetrated against people and animals.
- There were a range of different views on whether mandatory or permissive reporting schemes should be introduced. For example, whether social workers should be required or supported to report animal abuse, and whether veterinarians should be required or supported to report DFV against people.
- Concerns were raised about the possibility of women being deterred from disclosing violence if they fear that their animal will be removed, or that information will be shared with the person using violence. For older women, the risks may be heightened in situations where family members, guardians, attorneys or substitute decision-makers already exercise control over their lives.

7. WHAT LEGISLATIVE CHANGES AND LEGAL SUPPORTS COULD IMPROVE THE SAFETY AND WELLBEING OF PEOPLE AND ANIMALS EXPERIENCING DFV?

- Animal management and animal welfare functions are generally governed under separate legislative frameworks. Animal management officers have limited powers and responsibilities to address animal welfare concerns. Authorising and requiring animal management officers to investigate and enforce animal welfare laws could improve responses to DFV perpetrated against people and animals.

7.2 Recommendations

- Recognise animals as sentient beings and acknowledge in legislation that animals are victim-survivors of DFV in their own right.
- Amend DFV legislation to enable local courts to make family violence orders for animals as protected parties and victim-survivors of DFV in their own right, and to determine ownership of animals.
- Amend legislation and policy relating to microchipping and registration to enable the person listed as the owner of an animal on a microchip or the registry to be changed where there is evidence that the animal is being subjected to, or impacted by, DFV and the listed owner is the person using DFV against the animal or their family members.
- Further reform residential tenancy laws to prevent discrimination against people with animals and to make it easier for people with animals experiencing DFV to find a safe rental home.
- Consult with stakeholders to investigate whether to introduce a framework for practitioners across the DFV, community, homelessness, veterinary, animal welfare, animal management and animal support sectors to report DFV against people and animals.
- Introduce mandatory education and training for police and lawyers and provide access to education and training for judicial officers on DFV perpetrated against people and animals.
- Establish a framework for information sharing and cross-reporting about DFV and animal abuse between police and animal welfare law enforcement authorities.
- Investigate potential establishment of a national database to enable reporting and information sharing about DFV perpetrated against people and animals across all jurisdictions.

8. WHAT POLICY AND PROGRAM CHANGES COULD IMPROVE THE SAFETY AND WELLBEING OF PEOPLE AND ANIMALS EXPERIENCING DFV?

Participants discussed how people and animals experiencing DFV engage with practitioners across a range of disciplines and sectors within public, private and not-for-profit organisations. Legislative, regulatory and contractual responsibilities (or the lack thereof), as well as funding constraints, shape organisational priorities. This contributes to fragmented and siloed approaches that often result in a lack of coordinated efforts to respond to people and animals experiencing DFV.

8.1 Findings

- There is a significant lack of animal-inclusive emergency, crisis and transitional accommodation and long-term housing that will accommodate people and animals experiencing DFV together across Australia.
- Women and children living with large companion and farmed animals in outer metropolitan, rural, regional and remote areas face significant additional barriers to accessing accommodation for them and their animals.
- DFV, homelessness and community service practitioners often do not know or have access to information about services where they can refer people with animals for animal-inclusive accommodation and housing, or their animals.
- Intake, risk assessment, risk management and safety planning tools used by DFV, homelessness and community services do not always include questions about animals, or threats and harm to animals.
- DFV, homelessness and community service practitioners are not trained to recognise or respond to DFV against animals.
- Veterinarians, local council rangers, animal management officers, animal welfare inspectors, animal support services (including volunteer-run animal rescue groups) are not trained to recognise or respond to DFV, even though they often interact with people and animals who are experiencing DFV.
- There is a lack of cross-sector collaboration between DFV, homelessness, community, animal welfare, animal support and veterinary services and the police.
- Animal welfare organisations are under-resourced and are operating at or beyond capacity to support animals who have been surrendered or abandoned, and this limits their capacity to support animals experiencing crises like DFV.
- There is generally a lack of community awareness and understanding of the link between DFV perpetrated against people and animals.
- People and animals who are experiencing DFV have close and significant relationships. Enabling human and animal victim-survivors to maintain their connection supports their safety, wellbeing, healing and recovery. This is especially important for children, young people and older women for whom animals may be their primary source of companionship, emotional support and connection.
- Animals often experience compounded trauma as a result of DFV and homelessness, including separation from their family and extended periods of being housed in shelter environments which can be highly stressful.
- Animals may be euthanised when they are not supported to access behavioural support to heal and recover from the violence and trauma of DFV, homelessness and related impacts.

8. WHAT POLICY AND PROGRAM CHANGES COULD IMPROVE THE SAFETY AND WELLBEING OF PEOPLE AND ANIMALS EXPERIENCING DFV?

- People who use violence against animals should be held accountable and supported to change their behaviour.
- Neglect and threats to neglect animals is a significant form of violence against animals in DFV contexts, including against companion and farmed animals, but this is often overlooked in service and law enforcement responses.
- Research indicates First Nations people, people with disability and LGBTIQ+ people, people in rural and regional areas and families with children are even more likely than other Australian families to live with animals.
- People with animals who have experienced DFV understand the specific system and service gaps that need to be addressed and should be listened to.

8.2 Recommendations

- Increase funding for animal-inclusive emergency, crisis and transitional accommodation for people and animals experiencing DFV. This funding could cover modifications to existing accommodation and the construction of new accommodation, as well as the costs of food, veterinary care, and transport.
- Review public, community and affordable housing strategies and policies to ensure that housing is animal-inclusive and enable people and animals to find safe long-term housing together.
- Establish and maintain a national or state/territory directory of services that will support people with animals and animals, including animal-inclusive DFV refuges.
- Fund and support cross-sector collaboration between DFV, homelessness, community, animal welfare, veterinary services and police; including networks and communities of practice.
- Fund animal welfare organisations to provide emergency and crisis accommodation and to coordinate foster care for animals experiencing and impacted by DFV so that they are cared for until they can be safely reunited with their family members.
- Provide education and training for practitioners across the DFV, homelessness, community, health, child and family, disability, aged care, legal, law enforcement, veterinary, animal welfare, animal management and animal support sectors on how to recognise and respond to people and animals experiencing DFV in a trauma-informed way. This training should include how to refer people and animals for support and how to record evidence of DFV against people and animals.
- Universities, vocational education providers and professional associations should provide education and training on DFV perpetrated against people and animals, and embed recognition of animals as sentient beings and victim-survivors of DFV in their own right across the social work, veterinary science and legal professions.
- Deliver guidance and support for services across sectors to update organisational policies, procedures and practices to recognise and respond to DFV against people and animals.
- Ensure intake, risk assessment and safety planning tools and frameworks include questions about companion, farmed, wild and assistance animals, and harm, threats to harm, and neglect of animals.

8. WHAT POLICY AND PROGRAM CHANGES COULD IMPROVE THE SAFETY AND WELLBEING OF PEOPLE AND ANIMALS EXPERIENCING DFV?

- Fund support for people with large companion and farmed animals in outer metropolitan, rural, regional and remote areas to access accommodation for them and their animals as well as food, veterinary care and transportation.
- Fund DFV and animal welfare services to support people and animals to heal and recover from DFV, and to maintain their relationship if they are temporarily unable to be housed together. These support services should be available and accessible to children, young people and older women.
- Fund and resource behaviour change programs for people who use DFV to address violence against animals, including harm, threats to harm, and neglect of animals.
- Ensure availability and accessibility of culturally safe and trauma-informed services for First Nations people, people with disability, LGBTIQ+ people, people from migrant and refugee backgrounds and people in rural and regional areas with animals, including children, young people and older women.
- Embed the leadership of people with lived experience and expertise throughout design, implementation, governance, monitoring and evaluation of policies and programs for people and animals experiencing DFV.

9. WHAT ARE THE DATA AND RESEARCH GAPS IN RELATION TO DFV PERPETRATED AGAINST PEOPLE WITH ANIMALS AND ANIMALS?

Participants noted significant data and research gaps and highlighted the need for better data collection and analysis in relation to people and animals experiencing DFV. Participants also discussed the potential benefits of information sharing to improve responses to people and animals experiencing DFV, while recognising the need to mitigate any unintended adverse impacts on human and animal victim-survivors.

9.1 Findings

- There is a lack of prevalence, incidence and in-depth analysis of data in Australia on DFV perpetrated against animals and animal abuse as part of DFV perpetrated against humans.
- There are many critical research gaps including:
 - the relationships between children and young people and animals, the impact of animal abuse on children and young people, and the role of animals in supporting the healing and recovery of children and young people.
 - the impact of DFV on animal victim-survivors and responses that support animals to be safe and heal and recover, and the nature and extent of perpetration of DFV against companion, assistance, farmed and wild animals, and animals of different species.
- Data collection relating DFV perpetrated against animals and animal abuse as part of DFV perpetrated against humans tends to be ad hoc, fragmented or limited to individual organisation or service provider level data.
- People with animals are often turned away from services, or decline to access a service, because they cannot be accommodated together with their animals. However, the number of people with animals and animals experiencing DFV who cannot access accommodation and other supports is not being systematically captured in Australia.
- Animal welfare, animal management and veterinary services generally do not have requirements or systems to capture data, record evidence, or make reports relating to animals impacted by DFV.
- The national Personal Safety Survey includes threats to harm or harm to pets under the broad category of 'emotional abuse'. There is no specific and separate category of 'animal abuse'.
- Social and health workers may include client or patient disclosure of animal abuse in case notes but are generally not required to record the disclosure of animal abuse in a data collection system nor to report animal abuse to any authority.
- There is no system for identifying and collecting data on complaints and charges of animal abuse made by police or animal welfare law enforcement agencies that are DFV related.
- Data collected in the DFV, health, homelessness, community, animal management, animal welfare sectors and police about DFV perpetrated against people and animals is not integrated nor shared across systems.
- Privacy legislation creates actual or perceived barriers to data and information sharing between agencies and departments.
- Any reporting or information-sharing framework should preserve the victim-survivor's autonomy wherever possible, be based on informed consent, and prevent access by perpetrators and people acting on their behalf.

9. WHAT ARE THE DATA AND RESEARCH GAPS IN RELATION TO DFV PERPETRATED AGAINST PEOPLE WITH ANIMALS AND ANIMALS?

9.2 Recommendations

- Review and update data collection and reporting systems to capture data on the prevalence and incidence of DFV perpetrated against animals and animal abuse as part of DFV perpetrated against humans.
- Commission research on DFV perpetrated against animals and animal abuse perpetrated as a part of DFV against humans to improve prevention, early support and response strategies.
- Introduce a requirement and provide adequate funding for DFV, animal welfare and animal management services to collect data on:
 - the number of people with animals and animals who were supported,
 - the number of people with animals who were turned away or who declined a service because the service was unable to support their animals,
 - reports and disclosures of DFV perpetrated against animals.
- Include a question in the national Personal Safety Survey about animal abuse as a specific and separate form of violence.
- Provide practice guidance and training for social and health workers on how to record disclosures of animal abuse in data collection systems and how to report animal abuse.
- Introduce a system or code for police and animal welfare law enforcement agencies to collect data on complaints and charges of animal abuse that are DFV related.
- Review privacy legislation and guidelines to facilitate data and information sharing across sectors and service systems where safe and appropriate with the purpose of improving responses to human and animal victim-survivors of DFV.

10. HOW CAN WE PREVENT AND END DFV PERPETRATED AGAINST PEOPLE WITH ANIMALS AND ANIMALS?

Participants emphasised the need for a greater focus on preventing and ending DFV perpetrated against people and animals. While recognising the importance of supporting people and animals experiencing DFV to find safety, heal and recover, participants highlighted the opportunity to create long-term generational and cultural change.

10.1 Findings

- There is a need for more research to understand how the underlying drivers and reinforcing factors of gender based violence relate to the drivers and reinforcing factors of violence against animals.
- Societal values and attitudes towards animals shape how animals are treated. The normalisation of violence against animals contributes to a lack of accountability for the use of violence against animals.
- The primary prevention of DFV against animals would require a long-term, systemic approach that addresses the underlying drivers of violence.
- There are opportunities to embed recognition of animals as sentient beings who deserve to live free from violence within existing primary prevention of gender-based violence and DFV initiatives.
- Respectful relationships education could include education around consent and respectful relationships with animals and foster people's empathy and compassion towards animals.
- The understanding that the safety and wellbeing of people and animals is deeply interconnected, as reflected in the 'One Welfare' approach, could be integrated into primary prevention of gender-based violence and DFV frameworks.

10.2 Recommendations

- Include animals in respectful relationships programs across early childhood, schools, universities, vocational education and workplaces. This education should foster empathy and compassion towards animals and promote an understanding of animal welfare.
- Promote community education and media reporting to increase understanding of:
 - animals as family members and victim-survivors of DFV in their own right
 - DFV perpetrated against people with animals and animals
 - the legal protections and support services available for people and animals
- Adopt a 'One Welfare' approach to recognise that the safety and wellbeing of people and animals is interconnected. Systems and services should respond to people and animals together, rather than expecting victim-survivors to navigate separate and disconnected systems.

11. POST-ROUNDTABLE DEVELOPMENTS

National Collaboration to Prevent and End Family Violence against People and Animals

Lucy's Project established the National Collaboration in May 2026 to drive systems change to prevent DFV against people and animals, improve the safety and wellbeing of people and animals experiencing DFV, and ensure people and animals are supported to heal and recover together. The National Collaboration includes survivors, researchers, policymakers, advocates and practitioners across the domestic, family and sexual violence, homelessness, community, animal welfare and veterinary sectors.

National Roadmap for Change to Prevent and End Family Violence against People and Animals

Lucy's Project developed a National Roadmap based on the recommendations of the National Roundtable, victim-survivor stories and insights, and findings from a Churchill Fellowship. The National Roadmap was launched at Australian Parliament House in August 2026. This resource is intended to inform the development, implementation and review of Federal, State and Territory and Local Government strategies and plans for preventing and responding to DFV.

Submission to the Second Action Plan Consultation under the National Plan to End Violence Against Women and Children 2022-2032

Lucy's Project made a submission to the Australian Government's consultation on the Second Action Plan in July 2026 to highlight the findings and recommendations of the National Roundtable, as well as victim-survivor stories and insights.

Thank you and invitation to collaborate

Thank you to everyone who participated in the National Roundtable, as well as the Petstock Foundation, White & Case LLP, and the parliamentarians and political advisors who attended a briefing.

Lucy's Project looks forward to continuing to work with individuals and organisations across sectors to create a future where every person and animal across Australia is safe. If you would like to join us, please contact hello@lucysproject.com.



12. APPENDIX A

List of organisations that participated in the National Roundtable convened by Lucy's Project

Academic and Research Institutions

Australia's National Research Organisation for Women's Safety
Australian Institute of Family Studies
Deakin University
Griffith University
James Cook University
RMIT University
Southern Cross University
University of Canterbury
University of Melbourne
University of New South Wales

Animal Welfare and Veterinary Sector

Animal Management in Rural and Remote Indigenous Communities
Animal Welfare League NSW
Australian Veterinary Association
Cat Protection Society NSW
Cherished Pets
Companion Animal Network Australia
Don't Forget My Pet
Getting to Zero
Lort Smith Animal Hospital
Lost Dogs Home
Meraki Services
Paws and Recover
PetRescue
Pets in the Park
RSPCA ACT
RSPCA Australia
RSPCA NSW
RSPCA QLD
RSPCA VIC
RSPCA WA
Safe Pets Safe Families
Second Chance Animal Rescue
Sydney Dogs and Cats Home
Veterinary and Community Care



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Community and Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence Sector

Aboriginal Women and Children's Crisis Service
Australian Local Government Association
Australian Multicultural Women's Alliance
Beryl Women's Refuge
Centre Against Violence
Domestic Violence NSW
DV Connect QLD
Embolden SA
Engender Equality TAS
FAMS
Federation of Ethnic Communities' Councils of Australia
Foodbank SA & NT
Full Stop Australia
FVREE
Hope and Heal
Illawarra Women's Trauma Recovery Centre
Immigrant Women's SpeakOut Association
Immigration Advice and Rights Centre
Law Institute of Victoria
Legal Aid NSW
LGBTQ Domestic Violence Awareness Foundation
Local Government Association NT
Local Government NSW
Mary's House
Municipal Association of Victoria
National Women's Safety Alliance
Ngarrunga Refuge and Link Wentworth
No To Violence
NSW Police
Older Women's Network NSW
People with Disability Australia
Plus Community
Relationships Australia
Safe and Equal VIC
Safe Steps
Stepping Out
Sydney Women's Counselling Centre
The Salvation Army
The Women's Cottage
WESNET
Women with Disabilities Australia
Women's Community Shelters
Women's Legal Service NSW
Women's Legal Services Australia
Women's Legal Services QLD
Women's Safety Services SA



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Corporate and Philanthropic

Commonwealth Bank of Australia
Mookeye and Momot Consulting
Petstock Foundation
White & Case Law Firm